

## Two Trends in Community-Oriented Renewable Energy

There are two interesting trends happening in community-oriented renewable energy, with roots in California but with branches around the country. These programs provide opportunities for communities to literally invest in renewable energy such as solar and wind power, and to have their communities receive the economic and environmental benefits.

### Community Choice Aggregation

[Community Choice Aggregation](#) (CCA) involves a local entity such as a municipal agency purchasing the power that the community consumes. The utility (in our case, PG&E) continues to provide the transmission and distribution service, as well as billing and customer service. But the CCA directs the dollars to power contracts – which can be focused on renewable energy sources, if the CCA so chooses.

According to Wikipedia, nearly one million Americans receive service from CCAs. But that number is poised to jump dramatically as several major metropolitan areas prepare to launch CCA programs, including San Francisco. [Cincinnati](#) recently became largest city in the U.S. to provide 100 percent green electricity supply through CCA, and managed to do so with rates that save customers money compared to their incumbent utility's rates. [San Francisco](#) is nipping at their heels, as they are planning to roll out a 100% green power CCA later this year, albeit with rates that may be above PG&E's. [Marin County](#) was an early CCA adopter, launching in 2010, and is the only active CCA in California. In all cases, residents and business are given the opportunity to opt-out of the program and continue their regular service with their electric utility.

The City of Albany's Sustainability Committee brought in a local expert in CCAs to our last meeting. She provided committee members and the public with an overview of how CCAs operate, the risks and benefits to the community, and a survey of CCA current activity. She indicated that [East Bay Municipal Utility District](#) is interested in meeting with local cities interested in forming a CCA. So perhaps there will be some movement afoot here in Albany.

### Community Solar

At a smaller and more localized scale, there have been several fascinating recent pilot projects in community renewables, particularly in community solar. These projects allow community members to invest in a local project and share in the return. It is ideal for residents or businesses that want to support solar and receive the benefits of solar, but are not able to install their own system because they do not own their building, the building rooftop is not suitable, the building is in a shaded location, or there are financing challenges. Typically with community solar, you invest in the system up front and receive dividends over time as the facility generates energy. A few examples include [Ellensburg](#), Washington and [University Park](#), Maryland.

One local firm, Berkeley-based [Solar Mosaic](#), will even provide a financial return on your investment using their crowd-based funding model. They're like the [Kiva](#) of renewable energy. I bought a Solar

Mosaic tile myself, to help fund a solar installation at the St. Vincent De Paul in Oakland. I'd love to invest my dividends in a facility right here in Albany!

Renewable energy is a growing industry, and there are many creative policy and business approaches being utilized to bring renewable to a level where a community can be engaged. CCA is included in the City of Albany's Climate Action (CAP) plans as a measure to be considered to help meet the goals of the CAP. With solar prices lower than ever before, hopefully community renewable energy can become a reality in which Albany residents can take pride.