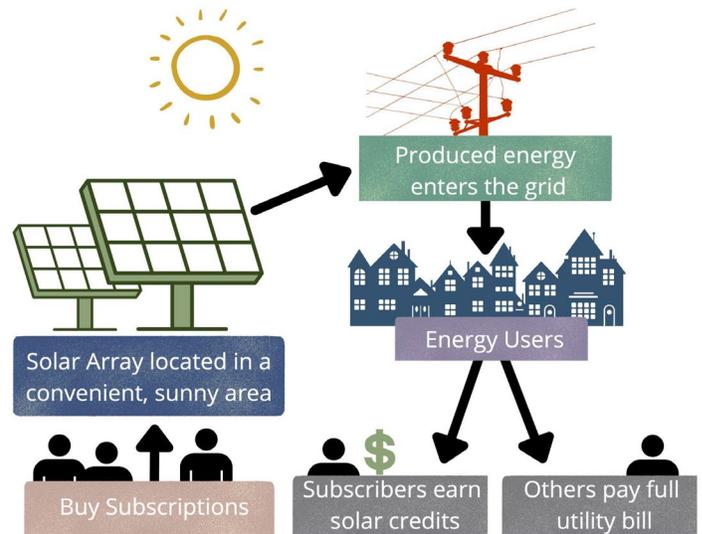


Enable Community Solar in Michigan

Community solar allows people to invest in collective, community-based solar projects and receive credits on their electric bills for the energy produced. Community solar programs and payment models are highly customizable and can be uniquely designed by communities.

In comparison to utility-scale projects, community solar keeps the benefits (and often the decision-making) local. Community solar installations are typically much smaller than utility ones. Most cover about 20 acres of land, but size can vary. A single community solar project has the potential to power hundreds, even thousands of homes.



Community solar is popular and new projects are emerging quickly around the world. It is widespread in states with community solar enabling policies, including: [Minnesota](#), Massachusetts, New York, and Florida, who are ranked [top four](#) for the most community solar projects. Community solar is promoted by many agencies including Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), the U.S. Department of Energy, and the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL).

Benefits of Community Solar

- Allows people who may not be able to install solar panels (renters and multi-tenant buildings) to still benefit from solar energy.
- Helps to create a stronger, spread out, and more [resilient](#) energy grid.
- People take ownership of and have choice in the energy they consume.
- Opens access to solar for people of all incomes and backgrounds, promoting [energy justice](#).
- Strategically located in places that receive the most sun to generate the most benefit.
- Communities can design projects depending on needs.
- Opens the market, reduces barriers, and increases energy competition.
- More [socially acceptable](#) than utility-scale solar because it gives benefits directly back to the community, is smaller scale, and is under community control.
- Offers economies of scale in comparison to residential solar.

Policy Changes Needed to Support Community Solar

Michigan's current energy policy gives utilities a full monopoly in their service territory, which gives them the power to reject and prevent community solar projects. Utilities have been reluctant to give up any market share to community solar. This is why there are relatively few projects in Michigan compared to other states.

In April 2021, a bipartisan group of legislators introduced two bills (House Bills [4715](#) and [4716](#)) that would enable community solar projects for all Michiganders. These bills make solar more accessible by forcing utilities to accept the community solar project and give participants credits on their electric bills, creating opportunities for low-income

Enable Community Solar in Michigan

Example of a Successful Community Solar Project

L'Anse is a village of 2,000 people in the Upper Peninsula. Its municipal utility started an award-winning community solar project that supports low-to-moderate income families. Click [here](#) to learn more.

households to participate, and making it possible for third parties to create and install community solar facilities. House Bills 4715 and 4716 are currently in the Michigan House Energy Committee who held a hearing to discuss them Oct 27, 2021.

As of December 2021, the committee is still considering whether to report the bills out to the full legislature. Utilities are currently fighting against community solar enabling policy because of the threat of competition, but their recent reliability issues related to the August 2021 storms have weakened their influence over Michigan legislation.

Bill goal: The main goal of these bills is to break down some of the barriers obstructing and sometimes preventing community solar projects in Michigan.

How the Oct 27, 2021 hearing went: The hearing on October 27th leaned in favor of community solar enablement. Several people and organizations testified. Utilities were in opposition, but there were many in support of the bills including solar installers, Michigan Energy Options, Michigan Conservative Energy Forum, and MTU students. As of Dec 13, 2021 the Energy Committee has not yet held a vote to forward the legislation to the full House.

When and by whom these bills were introduced: April 27, 2021. Introduced by Reps. Hood, Steckloff, Hope, LaGrand, Kuppa, Pohutsky, Rabhi, Aiyash, Hammoud, Hertel, Neeley, Cynthia Johnson, Young, Tyrone Carter, Ellison, Peterson, Stone, Cambensy, Wozniak, Outman, Bolden, Bezotte, Whitsett, Weiss, Markkanen, Steven Johnson, Sowerby, Meerman and Yancey and referred to the Committee on Energy.

How You Can Help

- **Write to your legislatures.** One of the most effective ways to support the passing of these bills is to write to your representatives and/or members of the energy committee. Resources are available to guide you on how to write an effective letter to different members of the Michigan legislature.
 - Letter templates and other helpful materials can be found [here](#).
 - To learn more about the legislative process, click [here](#).
- **Share information about community solar with others.** The more people that know about community solar, the more support these enablement policies can receive.
 - Share this document.
 - Share this [social media post](#).
- **Follow the Michigan House Energy Committee.** Sign up for email notifications from the committee [here](#).

Enable Community Solar in Michigan

Where to Learn More

[What is community solar? | energysage](#). Defines and clarifies what community solar is and gives more detail on the benefits and different models of community solar.

[Community Solar Basics | Solar Energy Technologies Office](#). Defines community solar and how it works, and gives a short description of benefits for consumers and utilities.

[Community Solar Case Studies | EESI](#). Provides case studies of community solar projects in Colorado, Iowa, and Minnesota.

[The 4 Types of Solar Projects | SolarLandLease](#). Defines the four main types of solar projects: residential, commercial, utility-scale, and community solar.

[Pros and cons of community solar | energysage](#). Gives and describes three pros and three cons of community solar.

About this Document

This document was written by students at Michigan Technological University and posted on December 14, 2021. Its primary authors are Erin Doran, Morgan Hallberg, and Christian Sheja. All of the people noted below contributed to the broader ideas and learning around community solar included in this document over the course of fall semester 2021.

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