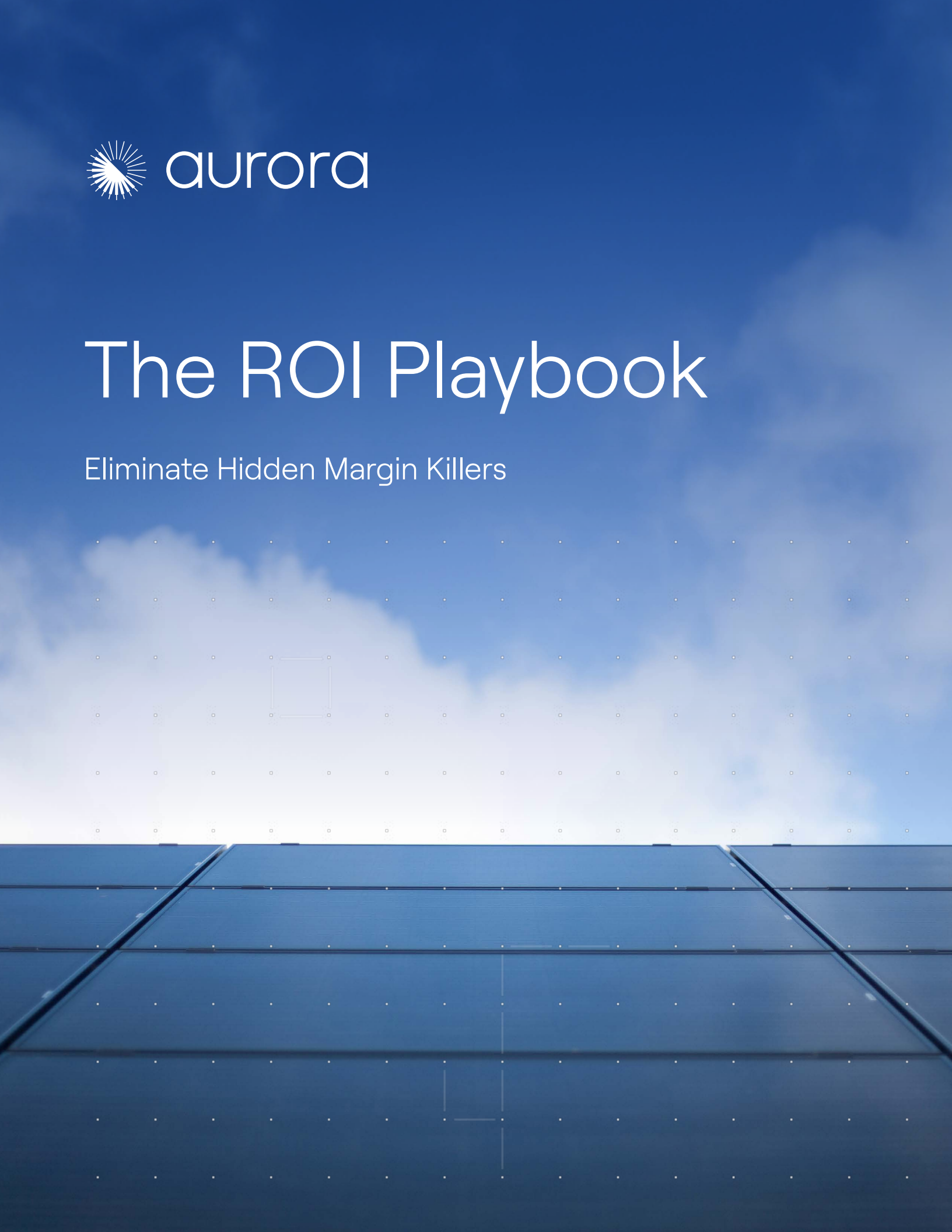

The ROI Playbook

Eliminate Hidden Margin Killers

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Executive Summary

Margins Are Tight, Accuracy Is Critical

Today's solar market is more challenging than ever. Federal incentives are disappearing, interest rates are still high, and competition is fierce. Margins are tight, and promise to get tighter.

Hardware costs have come way down over the years, but other costs have remained stubbornly high — these pesky "soft costs" continue to make up almost 40% of your total project costs. This was a nuisance before, but with the new solar market it's unacceptable.

The solar companies that actively look for ways to reduce soft costs are the ones that will come out ahead. But where do you start?

In this Solar ROI Playbook, we'll identify the areas of solar businesses that are ripe for innovation and cost savings. These areas cover the entire solar project lifecycle: from pre-sales design, through repeat sites surveys and change orders, through to plan set rework and cancellations. They're caused by inefficient workflows, outdated tools, and miscommunication.

To solve these inefficiencies, we'll look in detail at solutions to invest in, and how to make sure those investments deliver quick, significant ROI.

The Hidden Costs of Limited Tools

Cheap, or even "free," options are understandably tempting at first glance, especially at this moment. But a look one step deeper shows their hidden costs: limited accuracy, which leads to costly rework and delays, quietly killing your already thin margins — and your reputation to boot.

Delays Cascade into Bigger Problems

Think about it, you sell a homeowner a system, but then have to make significant changes once you get to the design phase of the project to get a system you can actually install. The project is delayed, it costs the customer more, it definitely costs you time and money, and nobody is happy in the end. And we all know one delayed install has a snowball effect, throwing off the scheduling of other projects, costing you even more time and money.

A Better Way Forward

There is a better way. Success in the new era of solar depends on using a platform that ensures precision, grows with your business, and equips your teams to perform at their best. You install the projects you sell — the ones the customer and your teams saw in the proposal — without design rework, without costly delays. Your close rates go up, your change orders go down, and you complete more projects, quicker, all with the same teams.

Ready to move forward? Let's get started.

> The greatest contribution of technology is not to automate the work of people. It is to elevate them to do more than they could before.

Ginni Rometty – Former CEO of IBM

Introduction

You didn't get into solar because it was easy. Solar companies face a seemingly endless parade of challenges: ever-evolving policies, tighter margins, and stiffer competition, just to name a few.

The last thing you need is to make things more difficult. But too often, "low cost" (re: cheap) solutions force your teams to redo designs, revisit sites, and repair customer relationships. If this sounds familiar, it's time to re-evaluate the tools you're using to run your business.

Efficiency isn't just a nice-to-have — it's essential for staying competitive, delivering better customer experiences, and keeping projects on track. And that's where return on investment (ROI) comes in.

For homeowners, ROI is often the starting point, not just a bonus. It's how they justify the decision to go solar in the first place. From the first conversation with a sales rep, customers are asking: How soon will this pay off? What will I save each month?

Of course, you need a return on your investments, too. Whether it's a new truck, hiring more people, or installing new software, your investments need to generate more income than they cost to implement and use.

ROI = (Net Gain ÷ Cost of Investment) × 100

At its core, ROI measures the return generated relative to the cost of an investment.

While the formula is simple, applying it in the real world — especially in a complex, fast-moving industry like solar — can be difficult. ROI isn't just about dollars in vs. dollars out. Here's how most solar companies think about what it costs them to run their business.

Solar Project Cost Breakdown

Category	Description	Example Cost
Total Cost (no storage)	Typical all-in cost to install a system without storage	**$3.37/watt**
Total cost (no storage) breakdown		
Hardware (43%)	Physical equipment: modules, inverters, racking, etc.	**$1.45/watt**
Fixed Soft Costs (18%)	Costs that don't scale with project volume: office space, licenses, insurance, taxes, etc. Profit margin: varies by market, company size, and competition	**$0.61/watt**
Variable Soft Costs (39%)	Costs that do scale with project volume: customer acquisition, design, permitting, labor, project management, etc.	**$1.31/watt**

Total Cost Source: Wood Mackenzie US Solar Market Insight Q2 2025
Total Cost Breakdown Source: Department of Energy Solar Soft Cost Breakdown

In this playbook, we'll focus on that "variable soft costs" bucket — the expenses that grow or shrink based on how many installs you do. Specifically, we'll show you how choosing the right software for your business can quickly deliver real ROI — reducing risk, saving time, improving accuracy, and supporting your long-term operational health.

And the returns aren't theoretical. The right solar software isn't just a cost — it's a way to make your business more efficient and manage demand changes.

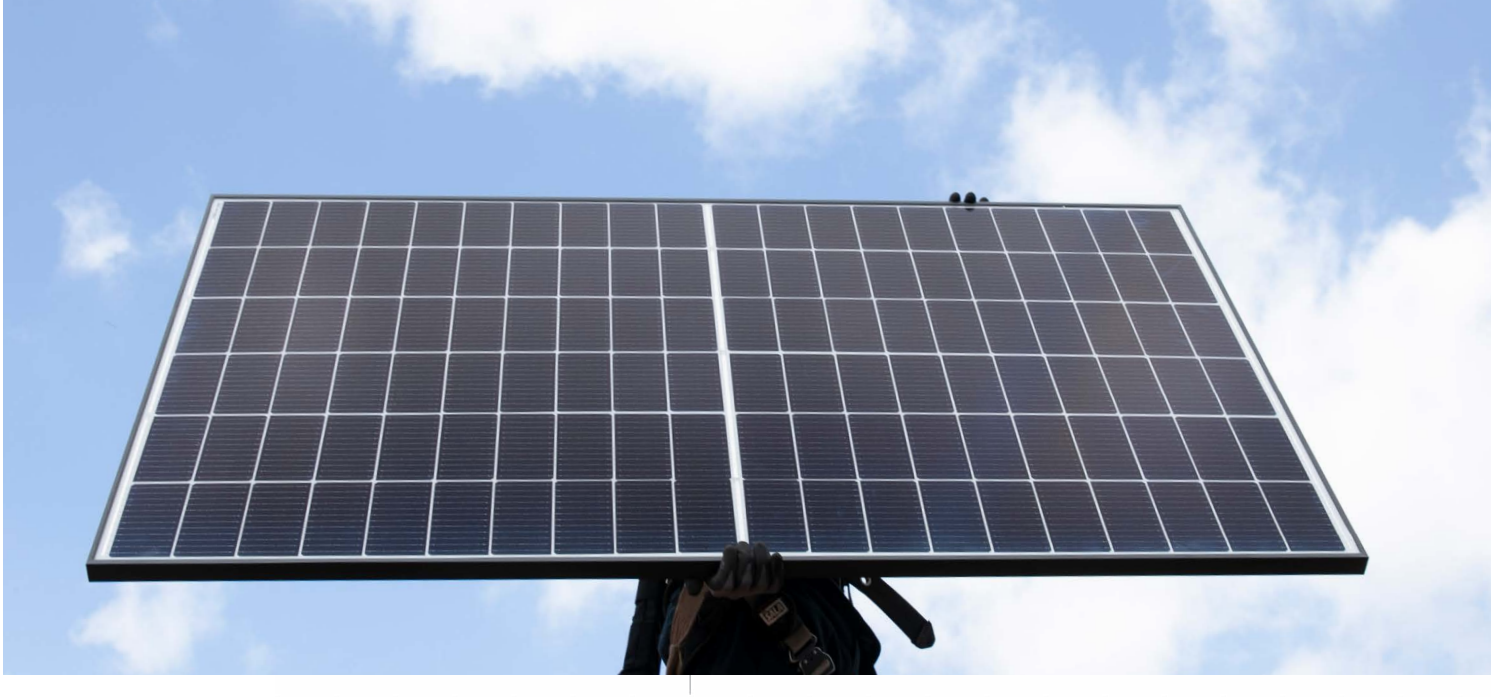
This playbook will guide you through four steps that you can use to make sure your investments reduce your variable soft costs and give you real, measurable ROI. Along the way, we'll highlight real-life examples of how leading solar companies are using modern software to reduce soft costs, accelerate project timelines, and focus on the opportunities that matter most. We'll also get into the details and look at actions you can take *right now* to get started on your road to ROI. Then, at the end, we wrap it all into an ROI checklist you can use to make sure you're getting the most out of your investments.

Actions to take

- Time to prepare. Start pulling together these soft cost data points: cancellations, change orders, number of repeat surveys, time spent on proposals, plan set rework, and handoffs between sales and design.
- Use the data you collected as a reference point. Refer back to it as you follow this playbook, so you can pinpoint the areas where each step will drive the greatest ROI for your business.

Actions Top Installers are Taking

- **Increase close rates**
  by arming reps with fast, accurate proposals
- **Reduce change orders**
  with more accurate designs and better pre-sale validation
- **Expand design and engineering capacity**
  without needing to hire
- **Increase project throughput**
  and scale with their current team
- **Shorten post-sale timelines**
  including site audits, permitting, and plan sets
- **Improve team collaboration**
  by unifying sales, design, and operations workflows
- **Avoid repeat site visits**
  by improving data capture and measurement accuracy
- **Maintain customer trust**
  with transparent proposals that meet expectations
- **Reduce manual handoffs**
  with automated workflows in one streamlined platform



Step 1

Understand ROI in the New Era — Tighter Margins, Higher Stakes

Residential solar used to be all about volume. Generous incentives, surging customer demand, and low interest rates meant companies could grow quickly — even if their operations were inefficient. But that era is over.

Today, the market is more competitive, more fragmented, and more cost-sensitive than ever. Several major shifts have changed the equation:

- **Higher interest rates** have made financing more expensive, for both homeowners and businesses.
- **Policy changes like NEM 3.0** in California have changed how you have to explain and sell solar to customers.
- **New policies like the One Big Beautiful Bill** (OBBB) will (once again) drastically rewrite how solar savings are delivered, how systems are designed, and how companies generate revenue.

Solar has always been shaped by policy, but the rollback of key incentives could signal a lasting shift in the market. And as incentives decline, margins get tighter. This means that making

your investments count has never been more important.

One area to look at right away is the tools you're using everyday. Limited, inaccurate tools don't just cost you the price of the software — they cost you in change orders, rework, project delays, lost customers, and more. Investing in software that fits your needs and grows with you is a proven way to increase those margins and stay competitive.

We already have examples of how this strategy has worked in the past. Look at California's NEM 3.0., which changed the economics of rooftop solar — slashing the credit homeowners receive for sending extra solar energy back to the grid. Batteries quickly went from a nice-to-have to a near-essential part of every proposal, and sales teams had to completely rethink how they explained long-term savings. The companies that adapted quickly — using tools that support consumption modeling, battery add-ons, and a more consultative sales approach — stayed competitive. Those still working with limited or stand-alone tools were left scrambling.

Now, with the One Big Beautiful Bill poised to reshape the financial landscape again, the stakes are even higher.

The solar companies that succeed will:

- **Deliver accurate proposals faster** to reduce sales friction and build homeowner trust
- **Automate workflows** to reduce manual work, cut costs, and free up team bandwidth
- **Improve cross-team efficiency** to avoid delays, rework, and missed project milestones
- **Reduce risk in a high-interest-rate environment** where every delay impacts profitability

When incentives and margins were higher, cheap, basic tools may have been good enough — even if they added soft costs to every project with inaccuracies, errors, redesigns, delays, and unhappy customers.

Now that margins are tighter? ROI isn't just a financial concept, it's a strategy. When talking specifically about solar software, tools that streamline every part of every project increase your margins at every step. Investments like this rack up ROI surprisingly quickly.

So, let's look at the ROI equation again, but with your business's real inputs:

- **Cost of Investment** — software license cost, project delays incurred, sales lost, change orders added, extra site visits, customer trust lost, manual labor added
- **Net Gains** — extra sales won, project time saved, change orders & site visits avoided, customer trust gained, customer referrals added, manual errors saved

This is why the companies that thrive aren't always the biggest. They're the ones that:

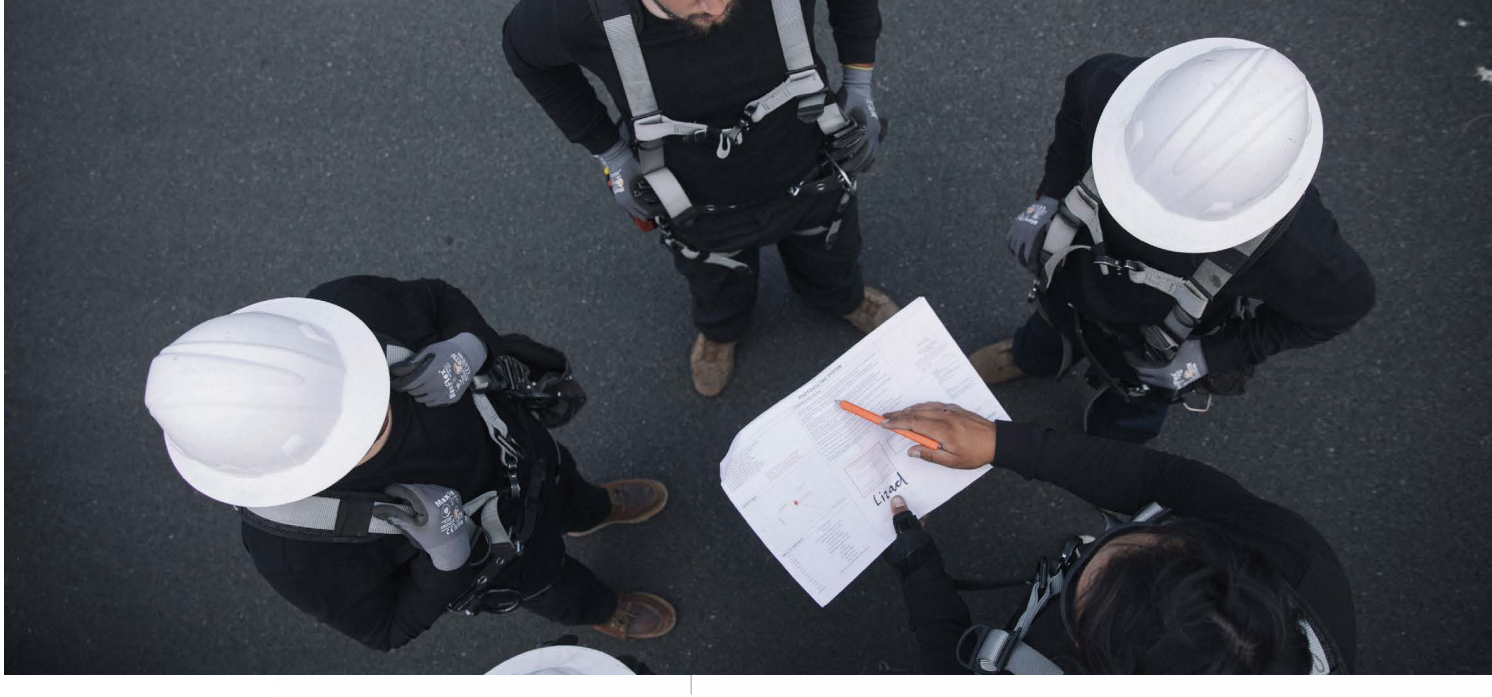
- **Invest in tools** that reduce friction
- **Pursue the right opportunities**, not just more of them
- **Operate with clarity, consistency, and speed** in each step of each project

Actions to take

Prepare for the new policy and financing landscape:

- Prepare for the new policy and financing landscape: explore and expand your TPO financing options, ensure compliance with 48E, update your component library, and start reframing your 2026 go-to-market strategy.
- Pursue the right opportunities, not just more. Focus on projects with the highest probability of success.
- Invest in tools that clearly present dynamic financial options—cash, loans, and TPO—and allow you to work with customers to find the best fit.
- Educate customers on the latest policy changes and how they affect them.

> "The OBBB and EO are a setback — introducing new costs, uncertainty, and complexity. But it's not a death knell. What comes next depends on how the solar community responds."
>
> Christopher Hopper
> Founder and CEO of Aurora Solar



Step 2

Identify Hidden Margin Killers

Now we know margins are tight and getting tighter. The next step is to identify things you're doing now that are killing your margins even more, and find solutions that can widen those margins again.

This is important to keep in mind when you're looking at solar platforms. While it's common to focus only on upfront costs like licenses and feature sets, a limited tool can really cost you in other ways — things like inaccurate designs and inefficiencies quietly drive up soft costs. These are margin killers.

A platform with features that reduce soft costs for sales, design, permitting, and operations can really boost your margins, and maximize your ROI — even if it might be a bit more expensive up front.

And a major margin killer that all these inefficiencies lead to, and investing in a platform can help solve, is project cancellations. According to a study by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), contract cancellations can account for up to 25% of pre-install soft costs, largely due to customer acquisition spending. The study found that 51% of contracts never result in an installed system, and 73% of

cancellations happen before permits are even submitted (NREL, Evaluating the Impact of Residential Solar Contract Cancellations, 2022).

These aren't minor inefficiencies — they're margin killers. In fact, we created a model based on a company doing 500 installs per year and found that making improvements across key drivers — including cancellations, change orders, proposal turnaround, repeat site visits, plan set rework, and manual handoffs — can unlock over $650,000 in annual soft cost savings, without even touching hardware pricing or incentives.

How? We'll get into the details in the next step, but here are the main categories to look into:

Wasted Time Across the Project Lifecycle

Time is every company's most limited and expensive resource, and inefficient tools consume time quietly. Whether it's sales reps waiting on a design team, designers redrawing rooftop models after handoffs, or operations teams spending hours reworking plans to meet AHJ requirements, every delay slows projects down and cuts into margins.

But in many solar orgs, the end-to-end process still includes:

- **Manual site measurements** or clunky imports from external modeling tools
- **Proposals that take hours** (or even days) to generate and deliver a final customer facing version
- **Double-handling designs** between sales and engineering, often using more than one tool
- **Excessive time spent revising** plan sets after you've made the sale

These all add hours to every project, which quickly multiplies across hundreds or thousands of installs — costing the industry an estimated $115 million annually. Even worse, this wasted time isn't just an internal frustration — it undermines customer trust and gives competitors the opportunity to close deals first.

Change Orders and Rework: The Silent Margin Killer

Few things disrupt both profitability and customer trust more than a change order. When a project needs to be redesigned — because of an inaccurate model, a mismatch between proposal and reality, or a missing detail — it's not just more labor costs. It's the cost of poor coordination, broken handoffs, and wasted time.

Some examples of how change orders cost you money?

- **New site visits** or truck rolls
- **Delays in permitting** or approvals
- **Missed install timelines**
- **Customer dissatisfaction** or cancellations

Still, many companies accept a 20–30% change order rate as "normal." But real-life data shows that the cost adds up quickly.

According to an industry survey in partnership with SolarBuilder Magazine:

Many installers report change order costs between $750–$1,250 per project. At 1,000 installs annually, that could mean **$150K–$300K+ in extra costs** — just from scope changes and redesign.

Lost Revenue from Proposal Delays and Inaccurate Designs

Every extra day it takes to deliver a proposal creates an opening for competitors. Proposals that don't reflect the homeowner's true needs or contain inaccurate assumptions further reduce the likelihood of closing the deal.

Improving your conversion rate even just 1–2% can translate to hundreds of additional installs per year. But outdated or disjointed tools can create:

- **Delays** in generating accurate pricing and storage configurations
- **Design flaws** or incorrect bills of materials
- **Gaps** between what's sold and what can actually be built

Team Misalignment and Burnout

In most solar companies, the sales, design, and operations teams all touch the same project, yet they often work in separate tools, spreadsheets, and systems. And when these systems don't speak the same language, teams are forced to fill the gaps manually.

That means:

- **Designers double-checking** and reworking initial pre-sales designs
- **Designers redrawing models** from scratch
- **Operations dealing** with gaps in standardization, documentation, and communication

Workflows and tools that make it hard for teams to work together make it more difficult to do project tasks, slow project delivery, and contribute to burnout — particularly when high-value employees have to do work that could be automated or avoided. These delays can also postpone sales commissions, fueling attrition, turnover, and costly retraining cycles.

The Cumulative Cost of Complexity

Lastly, there's the cost of simply maintaining so many different software tools. Solar companies often piece together many different solutions: one for proposals, one for design, another for permitting, a spreadsheet for storage modeling, and email chains to track it all.

This patchwork system adds:

- **Higher training and onboarding costs**
- **More room for human error**
- **Duplicated data entry and inconsistent documentation**

- **Difficulty scaling or adapting to new workflows (e.g. TPO integrations)**

While each inefficiency can feel relatively small, when you add them all together they're like sand in gears — grinding your margins down.

Why These Costs Go Unnoticed

The biggest challenge with hidden costs? They don't show up all at once. They bleed into operations slowly — 10 minutes here, an extra day there — until projects take longer, teams are stretched thinner, and customer satisfaction drops without a clear cause. But when teams identify and eliminate these inefficiencies, the impact is immediate and measurable.

Actions to Take

- Investigate soft costs. Where are you spending more time and money than expected? Identify the biggest margin killers and spot opportunities to cut waste.
- Audit your tools. Software stacks grow fast. List everything you're using, check if they integrate, and be honest about the ROI they actually deliver.
- Automate manual work. Onsite measurements, AHJ requirements, plan set approvals—these eat up hours. Many of these steps can be automated, unlocking major savings.

> "Before Aurora, we had a team dedicated just to handling change orders. Now our designers have more capacity and can focus on more impactful work. With better imagery and design accuracy, we've gone from a 40–50% change order rate to under 10%."
>
> Hamilton Rufino, Senior Design, Mpower Solar

80%

fewer change orders

Step 3

Pinpoint the Opportunity in Eliminating Soft Costs

Now that we've looked at where the solar market is right now and identified some hidden margin killers, we can start dialing in and pinpointing your exact opportunities to eliminate soft costs.

As we discussed above, soft costs can generally be divided into two categories: fixed and variable. Fixed costs are expenses that remain relatively constant over time. Variable soft costs, on the other hand, include things like customer acquisition, design, permitting, labor, and project management. These costs scale with your project volume, so inefficiencies in your existing workflows can significantly impact these variable costs, driving them higher as you grow.

Our Soft Cost Optimization figures below highlight where today's soft costs typically arise — and what's possible when teams streamline operations with integrated tools, accurate data, and faster execution. These savings materialize when you move beyond limited tools to platforms that integrate data, automate handoffs, and improve accuracy.

Soft Cost Optimization

Soft Cost Lever	Industry Reality	Optimized Performance	Estimated $/W Savings
Cancellations	33% of contracts canceled	<10% cancellation rate	$0.02–$0.23/W
Change Orders	20–30% of projects	<10%	$0.01–$0.04/W
Proposal Turnaround	Same-day to 2+ days	<30 sec for simple; <1 hr for complex	$0.004–$0.007/W
Repeat Site Surveys	Common for rework or missing data	Avoided via accurate virtual modeling	$0.002–$0.009/W
Plan Set Rework	2–3 revision rounds per project	1 accurate, AHJ-ready submission	$0.005–$0.01/W
Automated Workflows	Sales, design, ops work in silos	Integrated, streamlined workflows	$0.004–$0.007/W

Soft Cost Optimization Impact on Project Cost ($/Watt)

Average savings used to depict cost impact.

How We Calculated It

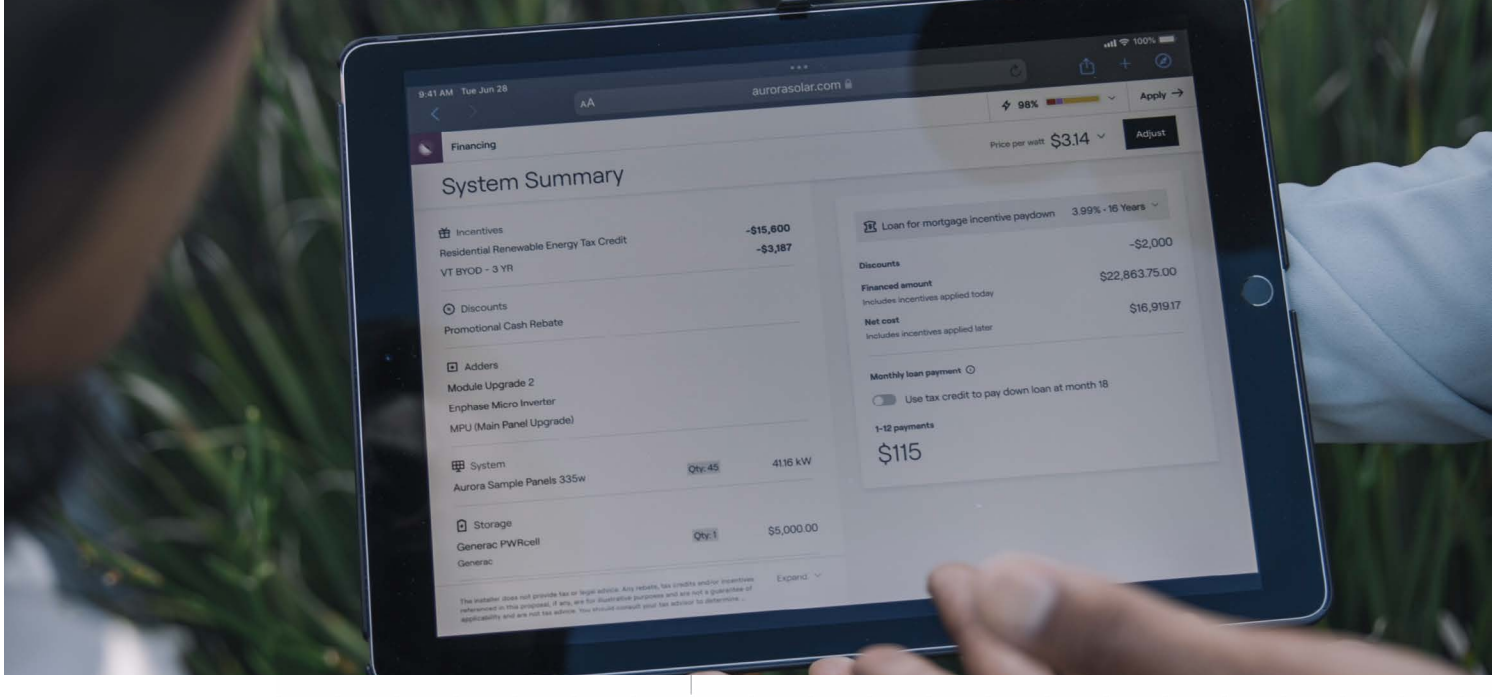
We based these savings on conservative assumptions across 500 installs/year and a 7 kW system size, drawing from NREL research, SEIA benchmarks, and Aurora customer results.

Methodology

Lever	Calculation / Assumptions	Portfolio $/W	Annual Savings (Low–High)
Install Volume	500 installs × 7 kW average system size = 3,500,000 watts total	—	—
Cancellations	Avoiding ~24% of cancellations from net installs × $500–$5,000	$0.02–$0.23	$70,000–$800,000
Change Orders	100 avoided × $250–$1,250	$0.01–$0.04	$25,000–$125,000
Proposal Turnaround	500 projects × 1–2 hrs × $50/hr	$0.004–$0.007	$14,000–$25,000
Repeat Site Surveys	100–200 avoided × $150–$300	$0.002–$0.009	$7,000–$30,000
Plan Set Rework	350 projects × 1–2 hrs × $50/hr*	$0.005–$0.01	$17,500–$35,000
Manual Handoffs	500 projects × 0.5–1 hrs × $50/hr	$0.004–$0.007	$12,500–$25,000
TOTAL (500 Installs)	—	$0.04–$0.30	$146,000–$1,040,000

Actions to take

- Compare your numbers to industry reality. In the last section you mapped your soft costs to the root causes. Now look at your competitors. Where are your costs higher or lower? Which improvements will be easiest to implement?
- Invest in automation. Automation can save you time and money in many ways. It gives you more time to consult with the homeowner. By not working on redesigns and rework (and waiting for new designs) with AI and automation, you can focus on what matters most — building rapport and educating homeowners with visuals.
- Invest in automation. So important, we had to say it twice. Automation can also help with specific tasks like plan sets that now take a lot of time, effort, and rework. Automating tasks like these can save you money immediately.



Step 4

Create a Soft Cost Reduction Roadmap

We've seen so far that return on investment (ROI) goes far beyond feature lists and product comparisons. When talking specifically about software, ROI reflects the measurable impact the right software can have on a solar company's — on your company's — operations. It touches everything from accelerating project timelines and reducing costs to empowering teams and increasing revenue per project.

Across all of these outcomes, one thing consistently stands out: accuracy is the multiplier. Accurate designs, proposals, and data inputs reduce delays, eliminate costly rework, and give teams the confidence to move faster and sell smarter.

Drawing from industry interviews, business case analyses, and real-world performance data, four primary drivers of ROI consistently emerge across top-performing solar companies. We'll build our roadmap to reduce soft costs based off of these drivers:

- Time savings & workflow efficiency

- Revenue growth
- Cost avoidance
- Empowered teams & cross-functional alignment

This isn't just theoretical or some list spit out by AI, it's based on real customer results over years of tracking and conversations. You'll notice that these ROI drivers align directly with many of the soft cost areas we've discussed so far, like cancellations, change orders, sales design time, site surveys, plan set rework, and manual handoffs. (And, of course, the exact financial results depend on your business and project volume.)

Let's look at each driver in more detail, including real results solar companies have achieved.

Time Savings & Workflow Efficiency

In the solar industry, time is more than just money; it's momentum. Coordinating across sales, design, permitting, and installation requires synchronization, and when one step lags, the entire project timeline can be impacted. Workflow inefficiencies often show up in the form of idle time, double handling, or repeated tasks that slow teams down and reduce output.

Organizations that streamline these workflows often see measurable improvements in turnaround times and the number of projects they can complete. Time saved in one department creates more capacity in another, allowing teams to focus on higher-impact tasks such as customer education, lead generation, and installation execution.

Rather than just minimizing delays, these improvements contribute to more efficient resource allocation and higher project volume without increasing headcount.

- New Day Solar eliminated back-and-forth between sales and engineering, saving 6 hours per project with more complete, accurate designs upfront.
- Kasselman Solar saved 2 hours per project by streamlining design handoffs and triggering requests through API integrations.
- Solaris Renewables doubled project throughput by centralizing workflows and reducing interdepartmental delays with an all-in-one platform.
- Orizon Energy achieved an 80% reduction in time spent on design audits and pricing adjustments by automating key steps.

Revenue Growth

With rising acquisition costs and slower industry-wide growth, many solar companies are looking for ways to increase revenue per project. This can include faster deal cycles, higher storage attach rates, and converting qualified leads more effectively. Revenue gains in these scenarios are often tied directly to speed and clarity, particularly during the sales process.

Providing accurate, visually compelling proposals, and providing them quickly, enables sales teams to close before competitors, while

the ability to confidently explain storage and efficiency upgrades increases deal value. Even small improvements in conversion rates can lead to substantial returns when scaled across hundreds or thousands of leads.

- New Day Solar increased close rates by 15% after empowering sales reps with accurate, visual designs they could trust — and confidently sell on the spot.
- Cape Fear Solar Systems reached a 75% storage attach rate and realized a 10x return on storage revenue by combining tailored storage modeling, real-time proposal walkthroughs, and homeowner education using Sales Mode.
- Michigan Solar Solutions achieved a 45% storage attach rate by using advanced storage modeling and boosting upsell success through a consultative sales approach.

What do all these have in common? They are laser-focused on maximizing the value of each customer interaction — for both the company and the customer. This not only leads directly to more total revenue, it increases customer satisfaction.

Cost Avoidance

If revenue growth is one side of the ROI coin, cost avoidance is the other. Here we're looking at the ability to eliminate inefficiencies that otherwise lead to project delays, lost revenue, or diminished margins. While these costs typically don't appear on a balance sheet, they are very real and repeat project after project.

Repeat site visits, misaligned expectations between teams, AHJ rejections due to plan set errors, and change orders driven by inaccurate models or outdated assumptions are all examples of this hidden waste. Each introduces risk and adds operational delays, but most are preventable with the right data and tools.

Eliminating these recurring friction points improves both customer experience and operational efficiency — for every single project.

- New York State Solar cut site survey time by 45+ minutes and saved $150 per site visit by reducing repeat visits — unlocking 2.25x faster true-ups and enabling 2–3 additional surveys per week.
- Our World Energy reduced change orders from 40% to under 10% by generating accurate system designs at the point of sale, minimizing mid-project changes.
- A multi-state residential provider accelerated plan set revisions from 24–48 hours to just 2–3 hours, saving 5+ days on multi-round edits per project.

Empowered Teams & Cross-Functional Alignment

Technology decisions impact people. When teams are equipped with tools that reduce manual work and provide accurate, consistent data, their confidence and performance improve. This often leads to smoother collaboration across departments, less burnout, and improved employee retention. It's difficult to achieve this level of alignment when each department is

using a separate, limited tool that can't serve as a single source of truth.

Accurate, consistent designs give sales teams the confidence to close faster, free designers from repetitive modeling, and equip operations with better documentation and fewer handoffs. The result is stronger alignment across teams and significantly less operational friction.

These improvements foster stronger internal trust and enable teams to stay focused on delivering value, not managing chaos.

- Simply Solar reduced plan set turnaround from 7 days to under 24 hours, unblocking downstream teams and freeing up engineering capacity.
- Freedom Forever increased efficiency across sales-to-design handoffs by 83%, reducing the timeline from 2 hours to just 20 minutes.
- MSS cut design time by 70% using Aurora AI's auto-design tools and instant shading analysis.
- New Day Solar improved engineering team productivity by 20%, thanks to fewer redesigns and cleaner handoffs from sales.

Actions to take

It's time to prioritize, set goals, and get to work.

- Make smart of use of AI: From identifying obstructions to modeling those more basic roofs, AI is ready to help solar companies save time right now.
- Look for new ways to lower customer acquisition costs: Virtual proposals and solar market places are great ways to reduce costs.
- Automate where possible: Now is the time to set up TPO integrations and dial in storage modeling.

15%

increase in close rates and 6+ hours saved per project

New Day Solar

50%

reduction in site survey time

Our World Energy

3x

more designer capacity without expanding the team

Simply Solar

Why the Right Platform — Right Now — Matters

In solar, delayed decisions postpone progress, and they often come at a measurable cost. When bottlenecks, redesigns, and inefficiencies go unaddressed, they quietly erode margins, burn out teams, and slow down the business. The longer those issues persist, the more cumulative the impact becomes.

For a company completing 25 projects per month, waiting even six months to address outdated tools and processes could mean:

- **225+ hours of lost productivity** across design, engineering, and ops
- **100+ project delays** or rescheduled steps caused by slow handoffs
- **Tens of thousands in avoidable soft costs** from repeated site visits, change orders, and plan set revisions

While many solar companies recognize the need to modernize, making changes can feel daunting — especially in times of market uncertainty. But the most resilient companies don't wait for perfect conditions, they empower their teams to thrive in any environment.

That's why having a true platform is critical: it builds resilient, repeatable processes across your entire business — enabling your teams to adapt quickly, avoid costly inefficiencies, and ultimately deliver greater ROI for your business. Sometimes, spending a bit more upfront on the right solutions isn't more expensive at all — it's an investment that pays off in scalability, speed, and margin protection over time.

The most successful solar teams aren't stitching together a bunch of different solutions. Instead, they're **consolidating and optimizing workflows** across the project lifecycle. They're choosing platforms that:

- Enable **accurate, fast designs** that reduce rework and time to install
- Seamlessly **integrate storage, TPO, and permitting** into the process
- Allow reps, designers, and ops to work **from a single source of truth**

This isn't just about replacing one software tool with another. It's about rethinking how projects get done. It's about a solution that works across your entire business.

For many companies featured in this report, that shift paid for itself in **months**, not years.

> "Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken. The key to long-term success is doing things differently before you're forced to."
>
> Warren Buffett – CEO of Berkshire Hathaway

In Closing...

As the solar industry continues to evolve, you need to demand more when it comes to speed, accuracy, customer experience, and operational efficiency to keep up. Leading companies aren't simply reacting to change — they're targeting their investments to reduce friction, lower risk, and elevate performance across their entire business. They're actively investigating ways to cut costs and increase income.

In today's uncertain market, taking it step-by-step can help deliver the best results:

- Addressing immediate year-end priorities
- Identifying where limited tools are creating hidden costs
- Making a plan to replace them with accurate, integrated platforms that safeguard — and grow — margins

If that's your plan, now is the time to start. Exploring your options today ensures your teams are ready to hit the ground running in January — with tools designed not just to keep up, but to drive real ROI in a more competitive landscape.

What's next?

- Use the Soft-Cost Reduction Roadmap in the back of this Playbook to plan your actions step-by-step.
- Check-out the detailed solar policy charts to make sure you're ready for the new solar landscape, and that you can educate your customers on it.

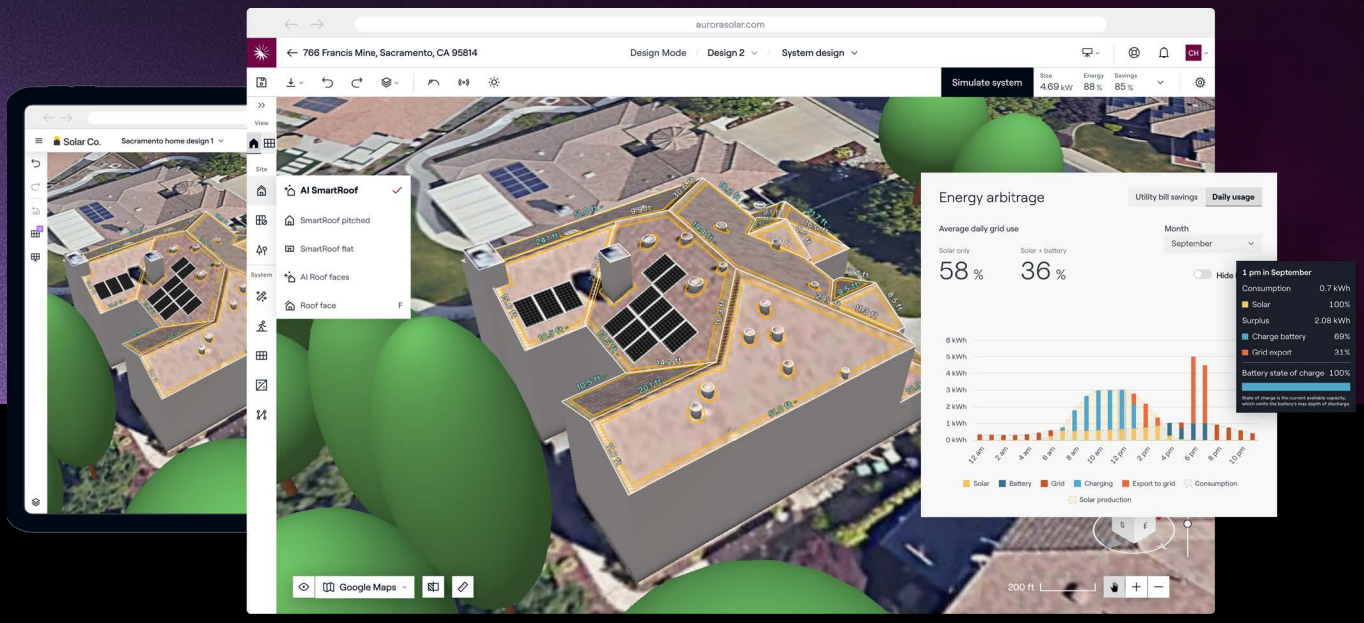
Have questions or just want to explore what's possible? Get in touch — we're here to help.

> Frequent change orders, delays in approvals, and inefficiencies in our processes were holding us back. We needed a solution that could streamline everything from design to installation while meeting the strict requirements of TPO financing.

Mark Ramirez
Our World Energy, Sales Operations

75%

change order reduction



Explore how the right platform can impact your operations, sales process, and bottom line

Book a demo →

Appendix

ROI Reduction Roadmap

How to use this guide

1. Work through each step referencing the playbook as needed
2. Adapt each section to your business's needs
3. Keep it practical. Assign owners, due dates, and check ins to keep things moving

Prep Work — Gather your Soft-Cost Inputs

Use this list to pull the numbers you'll analyze later.

- ☐ **Cancellations** (# / year)
- ☐ **Change orders** (avg $ / change order)
- ☐ **Repeat site surveys** (# / year)
- ☐ **Pre-sales** (hrs / proposal)
- ☐ **Plan set rework** (hrs / per project including revisions)
- ☐ **Sales → Design handoffs** (hrs / per project including errors/rework required)
- ☐ **Permitting / interconnection cycle time** (avg days / project)
- ☐ **Customer comms touches** (# per job)
- ☐ **Financing exceptions** (financing mix today and forecast for 2025)
- ☐ **Any other admin time** (specify: _____)

Tip: Use the last full 90 days.

Step 1
Understand ROI in the New Era—Tighter Margins, Higher Stakes

Confirm you're ready for the 2025–2026 landscape.

- ☐ Review your supply chain for 48E compliance
- ☐ Update your design component library
- ☐ Explore and deepen your TPO financing options
- ☐ Begin reframing your 2026 go-to-market strategy and team training

Step 2
Identify Hidden Margin Killers

Now link your soft cost inputs to root causes. Check what applies.

Sales process

- ☐ Poor discovery → wrong system sizing/expectations
- ☐ Proposal errors or long turnaround times
- ☐ Weak qualification → high cancellation rate

Design & survey

- ☐ Incomplete survey data → redesigns
- ☐ Outdated component library → rework
- ☐ Handoff gaps (missing notes / photos)

Permitting & interconnection

- ☐ Local AHJ requirements misunderstood/high rejection rates
- ☐ Incomplete applications or drawings
- ☐ High volume of hours on creation/revisions

Step 2 Continued

Financing

- ☐ TPO related change orders creating delays/high costs
- ☐ Limited TPO or lender options
- ☐ Difficulty selling value to homeowners/lower close rates

Write your top **3-5 root causes:**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Step 3
Pinpoint the Opportunity in Eliminating Soft Costs

Compare your numbers to reputable benchmarks. Record deltas.

Soft Cost	Optimal Performance	Your Value	Delta
Cancellations (# / year)	<10%		
Change orders (avg $ / change order)	<20%		
Repeat site surveys (# / year)	<20%		
Proposal time (hrs / proposal)	< 1 hour		

Soft Cost	Optimal Performance	Your Value	Delta
Plan set rework (hrs / per project)	95% first-time pass rate		
Sales → Design handoffs (hrs / per project)	.5 to 1 hour		
Other:			
Other:			

Circle any metric where you're >20% worse than the benchmark — these are likely high-leverage fixes.

Step 4

Create a Soft Cost Reduction Roadmap

Score each initiative, then sort by **Priority Score** (Low, Medium, High)

Soft Cost	Effort	Value	Confidence	Risk	Ranking
Example: Implement Aurora AI	Low	High	High	Medium	1
Example: Integrate new TPO financier	High	High	Medium	Medium	2

Step 4 Continued

Once you've ranked your solutions, create a plan to get to work.

Priority	Due Date	Definition	Milestone
1	Oct 1	**Example**: Implement Aurora AI- Deploy Aurora AI for both designs and proposals from an to accelerate project cycle times	• Train sales and design by Sep 15 • Enable sales and design tenants by Sep 17 • Two week check in on progress by Oct 1 • Reduce average time on project by 1 hour by Oct 17
2	Dec 15	**Example:** Integrate new TPO financier to increase project volume and reduce TPO change orders	• Partner with new TPO financier by Oct 1 • Train sales and design by Oct 15 • Enable sales and design tenants by Oct 17 • Two week check in on progress by Oct 1 • Reduce % of projects with change orders by 50% within 3 months

What's inside "The One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) Act"

Section	Description	
Residential Solar Incentives (Section 25D)	• 30% residential Investment Tax Credit (ITC) will be eliminated • Specific to homeowners purchasing solar through cash or loans • Expiration date of December 31, 2025 (installed)	
Commercial & Third-Party Owned Solar (Section 48E)	• 30% ITC (with potential adders) will remain available for solar system owners • This includes third-party ownership (TPO) models • Three key windows to know (see below)	
48E Timeline Requirements		
Project	Construction starts	Placed in service
Solar	within 12 months of bill signing	within 4 years
	after 12 months of bill signing	by Dec 31, 2027
Storage	anytime	anytime
Foreign Entity of Concern (Section 48E)	• Goes into effect January 1, 2026 • Specific component and project cost thresholds must be met (see below) • Threshold will increase over time	
FEOC Requirements		
Requirement	Definition	% Threshold
Components	Panels and inverters	50%
	Storage	60%
Project	Total project cost	40%