

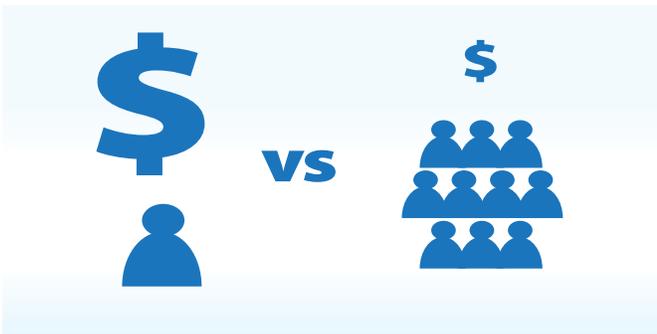


# San José SunShares

## Go Solar with Group Buying Power



# What is San José SunShares?



## Harness the power of many

“Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success”

That principle inspired a group of City of San José employees who had a common interest in using solar energy in their homes. With some inspiration and assistance from their organization, and low-interest financing from their credit union, the employees leveraged their collective buying power to get the lowest purchase prices to-date in the country for home solar systems. Their grassroots effort, called the **San José SunShares** program, now serves as a proven model for others interested in reducing the costs of solar installation.

Everyone benefits! Employees get solar at lower cost, employers offer a great new benefit, financial institutions get a new green program, and solar companies gain new customers.

The path toward solar energy

San José’s SunShares model is ideal for any organization and their employees. In this guide, you’ll discover how employers and their employees can work together to buy quality solar electrical and hot water systems on their homes at a dramatically discounted cost and with highly attractive financing. You’ll find simple steps on how to receive and evaluate competitive proposals from solar contractors and reduce upfront costs as well as helpful hints and resources for developing financing options.

# How It Works:

## Key elements of the SunShares program

### Start the Buzz with your organization & colleagues – Collective power

Your organization and your fellow employees are what make this all work. You and your organization can facilitate the internal outreach to build a team whose collective buying power will make participation a big win for everyone. With informal activities like brown bag lunches and workshops, this team of employees interested in solar energy for their homes can inform themselves on the benefits of group pricing and use the simple steps in the next section to attract the best deal possible.

### Financial Service - A trusted partner in your corner

For financial guidance, use well-regarded institutions you trust - your company credit union, for example. Explore ideas such as low cost financing options and loan alternatives for program participants. A simplified financial package will build confidence, attract support, and create a great marketing opportunity for the financial institution.



***“Offering a low-interest loan for the San José SunShares participants enabled us to help our members save money and contribute to the City’s environmental goals.”***

**Belinda Hedling,**  
VP Lending, San Jose Credit Union

### Technical Advisors- An unbiased resource for guidance

Having someone familiar with the solar field to support and advise in the effort can prove to be an invaluable resource. Local nonprofits — such as the American Solar Energy Society chapter ([www.ases.org](http://www.ases.org)) — along with other environmental organizations or educational institutions could also provide you with unbiased information on your solar choices.

### Solar Providers - Finding the best deal

There are many great providers for solar energy. When contractors compete for the business of a potentially large group of customers, the result is a good deal and strengthens the group’s decision to go solar. Resources for soliciting bids, model Requests for Proposals, and evaluation tools for selecting contractors through a competitive process are available on the back panel of this guide.



# Making It Happen:

A basic step-by-step guide for groups going solar



## Step 1 – Engage champions and participants

- Start with a dedicated individual or team to oversee the process
- Educate and build interest with champions and participants
- Identify a technical advisor or advocate to educate the group
- Hold informational sessions on the basics of solar, collective buying, incentives, and how to participate
- Identify bank, credit union or financial partners and explore a financing mechanism



## Step 2 – Shape program and drive momentum

- Continue employee education and outreach to recruit more group-buy participants
- Develop and issue Request for Proposal (RFP) to solicit bids from solar contractors
- Form RFP evaluation committee
- Review proposals and select solar contractors
- Confirm group buy participation list
- Finalize financing and loans



## Step 3 – Close the deal

- Close group buy participant list
- Finalize pricing based on installed capacity
- Invite the winning contractor and financial partner to workshops to present the installation procedures with final group participants
- Conduct site assessments
- Begin installations
- Celebrate and assess the effort

# Things to think about:

On the way to successful solar solutions

## Involvement in Decision Making

Ensure that all members of the group are able to participate in decision-making and shaping the program to meet their collective needs.

## Communication

Have a champion, or key organizer from within the group, who will diligently keep all members of the group in the loop throughout the process.

## Collaboration

Work with trusted financial and technical support resources to ensure that participants receive quality systems at the best possible price.

## Picking the Right Solar Providers

### **Selecting a Contractor that meets Group's Values**

In developing the Request for Proposals (RFP), the group has the opportunity to develop selection criteria that is important to them. In addition to ensuring up-to-date licenses and permits, other criteria such as being a local or minority owned business, and sourcing local/sustainably manufactured equipment could be given weighting during the selection process.

### **Ability to Handle Demand**

Determine a contractor's capacity for managing broad-scale installations for employees who may live throughout a region or state.

### **Itemized Cost Information**

Think about including a requirement in your RFP for all quotes to include a detailed cost accounting, including price per watt, permitting fee, sales tax, government incentives and credits, and price for each additional cost, such as roofing or conduit run.



# How to Get Involved

Join others who are using solar on their homes

Within a year of beginning educational workshops, San José city employees achieved the lowest dollar-per-watt cost in California to date and installed nearly 120 kilowatts of new solar power throughout the Bay Area and beyond.

Use these resources to learn more. Additional information on San José SunShares, including detailed resources, is available through SunShares' partner, the Bay Area Climate Collaborative.

## SunShares information and resources:

[www.sunshares.org](http://www.sunshares.org)

## SunShares inquiries:

[SunShares@baclimate.org](mailto:SunShares@baclimate.org)

408-320-8192

## Other Resources:

[energy.sanjoseca.gov](http://energy.sanjoseca.gov)

[www.gosolarcalifornia.org](http://www.gosolarcalifornia.org)

[solaramericacommunities.energy.gov](http://solaramericacommunities.energy.gov)

[www.ases.org](http://www.ases.org)

[www.findsolar.com](http://www.findsolar.com)



## About the Bay Area Climate Collaborative

The Bay Area Climate Collaborative (BACC) is a public-private initiative accelerating the clean energy economy. Major partners include Bank of America, Pacific Gas & Electric, and local governments representing over 70 percent of the Bay Area population. The BACC is driving electric vehicle, energy efficiency and solar innovation. For more information on the BACC, please visit: [www.baclimate.org](http://www.baclimate.org)

San José's SunShares project was developed through a partnership between the City of San José and the United States Department of Energy's Solar America Communities program (AWARD # DE-EE0002075), with support from the Bay Area Climate Collaborative. The employee-run model is aligned with the City's landmark Green Vision initiative.



[www.sunshares.org](http://www.sunshares.org)  
ph. 408-320-8192

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, City of San José Environmental Services materials can be made available upon request in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, audio-tape or computer disk. Requests may be made by calling (408) 535-8550 (Voice) or (800) 735-2929 (CRS).