

Your Definitive Checklist To Getting Off The Grid Step-By-Step

Given the strategic importance of the decision you are making with regards to your electricity cost, supply and safety, as well as the quantum of your financial investment and expected ROI, it's important to understand all the important aspects of your solar journey, as well as the key things you should be looking at when assessing a solar energy partner to work with.

Here's the really important stuff you need to know when assessing a solar partner to work with:

- Track record** Choose a partner with the technical expertise and proven track record over time so that you get it right first time, for the long haul. No one becomes a specialist in 6 months. Ask for references and do the necessary due diligence.

- On-site consultation and audit** Before any installation happens, does your installer provide an onsite consultation and energy audit at no charge to you? Has a site assessment and energy audit been done to ensure that your proposed solution is fit for purpose and your needs. Does your installer fully understand your expectations and are the capabilities of your proposed system aligned?

- Scalability** Many people start with a scalable solar hybrid solution that takes care of immediate needs for back-up power during load shedding and power failures and allows you to scale up in future to self-generation by adding solar panels and additional batteries if needed. However not all inverters offer this scalable functionality so it's essential to work with a solar partner who is experienced in this field and understands your objectives.

- NRS-097 regulations** Check that the inverter specified is on the list of Inverters /Equipment in terms of NRS 097-2-1 and that they can be legally connected to the grid.

- SSEG Authorisation** All solar PV installations now need to be authorised and registered with your local council, or Eskom if you are a direct customer - this applies to historical installations as well. Check with your installer whether they offer a SSEG registration service which can be done at an additional cost on your behalf. The onus remains on you to ensure that the application is done and that your system is fully compliant – whether or not you feedback into the grid. Many councils seem to be in complete disarray on this matter, so having an installer partner who can take care of this onerous process on your behalf is a crucial consideration. Failing to register could be an expensive business, with some municipalities using aerial photos, inspections, and billing analysis to locate unauthorised systems, which will then attract penalties, contravention notices, and supply disconnection. Failure to register your system may also invalidate your insurance.



Safety and Compliance

A non-compliant installation has significant implications for your safety and your insurance cover if things go wrong and you need to claim. Make sure that you receive an electrical COC for your installation – this will be a supplementary COC for the installation only and is in addition to your existing COC for your home or business premises, which you should already have. Does your installer comply with relevant health and safety regulations during your installation?

Membership of a Professional Industry body

Check whether your provider is registered and a current member of professional industry bodies such as SAPVIA.

Insurance

Does your installer have the requisite business insurance such as public and contractor's liability and goods in transit cover to insure your goods while in storage and transit to your site? If your contractor is involved in an accident or their vehicle is hijacked and your equipment is damaged or lost, are they suitably insured for the hardware which you have likely paid at least a 70-80% deposit for? Once the equipment is delivered to your premises, remember then that the liability for its care and safe keeping then sits with you, and needs to be added to your insurance cover.

Warranties

Does your installer have the financial backing and proven reputation of standing by all product warranties and money-back guarantees?

Quality Management

Check whether your provider has a CRM system which records the detailed installation and service history of your system, which means consistent quality control, warranty management and business continuity for you. If your original installer is no longer around, what is the succession plan to provide ongoing back-up and support on your system which has a 20+ year lifespan?

Handover

What is the handover process of the solar plant once installed? Typically this will involve an overview or induction of how your system operates, details regards monitoring and maintenance and setting up of your details for remote monitoring, handover of warranty documents and the COC once checked and signed off by the electrician and establishing any service requirements.

Back-up and support

Check that your solar installer provides ongoing support, annual site inspections if needed and services (heat pumps require an annual service as just one example), remote monitoring, maintenance and technical support.

The journey to grid independence is a big and important step and you need to be sure that the steps you take today are right for your needs down the line.

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