# COMMUNITY SOLAR WORKS FOR LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

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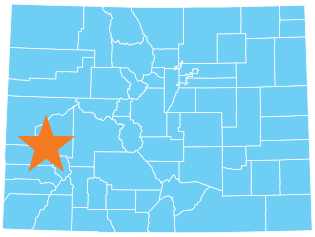
| PROGRAM ELEMENTS | ADDITIONAL DETAIL |
|---|---|
| **Ensure low-income customer participation.** | ▸ **Carve out program -** A carve-out can specify that a certain portion of the total program capacity (not on a per-project basis) should be set aside for low-income customers.<br>▸ **Incentives Program -** Incentives can entice project developers to serve low-income customers.<br>▸ **Standalone Program -** A standalone programmatic approach that focuses on serving low-income families. *For example, by combining energy efficiency and weatherization improvements with community solar participation.*<br>▸ **Preference -** Utility regulators or individual utilities, municipal utilities, or rural electric cooperatives can use a tariff structure to establish a preference for projects that serve low-income customers. |
| **Low-income customers should receive a tangible economic benefit.** | ▸ Community solar bill credits should reflect the full retail value of the solar energy.<br>▸ Combined community solar with energy efficiency and weatherization offerings can maximize customer bill savings.<br>▸ Incentives can be awarded for low-income participation, which can be wholly or partially passed on to program participants. |
| **Make it as easy for the customer as possible.** | ▸ If a payment will be required to participate in the community solar offering, utilize an on-bill payment or on-bill financing mechanism.<br>▸ Minimize income verification requirements. *For example, consider location-based eligibility or income verification every five years.*<br>▸ The community solar offering should be consumer friendly. *For example, no contracts or short-term contracts, no termination fees or unsubscribe fees.* |
| **Partner with community-based organizations.** | ▸ Trusted local organizations can help locate income-eligible subscribers.<br>▸ Community-based organizations can leverage established relationships, build trust and overcome customer skepticism or confusion.<br>▸ Community Action Agencies can help ensure participants are signed up for complimentary programs like energy efficiency and weatherization.<br>▸ Optimal program design includes funding for outreach to community organizations, and to aid them in conducting education for their members. |
| **Sustained funding is key.** | ▸ Identify funding sources that can facilitate low-income participation, help low-income families afford community solar and receive tangible economic benefits.<br>▸ Energy assistance directed to community solar participation should be considered may be a more sustainable way to help families afford their utility bills.<br>▸ Incentive adders can help attractive community solar project owners to include low-income customers. |
| **Incorporate job training and placement.** | ▸ Community solar project development and construction provides valuable opportunities for on-the-job training.<br>▸ Job training opportunities should be targeted toward underserved communities. |
| **Review and adjust as needed.** | ▸ There is no one-size-fits-all way to do community solar that maximizes benefits for low-income customers. Establishing periodic program evaluations and opportunities for adjustment will ensure continuity and maximum opportunities for customers to benefit. |

# EXAMPLES OF WELL-DESIGNED COMMUNITY SOLAR PROJECTS
# SERVING LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

## DELTA-MONTROSE ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION'S (DMEA)

When built in 2016, DMEA's low-income community solar garden was the largest of its kind in the country.



**Colorado:** Montrose County

### Accessibility and Affordability:

- Subscribers will realize average annual cost savings of $312, and up to $512 when combined with average cost savings of $200 from the state's weatherization assistance program.
- GRID Alternatives manages customer enrollment.
- Subscribers' community solar bill credits are set at a value of 4 cents per kWh. This fixed rate helps insulate customers from bill fluctuations, providing both price predictability and the ability to budget household energy expenditures.

### Community Engagement:

- DMEA and GRID Alternatives partnered to provide customer outreach using printed materials and in-person workshops.
- GRID Alternatives provided on-the-job training during construction.

### Compatibility and Integration:

- Integrates solar with energy efficiency and weatherization upgrades.

> It is a **BIG THING** to know what our bill costs will be for the next few years. **IT HELPS US WITH BUDGETING.**
>
> *Steve Sidebottom, Subscriber (Source: the Colorado Energy Office)*

### More information can be found here:

- https://austinenergy.com/ae/green-power/solar-solutions/for-your-home/community-solar

## AUSTIN ENERGY

Austin Energy, a municipal utility, enables cost-effective low-income participation in its 2.5 MW La Loma Community Solar project.

**Texas:**
Travis County

### Accessibility and Affordability:

- 200 customers in Austin Energy's Customer Assistance Program (CAP) are eligible to participate in the program and receive 100% clean, solar energy.
- Eligible CAP customers receive a reduced rate for their subscription and receive no-cost energy efficiency improvements.
- Low-income participants receive a fixed $1.5 cent per kilowatt-hour savings. This rate is locked in for 15 years providing price predictability and stability.

> Austin is **FOCUSED ON INCLUSIVE INNOVATION** around sustainability. We are realizing a more green future, and the Austin Energy Community Solar initiative shows the world how everyone in **YOUR COMMUNITY CAN SUPPORT** and benefit from renewable energy.
>
> *Austin Mayor Steve Adler*
>
> *(Source: https://austinenergy.com/ae/about/news/press-releases/2018/austin-energy-community-solar-wins-climate-protection-award)*

## CHERRYLAND ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY SOLAR PILOT PROGRAM

Cherryland Electric Cooperative partnered with the Northwest Michigan Community Action Agency (NMCAA) and the Michigan Agency for Energy (MAE) to deploy community solar to help customers save energy, lower their energy bills and experience improved comfort in their homes.

**Michigan:**
Wexford County

### Accessibility and Affordability:

- Each participating customer will subscribe to nine panel shares.
- The community solar arrangement utilizes virtual net metering.
- Participants will receive a monthly bill credit of 10 cents per kWh for the output of their panel shares, or about $350 each year in solar bill credits.
- Customers could see a reduction of up to 33% on their electric bills.
- Funding for the pilot program comes from MAE, which provided an $80,000 grant, Cherryland, and the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) through NMCAA.

### Community Engagement:

- Cherryland, working with the NMCAA, identified participants who were low-income, underwent weatherization upgrades to their homes, and completed a home energy assessment to identify low-cost and no-cost opportunities to save energy and money.

### More information can be found here:

- http://www.michigan.gov/energy/0,4580,7-230--461872--,00.html

> We should see a decrease in participating members leaving unpaid bills or getting disconnected. It's a **WIN FOR THE STATE** and all of our taxpayers because we should see a decrease in reliance on energy assistance dollars."
>
> *Tammy Squires, Cherryland Energy Adviser. (Source: electric.coop)*

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**For more information and resources, visit the Low Income Solar Policy guide at www.lowincomesolar.org**