Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC) launched its instructor training program in the spring of 2013 as part of the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Solar Instructor Training Network (SITN). The SITN is part of DOE’s SunShot Initiative—a national collaborative effort to make solar energy cost-competitive with other forms of electricity by the end of the decade. The SITN contributes to this goal by facilitating the development of quality training programs to prepare a well-trained workforce to meet current and future demand for Solar Photovoltaics (PV).

During the winter of 2012-13, KVCC marketed the new Solar PV Train the Trainer program to instructors from educational institutions across New England and New York. “We looked for partner institutions that already have existing training programs in three curriculum areas: electrical technologies, building construction, and engineering/architecture” said Dana Doran, former Director of Energy Programs at KVCC. “We opened the program to technical high schools, community colleges, baccalaureate institutions and trade/apprenticeship organizations with existing programs in one or more of those curriculum areas”. KVCC had an enthusiastic response and in April 2013, 26 instructors from 21 educational institutions entered the program. Instructors come from a variety of institutions across a seven state region (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont), ranging geographically from Alfred State College in Western New York to St. Croix Regional Technical Center in Eastern Maine.

Upon entering KVCC’s SITN program, instructors become students and are referred to as ‘instructor trainees’. KVCC’s program teaches instructor trainees about Solar PV technology and how to effectively teach Solar PV content to their students. By the end of May 2013, all 26 instructor trainees successfully completed the first stage of the program—an Introduction to Solar PV online course. Over the summer 2013, we were excited to meet all instructor trainees as each traveled to KVCC to attend one of three summer hands on training courses:

- Intro to Solar PV for Electrical Technology Programs in June
- Intro to Solar PV for Construction and Building Technology Programs in July
- Intro to Solar PV for Engineering Programs in August

Instructor trainees attended the course appropriate to the curriculum areas they teach. All three onsite courses built upon knowledge gained from the online
course, adding lecture, design labs, hands on labs and opportunities for networking. KVCC’s Solar PV Instructor, Michael Paradis, created and taught both the online and onsite courses. “It is a complete pleasure to be working with such a talented group of instructors. Everyone was enthusiastic to learn more about cutting edge solar PV technology. Instructors came in with a wide range of skills and were eager to collaborate and share best practices of technical instruction.”

More SITN online train the trainer courses will be deployed over the coming fall and spring semesters. KVCC is also working with each instructor trainee to develop individual mentoring plans to support the integration of new Solar PV content into existing courses, and maybe even new Solar PV courses into their existing curricula.