



Institute for Energy and the Environment

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The Energy Clinic's Seven Steps to Community Solar Ownership

Step One – Do you want to go solar but perhaps you don't have access to a good solar site of your own? Do you want to own your share of a community solar project to reduce your carbon footprint, support the local economy, and increase your economic benefits from the project? If so you can help create a community solar array along with the members of your town energy committee, church group, softball league, or just a group of your friends looking to take action to benefit the community and the planet.

Step Two – The group's leaders should educate themselves about what community solar is to help guide the group through the process and assist in making good decisions that lead to a successful project. There are a number of resources that can help you such as the [Energy Clinic's Community Solar Guidelines](#), which provide an overview of the Group Net Metering rules as well as a detailed discussion of the steps involved. You can also find additional resources from the Vermont Natural Resources Council at www.vecan.net and you can email us at energyclinic@vermontlaw.edu if you need some early help.

Step Three – We advise early on in the process that you identify a local solar company as a project partner. Perhaps one of your early group members has an existing relationship with a good solar company or you could do some research or even interview a few companies to identify a company which shares your group's values. Your local solar company partner will be an important technical resource as you find a site and develop a simple financial plan for the solar array. This company would ultimately construct the array and sell it to the group's members.

Step Four – Begin to investigate some possible sites and develop a simple financial plan for the community solar array. Your local solar company can help you with this and the Energy Clinic is glad to answer questions along the way. Once you educate yourself on what makes a good site exploring the local possibilities should be fun. Your solar installer can begin developing some estimated costs for the project and you can estimate how many community members you approximately need. In addition to individual households, any local business or community organization can own a portion of the array.

Step Five – Begin formalizing your group. The Energy Clinic's Solar Guidelines recommend setting up a member managed limited liability corporation (LLC). The Energy Clinic's webpage includes a model operating agreement for your own community solar LLC. This process is easier than you think and it has been done many times. In addition to the Energy Clinic's model agreements the Energy Clinic team would be glad to meet with your group and help you throughout the process. Other models exist also.

Step Six – Finalize your group, sign up with your installer just as if you were installing the array on your house, and have your solar company permit and construct the project. Once you formalize the basic details, the process can move faster than you would expect but don't delay since some of the current financial incentives expire on 12/31/16.

Step Seven – Once your project is energized by the local utility you must celebrate this most meaningful achievement. Your community group has taken an impressive step forward in community energy ownership in a manner that is friendly to the local community and the planet. You will be surprised at how proud you feel at this achievement and in the end how easy it really was. At least annually your community solar group should get together to discuss the operation of your solar company and to celebrate the magic of the sun.