San Diego
Solar Equity Program

Tips for Selecting a Solar Contractor

Refer to the List of Eligible Solar Contractors

San Diego Solar Equity Program (SDSEP) maintains an updated List of Eligible Solar Contractors in the San Diego region who have completed a Solar Contractor Workshop and fully understand the program requirements. Inclusion on the List of Eligible Solar Contractors means that the Solar Contractor has met the minimum requirements necessary to participate in the program. The Center for Sustainable Energy, the Program Administrator, in no way endorses or guarantees any Solar Contractor or their work.

Get multiple bids

A "bid" is a proposed cost for the equipment and labor costs of purchasing and installing the solar photovoltaic (PV) system. It is important to evaluate multiple bids and compare each Solar Contractor's proposed cost for equivalent systems before contracting with a Solar Contractor. Each Solar Contractor is only permitted to install five systems under the SDSEP annually, so if a Solar Contractor you contact is not available, consider another Solar Contractor on the list.

Get references or visit business review sites

Get references from previous customers of the Solar Contractor and review past work to confirm the Solar Contractor's reputation within your community. You can also go to a business review site to get a better understanding of a Solar Contractor's reputation and review comments or complaints.

Understand the project deposit

SDSEP is an equity-focused solar incentive program intended to cover the majority of the cost of the solar system for the Host Customer. Some Solar Contractors may request an initial deposit from the Host Customer as part of the contract process, which would be returned when the incentive is claimed at the end of the project. However, not all Solar Contractors will require a deposit and you are within your right to only contract with a Solar Contractor who does not require a deposit. If you do decide to contract with a Solar Contractor who requires a deposit, never pay more than 10% down or $1,000—whichever is less.

Understand expected performance of the proposed system

Be sure to compare the expected energy output of the proposed solar system before choosing a Solar Contractor. The expected energy output from a solar system (measured in kWh[1]) is a much better indicator of the system performance than the system rated capacity (measured in kW[2]). Also, be sure to verify that your system has an easy-to-read meter installed that measures the energy produced in kilowatt-hours. The utility meter only provides the net energy used at your home and does not tell you how much energy your system produces.

Determining how much electricity a photovoltaic (PV) system will produce is based on the orientation and tilt of the system and shade from trees, chimneys or other objects. In San Diego, an average 1-kilowatt of solar panels installed on your roof, at the optimal orientation and tilt for maximum annual energy production, will produce between 1400-1700 kilowatt hours per year. For purposes of estimating the energy output of the PV system, it is reasonable to use the middle of that range: 1550 kilowatt-hours per year. This estimate accounts for the following factors that can affect the energy output of the system:

Factor	**Description**
Dirt and Dust	Dirt and dust that accumulate on the PV modules can account for energy loss in energy production. If the panels are cleaned regularly, losses due to dirt and dust could be zero.
Temperature	Increased temperatures reduce the energy output of all PV modules. For example, PV systems in the desert will be more affected by high temperatures than systems installed in temperate coastal zones.
Energy Loss in Wires	Connecting a PV system to your home electrical system requires running some length of electrical wiring. Energy is lost in transfer along the wires between system components. The longer the length of wires connecting your PV system to your electrical meter, the greater the energy lost in transfer.
Shade	In many residential settings, the presence of shade is inevitable. Speak with a Solar Contractor to determine how shade will affect the performance of your system.
Orientation/Tilt	The direction and angle of the installed system will affect the amount of electricity it can produce and the time of year it will produce the most. To maximize annual production, placing the system facing South at about a 33-degree incline is best. To maximize summer production, placing the system facing South at about an 18-degree incline is best.

[1] kWh is kilowatt-hours, a unit of measurement for energy (power applied over time)
[2] kW is kilowatt, a unit of measurement for power