

Project Name:

COMMUNITY SOLAR FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Community Action Agency spearheads no-fee community solar for low- and middle-income subscribers

Size:

110 kW_{DC}

Location:

91 Buck Drive, Westminister, VT 05158

of LMI customers:

50 households

Project Website:

<https://www.sevca.org/news/267-free-solar-energy-assistance-now-available-from-sevca-s-community-solar-for-community-action-project>

BEST PRACTICES

- Local Government Grants or Bonds
- Public funding campaign
- No cost site lease
- Philanthropic grants



Overview

Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) owns and manages a Community Solar for Community Action project (CS4CA), which was energized in 2019. SEVCA is a Community Action Agency (CAA) which was established in 1964 as part of the Economic Opportunity Act, to support the “War on Poverty.” SEVCA is a local private and public nonprofit organization that carries out Community Action Programs. The community solar project goals include reducing the energy burdens of low-income households and SEVCA’s Westminister location, and stabilizing energy costs for subscribers. Virtual (group) net metering credits deliver energy assistance directly to low-income households. Ninety percent of the energy production is dedicated to income-qualified subscribers, and SEVCA offtakes the remaining 10% for the Westminister facility. SEVCA manages the subscription process and owns the installation.

Catamount Solar, a Vermont-based, employee-owned solar contractor, installed the array. The Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) provided technical assistance and helped navigate the regulatory process with Green Mountain Power (GMP) - Vermont’s only investor-owned utility - and the Vermont department of public service. RREAL is an award-winning solar developer, and based on their CS4CA model (used in Minnesota and Vermont), they were awarded a \$200,000 prize in the Solar in Your Community Challenge, a national



competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). \$15,000 of the award was used on SEVCA's solar project.

Households in Windham and Windsor Counties that have a GMP account are eligible to apply. Initial enrollment outreach efforts were aided by rosters of clients already receiving services from SEVCA. They mailed applications to around 700 households who had received weatherization and/or energy assistance. They also publicized the enrollment period in local press. Households with high energy burdens were targeted for subscriptions. Benefits amount to approximately \$300/year in savings per household, and SEVCA does not charge any subscription fees. Subscribers rotate in and out of the program on a three year term. GMP allows changes to, or 'rotates', subscribers four times a year, to offer some flexibility for subscribers leaving or entering the program. The below chart provides a high level, subscriber view of the program:



The CS4CA project cost was \$314,000. Several local corporate and private contributors made significant donations to the project, and RREAL ran a [fundraising campaign](#). As previously mentioned, RREAL contributed \$15,000. SEVCA was also awarded a matching grant of \$111,000 from the [Windham Regional Commission's Renewable Energy Grant Program](#).



Innovative Approaches

- As a trusted CAA, SEVCA was able to **leverage their long-term relationships with clients** to recruit subscribers.

Lessons Learned

- Project was downsized due to Vermont capacity and location (roof and ground mount) limitations. A roof upgrade on SEVCA's offices was needed to install the roof array.
- Information conveyed to potential subscribers needs to be basic, and the application needs to be as simple as possible.
- [CAP Solar](#) is a nonprofit solar developer aligned with the CAAs to assist with solar project financing and evaluation. SEVCA may have been able to receive assistance from this organization.



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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