

Installing Solar on a Council Building Information for Lessees and Tenants

Many Council facilities are leased and operated by community groups seeking to install solar systems on Council owned buildings.

The installation of a solar system involves a number of steps which may vary depending on who is funding and managing the installation process.

Care must be taken to ensure the solar system achieves expectations and most importantly is installed safely by a professional accredited installer.

The steps below are to assist tenants and lessees navigate this process which may vary from Council to Council:



Step 1: Collate information and data

Tenants in Council facilities will need to undertake research to confirm:

a. Interest from all lessees at the site.

Changes to the site's electricity supply will impact all users of the facility. In some instances, multiple clubs/groups have seasonal based tenancies with Council. Make sure you have everyone on board from the outset and seek written consent from all tenants.

b. Suitability of roof space.

Available roof space, construction type, shading and orientation will all impact the financial viability of the project. Refer to the *Behind the Meter Solar PV Funding Guidebook*¹ (Page 58).

c. Data and information on current electricity costs.

Your annual electricity costs and existing retailer electricity tariffs (c/kWh peak and off peak) will have a significant impact on the financial viability of your project. You'll need to collate 12 months of electricity bills and interval data from the site's smart meter. You may need to request this data from Council if they pay the electricity bills.

d. Quantify value of the works.

You may need to seek three (3) quotes for the solar panels. Councils often have specific requirements regarding the certification of materials and installers - it's best to insist on CEC accredited products and installers. Many solar suppliers are able to provide indicative desktop-based quotes using satellite imagery and your electricity billing data, so collecting this information may be as simple as making a few calls.

e. Check switchboard.

Investigate the suitability of existing Switchboard to see if an upgrade is required to accommodate solar.



Step 2: Engage with Council

Installing solar on a Council facility typically involves staff from a number of different departments. These may include:

- Environment and sustainability
- Facilities and assets management
- Capital works and major projects
- Finance and procurement
- Recreation and leisure services

It's important that you engage with Council early in the process to ensure this process runs smoothly and efficiently. There may be technical and regulatory approvals that need to be addressed. A single point of contact at Council will help you navigate these tasks.

The quality of data that has been gathered will assist Council in making a decision on whether to pursue the project further. Council may choose to undertake a detailed Business Case (Step 3) before making a decision to contribute financially to the project and before providing formal authorisation for the project to proceed.



Step 3: Detailed Business Case

A detailed Business Case may include:

- Site visit to conduct a structural review of the roof space and ensure safe roof access
- Optimisation of system size capacity (kW) for the site and consumption
- Break down of capital and labour costs
- Permit review, including planning and building approvals and Statutory requirements
- Network connection costs
- Maintenance and monitoring costs
- Risk assessment
- Cost to upgrade switchboard (if required)
- Funding model (see Step 4)



Step 4: Confirm funding

Careful consideration should be given to how the project will be funded. The two main options available include:

a. Invest: All costs paid up front and savings are recouped over time

Council may choose to fund installation costs or to co-invest with the tenant(s). Some tenants may seek to meet all up-front costs through other approaches by securing a Council grant or via donations and crowd funding models.

b. Buy: Zero costs up front, with ongoing payments over time

- Solar lease where the tenant enters into an agreement with the solar provider for fixed payments over a fixed term (i.e. 10 years)
- Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA) where the tenant commits to purchasing electricity generated on site at an agreed rate over a fixed term (i.e. 10 years)

Both lease and PPA approaches seek to ensure ongoing savings exceed the agreed repayments, so the energy use is cash-flow positive from day one. These options include the additional costs of finance which may impact the overall viability of the project, however, this may be a preferred approach where there are insufficient funds available to invest. The long term nature of these approaches will mean the tenure of lease will be a key consideration.



Step 5: Choosing a solar supplier

When choosing a solar supplier there are many factors to consider. These can be quite onerous, and Council may be able to help so check with them first. If Council is funding the installation in its entirety, it is likely that they will manage the procurement process internally.

If you are choosing your own supplier, the following factors need to be considered:

- Technical specifications
- Accreditation requirements
- Experience
- Warranties
- Documentation
- Safety standards
- Maintenance requirements

What information have you received from your solar provider to make sure their credentials stack up? Refer to the *Behind the Meter solar PV Funding Guidebook*¹ (Page 33). Make sure you have your Council's approval before making a final decision.



Step 6: Solar installed

The chosen provider will need to work closely with Council's assets and facilities teams to ensure installation runs smoothly and minimises any potential disruption to service continuity. Your contact at Council will coordinate the various parties and liaise with you (and other tenants) along the way.



Step 7: Monitoring and maintenance

Performing regular maintenance and inspection of components will aid system performance and minimise disruption due to component failure. Speak to your Council and the installer to ensure this is integrated into Council's ongoing asset management plan or coordinated with the supplier.

Having access to a suitable data monitoring portal will enable the system's performance to be monitored and communicated to the site's users and visitors.

FRONTIER IMPACT GROUP

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¹ www.frontierimpact.com.au/toolkit

Member Councils:



For more information on how solar works check out these resources:

www.frontierimpact.com.au/toolkit

www.renew.org.au/resources/how-we-can-help/solar-and-batteries/grid-interactive-solar

www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/victorian-feed-in-tariff/whats-involved-in-going-solar/paperwork-required-for-solar