A free step-by-step guide for households and neighborhoods that don't want to wait nine days for the power company again.

Step 1: Know What You Actually Need

1

Calculate your critical-load wattage

List only what must stay on during an outage — fridge, medical devices, a few lights, phone chargers, a fan or space heater. Add up their running watts (check the nameplate on each device). Most households can cover critical loads with 1,000–2,000 watts of backup capacity — far less than powering a whole house.

2

Time your typical outage

A portable power station (500–1,000Wh) can usually bridge a several-hour outage. A home battery paired with solar (10+ kWh) is built for outages lasting days, like Gary's recent nine-day blackout.

Step 2: Start Small and Portable (Individual Level)

1

A solar generator / portable power station

Units in the $300–$1,500 range (e.g., EcoFlow, Jackery, Bluetti) can be charged from a wall outlet ahead of a storm and recharged by a portable solar panel during a long outage. No permits, no electrician required.

2

A basic battery + inverter backup for one circuit

For a fridge or medical device specifically, a dedicated small battery backup (UPS-style) keeps that one appliance running through short outages and buys time during long ones.

3

Weatherize before storm season

Caulking, insulation, and LED bulbs cut the power your home actually needs, which shrinks how much backup capacity you need to buy in the first place.

Step 3: Go Bigger — Rooftop Solar + Battery

1. **Get multiple quotes and check for incentives**
   Federal, state, and local incentives can offset a meaningful share of installation cost. Ask installers specifically about battery backup (not just grid-tied solar, which shuts off during a blackout for safety unless paired with battery storage).

2. **Prioritize a battery, not just panels**
   Grid-tied solar without a battery still goes dark in an outage. A home battery (e.g., 10 kWh+) is what actually keeps the lights on when NIPSCO's grid doesn't.

Step 4: Think Like a Community, Not Just a Household

1. **Look at what Highland Park, Michigan did**
   After the utility repossessed the city's streetlights, residents formed the nonprofit Soulardarity and installed community-owned solar streetlights with battery storage that keep shining even when the grid is down.

2. **Look at what Adjuntas, Puerto Rico did**
   After 6 months without power post-Hurricane Maria, Casa Pueblo built a solar micro-grid downtown. When Hurricane Fiona hit in 2022, it kept businesses and services running for 9 days while the rest of the island went dark.

3. **Ask your city about a resilience hub or microgrid**
   The U.S. Department of Energy's Community Microgrid Assistance Partnership funds exactly this kind of project for communities with repeated, prolonged outages — a real funding path a neighborhood association or church could pursue.

Step 5: Build Your Personal Outage Kit

1. **Battery-powered or hand-crank radio + flashlights**

2. **A list of medical devices in your home that need power, and a plan for each**

3. **A few days of shelf-stable food and water per person**

4 **A charged portable power bank, kept topped off year-round**

5 **Your utility's outage-reporting number and your city council member's contact info**