access MI solar Frequently Asked Questions

What is Access MI Solar?

Access MI Solar is a solar group-buy program that helps homeowners and small businesses afford solar panels to save on monthly energy bills and reduce their carbon footprint while also aiming to increase local energy independence, help communities transition to clean energy, and advance clean energy education.

Why participate in Access MI Solar?

Yes, switching to solar is about saving money—but it's also about more than that. It's about creating a sustainable future for your family. Many past participants have told us how Access MI Solar helped them to make the jump and switch to solar energy. The program empowered them to take action for a cleaner, healthier world, knowing they're helping secure a better future for their children and grandchildren (while saving money along the way).

How can I participate?

The signup form for the 2025 program will become available in early spring. Be on the lookout for the form, and in the meantime check out PVWatts and Project Sunroof to calculate how much solar energy you could generate at your home or business! Keep in mind that signing up in no way obligates you to sign a contract with the installer. That will be your decision to make later after you see a formal estimate and decide if you are ready.

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What are the roof requirements for solar?

For optimal solar installation, most installers recommend that your roof has at least 5 to 7 years of life left on the shingles. If your roof will need replacement soon, it's usually best to replace it along with the solar panels. As for installation, solar panels won't damage your roof when properly installed. They add weight, which could be a consideration if your roof has multiple layers of shingles. In that case, it's a good idea to have a roofer assess the situation. A bonus benefit of solar is that the panels actually help protect your shingles from sun damage, potentially extending the life of your roof!

Can I put solar panels on my garage?

Yes! Panels that power your house can be placed on an adjacent structure such as a detached garage if this is the most suitable roof. Another option is solar panels on a garage to power an electric vehicle or studio work space.

Can solar panels be installed on flat, metal, or slate roofs?

Flat and metal roofs are generally great for solar installation and don't pose many issues. Slate roofs, however, can be more challenging. It's best to consult with a solar installer who can evaluate your specific roof and provide tailored recommendations for the best solution.

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Can solar be ground-mounted?

Yes! Your installer can help determine the best set-up for you. In Traverse City, some areas have restrictions around how big your ground-mount system can be.

Is East/West-facing solar OK?

Yes. There is generally a reduction in panel efficiency for E/W facing panels of approximately 15%, depending on the pitch of the roof. In most cases, the financial impact to return on investment is fairly modest. Your solar installer will help you maximize the solar potential of your installation to ensure you get the best possible return on investment.

What is the average installation size?

The average size of residential solar arrays in MIchigan is approximately 5 kW. In Traverse City last year, the average size of Access MI Solar installations was 5.31 kW.

What is the average cost of putting up a solar array?

Cost depends on many factors, including how much energy you use, how much sun your roof gets, how complicated the roof is, the efficiency of the panels chosen, the type of inverter chosen, and more. A typical 7 kW system might cost around $21,000 before federal tax credits and solarize discounts. This could be reduced to around $12,000 to $13,000 with the federal tax incentive and the discounts offered through the Access MI Solar program.

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What are some pricing factors?

Price varies based on things such as the type of panels and inverters used by the installer, the complexity of the project (eg: trenching, multiple roof areas, EV chargers, etc), product and service warranties offered, and the size of the installation company. And, naturally, the size of the system is also a factor, with smaller sized systems usually having higher cost per watt. The average "price per watt" is around $3.11 in Traverse City, but the range can be anywhere from $2.70/watt to $3.80/watt for most roof-mounted systems, depending on those factors detailed above.

How are the Access MI Solar installers chosen?

The shortlist of contractors that have been vetted by Groundwork this year all participate with MIchigan Saves. MIchigan Saves provides vetting of contractors, including making sure licenses, registrations and insurance are up to date. The contractors participating have all agreed to the pre-negotiated tiered discounts, and have signed on as Access MI Solar contractors.The Access MI Solar program utilizes a small cohort of residents who have indicated that they are interested in being apart of the "Early Bird" committee to reach out to a short list of solar contractors that service northwest Lower MIchigan and request bids. The committee members will receive competitive bids from multiple installers and choose one to work with based on any number of factors—just as you would choose any contractor for your home. The chosen installer will perform all of the installs for Access MI Solar participants and provide the hardware discount (up to 15%!) for participants.

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Is financing available for solar?

Yes! All Access MI Solar installers participate with MIchigan Saves, a green bank that offers lower-interest financing for energy efficiency upgrades and solar. In addition, some homeowners use home equity loans.

How much can I save?

The Access MI Solar discount on hardware can be as much as 15%, depending on the number of households moving forward and solar ins taller chosen. This discount on hardware is in addition to the federal tax credits for solar installations (See the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022)

Do I need a battery with my solar system?

Batteries are optional but can be a great addition. Solar systems are typically "grid-tied," meaning they send excess energy to the grid, and you draw energy back when needed. A battery lets you store that excess energy to use later, like in the evening, and can also act as a backup power source during outages. Adding a battery can also reduce your system size, as it helps you use more of the energy you generate. Keep in mind, batteries come with added upfront costs.

Can I add to my solar system in the future?

Yes, if you think you'll want to expand your system later (for example, to charge an electric vehicle), be sure to discuss this with your installer. They can design the system with room for future growth.

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