

Project Name:

ACCESSOLAR AT NYCHA

Large city-wide program brings benefits to developers and the community

Size:

NYCHA has pledged to host 30 MW of solar on its property by 2026. 3 MW have been installed at five developments via third-party roof leases such as ACCESSolar. An additional eight MW of community shared solar is currently in negotiation, 4 MW of which was from the ACCESSolar solicitation.

Location:

New York City

of LMI customers:

Over 600 LMI New Yorkers are currently subscribed to NYCHA community solar projects.

Project Website:

[ACCESSolar April 2022.pdf \(nyc.gov\)](#)

BEST PRACTICES

- Low-cost rooftop leases
- Seek to make proposal development as collaborative and flexible as possible

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Overview

ACCESSolar stands for “ACcelerating Community Empowered Shared Solar” and is a project of the [New York City Housing Authority](#) (NYCHA). NYCHA is the nation’s largest residential landlord, with a public housing portfolio that serves 400,000 of the nation’s lowest-income households. ACCESSolar is part of NYCHA’s commitment to host 30 MW of solar by 2026 as part of its [Sustainability Agenda](#) and the Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) [Renew300 Initiative](#). The Renew300 program helps federally assisted housing properties (like NYCHA) to implement community-based renewable energy projects, and NYCHA received assistance under that program in 2016 when first scoping its solar goals.

In 2018, NYCHA released an open call for teams to develop proposals for solar on smaller NYCHA rooftops under the ACCESSolar banner, to complement NYCHA’s first Commercial Solar RFP focusing on larger rooftops. These teams were required to include local nonprofits or small businesses, and were asked to maximize community benefits in their proposal. Five teams were selected to develop full proposals. Four teams- those led by [Kinetic Communities Consulting](#), [Solar One](#), [Sol Purpose](#), and [Bloc Power](#), are currently a part of the ACCESSolar program, and one project, covering 1.2 MW across three developments (Kingsborough, Glenwood, and Carver) has completed





construction, to accompany NYCHA’s first 1.8 MW solar lease at Queensbridge North and South. An additional 4 MW across 11 developments is planned under the ACCESSolar banner. Community benefits that teams provided included high levels of low- and moderate-income enrollment electric customers as well as, in one case, provision of free Wi-Fi to residents of buildings where solar panels were located.

This collaboration was able to tap into [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority \(NYSERDA\)](#)’s larger [NY-Sun](#) initiative, which contributed approximately \$110,000 in funding to help [Sustainable CUNY](#) and [ICF](#) (a consulting firm) provide assistance to NYCHA and the selected teams. These partners assisted with partnership building and information on permitting, safety and security on multifamily housing, [VDER](#) (Value of Distributed Energy Resources) analysis, and consumer protections.

Constraints on NYCHA’s ability to access solar through traditional means (explained below) led to the development of the ACCESSolar program, which aligns with NYCHA’s focus on lifting up local, smaller scale developers that could serve their own communities via

economic development, green jobs, and reduced utility costs for low-income housing residents.

Innovative Approaches

- **Work around NYPA constraints on access to traditional solar.** NYCHA purchases its power from the New York Power Authority (NYPA), whose rates and regulations have historically made it impractical to construct large Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) systems on NYCHA housing property. Furthermore, NYCHA was not allowed to be an off-taker for any community solar system when the ACCESSolar program was set up. ACCESSolar projects, instead, are third-party roof leases for community solar, in which NYCHA offers roof space in exchange for lease revenue and programmatic commitments. ACCESSolar projects must ensure a low-cost utility bill or an on-bill credit to LMI subscribers, as well as workforce development commitments for NYCHA residents. These barriers resulted in the distinctive aspects of the ACCESSolar project.

BEST PRACTICES

- **Leverage private resources to meet sustainability commitments.** The ACCESSolar leases are structured as third-party projects in which NYCHA does not purchase the electricity or pay for any part of the construction. This approach minimizes cost and risk for the Authority and allows it to scale its sustainability goals while reserving its limited funding for pressing capital needs.
- **Workforce development.** NYCHA requires all solar lessees (those chosen through the ACCESSolar solicitation or via other RFPs) to hire and train members of the NYCHA community to install the systems. A cohort of NYCHA residents were trained for thirteen solar installation positions in connection with the solar lease at Queensbridge North and South, and twelve NYCHA residents were hired to install the solar projects at Carver, Glenwood, and Kingsborough. For both projects, several NYCHA residents have remained with the installer team for permanent positions.
- **Support for small developers.** NYCHA and its partners provided:
 - A flexible, open application process in which NYCHA worked with selected teams to develop the best possible proposal
 - Rooftops for solar installation, available for a modest rent payment.
 - Partnership-building support from [Sustainable CUNY](#).

- Technical assistance funding
- Partner with utilities and community organizations

Lessons Learned

- For massive programs like ACCESSolar, coordinating with all partners (federal, city, private), on all aspects of the program leads to success. Barriers to accessing traditional solar structures such as PPAs can result in the creation of innovative programs that benefit local communities.
- Allowing for flexibility in proposal development is crucial to keeping projects alive- many initial rooftops have proven unfeasible, but ACCESSolar's collaborative structure allowed NYCHA to pivot and find alternative sites.



This case study is a part of the LIFT Toolkit initiative. To explore more case studies and best practices visit LIFT.Groundswell.org
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