

Community Solar = Solar for Everyone

A new program in Maryland aims to expand access to solar power

Across the U.S., solar power is booming as a source of energy, benefiting consumers, communities, and our climate. Solar energy not only reduces our carbon footprint and decreases air pollution, but it is also quickly overtaking fossil fuels as the leading job creator in the energy sector. The number of solar jobs in the U.S. has reached over 250,000! In Maryland, over 5,000 people are employed by the solar industry.

What is community solar?

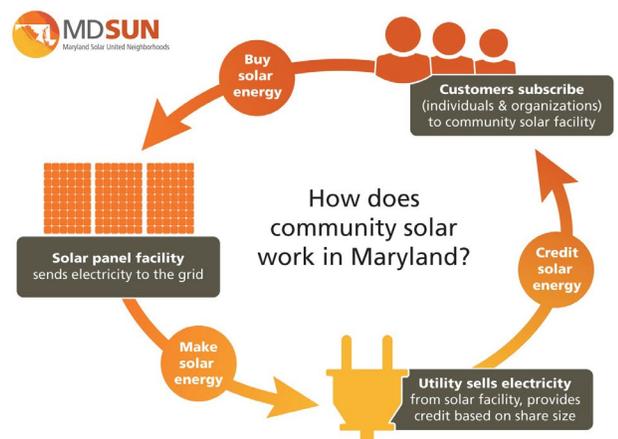
Maryland's community solar pilot program allows families to take advantage of the cost savings of solar without having to own their home or install equipment on their property. Only 20% of the U.S. population has access to rooftop solar panels. Most of us face a variety of barriers to switching to solar: don't own our homes, can't afford solar panels, have shady roofs or structurally unsound roofs, etc.

Community solar allows customers who rent, have shady roofs, or are otherwise unable to install solar on their residences to buy or subscribe to a portion of a shared solar system. The subscriber's share of the electricity generated by the project is credited to their electricity bill, just as if the solar system were located at their home.

How does it work?

Under Maryland's community solar program, households can own or subscribe to a small share of a larger solar project that is sited locally, but not on their property. The solar project delivers all the power it produces into the grid, and the local utility redistributes this power among its customers. The household then receives a credit on their monthly utility bill for the amount of electricity their share of the system produced. This arrangement is called "virtual net-metering."

Solar projects may vary from community to community, depending on the solar developer, the utility company that serves the region, and the customer's requirements. Yet, no matter the structure of the project, all of the projects will be designed so that solar subscribers will see lower rates.



Who can sign up?

Anyone who has an account with a utility in Maryland and meets the individual requirements can join — no roof required.

Importantly, the pilot program was designed to provide low- and moderate-income households an opportunity to participate in community solar. This commitment to making solar accessible to everyone is critical because, even as solar electricity takes off, working families account for only a small fraction of all residential solar installations. This problem is stark in Maryland. According to the Center for American Progress, only one percent of residential solar has been installed in Maryland communities where median household incomes are below \$40,000. Maryland's community solar program is a major step toward a more equitable clean energy economy.

If you live anywhere other than the Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO) service territory, you can sign up for community solar today! Neighborhood Sun and CleanChoice Energy are taking subscribers. Go to their websites to sign up and see what's being offered in your community.

There are currently two community solar providers in BGE:



Neighborhood Sun: BGE customers will save 5% off their utility rates, or 15% if they meet low- or moderate-income requirements in a 3-year contract. No rooftop required and no money down. More info:

<https://neighborhoodsun.solar/>



CleanChoice Energy: BGE customers can save up to 10% off their utility rate by joining a local Community Solar Farm in a 25-year contract. No rooftop required and no money down. More info: <https://cleanchoiceenergy.com/zip-community-solar/>



Have any questions or want to get involved in bringing community solar to your neighborhood? Contact Taylor Smith-Hams, CCAN's Healthy Communities Campaign Organizer, at taylor@chesapeakeclimate.org or (650) 704-3208. More info at <http://chesapeakeclimate.org/maryland/community-solar-for-everyone/>.