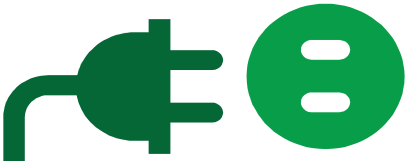


Promising Practices



Energy Co-operatives

Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative a trail blazer

The Toronto Renewable Energy Co-operative (TREC) is a non-profit organization founded in 1998 to make green energy initiatives accessible to all individuals and to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of energy consumption.¹ TREC's work ranges from establishing energy generation projects, to educating the public about green energy, to helping others establish co-operatives.

Renewable Energy Generation

Local energy generation projects are good for the economy, argues TREC, because they keep long-term jobs in Ontario and reduce losses incurred from the transmission system since the energy is generated close to where it is being used.² TREC develops local, community power projects using a co-operative model. All members, regardless of how much they invest, have one vote, giving each member equal say. Members receive an annual return based on how much money they invested. Thus, instead of large corporations benefitting from the demand for green energy, the renewable power generates funds for community members.³

WindShare: TREC has been a pioneer in renewable energy in Ontario. Its wind turbine at Exhibition Place was the first urban wind turbine in North America and the first community-owned wind power project in Ontario. It not only generates money for the community in a sustainable fashion, but also reduces conflict between the community and the developers, since the project is community-owned.⁴

The Exhibition Place turbine produced energy over 94% of its operational time from 2009 to

2010.⁵ The 1 million kWh of energy produced a year is enough to power 250 homes.⁶

SolarShare: TREC has decided to pursue its campaign to advocate for renewable energy in the solar energy field. SolarShare is a cooperative developed by TREC in which members have a stake in local solar projects. The co-operative currently owns 18 solar projects under construction, in the Greater Toronto Area and rural Ontario, which include ground-mounted systems and solar panels on the roofs of commercial and industrial buildings. SolarShare focuses on the idea of a triple bottom line: cooperative members gain financially, environmentally and socially.⁷

Educating the Public

TREC hosts bike tours to highlight Toronto's green projects, from the urban wind turbine and Toronto's deep lake cooling system, to rooftop gardens and cooperative solar projects.⁸ TREC provides environmental education to schools, ranging from field trips to the Green Collar Careers Program, which exposes high school students to green job opportunities through co-op placements.^{9 10} Additionally, every year, TREC hosts the Kids' World of Energy Festival for grade 5 and 6 classes. Students are introduced to various concepts such as climate change, the science of energy, energy conservation, and renewable energy, and participate in hands-on workshops in which they, for example, generate energy via solar panels, wind turbines and hydrogen.¹¹ Although there is a charge for classes to participate, subsidies are sometimes provided for schools in need.¹²

Our Power: TREC encourages communities to start up their own cooperatives or invest in solar energy

themselves. Through its Our Power Program, it leads roundtable discussions and home tours of solar installations to involve others in solar energy.¹³

Co-op Services

TREC offers its expertise to others interested in the community power model. Its website contains basic documents about establishing community solar projects.¹⁴ Groups with a prospective site for renewable energy can purchase legal templates and services from TREC that assist them in the process of acquiring the site, selecting a vendor, building the site and ensuring due diligence throughout the project. Statement templates for selling stocks and bonds as well as a marketing package are also offered.

TREC is developing a Community Power Investment Management software platform to manage membership and investments for co-operatives. To date, no such software exists for community power projects in Canada, so TREC will be offering a unique service of running co-operatives' administration based on a fee-for-service subscription model. It has applied for a Community Energy Partnership Program grant to further the project and it is looking at ways to expand its services. TREC's templates and services have already been used by the co-operatives it developed as well as three independent Ontario co-operatives, and three other co-operatives are hoping to collaborate with TREC.¹⁵

TREC is clearly leading the way for community cooperatives across Ontario to take part in the renewable energy economy.

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www.community-energy.ca



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