

Citizens Solar Advice Guide

Guidelines for setting up voluntary citizens solar advice (BSB: BürgerSolarBeratung)

“The sun does not send an invoice.” (Franz Alt)

Photovoltaic (PV) is an important building block for the climate-friendly energy transition in the hands of the citizens, is often an economic measure and increases regional value creation. If you look at the roofs in the area, you unfortunately have to realize that this knowledge is far from being common knowledge. And even if: it can still be a long way from knowing: “PV is worth it for me” to having your own PV system.

At the initiative of and with the support of the association Bobenop, a climate and energy turnaround was made possible and the Hürup office was able to successfully bring about an advisory group for citizens wanting to use solar energy (BSB: BürgerSolarBeratung).

In terms of neighbourhood help, the BSB is a manufacturer- independent and free initial consultation for all homeowners from the Hürup office. During the consultation, voluntary consultants check the feasibility of the PV system, estimate the profitability and respond to individual questions. If you are interested in an implementation, record the building-specific data and obtain (comparable) offers from local/regional electrical installation companies. Other municipalities/ offices/ regions that want to set up their own BSB can use this concept as a blueprint and/or if necessary be coached/accompanied during the implementation phase if required. Copying is expressly desired ;-). If you are interested, please contact us preferably by email at 100daecher@bobenop.de

Motivation or “Why do you need a BSB“?

Although PV in the private sector, (especially with a certain amount of electricity self-consumption) is usually economical and can make an important contribution to personal energy transition, only a fraction of the roofs suitable for this are covered with PV. One of the main reasons for this is information deficit and confusion. In order to counteract this, the Metropolstar citizen solar advice (BSB) association in the Rhein-Neckar region initiated citizen solar advice a few years ago. We adopted the basics of this concept and adapted it to our context and further developed it, so that the recipients of our advice can now go through the entire process and can be managed, from the initial consultation to the solicitation of an offer to the point at which the implementing electrical installation company can take the reins.

Which Steps are to be taken?

Building on the implementation in Hürup, which was funded by the EKSH (Programme for Climate Protection in Small Communities) we recommend that you consider these points when setting up further BSB;

1. Preparatory Measure: involve key stakeholders

a) Get the local electrical installation companies enthusiastic about the concept. The companies should understand that the BSB is not a competitor, but has the goal of relieving the companies of the work involved in acquisition and advice and regenerating additional local added value. Once the companies have understood this, they are usually happy to help actively advertise the offer to their customer base.

b) Interfaces and define the quality standards: The interfaces and quality standards for the essential components are defined jointly with the local electrical installation companies so that the customer later receives comparable offers. Due to the clear demarcation of the interfaces between voluntary advice and specialist craftsmen, unnecessary duplication of work in advice and data recording is avoided.

c) Build a network of experts that supports the honorary advisors with their specialist knowledge. In the ideal case, in addition to the local electrical installation companies, it is possible to win other experts for this, for example energy consultants. Because a PV system does not necessarily make sense on a roof that is not insulated and/ or in need of renovation. It is good if the voluntary consultants are aware of this, know their limits and refer to the relevant experts. Tax consultants are also involved. The establishment of an expert network initially costs time but is essential for the professional support of questions and ambiguities in various subject areas and through integration into the training, ensures a high quality for this event and consequently also for this advice.

2. Public Relations

a) At the start of the project a public information event as a “kick-off” for the BSB implementation, (in Hürup “Idea factory PV power for your own roof”). The general framework conditions for PV and the concept of citizen solar advice will be presented at the event. Homeowners can already register for a consultation at this point in time.

b) To address customers articles should appear online and in the local press (e.g., Official Journal). In addition, information brochures (in Hürup see https://www.bobenop.de/images/Bilder_Artikel/Projekt/2020/09/100-Daecher-Folder-2020.pdf) can be designed, which are available online and/or at various locations in the administrative area.

3. Training of voluntary citizen solar advisors:

A few weeks after the kick-off, the volunteer advisors should be trained.

“Creating something meaningful together” is how the citizens solar consultants` motivation can be summed up. Our experience: with a targeted and personal approach, volunteers can be found who will be happy to support their neighbours on their way to their own PV system as part of extended neighbourhood help. For this task you will be trained professionally and, above all, methodically in order to be able to answer questions about the technology, feasibility and usefulness. They provide an initial forecast of investment costs, an estimate of profitability and yield.

The recommendation is to include a lot of interaction and role-playing, and to focus heavily on the content relative to the consultation, rather than getting too deep into the technology. Building on your own experience, we recommend the following training process:

Time	Theme
First Training Event	
18:00	Presentation of the Consultation Process
18:30	Technology and Construction Photovoltaic
19:30	Discussion and Questions on the Topic
19:45	Break
20:00	Presentation of Modal Design
20:30	Exercise Modal Design
21:15	Final Discussion

Second Training Event	
18:00	Presentation of the Consultation Process
18:30	Self-consumption and Profitability of Photovoltaic
19:30	Discussion and Questions on the Topic
19:45	Break
20:00	Exercise Profitability Calculation
20:30	Role-play Advice
21:15	Final Discussion

4. Carryout Consultations

a) Appointments can be made by phone or email. Co-ordination takes place centrally.

b) Carryout the **initial consultation** (approx. 1 hour). Aim of the consultation: to enable homeowners to make a well-founded decision for/ against Photovoltaics on their own roof. To do this the consultants must above all “be there” and respond to individual questions. It is important to look transparently and comprehensively together with the person receiving the advice as to whether his/her roof is suitable for photovoltaics, which system size makes sense and how economical the measure is. It is widely assumed that the decision for/against PV is primarily driven by economics. Our impression, on the other hand, is that “soft factors” have much more influence, that it´s a lot about personal experience and understanding the advantages. The local connection and the neutral advice at eye level and without sales interests generate trust, perhaps even more than experts are capable of. Additional advantage: due to the voluntary structure, no costs have to be charged for this step, which lowers the inhibition threshold for homeowners.

c) Data recording: if the interested parties have further interest in implementing the measure after the first assessment of the feasibility and economic viability, the building and project-specific data can be recorded (immediately afterwards or at a separate date), are necessary to provide important information and obtain comparable offers.

d) Obtain offers: the coordinating office checks the information and then obtains the offers from the electrical installation companies. In order to keep the effort on all sides as low as possible, it has proven useful for us not to obtain more than 3 offers.

5. Network the consultants with each other and support them with the first steps.

a) Coaching: if desired by the consultant an expert was present at the first appointment as technical support and to give the consultant security and tips.

b) Networking: social media (e.g., a Whatsapp group) are particularly suitable for exchanging ideas with each other. Questions from the consultations can be discussed in this group and, if necessary, passed on to the expert network. The coordinator can also feed information into the network or, if necessary, request further training. Our experience is: the BSB id also attractive for the consultants as a volunteer: they are trained, mentored, and networked with each other. In this way you can, (with a manageable amount of time) support your fellow human beings on your way to a personal energy transition.

Final remarks: Our concept provides that the executing electrical installation company that carries out the work pays a commission for the advance service.

The central coordination of the network is guaranteed by the commission payments for the data acquisition/ solicitation of offers via the consultants. This means that the offer is sustainable and independent of any funding. For the customer this does not result in “additional costs” because the specialist company only passes on a part of what it would have had to spend on data acquisition and acquisition itself. A multiple win-win situation.

Source: https://www.bobenop.de/images/Downloads/Leitfaden_BSB_2021.pdf

Translated by Alexander Page Nov/2022