

# Putting Sustainability into Practice

Sustainability is more than just a buzzword. It is a practical part of modern design and can be leveraged in a number of realistic, impactful ways. However, with an ever-evolving ecosystem of sustainable standards and products – staying on top of best practices can seem daunting to firms of all sizes and scopes.

To help your firm put sustainability into practice, here are five ways to incorporate sustainability into your specifications with actionable steps to evangelize and execute sustainable design practices in future projects.



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## Practice #1: Start small, think big

Developing a sustainability-focused practice can be a time-consuming process. So how do you take on climate change within the profession when barriers like staff capacity, client education, and fast-paced schedules hold you back?

Think about starting small yet thinking big. Identify what sustainability means to your practice and set project goals that meet your firm's sustainability vision. Make sure that all stakeholders are on board with sustainable design choices. As an example, does your firm want to specify a material with a high recycled content percentage compared to one that is not? Do you want to invest in more sustainable products so you can meet the sustainability vision of the firm?

According to [The Architect's Journey to Specification, 2022 AIA Report](#), architects consider sustainability throughout the project. However, sustainability is often top of mind during specification, indicating that architects see sustainability as connected to product selection. Six in ten firms research sustainability at least 50% of the time when selecting products or materials.

While incorporating sustainability may seem ambitious, owners have a growing interest in developing buildings with products to meet their corporate goals while being environmentally friendly. To meet owner's sustainable building requirements, firms need access to up-to-date Building Product Manufacturer (BPM) information that showcases a product's sustainability parameters.. Providing the most up-to-date content, including sustainability information, allows ease of specification, which fosters a more informed product selection and installation process and, in turn, a better-built environment.

Sustainability strategies will be ever-evolving throughout the project due to construction and budget constraints, so it's essential to be adaptable.

Architects should consider specifying high-quality, environmentally friendly building materials that are energy-efficient. Set minimum requirements within your firm – you can streamline your processes for sustainable product selection. Start early, do your product research, and use tools to identify sustainable products.

## Practice #2: Be specific and instructive

A great design should have specifications that serve as an on-site instruction manual for those building the project, clearly stating the design standards you expect. The specifications ensure the end project matches your design vision.

When specification documents skimp on details, it affects the accuracy of the bid and, down the road, will impact the project schedule and budget. For example, guessing a model number will prevent the contractor from buying the correct product and bringing the design vision to life. It also leads to lost time during construction as the contractor scrambles for a replacement.

"That's why coordination—in drawings, specs, and communication—is critical", says Jane Williams, Director of MasterSpec® at Deltek. Work through each section with the design team and ask the questions that identify every detail.

Greater specificity means fewer questions, change orders and RFIs. Getting specific requires coordination and asking questions. Every player on the project, from the architects to the owner, responds differently to drawings versus specs.

"An architect must understand all the unique aspects of construction specifications because it dramatically impacts the project's success".

— GILL LETOURNEAU, AIA CSI, Sr. Director of Product Management AECO, Deltek



### Practice #3: Recognize the possibilities for automation

Developing specifications can be a time-consuming process. Specifications are a large percentage of the contract deliverable - up to 50%. It's an integral part of the design process, but it can be time-consuming and requires all team members to be involved. Navigating through the multiple phases of design and construction requires the team to work efficiently and accurately.

Automation is key to helping meet today's demanding project schedules and achieve high-quality results without burdening the project team with increased RFIs, change orders, and schedule disruptions. Additionally, with the vast amount of building products in the market, it takes time to stay current on the latest product offerings.

That's why it's essential to adopt modern specification software and let it do the work for you. In addition, making product comparisons on the salient characteristics of the product and its sustainability levels is essential.

Specification software provides in-depth product data points around performance, options, and sustainability to foster better-informed product decisions. Architects can explore various options at various costs but still meet the minimum required standards.

"Having a single source to view and specify products means greater efficiency. I can focus more on technical concerns of my spec writing and waste less time searching for product data across multiple internet sources".

— **FERNAND RICARD**, CSI, CDT, LEED AP - Associate  
Principal | Specifier – CallisonRTKL, Inc.

### Practice #4: Go green with construction materials

Materials are engineered to be smarter, stronger, sleeker, and easier on the planet. Architects need to stay up-to-date on these material innovations to stay competitive. Buildings crafted with well-thought-out, intelligent material selections will be better equipped to solve ongoing challenges, reduce the carbon footprint, and positively impact the environment.

There are many considerations when selecting materials in the built environment. For example, materials may be sourced for low environmental impact or renewable resources or be easier to break down at the end of life for a building. Architects can be challenged by knowing what makes a product sustainable, not having enough time to research sustainable alternatives – and the lack of information or inability to locate information on available sustainable products.

With modern specification software, you can effortlessly search, sort, and filter product characteristics and performance properties, making it easy to find the right product to achieve design goals. In addition to the product properties, there is a lot of information about the company itself. For example, suppose you need to become more familiar with a particular manufacturer and learn a little bit more about them. In that case, the product detail pages provide specific information about the product. Modern specification software should give the architect better convenience, speed, and tech-based intelligence for getting the work done.

**51%** of architects are looking for BMPs to review and edit specs rather than advise according to [The Architect's Journey to Specification, 2022 AIA report.](#)

Incorporating the desired material properties into the individual sections that subcontractors see is a great way to ensure involvement with everyone on the project team.



## Practice #5: Enable and empower your team

Architectural and engineering projects are only as successful as the team's ability to work together. In addition, design is an iterative process, so your construction specifications need to adapt as the project proceeds through the design phases.

From the moment you start planning a project, collaboration is essential. Make sure the major players are all in on the decision-making process, including architects, engineers, contractors, subcontractors, facility managers, and owners. When all team members have ownership of the outcome, the resulting synergy can produce high quality building projects more efficiently. In addition, getting everyone together will enable the team to identify critical project details that have the most risk, and you can plan, in advance, how to mitigate these issues to reduce project risks.

Look for modern specification software that removes silos between designers, building product manufacturers, and external project participants, consolidating all relevant information into a single source of truth. Each team has equal access to the information with flexible permissions to invite external users into your project team for even better collaboration. With streamlined project coordination and integrated technology that supports real-time project collaboration, you'll have access to current and past specification data that can provide predictive insights to reduce risk and improve project results.

Providing the most up-to-date content allows ease of specification, which fosters a more informed product selection and installation process and, in turn, a better-built environment.

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## Getting started

More often than not, architects and engineers look to the future and consider more sustainable, eco-friendly, and smarter buildings. There is a lot to consider here. But, while it might seem a bit overwhelming, it doesn't have to be. Fortunately, innovative solutions leverage technology to integrate sustainability more seamlessly in the design process.

## Explore the Possibilities

The AEC industry is reshaping how it builds and manages projects and is implementing new technology to get there. Deltek and AIA have teamed up to deliver [Deltek Specpoint, home of AIA MasterSpec®](#), a comprehensive online building product research and selection tool, combined with a streamlined specification design and publishing tool pulling from decades of experience serving the industry's specialized needs.

[Request a demo](#)

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