

Project Permit: *Best Practices in Residential Solar Permitting*

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1. **Post Requirements Online:** Information on permit fees, application requirements and process should be easily accessible via the city's website so applicants can review and prepare materials in advance. Municipalities should provide a submittal checklist of all requirements for rooftop solar PV and solar thermal permitting in a single online location. **For an example of a solar checklist: <http://bit.ly/14Rg31Z>**
2. **Implement an Expedited Permit Process:** The majority of small residential PV systems can be processed quickly if they meet clearly defined review requirements. We recommend adopting an expedited permitting review process for these systems that enables review over-the-counter or via electronic processing within one day. The *Solar ABC's Expedited Permit Process for PV Systems* provides a good example that can be adopted in full or used as a starting point. (Note, for larger systems, not covered by the *Expedited Permit* guidelines, municipalities should set and adhere to standard permitting requirements to make the process clear and transparent. The municipality should work to make these standards consistent with neighboring jurisdictions.) (NOT CURRENTLY GRADED IN PROJECT PERMIT)
3. **Enable Online Permit Processing:** Moving to a fully online permitting system can significantly reduce travel time for installers and workload for municipalities. We recommend adopting a system that enables submittal, review and approval of PV permits via email or a website within a short period of time.
4. **Require a Fast Turn Around time.** Offering a same-day 'over-the-counter' permit submission is a best practice. Travel to-and-from the building department can be one of the most cost intensive parts of the permitting process for installers. Obtaining a small PV permit should require no more than one visit to the building department for properly completed applications. If an over-the-counter option is not feasible, we at least suggest a permit turn around time of less than three days.
5. **Implement Reasonable Permitting Fees:** Using a flat-fee method instead of a value-based method to assess permit fees streamlines the process and ensures that larger solar energy systems are not arbitrarily penalized. Fees should fairly reflect the time needed for city staff to review and issue a permit - that's something that remains constant regardless of system size. A reasonable residential permit fee should be a flat fee of \$400 or less if best practices are followed.
6. **Do Not Require Community-Specific Licenses:** We recommend accepting NABCEP PV installer and solar thermal certification, or already existing state licensing requirements, in lieu of community-specific solar business licenses.
7. **Offer a Narrow Inspection Appointment Window:** Offering an exact appointment time, or keeping the windows for inspection appointments at or below two hours greatly reduces the amount of costly worker time spent waiting for inspectors to arrive. Inspectors could also call contractors as appointment time grows close to further save time.
8. **Eliminate Excessive Inspections:** We recommend a clearly defined plan review process and only one inspection for standard rooftop systems on existing homes. Eliminating reviews that do little to validate the safe and efficient operation of a proposed PV system (i.e. plan checks with aesthetic criteria) removes unnecessary costs and expedites permit issuance. We support having both qualified installers and inspectors proficient in solar to ensure safe and compliant installations.
9. **Train Permitting Staff in Solar:** Training building department staff to review permits and perform standard fire department checks reduces time and cost. Cities should make one or half-day workshops available to relevant staff. Trainings should be available to both building department plan check and review staff as well as for inspectors. Visit <http://www.pvonlinetraining.org> for free online training for code officials, developed by IREC. (NOT CURRENTLY GRADED IN PROJECT PERMIT)