



Community Solar Benefits Maine

Increasing the Benefits of Solar to All Mainers

Community solar farms are a promising and proven tool for increasing access to solar by households of all kinds. A strong community solar policy:

- Expands access to local clean energy for renters or those lacking a suitable roof, and those who can't afford the upfront cost of solar.
- Gives towns and other organizations an opportunity to build large, cost-effective solar farms that serve multiple homes, businesses, and other consumers.
- Lowers energy costs for everybody who pays an electric bill by delivering electricity locally and reducing dependence on large, expensive power plants and costly transmission lines.
- Contributes to cleaner air by reducing reliance on expensive, polluting fossil fuel energy sources.

What is a Community Solar Farm?

A community solar farm gives a group of people, businesses, or a town (or a mix of all three) greater access to the benefits of solar energy. Instead of installing solar panels individually, the group works with a developer to build a medium- to large-sized solar installation that can distribute the clean energy locally to separately metered buildings. Monthly electricity costs for participants are the same or lower than before they subscribed to the solar farm because they typically pay for the solar through a Power Purchase Agreement with no upfront cost. If you rent or move within the state, you can take your solar subscription with you—or even transfer it back to the community solar farm for someone else.

The use of community solar farms in the United State has more than quadrupled since 2016¹ because they expand access to solar for people of all incomes by lowering electricity costs and allowing people to overcome upfront installation costs.

Outdated policies and an arbitrary nine-person limit on the amount of people who can participate in any community solar farm have caused Maine to fall behind on this promising clean energy solution. **LD 1711** would eliminate that cap and enact modern policies so that thousands of Maine households can take part in community solar.

¹ <https://e360.yale.edu/features/energy-equity-bringing-solar-power-to-low-income-communities>

Expanding Clean Energy Access for Low and Moderate Income Communities

Community solar farms present an exciting opportunity to bring clean energy to Mainers who rent or live in mobile homes, don't have financial resources to cover upfront installation costs, or don't have suitable roofs. For example, in Colorado, the nearly 400 households enrolled in the state's 8 low-income solar projects save between 15 and 50 percent on their electricity bills.² **LD 1711** would also increase energy equity in Maine by requiring a portion of investments in community solar projects to serve low- to moderate-income families.

Case study: Downeast Community Partners (DCP) is a nonprofit group that has been serving more than 5,000 low-income Mainers in Washington and Hancock Counties since 1966.

DCP first looked into community solar to help lower energy costs for the households they serve, but unfortunately Maine's outdated energy policy limited a project to nine participants. This arbitrary cap prevented DCP from being able to install a project that was large enough to take advantage of economies of scale and connect to the residents who need the benefits the most.

Instead, DCP built a community solar farm on an old, unused blueberry field in Franklin that serves 9 of their 14 organizational buildings. They paid no upfront costs and their electricity bills will stay steady even as electric rates rise. Once the pay-off period is over (DCP can buy the solar farm outright at a great price at the end of the payoff period), their electricity costs will drop.

"Any dollar that we don't have to spend on operating expenses is another dollar that we can spend on helping the people in our communities. Maine should lift the arbitrary cap on community solar so low- and moderate-income Mainers can take advantage of the same savings we did." –Dale Basher, Operations Manager, Downeast Community Partners



DALE BASHER

² <https://e360.yale.edu/features/energy-equity-bringing-solar-power-to-low-income-communities>

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