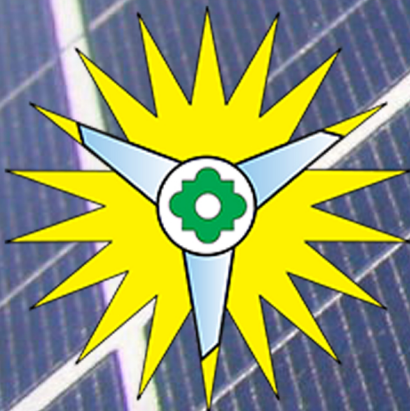


Solar Best Practices for Congregations



By North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light



This document was primarily created by members of Temple Emanuel Greensboro and based on their successful solar panel project, completed in 2011. Contributions are also from members of Myers Park Baptist, Charlotte and the Pastor of 1st Congregational United Church of Christ, Asheville.

Please note that this document is to serve as a guide, rather than a literal step-by-step process. How individual congregations pursue this process must reflect their own particular decision making procedures and policies.

Note: Tasks relating to “donors” only apply to congregations using the direct-donation model.

1. Gather initial group of interested congregants and clergy. This project could be taken on by an existing “Green Team” (or whatever your Environmentally-minded committee is called), a subcommittee of the Green Team, or a new group of people.

- Identify other congregants and invite them to the team.
 - If possible, include people with experience or expertise in construction, green energy, tax benefits, fundraising, communications and public relations.
 - Try to engage the youth, having 2 or so youth representatives on the team.
 - Woven throughout the group should be people passionate about this project seeing it through, especially because most successful solar projects at congregations take 2-3 years.
- *Note regarding clergy involvement:* How and when your clergy become involved should reflect how your congregation typically operates. Keeping communications open and inviting clergy early in the process is ideal – then clergy can determine when it is appropriate for them to become more actively involved.

2. Determine the solar suitability of a building. If none of your buildings (or possibly parking lot spaces) have a good, shade-free south-facing roofs/potential, consider partnering with another congregation that has a more suitable building. Most installation companies will do a quick, free suitability assessment - often using GoogleEarth. *Note: NC IPL does not endorse any specific companies, per our standard operating procedures.*

- Determine approximate cost of the project based on size of the projected installation (size may be limited by NC GreenPower) and other factors.
- Research options for energy use such as “Buy all sell all” through power companies or NC GreenPower, or using the power you generate on site.

- Determine what [financing model](#) your congregation(s) will use. Each model has different parameters, including the ideal number of funders the project needs to succeed.
- Create an overall plan and projected timeline.

3. Gain Approval for Project

- Create a presentation explaining the basic plan, including how it will be funded, environmental benefits, educational benefits, financial benefits to congregation, and why the project reflects our religious obligation to protect the earth. Be prepared to address:
 - Concerns around funding, how much it will cost the congregation, how you will ensure that donors do not lessen their congregational contributions, and how the project will financially benefit the congregation. Consider contacting other congregational solar champions around the state (info@ncipl.org can put you in touch) so that you can share their stories of how they financed their panels without spending any direct congregational funds, or in their words, how it cost their congregation “zero dollars.”
 - Concerns that are specific to your congregation or site, such as whether or not you will have to cut any trees to reduce shade.
- Deliver presentation to congregational committees whose support would be helpful (i.e. Buildings and Grounds, Social Action, Religious Education).
- Meet with the groups necessary to gain approval. This may include clergy, lay leaders, entire congregation, buildings and ground committees, and/or your congregation’s Board of Directors.

4. Divide into sub-committees (each with its own chair)

- Communications/Fundraising – responsible for creating literature, planning kickoff event, contacting donors, explaining tax benefits, honoring donors, planning dedication of completed project.
- Procurement/Installation – responsible for determining best type of system to install, contacting vendors, soliciting bids, selecting a contractor, working with the contractor and the congregational staff throughout the installation.

5. Announce to Congregation and Build Enthusiasm

- Use emails, brochures, bulletins, displays, announcements during services, social networking, etc. to increase project support.
- Hold kickoff event (possibly luncheon) to present the project and answer questions. Local politicians and environmental leaders could be invited. Could include a speaker

with expertise in Green Energy, a leader of a successful congregational solar project elsewhere in the state, or someone from NCIPL.

6. Development Campaign

If using Direct-Donation model:

- Create brochure briefly explaining how solar panels are expressions of faith, and the benefits of project to the environment, the congregation and the donors. Include a pledge form and distribute to congregation.
- Be prepared for concerns around funding (see above)
- Detail tax benefits, explaining that credits for renewable energy projects for non-profit organizations are passed through to individual donors (they could deduct up to 60% of their donation). If possible, have a CPA that have experience in similar topics, or an outside consultant, available for potential donors to contact with specific questions.
- Identify potential donors and divide up between fundraising committee members to make contacts. Follow up with those who say they are considering making a donation.

Donations are sent to congregational office and deposited in a special account for the project. Office records name and contact information for each donor in a file which are made available to the fundraising committee.

If using Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) model:

- Determine the ideal number of investors and size of shares.
- Recruit investors.
- If you have more investors than you can handle, record their information and after the project is completed, consider doing a 2nd solar project on a community building and letting this be an investment in the community and another educational opportunity.
- Commission a legal contract between the LLC and congregation
- If the congregation is scheduled to buy the panels back from the LLC at a discounted rate, invite remaining congregation members to donate to a solar fund for that purpose

7. Solar Panels Installation

- Work with congregational administrators and Buildings and Grounds Committee to identify possible issues with construction, and best location for installation. Address these issues when making presentations.
- Identify local contractors who are capable of completing the project, and solicit bids from them.
- Committee reviews bids, and selects the best fit for your needs.

- Work closely with contractor throughout installation process.
- Possibly include installation of a monitor which is visible inside the building and displays ongoing energy generation.
- If using “Buy all sell all” register to sell energy to power company and NC GreenPower.

8. Follow –Up

- If using direct-donation model:
 - Congregation staff sends tax letters to donors
 - Hold reception for donors (optional)
 - Possibly honor donors above a certain level with a plaque.
- If using an LLC:
 - At the time specified in the contract, purchase or receive (depending on the terms of the contract) the solar panels
 - Decide how to use or sell the energy once the panels are transferred to the congregation.
- Hold a public dedication ceremony.
- Draw attention to monitor (if installed).
- Work with Religious Education leaders to incorporate the panels/monitor into the curriculum.
- Share your story with NCIPL, so we can use it to inspire others!