

AIA Framework for Design Excellence

In September 2019, the AIA formally adopted the AIA Framework for Design Excellence, formerly known as the COTE Top Ten Measures. Climate action is a critically urgent topic for our society and architects are well positioned for influence and impactful change. The Framework will help us organize our thinking, facilitate conversations with our clients and the communities we serve, and set meaningful goals and targeted outcomes.

The AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE) was founded in 1990 with the belief that architects can lead and facilitate the green building movement through a systemic and holistic approach to design. In 1997, COTE launched the Top Ten Awards to celebrate beautiful projects with exceptional performance. In 2002, the award criteria were refined through the creation of the Top Ten Measures. Over time, these have been updated, most recently in 2016.

M1 Design for Integration

 What is the big idea behind this project and how did the approach towards sustainability inform the design concept? Describe the project, program, and any unique challenges and opportunities. Specifically explain how the design is shaped around the project's goals and performance criteria, providing utility, beauty, and delight. How does the project engage all the senses for all its users, and connect people to place? What makes this building one that people will fight to preserve? Give examples of how individual design strategies provide multiple benefits across the full triple bottom line of social, economic, and environmental value.

M2 Design for Equitable Community

 Sustainability is inextricably tied to the wellness of communities. Describe specifically how community members, inside and outside the building, benefit from the project. How does this project contribute to creating a walkable, human-scaled community inside and outside the property lines? How were community members engaged during the design and development process? How does the project promote social equity at local, regional, and global scales? Because transportation-related emissions negatively affect public health, and because CO₂ emissions associated with how these reach a building are frequently comparable to the CO₂ emissions associated with operating the building.

M3 Design for Ecology

 Sustainable design protects and benefits natural ecosystems and habitat in the presence of human development. Describe the larger or regional ecosystem (climate, soils, plant and animal systems) in which the project is sited. In what ways does the design respond to the ecology of this place? How does the design help users become more aware or connected with this place and their regional ecosystems? How does the design minimize negative impacts on birds or other animals (e.g., design to prevent bird collisions, dark-sky complaint lighting)? How does the project contribute to biodiversity and the preservation or restoration of habitats and ecosystem services?

M4 Design for Water

 Sustainable design conserves and improves the quality of water as a precious resource. Illustrate how various water streams flow through the building and site, including major water conservation and stormwater management strategies. How does the project relate to the regional watershed? Describe strategies to reduce reliance on municipal water sources. Does the project recapture or re-use water?

M5 Design for Economy

 Providing abundance while living within our means is a fundamental challenge of sustainability. How does the project provide “more with less”? Possibilities include “right sizing” the program, cost-effective design decisions, economic performance analysis, economic equity strategies, notable return-on-investment outcomes, contributing to local and disadvantaged economies, etc. Provide examples of how first cost and lifecycle cost information influenced design choices. Identify any additional first-cost investments and how they are anticipated to improve life-cycle costs and longer-term economic performance.

M6 Design for Energy

 The burning of fossil fuels to provide energy for buildings is a major component of global greenhouse gas emissions, driving climate change. Sustainable design conserves energy while improving building performance, function, comfort, and enjoyment. How did analysis of local climate inform the design challenges and opportunities? Describe any energy challenges associated with the building type, intensity of use, or hours of operation, and how the design responds to these challenges. Describe energy-efficient design intent, including passive design strategies and active systems and technologies. How are these strategies evident in the design, not just the systems?

M7 Design for Wellness

 Sustainable design supports comfort, health, and wellness for the people who inhabit or visit buildings. Describe strategies for optimizing daylight, indoor air quality, connections to the outdoors, and thermal, visual, and acoustical comfort for occupants and others inside and outside the building. How does the design promote the health of the occupants? Describe design elements intended to promote activity or exercise, access to healthy food choices, etc. Outline any material health strategies, including any materials selection criteria based on third-party frameworks such as Health Product Declarations (HPDs), Living Building Challenge Red List, EPA chemicals of concern, etc. Include key results on occupant comfort from occupant satisfaction surveys.

M8 Design for Resources

 Sustainable design includes the informed selection of materials and products to reduce product-cycle environmental impacts while enhancing building performance. Describe efforts to optimize the amount of material used on the project. Outline materials selection criteria and considerations, such as enhancing durability and maintenance and reducing the environmental impacts of extraction, manufacturing, and transportation. Identify any special steps taken during design to make disassembly or re-use easier at the building's end of life. What other factors helped drive decision-making around material selection on this project?

M9 Design for Change

 Reuse, adaptability, and resilience are essential to sustainable design, which seeks to maintain and enhance usability, functionality, and value over time. Describe how the project is designed to facilitate adaptation for other uses and/or how an existing building was repurposed. What other uses could this building easily accommodate in 50-100 years? In what ways did the design process take into account climate change over the life of the building? Describe the project's resilience measures: How does the design anticipate restoring or adapting function in the face of stress or shock, such as natural disasters, blackouts, etc.? How does the project address passive survivability (providing habitable conditions in case of loss of utility power)?

M10 Design for Discovery

 Sustainable design strategies and best practices evolve over time through documented performance and shared knowledge of lessons learned. What lessons for better design have been learned through the process of project design, construction, and occupancy, and how have these been incorporated in subsequent projects? Describe ways the lessons have been shared with a larger audience (publications, lectures, etc.) and any ways the project may have influenced industry practices. Describe the processes used to maintain a long-term relationship between the design team and those occupying and operating the building and identify how both the users and designers benefited.