

PROFILE

NEW YORK STATE ENERGY AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

By Russ Willcutt



For more than four decades NYSERDA has been steering the state toward a brighter, cleaner, more-sustainable future.

THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE NEW YORK STATE

Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) can be found in the opening words of its vision statement, which reads: “To serve as a catalyst—advancing energy innovation and technology, transforming New York’s economy, empowering people to choose clean and efficient energy as part of their everyday lives.” Advocating for renewable energies and providing an infrastructure in which related companies can thrive has been central to its role since the mid-sixties, according to Francis J. Murray, Jr, president and CEO.

“The authority was formed during the administration of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and it was originally known as the New York State Atomic and Space Development Authority,” he says. “When the focus shifted to energy efficiency in 1975 the name was changed to the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority, which more accurately describes our mission these days.”

While its early efforts centered on research and development—applied, as opposed to basic-science research—aimed at reducing the state’s petroleum consumption, it has broadened its influence to promote the use of renewable energy sources such as wind, among many other activities. The real boost came in the mid-nineties, when the state’s Public Service Commission restructured the investor-owned utilities in New York State. The commission recognized that utility programs involving renewable energy and energy efficiency were beneficial, but that a more-centralized approach might be even more effective at reducing energy waste and increasing the use of renewable energy sources. It imposed a small charge on the bills of investor-owned utility ratepayers called the System Benefits Charge, and it directed NYSERDA to administer statewide programs to improve energy efficiency and help the state reach its energy goals. Since then a number of other funding sources have been approved. With a total annual budget of some \$650 million, the authority is a major driver of energy efficiency services and incentives for renewable energy projects, among other uses.

Bolstered by the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard, which requires that 30 percent of New York’s electricity come from renewable sources by 2015, NYSERDA has been proactive in attract-

ing and supporting wind energy companies. In its role as a catalyst, the authority is investing nearly \$3 billion in renewable energy through the RPS program and has helped to encourage the development of 1,175 megawatts of wind capacity in New York State. The organization also funds wind prospecting and site evaluation projects throughout the state, providing that information to communities to use in courting prospective wind-farm developers. In addition, NYSERDA funds wind mapping and forecasting activities, teaming with AWS Truepower—a leader and innovator in renewable energy consulting—to amass detailed information about wind conditions throughout the state, which is also used to develop workshops about the planning, development, and implementation of utility scale wind projects.

Companies interested in locating in New York State will be interested in NYSERDA’s flagship Saratoga Technology + Energy Park (STEP), which is located on 280 acres in Malta. Already home to giants such as GLOBALFOUNDRIES and Lockheed Martin, the clean-tech park is part of a region that also includes the University at Albany, with its NanoTech Complex, and GE’s wind and solar energy research center in nearby Schenectady.

Not only does NYSERDA encourage renewable energy projects, it also notifies interested parties through its “program opportunity notices,” which are sent to those who sign up to receive them or are found by visiting the authority’s Web site and clicking on the “funding opportunities” link. Doing so is well worth the time, according to Murray. “Approximately 98 percent of all the funding we provide is awarded competitively,” he says, “and largely through these program opportunity notices.”

A true advocate of renewable energy development—Murray was the state’s energy commissioner when Mario Cuomo was governor—he is proud of New York’s continuing commitment. “From Governor Andrew Cuomo on down, we are committed to bringing new clean-tech jobs to the state,” he says, adding that the Empire State Development Corp. is New York State’s development arm. “I would encourage anyone who’s interested in joining our effort to get in touch. Whether they’re a turbine blade manufacturer, a wind-farm developer, or an O&M service provider, I think they’ll find that we really roll out the welcome wagon.” ↵