

Solar Energy Co-ops for Homeowners

Are you interested in having solar panels installed on your roof, but aren't sure how to get started? A relatively new option in Minnesota is membership in a neighborhood solar cooperative; as members, homeowners gain a better understanding of the buying, financing, and installation of rooftop solar panels. Solar United Neighbors (SUN), a national solar power nonprofit, has developed several available local co-ops; its Twin Cities Region Solar Co-op serves the metro area. SUN has set up 250 co-ops nationwide and also lobbies for solar energy issues in Congress.

The co-op model has several objectives for its members, which include providing support and information and holding down the cost of installation. In 2018, for example, the cost per watt for solar panel installation for SUN co-op members was \$2.42, compared with an average national cost of \$2.98. Among the ways the co-op can hold down costs are through bulk purchasing of solar panels and by taking on some of the early research work on a home's viability for panels, such as roof reviews, which are traditionally done by the solar installation company. Co-op staff can also explain federal tax credits and Xcel Energy programs that lower costs through rebates.

Twin Cities Region Solar Co-op is nearing its goal of one hundred members and has selected a local solar panel installer. For more information or to join the co-op, visit its website at coops.solarunitedneighbors.org/coops/twin-cities-region-solar-co-op/.

SUN's co-op program is partnering with Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, a nonprofit whose primary mission is to help congregations respond to the climate crisis. St. John's supports MNIPL (mnipl.org) as a Sustaining Congregation with an annual contribution. For general information on residential solar, see the MNIPL website. To connect with St. John's members who have installed solar panels on their homes, contact Lois Neve at loisneve@icloud.com or Allen Gooch at allengooch314@gmail.com.