PV Incubator Pushes Solar Innovations

To catapult America to the global lead in solar manufacturing, the U.S. Department of Energy is turning to small start-ups with the kind of disruptive technology that has the potential to lower costs dramatically. The stale and the satisfied need not apply for the $1 million to $4 million subcontracts awarded through an aggressive photovoltaics (PV) incubator program prodding entrepreneurs to help the United States reach the DOE's SunShot Initiative goal of lowering the cost of utility-scale installations by about 75 percent to roughly $1 per watt by 2017.

But those with truly disruptive technologies that can greatly change solar-power economics will find eager, albeit stern, partners in the PV Incubator program, an initiative of the DOE executed through its National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

By "disruptive" or "differentiated" technologies, scientists or business people are referring to new ways of doing things that overturn the traditional methods and practices, such as the steam engine in the age of sail or e-mail in the age of post-office mail.

The DOE has provided $50 million to small businesses under the PV Technology Incubator program, which started in 2007. The businesses in turn have created more than 1,000 jobs in the United States and have the potential to raise solar-energy capacity in the United States from hundreds of megawatts to thousands of megawatts. To date, 20 small businesses have been awarded PV Technology Incubator subcontracts, with DOE's Solar Energy Technologies Program investing about $3 million per company.

“The returns on taxpayer dollars have been amazing,” said NREL's Martha Symko-Davies, the architect behind the PV Incubator program. “The private sector subsequently has invested nearly $2 billion in the companies selected for the PV Incubator program,” she said.

"It is even more impressive considering the recent difficult economic times faced by venture capitalists, making them much more selective about funding start-ups," she said. “The $2 billion "provides clear evidence of the commercial value of these differentiated PV technologies."

The project represents a significant partnering with U.S. industry to help speed commercialization of PV research and development in the United States to meet the goals of the DOE SunShot Initiative.

"The object is to scale up capacity from prototypes to pilot scale in just 18 months," Symko-Davies said. "We target hard deliverables, firm-fixed price subcontracting. We want to make sure taxpayer money is well-utilized."

Source URL (retrieved on *03/10/2014 - 2:11pm*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/product-releases/2011/03/pv-incubator-pushes-solar-innovations?qt-most_popular=0