



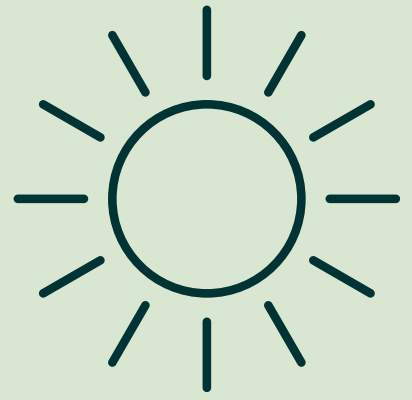
The City of Ann Arbor

Ann Arbor Solarize
Toolkit

Organizer Guide

2024

Table of Contents



Introduction to Solarize	03
Supportive Environments for Effectiveness	08
Roles and Responsibilities	09
How Solarize Works	10
How to Support Others	12
How You Can Expand the Program	14
Conclusion	15
Additional Resources	16

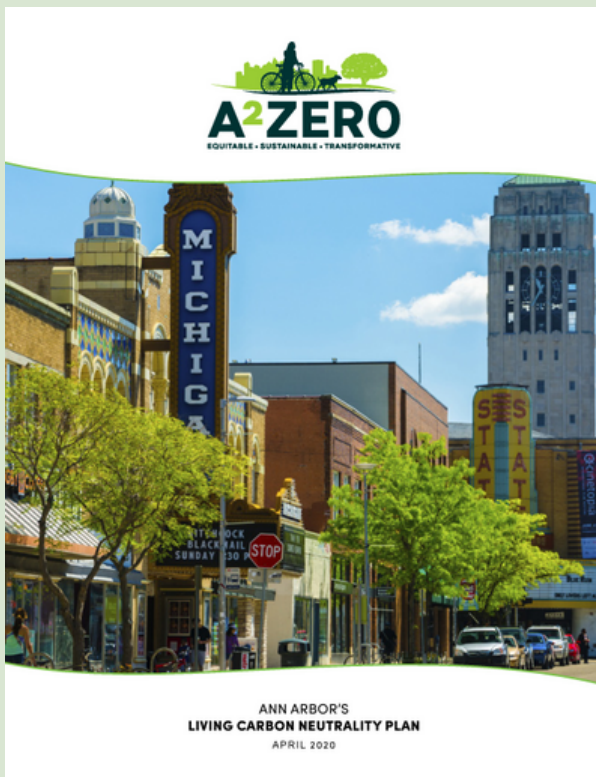


What is Solarize?

Solarize is a community bulk-buy program that encourages residents to gather neighbors and friends across Washtenaw County, along with participating solar installers, to learn about residential solar. These gatherings are an opportunity to get questions answered while providing the option to come together to purchase solar in bulk.

The standard discount structure is:

- 5% off for 3+ households**
- 10% off for 7+ households**
- 15% off for 10+ households**



Solarize was developed to help the City of Ann Arbor reach its carbon neutrality goals. Solarize installations have advanced the goal of supporting onsite renewables and battery storage throughout Washtenaw County while upholding the Living Carbon Neutrality Plan's aim of taking equitable, sustainable, and transformative action.

For more information about the City's carbon neutrality goals, check out the [Living Carbon Neutrality Plan, A2ZERO](#).

Why is Solar Important?

Solar energy provides a variety of benefits to homeowners and to the environment. Some of these benefits include:



Energy Independence

Residents can produce some of their own electricity rather than purchase all of their electricity from a utility



Improved Air Quality

Solar technologies do not produce greenhouse gas emissions resulting in less air pollution



Lower Utility Bills

Producing their own electricity can reduce the amount that residents need to purchase from a utility



Local Resilience

Solar can provide backup electricity generation during grid outages which increases local resilience during emergency events



Improved Public Health

Producing cleaner energy can help reduce symptoms of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions through improved air quality



Increased Property Values

Homes with solar panels can be more appealing to potential buyers because it suggests lower energy costs long-term

Solar Myths

“Solar panels will damage my roof”

For most roofs, adding solar panels may add weight to your roof but should not cause any damage. In many cases, solar panels can actually protect your shingles from degradation. If you are concerned that your roof may not be able to support panels, contact a roofer to evaluate your roof.

“Solar panels are too expensive”

By taking advantage of the Solarize discount and federal tax credits and incentives, homeowners now save an average of around \$9,000 per household making the average cost of an average size residential solar installation a little over \$13,000 after discounts. The average ROI for a Washtenaw County resident is 13 years.

“Solar panels require a lot of maintenance”

While it is rare that a solar panel might break or not be functioning properly, if this does occur and your system is under warranty, your installer will come out and fix the problem. Solar panel technology has improved in recent years, with warranties generally covering 25 years and estimated panel lifespans of about 30-40 years.

“Solar panels decrease your property value”

In 2019, Zillow conducted [a study](#) of recently sold homes across the United States and found that homes with solar sold for 4.1% more on average compared to homes without solar. For the median-valued home in the U.S., that equates to an additional \$9, 274.

Why Get Solar Now?

There are immediate benefits

You will start producing solar energy within about three-to-four months after installation is complete.



Costs have come down significantly

Most residential installations can go through expedited solar permitting which only requires an electric permit without requiring residents to pay for line item fees. Average price per watt (PPW) of solar has decreased to \$2.85/watt (post-discount) in Washtenaw County.



Technology has improved

In 2024, the average efficiency of solar panels produces about 10% more electricity per panel compared to five years ago. With more efficient panels and batteries, better solar production and storage of excess energy leads to improved long-term savings.



Achieve Energy Independence

In the last five years, DTE rates have significantly increased and appear to be continuing to trend in that direction moving forward. By having your own solar array, you can reduce your reliance on the grid.



Financial Incentives

There are many resources that residents can take advantage of to help finance your solar array that may not be available long-term. Some of these resources & opportunities include: federal tax credits through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, Solarize bulk-buy discounts, low-interest financing through Michigan Saves, and no property tax assessment in Ann Arbor.



Urgency of Climate Change

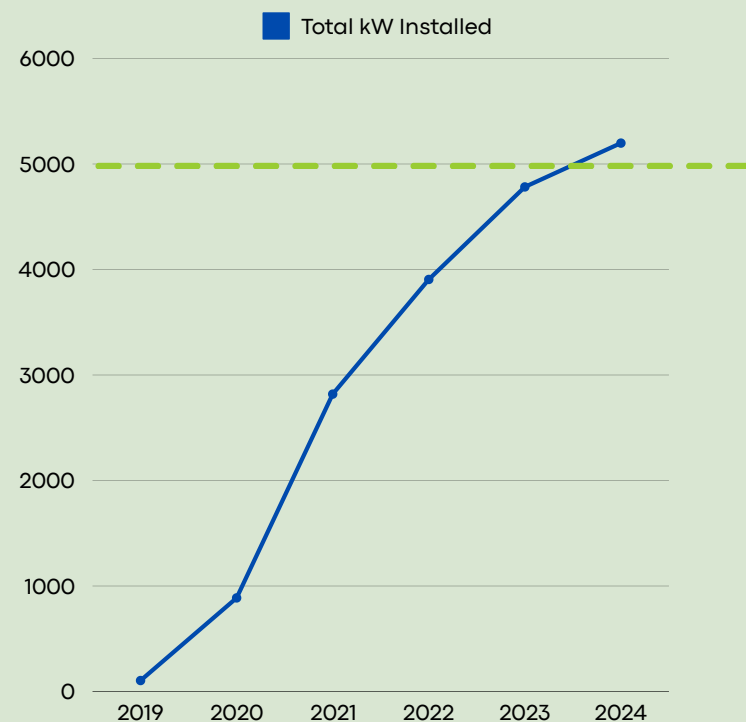
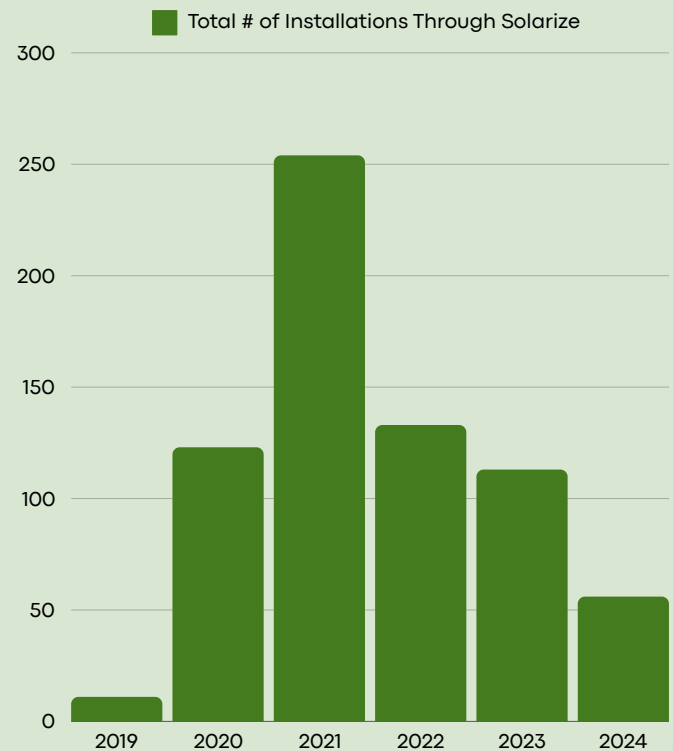
The use of fossil fuels accounts for about 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions and is one of the leading drivers of climate change. By switching to solar power in your home, you can significantly reduce your emissions and your carbon footprint.



Solarize Progress

Through the Solarize program:

- **690 solar installations** have been completed in Washtenaw County
- **5,198kW** of solar have been installed across Washtenaw County
- **\$2,354,383** has been collectively saved by residents through the Solarize discount with an average savings of **\$3,412 per household**

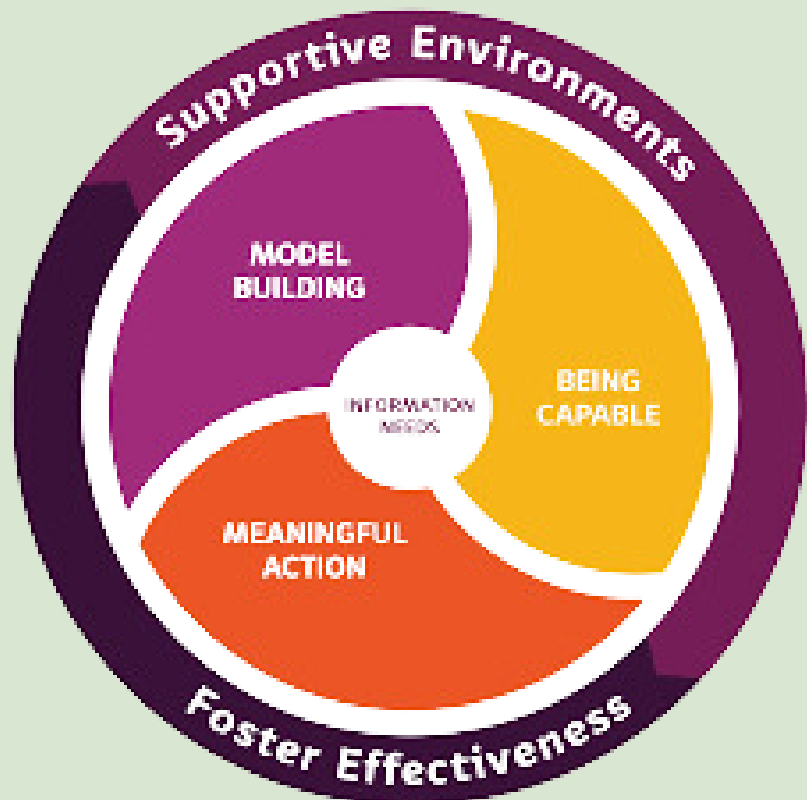


*Data in graphs shown through July 2024

Since the City has surpassed its goal of installing 5MW of residential solar by the end of 2024, a new goal has been set to reach a total 5.5MW by the end of 2025.

What is the SEE Framework?

Supportive Environments for Effectiveness (SEE) is a framework that recognizes people have a variety of ways of navigating different settings. For any setting, three key ways include 1) **forming an understanding through exploration**, 2) **meaningfully participating in an effort to make a difference**, and 3) **having the resources and mental clarity to feel competent when engaging with the information in a given environment**. SEE is a tool that could help transform the way people participate in the Solarize program, enabling them to be effective actors in the process.



Model Building

refers to the need to explore and understand, building on knowledge that is already familiar

Being Capable

refers to the need to feel competent and clear-headed when finding, learning, and sharing new information

Meaningful Action

refers to the need to make a difference and know that our efforts matter on a larger scale

Overview of Roles & Responsibilities

Solarize consists of four main actors that collaborate to help expand residential solar across Washtenaw County. Knowing what each actor is responsible for helps individuals build a better mental model of how the program functions.



Organizer

This individual is typically an employee of the City of Ann Arbor and serves as the main point of contact throughout the solar process.

This person's role is to:

- Schedule and Coordinate Events
- Collect and Manage Data
- Follow-Up with Participants



Host

This individual is a resident of Washtenaw County who is passionate about solar and wants to encourage others to consider solar.

This person's role is to:

- Engage in Community Outreach
- Select an Installer
- Share Passion for Solar



Installer

This individual is a representative of a solar installation company that is selected for a specific solarize group and provides estimates to interested residents.

This person's role is to:

- Share Information
- Manage Projects
- Provide Weekly Updates



Participant

These individuals are other interested residents who want to learn more about their potential to purchase solar for their homes.

Their role is to:

- Gather Information
- Attend Meetings and Information Sessions
- Recruit Fellow Community Members

Solarize Timeline

Week 0: The Organizer finds a Host

The Solarize group is formed when a host is identified and volunteers to help recruit for and organize the group

Week 4-6: The Host Recruits Participants

Using existing connections, the host reaches out to neighbors and friends to invite them to attend a virtual meeting regarding Solarize

Week 7-14: Participants receive estimates and sign contracts

Participants receive estimates from the installer and then sign a contract if they would like to move forward with the group

Week 1-3: The Host Chooses an Installer

After conducting research and receiving multiple estimates, the host will select an installer that will perform installations for the entire Solarize group

Week 6-7: The Host and Organizer facilitate a meeting

The organizer, host, and installer present information about solar to interested participants and talk about next steps

Week 9-16: The Installer installs participants' solar

After participants sign their contracts with the installer, the installer goes to each house to install their solar array. This usually occurs within about a month after signing the contract

How Solarize Works

From an Organizer's Perspective

1

Identify a Host

The first step in starting a new Solarize group is to identify a passionate and proactive resident who would like to be the host.

2

Assist the Host in Reaching Out to Community Members

In some cases, the host may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable recruiting fellow residents to join the Solarize group. Encourage the host to try to recruit 25+ residents, with a goal of 40 residents total, by leveraging existing connections and reaching out to their affiliated groups to seek out individuals with whom they already have an established relationship.

3

Co-Host a Solarize Meeting

For the initial meeting with interested participants, you will work with the host to set up a virtual informational meeting. In this meeting, you will be responsible for presenting information about solar energy, answering questions regarding solar, sharing the timeline for signing up for the group, and providing resources for getting an estimate.

4

Connect Participants with the Installer

Instruct participants to email you after the meeting to gather their contact information for you to share with the installer. Another helpful tip is to share a recording of the meeting to interested participants who want to look back on the information that was shared or who may have missed the meeting.

5

Track Data and Progress

Throughout the course of the group timeline, keep track of what stage each participant is in and concerns or questions that they may have. Meet with the installer weekly to discuss important metrics regarding group progress. Some of these metrics to track may include the number of sign-ups, the number of requested estimates, the number of sales, the amount of kW installed, and the total amount of participant savings.

6

Collect Feedback from the Group

After participants have had their solar installed, send out a feedback form to the host, participants, and the installer to gain insight into their perception of the process and recommendations for how the program can be improved for future groups.

How to Support Others



Purchasing solar energy can be a challenging and stressful decision for homeowners. Without adequate information and ample support from others, people can feel frustrated and deterred from the process.

Connecting back to the SEE Framework (page 6), it is important to be mindful of others' capacity to participate in Solarize. The following page provides a list of potential actions that you can take to support other actors throughout the Solarize process.

Reminders

- We all share the same goals
- We all want everyone to be happy with the outcome
- We all want to make a difference



General Tips for Supporting Others

- Check in with others frequently
- Be patient and understanding of others' circumstances
- Take time to celebrate the work that you have accomplished together

How You Can Support Others



Participant

1. Be a trusted and impartial resource regarding solar, energy efficiency, and sustainability initiatives and goals. Meet participants where they are at in terms of their knowledge of solar and avoid the use of jargon.
2. Help them connect with hosts and installers to gain more information about specific Solarize groups.
3. Provide weekly updates regarding the progress of the group and upcoming important dates.



Installer

1. Connect installers with hosts to set up the opportunity to provide estimates.
2. Invite installers to Solarize meetings to give their pitch to interested participants and to learn more about the program
3. Set up weekly meetings with the installer to check-in on progress related to participant estimates and installations.



Host

1. Provide clear expectations and responsibilities for the host throughout this process especially those regarding recruiting participants.
2. Organize Solarize meetings and manage data collection so that the host can focus solely on recruiting.
3. Be the point person for questions regarding solar energy.

How You Can Expand the Program

Continuing to Grow Solarize

Since 2019, solar arrays installed through the Solarize program have saved **29,869 lbs of CO2 emissions** which is the equivalent of planting **622 trees** across Washtenaw County.



Here are some meaningful actions you can take as an organizer to help the program continue to grow!

Engage policy makers and pay attention to changing Policies

Policy makers can be key aids in community outreach efforts and can work to establish policies that make solar installation easier for residents. It is also important to pay attention to current and changing policies that may influence residents' ability to get solar.

Reach out to Housing Units, HOAs, and Neighborhood Groups

These are excellent groups for finding future hosts and participants who have strong networks in the community and can help with recruiting efforts. It is also important to speak with HOAs and landlords for installing solar in these communities as there might be additional technical considerations.

Improve advertising

In the spring following participants' solar installations, you can offer to deliver a yard sign for them to display through the summer. You can pick up the sign again in the fall to be reused the following summer with other participants. Another way to improve advertising of the program is to distribute Solarize information at essential community sites such as libraries, police stations, transportation centers, places of worship, etc.



Next Steps

Want to learn more about Solarize?

This list of [FAQs](#) about Solarize can provide information responding to common questions asked by residents

Check out the following page to learn about additional resources that can answer any questions you have about solar

Want to learn more about becoming an organizer?

Reach out to cdailey@a2gov.org to learn more about the process

Reach out to friends and neighbors to learn more about the program and their experiences with solar

Already have solar?

Here are a few other ways that you can help residents become more energy efficient in their homes:

- ✔ Invest in an energy audit
- ✔ Purchase a battery to support your solar array
- ✔ Purchase an electric vehicle
- ✔ Check for drafts in your home and update your insulation
- ✔ Upgrade and electrify appliances in your home
 - ✔ Install a clothesline
 - ✔ Switch to LED lighting

Additional Resources

Solarize:

[Main Website](#)

[Advancing Sustainability with your HOA or MUD](#)

[Solarize FAQs](#)

Uncovering your Solar Potential:

[Project Sunroof](#)

[PV Watts Calculator](#)

[Energy Sage](#)

[Solar Help Desk](#)

Financial Resources:

[Inflation Reduction Act of 2022](#)

[Michigan Saves](#)

[A Homeowner's Guide to Solar Financing](#)

Community Stories:

[Solar Stories on YouTube](#)

[Ann Arbor Sustainability Stories](#)

Other Solar Power Resources:

[Residential Consumer Guide to Solar](#)

[Department of Energy's Homeowner's Guide to Going Solar](#)

[Choosing a Solar Installer](#)

[Consumer Solar Checklist](#)

[Clean Energy Consumer Bill of Rights](#)

[DTE Rate Changes and Solar](#)

Contacts & Acknowledgements

Prepared by Sarah Ramsey
reDirect Fellow, Summer 2024
sarahram@umich.edu

In collaboration with:

Joe Lange
Energy Analyst
City of Ann Arbor, Office of Sustainability and Innovations
jlange@a2gov.org

Connor Dailey
Energy Coordinator
City of Ann Arbor, Office of Sustainability and Innovations
cdailey@a2gov.org

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