

2022 Low-Income Program Survey Results

The following are results from the 2022 annual Oregon Community Solar Follow-Up Survey. Community Energy Project (CEP) surveyed participants who are Active in the program, as well as to a selection of participants who have been Assigned to projects that have not yet started generating energy.

CEP conducts surveys in order to gauge the success of the program, and identify opportunities for improvement within the low-income portion of The Program. Surveys were conducted electronically and over the phone.

Survey Results

Total individuals surveyed: 86*

**8 participants filled out the survey but declined to provide their name or contact information. It is unknown if these participants are Active or Assigned, so they are excluded from the below tables.*

Assigned participants have completed intake, have signed a contract, and have been assigned to a project that has not yet become operational. They have not yet started seeing savings on their electricity bill.

Active participants have completed intake, signed a contract, and have been connected with a project that is now operational, and so they are seeing savings monthly on their electricity bill.

Assigned: 252 total	Responses	% Surveyed
Email (198/252)	42	21%
Phone (54/252)	9	15%

Active: 182 total	Responses	% Surveyed
Email (137/182)	21	15%
Phone (45/182)	6	13%

Intake: Education and Income Verification

While most participants conduct phone intake, some people prefer electronic communication and fill out an online version with integrated education, while others participate in a workshop. Many participants surveyed completed their intake over 2 years ago, likely explaining why 21% of participants did not remember how intake was done. All forms of intake include education about the program and the opportunity for people to ask questions.

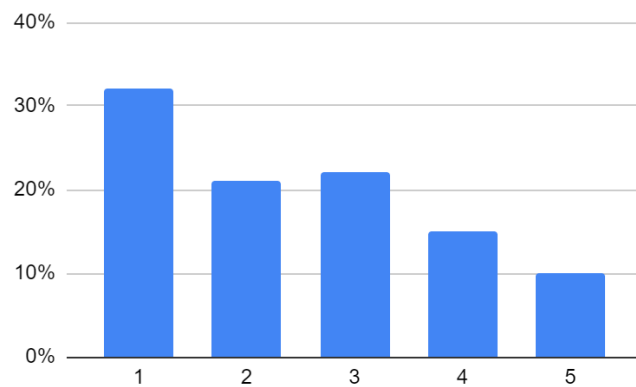
I don't remember	21%
Phone call intake appointment with Community Energy Project	53%
Filled out online Google Form with my information	19%
Filled out a paper form after a CEP workshop	6%

Questions 1-2 provide information about the participant’s understanding of The Program. Before intake, a third of participants did not feel informed about the program, and after intake, almost half of participants reported they felt very informed. This highlights the importance of education as part of the sign up process, which leads to higher confidence and comfort in signing up for a program with so many shifting variables.

Question 3 asked participants to rate CEP’s ability to answer their questions during intake. Nearly 80% rated CEP a 4 or a 5, the highest ratings available. Only 2% of participants reported CEP was unable to answer some of their questions.

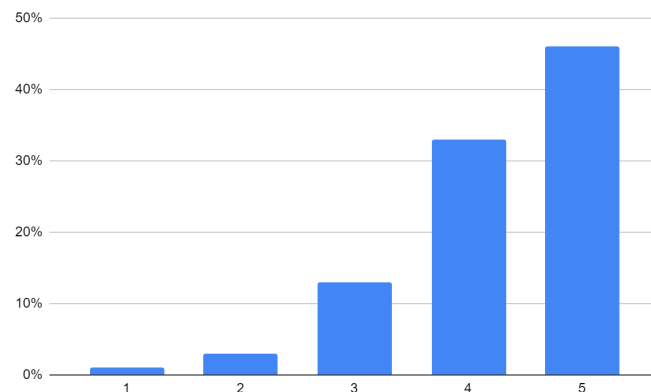
1. How informed did you feel about community solar BEFORE your intake? (Scale of 1-5, 1 being least informed, 5 being most)

1	32%
2	21%
3	22%
4	15%
5	10%



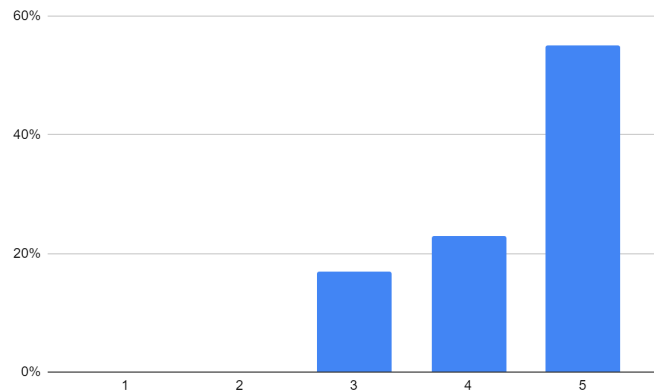
2. How informed did you feel about community solar AFTER intake? (Scale of 1-5, 1 being least informed, 5 being most)

1	1%
2	3%
3	13%
4	33%
5	46%



3. How would you rate CEP’s ability to answer your questions about community solar? (Scale of 1-5, 1 being not able to answer questions, 5 being very capable)

1	0%
2	2%
3	17%
4	23%
5	55%



Project Manager Relationship

After intake, participants are often placed on a waitlist until Project Managers (PMs) are ready to accept low-income subscribers. The waitlist time can vary from a few weeks to over a year depending on availability. At the time of assignment, CEP provides the name of the PM and the solar project. PMs then send the Low-Income Contract to the participant, which includes contact information for the PM. PMs are expected to take over communication with participants regarding contract signing, updates, further questions, or to handle subscription cancellations and changes.

Questions 4-6 aim to understand the customer experience after CEP is no longer involved. After the contract is signed, CEP is still available to answer general questions or to provide contact information for the project manager for those who ask, but any official updates to the subscription need to be carried out by the PM.

Unfortunately, roughly half of participants surveyed do not know the name of their PM or how to contact them. As the duration of contracts last from 10-20 years, it is likely that a participant should contact a PM at some point. This feedback shows that changes need to be made in order for participants to have a clear understanding of PM roles, and that they have easy access to the information they need. CEP would consider more frequent and relevant communication to participants to be a best practice here.

4. Do you know how to contact your project manager if you needed to—for example, because you were moving?

■ I do not know the name of my project manager	48%
■ I know the name of my project manager but do not have their contact information	3%
■ Yes, I know the name of my project manager and how to contact them	45%



5. Has your project manager sent any communication or information to you since enrolling in community solar?

No, I have not heard from my project manager	35%
Yes, I have heard from my project manager	24%
No answer	41%

6. If yes, what information did you receive from your project manager?

Answers:

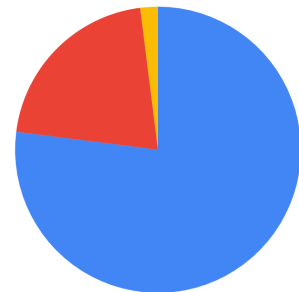
- They confirmed I was active
- Spoke to her on the phone
- If I remember correctly...a welcome letter with information on how to contact the manager for Neighborhood Community
- That it was going to be delayed and now a request to complete this survey.
- They sent a thank you and I will receive monthly savings

Integration with Other Programs and Services

CEP has become a trusted partner through 40+ years of serving the needs of low-income households. CEP designed the LI program that fits well with other programs that ease energy burden. In part because project timelines for operation are often very far out or unpredictable, we connect people with other savings/discount programs they can have immediately while they wait. We were also interested to see if the need for other programs, such as energy assistance, went down due to participation in The Program. We expect such numbers to increase in the Secondary Offering, which has deeper discounts.

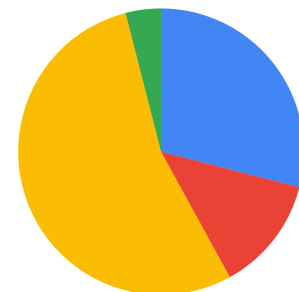
7. Are you enrolled in your utility's low-income bill discount program? (Available for both PPL and PGE)

■ Yes	77%
■ No	21%
■ I don't know	2%



8. Did enrolling in community solar impact your need for energy assistance? (Only for Active participants)

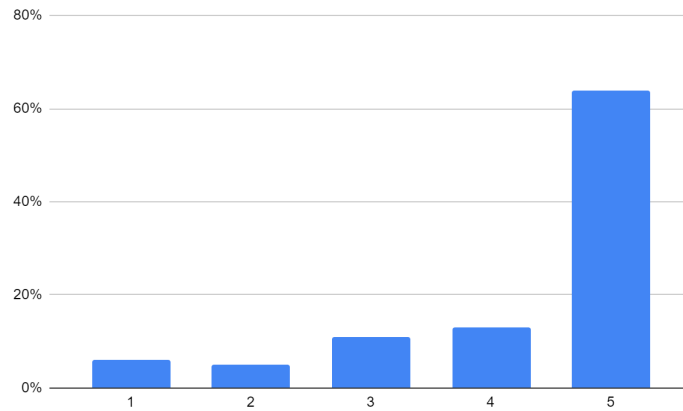
■ I didn't need energy assistance before	29%
■ I needed it before, but do not now	13%
■ I need both this discount and energy assistance	54%
■ No answer	4%



9. How likely are you to recommend community solar to your friends or family? (Scale of 1-5, 1 being unlikely, 5 being very likely)

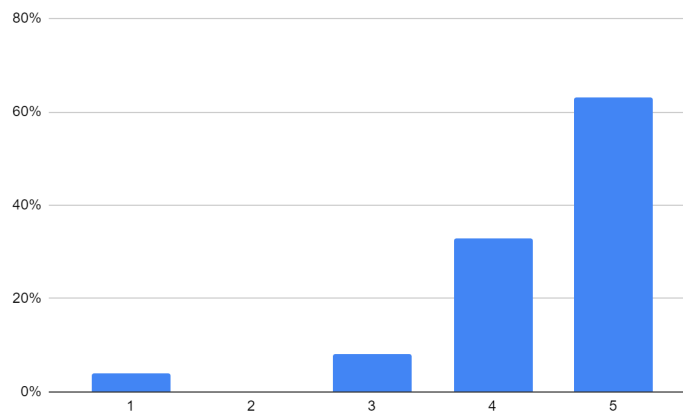
Assigned Participants:

1	6%
2	5%
3	11%
4	13%
5	64%



Active Participants:

1	4%
2	0%
3	8%
4	33%
5	63%



Motivations: Energy Burden and Environmental Pride

LI subscribers join the Oregon Community Solar Program for a variety of reasons, and CEP’s goal has been to design and deliver a program that reduces energy burden and connects people to the environmental movement through renewable energy. In the Primary Offering, the savings discounts were smaller than CEP had advised, and this is reflected in some of the comments. However in the Secondary Offering, discounts will be significantly higher and we hope to see higher impacts on energy burden. Part of program accessibility was also to allow LI subscribers to feel the same pride at being an acknowledged part of helping the environment that those from more privileged backgrounds get to have.

When it came to meeting expectations, the largest sources of frustration were long waits, unpredictable timelines for operation, and smaller discounts than some had hoped. However, participants also expressed gratitude for even small discounts and the team’s best efforts at helping navigate changing variables.

10. Can you tell us more about how your electricity bill has been impacted by community solar?

Answers:

- “I was very hesitant before to bump my thermostat up (in winter) or down in summer by even a few degrees on extreme weather days and nights, now I am a bit more comfortable doing that. I still keep my house rather uncomfortable, because I still need to keep my bill down.”
- “Started community solar after shifting some appliances from gas to electric. net bill is increased, but not by as much”
- “There is usually about a \$10 savings. Any amount that we are able to save helps a lot.”
- “Very small savings i thought it would be a little more”
- “My bills have decreased at least one third or more.”

11. How has ORCSP impacted your life?

Answers:

- “I feel proud to be able to do at least something that has less-negative impact on the world”
- “It makes me feel like I am contributing to a better world and doing my part to save the planet.”
- “I appreciate the reduction on my energy bill”
- “Super helpful for me and the environment.”
- “I hope that it will help me financially. Also I love the thought that I am a little part of the bigger solution against climate change.”
- “Lower bills and doing what I can to ease global warming”
- “In addition to saving money, I feel that we are doing something good for the planet and environment.”
- “It has saved some money on my electric bill”
- “I am considered a low income recipient and this has been an absolute gift to me to see the decrease in my monthly bill.”
- “My bill is now in the range that I can pay myself. I believe it has impacted not only the environment energy source but I can handle the bills within my current income which makes me feel very good.”
- “So far, I don’t notice any personal impacts. I fervently hope I am helping the environment.”
- “I feel like I can help move solar forward even though I'm not a homeowner. Hope for the future.”
- “Helped reduce my Monthly Payment.”
- “ADDITIONAL COSTS FROM PANDEMIC/DOG CARE HAVE GREATLY ADDED STRESS (which has been somewhat relieved by it, thanks)”
- “Just by saving some money.”
- “Keeps my bills low, I think it's a good deal as far as energy is concerned, anything to get us off fossil fuel I'm always for whether it's hydro or wind or whatever”
- “It has given me peace of mind that I have help in paying my bill.”
- “I know I'm using solar and it makes me feel good, because we are helping the environment”
- “It feels wonderful to be contributing to a clean energy project.”
- “I have been able to pay my full bill”
- “I think it’s wonderful! I didn’t think I could do solar living in an Apartment so I am happy I can now!”
- “I'm happy I'm using renewable energy”

12. Why did you sign up for community solar?

Answers:

- "Please see comment above (I have grandchildren and as of Nov. 2022 a great-grandson)"
- "I want to support the community"
- "To help bring down greenhouse gasses."
- "To save money"
- "Needed the discount on my bill"
- "Financial benefit and it is also good for the environment."
- "Money and morals"
- "Savings and support for green energy while rooftop is cost prohibitive"
- "To help the environment and save money"
- "It's the right thing to do"
- "Mostly to save money. We wanted to have our own solar panels but cannot afford it."
- "I want to support alternative energy sources."
- "Was offered the opportunity through Rose City Development as a tenant of one of their low income properties."
- "To try to reduce my electric bill & hopefully due my part on making a smaller footprint on humanity's impact on the climate crisis."
- "I signed up in order to help the environment, even in a very minimal way. I also signed up because I am unable to install solar panels on my roof because I live in a condo complex. I am very disappointed that the board is unwilling to get solar panels installed. I thought that by signing up for Community Solar, I could at least make up a little bit for not being able to have solar panels on my roof. I was also pleased that I would not have to pay anything to subscribe, plus I would get a credit each month. I am disappointed, though, about how small the monthly credit is."
- "Because there was no cost to me to do so"
- "To save money with the added bonus of doing my part, hopefully, to improve/save the environment."
- "Want there to be a market for solar"
- "Why wouldn't I? It is the future of how our Homes will be provided Electricity."
- "I wanted discount on my bill and thought it would help the environment"
- "I think it's great that people that cannot establish their own solar energy have a chance to participate in a solar energy project"
- "I always do programs, i like the green stuff and everything"
- "I did it just because I think long term it will be beneficial"
- "Because I had always wanted solar and was interested in it and when it came up as an option I went for it!"
- "to access renewables I couldn't otherwise"

13. Did [The Program] meet your expectations?

Yes	43%
No	10%
No Answer	47%

Comments:

- "I thought the discount would be more"
- "Easy-breezy!"
- "Other than my disappointment in how small my monthly credit is, I am happy with my decision so far."
- "No. It took a *lot* longer than I expected, there's been little communication, and I'm not even sure I'm receiving any benefit."
- "So far, so good. You are keeping on top of the massive information needed to implement this program."
- "Yes more than I thought it would be! I do need the info on how to share the info! I was told there was some sort of referral program of sorts? That if I referred someone I got something and the person I referred would get something. I can't remember now, but I would love that info so I can pass it on to my mom"
- "Yes, I'm just waiting to receive the discount"

14. Additional feedback

- "Y'all are impacting my family's future and I am so grateful 🙏"
- "I'm very happy as a whole with this program esp the positive impact on our environment"
- "I signed up last May and still have not received any assistance."
- "I'm really disappointed that my project start date has been pushed out multiple times and is now indefinitely on hold. I have no idea if/when I will actually see any savings through this program"
- "Thank you for offering such a great program for low income families and the general public. Wish there is a simplified messaging sent with utility bills so that more people are aware of the program."
- "Would really enjoy information on the actual solar site we are benefitting from. Also, a flier we can share with friends and family to get their interest and possible participation"
- "Wish I knew what was going on. It's such a great idea and I was so excited when it began, but..."
- "The program took a very long time to finalize! I almost forgot about it if I didn't get this survey email. I then had to dig up all my old emails to review what had occurred. As of today, the Community Solar Program has not started, email noted it will start sometime in Dec. 2022. After I signed the agreement back in May 2022, I haven't received any information on the name of the project manager supposedly assigned to me or any update email to inform the status of the program on the starting time frame so I can verify info on the PGE bill. From May on, I felt ghosted from any updates."
- "Excited to save some money and work towards a cleaner future"
- "I think this survey has prompted me to make a call of inquiry to my project manager. I signed documents on May 31, 2022"
- "I enrolled in this program and I don't see anything if I'm getting a discount or saving. I am very thankful to those who helped me through to enroll in this program. All the agents who helped me they're very nice and kind to me. I really loved them and they way they helped me"
- "Continue to strive for ways to help the community and keep the community informed with clean energy updates."

Conclusion

Customer experience is central to the low income program delivery and design. Survey results show that the education provided by CEP at intake is highly effective, and subscribers feel confident that their questions about the Program will be answered. The trust that CEP has built with communities it serves has led to a rise in information about the Program being spread via word of mouth.

Subscribers who have experienced long wait-times, delays in the operational date of their project, or been switched between PMs are likely to report more frustration with the Program. While some things, such as project delays, are nearly impossible to predict or avoid, participants in the program can show a lot of patience as long as they are provided realistic expectations and frequent updates.

The relationship between PMs/SMs and low-income subscribers has opportunities for improvement. They will be the primary point of contact for subscribers for the entire 10-20 year duration of their contracts. It is important that subscribers know the name and contact information for their PM, and when to contact them. PMs should also provide communication with updates on the status of their project when there are delays. Through support and ongoing training, PMs/SMs can increase their communication efforts with their low-income subscribers to ensure the long-term success of the program.

Low-Income subscribers continually express their support of the Program's goals of transition toward renewable energy. Low-income communities are frontline communities, meaning they are among the groups most impacted by the climate crisis, have a high home energy burden, and have lower rates of adoption of solar panels due to home type and home ownership status. The survey results illuminate the emphasis that many low-income subscribers place on being a part of a program that is working towards a cleaner, more sustainable future.