



## Minnesota Energy Assistance Program

# Incorporating Solar Garden Subscription Costs

National Energy Assistance Directors Association Meeting

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# Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

## The Basics

- The Minnesota Energy Assistance Program (EAP) incorporated solar garden subscriptions in program year 2022
- A low-income focused solar garden approached EAP because of customers concerned about solar and EAP
- Didn't want participating in solar gardens to decrease the benefits of energy assistance households
- Worked with the solar garden to ensure participation would not negatively impact their household's benefit

## How are benefits determined?

- Based on income and actual prior year energy costs, if available
  - Costs are supplied by our participating energy vendors
- Backup benefit table used if costs are not known, or vendor does not provide for whatever reason
- Solar garden vendors are not eligible for crisis benefit

## How are benefits paid?

- Households indicate where they want benefits paid
  - Default 70%/30% split between primary heat and electric
- Can specify on application if they want paid differently
- Subscription costs factored into benefit doesn't mean solar garden will receive benefit – most often it will not

## How are benefits paid continued?

- Benefits paid when application is approved
- Paid in a lump sum
  - Household can request benefit spread out over several months

# Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

## How do solar gardens become vendors?

- Treated essentially the same as any other vendor
  - Key Difference: asked to supply subscription costs instead of consumption
- Households list solar garden provider on their application
- Commerce reaches out to get them registered
- Currently have two solar gardens signed up as vendors
  - Households have listed three more on their apps
  - These gardens have not registered despite requests to participate

# Solar Gardens as Energy Vendors

## How do solar gardens become vendors?

- Currently there are two solar gardens signed up as vendors
  - Households have listed three more on their apps
  - These gardens have not registered despite requests to participate
- Solar gardens sign same vendor agreement as all our energy vendors

## What if solar gardens don't participate?

- Electric costs are made invalid since credits reduce reported costs
- This triggers the benefit to be determined using the backup tables
- This helps limit any potential loss of benefit from participating in a solar garden

## A Couple Notes

- Community solar subscription costs really only mattered to EAP because of how we determined benefits – and because our largest electric vendor would not include their costs on consolidated bill
- State laws have recently changed, requiring consolidated billing in the future
- This will likely make our current approach unnecessary