

SRP Cultivates Plug-in Electric Vehicle Community Among Employees and Customers



Salt River Project (SRP), one of the nation's largest public power utilities with one million retail customers in metropolitan Phoenix, is demonstrating its commitment to improving air quality, enhancing customer engagement, and strengthening the electricity grid. In addition to expanding its own plug-in electric vehicle (PEV) fleet, SRP has developed a suite of programs to encourage broader PEV adoption, including a comprehensive employee and public education campaign as part of its Drive Electric™ program, workplace charging, a PEV time-of-use rate, and a PEV calculator. To strengthen and inform its PEV program, SRP is cultivating a community of committed, enthusiastic PEV drivers and supporters—internally among employees, and externally among customers.

"We wanted to be collaborative and bring together our employees and customers in separate groups to share their observations and opinions. We recognized they all have great ideas and can provide valuable input."

—Kelly Barr, Senior Director of Environmental Management Policy and Compliance, SRP

Because PEVs impact so many different operational groups within a utility, SRP in 2014 established a cross-functional EV Roadmap Team comprised of representatives from more than 20 different departments. The Roadmap Team worked collaboratively to guide the utility's PEV preparations, create unique programs and educational materials, and launch its Drive Electric™ program.

The Roadmap Team continues to meet every six weeks to evaluate implementation progress and share new ideas. Its members' enthusiasm and PEV knowledge spread throughout the utility, further engaging employees at all levels. Employees—even those who do not drive a PEV themselves—designed unique marketing wraps for the utility's fleet PEVs.

SRP has cultivated its external PEV community by developing special promotions, programs, and customer engagement opportunities. Customers who contact the utility about PEV ownership receive access to events and information about programs tailored for PEVs, such as a residential time-of-use rate for charging. Since learning about how charging behaviors impact the grid is important for electric reliability planning, SRP also offers a \$50 Amazon gift card to customers who provide their vehicle registration location.

In 2015, SRP recruited 13 PEV customers to join its Community Advisory Group, which serves as a focus group for the utility's PEV programs. SRP shares information with the group about its programs, the PEV market, and industry trends. In return, members provide their perspectives on their PEV ownership experience—from driving and charging to opinions of potential utility programs and initiatives. Together, SRP and these customers explore ways for the utility to grow its Drive Electric™ program in a smart and mutually beneficial way.

SRP by the Numbers

37: No. of PEVs in SRP fleet

39: No. of employees driving PEVs

32: No. of workplace charging stations at SRP facilities

783: No. of customers in SRP Community Program

2,530: Estimated no. of PEVs in SRP's territory

Successes and Challenges

Success: The Roadmap Team's programs have helped foster internal enthusiasm for PEVs. Employees share perspectives and work together to develop customer programs and research projects.

Success: Employees have embraced and adopted PEVs. After SRP installed new workplace charging stations at one location, employee PEV ownership there jumped 175% in six months. Employees share chargers, volunteer at utility events, and communicate with one another about PEV ownership.

Success: The Community Advisory Group is an important partnering opportunity to support PEV adoption. At their first meeting, all participants provided valuable input and agreed to meet again.

Success: Research results help the utility's Load Management and Transportation groups understand how PEVs can impact grid reliability and reduce fleet emissions.

Challenge: Although more than 780 customers have signed up for the SRP Community Program, they represent about 30% of the PEV drivers in SRP's service territory. The utility plans additional programs to encourage sign-ups.

Challenge: These are exciting times, but resource expenditures are carefully evaluated. SRP is focused on implementing low-cost and no-cost programs that provide great value to customers.

Challenge: Institutional barriers remain. Arizona offers a reduced PEV license fee but no PEV purchase incentives. Dealerships lack a strong desire to sell PEVs. Consumers have few PEV models to choose from.

PEV Engagement Strategies

SRP has employed these strategies and tools for employees and customers:

- PEV 101 brochures, fact sheets, and newsletters
- Employee presentations, PEV trainings, and videos
- Internal SharePoint website for employees
- Workplace charging
- Employee PEV pricing from selected carmakers
- Ride & Drives
- PEV calculator
- Time-of-use charging rate

Lessons Learned

Public misperception of PEVs is widespread.

The general public is largely unaware of PEVs and their benefits. Many have a negative perception—if any opinion at all—and believe PEVs cannot meet their needs. An ongoing, comprehensive education effort with simple messaging is needed.

Sometimes past experience can come back to haunt you.

Some employees remember the utility's first investment in PEVs in the 1990s. SRP's Roadmap Team seeks to overcome any remaining uncertainty and educate the whole company about the new generation of vehicles and charging infrastructure.

Invest cautiously in PEV charging infrastructure.

Charging technology is changing rapidly, so it is prudent to take a cautious approach to investment. Most of SRP's stations are simple, non-networked stations; they can be easily switched out when the dust settles around demand response, wireless, and similar next-generation charging technologies.

Pre-wire charging infrastructure during new construction.

When SRP built a new parking garage, it pre-wired for 60 charging stations on three floors to accommodate future growth and save money. It installed only 20 stations initially, each split between two parking spaces. Already, employees are doubling up on the stations. SRP will install an additional 20 stations next year.

Contact Information

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