Common Materials Framework

Turning Design Intent into Measurable Impact

Through Alignment with the Common Materials Framework

CASE STUDY

Gensler

Gensler
AEC
Website

2025

The Challenge

As one of the world's largest design firms, Gensler knows that every material choice carries weight, not just for the spaces it creates, but for the world those spaces shape.

Yet even for a firm of Gensler's scale, navigating the fragmented maze of product certifications and sustainability data created confusion across design teams and manufacturers alike. Without a clear baseline or shared language, "sustainable materials" meant different things to different people.

To bring clarity and consistency to its practice, Gensler developed the Gensler Product Sustainability Standards™ (GPS)—a firmwide framework defining what sustainable materials mean for Gensler projects, streamlining specifications, and sending a unified signal to manufacturers about what matters most.

The Approach

The GPS Standards began with two overlapping efforts:

- A product design practice initiative to define sustainability expectations for products co-designed with partners.
- An embodied carbon research grant that identified the most impactful material categories across Gensler's portfolio.

Together, these efforts revealed an opportunity, and responsibility, to set clear expectations for product performance and impact.

Version 1.0 focused on high-impact materials most common across projects. Version 2.0 expanded to include product categories that appear almost everywhere, from data centers to hospitality, turning the GPS Standards into a living, evolving resource for teams.

Each category includes two tiers:

- A baseline standard to reduce environmental impact without adding cost or delay.

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

- A market differentiator tier showing what “best-in-class” looks like for that product type.

CMF Connection

From the start, Gensler knew this work couldn’t happen in isolation. Creating another proprietary system would only add noise to an already fragmented conversation.

Instead, the GPS Standards were built in alignment with mindful MATERIALS’ Common Materials Framework (CMF), ensuring Gensler’s structure complemented, rather than competed with, industry-wide efforts.

“We knew the best way to make an impact was to align the industry,” says David Briefel, Sustainability Director, Principal, Gensler. “With the CMF and the movement it’s building, our push for more sustainable materials and reduced project impacts is being amplified, because it’s being heard in unison with asks from across the industry.”

The GPS maps directly to the CMF’s five impact areas—Human Health, Climate Health, Circularity, Ecosystem Health, and Social Health & Equity. While Gensler uses its own naming conventions internally, the CMF alignment is transparent and communicated publicly.

Implementation in Practice

Today, the GPS Standards are embedded across Gensler’s global practice:

- Written into project specifications for all U.S., Canadian, EU, and UK projects.
- Supported by vetted materials libraries, weekly office hours, and one GPS contact in every office.
- Backed by an internal site offering client decks, marketing tools, and training materials to guide design conversations.

To ensure consistency across 50+ offices, Gensler uses a “train-the-trainer” model, empowering local champions to mentor design teams regionally. This approach scales the GPS program without losing its accessibility or intent.

The Impact

Aligning GPS with the CMF has deepened both Gensler’s internal fluency and its external impact.

Manufacturers now receive clear, consistent requests for sustainability data, while Gensler teams feel more confident navigating material transparency, performance metrics, and client conversations.

“We’ve seen a huge increase in fluency from both our teams and our external partners,” says Briefel. “Manufacturers have been incredible collaborators in this effort, and clients are more engaged than ever in understanding how material decisions influence performance and impact.”

This shared fluency is shifting the conversation—transforming sustainable materials from a niche focus into an expectation.

Lessons Learned

The biggest lesson? Clarity drives change.

By aligning the GPS with the CMF and focusing on category-specific guidance, Gensler has turned complexity into direction — and direction into measurable impact.

Their advice for others: “If you’re creating your own framework, focus on product category–specific standards,” says Briefel. “Narrowing the field to what’s relevant to each manufacturer makes your ask more effective and your impact more measurable.”

Looking Ahead

Next, Gensler is turning its attention to data automation and interoperability, ensuring that sustainable material data flows seamlessly across systems, teams, and tools.

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