

Community Solar Garden Frequently Asked Questions

What are the benefits of participating in community solar?

There are many reasons other communities have chosen to set up Community Solar Gardens. When you participate in community solar, you're choosing an alternative to fossil-fuel consumption. Solar energy is clean, helps to fight climate change, and can be produced locally. Community Solar Gardens can be a good financial investment, it is supporting locally produced energy and can be a source of community pride.

How does it work?

An array of solar panels is installed in one or more locations with a good sunny exposure. The power is distributed through the local utility. People can purchase a subscription for solar power from the array, to provide all or part of the electricity they use each month. They are credited on their utility bill for the power created by their subscribed share of the CSG.

What exactly am I subscribing to?

You are subscribing to a portion of the electricity produced by a large solar array.

How is it paid for?

Typically, subscriptions can be paid for up-front in a lump sum, or over time in monthly installments. Monthly payment plans would include a finance charge. Subscriptions are for a specified period of time, typically 20 to 25 years.

How much will it cost?

Subscription cost will depend on a number of factors, including the amount of power desired, the size of the array that is built (due to economies of scale, larger arrays provide cheaper power than small ones), and the payment option that is chosen. Exact figures will be available later in the project development process.

How much credit will I receive each month?

Your monthly credit will be calculated by dividing the entire array's total monthly production by the portion of the array that you've subscribed to. The resulting kWh credit will be applied to your bill according to the current electric rate.

What if I move or no longer wish to participate?

Depending on the particular CSG program, subscriptions that are paid for up-front can be gifted or sold to another customer within the utility service area, or sold back to the CSG operator on a pro-rated basis (a small surrender fee may be charged). Most CSG models allow subscribers on monthly payment plans to simply drop out of the program.

Will I save money by participating in a Community Solar program?

Probably. Based on current electrical rates, it may take from 15 to 20 years for participants to "break even" on their investment in solar energy. As the cost of electricity increases over the term of the subscription, savings might come sooner.

How do I get involved?

The Itasca Clean Energy team, a local group of citizens, and the North Star Chapter Sierra Club have been working together to make this project a reality in Grand Rapids.

There are many ways to get involved, from educating your networks about Community Solar, joining us at monthly planning meetings, and more!

To learn more about joining our efforts call Bill at 218-398-3079 or email Natalie at natalie.cook@sierraclub.org.

