

## MINI GRANT PROJECT SUMMARY

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Please complete the project summary and return the completed form to April Snyder, Associate Administrator for the Institute on the Environment at [aprilsnyder@umn.edu](mailto:aprilsnyder@umn.edu). Paper copies will not be accepted. Please also attach any photos, publications, brochures, event agendas or other materials that were a result of the mini grant summary.

<b>Date of Report Submission:</b>	March 15, 2013
<b>Project Title:</b>	Moving the Arizona Solar Commons Project to Minnesota

### Project Context & Purpose

*Please include the original project purpose statement and revise for any changes that occurred in the project after the start date with a short explanation of the changes.*

The original purpose of the IonE minigrant was to consult with solar energy advocates, educators, and industries in Minnesota and, after understanding the local solar terrain, to create a plan to move the Arizona-based Solar Commons Project to UMD. The Solar Commons project, initiated and designed for the regulatory and climate terrain of Arizona, is a design to place distributed solar energy collectors in urban right of way and hold the contract for sale of solar energy as a community trust that returns the income stream to local, low income housing. As a new resident of Minnesota and Duluth, I was unaware of how solar was developing in the state. Also, as a new faculty member of UMD, I was unaware of who on the campus was working with solar initiatives. Originally my intention was to move the project to UMD, but early on in the consultation it became clear that a collaboration with a community nonprofit and the city of Duluth would be the best way to go. f

### Work Completed

*Please provide a summary of the work that was completed for the mini grant project.*

With the help of the IonE mini-grant, I employed Jodi Slick, Director of the Duluth nonprofit Ecolibrium 3 to help me understand the issues and players involved with solar energy in Duluth. Jodi introduced me to the city officials working on solar and the region's local solar industry experts with whom I conducted informational interviews. During this time I discovered that the city of Duluth had already started to consider a community solar collaboration. At the time of the grant, Minnesota's legislature was reviewing a new law to make "solar gardens" (distributed, community solar) accessible to Minnesotans. My consultations with Ecolibrium3 and other solar players in the northeast region have lead me to create a new plan for the Solar Commons in Minnesota. Additionally, the IonE mini grant was used to hire web designers to create a new website for the Solar Commons project. The website has been moved and reformatted so that I and my students can use it to report on the progress of the solar commons project.

## **Partnerships & Collaborations**

*Please provide a summary of the project personnel, partnerships and collaborations that worked directly on the project or were started as a direct result of the mini grant project.*

The key partnership that was solidified as a result of the IonE mini grant was between me as a UMD faculty member and creator/director of the Solar Commons project and the Duluth-based, sustainability nonprofit, Ecolibrium 3. Ecolibrium 3 is reviewing a proposal to become the fiscal agent for the Solar Commons project (decision in January 2014). UMD has assigned a student assistant to help with the website and other aspects of developing the project in Duluth. Once fiscal agency is established, I will begin collaborating with Ecolibrium 3 and the City of Duluth to raise money, design, and build the project.

## **Project Outcomes**

*Please provide a summary of the outcomes of the mini grant project including future plans for the project.*

The outcome of the mini grant is a new collaboration among UMD, a local sustainability nonprofit, and the City of Duluth with the aim of creating community trust-owned solar energy installations in Duluth. Next steps include bringing the UMD Engineering department on board in the solar design and bringing UMD's new Cultural Entrepreneurship program on board for creating the Solar Commons business plan. Ideally, the Solar Commons project should include an interdisciplinary, studio-based design course at UMD where students design protocols for public interest community solar installations in Minnesota. Additionally, the new collaborative will need to choose specific persons to serve on the Duluth Solar Commons Team. This team will locate and secure the site, raise funds to pay for materials, design, and construction, and oversee the building of the Solar Commons project. The Solar Commons website will update the local and broader community about the progress of community-trust owned solar energy in Minnesota.