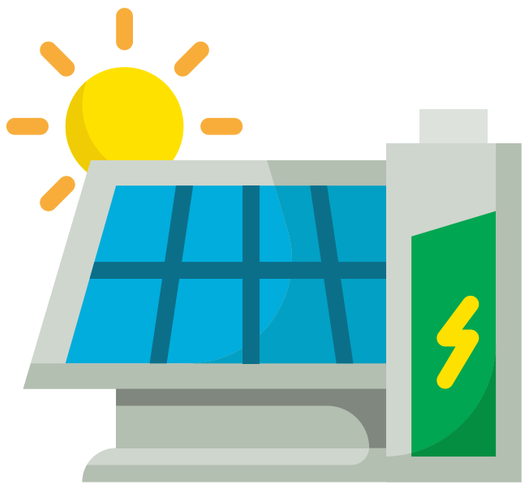
SOLAR FAQs



What are the parts of a solar PV system?

There are 3 main parts.
The **panels** that go on your roof,
the **inverter** that converts the generated DC power to AC power that is used in our homes,
and the **meter** (from your energy supplier).

What are micro inverters?

Inverters convert the DC electricity of solar panels into the AC electricity that matches the power of the grid that we all use. In a conventional system, one inverter is used, but one shortcoming of this is that if one or two panels are shaded the output of the whole system will be adversely affected. With microinverters this does not happen. Microinverters are a little more expensive but sometimes they are beneficial because the roof is at times shaded by trees and/or chimneys.

Can I add more panels later?

The same criteria applies as adding a battery later (see above).

Can I add a battery later?

As long as your system and inverter are not ancient (ie complies with current standards this is OK.

Do you deal with batteries?

Yes, we can help with battery purchase and storage advice.

Is the structure of a regular roof strong enough to support a solar system?

Yes, tile or metal are ideal but if roof is old or rusty the roof will need to be replaced before solar is installed. In general a slate tile roof is much more expensive because of the extra labour and specialists needed. But many older homes with a slate roof on the original building have a modern extension at the back with a Colorbond roof that's perfect for solar.

Is it better to have the panels flat or tilted?

The ideal tilt for solar is 30 degrees to the north, then having panels flat on a flat roof will cut performance to 87 percent. Tilt frames do cost a little more, perhaps $200 to $500, they not only improve performance, but it also means that the panels will be kept cleaner when it rains. Also tilted panels stay cooler which is preferable as performance declines when panels get too hot.

What are the heritage issues to consider when designing a solar PV system?

Generally, Councils have no problem with solar as long as you do not install a system facing the street if you live in a heritage or conservation area. If you have any doubts, call the Council Planning Department. In our experience, they are very helpful.

What is Inner West Community Energy's relationship to its preferred installers?

Our installers pay us a 'Finder's Fee' of 4% of the full price paid by the customer. Three quarters of that payment is invested by us in building our group and the rest is put into a trust fund to build community solar installations (up to $5K p.a).

What resources should an installer have?

The installers should be qualified electricians, and we only work with solar installers who are accredited with the Clean Energy Council's solar accreditation process. (http://www.solaraccreditation.com.au).

What should be installed first, the solar meter or the panels and inverter?

Ideally, having a solar-compatible digital meter will allow your solar installer to turn on the new system as soon as it's completed. We can help with advice on how to make this happen.

Can you access two storey houses?

Yes. Our installers have long ladders and safety equipment.

How long does installation take?

Again, there are variables involved - assuming perfect weather normally a good-sized system can be installed from start to finish in one day. Sometimes our installers will install a small system in the morning and make a start on another system in the afternoon, then return the next day to complete it.

What is a realistic time frame for getting solar PV installed?

If all goes smoothly, from the time our installer is invited on to the roof of your house to system completion is typically one to three months.

Can we run the house just on solar without batteries? We want to be able to run the house on solar when the grid goes down?

No, you can't run the system without batteries. The inverter needs the grid to stay active.

Do solar panels need cleaning?

Generally no. The tilt and/or rain are sufficient.

What maintenance is involved?

It would be wise to have your installer check the system over every 3 years or so for wear and tear.

What about wind/hail damage?

Damage to your system is either covered by the manufacturer's warranty or your household insurance. Check your policy and advise your insurer when your installation is complete.