



Cuyahoga Employee Benefits Solar Co-op

Overview

OH SUN is a nonprofit dedicated to helping Ohioans go solar and save money on their energy bills. We help community members organize solar co-ops to make it easier and more affordable to go solar. OH SUN would love to help organize a Cuyahoga County Solar Co-op, to help employees get a discount on going solar.

What's a solar co-op?

A solar co-op is when a group of citizens go solar together and get a discount—making solar more affordable and accessible. By going solar as a group, each participant saves 15-30% off the cost of their system and gets support from their peers as they go through the process. This results in significantly more homeowners going solar that would otherwise and helps ensure everyone has a good experience throughout the process.

OH SUN would love to help organize a solar co-op for Cuyahoga County employees, friends, and family. Any employees or friends and family members of County employees would be eligible to join the Cuyahoga County Solar Co-op and get a discount on going solar. They would have the support of OH SUN throughout the process, and the County would be able to offer additional benefits to its staff.



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Solar co-op process



Phase 1: Outreach and Sign Ups

OH SUN and the County conduct an outreach campaign to County employees, inviting them to attend a solar information meeting to learn about the co-op. These meetings can be in the morning, over lunch, or at the end of the day, whenever is most convenient for staff. At the meeting OH SUN explains the co-op process and answers many detailed questions people ask about solar. Interested homeowners then sign up to join the co-op via an online form (hosted on the OH SUN website). Signing up to join the co-op is not a binding commitment to go solar, and participants may drop out at any time.

As participants sign up, OH SUN does a preliminary screening of their roofs via satellite imagery to ensure participants' roofs are a good fit for solar. Participants then receive an email indicating whether or not they are eligible for solar.

Phase 2: Request for Proposals and Bid Selection

Once at least 20 people have signed up and passed the roof screening, OH SUN issues a Request for Proposals (RFP) from area installers. The RFP asks local



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installers to provide a single price that they will offer to the entire group of bulk purchase participants. Each community has the opportunity to customize the RFP to reflect local values and preferences.

Once OH SUN has received bids from installers, we develop a detailed analysis of the bids. We then convene a selection committee made up of members of the co-op (not OH SUN or the County). The committee selects an installer to complete all of the solar projects for the group.

Phase 3: Individualized Proposals and Signing Contracts

The selected installer visits each participant's home and provides them with an individualized proposal for a solar system. This quote reflects the group discount that was offered in the winning bid. Participants then sign a contract directly with the installer to purchase or lease their solar system.

Although we call the group a solar co-op, it's not a legal entity (i.e. an incorporated cooperative). Rather, it's a group of people who are going through the solarization process together. Each co-op members signs their own individual contract with the group's chosen installer, but all receive the group discount and support from OH SUN.

Phase 4: Ongoing Support.

Once homeowners have gone solar, OH SUN connects them with their respective state listserv, a state-wide group of solar enthusiasts who can answer questions and help participants should they ever encounter issues with their solar system. This connects participants to the growing network of solar supporters in the state and allows them to stay engaged.

Key components of the co-op process

Eligibility: While the goal of the co-op is to provide a benefit to County staff and help them go solar, participation in the co-op does not need to be closely restricted. We would welcome friends, family, neighbors, and others who hear about the co-op to also sign up to participate. While we would target our outreach to County staff, anyone living in the County would be eligible to participate. The greater number of participants the better a discount we're able to receive.

Competitive bidding process: We issue an RFP for each co-op, ensuring that the group is getting the most competitive price possible. This also allows us to ensure we have credibility with participants as a neutral consumer advocate, since we're not partnering with any specific installer or advertising on behalf of specific companies. It also avoids procurement issues for the County, as it's the



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co-op members who are selecting the company. We are committed to a growing, vibrant, competitive and transparent solar market.

Community involvement in installer selection: Unlike many solarize programs, participants in the group are involved in selecting their installer. This allows them to be more invested and involved in the process of going solar, as well as remain reassured that they are getting the best deal and a quality installation.

Simplified pricing structure: While some programs offer tiered pricing based on the number of participants, we offer a single, straightforward price for participants. This is easier for participants to understand and prevents people from waiting to sign up until they know what kind of discount they might get. It is also more straightforward to installers—who offer a base price expressed in \$/watt and specify any up-charges such as electrical work, higher-end panels etc.

Building long-term support for solar: After participating in a neighborhood bulk purchase, participants not only have solar on their homes, but also are better connected to their fellow solar owners, well educated on solar, and are significantly more likely to engage on solar policy issues in the future. In short, we're not only implementing solar projects, but also creating a broad community of educated solar advocates that will support us in future solar policy initiatives. We work collectively to support and grow the solar sector.

Implementing a co-op for Cuyahoga County staff

OH SUN and our sister programs (VA SUN, WV SUN, DC SUN, and MD SUN) have implemented a total of 58 solar co-ops in the last three years. A number of these have been affinity or benefits co-ops, where staff and friends and family of staff of a particular group are eligible to sign up to join the group.

In the case of a Cuyahoga County Solar Co-op, the County would provide information about the co-op to staff and OH SUN would help guide individuals through the solarization process should they decide to participate. The entire co-op process will take about six months, with the most active effort happening in months 1-3 as the County helps recruit participants for the co-op.

At the end of the process, at least 200 individuals will have attended an informational meeting and learned about solar, at least 100 will have signed up to join the co-op, and at least 20 will have signed contracts to go solar. OH SUN is very open to recruiting even more participants if there is significant interest.

Responsibilities for the County include:



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- Identifying times and locations for 3-5 informational meetings, for staff to attend to learn about solar and solar co-ops. Ideally these would be spread around the county and at various times, to make it convenient for staff to attend a meeting.
- Sharing information about the co-op with staff via newsletters, county-wide emails, and other existing channels of communication. OH SUN can provide template materials and links to additional information about solar.
- Introducing OH SUN staff to key contacts within the County to facilitate the further promotion of the co-op.
- Helping plan and implement a celebration party once the co-op has been completed, to celebrate the success of the group.
- Other support to OH SUN to get the word out about the group.

Responsibilities for OH SUN include:

- Setting up the co-op sign up webpage and developing all materials related to the co-op.
- Presenting on basics of solar and co-op at each informational meeting.
- Screening participant roofs and corresponding with co-op members, including providing technical assistance and answering all questions.
- Facilitating installer selection process.
- Providing oversight to chosen installation company and ensuring participants have a positive experience throughout.
- Helping plan and implement celebration party at the end of the successful co-op.

About OH SUN and Community Power Network

[OH SUN](#) is a nonprofit that expands access to solar by educating Ohioans about the benefits of distributed solar energy, helping them organize group solar installations, and strengthening Ohio's solar policies and its community of solar supporters.

Community Power Network (CPN) is OH SUN's parent organization and fiscal sponsor. CPN is a national network of grassroots organizations working to build and promote locally-based renewable energy projects & policies.

On the national level we serve as a resource and strategic partner to our diverse network. We help member organizations advocate for policy, start renewable energy projects, or create change in their communities.

On the local level we also run a number of state programs: [OH SUN](#), [DC SUN](#), [MD SUN](#), [VA SUN](#) and [WV SUN](#). Each of these state programs works to



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promote solar throughout their respective state, with the goal of (1) developing solar projects within communities, and (2) helping pass solar policies that expand each state's solar market.

Since ramping up our co-op program in August 2013, we have launched 58 solar co-ops in DC, MD, VA, WV, and OH. Our co-ops have had over 5,700 sign ups and 1,036 installs translating into 6.45 MW of solar installed. Combined our co-ops have resulted in over \$19.35M in residential investments in solar, and we've saved co-op members an estimated \$3M in system costs.