Project Name:

MT HOPE SOLAR

Implementation of State of Oregon program brings benefits to LMI Customers

Size:

2.502 MW_{AC}

Location:

32998 OR HWY 213 Molalla, OR 97038

# of LMI customers:

132

Project Website:

https://neighborhoodpower.com/community-solar/ or https://www.oregoncsp.org/project/mt-hope-solar/

BEST PRACTICES

- Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) owned by participants
- State incentives
- Using commercial "anchor tenants" to promote residential participation

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Overview

Mt Hope Solar community solar farm is operated by Neighborhood Power Corporation (NPC), serving customers in Portland General Electric's (PGE) service area. The project, which began operations in 2021, is located in Molalla, Oregon on land where co-farming activity is planned in the future. The project is a ground mounted, single axis tracking system, using bifacial solar modules. NPC has power purchase and interconnection agreements with PGE.

The project is implemented under the Oregon Community Solar Program (OCSP), passed in 2016 by the Oregon legislature in Senate Bill 1547. This program stipulates that 10% of any solar project's capacity must be dedicated to low-income customers. Most Oregonians pay for the program via a monthly surcharge on their energy bill, whether or not they enroll in community solar. All three of Oregon's IOUs (PGE, Idaho Power, and Pacific Power) must participate in the program. The PUC administers the program in partnership with Energy Solutions, Energy Trust of Oregon, and Community Energy Project. NPC acts as a "project manager" (PM) under the program, and receives the participant fees to pay for the cost to build, operate and maintain the project.

Overview of OCSP's Community Solar Program (Participant View)

OCSP has extensive technical and project management resources for PMs. Resources include tutorial and videos, steps and training for Project Certification,

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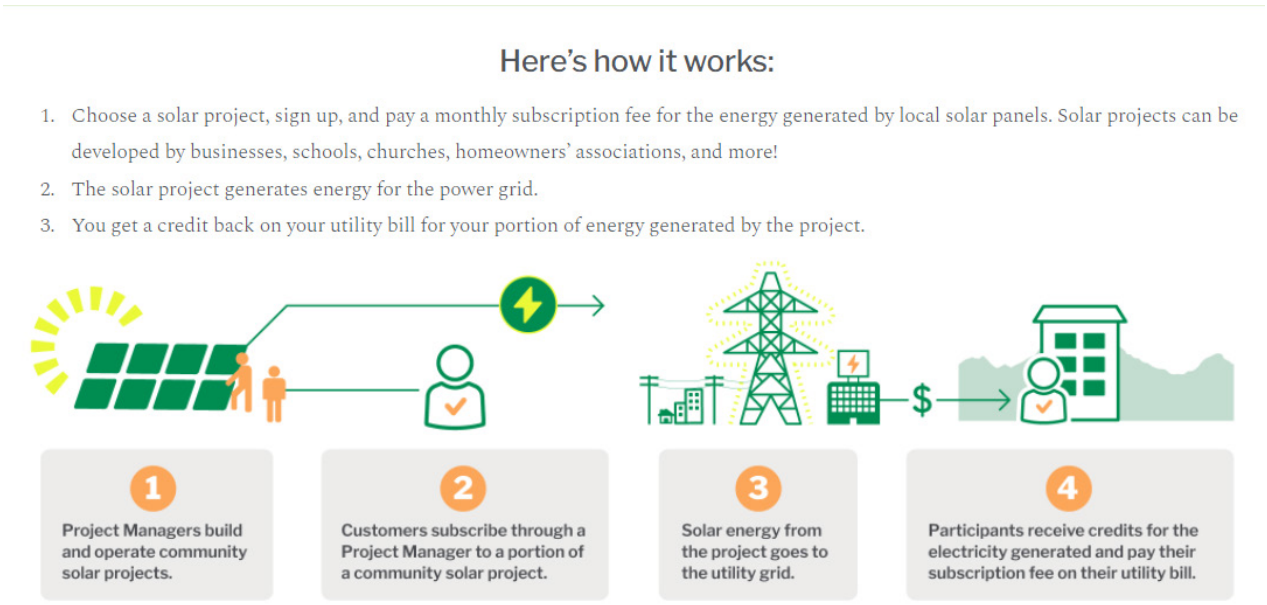

forms, waivers, and standardized contracts. To support participant enrollment, the website includes guidance on rates, bills and payments, RECs, and provides outreach and marketing support for participant enrollment including templates, materials, and low-income participant help and resources. OCSP also provides assistance on language services, project management, energy consumption workbooks, and bill calculators.

As mentioned above, the OCSP administers the program in partnership with Energy Solutions, Energy Trust of Oregon, and Community Energy Project. The OCSP received authority to administer the program from the Oregon Public Utility Commission. These organizations all play key roles in the implementation of OCSP, described in the chart below. Community Energy Project plays a key role supporting the LMI goals.

OCSP eliminates some barriers to accessing solar power such as home ownership, transfer, or cancellation fees. All billing and credits for community solar power are done through customers' regular monthly utility bills administered by their local electric utility. The number of LMI participants served by the project, stated as approximately 132 at

the start of this case study, is an estimate. Some of the buildings served are low-income master metered apartment buildings, so precise household counts are not available. For the Mt Hope Solar project, PGE provides customers with generation credits for their portion of the project. The solar subscription fees and PGE generation credit rates are fixed for 20 years. Customers may change their allocation in the solar farm at any time but capacity may be limited. PGE claims no RECs for the power generated. RECs are owned by the participant and retired by NPC on behalf of each participant.

Breakdown of Credits and Charges

- Generation credits - Higher than the below fees, resulting in typical savings up to 20% annually. Fixed at 11.234 cents per kWh.
- Subscription fees (debit) - payment towards the cost of building and maintaining the solar project. Fixed at 10.114 cents per kWh.
- Program fee (debit) - flat fee per month - waived for most LMI participants. Typically $1-5 per month for residential participants. The Oregon PUC can adjust these fees annually.

Innovative Approaches

- Iterative progress towards equitable access. The OCSP provides the backbone for Mt Hope Solar's equitable access. The program's intentional focus on LMI (see prior section on OCSP), and continuous improvement (via many stakeholder outreach events) over the years has yielded success in their LMI recruitment goals. As of December 2021, for PGE, there were 505 households participating, with 157 on the waitlist.
- Partners working in concert towards LMI goals. NPC (the Project Manager) recruits LMI participants using OSCP tools. The utility, PGE, sent flyers on the program to targeted households. OCSP laid out the overall strategy and program goals. OCSP's "Low-Income Facilitator" works closely with Project Managers to fill available capacity.
- Simple website for prospective customers. NPC's implementation of OCSP guidelines on recruiting LMI is clear and simple. It shows which projects are currently open, how much power is available, and lists future projects coming online.

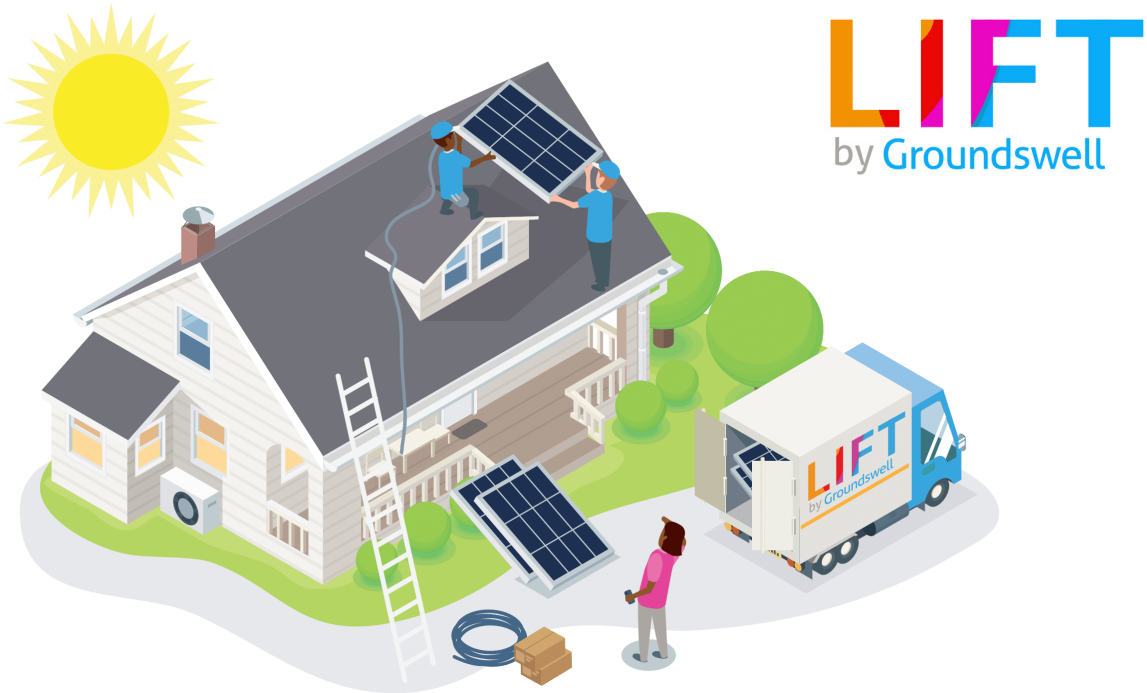


Photo Credit: Neighborhood Power Corp.

Lessons Learned

- Persistence, goal-setting, problem solving and commitment to the program yielded improvements. In the early days of the OCSP (entire program statistics through May, 2021 can be found here), LMI uptake was 2%, compared to the carve-out of 10%.
- However, despite good efforts to recruit participants, NPC was initially unable to meet their 40% residential and small commercial participation and 10% LMI participation requirement (mandated by OCSP) without help from the Community Energy Project, which left unused capacity behind. This capacity was desired by large commercial participants with sustainability goals but could not be allocated to them.
- NPC used creative approaches to tackle the recruitment problems. The most successful method was securing commercial "anchor tenants" such as local corporations as project champions. Each corporation's management team then emailed employees, explaining the benefits of the program and endorsing the community solar farms, which motivated hundreds of employees (residential participants) to sign up.
- Although the OCSP is mandated by the Oregon PUC, IOUs are hesitant to embrace community solar farms. Of the nine community solar farms NPC operates in Oregon, eight required formal complaints to the PUC against the utility to get them turned on.

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