



COMMUNITY SOLAR: AN EASY OPTION

As your Touchstone Energy cooperative, we want to be your source for energy and information. Since solar power generation is rapidly becoming more widely available, we put together this information to help answer questions you might have. Contact us for more information about solar.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SOLAR?

Some electric cooperatives offer a form of cooperative solar called community solar or shared solar. The electric co-op installs, operates, and maintains a solar system that is larger than home scale. Members can choose to buy into the system. Since its inception in 2003, community solar capacity has grown rapidly, and experts anticipate that the market will continue to grow, as consumers choose to support “clean energy” alternatives, including solar.

Community solar systems typically are larger than residential rooftop systems but smaller than utility-scale projects. Generation capacity is usually between 20 kilowatt (kW) and 1 megawatt (MW). These systems are most often sited in the community served by the systems, and may be installed on open land or even on top of a public building or parking garage.

HOW DOES A COOPERATIVE-OWNED COMMUNITY SOLAR SYSTEM WORK?

The cooperative handles all of the logistical details, including site assessment, selecting and installing the equipment, interconnection and permitting details, and maintaining the system after installation.

To pay for a community solar system, options include group purchasing of the solar equipment, crowd financing, community

investment, and donations. The system may also be anchored by one or more large business customers, who commit to the investment. Most cooperative-based projects allow customers to participate by contributing either an up-front purchase payment or pay through an ongoing monthly “subscription” or rental payment to support the units.

In return, participating members receive a payment, or credit back on their electric bills, based on their contribution and how much electricity is produced by the solar system.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES TO COOPERATIVE MEMBERS?

- In nearly half of housing arrangements, consumers are not able to install their own solar system. For example, if you rent your home or have covenants that prevent solar, you can participate in community solar. If your home is too shaded or your roof isn't strong enough to support a solar array, you can participate in community solar. If you can't afford an upfront investment in a solar array, you may be able to afford participation in a community solar unit.
- Community solar is a no-hassle clean-energy option for consumers. Because the cooperative builds, operates, and maintains the system, participating members have a win-win arrangement: bearing a low- or no-upfront investment, and

reaping the monthly rewards of the power generated.

- Community solar is more affordable than installing your own system; and you won't have to worry about financing either.
- Community systems have the advantage of economies of scale, meaning that costs decrease as the size of the system increases. The costs can also be spread out amongst many participants. That makes a portion of a large solar system less expensive than a comparable residential rooftop system.
- There is flexibility in most cooperative solar systems. You can lease or subscribe to any number of solar panels or a portion of one system, as you wish. Your purchase is in the form of "energy shares;" often you can add more capacity later, if you choose to do so. Not all programs require a long-term commitment.
- If you move from your home, some programs will allow you to take the solar commitment along.

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