

Return on Investment for AIA's Climate Action Pledge Programs



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A commitment to climate

Why create pledge programs for architects? What is the benefit or return on investment to participants, communities, and projects? AIA hosts two key Climate Action Pledge Programs, The 2030 Commitment and The Architecture & Design Materials Pledge. Each was conceived as a distinct pledge, with distinct targets and goals, but very much align on the broader trajectory of maximizing the impact of designers within the built environment.

Pledge programs are statements of common shared values and goals. They provide community, process and accountability, statement of priorities, and drive important conversations. For those looking to have a positive impact, pledges provide guidance on the how.

The early 2000's was a turning point of understanding the potential of the built environment and the positive impact designers can have through climate action. AIA responded to this turning point and the 2030 Challenge by creating the AIA 2030 Commitment pledge in 2008. The AIA 2030 Commitment community engages with sustainable design leaders from across the world. Signatory and reporting growth furthers the program's reach and makes evident the vital role of architects and designers to reaching a zero-emissions future and demonstrate a profession of leaders in climate action and climate justice.

Following the notable impact of the 2030 Commitment, the AIA began to formalize the bounds of the Materials Pledge beginning in 2018. While the Pledge continues to evolve, it focuses on holistically improving transparency and design of materials as illustrated by the 5 Materials Pledge Impact categories: Human Health, Climate Health, Ecosystem Health, Social Health & Equity, and the Circular Economy.

These Climate Action Pledges live within the structure of the AIA's Framework for Design Excellence which includes guidance and broad goals across 10 areas, Design for: Integration, Equitable Communities, Ecosystems, Water, Economy, Energy, Well-being, Resources, Change, and Discovery. While a firm can technically be a signatory of only one of the pledges, the goal is to have firms sign up for, and report to both as their goals are inextricable.

Pledge mythbusters

Climate action pledge reporting takes time, but it should not be a burden for your firm. For most projects you should already have access to all the data needed for reporting. Below are a few commonly expressed concerns about the pledges and AIA resources that can help your firm.

Myth 1: It takes too much time.

2030 Commitment: The typical time required to gather and input data is less than 30 minutes if you're starting from scratch, setting up a new account and inputting one project. If you have an existing Design Data Exchange (DDx) account it should take less than that per project. Many of the fields in the DDx are purely optional and all the information needed to input a project is typically found in a drawing or building permit set.

Materials Pledge: The typical time to report only the require Firm-level data should be 15-20 minutes. The firm level data collected is meant to be answerable by any firm of any size and will help the AIA track knowledge and process trends over time. For Project-level reporting only projects that have reached the Construction Documentation (CD) stage are considered eligible. This cuts down on the time required to report projects for firms with large portfolios. And while Product-level reporting can be more laborious, AIA recommends focusing on products that have the highest-impact or are most used in across your firm.

Myth 2: It requires too many resources.

Both Pledges are free to participate in and AIA offers a variety of supportive resources. These include:

- [2030 Commitment DDx help pages](#)
- [Materials Pledge FAQ documents and Reporting Guides](#)
- Pledge Peer-to-Peer Networks:
 - [2030 Commitment](#)
 - [A&D Materials Pledge](#)
- [Climate Action Pledge YouTube channel with recorded webinars](#)
- [CE sessions on AIAU with deep dives into annual reporting data](#)
- CE series on AIAU with foundational educational overviews and specialized deep dives:
 - [Designing for Decarbonization series](#)
 - Material series (update in progress)

Myth 3: Projects must be complete before reporting them.

2030 Commitment: The 2030 Commitment is a framework to set energy targets early in the design and track progress at each phase. AIA asks firms to update their projects every year, or as a project moves to the next phase, in an effort to track improvement over time. It also serves as a demonstration of the importance of energy-modeling to help improve predicted energy usage intensity (pEUI).

Materials Pledge: A project should be reported once it is at the CD stage and does not need to be reported across multiple phases or years.

Myth 4: I will be held to a different standard as a professional if I become a signatory to a pledge and participate in annual reporting.

No, becoming a signatory to either pledge does not change professional standard of care or your obligations to any specific client. The standard of care is defined through the actions of the entire profession (it's what a similarly situated architect would do). A single architect or firm signing a pledge does not carry the force to change the standard of care. The standard you will be held to for any individual project, if other than the professional standard of care, is determined by your contract.

Regardless of signatory status, it is best practice to never promise an energy performance or health performance outcome because such outcomes are beyond the control of the architect. Participation in AIA pledges is an aspirational statement of support that can catalyze positive changes in the way you run projects and even your firm, but becoming a signatory is not a commitment to specific results on any given project, or even all your projects taken together.

Myth 5: I will be asked to share my client's private project data.

You have the option when reporting to identify a project as confidential, and not enter the project name. Data in reports and AIA presentations is always fully anonymized and only presented in aggregate. No architect or client is ever identified in the trends distilled from national data. Occasionally signatory firms may be asked to share a case study by invitation.

Myth 6: I will be penalized for having poor performing projects in my 2030 Commitment portfolio, I should only report high-performing projects.

All 2030 Commitment data is aggregated and anonymous, no one will know which projects are yours and the AIA is interested in all different projects types. AIA and the Pledge Working Groups use the annual By the Numbers reports as a snapshot in time of the ambitions and performance of the profession. The Pledge programs are not meant to be used as a way to scold individuals or firms but an effort for the AIA to track the direction of the profession and push for more ambitious climate goals and higher performing building across a range of metrics.

Myth 7: I'll have to achieve the 2030 Commitment targets.

As noted above the Commitment is a goal-driven endeavor, not a compliance enforcement mechanism. Making progress is more important than meeting the targets.

Myth 8: Codes have comes up to the standards of the 2030 Commitment, therefore it is no longer necessary/helpful to continue reporting.

In some states with more stringent codes (California, Washington, Oregon, Massachusetts) this is close to being true, although no state yet meets the 90% reduction goal through building codes alone. Designing to code is a place to begin, but there is more efficiency to be achieved in striving beyond code. It is very hard to achieve the reduction goals of the Commitment without renewable energy inclusion and full electrification of your project and only by tracking the inclusion of these trends can we monitor increases in progress towards Commitment goals.

Pledge benefits for firms

Firms participating in the AIA 2030 Commitment and the AIA Materials Pledge consistently report benefits that extend beyond environmental goals and into core practice, business operations, and profitability. No matter your firm size, rather than adding new services or significant overhead, these commitments provide structured frameworks that help firms manage risk, improve project predictability, and respond efficiently to evolving client and regulatory expectations. Continued reporting to the Pledge programs over multiple years also leads to an increase in firms' internal knowledge about design trends and pushes teams towards more climate and energy-positive decisions that also lead to improved outcomes for occupants.

Participation in the AIA 2030 Commitment has helped firms integrate energy performance discussions earlier in the design process, reducing late-stage redesign and value engineering. Access to portfolio-level benchmarking allows firms to identify patterns across building types and climates, supporting more accurate scoping, clearer fee conversations, and repeatable design strategies. Many firms cite improved competitiveness in proposals. It is becoming a common selection criteria for public, institutional, and mission-driven clients—where demonstrated performance tracking is increasingly expected, but is also becoming popular for residential design where health impacts and long-term operational and maintenance costs are a concern. For talent recruitment, the programs are expected of medium and larger firms.

The AIA Materials Pledge similarly supports operational clarity by replacing ad-hoc material selection with consistent evaluation criteria. Firms report that structured approaches to material transparency and embodied carbon reduce internal friction, improve coordination between design and specifications teams, and lower the risk associated with product substitutions,

durability issues, and occupant health concerns. Over time, this has led to more efficient material libraries and reduced research duplication. As expertise and consistency continuously grow, firm literacy in the health impacts of material selections becomes a major selling point for clients.

Firms participating in both initiatives describe added value in addressing operational and embodied impacts together, allowing for more balanced decision-making and fewer trade-offs late in the process. Importantly, annual reporting and shared metrics have strengthened internal accountability while providing credible, third-party validation for sustainability claims. Collectively, these practices position firms to adapt to tightening codes, procurement standards, and client expectations—while improving fee discipline and operational efficiency.

Small and mid-sized firms often realize these benefits differently than larger practices by tailoring implementation to their scale, staffing, and market focus. Rather than building dedicated sustainability teams or complex reporting structures, smaller firms tend to integrate the AIA 2030 Commitment and AIA

Materials Pledge into existing workflows—using them to guide early design decisions, standardize specifications, and streamline client communication without adding significant overhead. This flexibility allows them to be nimble, aligning performance goals with the expectations of their specific client base, whether residential, rural, or niche institutional work. In many cases, the commitments help small firms differentiate in competitive local markets, justify design decisions more clearly, and build repeatable, efficient processes that strengthen both project delivery and profitability over time.

Larger firms, by contrast, tend to realize value through scale, standardization, and data collection. With the capacity to support dedicated staff and more formalized processes, they can implement firmwide performance tracking, develop deep internal expertise,

and apply consistent metrics across offices and project types. This enables more predictable project delivery, stronger quality control, and the ability to benchmark performance across a broad portfolio. Participation also strengthens competitiveness for large institutional and public-sector work, where demonstrated performance and material transparency are increasingly expected. Over time, these commitments support data-driven decision-making, reduce risk exposure across a large body of work, and position firms to lead in shaping client expectations, industry standards, and supply chains.

BENEFIT	SMALL FIRM (1-10 employees)	MEDIUM FIRM (10-50 employees)	LARGE FIRM (50+ employees)
Implementation process	Integrates into existing workflows with minimal overhead; no dedicated staff required	Establishes shared standards across teams without heavy bureaucracy	Formalized systems with dedicated staff, tools, and reporting structures
Market differentiation	Stands out in local, residential, and niche markets	Strengthens positioning across mixed client types and regional competition	Reinforces brand leadership in national/institutional markets
Client competitiveness	Helps justify value to cost-sensitive clients	Demonstration of repeatable performance narratives	Pledge participation is often required for large public, corporate, and institutional work
Project predictability	Reduces late-stage redesign that strains small teams	Improves coordination and schedule control across multiple teams	Standardizes delivery expectations across offices and large project portfolios
Fee & scope management	Supports clearer fee justification and scope boundaries	Enables more accurate fee forecasting using repeatable data	Uses portfolio data to refine fee models and manage risk at scale

BENEFIT	SMALL FIRM (1-10 employees)	MEDIUM FIRM (10-50 employees)	LARGE FIRM (50+ employees)
Operational efficiency	Builds repeatable details and specs; reduces one-off problem solving	Reduces duplication through shared templates, tools, and libraries	Drives firmwide efficiency through standardization and automation
Materials & specification	Simplifies decisions with clear criteria; reduces research time	Aligns design and spec teams; improves consistency across projects	Enables advanced material tracking, databases, and supply chain influence
Risk management	Limits exposure to redesign, material issues, and client dissatisfaction	Reduces variability and coordination risk across teams	Mitigates regulatory, legal, and reputation risk across a large portfolio
Data & insights	Uses simple tracking to inform future projects	Builds internal benchmarks across project types	Leverages large datasets for firmwide strategy and innovation
Staff & culture	Aligns small teams around shared goals; attracts talent, supports retention	Attracts and retains mid-career staff seeking clear practices	Supports recruitment, onboarding, and training across large organizations
Scalability	Adopts tools and processes gradually as capacity allows	Balances structure with flexibility; systems evolve with growth	Scales across offices, sectors, and regions with consistent standards
Industry influence	Builds credibility within local networks and communities	Expands influence across regional markets and client sectors	Shapes industry standards, policy conversations, and supply chains

Pledge benefits for clients

The AIA 2030 Commitment and the Architecture & Design Materials Pledge were originally conceived to support architects and the environmental aspirations of their firms and practices. Beyond their benefit to the profession, the pledge programs also offer significant benefits to clients and building owners. Working collaboratively, clients and design professionals can use the AIA pledge programs to inform their design decisions with data that can improve design outcomes in ways that can increase the value of their projects for generations. The understanding of this increased value is critical for design professionals who look to reduce the impact of the built environment on the planet and provide buildings and communities that support health and well-being.

Design informed by data

2030 Commitment: As reporting signatories to the AIA 2030 Commitment, design professionals set baselines, align performance targets, and track their progress towards achieving reductions in energy consumption that lower operational carbon emissions and utility costs. This process creates meaningful data that allows clients to take important design decisions from “intuition” or “gut feelings” to informed decisions based on analysis. Along with an understanding of the building’s performance, resources provided by the AIA 2030 Commitment can help building owners compare the performance of their project against others based on typology, regional location, or climate zone.

Materials Pledge: Clients can benefit from the portfolio-wide view that consistent Materials Pledge reporting provides. By creating a clear data flow from project material schedules and specifications into a consistent database oriented around the Common Materials Framework, the Materials Pledge allows clients to compare the materials optimization achieved

across their own project portfolios and with other best-in-class buildings. Aggregated Materials Pledge reporting results can contribute toward ESG and corporate sustainability reporting.

Improved project outcomes

2030 Commitment: The Commitment adds rigor to the design process that results in improved design outcomes for clients. To reach the targets set forth by the program, a design team must think holistically about the project. A design process that embraces passive design strategies, the optimization of building systems, and the pursuit of opportunities for introducing renewable energy not only lowers operational carbon emissions, but also results in a higher performing building that is more resilient, uses fewer resources, and costs less to operate year over year for the life of the project.

Materials Pledge: Optimizing material selections through the Materials Pledge framework leads to healthier, more durable, and less risk-prone buildings.

Healthier materials result in better indoor air quality and less occupant exposure to toxins commonly found in building products, including carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, and many other chemicals. This, in turn, leads to greater occupant productivity and respiratory health and reduces future liability risks. Given that salaries make up the largest part of most organizations' budgets, the increase in well-being and productivity, and associated decreases in absenteeism, add an enormous value to most clients long after the building is completed.

Increased asset values

2030 Commitment: Design solutions that are informed by data and use high performance design strategies result in projects that have an increased value. Clients can expect several benefits from their buildings which include alignment with Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) goals and greater ease in meeting requirements for various building certification programs. Depending on the region or market, high performance buildings can also result in increased sales value, increased rental rates and lower insurance premiums.

Materials Pledge: Buildings that are documented to be free of toxic chemicals and irritants, in which high-touch surfaces have been vetted through a framework like the Materials Pledge, are inherently more marketable and command a premium, and it is one that occupants can literally smell the moment they walk into a newly built space that is free from the odor off-gassing chemicals. Moreover, these buildings protect owners from potential future litigation over the health and social harm caused by the manufacturing of and exposure to problematic materials.

By signing on to one or both of AIA's Climate Action Pledge Programs, firms are signaling their conviction that design can and should promote a more sustainable built environment. To achieve this, signatories need their clients to join them on this journey. By understanding how data-informed, optimized buildings improve design outcomes and increase the value to their owners and occupants, we can begin to make the case for buildings that do more with less, and create healthier environments to live and work within.

Learn more about commonly cited benefits



Healthier materials and occupants >



Reduced energy costs >



Increased asset values >



More resilient assets >



Better ability to attract and retain talent >

For more information see [AIA's ROI of High-Performance Design website >](#)

FIRM & PROJECT CASE STORIES

Architects FORA



Firm background

architectsfora.com

Year founded: 1981

Firm size: midsize (10-19 employees)

Location(s): 100% virtual

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Architects FORA had been designing and building high-performing buildings for years prior to signing the pledge, under the previous ownership and brand OJK Architecture + Planning. When we underwent a rebrand in 2020, we wanted to make these features even more visible and transition from a project-by-project approach to a firm-wide strategy. We hired a sustainability specialist lead development of the first Sustainability Action Plan (SAP), which we co-created through multiple collaborative workshops.

Project staff were initially concerned with potential increased cost to projects and available bandwidth of our small team to achieve these goals. Based on this, we planned a series of firmwide training sessions to establish a foundational vocabulary and understanding of key concepts, connect staff to the most helpful resources for cost-effective strategies, and introduce simple workflows that reduced project staff time.

Value to firm

Our mission is to create vibrant, resilient, and equitable housing at all scales. We believe in the power of design to create a future that is beautiful, secure, and joyful. This vision includes reducing our impact on the environment

through energy, carbon, and water efficient design, harmonizing with nature, promoting healthy buildings, and co-creating equitable, future-proof communities.

Becoming a signatory, writing an SAP, and reporting has given us the opportunity to formalize our goals both internally and externally, and get specific about the steps we need to take to achieve them. As a result, we have introduced more regular sustainability training, goal tracking, and progress reports to reinforce key goals and actions and maintain momentum.

Value to clients

We note the pledge on our website, proposals, client pitch decks, project programming and goal setting workshops, blog/social media posts, and external speaking engagements. Most of our clients also have high performance goals and choose our team because we are knowledgeable and serve their projects well.

2030 Commitment details

We were already energy modeling all our projects with a consultant but being a 2030 signatory has helped us do more modeling earlier in the design process. Additionally, we have improved our team's understanding of the energy model inputs/outputs and their ability to have productive conversations with our energy modelers.

Materials Pledge details

Our materials training has empowered our team to advocate for healthier materials on projects and resulted in more clients saying "yes" when they understand the why.

Pledge Adoption



recent

COTE® Top Ten Awards 2009

Firm Impact

- Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- Led to software investment
- Increased staff software training
- ✓ Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Arkin Tilt Architects

ARKIN · TILT
ARCHITECTS



Firm background

www.arkintilt.com

Year founded: 1997

Firm size: small (5-9 employees)

Location(s): 1 office in Berkeley, California

Reasons for becoming a signatory

We'd already been aware of and pursuing the 2030 Challenge from Architecture 2030 since its inception in 2006, so upon learning of the AIA's embracing it as the 2030 Commitment, we didn't hesitate to sign up. Similarly the Materials Pledge aligns with our firm's foundation and culture, at every level.

Value to firm

We're rooted in natural building technologies, earth and straw bale construction in particular. These ultra-low carbon and carbon-storing materials are an easy gateway to meeting both the 2030 Commitment and Materials Pledge goals, as these and other natural materials can be an integral part of healthy, high-performing passive solar design strategies.

Introducing the goals of AIA's pledge programs is part of our standard introductory presentation to potential clients or at interviews, and it's on our website as well. We can't say we've used it as a recruiting tool, but once discussed has always furthered their interest. Interns are particularly enthusiastic about the opportunities to interface with natural materials and better understand embodied carbon.

Value to clients

We've found a target of zero net carbon emissions for both operational energy and those embodied in materials is something clients agree with and embrace, within the abilities of their program and budget. We've shared the results of the BEAM Estimator tool as part of a 'carbon budget' which can be assessed in the same way clients consider the 'dollar budget' and make choices and decisions with the benefit of this information. Fair to note, our clients come predisposed to share these goals.

2030 Commitment details

We are predisposed to do energy modeling to verify and improve passive performance, so we might have been doing it anyways, but knowing its improving our pEUI does drive it.

Materials Pledge details

For our firm the added awareness of social equity (labor practices), human health (toxicity) and circular economy (reuse) have expanded how we look at materials from beyond only the carbon impacts, and this confirmed most plant-based resources are strong across all five material priorities.

Pledge Adoption



midway

COTE® Top Ten Awards

1999
2003
2005

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- ✓ Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Project story: Sierra Valley Preserve Nature Center & Public Access

ARKIN • TILT
ARCHITECTS



With clients wanting to model energy and resource efficiency as well as low embodied carbon, some materials were easy to include: strawbale and cellulose wall insulation, locally harvested and milled cedar, salvaged well drill pipe and fence posts, and native willow woven into shade panels are a few examples. In addition, local tribes have constructed examples of their dwellings at the nature center.

We were already familiar with and known for utilizing bio-based and salvaged resources, but further scrutiny of the sourcing of these as well as more traditional materials influenced some of these choices. **A specific example is the preference to use local material resources to limit transportation impacts as well as supporting the local economy, and straw bales donated by one of the project partners, from a preserve they own and manage where rice is being grown.**

We did inquire after a few months of operations and they discovered the photovoltaic system was not sending power back to the grid when producing excess; this has been corrected. **The passive solar performance is superb during winter and spring months, and some adjustments are being made (added shading and radiant floor cooling) to improve performance summer into fall.** With climate change in effect, the summer of 2025 was significantly warmer than historic weather records and locals can recall.

Top image: Community “bale raising” and plaster work party.

Bottom image: A metal-faced trombe wall provides passive heat to the maintenance space in the winter, and connects to the wetland via cut-outs of migrating ibises. The patio is shaded with seasonal removable woven-willow shade panels fabricated by workshop volunteers.



Met 2030 target

(at time of completion)



Renewable Energy



Material Reuse



Bio-materials



Ellenzweig Architects



Firm background

ellenzweig.com

Year founded: 1965

Firm size: midsize (20–49 employees)

Location(s): 1 office in Boston, Massachusetts

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Senior leadership conversations around the two commitments was in some ways the same and in other ways different for the two Pledges:

Ethical responses were the same, we always advocate for addressing environmental and human health in our project work and encourage our clients to do the same.

Business reactions were similar. How does a modest-sized firm like Ellenzweig subsidize the extra effort entailed by the AIA pledges when our clients do not provide additional compensation for these efforts?

Marketing responses to the Pledges were varied, many of our campus clients had signed the ACUPCC and therefore signing onto the 2030 Commitment was seen as a marketing imperative to remain competitive. The Materials Pledge has not generated the same level of marketing pressures, its goals are embedded in our daily practice and we continue to test tools that support progressive materials-use across all projects.

Value to firm

Our firm values are Design for Discovery, Stewardship of the Planet, and Building Community. Within our Stewardship of the Planet value, we describe goals for energy efficiency, carbon emissions reduction, and resilience. We talk about our focus on sustainable design and our 2030 Commitment when recruiting and this is always appreciated. We highlight our 2030 Commitment in all marketing materials and proposals.

We emphasize the overall AIA pledges' missions through all-office meetings and in our AIA continuing education and have found project pEUI updates to be helpful opportunities for improvement.

In recent years, we have shared our statistics more widely because we see benefits from having well-informed clients, consultants, and staff, to support our collaborative design efforts and technological progress.

Value to clients

Our clients, and potential clients, appreciate, and in some cases expect, that we are signatories.

2030 Commitment details

We were already including energy modeling for most of our projects. Participating in the 2030 Commitment continues to increase our understanding of ways to reduce energy consumption, with the side benefits of simplifying project certifications and award submissions.

Pledge Adoption



very early
(2030 only)

Sustainability Awards

2025 AIA Mississippi COTE® Award

2023 I2SL Excellence in Decarbonization

Firm Impact

- Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

HMC Architects



Firm background

hmcarchitects.com

Year founded: 1940

Firm size: large (100–500 employees)

Location(s): 7 offices in California and Pacific Northwest

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Integrated sustainable design is a priority at HMC, making participation in both commitments a natural step. While early reporting presented challenges, the firm has since embedded the 2030 Commitment and Materials Pledge into its workflow with clear processes in place.

Our Design for Good ethos inherently supports these efforts. Following updates to the Sustainability Action Plan in 2025, both commitments are fully integrated. Ongoing internal education and firmwide reporting ensure continuous improvement and accountability.

The focus remains on refining workflows to better align performance, material health, and measurable outcomes.

Value to firm

Potential hires are often drawn to HMC's commitment to sustainability. The firm's Sustainability Action Plan paired with active participation in the 2030 Commitment and Materials Pledge signals a culture of accountability and impact, which resonates strongly with emerging talent.

Value to clients

In honor of our Design for Good ethos and the commitments we have signed, HMC regularly engages clients in discussions about energy savings, decarbonization, and material health. We are always looking to push the limits past what they have done in the past but not too far beyond their comfort zone. These conversations are motivational, whether they are willing to expand their standards now, or it opens the door to new possibilities in the future—they are a catalyst for change.

2030 Commitment details

HMC has significantly expanded the use of energy modeling across its portfolio since reporting started. Today, nearly 80 percent of projects are modeled. The firm is working in collaboration with engineering partners to make energy modeling, with iterations throughout design, a standard requirement within the RFP process.

Materials Pledge details

The Materials Pledge has enabled HMC to increase transparency in material selection. Clients are often unaware of certain material attributes, particularly when working with legacy standards.

For example, if a specified ceiling tile lacks CDPH emissions testing, the team can explain potential concerns, such as formaldehyde content, and recommend alternatives that better support indoor air quality and human health, typically at a comparable cost and performance level.

Clients consistently value this level of rigor and insight.

Pledge Adoption



very early

Awards for Floyds Farms

2025 AIA Central Valley

2025 SARA National & California

2021 San Diego Green Building Council

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Project story: Food Literacy Center at Floyd Farms

DESIGN
FOR
GOOD
HMC
Architects

A net-zero learning environment where energy performance and material restraint work together to support health, education, and long-term resilience while addressing broader community challenges around nutrition and food access.

This all-electric, net-zero-energy project prioritizes passive design strategies, supported by efficient active systems, with the remaining energy offset by an on-site photovoltaic system. The material palette is intentionally simple, with a hybrid wood-and-steel structure often left exposed to reduce the need for additional finishes.

As a new Materials Pledge signatory during design, the team prioritized reducing material use, evaluating embodied carbon, and reviewing product transparency through eco labels and certifications. Material data from the project has since been shared in award submissions; juries have praised the depth and clarity of the analysis.

Post-occupancy data from the first two years shows the building is producing more energy than it consumes. Variations from initial projections are largely tied to assumptions about the use of the demonstration kitchen. As programming expands, the facility is expected to utilize more of the energy generated onsite. Notably, the project was able to incorporate electric pizza ovens after construction without compromising its net-zero energy performance.

Designed during the early stages of the Materials Pledge, before formalized criteria and reporting systems were in place, the project nonetheless established a disciplined approach to material selection. The team closely evaluated where materials could be reduced and prioritized products with verified human and environmental health attributes, setting a foundation for more rigorous standards in future work.



Met 2030 target
(at time of completion)



Renewable Energy



Net-Zero Energy



Material Selection

Interior materials and glazing were evaluated using the Materials Pledge. **95% met at least one pledge Impact Category**, with 50% meeting three or more.

HOK



Firm background

hok.com

Year founded: 1955

Firm size: very large (500+ employees)

Location(s): 27 offices around the world

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Desire to demonstrate industry leadership and living up to our values of sustainability in high performance design were the primary drivers for the initial commitment. But firmwide leadership embraced the idea of healthy competition between firms and the AIA average, as well as the concept that you cannot improve what isn't measured.

There was confidence that data from tracking could only make our projects better and our designers stronger. And it has. The effort was embraced as an opportunity to make better buildings and to better serve our clients, and this continues to be a driver.

Value to firm

For AIA's 2030 Commitment, HOK has amassed invaluable data and knowledge that we are able to leverage to disseminate best practices across the firm, year over year. Metrics are also employed to identify studios or market sectors that need more resources or training to keep up with the escalating challenge. We are also able to use the program to challenge ourselves, to recruit new talent, and to explain our methodology and rigor around performance to our clients. The 2030 Commitment has become the pattern for all of our disciplines' decarbonization work, including SE 2050, MEP 2040 and ASLA 2040.

The Materials Pledge and 2030 Commitment are key metrics in the HOK Sustainability Action Plan. There is mandatory reporting and training for all staff and all projects. AIA 2030 metrics are one of the considerations in annual performance evaluations for our senior leaders.

Our Sustainable Materials Tracking program pre-dates the Materials Pledge, and it is because we built the pattern around the 2030 Commitment that we were able to build our interior materials program and so easily roll into Materials Pledge reporting. As a newer program, interior staff conduct peer to peer regular trainings. Some architectural staff join for personal awareness and growth. The initiative has been embraced as part of our base interior services.

Value to clients

Clients tend to be less invested in program targets unless there is a direct correlation to the performance of their own portfolio or project. However, the tools, training, and growth in staff service and knowledge are a direct benefit to many clients. Clients are generally receptive and supportive of pledge program concepts, particularly materials pledge concepts related to wellness and carbon, load reduction and first cost management, or reduction in operational carbon and operational energy cost.

Improved design staff fluency in these topics and the ability to provide empirical data and proven metrics related to strategies that improve project operation, reduce cost, and improve sustainability are direct benefit to clients and their projects.

Signatory status is included in marketing materials and public articles. This can help build brand identity, differentiate from other market peers, and contribute to thought leadership.

HOK



2030 Commitment details

HOK has annually tracked all projects since becoming a 2030 signatory in 2010. Upon initial reporting, HOK implemented a mandatory energy modeling policy for all projects that has helped generate important performance data and contribute to continual annual improvement in firmwide performance. Annual tracking helps leadership identify critical markets and large projects for targeted support and review to ensure improvement to projects and portfolio.

Materials Pledge details

Being a signatory has helped give structure and support to conversations around material selection best practices, especially around human health. It has create consistency in language and tracking across the industry. Being a signatory helped give credibility to existing internal best practice programs and processes, and create an avenue by which progress can be clearly documented. Internal HOK programs are outpacing the Pledge program at the moment, but it has helped give direction and support to concept of sustainability as thought leadership in material selection.

Pledge Adoption



very early

COTE® Top Ten Awards

2017	2001
2010	2000
2003	1999
2002	1998

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Lake Flato

LAKE FLATO

Firm background

lakeflato.com
Year founded: 1984
Firm size: large (100–499 employees)
Location(s): 3 offices in Texas and Portland

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Lake Flato’s decision to sign onto the AIA 2030 Commitment and Materials Pledge aligned with existing firm-wide commitments to environmental stewardship. Early conversations focused less on whether to sign and more on how to implement the commitments in a way that was consistent, measurable, and integrated into project workflows. The primary concern from leadership and staff was ensuring that the additional tracking and analysis would not overburden project teams. They addressed this by developing internal tools, setting clear benchmarks, and incorporating training to support teams.

Value to firm

The commitments reinforce long-standing firm values around climate-responsive design and resource stewardship. The firm incorporates performance metrics such as pEUI and embodied carbon into internal training, project reviews, and firm-wide discussions. Both project-level data and aggregated firm metrics are used to reinforce accountability and track progress over time.

Value to clients

The firm does include being a pledge signatory in our proposals and marketing materials. Clients are highly receptive. In many cases, they seek out Lake Flato specifically for our leadership in sustainability, so the Pledge framework reinforces expectations that are already aligned and provides a shared language for discussing performance and long-term value.

2030 Commitment details

Lake Flato’s status as a signatory is a meaningful recruiting tool and is discussed in interviews and internships. It signals that sustainability is integral to our practice and resonates strongly with emerging professionals. Being a 2030 signatory has also helped increase energy-modeling uptake across the firm.

Materials Pledge details

While material efficiency has long been a part of Lake Flato’s approach to design, the Materials Pledge has not fundamentally changed that trajectory. Instead, it is helping them build a more rigorous and consistent framework for evaluating material choices across projects. They see the program as a tool to strengthen how we measure, track, and compare outcomes, with the goal of ensuring that our material decisions are not only intuitive but also quantifiable and aligned with broader industry standards.

Pledge Adoption	COTE® Top Ten Awards			Firm Impact
 very early	2026	2018	2011	✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
	2024	2016	2009	✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
	2023	2014	2007	✓ Led to software investment
	2022	2013	2006	✓ Increased staff software training
	2020	2012		✓ Increased external consultant services
				✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches
				✓ Other: Increased data-driven design decision-making

Project story: Lake Flato San Antonio office

2030 Commitment: Lake Flato committed to using our office as a test case for achieving net-zero energy and are pursuing Living Future Zero Carbon certification, reinforcing our focus on both operational and embodied carbon reduction. This led them to prioritize high-performance energy strategies and invest in off-site PV to offset operational energy use. For embodied carbon, they emphasized material reuse and upcycling of salvaged elements, minimized unnecessary finishes, and selected low-carbon materials wherever possible.

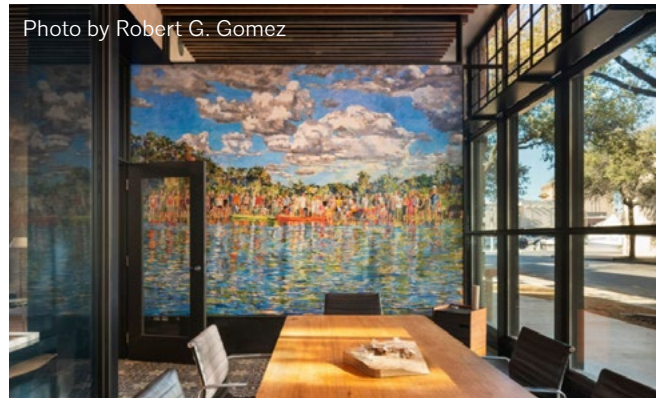
Being a signatory prompted important internal conversations about our responsibility to lead within the industry and to establish clear net-zero carbon goals for projects and the practice.

Participation in AIA's pledge programs has pushed the firm to more consistently track, measure, and communicate their design strategies and outcomes. As a result, they are often already doing the work needed for awards, making it easier to clearly demonstrate performance, health, and sustainability impacts.

Material Pledge: The Materials Pledge was not in place during the design of this project. However, during design there was a large focus on a new materials library and material storage throughout the office with the idea in mind that they wanted to have a central sustainable/health focused material system. The firm is now actively working to align our materials library with the Common Materials Framework and integrate those principles into future work.

While the Materials Pledge did not directly influence this project, they prioritized health-focused design goals and aimed to incorporate materials that support both low embodied carbon and healthy interior environments, using the office as a demonstration of these values.

LAKE FLATO



Renewable Energy



Material Reuse



Biomaterials



Material Selection

The firm's materials library is evolving to meet the Common Materials Framework, as well as internal materials education.

MSR Design

MSRDesign

Firm background

msrdesign.com
Year founded: 1981
Firm size: medium (10–49 employees)
Location(s): 3 offices in Minnesota, Utah and California

Reasons for becoming a signatory

The firm is proud to be among the earliest signatories of both pledges. We frequently reference the AIA Framework for Design Excellence 10 measures. For the Energy and Resources measures, we reference the pledges specifically.

Value to firm

Sustainability is integral to our vision and mission, and signing onto these pledges demonstrates that commitment. Our integrated approach to sustainability and demonstrated performance attract design staff. Being a signatory helps in the promotion of the firm as an industry leader in sustainable design. The pledges’ reporting requirements guide us to greater technical depth and breadth, which enables us to design buildings with enhanced energy performance and material sustainability.

Value to clients

We communicate signatory status in various ways, from marketing materials and interviews to client-facing presentations and other materials. Primarily the pledges serve as organizing frameworks for knowledge building, internal education, and conversations with client groups. The pledges help our teams consider a broader set of impacts and opportunities.

2030 Commitment details

Being a 2030 Commitment signatory has helped increase practices such as energy modeling across the firm, as well as the pursuit of all-electric buildings. It has helped us in the process of pursuing certifications, partly as a result of attracting staff members who are interested in high performance and sustainability and in achieving high levels of certification.

Materials Pledge details

Internal and client education about the five impact categories has helped improve our materials selections related to health and carbon performance. Our projects benefit from dedicated research efforts related to circularity and social and ecosystem health. Healthy materials and energy reduction are core components of sustainable buildings.

Pledge Adoption



very early

COTE® Top Ten Awards

2023
2019

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
 - Led to software investment
 - Increased staff software training
 - Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Olson Kundig

Olson Kundig

Firm background

olsonkundig.com
Year founded: 1966
Firm size: large (100–499 employees)
Location(s): 3 offices in WA, NY and IL

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Firm leadership and project staff embraced the 2030 Commitment enthusiastically. The conversation centered on the value of having a structured framework to monitor progress toward carbon-neutral goals, identify opportunities for improvement, and stay competitive in an industry increasingly shaped by sustainability expectations. Award recognition was also a natural part of the discussion, as pledge signatory status and reported metrics are now embedded in the eligibility and evaluation criteria for leading design awards such as the AIA COTE® Top Ten. Over time, annual reporting has increased project teams’ understanding of the metrics, strengthening meaningful data contributions each year.

Value to firm

Sustainability has always been central to how Olson Kundig approaches design, and the 2030 Commitment’s goals are embedded into projects from the outset. The firm’s Building Performance Team conducts a Climate Analysis at the start of every project, establishing 2030 targets that guide the design team through every phase. Building performance is evaluated through five integrated lenses: energy and carbon, materiality, health & wellness, water, and ecology.

Value to clients

While pledge signatory status is not always highlighted in client pitches or marketing materials, the commitment’s goals are woven into how the firm communicates its values. Client conversations naturally reflect the pledge’s principles, and every project begins with a Climate Analysis establishing 2030 targets.

2030 Commitment details

The 2030 Commitment’s emphasis on carbon tracking and measurable outcomes directly inspired the development of DARA—the Integrated Carbon Dashboard for Residential Architecture—created in partnership with the University of Washington’s Integrated Design Lab and funded through the 2024 AIA Upjohn Research Grant. This open-source tool fills a critical gap in the industry by making embodied and operational carbon analysis accessible to smaller firms working in single-family and low-rise residential projects, a building type that represents over 60% of U.S. building stock yet has historically been underserved by carbon assessment resources.

2030 Commitment signatory status has increased energy modeling from an occasional service to a standard expectation embedded in project contracts. Early-phase energy modeling is now a consistent part of the firm’s design process across all project types, used to optimize operational energy, cost, and carbon footprint while also informing thermal comfort strategies and evaluating energy reduction opportunities.

Pledge Adoption	COTE® Top Ten Awards	Firm Impact
	2025 2018	✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training ✓ Led to software investment Increased staff software training Increased external consultant services ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches
midway (2030 only)		

Project story: Aro Homes

Aro Homes exemplifies the 2030 Commitment's core values through measurable energy performance, carbon tracking, and early-phase engagement. By providing a modular, repeatable residential design that achieves carbon neutrality, Aro Homes provides a template for the housing industry to address climate change. The homes achieve better than net zero energy performance by first reducing their energy consumption through a high-performing building envelope and high-efficiency HVAC and lighting systems. Early energy modeling informed key design decisions such as an L-shaped roof optimized for PV solar generation across any site orientation, which enables the home to produce more energy than it consumes annually. **LCA analysis via Tally led to a critical redesign of the foundation system, where it was found that switching from a mat to a stem foundation, reduces concrete use by 58% and cut the timeline to carbon neutrality from 56 years to just 18.**

Pledge signatory status helped establish a shared framework for carbon performance conversations between Olson Kundig and Aro Homes from the outset. The 2030 Commitment's emphasis on measurable outcomes reinforced the client's commitment to achieving better-than-net-zero energy performance, keeping embodied carbon reduction as a central design priority throughout the process rather than a late-stage consideration.

While pEUI has not formally been compared to post-occupancy EUI across the full portfolio of homes, **early monitoring indicates the home is on track to meet its ambitious predicted energy target, producing 841 kWh more electricity than used since January 1st.**

Olson Kundig



Met 2030 target
(at time of completion)



Renewable Energy



Net-Zero Energy



Material Selection

Material choices were evaluated not just for performance but for their embodied carbon implications, e.g. light-frame wood framing and SIPs.

Payette



Firm background

payette.com

Year founded: 1974

Firm size: large (100–499 employees)

Location(s): 1 office in Boston, Massachusetts

Reasons for becoming a signatory

When PAYETTE signed on to the 2030 Commitment in 2011, there was general alignment with the goal and support from leadership. The primary hesitation centered on ensuring that the firm had the appropriate people and infrastructure in place to meaningfully fulfill the commitment. Leadership recognized the importance of not only signing the pledge but also being able to follow through in a credible and measurable way. As a result, the firm made a strategic decision to strengthen its internal capacity by bringing in building science leadership as part of this effort.

In contrast, the Materials Pledge reflected values that were already embedded within the firm’s culture and practice. The decision to sign was straightforward, with the firm’s president formally endorsing the commitment.

Value to firm

The commitments are not treated as external obligations, but as an extension of the firm’s core values and approach. Energy use intensity and embodied carbon are displayed through project alcove signage to maintain visibility. Progress toward targets is shared during an annual all-staff meetings to ensure transparency and accountability. These topics are also incorporated into

ongoing internal education through Building Science Forum presentations and are introduced early in the design process during project kick-offs. In addition, the material library includes signage and resources that reinforce the firm’s Material Health Policy.

Value to clients

The firm does not heavily emphasize its status as a Pledge signatory in external materials, as most clients are not actively seeking this information. More often, the underlying values of the pledges are integrated into project discussions, particularly during early meetings and sustainability-focused kickoffs, where they help guide decision-making and align expectations.

2030 Commitment details

Being a 2030 signatory has not necessarily increased the overall use of energy modeling within the firm, but it has influenced how it is used. Energy modeling is now more consistently integrated as a design tool, with earlier and more iterative modeling informing key decisions throughout design. The firm compares predicted EUI to post-occupancy EUI when data is available. Teams try to request this information on every project.

Materials Pledge details

PAYETTE was already committed to material health and embodied carbon reduction. The Pledge has helped broaden this approach by encouraging a more holistic consideration of all categories and how they are balanced within a project. It has also elevated areas that previously received less focus.

Pledge Adoption



very early

COTE® Top Ten Awards

2022
2021
2019
2017
2016

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

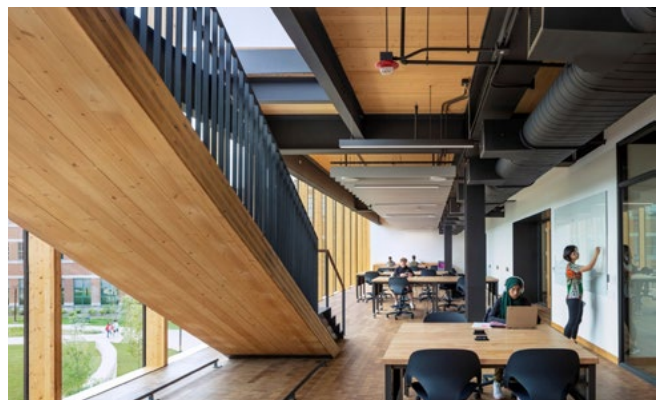
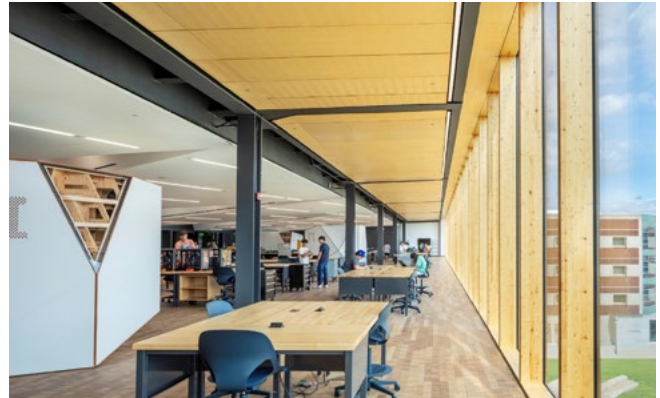
Project story: Engineering Design & Innovation Building at The Penn State

In this project the 2030 Commitment and Materials Pledge directly informed several key design decisions. The project set ambitious goals to reduce operational energy, lower embodied carbon, and align with PAYETTE's Material Health Policy. One of the most prominent features is the use of a timber curtain wall, which serves as both a defining architectural element and a high-performance system. **The timber frame improves thermal performance, reduces embodied carbon, and enhances glare control through deeper mullion profiles allowing blinds to be eliminated.** Timber was also used extensively throughout the building, including cross-laminated timber floors, stair stringers, and end-grain wood flooring.

Being a Pledge signatory helped shape both client and internal team conversations on this project. The 2030 Commitment targets were consistently referenced, and both the client and project team were motivated to meet the 80% reduction goal in place at the time. Through a highly collaborative process and innovative mechanical strategies, the project ultimately achieved an 83% reduction.

Material-related discussions were also integral to the process, though they were often framed through the firm's internal commitments rather than explicitly as the Materials Pledge. Interior material selections were carefully reviewed to align with the firm's Material Health Policy, with non-compliant materials replaced as needed. **Being a signatory supported more rigorous material selection on this project. Interior materials that did not meet the firm's Material Health Policy were replaced, and the team prioritized low embodied carbon options to reduce the project's overall impact.**

PAYETTE



Met 2030 target
(at time of completion)



Energy Use Intensity
28 kBtu/sf =
83% reduction

Embodied Carbon

35% reduction

measured via Whole Building
Lifecycle Assessment
(WBLCA)

Bio-materials



VMDO Architects



Firm background

vmdo.com

Year founded: 1976

Firm size: large (50-99 employees)

Location(s): 2 offices in Charlottesville, VA and Washington DC

Reasons for becoming a signatory

Being an AIA pledge signatory is part of our mission. There were concerns that we were signing up to a commitment/target that we would not meet by 2030. Eventually, everyone came around to the idea that we would not make progress unless we joined the Commitment and started reporting. The Materials Pledge was easier as it aligned with much of what we were already doing around materials and it has a less distinct target.

Value to firm

New hires meet with the Director of Sustainability as part of their onboarding to learn about the pledge programs and how they integrate with our project work. 2030 has helped provide purpose and focus for our staff, and they are proud to hold our signatory status up as evidence of “putting our money where our mouth is” to prospective employees.

Value to clients

We talk about being a pledge signatory in marketing materials and proposals. It helps us tell the story that sustainability isn't a one-off, but baked into our ethos.

2030 Commitment details

We write a public blog with detailed portfolio results each year, and provide a breakdown based on typology/studio to allow both firmwide and project-type comparisons over time.

Across every project in our portfolio, the 2030 Commitment has made it commonplace for us to bring up the pEUI target at the project outset, to incorporate iterative energy modeling from concepts on, to look at the pEUI effects of MEP system selection, to follow up with detailed energy modeling when the design is finalized, and to obtain measured results 18 months after occupancy and do a gap analysis/lessons learned.

Being a 2030 signatory has led to increased energy modeling and post-occupancy surveying across the firm's portfolio.

Materials Pledge details

Being a materials pledge signatory has been helpful for putting the materials discussion into a larger framework, but the reporting requirements have been a little overwhelming.

Pledge Adoption



early

COTE® Top Ten Awards

2024
2017
2010

Firm Impact

- ✓ Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
- ✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
- ✓ Led to software investment
- ✓ Increased staff software training
- ✓ Increased external consultant services
- ✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches



Firm background

zgf.com

Year founded: 1942

Firm size: very large (500+ employees)

Location(s): founded in Oregon, now has 7 offices across North America

Reasons for becoming a signatory

We signed on in the first year. The 2030 Commitment was aligned with some early EUI benchmarking and goal-setting (prompted by the 2030 Challenge), so it was a pretty easy discussion. Of course, we didn't really know what were getting into at the time.

We also signed the Materials Pledge at its launch. Firm sustainability leadership was involved in the crafting of the MP, so we were aware of it in its development and ready for it.

ZGF also advocated at the AIA Large Firm Roundtable (LFRT) to make participation in both programs mandatory for all LFRT firms.

Value to firm

The Pledges are core to our mission. We refer to commitment frequently in firm meetings (sustainability-oriented internal lunch and learns, sometimes in specific office or all-firm general staff meetings). We report on progress annually, include 2030 stats in our internal project design annual and also have a dashboard on intranet with individual project performance.

Being a signatory of both pledges has raised the bar for integration of rigorous sustainability metrics for all projects, and through our progress has also been a great validation for the positive impact of the firm's increasing focus on sustainability, as well as its value for our reputation in the industry.

Value to clients

Yes! We find that clients are not as knowledgeable about pledges, it usually resonates more when we talk about things closer to them (e.g., their GHG neutrality commitment, or Health Sector Climate pledge, e.g.)

2030 Commitment details

Energy modeling has increased over time (peaking at 95% for 2024 projects, declined in 2025 due to more early-in-design projects) for multiple reasons, but 2030 has helped social the process and value.

Materials Pledge details

Being a Materials Pledge signatory has not led to any specific client shifts in material selection. The Materials Pledge has been a "trailing metric" thus far, but that said, we are currently developing ways to integrate the Materials Pledge metrics into designer research, specification development as well as construction submittals.

Pledge Adoption	COTE® Top Ten Awards	Firm Impact
	2024	Led to hiring staff with more sustainability training
very early	2016	✓ Increased staff sustainability subject matter training
	2015	Led to software investment
	2013	Increased staff software training
	2010	Increased external consultant services
		✓ More inclusion of sustainability materials in pitches

Demonstrating the value of high performance design

The AIA Framework for Design Excellence and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) share a common purpose: advancing a built environment that is equitable and resilient. As countries adopt embodied-carbon policies, building performance standards, and decarbonization mandates, pledge signatories are actively future-proofing their practice within an accelerating international climate landscape, and the ROI of doing so extends well beyond firm competitiveness. The pledge programs provide the structure, community, and accountability needed to meet this moment. This makes the pledge programs not just a strategic business investment, but a catalyst for the systems-level change architecture is uniquely positioned to lead.

The international climate landscape makes these programs even more relevant. Internationally countries are adopting embodied-carbon policies, building performance standards, and decarbonization requirements, and pledge signatories are future-proofing their practices. AIA's pledge programs provide the structure, community, and accountability needed to meet this responsibility at scale. The pledge programs are catalysts for systems-level change. As climate pressures intensify and policies evolve, the ROI of these programs will only grow, offering firms a strategic and ethical roadmap to shape built environments that are zero-carbon, equitable, resilient, and regenerative. The AIA pledge programs already demonstrate that architecture is not only taking on the challenge of accelerating climate action but helping to lead it.

Across case studies, firms repeatedly demonstrate that participation in the pledges accelerates internal capacity-building, strengthens design rigor, and improves project outcomes, while also increase competitiveness in a market that increasingly values transparency, resilience, and measurable environmental and social performance.

Firms that demonstrate measurable sustainability performance are better positioned to win mission-aligned clients, retain them for repeat work, and command credibility in markets where high-performance design is increasingly expected. Firms with sustainability-focused clients like Arkin Tilt and Lake Flato have seen the most direct connection between pledge reputation and new work.

One of the most tangible returns has been the normalization of energy modeling as a core practice. The 2030 Commitment has shifted energy analysis from an occasional add-on to a standard expectation embedded in project workflows across firms of every size:

- HOK implemented a mandatory modeling policy firmwide within a few years of signing.
- Olson Kundig now includes energy and carbon performance targets in every project contract.
- VMDO Architects conducts post-occupancy gap analyses as standard practice.

This shift toward earlier, more iterative predictive design performance modeling leads to better-performing buildings after occupation and reassures clients that they can trust the data behind the firms' design decisions. This establishing of trust often leads to repeat business and stronger client relationships.

Award submissions represent the clearest, most universally shared ROI as 2030 Commitment data feeds directly into AIA COTE® Top Ten and other major sustainability program requirements, reducing the burden of documentation and strengthening the quality of submissions across the board.

Olson Kundig has received two COTE Top Ten awards supported by 2030 reporting while Lake Flato, MSR, and Arkin Tilt describe pledge participation as integral to their award pipelines.

The Materials Pledge has expanded how firms think and talk about materials by moving the conversation beyond aesthetics and cost to encompass human health, embodied carbon, social equity, and circularity.

Firms like Payette, HOK, and Architects FORA report that a structured framework for material evaluation has reduced internal friction, empowered project staff to advocate for healthier choices, and created a consistent language for conversations with clients. And Arkin Tilt describes how presenting embodied carbon data as “carbon budget” alongside the monetary budget has led clients to choose higher-performing, carbon-storing materials they might not have otherwise.

Finally, pledge participation has proven to be a reliable and growing asset for talent recruitment and firm culture. Across all firms, signatory status resonates strongly with emerging professionals who want to work where values and practice align.

Staff describe pride in the pledges as tangible evidence that their firm is accountable and does not treat sustainability as a box-ticking exercise. At the end of the day, a firm that tracks its impact is a firm that keeps improving. This continuous improvement is the most important return of all.

Commonly cited benefits



Easier awards submissions



Increased client trust



Enhanced internal education



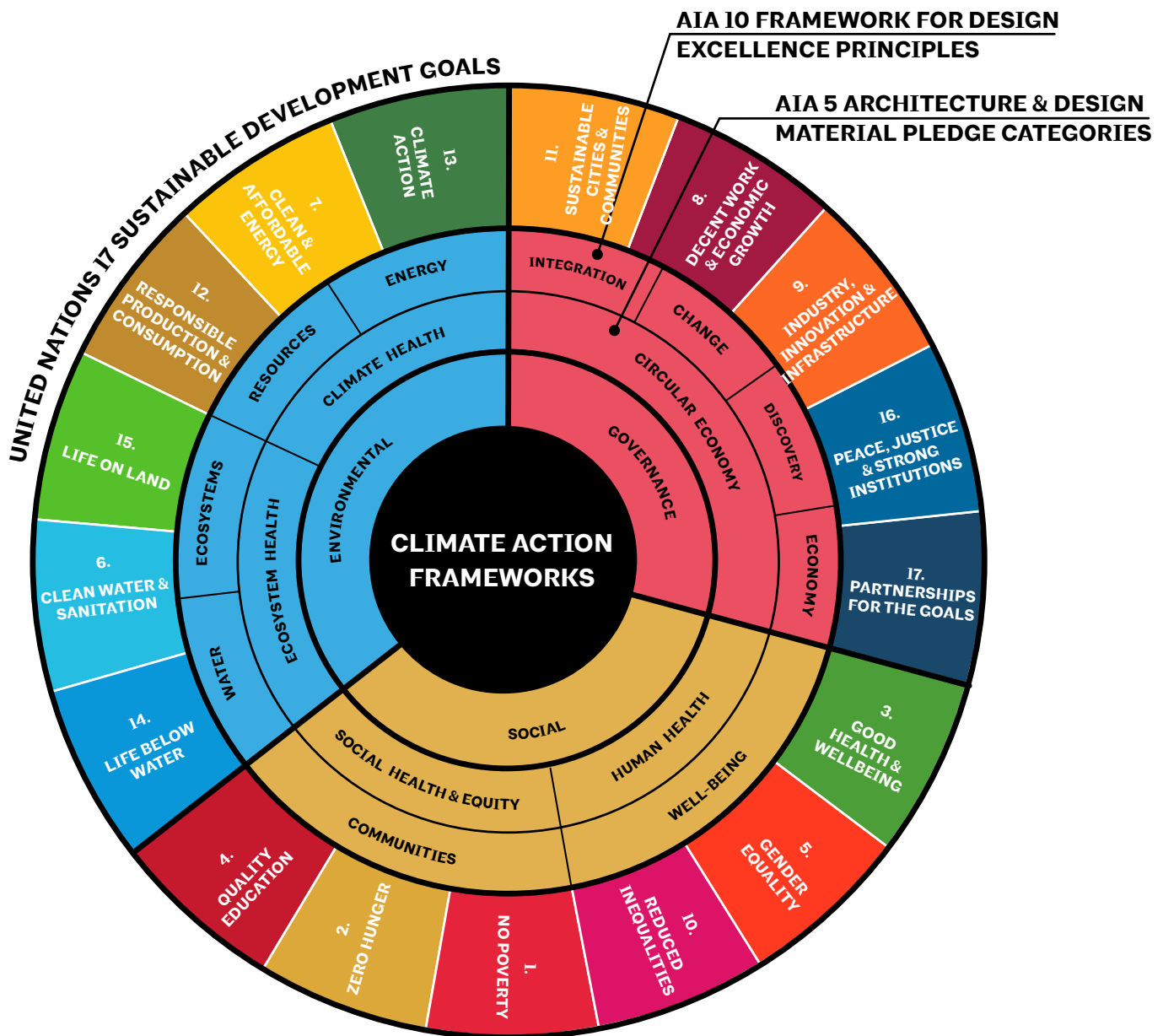
Expanded talent recruitment



Improved data analysis capabilities

The AIA Framework for Design Excellence maps to the UN SDGs, establishing a shared global language for climate action and design excellence. Firms participating in pledge programs are therefore not just improving internal processes, they are advancing measurable progress towards SDG targets such as Climate Action (SDG 13), Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), Clean and Affordable Energy (SDG 7), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), and Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3).

The following graphic illustrates this alignment between the AIA Framework for Design Excellence and the SDGs. This visual mapping reflects the shared global priorities within architecture, and how pledge programs operationalize these priorities through measurable design and performance actions. By situating the 2030 Commitment and MP within this global framework, the graphic underscores how the ROI of these programs extends beyond firm-level benefits to directly support broader planetary goals and societal well-being.



Resources

AIA resources

- [AIA 2030 Commitment peer-to-peer network](#)
- [AIA Architecture & Design Materials Pledge peer-to-peer network](#)
- [AIAU Design for Decarbonization series](#)
- [AIAU Designer's Guide to Holistic Material Selection to Improve Health, Equity and the Environment series](#)
- [Climate Justice in Architecture case studies](#)
- [DDx and Materials Pledge help pages](#)
- [Materials Pledge starter guide](#)
- [Materials Pledge reporting guide](#)
- [Renovate, Retrofit, Reuse guide](#)
- [ROI of High Performance Design talking points](#)
- [Sustainability and Materials Action Plan guides](#)

External resources

- [Acelab](#)
- [BuildingEase](#)
- [Built Environment+ embodied carbon reduction challenge case studies](#)
- [Carbon Leadership Forum embodied carbon reductions built project case studies](#)
- [ecomedes](#)
- [Green Badger](#)
- [International Well Building Institute: Investing in Health Pays Back](#)
- [Material Bank](#)
- [mindfulMaterials](#)
- [Passive House Accelerator](#)
- [SE2050 case studies](#)
- [stok report: The Financial Case for High-Performance Buildings](#)
- [Sustainable Minds](#)

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