
7 STEPS TO SELECTING A SOLAR PROVIDER

Across multiple sectors business owners are interested in going solar for both economic and environmental benefits but may not know how to procure an on-site solar energy system. This resource highlights best practices to selecting a commercial solar provider. Business owners interested in going solar can take the following steps to install an on-site solar photovoltaic (PV) system.

- 1. Learn about Solar:** The development and installation of a solar PV system requires an understanding of the technology, its financing options, and the procurement process. Reference the [Better Building Alliance On-Site Commercial Solar PV Decision Guide](#) to learn about key aspects of a commercial solar installation.
- 2. Define Project Goals:** In order to have a successful project you will need to define your goals and objectives. This will allow solar providers to tailor their bid responses to your company's needs and demonstrate how they can successfully meet your goals.
- 3. Define Selection Criteria:** Develop a scoring system for the bids based on the evaluation criteria most important to your company and form an evaluation committee to review bids. The evaluation committee can be made up of representatives from multiple viewpoints including procurement, engineering, facilities, finance and sustainability offices. A final provider selection will be based on the total number of points awarded by the evaluation committee. The selection criteria can be based on the following list of project characteristics, but weighing the criteria will depend on your company's priorities:
 - ▶ **Project Cost Effectiveness:** Project meets company financial savings targets and provider's bid matches or exceeds the competitor bids. Bid clearly communicates the financial benefits of the project, using the financial metrics requested in the Request For Proposal (RFP) (e.g. \$/W, \$/kWh, Net Present Value (NPV), etc.)
 - ▶ **Technical Approach/System Design:** System design meets RFP specifications or provides additional value to the customer through customized design.
 - ▶ **Implementation Schedule:** Provider can construct the project to meet incentive deadlines and accommodate building schedule.
 - ▶ **Company Qualifications/Project Experience:** Company has experience installing similar projects: (1) Location (in state or for specific utility), (2) Project design (roof vs. carport vs. ground), (3) System size.
 - ▶ **Project Team, Team Experience and Approach:** Qualified team with past experience installing projects of similar size, design and location. Clearly communicated design and construction approach.
- 4. Develop a Request for Proposal (RFP):** An RFP notifies solar providers that your company is receiving bids for a solar project. The RFP allows your company to outline the bidding process and contract terms, and communicate project specifications to the solar providers that submit proposals. The company can choose to issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) prior to the RFP and use the same weighing process to identify four to five qualified bidders. Having a short list of top bidders efficiently expedites the evaluation process and allows your company to focus on answering questions from solar providers most likely to win the project. For guidance on writing an RFP, reference the [Solar Request for Proposals & Procurement Guidance](#) as a starting point.
- 5. Issue RFP:** Respondents can have a minimum of two weeks to respond to the RFQ and three to four weeks to respond to the RFP. Adequate response time is necessary to receive quality bids.
- 6. Shortlist Providers:** Depending on the number and quality of bids received, you may decide to shortlist providers and interview the two to three finalists, or award the project based solely on the RFP responses.
- 7. Select Provider:** The evaluation committee uses the pre-determined selection criteria (and interview results, if applicable) to evaluate RFP responses. Company decision-makers can expect a satisfactory proposal from the final provider that closely aligns with your company's goals.