



COMMUNITY SOLAR DEVELOPER & OPERATOR QUESTIONS

Community Solar Gardens (also called Community Solar and Community-Shared Solar) are centrally-located solar PV systems that provide electricity to participating subscribers. They are a new and exciting way for people in Minnesota to benefit from solar photovoltaic (PV) systems without having to install their own stand-alone project.

This document features key questions community groups, often working on behalf of multiple subscribers, could ask to learn more about Community Solar Garden developers and operators.



QUESTIONS COMMUNITIES SHOULD ASK

COMPANY & APPROACH

- How long have you been in business? How many installations have you done? Do you have references we can contact?
- What do you see as your strategic advantage in this new Minnesota market?
- Are you in compliance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations, including tax, ownership, and securities laws and regulations?
- Who will develop, own, finance, install, operate, and maintain the system? Do you have a set of contractors you work with for these tasks? Do you plan to do them yourself?
- Will your process be open to an RFP with the opportunity for local contractors to be involved?
- Is the installer who will be performing the work NABCEP certified?

YOUR MODEL

- Is your model a pre-paid plan or a pay-as-you-go plan (or a combination)?
- If pay-as-you-go, is there a long-term subscription? Penalty for early termination?
- If pre-paid, are there times when a subscriber might be asked to pay additional charges?
- What risks and benefits do you see with your model?
- Do you have a plan for how to engage lower income customers in your projects?
- What does your model look like for less than 10 subscribers?
- What roles do subscribers have in the garden's financial health and future? Will there be an annual meeting of subscribers to discuss financial reports and activities? Voting rights of the subscribers?
- Will the operator issue annual reports to subscribers and/or the community? If so, what will be included in the reports?
- What is the form of the guarantee that the project will be intact for the duration of the subscription?
- Will I get my money back if anything happens to your company?

EQUIPMENT & MAINTENANCE

- What types of modules are being specified? Are they high quality from a reputable company?
- Describe your production and maintenance warranties.
- What is the lifetime of the equipment?
- What levels and types of insurance do you carry?
- Who will be the entity to conduct the maintenance on the system? How have you budgeted for those costs in your business model?
- Do you carry service interruption insurance? What do I get back from a service interruption?
- Is all maintenance included in the initial subscription price?

PARTNERS & SITE SELECTION

- Are you open to working with host sites and community partners to tailor your projects?
- Can community groups participate in site selection?
- What are your expectations of roles and responsibilities of the community partners?
- Describe costs, both community partner costs and capital costs for the project.
- Who will handle the majority of the marketing—you, community partners, or a combo?
- Do you have a preference for host sites in terms of the type of entity and/or location?
- Do you have a preference for ground-mounted vs. rooftop installations?

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

- Checklist of items that should be included in a Community Solar Garden subscriber agreement:
<http://mncerts.org/csg-disclosure>
- Questions that prospective subscribers can ask of operators about their Community Solar Garden projects:
<http://mncerts.org/csg-subscribers>

FIND MORE RESOURCES

Learn more from the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) in our Guide to Community Solar Gardens, which includes a list of available programs, frequently asked questions, and other resources at <http://mncerts.org/solargardens>.

SOURCES:

- Questions for Hiring a Contractor by Minnesota Department of Commerce
<http://mn.gov/commerce/energy/images/Hiring-Renewable-Energy-Installer.pdf>
- Michigan Community Solar Gardens Guidebook by Great Lakes Renewable Energy Association
www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcd/Michigan_Community_Solar_Guidebook_437888_7.pdf
- Community Solar Garden Guide by National Renewable Energy Laboratory
www.nrel.gov/docs/fy11osti/49930.pdf