



**GRID Alternatives**

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## **GRID Alternatives Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

### **1. What is GRID Alternatives?**

GRID Alternatives is a nonprofit solar contractor that installs solar electric systems for low-income families with the help of volunteers, job trainees, and the families themselves. Our barn-raising model brings together many hands from diverse backgrounds to empower and improve the lives of those living in low-income communities.

### **2. How and why was the organization founded?**

GRID Alternatives co-founders Erica Mackie and Tim Sears are both mechanical engineers who worked for an energy efficiency consulting firm prior to founding GRID Alternatives. While spending countless days on the road auditing large corporations and organizations for their energy consumption, Erica and Tim felt strongly that they wanted to touch and feel that they were really making a difference in people's lives. Sure, they were saving kilowatts by working for this firm, but were their endeavors truly impacting the folks who needed it most?

After much deliberation, Erica and Tim decided to switch gears and create an organization that that would bring clean technology to people in low-income neighborhoods who are most impacted by environmental pollution and high energy prices. As a result, they founded GRID Alternatives in 2001, with the mission of empowering communities in need by providing renewable energy and energy efficiency services, equipment and training.

### **3. What social needs do you address?**

GRID Alternatives addresses multiple social issues, ranging from environmental sustainability to economic justice to green collar jobs. The organization was created because the people who need solar energy the most are usually the people who can't afford it.

GRID operates at the intersection of the environment and the economy and directs its efforts toward impacting these issues in a very tangible way. We address the needs of low-income families by lowering their energy bills, which provides extra dollars to buy the items they need most—food, clothing, and other necessities. Our renewable energy solutions also address the need for clean technology in our environment, one house at a time.

With our unique “barn-raising” model, we are able to meet each of these interconnected needs in a very hands-on way by supporting every part of the process, from outreach to installation. Our model also helps support the emerging green collar economy by providing opportunities for community members to gain real-world, hands-on experience with solar electric technology.

### **4. What makes GRID Alternatives different from other organizations that provide green collar jobs, solar equipment and installation, and other services for low-income families?**

No one else is doing exactly what GRID Alternatives does.

- Green collar jobs—GRID Alternatives is not a job skills training organization. Rather, we provide a teaching lab in which we offer hands-on experience for individuals who are enrolled in solar installation job training programs throughout California. We set aside a dedicated portion of our solar installations for our partner job training organizations.

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- Solar equipment and installation—GRID Alternatives is a not-for-profit licensed installer of solar electric systems. We do not manufacture or distribute solar equipment, and we don't mark up the cost on the equipment we use. Our installations are done collectively with homeowners, community members and a professional installation team.
- Other services—We collaborate with many other non-profit organizations that serve low-income families, but we try to concentrate on providing the pieces that no one else offers – financing and installing solar electric systems.

**5. Where does GRID Alternatives find the means to provide these services?**

We are funded by a variety of sources, including individual donors, corporate sponsors, private foundations, fee-for-service partnerships with other non-profits, and government agencies.

**6. Who is eligible for a solar installation from GRID Alternatives?**

Right now, we serve low-income homeowners in the state of California who either live in a home that meets specific affordability requirements, or live in an area where we have local grant funding. Our website provides information for people who want to find out if they qualify.

**7. How does GRID Alternatives' program work?**

As a California licensed solar installer, we provide all of the services of a regular contractor, including NABCEP-certified staff and a 10 year labor warranty for each solar installation. In addition to that, we offer a layer of social services including community building and education. Our services begin at the point of client outreach and span the system design and engineering, building permits, rebate and utility paperwork, solar installation, and client education.

**8. Is it cost-effective for low-income families to go solar?**

For low-income families struggling to pay their monthly expenses, the long-term return on investment for solar typically takes a backseat to the need for immediate, short-term savings on their utility bills. As a result, we ensure that all of our installations provide significant, immediate savings for our clients from Day 1, in addition to major long-term energy savings over the life of the system. GRID Alternatives brings together support from local governments, private funders, and solar incentive and rebate programs to make this happen, giving our clients more money for basics like food, clothing, and housing costs.

**9. Do you work together with any other organizations?**

Yes, we collaborate with solar electric equipment manufacturers and suppliers, contractors and installers, job training organizations, non-profit housing developers, and local government agencies to bring renewable energy to low-income households.

**10. How can I help GRID Alternatives?**

We rely largely on donations to operate. For donors who choose to support GRID Alternatives, you can be assured that you will be putting money into the pockets of low-income families, reducing harmful greenhouse gases in the environment, and helping to sustain community-based education and job training. This is a way to make an major impact in a very concrete, tangible, and local way. Please go to <http://gridalternatives.org/donate> to learn more about how you can lend your financial support.

GRID Alternatives is grateful to its large base of volunteers – our growth has been possible because of their dedication. At this point in time, we are fortunate enough to have plenty of volunteers for our installation crews. Periodically, we'll provide updates at our website on new volunteer opportunities.

**11. What is GRID Alternatives' vision for the future?**

Our vision is to build a model for replication in communities across the US and beyond. We'd love for others to be able to replicate our hands-on approach to bring renewable energy to families in need.