+ E-BOOK

Community Solar for C&I Leaders

Unlock New Revenue, Reduce Energy Costs, and Expand Clean Energy Access

12-MINUTE READ

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Community solar has moved from an emerging concept to a proven pathway for expanding access to clean electricity, without requiring every participant to install panels on site. As of June 2024, there were approximately 7.9 gigawatts of community solar operating in the U.S. spread across 44 states — and capacity continues to grow.

For commercial and industrial (C&I) organizations, community solar is a key strategic pillar that provides long-term energy price stability and decarbonization progress regardless of space or load-profile constraints.

In this e-book, we'll unpack the mechanics and benefits of community solar adoption and how PowerFlex can help make your project a success.

What Is Community Solar?

Community solar is a model where a shared solar photovoltaic (PV) system provides clean energy benefits to multiple participants. Participants subscribe to a portion of the project's output and receive credits on their electricity bills even though the system is not on their own roof or property.

It is especially valuable for individuals and businesses that can't install solar due to:

- Infrastructure limitations (roof condition, shading, structural capacity)
- Ownership constraints (leasing, multi-tenant sites)
- Financial or procurement limitations

In short, community solar expands access to clean energy while enabling development of larger, more economically efficient solar projects.

How Community Solar Works, and Who's Involved

A successful community solar project aligns stakeholders across development, operations, and customer participation. Understanding the roles and relationships between these parties is essential for C&I leaders as they evaluate whether community solar fits their strategic and financial objectives. Here's a quick breakdown:

The **host**, or property owner, provides the physical asset, whether that's roof space, land, or a parking structure. The **system owner** may be the same entity or a separate party, depending on the ownership model chosen. Once built, the system requires ongoing management, which is typically handled by an **operator** who manages day-to-day operations and maintenance, often through a contracted arrangement rather than in-house.

On the customer side, a **subscriber administrator** manages the relationship between individual **subscribers** and the utility, handling enrollment, billing coordination, and customer service. The subscribers themselves — households, businesses, nonprofits, or municipalities — are the end beneficiaries, receiving bill credits based on their share of the system's output.

In many projects, an **anchor tenant** plays a stabilizing role by committing to a large, long-term subscription, which helps secure project financing and reduces the need for a developer to find many smaller subscribers.

The **utility** is also a critical partner, responsible for interconnecting the system to the grid, managing the billing and crediting mechanics, and distributing power to subscribers.

Behind the scenes, the **solar developer** orchestrates the entire effort, identifying suitable sites, securing permits and approvals, arranging financing, and overseeing construction and operations.

Finally, **financiers and investors** provide the capital that makes projects possible, whether through equity, debt, tax equity structures, or other mechanisms.

For C&I leaders, clarity on these roles is more than academic. It determines who carries risk, who is accountable for performance, who manages subscriber relationships, and who bears compliance obligations. A well-structured project makes these accountabilities explicit and ensures that each party has the expertise and incentives to execute their role effectively.

Why Host Community Solar as a C&I Organization?

For commercial and industrial organizations, the decision to host a community solar project often hinges on a combination of financial opportunity and strategic value that extends beyond a simple energy purchase.

Energy Cost Management

If your organization chooses to own or act as an anchor tenant for a community solar project, you can reserve a portion of the project's energy output to offset a meaningful share of your grid electricity consumption. This directly lowers your utility bills and provides a hedge against long-term energy price volatility. For organizations facing rising electricity costs or operating in regions with volatile energy markets, this certainty can be a significant competitive advantage.

Monetization Opportunities

Hosting a community solar project can create a new revenue stream. If your organization owns the property, you can lease roof, land, or parking assets to a developer or project owner, generating lease income with minimal operational burden. If you participate in the ownership structure, you may benefit directly from project revenue, tax credits, and incentive programs.

Community solar economics are particularly attractive when your facility has lower energy consumption relative to its available space, allowing you to monetize square footage that would have gone unused with a behind-the-meter system sized only to your own load.

Emissions Reduction

Companies that host or serve as an anchor tenant for a community solar project often retain a sizeable percentage of their solar system's generation. This allows them to use clean energy on site to help power everyday business operations, reducing reliance on fossil-fuel electricity and shrinking carbon footprints. Solar energy benefits are transparent and easily quantifiable, which simplifies climate goal tracking and enables companies to remove friction when complying with ESG reporting requirements.

Risk Diversification

Community solar projects serve multiple subscribers, which means the project's revenue and performance are not dependent on a single buyer or the occupancy of a single tenant. This distributed customer base reduces financial risk and makes it easier to secure project financing, as lenders and investors are more comfortable with projects that have multiple revenue streams rather than a single large offtaker.

Sustainability Leadership & Community Engagement

Hosting or owning a community solar project demonstrates a tangible commitment to sustainability and community wellbeing, which can improve corporate reputation and deliver easy PR wins.

Community solar creates more equitable access to renewable energy for local residents and businesses by removing the physical and financial hurdles of operating a solar project themselves.

Additionally, those who subscribe to community solar programs — including your own employees who choose to opt in — typically see immediate and long-term energy cost savings through credits applied directly to their utility accounts.

Common Ownership Models

Community solar projects can be structured in several different ways, each with distinct implications for risk, control, financial return, and operational responsibility. The ownership model you choose will shape your role in the project, your financial exposure, and your ability to influence key decisions. For C&I leaders evaluating community solar, understanding these models is essential to determining which structure aligns with your organization's financial capacity, risk tolerance, and strategic objectives.

Host-Owned

In the host-owned model, the property owner retains full ownership and control of the solar system. This means you (often with the help of a developer) are responsible for all aspects of the project, from securing financing and managing construction to handling operations, maintenance, and subscriber relationships. While this model offers maximum control and the potential to capture all project revenues and tax benefits, it also requires significant capital investment upfront and places the full burden of project execution and performance on your shoulders.

For organizations with strong balance sheets, in-house expertise, or a desire for complete control, this model can be highly attractive. For others, the capital requirements and operational complexity may be prohibitive.

Cooperative or Community-Owned

Cooperative or community-owned structures grant ownership of the project to a group of stakeholders, often a mix of the host organization, local residents, nonprofits, and other community members. This model distributes both the financial investment and the governance responsibility across multiple parties, which can reduce the capital burden on any single entity and foster a stronger sense of community ownership and engagement.

However, cooperative structures require robust governance frameworks, clear decision-making processes, and alignment among diverse stakeholders,

which can slow decision-making and complicate operations. Organizations considering this model should be prepared to invest time in stakeholder coordination and to accept that some decisions will be made collectively rather than unilaterally.

Third-Party-Owned

In the third-party-owned model, an external developer, investor, or specialized solar company owns and operates the system, while your organization provides the property and may participate as a subscriber or anchor tenant. This model minimizes your capital investment and operational burden; the third party handles financing, construction, operations, and subscriber management, allowing you to benefit from the project with minimal risk or complexity.

In exchange, you forgo direct ownership of the system and the associated tax benefits and long-term revenue streams, instead receiving lease income (if applicable) and energy bill savings (if you participate as a subscriber). For many C&I organizations, particularly those without solar expertise or capital availability, this model offers an attractive balance of benefit and simplicity.

How PowerFlex Optimizes Community Solar for C&I Customers

Community solar succeeds when development experience meets operational excellence. PowerFlex covers both, delivering a turnkey, end-to-end approach that simplifies complexity for commercial and industrial hosts.

We support customers across the full project lifecycle, including:

SITE ASSESSMENT AND FEASIBILITY

- Validating site constraints, production potential, and project economics
- Assessing fit for rooftop, ground-mount, or solar carport applications

PERMITTING AND UTILITY COORDINATION

- Managing approvals with authorities having jurisdiction (AHJs)
- Coordinating utility interconnection steps

INCENTIVES AND POLICY EXPERTISE

- Identifying and pursuing the most beneficial federal, state, and local utility incentives
- Reducing CapEx and improving long-term return on investment

SYSTEM DESIGN AND ENGINEERING

- Developing full engineering plans, optimizing designs for long-term performance, and planning for constructability

PROCUREMENT

- Leveraging established supply chain relationships for quality equipment and competitive pricing

CONSTRUCTION

- Coordinating contractors, mobilizing builds, and driving projects to commercial operation

O&M AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

- Monitoring performance, dispatching O&M as required, managing warranties, supporting customers, and managing ongoing incentives

ASSET MONITORING AND OPTIMIZING

- Providing unparalleled visibility into your system's operational and financial performance via the energy acceleration platform, PowerFlex X™
- Tracking and reporting on solar generation, facility consumption, energy savings, and much more

With a capable partner like PowerFlex, you can ensure your community solar project lives up to the demands of your business as well as the needs of your neighbors.

Community Solar Success Stories

PowerFlex has partnered with leading commercial and industrial organizations across the United States to deliver community solar projects that generate measurable financial, environmental, and social impact. These real-world examples demonstrate how the right partner, combined with strategic site selection and community engagement, can transform underutilized assets into powerful engines of clean energy and economic value.

Medline Industries: Building a National Portfolio With Community Solar as the Backbone

Medline Industries, a global manufacturer and distributor of medical supplies, has worked with PowerFlex to develop a comprehensive national solar strategy that spans multiple states and facility types. Over the past several years, the partnership has resulted in more than 10 solar projects either completed or currently under development, representing a combined system capacity of 28.1 megawatts (MW) across California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York. Several of these installations incorporate battery energy storage systems, enabling greater energy independence for Medline's operations.

The crown jewel of this portfolio is a 7.2-MW rooftop community solar project in Montgomery, New York, which as of 2024 stands as the largest rooftop community solar installation in the state. Sixty percent of the clean energy generated is allocated to Medline employees and local residents through a community solar subscription program. This approach not only reduces energy costs for participants but also strengthens Medline's relationship with its workforce and the surrounding community.

The project was supported by $3 million in funding from the NY-Sun program, demonstrating how public incentives can accelerate private-sector leadership in clean energy.

Krasdale Foods: Powering Distribution and Advancing Community Health

In the Bronx, New York, PowerFlex completed what is now the largest rooftop solar installation in the borough for Krasdale Foods, a family-owned grocery distributor serving independent supermarkets throughout the Northeast. The 2.7-MW system features 6,690 solar panels and generates approximately 3.4 million kilowatt-hours of clean electricity annually, enough to power hundreds of homes.

Krasdale uses roughly 40% of the system's output to meet its own operational energy needs, directly reducing its utility costs and carbon footprint. The remaining 60% is allocated to approximately 300 local households and small businesses through a community solar program, providing tangible economic relief to Bronx residents and supporting local clean air initiatives.

PowerFlex played a critical role in navigating the complex incentive landscape, helping Krasdale secure funding through the NY-Sun program and the federal Investment Tax Credit. The result is an estimated $700,000 in annual savings for Krasdale, alongside meaningful environmental and community benefits that extend far beyond the company's warehouse walls.

Community solar is a win-win for companies and localities: It expands access to clean energy, supports resilience, and creates attractive financial and ESG outcomes for commercial and industrial hosts and participants.

Contact PowerFlex to learn more about community solar and get started on a project.

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About PowerFlex

PowerFlex is a clean technology solutions company making the transformation to carbon-free electrification and transportation possible. Our adaptive energy optimization platform PowerFlex X™ monitors, controls, and co-optimizes onsite assets like EV chargers, solar, energy storage, and microgrids — reducing overall energy costs through patented algorithms that maximize distributed energy resources.

PowerFlex is the second-largest installer of commercial solar in the United States, with over 500 megawatts (MW) of total solar capacity plus 50+ megawatt-hours (MWh) of battery energy storage. Combined, our solar and energy storage projects offset 460,000 metric tons of CO_2 each year. We also manage more than 50,000 EV chargers nationwide, making us the second-largest EV charging provider in the U.S. in terms of Level 2 port management.

PowerFlex is backed by EDF power solutions and Manulife Investments.

Visit powerflex.com for more information, and connect with us on LinkedIn and YouTube.

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