Winter is a particularly tough time for the low-income families Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) serves due to the high cost of heating their homes. In fact, 1 in 5 Vermonters suffers from energy poverty—meaning that their high heating and utility costs make it impossible for them to meet their other basic needs for food, housing, health care, etc.

According to NEUAC state-fact sheet, in Vermont only 34.47 % of the total eligible population in Vermont received LIHEAP benefits in 2017.

Each year, SEVCA provides crisis fuel assistance each year to hundreds of families who run out of heating fuel or are in danger of having their utilities shut off. And, to address one of the major causes of the problem of high energy bills—the lack of insulation in their homes—SEVCA also provides home weatherization services that reduce home heating and cooling costs substantially while contributing to the sustainability of our energy resources.

SEVCA is partnering with RREAL on the Community Solar for Community Action (CS4CA) pilot because we’d like to go even further in our efforts to address energy poverty and environmental sustainability at the same time. Year after year, SEVCA’s donors have generously contributed to keeping their neighbors warm in the winter through donations designated to emergency heating assistance. This certainly helps avert the immediate crisis the family is experiencing; unfortunately, they often find themselves in the same situation the following year, which requires another infusion of funds. What if we could generate power from a renewable source that would provide the household with energy assistance for as many years as they need it? We’re excited to tell you that with your help, we can do just that!

After construction is completed, SEVCA will own and manage the innovative community solar installation that will use virtual net metering credits to deliver solar energy assistance directly to Windham and Windsor County households with high energy burdens. This Community Solar for Community Action project, will demonstrate a new, nationally replicable model of energy assistance, enabling low-income households to meet their energy needs while supporting the development of renewable energy resources. SEVCA is building a community solar array at its Westminster office that will generate about $23,000 worth of electricity per year for the next 25 years. Approximately 50 area households will benefit annually through credits on their electricity bills, which will help them to meet their overall household energy needs.
Why Develop “Community Solar for Community Action”?

- On average, Vermont households with incomes below 200% of FPL paid an estimated $2,055 more than they could afford on home energy bills in 2016; existing energy assistance programs don’t fully cover this gap.
- 83% of the low-income respondents surveyed in SEVCA’s 2015 Community Assessment reported that they had a hard time paying their heating and/or electricity bills.
- Low- and moderate-income households make up 40% of the nation’s population but less than 5% of all solar power customers. A lack of resources and viable financing options to make upfront investments in solar create barriers that prevent this population from accessing renewable energy opportunities.
- “Community Solar for Community Action” will reduce participating low-income households’ dependence on seasonal and/or crisis fuel assistance by decreasing and stabilizing their energy costs. It will serve as a model of a lasting, clean, and locally-generated solution to energy poverty.

This project aims to chart a new future towards a more sustainable low-income solar energy assistance program nationally. Vermont has a favorable regulatory environment for community solar projects, a population that is highly supportive of renewable energy, and a significant need for energy assistance among low-income households, making this a great testing-ground for this model. SEVCA was awarded a grant of $111,000 from the Windham Regional Commission’s Renewable Energy Grant Program to help make the project a reality. **SEVCA can only utilize the full amount of this grant if we raise enough matching funds to support the project!**

If you support more sustainable communities and want to help ensure that Windham and Windsor County households can better meet their basic needs for heat and electricity in a more environmentally-friendly way, we’d love to hear from you! Donate by check or online ([instructions below](#)). For more information, contact Vicki O’Day Development Director at RREAL at [vicki@rreal.org](mailto:vicki@rreal.org) or Becky Himlin, SEVCA’s Director of Planning and Development, at (802) 722-4575, ext. 163 or [bhimlin@sevca.org](mailto:bhimlin@sevca.org).

Thank you so much for all your past support and for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Steve Geller  
Executive Director

Kathryn Poston  
Board President

You can donate electronically by clicking the “Donate” button at the top of the home page on our website, [www.sevca.org](http://www.sevca.org). Then on the donation page, just click on the link: “Donate to Community Solar for Community Action.” If you wish to send a check by mail, please use the enclosed remittance envelope. **Make a note that your donation is for our Community Solar Project. Thank you!**