



QUESTIONS TO ASK A SOLAR PROVIDER

When you're exploring solar power for your facility, the biggest decision you'll make is who to partner with to implement your system. Here are the basic questions you should ask when considering a solar provider, and how to interpret the answers:

1 Has the solar provider considered how a solar array aligns with your facility's master plan?

A solar array is a long-term investment and most will last over 25 years. But they're not permanent fixtures and can be moved if necessary to accommodate future plans on site. Though rooftop space could be preferred over open land, that may not be the best long term fit for your facility. *The right solar provider will help you find the best option for your current facility footprint as well as future planning considerations.*

2 Who owns the solar array?

This may seem like an odd question, but it's not uncommon for solar providers to actually own the arrays regardless of the property where it is located. In these cases, it's important to understand who the responsible party would be if the array owner goes bankrupt. No matter who holds the title, a bankruptcy or other major financial development could throw your array into jeopardy. *Working with a provider that has a proven track record and years of experience is critical to avoid any financial issues.*

This question also presents a great opportunity to ask about a warranty, which is only as good as the solvency of the provider. If your developer goes out of business, your warranty goes with it—and so does the value of the solar array. *If your provider is the financier/owner of the array, what provisions are in place to maintain the asset should the business change hands or dissolve?*

3 Who will provide operation and maintenance support after installation? Can the provider share a detailed plan about maintenance during the planning stage?

At a minimum, your solar array will need some kind of preventive maintenance every year after installation, particularly in the first one to two years. It's important to establish a maintenance schedule before installation takes place, either with the provider or with another party. Regular maintenance will ensure your investment will function as designed for years to come. In addition, you need that reliable partner to manage emergency situations should the system go down.

This question is also critical when you're considering price. The lowest price will not necessarily equate to the best value, because a low-cost array may be made up of inferior components that end up requiring costly maintenance year after year, thereby lowering the value of your array. How the prospective provider plans to handle maintenance can be very revealing, and *a reputable provider will gladly share a detailed maintenance plan with you.*

4 Given your electricity demand, how will the size of your solar array maximize savings and optimize your output?

Not all providers give accurate estimates on the size and output of your solar array, and may provide a low-priced solution that's not tailored to your specific needs. If a provider uses a 'cookie-cutter' approach, you may end up with an array that doesn't meet your electricity needs, and neither your savings nor your output is maximized. In fact, you could end up losing money if the system is not properly sized. To make sure the array is being designed and priced for your unique load profile, it's important to establish clear guidelines for your needs and budget. *Choosing your provider based on experience and quality support, not solely on price, will ensure you get the right solution.*

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What is the provider's track record for executing the utility interconnection process? What will be the timeframe for permitting?

It will take time for your provider to get the necessary permits to establish your solar array and navigate the background work required to connect the array to the electrical grid. A good rule of thumb is two to three months for the design and permitting stage, while connecting to existing utilities shouldn't take longer than six months from start to finish. *Working with an experienced provider who knows how to navigate these critical steps will ensure your array is up and running on schedule.*

6

How does your developer handle zoning and other regulatory approvals?

Every solar project will have to deal with questions about zoning, conditional use, wetlands delineation or other regulatory obstacles on its path to completion. Your developer should have experience in overcoming these obstacles, typically evidenced by attending public hearings as usually required for solar projects. A typical solar project should take less than 12 months to complete from start to finish. *Your provider should know how to handle the approval process, and account for it in the overall timeline.*

7

What is your provider's deployment capability? Where and how do they hire labor?

The developer you choose for your solar project should be able to describe safety and training requirements for workers, as well as the hiring process for those employees. Make sure the labor used for your project is experienced in building solar arrays.

Don't hesitate to ask about how the work will be done. Will the provider use a modular or field assembly process? How will the construction site be staffed? Will a foreman be on site at all times? *A reputable provider should have satisfactory answers for each of these questions.*

8

What is the construction and build timeline?

In addition to cost, the most vital question about your solar array construction project has to do with time. After the project details have been established and approvals obtained, how long will it take for the array to actually be built? As a baseline, a one- to two-megawatt array typically takes around three months to construct. *Establish the timeline for construction and make sure your provider is prepared to stick to it.*

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What is the solar provider's track record?

Solar power is a booming business, and there are hundreds of start-up companies with minimal experience, no financial depth or diversification, and a high failure rate. If a proposal sounds too good to be true, it likely is. Unfortunately, some developers promise things they can't deliver, and property owners only find out after it's too late. When selecting your provider, choose well-diversified partners with a long, proven track record in energy projects.

Experienced providers, that have multiple revenue streams within the company, bring a better knowledge of the energy industry at large, and won't be negatively impacted by solar market fluctuations. They also know how to source and vet the right technology and parts manufacturers for your unique application. *A reliable solar partner will provide the experience and stability critical for a successful solar project.*