

CALIFORNIA SOLAR INITIATIVE BID COMPARISON WORKSHEET

HOW TO MAKE SMART CHOICES WHEN GOING SOLAR

Qualified contractors are your key to getting the most productive solar system for your home or business, which is why *Go Solar, California!* joins with the Contractors State License Board (CSLB) in advising Californians to be smart shoppers when selecting a solar contractor and comparing bids.

Because a solar energy system may not qualify for rebates if the process is not followed correctly, here are some guidelines to help ensure that you select a qualified, licensed solar contractor:

- 1. Start by visiting www.GoSolarCalifornia.ca.gov** for a list of licensed solar contractors. Read about how to hire a contractor— such as checking references, obtaining detailed information in writing about all materials to be used, and confirming the contractor’s classification—in the “Resources” section.
- 2. Verify that the contractor has an active A, B, C-10 or C-46 license** (or C-36 for solar water heating installations) through the CSLB at www.cslb.ca.gov or by calling 800-321-2752. Ask the contractor to show his/her CSLB “pocket license” to make sure you’re meeting with an authorized person and a photo ID to confirm identification.
- 3. You should interview at least three solar contractors** and compare their bids—including the amount of electricity the system will produce and the net cost of the system per watt— before hiring. Take caution against automatically selecting the contractor with the lowest bid, which may be a red flag that the contractor is cutting corners. Also be on the watch for unusually high bids. You can obtain detailed information from the California Solar Initiative about average project costs at www.GosSolarCalifornia.ca.gov to see if your bids are within the average range.
- 4. Read the fine print!** Make sure you fully understand everything contained within the contract— including warranties and maintenance agreements—**before** signing a contract.
- 5. Finally, under California state law**, you should **never** pay more than \$1,000 or 10% of the contract price (whichever is less) for a down payment.

FOR HOMEOWNERS AND
SMALL BUSINESSES

GO **solar**
CALIFORNIA

www.GoSolarCalifornia.ca.gov



CSI PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR CONTACT INFORMATION

California Center for Sustainable Energy® (for SDG&E customers)

Attn: CSI Program Manager
8690 Balboa Ave., Ste. 100
San Diego, CA 92123

Email: gosolar@energycenter.org
Phone: 1-858-244-1177/(866)-SDENERGY
Fax: 1-858-244-1178

Web site: www.gosolar.energycenter.org

Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Attn: California Solar Initiative
P.O. Box 7265
San Francisco, CA 94120-7265

Email: solar@pge.com
Phone: 1-877-743-4112 (General Solar Inquiries)
1-415-973-3480 (CSI Project Inquiries)

Web site: www.pge.com/solar

Southern California Edison

Attn: CSI Program Administrator
P.O. Box 800
Rosemead, CA 91770

Email: CSIGroup@sce.com
Phone: 1-800-799-4177 (General Questions)
1-866-584-7436 (CSI Project Inquiries)

Web site: www.sce.com/gosolar



This worksheet is intended to be an overview and introduction to the CSI Program. It is not intended to replace the CSI Program Handbook. If there are differences between the Handbook and this fact sheet, the Handbook shall prevail. Please see the most recent version of the Handbook for the most up-to-date information at www.GoSolarCalifornia.ca.gov/documents/index.php.

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Use this solar bid comparison worksheet to organize information needed to make a smart solar decision.

	ITEM	BID #1	BID #2	BID #3
CONTRACTOR INFORMATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Company/Rep Name			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Company Phone #			
	<input type="checkbox"/> CSLB License #			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Check the status @ www.cslb.ca.gov			
SYSTEM DESCRIPTION	<input type="checkbox"/> System nameplate rating (DC kW)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> System size in CEC-AC kW			
	<input type="checkbox"/> % of Electric Load Offset			
SYSTEM COST	<input type="checkbox"/> Base system cost			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Adders			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Estimated Permit Fees			
	<input type="checkbox"/> (Less) Estimated CSI Rebate			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Total Cost			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Cost Per Watt (total cost + system size kW) + 1000			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Down Payment			
PROJECT VALUE	<input type="checkbox"/> Year One Expected Savings			
	<input type="checkbox"/> # Years for Payback			
OTHER FACTORS	<input type="checkbox"/> Contractor Financing Options (if applicable)			
	<input type="checkbox"/> Warranty Terms			

Terms to know when comparing solar bids

- **System Nameplate Rating:** Capacity rating of the system in Direct Current (DC) kilowatts (kW). DC kW is referred to as the nameplate rating but does not reflect actual power production because DC must be converted into Alternating Current (AC) to power your home. It's not necessary to see a DC rating on your bid, although some contractors choose to include it.
- **System Size in CEC-AC kW:** A kilowatt (kW) is 1,000 Watts. CEC-AC kW is the most common and accurate rating to determine system size. It is based on the California Energy Commission's rating of solar equipment in real-world conditions. It must be included on your bid – if it's not, be sure to ask for it.
- **Percentage of Electric Load Covered:** Prior to the bid selection and installation, it is important to understand how much of your monthly electricity needs the system will generate.
- **Base System Cost:** Some companies have a base system cost and then will add charges. Others will simply list total cost. Make sure you are clear on how the costs are listed and what those costs include.
- **Adders:** Adders are extra charges for items such as roof costs and trenching. Be clear on whether these have already been included in your bid, if applicable. Monitoring Costs (if applicable) provide the ability to view the system's electricity production online (at an extra cost). This may or may not be included in your bid.
- **Estimated Permit Fees:** Permit fees should not vary between contractors. Each city or county jurisdiction sets their own permit charges.
- **CSI Rebate (Estimate)** is calculated by several design and locational factors. Your solar contractor typically applies for these rebates on your behalf, subtracting the estimated rebate from the total cost of your system. Note, federal tax credits can reduce system costs even more; ask your contractor or tax professional how.
- **Total Cost (after rebates, tax credits):** This refers to your out-of-pocket costs after all applicable rebates and credits have been deducted.
- **Cost Per Watt:** Allows you to compare bids more accurately and is calculated as total cost divided by system size (in Watts).
- **Contractor Financing Options (if applicable):** Some contractors may offer financing methods, such as system leasing. If this is of interest to you, inquire with the contractor before soliciting a bid.
- **Warranty Terms:** To qualify for the California Solar Initiative rebate, the system must come with a minimum 10-year warranty.



The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) operates under the umbrella of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. CSLB licenses and regulates more than 300,000 California contractors and is regarded as one of the leading consumer protection agencies in the United States. In fiscal year 2008-09, CSLB investigated more than 20,000 complaints and helped recover nearly \$36 million in ordered restitution for consumers.

The California Solar Initiative (CSI) program is funded by California investor-owned utility customers and administered by the California Center for Sustainable Energy* (in San Diego Gas & Electric territory), Pacific Gas & Electric, and Southern California Edison under the auspices of the California Public Utility Commission. Visit www.cpuc.ca.gov for more information.