Open access solar for C&I consumers: the 2026 playbook

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Third-party and group-captive open access can cut landed power cost by 25–40% for eligible consumers. Here is how the approvals, charges and contracts actually work.

For commercial and industrial consumers paying ■8–11/kWh, open-access renewable supply is the single largest cost lever available today — often worth 25–40% off the landed cost of power.

The two dominant structures

Third-party open access means buying from an independent generator under a PPA, paying wheeling, transmission and cross-subsidy charges to move the power. Group captive means owning at least 26% equity in the generating plant and consuming at least 51% of its output — which, under current rules, waives the cross-subsidy surcharge entirely in most states.

Where the savings come from

The generation cost of utility-scale solar is now ■2.5–3.5/kWh. Even after open-access charges, the landed cost typically sits ■2–4/kWh below the grid tariff. Add banking provisions where available, and the effective discount grows.

What to watch

State regulations differ sharply on banking, charge trajectories and eligibility thresholds — and they change. A contract that pencils today can erode if cross-subsidy surcharge waivers narrow. This is why tenure, change-in-law clauses and exit provisions matter as much as the headline tariff.

Getting started

The sequence that works: interval load study, state-regulation screening, structure selection (third-party vs group captive), generator shortlisting, then PPA negotiation. Done in that order, most eligible consumers reach contract signature in one quarter. Our PPA desk runs this end-to-end — from feasibility through open-access approvals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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