

Public Schools Solar Project Guide

with Illinois Shines



Is your school considering “going solar”? The Illinois Shines program has incentives for K-12 public schools and public institutions of higher education! This guide provides a step-by-step process to get you started.

1. Create a team to guide the project:

Public schools have many stakeholders involved in capital improvement plans and budgets. A solar project planning team could include decision-makers from the school board, school administration, parent teacher organization, teachers, buildings & grounds staff, and community members.

2. Conduct an energy audit and roof assessment:

Before submitting a project application with the Illinois Shines program, your school can either conduct an energy audit or access its Carbon Free Assessment (if the school is in [ComEd](#) or [Ameren](#) service territory) to identify its energy consumption patterns and readiness for solar energy. This will help determine the size and type of solar energy system your school needs and estimate potential energy savings. Evaluations should also be done to the school's electrical system and roof to ensure solar readiness.

3. Choose a participation avenue:

Your school can participate in the Program in several ways — a Distributed Generation or Community Solar project located on a rooftop, a ground mounted system, or a parking lot canopy system. Considerations when choosing an approach may include: the amount of energy the school aims to offset, available space for the array(s), ownership and financing options, and ongoing system maintenance.

Distributed Generation

Install a photovoltaic (PV) system that will serve only the school's electricity needs. The installation can be accomplished through a developer or by the school itself, and can be financed through direct ownership, leasing, or a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

Community Solar

A school can install a Community Solar project with the help of a developer. Community solar projects are sized much larger than the schools electrical needs and serve multiple utility customers through subscriptions. This approach allows the entire community to take advantage of the project. In the Public School category of Illinois Shines, Community Solar projects will have to abide by the requirements listed below:

- The school must act as an “anchor tenant” subscribing to no less than 10% and no more than 40% of the project’s energy generation
- The project will be required to retain a subscription mix of at least 50% small subscribers (less than 25 kW)



Considerations	Distributed Generation	Community Solar
Energy Use Offset	The energy use of the school and/or district facilities where the project is installed.	The energy use of the school where the project is installed, as well as local residents, and businesses in the community. Energy users from outside the community may subscribe to the project as well to offset their electricity needs.
Available Space Required for Install	Distributed Generation projects seek to only address the energy needs of the site where the project is located, making the footprint of these projects much smaller than Community Solar projects.	Community Solar projects are often larger, as they accommodate more than one energy-user. Thus these larger projects are often ground-mounted as they need to be larger than most roofs can accommodate. The larger projects are usually sized around 2-5 MW, which could be as much as 10-25 acres.
Ownership & Financing Options	With Distributed Generation projects there are 3 financing options: ownership, leasing the project, or financing through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).	School ownership of Community Solar projects is less likely due to the fact that larger systems have a larger upfront capital cost, as well as the complexity of subscriber management for other subscribers to the Community Solar project.
Maintenance	Maintenance responsibilities depend on financing structure and agreement between the project developer and the customer. Usually with a leased system or PPA, maintenance is included.	System maintenance and subscriber management is usually performed by the system owner or project developer, but depends on the written agreement between the system host and project developer.

(This table is a high-level overview of possible participation avenues meant to guide research)

4. Identify the solar developer you will work with:

Your school can find a solar developer to work with through Illinois Shines resources or by conducting its own search. All projects submitted to the Program for incentives must be submitted by an Approved Vendor as verified by the Program Administration team.

5. Apply to the Program:

Once you have identified a solar developer, and chosen a solar project type and financing type, the Approved Vendor will submit your application to the Illinois Shines program on the school's behalf. Alternatively, the school may choose to register as an Approved Vendor with the Program and submit the project itself.

6. Educate your parents and community:

We encourage public schools to take advantage of the Illinois Shines program and explore the opportunities offered to schools, students, and communities. For more information on the Program and how to participate, please visit the [Illinois Shines website](#) or contact the Program Administration team directly.

For questions regarding the Illinois Shines program, please email schools@illinoisshines.com.