

# **Photosynthesis: Growing Commercial Solar with NATiVE**

Aidan Brunner, Xintao Zhang-Stephen, and Samuel Dunkerley

## Introduction

Despite the incoming pressure on supply chains due to tariffs, NATiVE CEO and Founder Lloyd Lee seemed hopeful for the future. "I've got a great team," Lloyd explained. Confidence in his people and his industry seemed to influence his tone. NATiVE is a central Texas-based sustainable solution provider that provides everything from eco-conscious buildings to rainwater and solar systems. (NATiVE will be formatted as NATiVE or Native interchangeably throughout.) Native Solar, a branch of NATiVE, recently went all-in on commercial solar and has paid out dividends. Speaking to the Chief Revenue Officer and sales team lead, Derek Evans, we got a sense of the scale. In discussions around commercial sales, he remarked, "(they) got a budget to spend, so they are gonna spend it." Corporate budgets and promises drive the market for sustainable solutions within the commercial world, and they aren't slowing down anytime soon. Native has recently accomplished some of their most significant projects with various central Texas builders and companies, such as HEB. Business is growing so well that Derek provided us with a special request. He aimed to build a team beyond the standard salesforce at Native Solar. This team would be made up of young, energetic salespeople who would be tasked with account management and relieving the current sales team. Our goal became to provide a framework for hiring and developing that team.

## Industry Background

Firstly, context around the U.S. Commercial and Residential solar market is essential. The U.S. solar market has experienced rapid growth in recent years, which is driven by policy incentives, declining technology costs, and increasing corporate sustainability commitments. In 2024 alone, the United States installed nearly 50 gigawatts of new solar photovoltaic capacity, marking a massive 21% increase over 2023 and the second consecutive record year for installations. By the end of 2024, cumulative PV capacity topped 235.7 gigawatts, enough to power around 40 million homes. Solar has become the dominant source of new power generation in the nation. This expansion highlights solar's central role in the nation's ongoing transition toward renewable energy. (SEIA)

The economic scale of the solar industry is crucial. In 2024, solar development attracted \$70.4 billion in private investment, supporting a supply chain of 10,000+ companies and nearly 280,000 jobs across all 50 states. Solar energy costs have plummeted about 40% over the last decade, making new projects highly competitive. For example, utility-scale solar power purchase prices now range around \$16–35 per MWh (<fossil fuel). These economic climate and energy security goals have cemented solar as a mainstream energy source. Even so, growth is not without headwinds – rising

interest rates and other constraints slowed some segments in 2023 and 2024, but overall industry momentum remains strong. Solar's record-breaking 2024 installation was the most significant amount of capacity added by any energy technology in a single year in the U.S. in over two decades, emphasizing the industry's key role in the current energy mix. The U.S. solar market spans three primary segments: Utility-scale, residential, and commercial.

First, like traditional power plants, utility-scale solar is like a large energy project designed to produce electricity directly for the power grid. These installations are usually ground-mounted on expansive sites. They typically use solar photovoltaic panels or concentrated solar power technology to generate large volumes of electricity for widespread distribution (SEIA).

Second, residential-scale solar is like solar photovoltaic systems installed on homes, buildings, or smaller structures. Residential solar (rooftop systems for homes) experienced a notable slowdown after years of steady growth. Several factors contributed to the contraction. Higher interest rates and tighter consumer financing conditions have dampened homeowner demand. The U.S. Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes translated into more expensive solar loans, eroding the immediate savings for consumers. Many installers report that they had to adjust to selling higher-APR loans with slimmer customer savings as financing costs rose. This led some prospective customers to delay or cancel solar purchases, especially in markets without robust incentives. Also, policy is a very powerful element in shaping and affecting residential solar development. In our case study, Native Solar specializes in and mainly focuses on commercial-scale solar. Derek said their revenue from residential services is minimal, and they still do some residential solar projects to maintain relationships for future sales or referrals instead of revenue. He mentioned that their revenue is approximately 98% commercial and 2% residential, and they are probably losing money on residential service work. Derek said they made a dramatic shift in the last two years to determine their optimal customers. Many of their current customers on residential-scale jobs are not direct homeowners; they sell to builders and architects directly. They have never even talked to an actual homeowner through their sales history. Thus, even their "residential" sales are more like a B2B sales process. Therefore, we will mainly focus on commercial-scale solar in this case study.

Finally, commercial-scale solar is a focal point of the industry's expansion. In most cases, commercial solar systems are installed on-site (rooftops, parking canopies) to help organizations reduce their electricity costs, achieve sustainability goals, increase energy independence, and gain a good reputation in public. System sizes vary widely, ranging from 50 kilowatts to several megawatts, depending on the customer's energy needs and property size. The U.S. commercial solar market has expanded steadily in recent years, driven by reduced costs, favorable incentives like the Investment Tax Credit, growing companies' sustainability commitments, and the desire for more

predictable and long-term energy expenses. Despite the rapid development of the industry, commercial-scale solar still accounts for less than 10% of total U.S. solar deployment annually, suggesting substantial untapped market potential. However, the path to successful commercial solar development is complex. Unlike residential projects, which involve relatively fast sales cycles and standardized offerings, commercial deals require longer timelines, customized system designs, permitting and zoning navigation, complex financing structures, and building deep, trusted relationships with multiple decision-makers. Interconnection delays, regulatory hurdles, and rising project soft costs continue to slow the pace of C&I solar expansion across many regions. In this environment, relationship-based selling and service differentiation are critical competitive advantages.

## Company Background

Native Solar, founded over 18 years ago and based in Dripping Springs, Texas, has carved out a niche within the last couple of years by shifting focus almost exclusively to commercial-scale solar projects. Native Solar started doing residential retrofits, but has shifted away from the market recently due to oversaturation. Although the company maintains a small residential practice, commercial work represents approximately 98% of Native Solar's total revenue, according to CRO Derek. A graph outlining the central Texas residential solar market and Native's entry and exit points can be viewed as *Figure 1*. As Derek emphasized in recent discussions, Native Solar's current "residential" clients are not even homeowners, but builders and architects, meaning that even their residential efforts follow a B2B sales model rather than traditional B2C. Rather than persuading customers why they should install solar (a conversation that can be complex and mission-driven), Native Solar focuses squarely on identifying technical needs, understanding business requirements, and delivering tailored solutions. Their approach prioritizes service and maintenance bundling, ensuring long-term relationships through annual inspections, upgrades, and operations support after installation. According to Derek, one of the company's most significant opportunities and its biggest constraint is the ability of its sales team to manage authentic, high-value relationships at scale. With only five full-time salespeople, Native Solar risks hitting a capacity ceiling: each salesperson can only maintain a limited number of active relationships without sacrificing service quality. As the commercial solar market expands, Native Solar faces a critical challenge: growing its relationship-driven sales strategy without losing the trust and customization that have defined its brand.

Before the NATiVE Solar name was created, they went by Hill Country EcoBuilders (HCEB). Founded in the Texas Hill Country in 2007, the mission was to build affordable zero-energy custom green homes with rainwater harvesting and solar

power. After 2 years and lots of experience later, HCEB spun off Hill Country EcoPower in 2009 to focus solely on renewable energy system integrations. Both companies began to grow, and in 2012, they merged under a new brand, NATiVE. As NATiVE started to expand in 2018, the construction side of the Native business became Build NATiVE, still offering custom green buildings in Austin and surrounding communities. The solar side of the company grew, taking on members from other solar companies and creating NATiVE Solar.

NATiVE Solar has completed over 1,000 solar projects totaling over 60 megawatts of capacity in Texas and across a dozen other states. The company has grown to 35 employees with five full-time salespeople. The sales team is split into two commercial, one hybrid, and two residential agents managing large territories. Each salesperson's role is to develop opportunities, provide a return on their investment, and keep up with utility and maintenance. They pride themselves on after-sales service, where they grow relationships with clients. Partners bring opportunities to NATiVE, the most common channel through which they get business. The sales team payment plan is salary plus commission, which incentivizes relationships and brings more opportunities to the team. They work with firms, custom builders, architects, general contractors, energy consultants, and property managers. Currently, the company is shifting to working with more commercial companies rather than commercial deals. Their commitment is to customer experience and sustainability.

## **The Green Team**

As mentioned in the introduction, we will be building out a new Salesforce branch for Native Solar in the form of Account Managers. But how? The first important aspect is to ask who we are hiring. We can adopt the model that many modern solar and pest control companies adopt but slightly modified to accomplish our goals. The most defining aspect of these companies is the kind of people they hire, usually young men involved in athletic activities or religious organizations. As an example, we can look at the pest control company Hawx. Lower-level managers mostly do their recruiting for sales roles through social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. They avoid LinkedIn and tend to keep things more informal. After two short rounds of interviews, prospects are on for 10 weeks of selling. Hawx had the same problem as Native: the residential market for pest control is also ultra-saturated. By differentiating themselves and returning door-to-door, they could target wealthy areas and use word of mouth to effectively promote their business. After the neighborhood is sold, technicians fulfill the pest control demands. Native is in a much different industry, and beyond that, has fully transitioned towards commercialism. We wouldn't be hiring for the short term like these companies, and we definitely wouldn't do all of our recruiting through lower-level

managers because there are none. However, we can still learn from the attributes that these businesses pursue.

As mentioned before, these companies shoot for an athletic or religious leadership background primarily because of the social attributes that come with it. It's no secret that social skills make a great person. Lloyd mentioned, "You can teach a salesman solar, but it's much harder to teach a solar-man sales." With this in mind, we think going for applicants with less sales experience and excellent social skills would be optimal. In addition, we believe that college degrees should be of low priority. Salespeople with college degrees will expect higher pay and more ability to climb, which is very difficult with a company of this scale. Our optimal employee would have excellent social skills, a bit of sales experience, and enthusiasm for an entry-level position. If we can find that, we can build our Native Green Team.

## **Strategy**

The sales strategy for solar account managers at Native must center around relationship-driven, consistent selling with a deep technical understanding of solar project development. Unlike traditional sales reps focusing on transactional volume, account managers will adopt a long-game approach, building trust with key commercial clients over time. After generating various leads with Native, the account manager's strategy will start with teaching clients about different options, tax incentives, and structures. From there, they will focus on identifying and nurturing long-term opportunities, maintaining frequent touchpoints even if a project takes 12 to 18 months to close.

Account managers will be expected to work cross-functionally with engineering, sales, and project management teams, ensuring that proposals are technically sound and tailored to each client's operational needs and sustainability goals. They will leverage tools to map organizational decision-making hierarchies, systematically moving prospects from awareness to action through customized proposals, site evaluations, and presentations. Critically, their role won't end once a contract is signed; strong post-sale support and relationship maintenance will be key to their sales strategy, driving referrals, repeat projects (like solar expansions or battery storage add-ons), and long-term loyalty. Derek told us that the most profitable projects were large-scale repair and replacement jobs, so these relationships are crucial. Success will be measured not just by new megawatts sold but by the depth of customer relationships, lifetime value of accounts, and client satisfaction ratings. Ultimately, our Green Team's sales strategy will reflect a professional, consultative, and technical selling process. They won't just sell a product but sell certainty and stability to commercial customers making significant, long-term infrastructure investments.

## Compensation

Now that we know the strategic framework for our Green Team, how will they be compensated? Let's set compensation to be similar to other account management roles in the solar industry. Zippa estimates an entry-level solar account manager's salary to be \$49,000. The average tends to be 70 to 80 thousand with experience leveraged in. For a 50-week work year, someone who makes \$50,000 per year would make \$25 an hour. Hourly pay for this role should be \$22 an hour. Not only would this make Native stand out from the starting sales jobs that pay around \$20 hourly, but it would also provide a comfortable base for many employees without a college education. This rate could also fluctuate based on demand or specific aspects of applicants.

We could use competitive commission rates to accelerate growth to compensate for this slightly lower-than-average hourly rate. Giving account managers 0.5% of total sales for their accounts would be a great start, and this rate could ramp up to 2% on accounts originated by that salesperson. Typical residential salespeople make around 3 to 10 percent of their sales, so .5 to 2 percent makes sense for much larger commercial projects. Regarding sales quotas, we do not believe quota implementation would be a great idea, primarily because of the market uncertainty and the "volatility" from current sustainability initiatives and tariff effects. Derek described the transition from working for a homeowner to being a sub-sub-contractor of a significant asset management corporation. This transition meant that volatility would carry from layer to layer within a business—simply, minor grievances compound. With a long chain of command, quotas are hard to set, especially with the volatility between each level. As for long-term growth, a good account manager could easily join Native's current primary sales team and make more, especially as the company keeps growing. As for compensation, we think this plan would effectively motivate and bring in talented salespeople.

## Hiring

For the hiring process, we have to start with a posting. Regarding the platform, we believe Indeed, LinkedIn, and the Native Solar website will be the best options. In the posting, we will emphasize several attributes. A college degree is not required, but a high school diploma or GED will. Sure, there may be some wiggle room, but being unable to finish primary education is a major red flag when entering a field as advanced as renewable energy. Sales experience will not be required but will help applicants reach priority status. Applicants must also have a valid driver's license and reliable transportation. Solar industry experience and door-to-door selling will also be noted and hold massive value in the application process. Finally, the posting will highlight soft skills

like customer service and communication. *Figure 4* represents a framework for a possible job posting.

Applicants whose resumes meet the requirements will then be routed to a first-round group interview. In this interview, a sales team member will provide a brief overview of the job and attributes of an optimal candidate and then direct applicants to a primary questionnaire. This questionnaire will have fields to collect personal information, followed by three short-answer questions for each applicant to fill out. The first question will be, "Describe when you had to convince someone to change something. What happened?" This question provides a groundwork for learning about an applicant's ability to influence and solve problems or tension between customers or coworkers. Next, the question will be, "Talk about a time when you were pushed beyond your limit. How did you manage?" This question will hopefully reveal how our applicants cope with stress, which is possible in a market like commercial solar. Issues such as dealing with multiple closings simultaneously or simultaneous client issues will put our account managers under great stress. By asking how they cope now, we will be able to find applicants who can roll with the punches and maintain integrity in their selling. Finally, we will ask, "Why solar? Why Native?" This question is vague, but we believe it can reveal much. In terms of solar, applicants cannot just be in solar because it is a growing, future-proof industry. They need to accept the terms of being in renewable energy. Solar is risky; government subsidies and social marketing drive the whole industry. If you want to sell solar, you have to believe in it. Secondly, why Native will help us identify who takes the survey seriously? Using a relatively short brand name, this question should weed out some AI use, but it will also show us who's kissing up and who legitimately sees a future with the company. For example, someone who says Native's location in central Texas is important to them would be preferred over someone who rambles about the quality of Native as a company. The applicants who put in the most effort should be rewarded with the best chances of securing a job, but they must be genuine throughout. A sales team member or AI could review these questionnaires and then funnel them in priority order to the second round of interviews.

As for that second round, it will be a one-on-one Zoom call. In this call, a sales or hr team member will ask applicants questions about their resume and their answers to the questions in the questionnaire. This, again, will limit applicants from faking their way through the process, as they will have to confidently stick up and support their answers. Meetings will be recorded so applicants can be reviewed for confidence and communication afterward. This round is crucial, as the ability of applicants to elaborate and effectively communicate is an absolute necessity in account management. Suppose applicants are nervous at a debilitating level or lack communication. In that case, they will be moved to a much lower priority than those who can hold a conversation and react quickly.

Finally, after this second round is cleared, the applicants will be scheduled for in-person interviews. In these interviews, prospective members of the Green Team will be given information and a hypothetical scenario, where they will then play the role of an account manager responding to a customer, played by a Native hiring specialist or sales team member. The hypothetical meeting will consist of two significant issues. Firstly, the theoretical Native customer will drill the applicant with questions about the information provided and the current sales environment. The information will be concise and very numeric, forcing the applicant to effectively communicate these metrics in the meeting beyond numbers. The applicant will also be pushed to answer questions where the information is not provided. This will test their ability to think on their feet and provide answers to satisfy the customer, like getting back to them with information later.

Secondly, the prospective employees will be tasked with a separate project from the customer. The information sheet will give an overview of the services Native Solar provides but with minimal detail. The hypothetical customer will express dissatisfaction with a current solar system that was installed by a competitor 5+ years ago. As stated earlier, Derek emphasized how repair and renewal services were a primary profit maker for Native, so it will be important for account managers to effectively promote these opportunities. Our customer will bring up the idea of replacing the whole system. The goal is for the prospective Green Team member to lay out possible repair opportunities Native offers. The customer will receive value far above their paid price, which the account manager must fulfill. Of course, this scenario has various solutions, but the open-ended aspect will reveal background solar knowledge carried by applicants and further highlight communication skills. After three rounds of solid interviews with different bits of information collected at each, we believe that Native will be able to weed out great fits for the account manager position.

## **Training**

The whole purpose of the proposed Green Team is to help Derek's primary sales team relieve the weight off their shoulders. The training will emphasize this, as onboarding employees will be paired with a current sales member and gradually brought up to their usual scope of work. However, the employees will never be left entirely on their own, as the sales team will be available to assist with complicated issues or various roadblocks. Given this safety net, members of the Green Team should be ready to take up regular duties within 4-5 weeks of training.

Employees will start as a shadow, following sales members with their everyday activities, doing anything from reading emails to attending meetings. Employees will gradually take over smaller, lower-maintenance existing accounts after gaining the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their goals. These smaller accounts will give the employees a sense of responsibility only a week into the job, accelerating them toward

their objectives. Smaller residential and minor commercial accounts require minimum upkeep and attention, so pawning them off to the new employees will help free up Derek's primary team for more advanced contracts and partnerships. By week 3, trainees will continue to shadow, spending less and less of their day with their appointed trainer. The time spent away will be spent with other sales team members or attending to smaller accounts. In weeks 4 and 5, the trainees will be slowly introduced to accounts of a higher importance level, where they will provide support for after-sales and lead generation. The full training timeline is shown in *Figure 2*.

By the end of the 5 weeks, members of the Green Team will be right where they need to be. They will be responsible for smaller accounts of their own and can close smaller contracts with minimal support from the primary sales team. This was our goal, as this will allow the primary sales team to fully devote themselves to advanced and multi-faceted projects that require more attention. Lower-level account managers on our Green Team will be the boots on the ground for Native's sales operation, managing a bulk of Native's contracts and customer relationships.

## **Conclusion**

Native solar hit the commercial market in full force, and growth does not seem to be slowing down anytime soon. By developing the "Green Team" of lower-level account managers, Native will not only be able to provide excellent customer service before and after all sales, but they will also be able to allocate resources more effectively and devote more attention to primary and key accounts. Derek and his team will be relieved of unnecessary stressors, and they will be able to expand and develop the business more effectively. The support given by the Green Team to each stage of the sales process is outlined in *Figure 3*. The primary sales team can avoid one-time, limited deals and shoot for accounts with growth potential while the Green Team handles lower-priority jobs. Building up this team of account managers will also open up opportunities for further expansion beyond Central Texas. In addition, existing accounts will have more attention and develop a more tight-knit relationship, which could lead to cross-selling beyond solar, especially into Native and partners' other sustainable products. Overall, the "Green Team" wouldn't just relieve Native of unnecessary pressure; it would push them into a position for immense growth and development.

### Resources

Figure 1

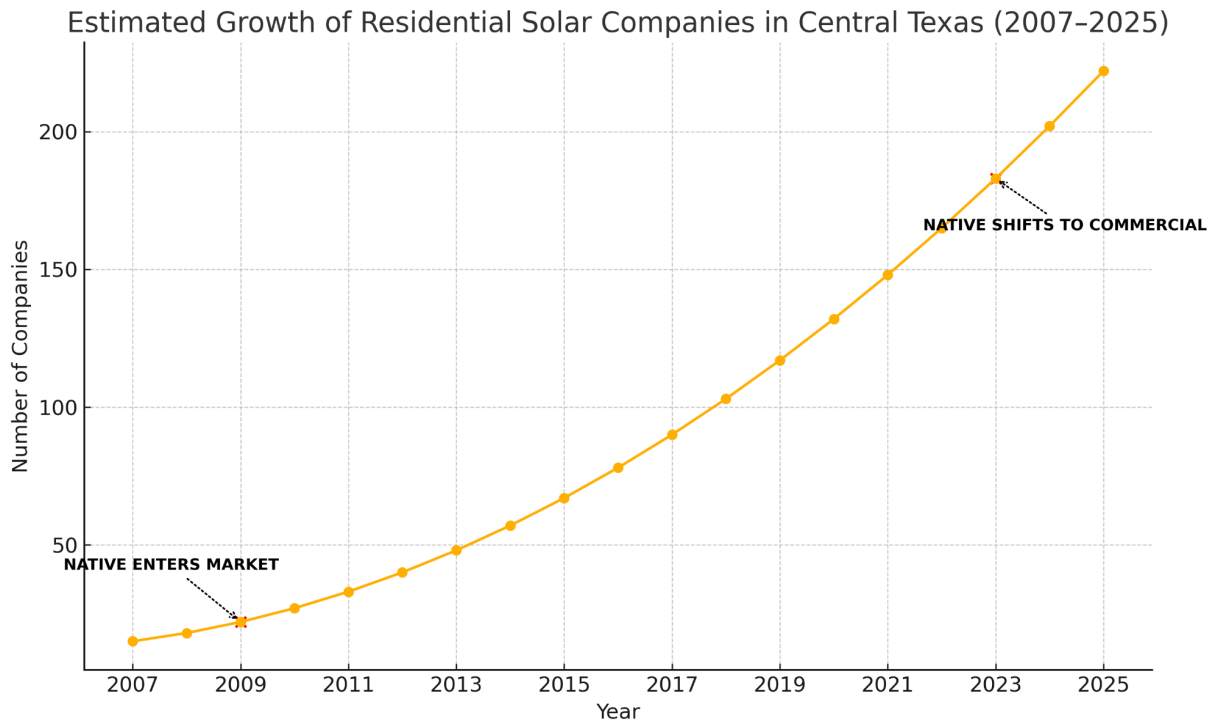
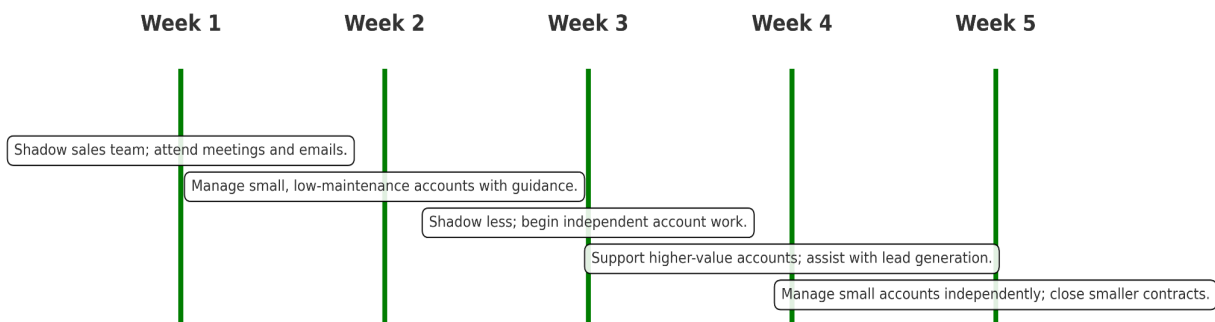
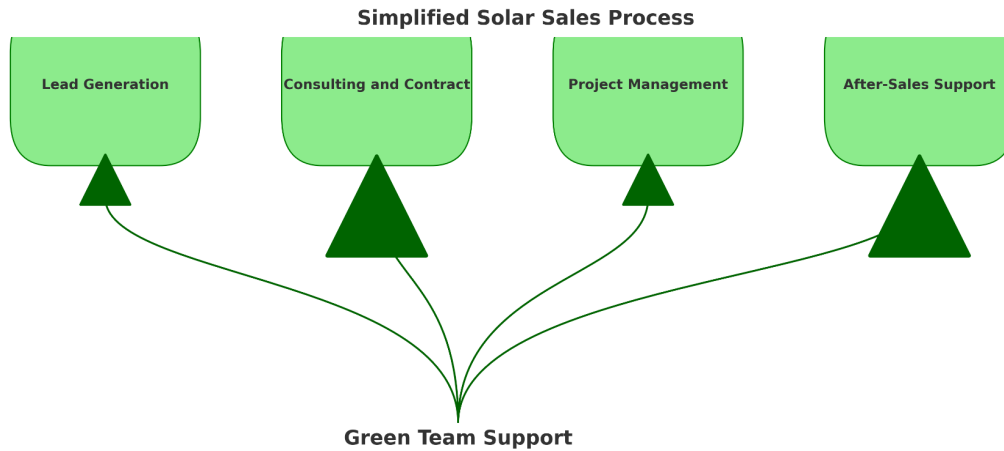


Figure 2

### Green Team Training Timeline



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

Native Solar

Green Team Sales Account Manager — Commercial Solar (Entry-Level Support Role)  
 Austin, TX | Full-Time | \*\*\$22 an hour + Competitive Commissions\*\*

About Us

Native Solar is one of Central Texas' leading commercial solar providers and we are expanding our team with the Green Team initiative, a new program designed to support our senior sales professionals and fast-track career growth in the renewable energy industry.

Job Description

As a Green Team Sales Account Manager, you'll work with our experienced commercial sales team, managing smaller accounts and providing critical after-sales support.

Key Responsibilities

- Manage lower-maintenance residential and small commercial accounts.
- Assist senior sales with lead generation, client follow-up, and documentation.
- Support solar project coordination through direct client communication.
- Complete structured 5-week onboarding and ongoing training.
- Ensure excellent client service and satisfaction.

Requirements

- High School Diploma or GED (\*\*College Degree NOT required\*\*).
- \*\*Valid driver's license and reliable transportation required\*\*.
- Solar industry experience or door-to-door selling highly valued.
- Sales or customer service experience preferred but not required.
- Strong communication skills, professionalism, and client focus.

Compensation

- \*\*Base pay set at 22/hour\* \* (approximately 44,000/year for a 50-week year).
- \*\*Commission starting at 0.5% of managed account sales\*\*.
- \*\*Commission ramps up to 2% for accounts originated by the salesperson\*\*.
- \*\*No strict quotas\*\* due to market volatility and the nature of commercial sustainability projects.
- Clear path to promotion into Native's primary sales team with higher earning potential.

Additional Info

Applicants without a high school diploma or GED will not be considered. Applicants with solar experience or face-to-face selling experience will be prioritized.

Where to Apply

- Indeed
- LinkedIn
- Native Solar Website

Join us in making an impact in the renewable energy sector!

## References

Solar Energy Industries Association. (n.d.). *U.S. solar market insight*. SEIA. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://seia.org/research-resources/us-solar-market-insight/>

Hawx Pest Control. (n.d.). *Careers*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://hawxpestcontrol.com/careers/>

Zippia. (n.d.). *Solar account manager salary at Solar.com*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.zippia.com/solar-com-gr-careers-261418/salary/account-manager/>

ZipRecruiter. (n.d.). *How much commission does a solar sales representative make per sale?* Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/e/How-much-commission-does-a-Solar-Sales-Representative-make-per-sale>

Native Solar. (n.d.). *Native Solar*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://nativesolar.com>

National Renewable Energy Laboratory. (n.d.). *NREL*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.nrel.gov/>

International Energy Agency. (2024). *Renewables 2024*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewables-2024>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024). *Solar photovoltaic installers*. Occupational Outlook Handbook. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/solar-photovoltaic-installers.htm>

First Solar. (n.d.). *Investor overview*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://investor.firstsolar.com/overview/default.aspx>

NextEra Energy. (n.d.). *NextEra Energy*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.nexteraenergy.com/>

Solar Energy Industries Association. (n.d.). *U.S. Solar Market Insight Reports*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.seia.org/research-resources/us-solar-market-insight>

National Renewable Energy Laboratory. (n.d.). *About NREL*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.nrel.gov/about/>

State Energy Conservation Office. (n.d.). *Go Solar Texas*. Retrieved April 26, 2025, from <https://www.gosolartexas.org/>