UC Solar
Research
Innovation
Education
University of California Advanced Solar Technologies Institute

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California Energy Commission
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Comments on the proposed EPIC investment plan
Docket # 12-EPIC-01

Dear CEC Commissioners and Staff,

The University of California Advanced Solar Technologies Institute (UC Solar) is a multi-campus research institute made up of faculty and students from the University of California's Merced, Berkeley, Santa Barbara, Davis and San Diego campuses.

Headquartered at UC Merced, UC Solar develops technologies that make solar energy systems more efficient, more affordable, and easier to implement, while also educating tomorrow's solar energy leaders and entrepreneurs. Through collaboration with industry and other stakeholders, UC Solar researchers create solar technologies that can be brought to the marketplace quickly and cost effectively.

We at UC Solar are delighted to submit these written comments on the Electric Program Investment Charge: Proposed 2012-2014 Triennial Investment Plan.

We find the plan to be very comprehensive, and we are enthused by its scope and by the participation of so many of California's institutions of higher education in the planning process. We are also very pleased that the plan includes establishing a competitive process for EPIC investments in research centers (as described in Chapter 7), which we see as an important component of a plan of this size and scope.

We believe that research center funds empower the organizations they support and provide significant benefits to electricity ratepayers and the State of California in the following key areas:

Innovation. Research center funds enable the center leadership, in consultation with its advisers and partners, to conduct applied research that reaches beyond a typical project grant horizon. This introduces creativity and flexibility into the scientific process, and empowers scientists to produce results at the speed of innovation. New directions can be explored and new technologies will emerge that bridge or expand on research activities defined by a particular grant.

Commercialization. By purchasing needed equipment and funding lab and field demonstration activities, center funds enable scientists and staff to bring promising new technologies from concept to commercialization. At UC Merced alone, prototype investments have led to the formation of multiple solar companies, including California-based SolFocus and b2u.

Workforce preparation. UC Solar graduate students and research assistants are our primary workforce, and they are California's future solar innovators. Typically, it takes 4-6 years for a PHD student to obtain his or her degree, and this is beyond the timeline of most research grants. Research center funds are crucial in bringing stability and continuity to the student experience. These funds have a buffering effect that actually empowers students to pursue their educational and research goals -- often enabling them to graduate sooner. For this reason, these funds help to attract the world's best and brightest graduate students to study, work, and live in California.

Research center funds are an important component of the EPIC funding portfolio. They empower researchers, accelerate the commercialization of new technologies, and attract and retain the next generation of solar scientists and entrepreneurs -- all of which provide significant ratepayer value. We fully support their inclusion in the proposed Electric Program Investment Charge 2012-2014 Triennial Investment Plan.

Sincerely,

Roland Winston

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University of California, Merced

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