



Planning for Your Solar Project

Solar can be a large investment, and it may not be right for everybody. As you begin to plan for your solar project, consider the following questions. Be sure to call SmartSolar for any additional information and assistance with this process.

What Does Your Energy Usage Look Like?

Review your PG&E energy use history for a period of at least one year, paying close attention to whether your monthly usage is primarily electric or natural gas. Do your bills fluctuate significantly month to month, or seasonally? If you do not have a paper record of your bills, you can easily access your information at www.pge.com by setting up an online account.

What Opportunities Do You Have for Energy Efficiency?

Think about where the majority of your energy usage may occur. Is your water heater insulated and efficient? Is your building well insulated and weather-sealed? Have you upgraded your lighting to energy saving technologies? Do you have old appliances that could be upgraded to ENERGY STAR models? Refer to SmartSolar's guidelines for potential improvements in each of these end use areas – space conditioning, water heating, lighting, and appliances and electronics – and consider talking to a building performance contractor.

What Are Your Solar Options?

Consider your current and future energy needs when determining whether solar will be right for you. Do you have a large electric load that cannot be significantly reduced by energy efficiency upgrades? If so, a solar electric (or PV) system might be your best option. Solar hot water could also be right for you if you use a lot of natural gas usage for water heating. Other major considerations for solar include assessing the age and condition of your roof and determining whether you have a sunny south, west, or east facing roof exposure for solar.

Do You Anticipate Changes in Your Future Energy Use?

If you anticipate a major change in your life or your building use (adding a major appliance or an electric vehicle, increasing the number of building occupants, etc.), this might change your overall energy usage and impact your projected solar system size.

What is Your Project Budget?

Decide what your project budget is, and prioritize projects accordingly. Changes in project costs can be difficult to predict as they are based on a number of market factors. Incentive programs, however, generally have very specific conditions, including their dates of availability and rates. It is important to be aware of these conditions, as incentives can have a significant impact on final project cost. If financing will be pursued for a project, begin researching the available options so you can include financing costs (down payments, interest, etc.) into planning.

