Common Materials Framework

Building Internal Standards with the CMF

Perkins Eastman's Materials Action Plan (MAP)

CASE STUDY

Perkins Eastman
AEC
Website
2025

The Challenge

Perkins Eastman, a global design firm working across multiple practice areas, saw the need to align its teams around a shared, sustainability-centered approach to materials. Without consistent guidance, practice areas risked working in silos—leading to fragmented approaches and limiting the firm's ability to scale impact across its portfolio.

The Approach

To close that gap, the firm's internal sustainability team and materials subcommittee developed the Materials Action Plan (MAP)—an internal guide designed to bring consistency, education, and accountability to materials decisions.

Part checklist, part educational tool, the MAP helps designers evaluate and specify materials with both sustainability and performance in mind.

At its core, the MAP provides:

- A clear baseline for all projects, emphasizing education, awareness, and guided research.
- Better and Best tiers that build toward deeper optimization goals.

This structure allows each practice area to adapt the framework to its unique priorities—whether focused on health, carbon, or performance—while maintaining firm-wide consistency.

CMF Connection

From the start, the MAP was grounded in the Common Materials Framework (CMF), aligning with all five impact areas: Human Health, Environmental Health, Social Health & Equity, Embodied Carbon, and Circularity.

By adopting the CMF, Perkins Eastman established a shared language and baseline for decision-making—effectively "setting the ground" for internal standards.

CMF IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT RESOURCES

- AEC/O CMF Implementation Toolkit
- 2025 Data Ecosystem Report
- Guidelines for Creating Material Decision-Making Criteria Based on the CMF
- Guidelines for Aligning Your Existing Material Decision-Making Criteria With the CMF

The CMF provided the necessary depth and vocabulary to standardize expectations across diverse teams and material types. While its detail can be daunting for non-specialists, that precision was critical to building credible, measurable benchmarks. The MAP, in turn, distills that complexity into actionable guidance for real project workflows.

Lessons in Progress

The process hasn't been without challenges. One recurring issue has been data granularity—the level of detail in the CMF—which can make translation into daily design practice difficult. Most designers aren't material scientists, and navigating highly detailed impact categories requires structured support.

Perkins Eastman tackled this by introducing tiered expectations, simplified visuals ("bingo cards"), and curated Playlists to guide users. The biggest lesson? Progress comes through engagement. Teams gain fluency simply by using the MAP.

Early pilots—spanning education and healthcare projects—are already showing results: more informed materials discussions, clearer specification language, and stronger alignment with firmwide sustainability goals. As one internal champion put it: "Just start using it." The first pass may feel clunky, but consistent engagement builds comfort and confidence.

Expected Outcomes

As the MAP becomes embedded in workflows, Perkins Eastman expects to see:

- Consistent materials standards and education across practice areas.
- Stronger integration of sustainability goals into daily project work.
- A scalable foundation for CMF-aligned decision-making across the firm's global portfolio.

Key Takeaway

Alignment doesn't start with perfection—it starts with structure. The CMF provides the depth; the MAP translates it into action. Together, they create a practical bridge between framework and implementation—helping a large, multidisciplinary firm make healthy, sustainable material choices part of everyday design culture.