

## Frequently Asked Questions

---

### GENERAL ACES INFORMATION

#### **Q: What is ACES?**

A: In 1999, the Alliance for Competitive Energy Services (or “ACES”) program was created to provide energy savings to New Jersey school districts through the competitive purchase of electricity. ACES is a collaborative partnership that is sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), the New Jersey Association of School Business Officials (NJASBO), and the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA). Throughout the years, these sponsors have helped ensure that the interests of the school districts remain the highest priority.

At the program’s inception in 1999, ACES was focused on helping school districts buy electricity through an aggregated approach to achieve group savings. Building on the success of the electricity aggregation program, a complementary natural gas program was initiated in 2006. The program has long-standing success, a proven track record and currently includes over 430 school districts throughout the state.

In 2014, NJSBA and NJASA expanded the ACES service offerings to include ACESplus – the next generation of cost saving strategies. ACESplus facilitates the implementation of energy sustainability projects at schools by providing easy access to energy experts at no out-of-pocket expense to the districts.

In short, the ACES program is comprised of the ACES electric program, the ACES natural gas program, and the ACESplus program.

The ACES program has been serving New Jersey school districts for over 15 years and has proved to be a ground-breaking initiative to support the educational community.

#### **Q: Is ACESplus part of ACES?**

A: Yes, ACESplus is an additional program under ACES that was introduced in 2014.

**Q: What are the service offerings under the ACES program?**

A: There are three (3) service offerings under the ACES program including:

1. Buying electricity;
2. Buying natural gas, and;
3. Consulting services for sustainable energy projects (through ACESplus)

Districts have the option to participate in any or all of the ACES programs.

**Q: What are the benefits of the ACES program?**

A: The service offerings under the ACES program provide school districts with a convenient way to reduce energy costs, and pursue advanced clean energy projects that help reduce the districts carbon footprint (through ACESplus).

With the ACES electric and natural gas buying programs, energy is purchased through a large group which helps achieve greater rate discounts due to the economies offered by aggregation. ACES customers benefit from the purchasing power of hundreds of districts buying as a cooperative.

ACESplus provides members with free access to vetted and specialized energy experts without the hassle of costly procurement processes to obtain those resources. ACESplus provides customized energy consulting support in which trusted energy consultants facilitate the successful development of sustainable projects.

Most importantly, the main goal of all ACES programs is to save districts money – all at no upfront costs to the districts. This helps to alleviate budgetary pressures so school districts can focus financial resources on more pressing school matters.

**Q: What is the difference between ACES and ACESplus?**

A: ACES is the overarching program that was originally created to provide electric and natural gas buying services for districts. It has since been expanded to include access to expert consulting services for clean energy projects through ACESplus.

Within the ACES Cooperative Pricing System, there are several different offerings. Two related offers allow members to buy either electricity or natural gas as part of a large group contract. These are known as ACES – buying electricity, or ACES – buying natural gas. Members may also make use of specialized energy consulting services, known as the ACESplus program.

Once a district joins the Cooperative Pricing System (CPS) (and signs a CPS agreement), it can take advantage of any of the services offered under the ACES program including: (1) electricity purchasing, (2) natural gas purchasing, and (3) consulting support for energy projects (under ACESplus). A member can use the services in any combination. They are not required to buy electricity or natural gas to make use of the energy consulting services ACESplus.

**Q: Why should I join ACES?**

A: The ACES program provides a one-stop shop for all your energy needs. Whether you are looking to competitively purchase energy, generate your own energy, or reduce your energy usage, ACES is a convenient, no-cost choice.

**Q: How do I join ACES?**

Whether you want to participate in the ACES program for energy procurement savings or to receive sustainability project support through ACESplus, the process to join ACES is the same and only requires a few simple steps!

First – call us and discuss your energy needs. We can advise you on the ACES services that would be most helpful to your district. If interested in a solar energy or building efficiency project, our experts can provide an initial feasibility evaluation.

To participate in the ACES program, the district board of education must first pass a resolution to join the ACES Cooperative Pricing System (CPS) as well as execute a CPS agreement. The CPS essentially serves as the master umbrella agreement that provides entry into the ACES programs. After this step, you are officially a part of the ACES coalition and will have access to ALL the energy saving programs that ACES has to offer!

Next, the district board of education would pass a resolution for the specific service or services that it would like to engage in. This includes:

- 1) Electricity purchasing;
- 2) Natural gas purchasing, and/or;
- 3) Sustainable energy and conservation projects (ACESplus)

Although participation in all three programs is encouraged to maximize savings, all services are distinct and districts have the discretion to take advantage of the offerings that best meet their unique needs.

**Q: How much does it cost to be a part of the ACES program?**

A: No matter which ACES program a district decides to utilize, there are no out-of-pocket costs or expenses.

When participating in the ACES electric or natural gas program, the energy agent fee is clearly stated in the bid documents (as a \$/kWh for electric and \$/therm for natural gas) and is paid by the winning third party supplier.

When participating in the ACESplus program, fees for the consulting services are captured as part of the energy project so there is no direct payment required by the district.

It is also important to note that as part of the ACES program some of these proceeds are retained by the sponsoring organizations where they are used for further school improvements and offerings.

**Q: Where can I find the resolutions and supporting documents related to the ACES program?**

A: All documents related to the ACES program can be found at the ACES website ([www.aces-nj.com](http://www.aces-nj.com)) by clicking “Resources” under the “Membership” tab.

**Q: Who should I contact to learn more about the ACES program?**

A: For more information on the ACES program, or to sign up, please contact Carol Friedman, the ACES Coordinator at 732/296-0770 or by e-mail at [Carol.Friedman@aces-nj.com](mailto:Carol.Friedman@aces-nj.com).

Additional information can also be found on the ACES website at: [www.aces-nj.com](http://www.aces-nj.com).

## **ACESplus PROGRAM**

**Q: What is ACESplus?**

A: ACESplus is a hassle-free program that provides districts with energy consulting services to support the development of advanced energy projects. ACESplus consultants help schools navigate through the financial, technical and procurement complexities related to the implementation of solar energy, building efficiency, or other sustainability projects. Because it is part of the broader ACES Cooperative Pricing program, districts can take advantage of ACESplus simply by passing a standardized resolution – with no specialized procurement required.

The fees for the consulting services are captured as part of the energy project so there are typically no out-of-pocket expenses for the district. ACESplus is therefore a convenient way to engage expert consulting services without procurement hassle and without direct expense.

ACESplus consultants serve as experienced energy allies through all stages of the development and implementation process. We serve as an advocate to ensure that your interests are protected and your savings are maximized. Recognizing that energy needs are not a “one size fits all,” ACESplus offers a fully customized and tailored approach for each participating district.

The most common projects for ACESplus consultants are building efficiency upgrades or on-site solar electricity generation projects. In these cases, the ACESplus consultants manage the project feasibility assessment, request for proposal (RFP) process, vendor evaluation selection, and construction phases of the project. The ACESplus program combines energy expertise with extensive experience managing projects through the public procurement process required by school districts.

**Q: What are the benefits of using ACESplus?**

A: ACESplus makes it easy to engage the experts needed for advanced clean energy projects, without procurement hassle, and typically at no direct budgeted expense.

We serve as a trusted advisor and provide advocacy support to each district throughout the entire project. ACESplus helps solve the inherent problems that all districts face when considering complicated energy projects by having access to knowledgeable experts to provide the services needed to implement the project.

**Q: What are the services offered under ACESplus?**

A: Although ACESplus projects can be very flexible, there are typically two main types of projects: On-site solar electricity generation projects and energy efficiency building upgrades.

In both cases, ACESplus consultants are there to provide comprehensive support to districts from project commencement to completion. This includes:

- Initial project assessments and opportunity sizing;
- Development of a competitive request for proposals (RFP) and other applicable bid documents;
- Management of the vendor evaluation and selection process;
- Contract negotiation support after the award, and;
- Construction administration services as the project is being implemented

Please note that the ACES team has a strong understanding of public procurement processes and procedures and is diligent regarding its adherence to Local Public Contract Law and Department of Community Affairs (DCA) guidelines.

**Q: How would a solar electricity project benefit my district?**

A: On-site solar electricity projects give districts the opportunity to generate their own energy at a reduced rate. A third part investor will install a system on the district's properties, often at several schools simultaneously. The district will agree to buy all the solar electricity generated by these systems, at a rate that is less than current utility cost. This arrangement is known as a "Power Purchase Agreement" (PPA), and has become the standard method for developing solar projects for a wide variety of customers, including school districts.

The ACESplus consultants will use a competitive process to select a project developer that will finance, own, design, install, commission, operate, and maintain the solar facility at the site. A primary benefit of this PPA approach is that the school takes little risk, system generation and economic benefits are guaranteed, and all operations and maintenance for the system are provided by the project developer. In short, this approach means no out-of-pocket expense for the district for construction of the system, minimal project risk, and little long term operational concern.

**Q: What types of building upgrades are included in energy efficiency projects?**

A: Building upgrades can include the implementation of a range of energy conservation measures such as lighting replacements, heating and cooling system upgrades, and building envelope improvements (i.e., windows, doors, etc.).

**Q: My district has completed a Local Government Energy Audit. How can ACESplus help with the next step?**

A: While many districts have completed free energy audits under the Local Government Energy Audit (LGEA) program, many find it difficult to implement comprehensive upgrades due to funding shortfalls, the

complications of New Jersey's procurement laws or other resource limitations. ACESplus can eliminate all these hassles and help districts take the results of the audit to the next level. This includes the development and administration of a competitive process to select a qualified vendor to install the viable energy conservation measures identified in the LGEA audit.

**Q: Can I earn points towards my Sustainable Jersey goals by using ACESplus?**

A: Yes. Depending on the specifics of the project, the ACES team has the ability to identify how the project fits into the Sustainable Jersey (SJ) framework and can help the district prepare the needed paperwork to receive SJ recognition. For example, solar projects are a perfect fit for the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Program; therefore, districts can earn points towards its certification goals.

**Q: Can I connect ACESplus projects to my district's curriculum?**

A: Yes. Using the school building as a learning lab, ACESplus projects can frequently be incorporated into school curriculum as an innovative teaching and learning resource for students of all ages. NJSBA can also help give districts instructional guidance on how to effectively make this connection.

**Q: I am interested in receiving consulting services through ACESplus. How do I join?**

A: Interested districts will need to complete the following steps:

1. Call us and let us perform a preliminary assessment of your projects. If there is a project that fits well with the ACESplus service, you can then formally engage the ACESplus consultants.
2. If the district isn't already a member of the overall ACES program, pass a standard resolution authorizing the district to join the ACES Cooperative Pricing System Agreement (CPS) and sign a CPS Agreement.
3. Pass a separate standard resolution to engage the ACESplus consultants for the desired project.

**Q: Who should I contact to learn more about the ACESplus program?**

A: For more information on the ACES program, or to sign up, please contact Carol Friedman, the ACES Coordinator at 732/296-0770 or by email at [Carol.Friedman@aces-nj.com](mailto:Carol.Friedman@aces-nj.com).

Contact us now to schedule a free, initial consultation with the ACESplus team to discuss the viable options to reduce energy costs at your district.

Additional information can also be found on the ACES website at: [www.aces-nj.com](http://www.aces-nj.com).