

# Simple Steps to Solar



**AUSTIN**  
**UTILITIES**  
Connections for Better Living™

**CONSERVE & \$SAVE**

## Did you know...

Austin Utilities offers rebates for solar projects to our customers!

Details on reverse →

Steps to start powering your home or business with solar energy!

## Before you begin...

**Energy efficiency is the cleanest energy of all.** Before adding solar energy production, limit your need for additional energy by making your home or business as energy efficient as possible. An energy audit is a great way to understand your energy use. Austin Utilities offers incentive programs for efficiency improvements ([austinutilities.com](http://austinutilities.com)). The MN Department of Commerce also provides a wealth of resources about energy conservation ([mn.gov/commerce](http://mn.gov/commerce)).

## 1: GET EDUCATED

**Understand what sort of system is right for you.** Solar technologies come in differing models. A photovoltaic (PV) system offsets electric energy use. A solar thermal hot water system reduces demand for fuels needed to heat water. A solar thermal air heat system lowers demand for fuels needed to heat buildings. Any one of these technologies might be right for you depending on your energy use and the solar resource available at your site. You can learn more about solar technologies from the Clean Energy Resource Teams solar page ([solar.mncerts.org](http://solar.mncerts.org)).

## 2: START PLANNING

### Consider your sun exposure, budget, and roof life and structure.

**Sun Exposure:** It is important to consider the solar resource at your site. A solar site assessor can help you decide which technologies are the best fit for your home or business. Assessments will provide insight on the solar resource and potential structural issues. **TIP:** Using a third party to get an unbiased opinion for your site assessment can be helpful. Clean Energy Project Builder ([cleanenergyprojectbuilder.org](http://cleanenergyprojectbuilder.org)) provides a directory of assessors who can provide this information. You can get a sense for the solar resource at your site using the Minnesota Solar Suitability App ([solar.maps.umn.edu/app](http://solar.maps.umn.edu/app)). Other groups also provide virtual site assessments ([mnrenewables.org](http://mnrenewables.org) or [midwestrenew.org](http://midwestrenew.org)).

**Planning and Zoning:** It's important to check in with your local city/county about ordinances that might be in place that would impact your solar project. Some require setbacks or structural assessments, for instance. Your solar installer should have a good handle on this process, but it's worth knowing in advance.

**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 USDA REAP provides grants for up to 25% and loans for up to 75% of the cost for farms and small businesses. Austin Utilities also provides solar rebates. Check [dsireusa.org](http://dsireusa.org) for more.

**Next Steps** →  
3: Seek Advice  
4: Get Bids  
5: Install Solar  
6: Get Rebate

## 3: SEEK ADVICE

**Austin Utilities is here to answer your questions.** While the contractor you hire will end up being the solar expert for your project, Austin Utilities is happy to answer questions you may have about solar photovoltaic (PV) and solar thermal energy, as well as the requirements of our solar rebate programs.

- Give us a call. You can call 507-433-8886 any time to talk to an Austin utilities representative.

## 4: GET BIDS

### Compare bids from several solar contractors.

You can use the Clean Energy Project Builder online directory ([cleanenergyprojectbuilder.org](http://cleanenergyprojectbuilder.org)), to help you search for solar contractors. The Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources provides a useful set of questions to ask potential contractors ([bit.ly/solar-hire](http://bit.ly/solar-hire)). TIP: Most contractors will charge you a fee for coming out to do a site assessment, but then subtract that amount from your contract if you select them. Sometimes you can get site assessments for free or reduced costs in months when installations are slower (December, January, and February in MN).



## 5: INSTALL SOLAR

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

## 6: GET MONEY BACK



### Austin Utilities' Conserve and Save® solar rebate program makes it more affordable for you to install solar.

- The program provides a rebate of \$500 for solar electric systems 2kW DC or larger for residential and business customers
- The program provides a rebate of \$15 per square foot net aperture for solar hot water systems (up to \$1,200) for residential and businesses customers
- Rebates are available in conjunction with other state and federal programs

Visit [austinutilities.com](http://austinutilities.com), choose customer type, click Rebates, then Solar Power



This guide was created by the Minnesota Clean Energy Resource Teams, or CERTs, a statewide partnership with a shared mission to connect individuals and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community-based clean energy projects. More at [CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org](http://CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org).