

EVOLUTION OF VENDOR EMPANELMENT STANDARDS IN INDIA'S ROOFTOP SOLAR SECTOR (2017 VS. 2026)

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Abstract: This research paper analyzes the structural changes in the empanelment criteria for solar vendors under the guidelines of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). It compares the rigorous "Rating-Based Era" of 2017 with the "Open Access Era" of 2026, evaluating its impact on market quality and technical reliability.

Index Terms - MNRE, Solar Policy, Vendor Rating, CRISIL, Quality Assurance.

1. Abstract This research paper analyzes the structural changes in the empanelment criteria for solar vendors under the guidelines of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). It compares the rigorous "Rating-Based Era" of 2017 with the "Open Access Era" of 2026, evaluating its impact on market quality and technical reliability.

2. Baseline: Quality-Centric Empanelment (2017) According to the MNRE notification (File No. 5/22/2013-14/RT dated 11.01.2017), the solar sector operated under a highly regulated framework:

Mandatory Third-Party Grading: It was compulsory for all private entities to obtain a "Solar Power Rating" from agencies like CRISIL, ICRA, CARE, SMERA, or Brickwork. **Techno-Financial Matrix:** Vendors were graded based on Technical Strength (1 to 5) and Financial Strength (A to E).

Ambassador while filling up the online form.

Govt Agencies/PSU may directly apply on SPIN with the following documents:

- Documents of Registration: Company registered under the company act 1956/2013 (CIN no.) OR registered under Society Acts OR State Government Registration etc.
- Solar/Power related experience (Experience of company/Agency)
- PAN card/TIN/VAT documents of Agency

Note: Govt. Agencies or PSUs are exempted from the accreditation by Rating agency

Rating Agencies

At present the following agencies are registered with RBI

- CRISIL Limited
- India Ratings and Research Private Limited
- ICRA Limited
- Credit Analysis & Research Ltd. (CARE)
- Brickwork Ratings India Private Limited
- SME Rating Agency of India Ltd. (SMERA)

Eligibility: Only agencies with ratings from "1A" to "5E" could become Channel Partners.

Eligible Ratings:

The following ratings are allowed to become Channel Partner/ Solar Rooftop Ambassador:

1A	1B	1C	1D	1E
2A	2B	2C	2D	2E
3A	3B	3C	3D	3E
4A	4B	4C	4D	4E
5A	5B	5C	5D	5E

1 to 5 depicts the technical strength with 1 being the highest. A to E depicts the financial strength with A being the highest.

3. Operational Rigor and Accountability

The 2017 regulations maintained strict control over vendors:

Zero Tolerance (De-empanelment): Inactivity for 2 months or the supply of substandard materials led to immediate removal from the approved list. This ensured that only active and quality-conscious players remained in the market.

9.0 De-Empanelment

The Ministry reserves the right to De-Empanel any Channel Partner/ Solar Rooftop Ambassador based on performance. The De-empanelment criteria will include but not limited to following reasons:

- a) Unable to achieve the target designated by MNRE
Inability to achieve the yearly target designated by MNRE, will lead to de-empanelment.
- b) Inactivity on SPIN
Channel Partners will regularly maintain their database with updated contact details and project completion reports with actual plant picture and geographical coordinates etc. as specified in online platform SPIN. The entries should be updated on monthly basis. Failing to enter data for more than 2 months will lead to de-empanelment with out any prior notice. In case no installation has been done in a month, a NIL report should be submitted.
- c) Firm blacklisted by any State/Central Govt. Agency
- d) Unattending the customer feedback/problem related to the system installed by them or supplying of substandard material/components/system.

Skill Development: It was mandatory to train local individuals to ensure a robust service network

8.0 Training

The Channel partner/Solar Rooftop Ambassador have to develop training capacities. They will also assist in training of local persons to ensure service near the user. The details of trained manpower must be placed on Channel Partner's Website.

4. The 2026 Shift: Open Access Era By 2026, under the PM Surya Ghar Yojana, the "Experience-Based Rating" was removed to encourage mass adoption. Any registered entity can now install systems.

Criteria	Policy Framework (2017)	Policy Framework (2026)
Verification	Independent audit by rating agencies	Self-declaration and registration fees
Certification	Matrix-based (Technical & Financial)	Simplified online registration
Entry Barrier	High (Experience & Track Record required)	Low (Security Deposit/Fee-based)
Quality Control	Performance reviews & mandatory training	Decentralized DISCOM monitoring

5. Current Scenario: National Rooftop Solar Portal (2026) In contrast to the complex process of 2017, the current National Portal for Rooftop Solar has made vendor registration completely digital and simplified:

- **Ease of Registration:** Vendors no longer need audits from independent rating agencies (CRISIL/ICRA).
- **Direct Enrollment:** Vendors can register by submitting required documents and a Performance Bank Guarantee (PBG) directly on the DISCOM portal.
- **Decentralized Process:** State-wise DISCOMs now manage vendor empanelment, leading to a massive increase in the number of local vendors.
- **The Challenge:** While this offers consumers many choices, the lack of technical experience verification means "Quality Control" now depends entirely on vendor honesty and consumer awareness.

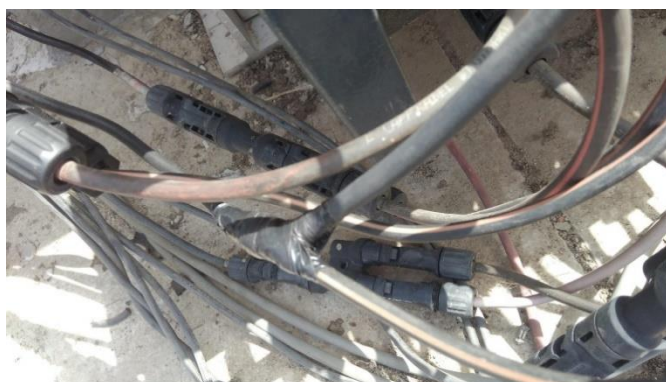
Government of India		
 PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana National Portal Contact Registered Vendors Grievance Login		
Home What is New Consumer Vendor Discom Achievement Capacity Building More		
3	Eligibility	i. The Solar Vendor/ Channel Partner/ Sub- Contractor should be registered with Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE)/ DISCOM. Blacklisted vendors on MNRE site shall not be eligible. List of backlisted vendors is available on Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (mnre.gov.in). ii. The registered Solar Vendor/ Channel Partner/ Sub- Contractor should have vintage of at least 6 months of registration and should have handled at least 10 projects in the preceding 6 months period. iii. Solar Vendor should have the valid 'Udyam Registration Certificate' and registered with GST. iv. CIC Score of all Promoters > 650. Wherever the promoters have NIL credit history, even CIBIL Score of ~1" on account of this reason is considered acceptable and may be permitted. v. Internal Rating: Each Bank may specify different Rating criteria as per its risk appetite.

6. Visual Evidence of Technical Failures (Case Studies - 2026) Following the removal of experience-based ratings, serious signs of technical decline have been observed in the market:

Shadow-Affected Installations: Panels installed in shaded areas, resulting in zero production.



Exposed DC Wiring: Open wires without conduits posing a high risk of short circuits.



Loose Wiring and Faulty Breakers: Substandard MCBs and loose connections leading to burnt junction boxes.



Substandard Lightning Arresters (Low Quality LA): Thin cables and rusted pipes failing to provide protection against lightning strikes.



Incorrect Direction and Placement: Wrong panel orientation and lack of inverter ventilation significantly reducing system lifespan.



7. Conclusion The 2017 era prioritized the longevity (25 years) of solar assets. While current policies have taken solar to every household, the removal of "experience-based ratings" has led to technical compromises. To safeguard India's solar infrastructure, reintroducing "Competence-Based Evaluation" is essential.

8. References

- MNRE Office Memorandum, File No. 5/22/2013-14/RT (2017).
- SPIN Portal Guidelines (www.solarrooftop.gov.in).
- Current PM Surya Ghar Yojana Portal (pmsuryaghar.gov.in) Standards 2026