Hiring a contractor

Selecting the right contractor is crucial for a successful solar installation. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you make an informed decision:

1. Research and Shortlisting

- Use the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's License Lookup Tool to verify contractor licenses and insurance
- Check if the contractor has a an enforcement action on their record
- Check for relevant clean energy certifications from organizations like the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP), Building Performance Institute (BPI), or Energy Smart
- Beware of fake or sponsored online reviews
- Ask for recommendations from friends, family, and your professional network

2. Vetting Contractors

- Request at least three quotes for comparison
- Ask for references and contact them
- Verify insurance coverage (general liability and workers' compensation)
- Check how long the company has been in business
- Inquire about their experience with your specific type of installation

3. Evaluating Proposals

Each proposal should clearly outline:

- System size and estimated energy production
- All components (panels, inverters, etc.) with brand and model numbers
- Total costs, broken down by equipment and labor
- Financing options and terms
- Projected savings and payback period
- Warranties for equipment and workmanship
- Timeline for installation and grid interconnection
- Responsibilities of maintenance
- Maintenance support contact information
- If you are financing, beware of contracts that allow loan payments to start before the system is interconnected and operational.

4. Key Questions to Ask

- Who will design the system? Is a professional engineer involved?
- Will they handle permits and grid interconnection paperwork?
- What brands of equipment do they use and why?
- How do they handle warranty claims?
- What ongoing support or maintenance do they offer?
- How do they ensure roof integrity during and after installation?

5. Red Flags to Watch For

- High-pressure sales tactics or “limited time” offers
- Unrealistic promises about energy savings or tax benefits
- Reluctance to provide detailed, written estimates
- Lack of proper licensing or insurance
- Insistence on large upfront payments
- Unwillingness to answer questions or provide references

6. Making Your Decision

- Don’t rush – take time to compare offers and ask questions
- Ensure all promises are in writing
- Read the entire contract before signing
- Don’t sign any contract if the promises made by the salesperson are not backed up in writing
- Understand the timeline and payment schedule
- Know your rights, including the 5-day cancellation period

7. After Choosing a Contractor

- Keep all documentation
- Stay involved in the process and ask questions
- Don’t make final payment until the system is operational and inspected
- Understand how to monitor your system’s performance

Remember: A reputable contractor will be patient, transparent, and happy to answer all your questions. If something doesn’t feel right, trust your instincts and keep looking.