

Google maps Fresno's rooftop solar potential

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Fresno is one of three U.S. cities in which Internet giant Google has launched [Project Sunroof](#), a website where homeowners can get an estimate of their rooftop's potential to generate electricity with solar panels.

Google already has a large amount of information about your home, thanks to its popular Google Maps and Google Earth satellite imagery. What Project Sunroof does is use that high-resolution aerial mapping to estimate how much sunlight any given roof can capture – as long as you live in Fresno, San Francisco or Boston, where the program is being tested.

“If you're in one of our test regions, simply enter your address and Project Sunroof will crunch the numbers,” Carl Elkin, Google's lead engineer for the project, wrote in [a blog post announcing the project](#) Monday. “It figures out how much sunlight hits your rooftop throughout the year, taking into account factors like roof orientation, shade from trees and nearby buildings and local weather patterns.”

Based on Google's database of aerial imagery and maps, Project Sunroof knows how much space on your roof can fit solar panels and where is best to install them.

Project Sunroof website

The website also lets homeowners plug in information about their monthly power bill to help customize Google's estimates of savings if they were to install solar panels on their roof.

“As a volunteer with the Boston-based solar program Solarize Massachusetts and a solar homeowner myself, I've always been surprised at how many people I encounter who think that ‘my roof isn't sunny enough for solar’ or ‘solar is just too expensive,’” Elkin wrote.

Why Fresno? A promotional video by Google explains that Boston is where the Project Sunroof team is based and Google is headquartered in the San Francisco Bay Area, and Fresno is “where one of our engineers' mom is from.” Plus, Fresno is already known for its solar potential.

A [case study of Fresno](#) by nonprofit Strategic Energy Innovations and the U.S. Department of Energy reports that the city has about 55,000 “solar-viable homes” with a total potential to generate more than 300 megawatts of electricity. One megawatt of generating capacity is typically estimated to meet the power needs of about 500 homes.

Project Sunroof also offers a list of sponsored links to solar providers. “Our service is free to you, but we may be compensated by some of these solar companies,” the website states. It's unclear if that compensation is in the form of a commission for potential leads that come from the Project Sunroof site, or if the solar companies have paid to be listed on the page.

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