

# Roth: Sharing the warmth with solar energy

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on November 6, 2017.

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## Sharing the warmth with solar energy

You may have noticed the Salvation Army's Share the Warmth program on your electric bill.

Many areas have similar utility assistance programs that help residents who are having a difficult time paying their utility bills. Some utility companies are taking this idea to a whole new level by building solar energy projects whose electrons are devoted specifically to lower-income residents. Three such

examples come from New York utility Con Edison's pilot project; Colorado's collaboration between the state Energy Office, Grid Alternatives, a nonprofit, and Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association, an electric co-op; and finally, a California law that incentivizes affordable housing owners to install rooftop solar that would pass financial savings to tenants.

The Colorado low-income community solar project, currently the largest of its kind in the U.S., was made possible in part by a grant awarded by the Colorado Energy Office. Most of the energy from the 1.95-megawatt solar array will be devoted to low-income residents and housing providers as well as nonprofits, all located in rural areas. The pilot project is scalable and affordable and maximizes less-desirable land adjacent to a landfill. Plus, the project will help train a new workforce of solar installers. For one of the partners, Grid Alternatives, the project serves as a continuation of its mission to bring solar choice to people who do not have the resources to install it on their own.

In New York, Con Edison's program just received approval in August and intends to pilot a scalable program with an eventual goal of 11 megawatts that would serve up to 6,000 residents from the utility's low-income bill assistance program. New York's Public Utility Commission was involved in reviewing and approving Con Edison's project. The PUC recognized that the project aligned with the state of New York's "Reforming the Energy Vision" plan to reduce emissions and increase access to distributed generation.

Never to be outdone in the solar arena, California has committed up to \$100 million per year for the next four to 10 years toward low-income solar accessibility. Last year, the Legislature passed the Multifamily Affordable Housing Solar Roofs Program, which uses funds from the state's greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program to provide subsidies to affordable housing owners who install solar with the requirement that

associated cost savings are extended to tenants.

The financial benefits that accompany these programs are largely tied to flexibility in states' policies such as third-party ownership of solar assets and net energy metering. Third-party ownership allows for a company with adequate capital to build and bear the costs of these projects and the resident to benefit from the system. Net energy metering is the idea that consumers who generate their own electricity can use that electricity anytime, instead of at the moment it is generated. Policies like these are imperative to solar energy development.

If you are like the many Americans who love the idea of incorporating solar energy, I encourage you to reach out to your electric utility company and let them know of your interest.

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