



CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

SOLAR CONSUMER PROTECTION GUIDE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Anne Dougherty, Erin Allingham Silvia Van Riper

July 20, 2020

AGENDA

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

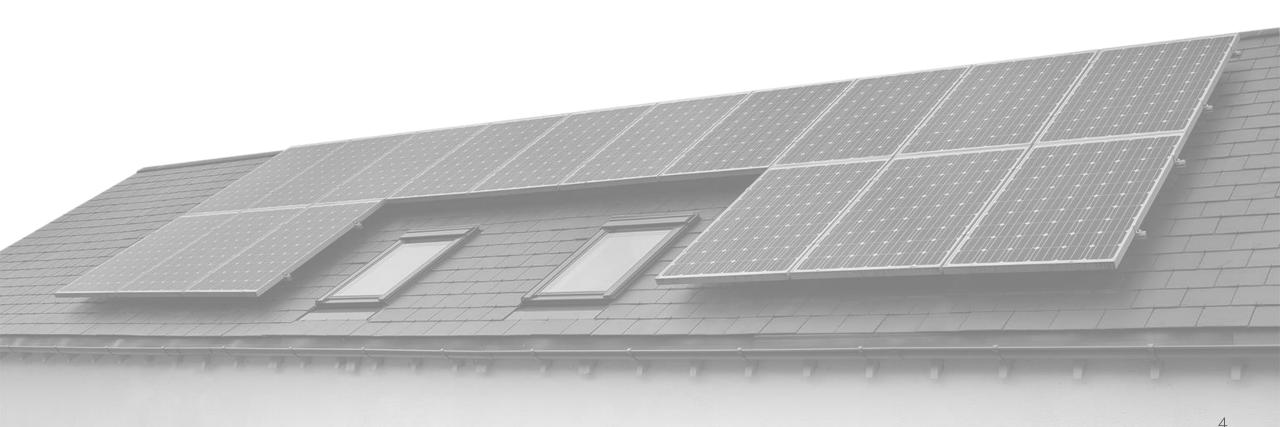
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SPANISH LANGUAGE FINDINGS

Q&A AND CLOSE

INTRODUCTION + OBJECTIVES



Meet Our Team



ERIN ALLINGHAM
Senior Managing Consultant
Project Manager



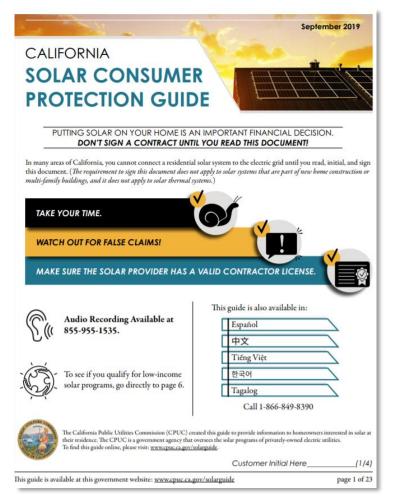
SILVIA VAN RIPER
Senior Research Analyst
Lead Analyst



ANNE DOUGHERTY
Founder & Co-Owner
Executive in Charge

Background

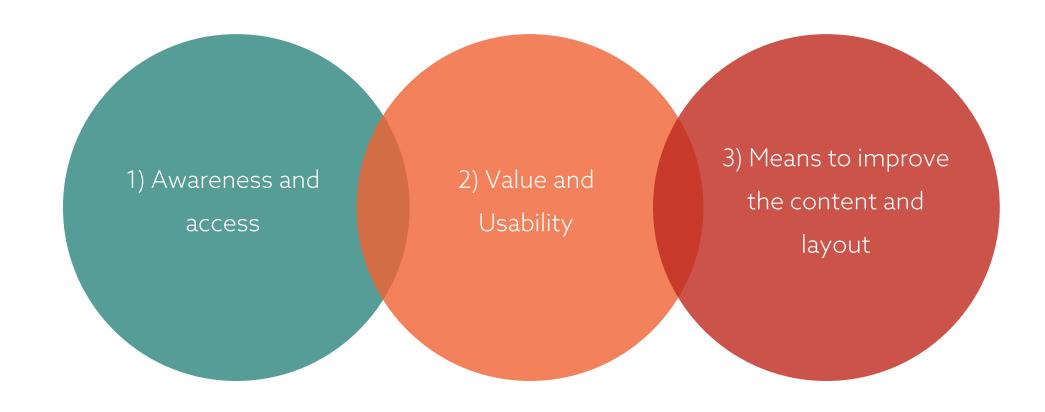
The Solar Consumer Protection Guide was released in September 2019



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The C		hission recommends that you take 48 ho entire guide before you sign below.	ours to read and understar
		to read the complete document while the sa me back at a later date to allow you time to r	
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SOLA	mer Printed Name R PROVIDER* The customer initialed the first or PACE financing of a solar sys	Customer Signature 4 pages of the guide. bre entering into a contract for the purchase, le teem or solar energy with the company named	Date ase, power purchase agreement, below.

Research objectives

To explore perceptions of the guide among residential customers who have installed solar or are interested in getting solar, and in particular to assess:



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

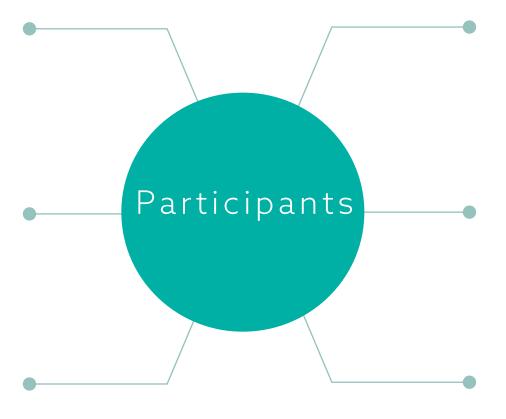


Focus group sampling and recruitment

Solar adopters or shoppers

English- and Spanishspeaking single-family homeowners in California's IOU territories

Near-coast or inland based on residence zip code



Mix of ages, with representation of older solar adopters/shoppers (65 years or older)

Mix of income, with representation of incomequalified and moderate-income customers

Mix of gender, race, ethnicities, and education level

Who we talked to

May 18 & 20, 2020

May 19, 2020

May 21, 2020

May 22, 2020

INLAND

English-speaking
Mix of adopters and shoppers

NEAR-COAST

English speaking Adopters only

FRESNO

Spanish-speaking
Mix of adopters and shoppers

NEAR-COAST

Spanish-speaking
Mix of adopters and shoppers

Five focus groups and a total of 27 residential, single-family homeowners (16 adopters, 11 shoppers)

FINDINGS + RECOMMENDATIONS



Awareness and Access

Awareness of the guide was moderate among recent adopters and very low among shoppers

- 6 of the 10 solar adopters who had signed a contract since September 2019 had been given the guide by their contractor
 - 5 were presented with the guide at the time of signing the contract (one of these also received the guide early in the sales process), and one received the guide after signing the contract.
 - 2 found the guide on their own
- None of the shoppers reported finding the guide on their own

Usefulness and Clarity

All participants thought that the guide was comprehensive in the topics it covered and highly useful

- Shoppers often reported that it was the most useful and detailed source of information they had come across
- All sections were important to understanding solar and making a decision about whether to install it
- Participants found the information presented in the guide generally clear and easy to understand (note: Spanish-language findings will be presented separately)

Customer perceptions

Usefulness and Clarity

"I wish I had all this information. When they spoke to me, the company spoke very nicely suggesting – This is your best option, we can send someone tomorrow. I just went with that option without thinking about asking for 3 bids. This is very important information." [Translated from Spanish]

—Spanish-language adopter, Fresno area

"These are all [...] details that you need to be aware of that might just slip through the cracks, particularly if you're talking to a salesperson in person."

—English-language adopter, inland

Suggested changes

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY TO SHOPPERS

Expand the means of disseminating the guide so that shoppers are more likely to find it on their own, rather than relying on contractors who supply the guide at the end of the process.

REQUIRE EARLIER SHARING OF GUIDE

Consider requiring contractors to provide the guide with up-front sales material rather than at the time of signing a contract.

Purpose and Credibility

CPUC authorship created trust and added value for participants, however the contract-like look of the document undermines this

- Participants identified and found credible the guide's two main goals of protecting and educating consumers, but found their separate presentation in the guide jarring
 - They felt the first four "required" pages—clearly aimed at protecting consumers—felt distinct from the rest of the guide, focused more on educating consumers, in tone, content, and visuals.
- Participants noted that it included a great deal of important information that was needed before reaching the point of signing a contract.
- Participants were confused as to why signatures and initials were required on the guide, leaving them wary of the requirement.

Suggested changes

HARMONIZE FIRST SECTION WITH REST OF GUIDE

Bring the tone, content, and visuals of the first four "required" pages into alignment with the rest of the guide.

STATE PURPOSE OF SIGNATURE AND INITIALS

Early on in the guide, state the purpose for requiring initials and a signature. Also, who retains the signed copy and for what purposes.

STATE INTENDED AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE EARLY

Starting with the audience(s) the guide is intended for on the first page and a "what's inside" heading to help readers quickly understand the value and relevance to them.

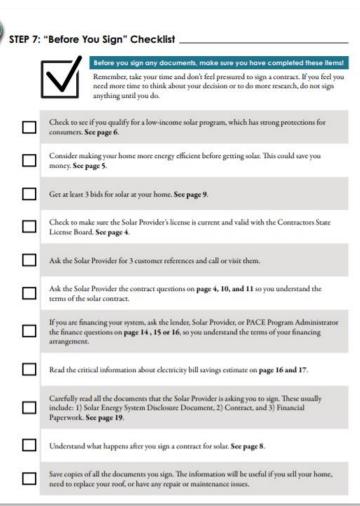
INCREASE CPUC LOGO SIZE AND PROMINENCE

Given its importance to give the guide's credibility, consider making the CPUC logo and statement of authorship more prominent—either moved higher on the page or made larger.

Organization, Structure, and Wayfinding

Participants observed that clearer structure is needed to assist navigation through each of the sections.

- Participants felt that while the order of the "steps" made sense overall, they needed to be provided earlier on as a table of contents with descriptions.
 - Some felt the checklist in Step 7 could be used at the beginning as the guide's contents.



Organization, Structure, and Wayfinding

Participants observed that clearer structure is needed to assist navigation through each of the sections.

- The guide directed them to jump through sections more often than they felt comfortable with.

 They mentioned having a feeling of "being bounced around."
 - Participants were confused by the instructions to skip to the checklist and signature page at the end of the guide after the first four pages.
 - Many felt the guide should still ensure consumers are aware of the steps in the guide.



Organization, Structure, and Wayfinding

Participants felt that the structure of the guide could be improved in order to find the information more easily.

- Participants suggested section or page headings would be helpful.
- Many found mid-page section breaks awkward and that it made it difficult to find information (Steps 1 and 5).



Customer perceptions

Organization, Structure and Wayfinding

"I like this [checklist] a lot. It makes you review all the important points. In my opinion, it is the most important page in this guide." (Translated from Spanish)

Spanish-language solar shopper, Fresno area

"I think a header at the top [of Step 6] would be helpful, just an introduction. Like 'this is the paperwork you're going to encounter'."

English-language shopper, near-coast

Suggested changes

INCLUDE TABLE OF CONTENTS AT THE BEGINNING

This should indicate what information is included in each section and where it is located

OMIT OR CLARIFY INSTRUCTIONS TO SKIP SECTIONS

Most feedback indicated the all steps and contents were useful and important

KEEP CHECKLIST ORDER THE SAME AS SECTIONS

Organize the checklist based on the order used for the different sections in the guide.

USE HEADINGS AT SECTION BREAKS

Use headings that match the table of contents to make finding information easier, and incorporate these at page breaks to indicate changes between sections (avoiding mid-page section breaks).

Visuals and Design

Overall, participants liked that the guide did not have overly dense text and that it used images, icons and graphs to create visual interest

- Participants particularly appreciated visuals that contributed to their understanding of the information next to the visuals.
- Some participants felt certain pages or sections were overly busy or cramped by visuals.
- They felt more consistent organization and formatting by section and page would be helpful.

Suggested changes

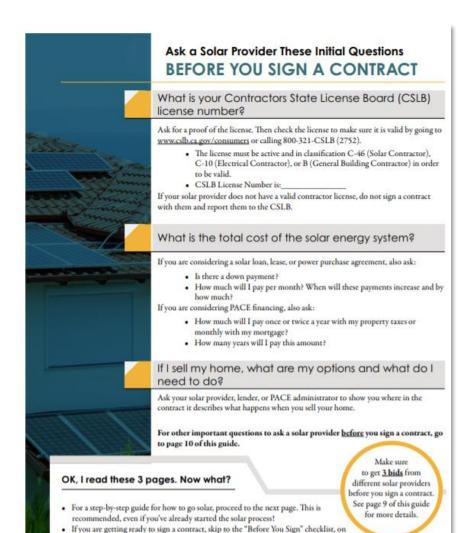
CREATE A CONSISTENT VISUAL HIERARCHY

To indicate the relative importance of information and to direct readers' attention without calling attention to the visuals themselves.

EMPLOY VISUALS THAT AID COMPREHENSION

Try to ensure that visuals and graphic elements add to comprehension and/or legibility rather than distract.

Visuals and Design (examples)





STEP 6: Carefully Read All Paperwork



THE SOLAR ENERGY SYSTEM DISCLOSURE DOCUMENT

This one-page document from the Contractors State License Board shows you the total costs for the proposed solar energy system. It also has information about your three-day right to cancel a contract. A Solar Provider is required to fill our this document. It may be placed as the cover page to the contract. See a blank version at www.cslb.ca.gov/contractors/SolarSheet.aspx.



CONTRACT

- The solar contract is the legally binding document between you and the Solar Provider. Make sure to read it carefully.
- Make sure everything you were promised is written in the contract. For example, many answers
 to the questions on pages 10 and 11 of this guide should be referenced in the contract.
- . By law, any contract for solar installation must include:
 - · Contractor information, including business address and license numbers
 - · Description of the project, including equipment installed and materials used
 - Contract price, plus finance charge and/or down payment if applicable
 - Approximate start and end date of the contract term
 - Notice of a 3-day right to cancel the contract (with limited exceptions)
- Ask the Solar Provider what situations would allow you to be released from the contract. For example, if your Solar Provider discovers on a site visit that your roof is shaded in a way that wasn't expected, that could cancel the contract.



FINANCIAL PAPERWORK

- If you are purchasing a system with a solar loan, you will be asked to sign a separate financing
 agreement. The Lender will provide you with this separate agreement.
- If you are purchasing a system with PACE financing, you must sign: (1) a Financing Application and, (2) a Financing Agreement.
 - Before you sign the Financing Application, read it carefully to make sure all the information is correct, including your contact information, your income, and the cost of the solar energy system.
 - The separate Financing Agreement may be provided by the Solar Provider, the PACE administrator, or a financing institution.
- Make sure everything you were promised is written into any financial agreements. For example, many answers to the questions on pages 14-16 of this guide should be referenced in the contract.

Customer Initial Here_____(4/4)

This guide is available at this government website: www.cpuc.ca.gov/solarguide

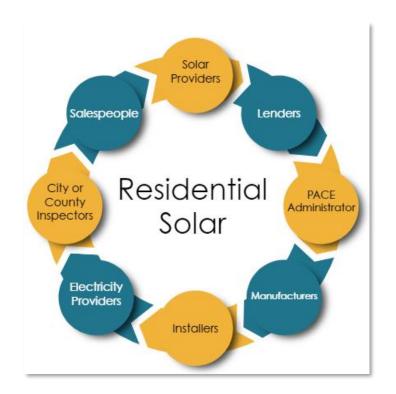
page 19 of 23

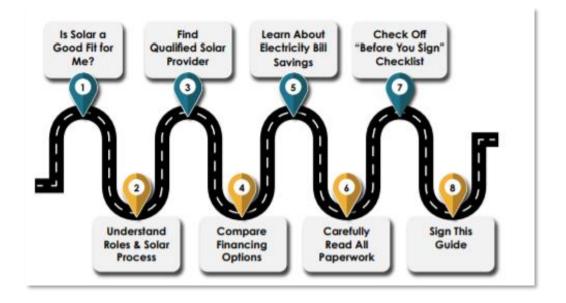
page 22 of this guide.

Visuals and Design (examples)

"I don't think that graphic is helpful to be honest, because where does it start? And where does it end?"

-English-language adopter, inland





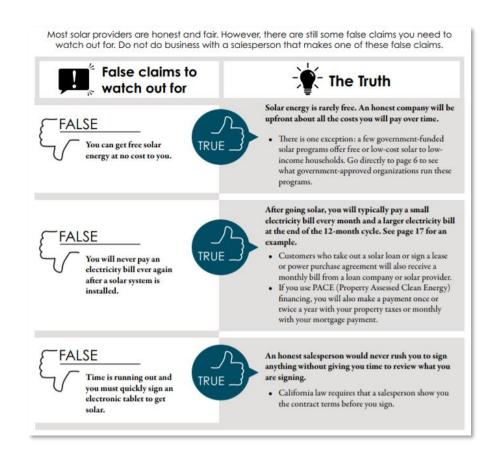
"I think it was set up to be a roadmap, right? But it goes up and down. It's kind of disconcerting and not how you normally read. You go up and down from one to the next."

⁻English-language solar shopper, inland

Spanish-Language Findings

Several Spanish-language participants had encountered false claims

 Two out of five Spanish-speaking solar adopters have experienced them in person during their solar journey, particularly the first two about promises of free solar panels and no energy bills.



Spanish-Language Findings

Spanish-speaking participants found the Spanish-language translation clear and

comprehensible for the most part.

- Spanish-language speakers thought the translation was clear overall.
- Participants noted several aspects that stood out as inconsistent, unclear or translated incorrectly from English.



Register switch

Readers are inconsistently addressed.

Participants pointed out that the level of formality used to address consumers/readers was inconsistent.

TIENES EL DERECHO...

a una copia del contrato de energía solar y del acuerdo de financiamiento en el idioma en el que el vendedor se comunicó con usted.

Si un proveedor de energía solar viene a su casa para venderle paneles solares y le habla en otro idioma que no sea el inglés (español, por ejemplo), tiene derecho a recibir una copia del contrato en ese idioma. Por otro lado, si prefiere leer esta guía en español, chino, coreano, vietnamita o tagalog, el proveedor de energía solar debe proporcionarle esta guía en el idioma de su preferencia.

Use of imperative tense

Participants perceived some of the advice given, particularly where the imperative tense was used, to be too harsh and intimidating. "Asegúrese" for "make sure"

Possible alternative

"Deben asegurarse"

"No firme" for "do not sign"

Possible alternative

"Se recomienda no firmar..."

Minor translation and editing issues

Terminology

- Inaccurate translations of specific terms were found through the guide by some participants.
 - Example: "Activo" translated from the English word "asset" should be "bienes."

Words Left Untranslated

- There were a few instances where English had note been translated.
 - "Example of a settlement" was found in the section discussing billing in the Spanish version.

Misspelled Words

- There were occasional misspelled words in the guide.
 - "Desición" should be "decisión," "través" should be ""a través"

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Accessibility of the guide

- Expand access so that shoppers are more likely to find it on their own, rather than relying on contractors who supply the guide at the end of the process.
- Consider requiring contractors to provide the guide with up-front sales material rather than at the time of signing a contract.

First section (first 4 pages)

- Contextualize and harmonize the content and purpose of the first four "required" pages with the rest of the guide.
- State the purpose for requiring initials and a signature along with what should be done with the guide after signing (e.g. who retains it and for what purpose).
- Omit or more clearly explain instructions to skip sections of the guide.
- Provide a table of contents in the first section that indicates what information is in each section, where they are located, and links to navigate directly to them.
- Consider featuring the CPUC logo and authorship statement more prominently.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Structure

- Use headings throughout the guide based on the table of contents to make finding information easier
- Incorporate page breaks to indicate changes between sections and avoid midpage breaks.

Spanish-language

 Employ the services of a Spanish-English translator to resolve issues noted by participants.

Design

- Create a consistent visual hierarchy to indicate the relative importance of information and to direct readers' attention without calling attention to the visuals themselves.
- Employ visuals that aid comprehension without being distracting. For instance, the size and multitude of graphic elements, fonts, and text sizes on page 4 of the guide was perceived by many to be a distraction from the information.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

RELATED TO	RECOMMENDATION	
Accessibility of the guide	 Expand access so shoppers are more likely to find it on their own rather than relying on contractors who supply the guide at the end of the process. Consider requiring contractors to provide the guide with up-front sales material rather than at the time of signing a contract. 	
First section (first 4 pages)	 Contextualize and harmonize the content and purpose of the first four "required" pages with the rest of the guide. State the purpose for requiring initials and a signature along with what should be done with the guide after signing. Omit or more clearly explain instructions to skip sections of the guide. Provide a table of contents in the first section that indicates what information is in each section, where they are located, and links to navigate directly to them. Consider featuring the CPUC logo and authorship statement more prominently. 	
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Spanish-language	 Employ the services of a Spanish-English translator to resolve issues noted by participants. 	

Questions?

WE'VE GOT ANSWERS

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