



INVESTING IN SOLAR ENERGY

How Parks Advance Sustainability and Resilience

Solar power is one of the fastest growing energy sources in the United States and offers great potential for cities looking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Urban areas often have limited space for renewable energy infrastructure, yet parks and green spaces can provide a creative solution for increasing the availability of clean power in cities.

Parks can be leveraged for solar energy in several innovative ways, including integrating clean power generation into park facilities and serving as the location for community solar programs (described in detail below).

Leveraging Solar for Park Operations

When considering where and how to leverage solar power in parks, cities have a range of available options. Examples include the following:

- **Solar panels on park structures:** The rooftops of recreation centers, parking areas, picnic shelters, maintenance buildings, and other structures can provide space for solar arrays, and the energy generated can power park operations.

- **Solar lighting:** Solar-powered lighting can illuminate pathways and parking lots, providing enhanced visibility and safety at night.
- **Solar art installations and water features:** Solar panels can be incorporated into art installations, interactive displays, and water features to provide aesthetic appeal and educate visitors about solar energy and sustainability.

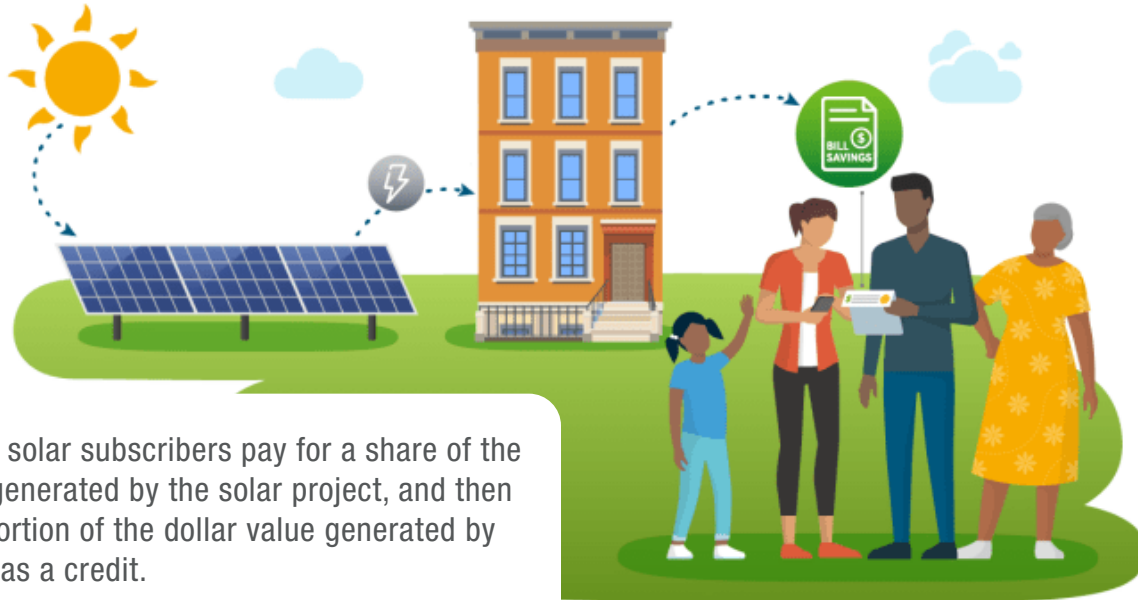
Leveraging Parks for Community Solar Programs

Parks are a natural place to locate community solar programs, because they often have buildings and other infrastructure that can host rooftop solar panels. In a community solar program, a city or utility agency will install a large central solar panel on a public building, and community members can buy a share of the panel to power their homes.

Participants receive credits on their electricity bills for the solar power they receive, often [saving money](#) compared to traditional energy sources. This makes it possible for families to enjoy the benefits of solar without having to pay to install costly panels on their own homes.

How does it work?

Community solar projects generate electricity from sunlight and the electricity flows to the electricity grid. Project owners can sell this power to their local utility.



Community solar subscribers pay for a share of the electricity generated by the solar project, and then receive a portion of the dollar value generated by the project as a credit.

Source: [Energy.gov](https://www.energy.gov)

Health and Equity Considerations

When implemented in partnership with community, solar panels in parks and neighborhoods can help mitigate environmental and economic disparities that negatively affect people of color and those with low incomes. Benefits include the following:

- **Improved air quality and public health:** Compared to traditional energy sources, solar power does not create air pollution or contribute to climate change. This is particularly beneficial for low-income areas and communities of color, who on average bear higher levels of exposure to pollution from fossil fuel–based energy sources and suffer worse health outcomes.
- **Savings:** Community solar programs can offer significant economic benefit by providing immediate savings on monthly electricity bills. People of color are more likely to be financially burdened by energy costs, sometimes having to choose between paying electricity and heating bills and covering other necessities. Solar energy credits can reduce utility bills and minimize this burden.

- **Enhanced energy independence, resilience, and reliability:** Solar power can help communities reduce their reliance on external energy sources, protecting them from price increases or disruptions caused by climate hazards.

Project Example

Community Solar Project at Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, Washington

A partnership between Seattle City Light and a local neighborhood association facilitated the installation of 60 solar panels on a food pavilion building at the Woodland Park Zoo. Combined with other nearby solar arrays, the project generates 75,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually, shares of which can be purchased by City Light customers to help offset monthly utility bills. In total, Seattle City Light has four community solar projects generating more than 190,000 kilowatt hours of solar power annually for 1,300 participants.