

Simple Steps to Solar Energy

Power your home, business, organization, or farm with solar!

Before you begin: Before adding solar energy production, limit your need for additional energy by making your building as energy efficient as possible. Most utilities have incentives for efficiency improvements, so be sure to ask your utility. Get an energy assessment to find opportunities to reduce energy usage and check out our Home Energy Guides for more efficiency tips: cleanenergyresourceteams.org/home-energy-guide-tips



WHERE TO START

1 Get educated

Understand whether a solar photovoltaic (PV) system will work for you to offset your electric energy use. Other technologies like air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, and insulation might better reduce demand for fuels needed to heat buildings. Any one of these technologies might be right for you depending on your energy use or the solar resource available at your site. You can learn more about solar and efficiency technologies from the CERTs solar page (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/solar) and heat pumps guide (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/ashp).

2 Do you have a sunny site?

You can get a sense for the solar resource at your site using the Minnesota Solar Suitability App (solar.maps.umn.edu/app). Our Solar Directory (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/tools-guides/directory) provides solar installers that you can consider working with who should start by providing you with a detailed site assessment. If you don't have a good site, you might consider buying renewable energy from your utility or subscribing to a community solar garden.



CONSIDERATIONS

3 Know local rules

It's important to check in with your local city or county about ordinances that might impact your solar project. Though many ordinances consider on-site solar installations as accessory uses, some require setbacks, structural assessments, and screening requirements. Your solar installer should have a good handle on these requirements, but it's worth knowing these matters in advance.

4 Your budget

Installers should be able to provide a good cost estimate for a project you're considering, and incentives can make solar more affordable. A federal tax credit can cover up to 30% of the project cost and some utilities offer rebates, too. The USDA REAP provides grants for up to 40% of the cost for farms and rural small businesses (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/grants-farmers-rural-businesses). Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing could also be a good fit for paying for non-residential projects (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/pace).

5 SEEK ADVICE

We can provide one-on-one assistance. If you are a farm or business looking to implement solar and you want to talk it over, just give us a call or an email and we'd be happy to help! Melissa Birch, CERTs Rural Energy Development Coordinator: mbirch@umn.edu.



HIRE & INSTALL

6 Compare bids from several solar contractors

You can use our Solar Directory to help you search for solar installers (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/tools-guides/directory). We also provide a useful set of questions that you can ask companies (cleanenergyresourceteams.org/questions-ask-companies).

7 Install solar

Select a company, sign a contract, and install your system. It usually takes two weeks to two months from the time you sign an agreement to the time the project is completed, depending on type of solar technology and the incentive process. If installing PV, your contractor will facilitate an interconnection agreement with your electric utility which will allow you to track production and get paid for excess production with net metering.

FIND MORE

CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org/Solar