

# 2022 SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN

/ AIA 2030 Commitment

**Architects FORA**

March 2022

ARCHITECTS  
**FORA**

The logo for Architects FORA features the word "ARCHITECTS" in a small, uppercase, sans-serif font above the word "FORA" in a large, bold, uppercase, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic element consisting of a blue-outlined square with a white diagonal line running from the top-left corner to the bottom-right corner.

# OUR COMMITMENT

/ **Architects For A** Just World, Strong Community, Collaborative Approach, Restorative Process, Resilient Future, For All.

Architects FORA is a group of intentional designers who constantly pursue low-maintenance, high-performance, living-centered environments. We collaborate with communities to elevate quality of life by co-creating beautiful, healthy, stable homes for all. Our project teams are strengthened by a diverse staff with shared values for sustainable work and a passion for evidence-based design. We are fortunate to partner with consultants and clients who are similarly aligned to produce better buildings. Our portfolio demonstrates this through our many LEED and/or GreenPoint Rated projects. Plus, as a fully remote, paperless, officeless firm, we have an inherent gravitation towards more sustainable and innovative solutions. Joining the AIA 2030 commitment is a step towards our vision for a healthy, restorative, and resilient future.

## / Vision


We believe sustainable design works in harmony with its environment and community to enhance the quality of life for current and future generations. Sustainable design takes into account a triple bottom line that strives to create a positive environmental impact, social equity for all stakeholders, and economic viability. We see a future that is created with communities to foster healthy, place-based architecture. By preserving natural ecosystems, selecting responsible materials, and adopting resilience measures, we can create buildings that better serve their communities. Additionally, through education and advocacy we can share the benefits of this future with all.

## / Strategies for Change

As we work towards our vision, we will continue to lean on our unique firm strategies to foster change. Our open communication and continual adaptation allow us to efficiently and proactively identify strategies that are successful as well as opportunities for improvement. Our commitment to transparency and knowledge sharing ensures that we are all learning together and able to apply lessons learned as soon as possible. By giving every employee the opportunity to pursue an individual specialty, everyone at Architects FORA is involved in this movement and has power to create change. Additionally, partnership and collaboration with our consultants and contractors will continue to be integral to the designing, building, and maintaining truly sustainable architecture. We will continue to iterate on this action plan and our goals, starting with the high priority areas and adjusting over time.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 / DESIGN & APPROACH	4
02 / GOAL SETTING & EVALUATION	8
03 / GOVERNANCE & REPORTING	12
04 / INTERNAL TRAINING & EDUCATION	16
05 / OUTREACH, ADVOCACY, & EXTERNAL EDUCATION	20
06 / OPERATIONS & OUTLOOK	24

An architectural rendering of a modern, multi-story building with a facade of dark panels and large windows. The building is set against a blue-tinted background. In the foreground, a woman in a patterned dress and a young girl are walking on a sidewalk, holding hands. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting on a bench. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter, and a large white diagonal shape is on the right side of the image.

# 01 / DESIGN & APPROACH

# DESIGN & APPROACH

## / Current

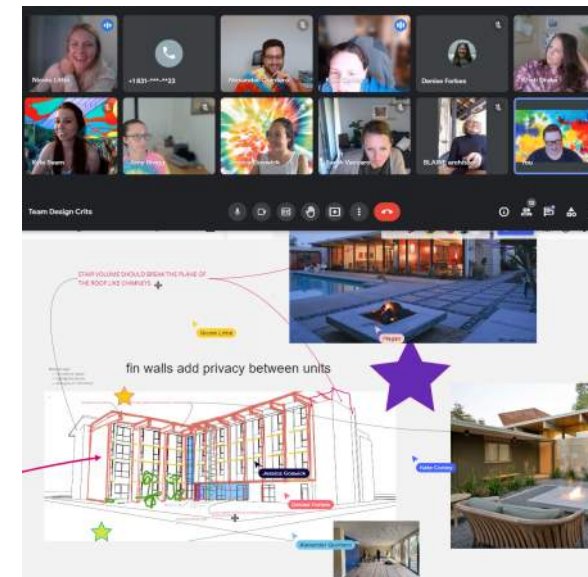
Our design process is highly collaborative both within our team and through partnerships with our clients, community organizations, government agencies, residents, and industry experts. We believe that keen listening is a powerful tool for crafting meaningful, responsive, designs that celebrate people, place, and planet.

At the start of a project, we analyze environmental conditions as well as local policies and community needs in order to best serve the site. While working with our long-standing clients, we have developed and continue to refine a thorough community engagement process to identify existing neighborhood sustainability successes and challenges. Historically, our building performance goals have been driven by our clients, however one of our goals is to become leaders of this conversation in the future. We assemble a full project team early on, including consultants, clients, building officials, industry experts, and more in order to establish clear goals and give us the greatest probability of success. Over the course of a project's timeline, this closely knit team works together to prioritize the most impactful sustainable strategies and carry them all the way from concept through occupancy. On recent projects, these goals have included focuses on improving resilience measures in the case of emergency, reducing water consumption, restoring habitats for native species, reducing building system energy use, maximizing onsite power generation potential, and specifying healthy materials.

While we currently rely on consultants for building performance models and analysis, we plan to bring more of that knowledge to our internal team over the next few years. Our overall goal for the design process is to integrate building performance modeling throughout. By training staff to perform simple, quick, energy models we can inform design at early stage. Additionally, through working with consultants more closely and frequently we can better utilize energy models at later stages of design. By partnering with consultants early in the design process, we can work with them to develop a flexible workflow for incorporating the performance model at all phases.

## / Goals

- Establish key internal goals and/or research questions for each project (1-year)
- Build out project goal setting and programming process with stakeholders to lead discussion, evaluation, and prioritization of sustainable design goals and strategies at the beginning of each project (1-year)
- Work with consultants to establish a workflow and scope division for creating and analyzing the building performance model (1-year)
- Develop project checklist to address building performance goals at each project phase (1-year)
- Develop Post-Occupancy Evaluation (3-year)
- Research cost-benefit analysis of lifetime costs (5-year)
- Embed sustainable design strategies into our design and details (5-year)



ABOVE:  
Design crit with external  
collaborators

RIGHT:  
Schematic design result after crit



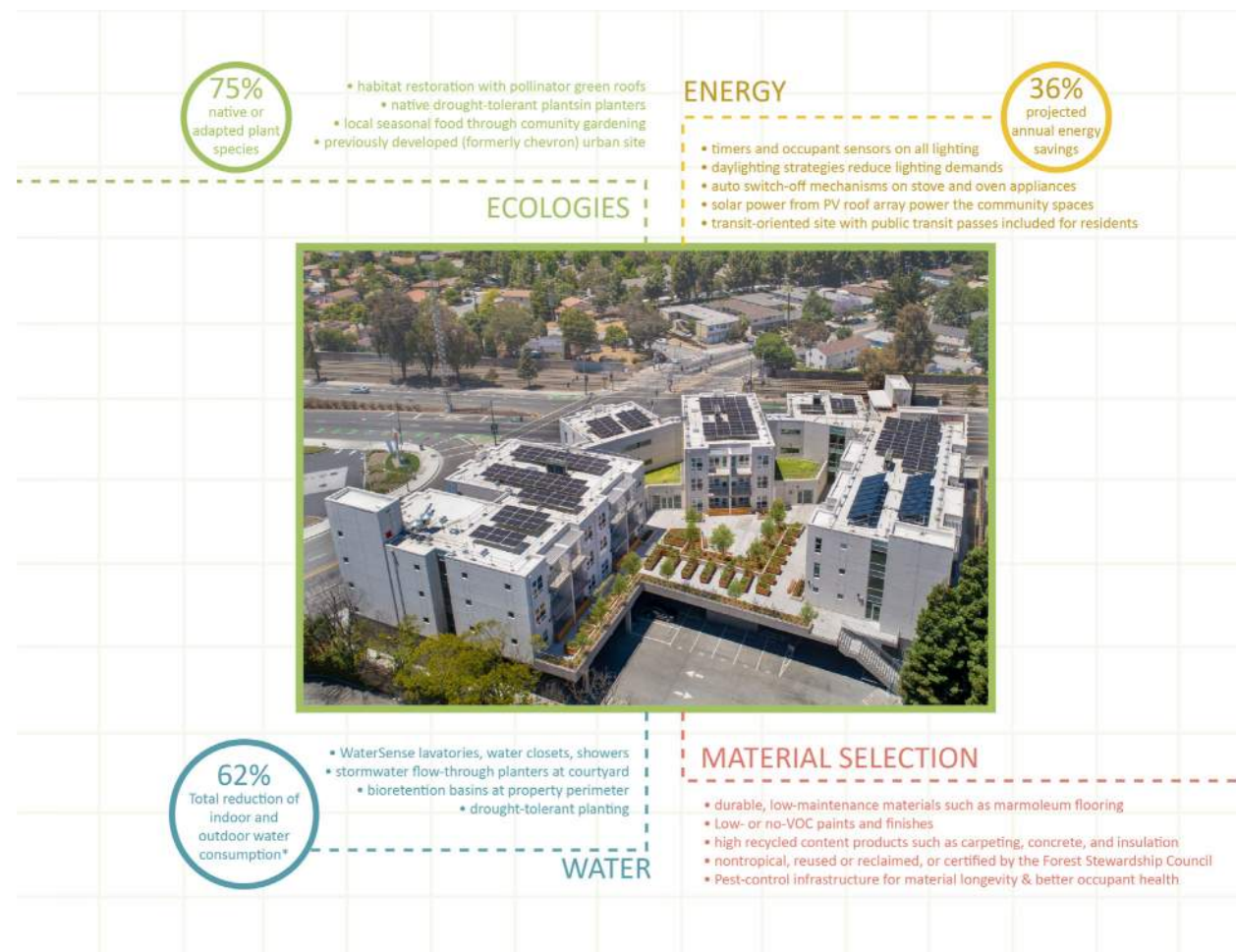


02 / GOAL  
SETTING &  
EVALUATION

# GOAL SETTING & EVALUATION

## / Current

We do not currently have a robust system for evaluating the performance of our projects. In the past, many of our project goals have been driven by clients and certification systems. Now, we are beginning to analyze our portfolio as a whole, in order to better learn from our past experiences and improve our projects' impact. Many of our short-term goals are centered around establishing baselines and educating our staff about green building strategies. By understanding where we are starting, we can lay the groundwork for more effective strategies in the future. Our long-term goals include tracking more of our projects' performance data and establishing ourselves further as high-performance building designers. As we start towards these goals, we will continue to review them and update as needed to push our work forward.



ABOVE:  
Sustainable goals analysis for Leigh Avenue Senior Apartments

## Project Performance Goals

### / Energy Consumption (EUI)

- 1-year: Evaluate pEUI for all new projects
- 3-year: Improve pEUI by 80% from baseline to meet AIA 2030 targets on 25% of projects
- 5-year: Meet AIA 2030 targets on at least 50% of projects

### / Healthy Materials (HPDs, EPDs, Declare labels, etc.)

- 1-year: Identify existing material health resources for use in product selection
- 1-year: Educate our team on responsible material selection through evaluating material manufacturing transparency, content, and emissions
- 3-year: Audit current specs and prioritize areas to improve
- 5-year: Eliminate the use of red-list ingredients in our projects

### / Embodied Carbon (kgCO<sub>2</sub>e/m<sup>2</sup>)

- 1-year: Research & train team on embodied carbon reduction strategies
- 3-year: Track embodied carbon on a pilot project
- 5-year: Track embodied carbon on at least 50% of projects

### / Water Consumption (gal/sf/yr):

- 1-year: Research & train team on water efficiency strategies
- 3-year: Track predicted water consumption on a pilot project
- 5-year: Track predicted water consumption on at least 50% of projects

### / Post Occupancy Evaluations

- 1-year: Develop Post Occupancy Evaluations
- 3-year: Perform POEs on at least 3 projects

03 /

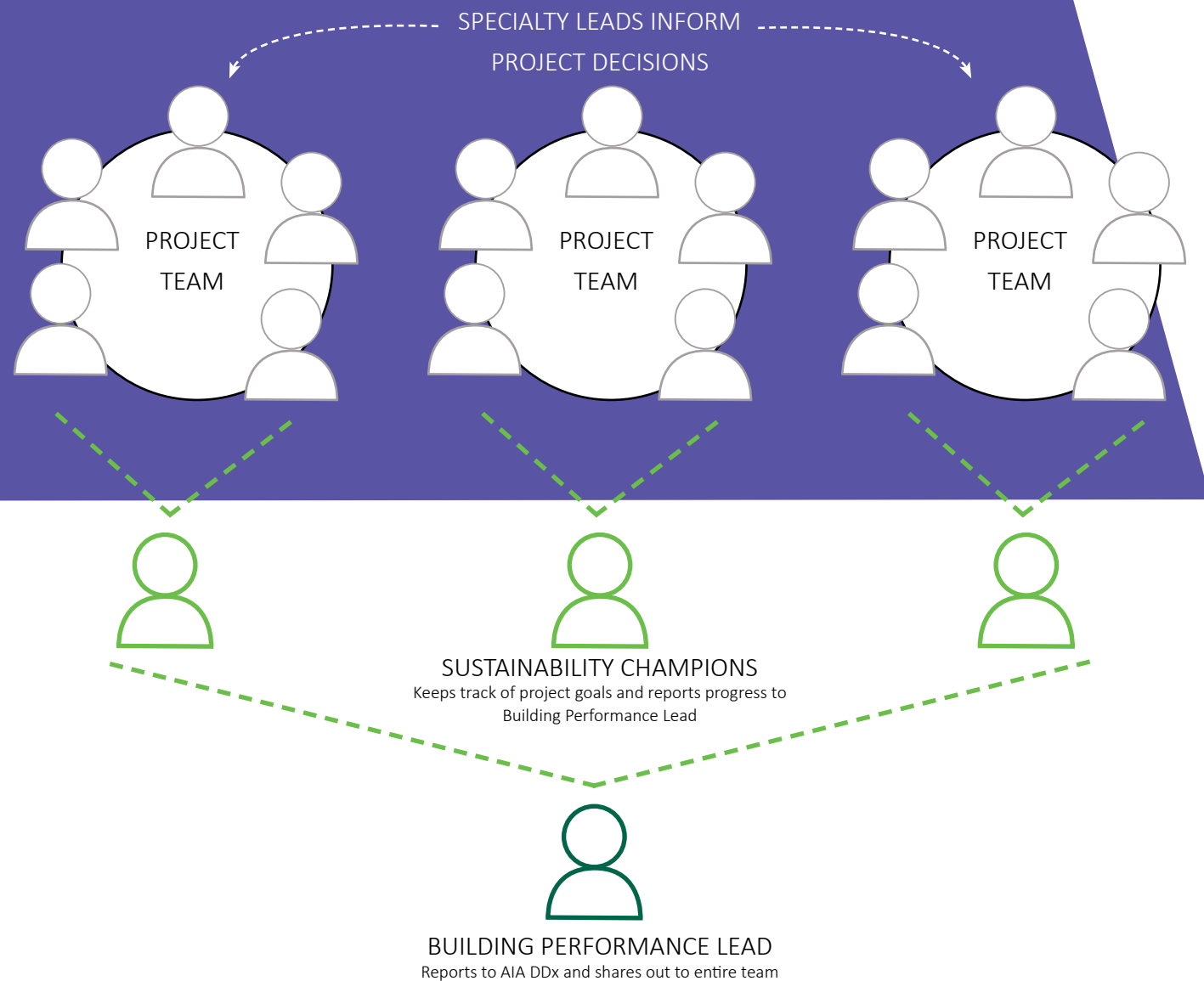
GOVERNANCE &  
REPORTING

# GOVERNANCE & REPORTING

## / Current

Currently, every employee at FORA is given the opportunity to research an topic of their choice and develop projects related to their area of expertise. These specialties allow us to pursue different angles of sustainability, research potential new strategies, and share feedback with the rest of the firm. Additionally, our specialty leaders are constantly evolving our internal processes. Through collaborative, frequent feedback sessions, each team member is equipped to deploy these lessons learned on their current projects. Moving forward, our goal is to formalize the Sustainability Champion role on project teams to improve our building performance tracking.

## Project Team Roles



## / Goals

- Plan staffing and fees for a designated Sustainability Champion at the beginning of each project who will advocate for the sustainability goals on each project, record progress, and report back to the firm Building Performance Lead. (1-year)
- Firm Building Performance Lead to aggregate project data from each team to analyze firm data, begin reporting to the AIA DDx, and share findings at team meetings. (1-year)
- Commit to AIA 2030 Commitment (1-year)
- Develop project performance tracking workflow (1-year)
- Report pEUI of 50% of projects to DDx annually (3-year)
- Report pEUI of 100% of projects to DDx annually (5-year)





04 / INTERNAL  
TRAINING &  
EDUCATION

# INTERNAL TRAINING & EDUCATION

## / Current

Architects FORA believes that supporting employees' passions and continuing education supports the growth and development of the whole organization. Formally, all employees receive the following benefits:

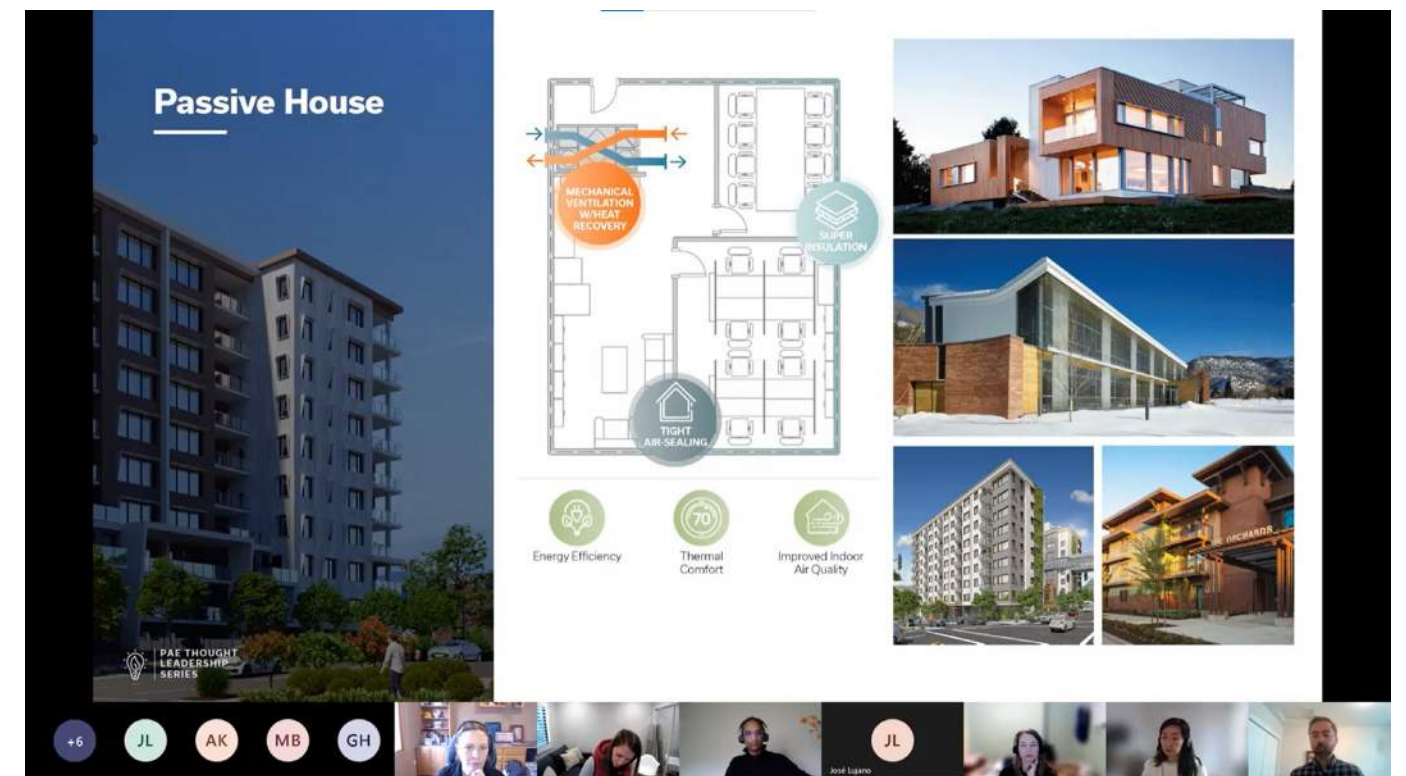
- Reimbursement for 1 association fee/year
- \$500 stipend/year for continuing education
- Up to 8 staffing hours per week devoted to specialized research and development of the individual's choice
- Scholarship to large events and conferences

In addition to individualized learning, weekly design crits and team meetings serve as platforms for firm-wide training and discussions. During these times, we have held education sessions across many different sustainability topics from innovative solar technology to energy policy changes and case studies for Passive House buildings. Our design crits provide the opportunity for collaborative workshops with experts to drive innovation, partnership with sustainably minded consultants and contractors, and more.

## / Goals

As we continue to build out the firm's educational resources, our priorities for the next year are to:

- Organize an on-demand platform for asynchronous learning (1-year)
- Create a schedule for trainings, seminars, and other sustainability education based on staff feedback and building performance goals (1-year)
- Train employees to be able to find building performance metrics for their projects and understand conceptual energy models (3-year)
- Develop sustainability training during onboarding for new employees (3-year)



ABOVE:  
Learning about Passive House from our consultants (PAE)



05 / OUTREACH,  
ADVOCACY,  
& EXTERNAL  
EDUCATION

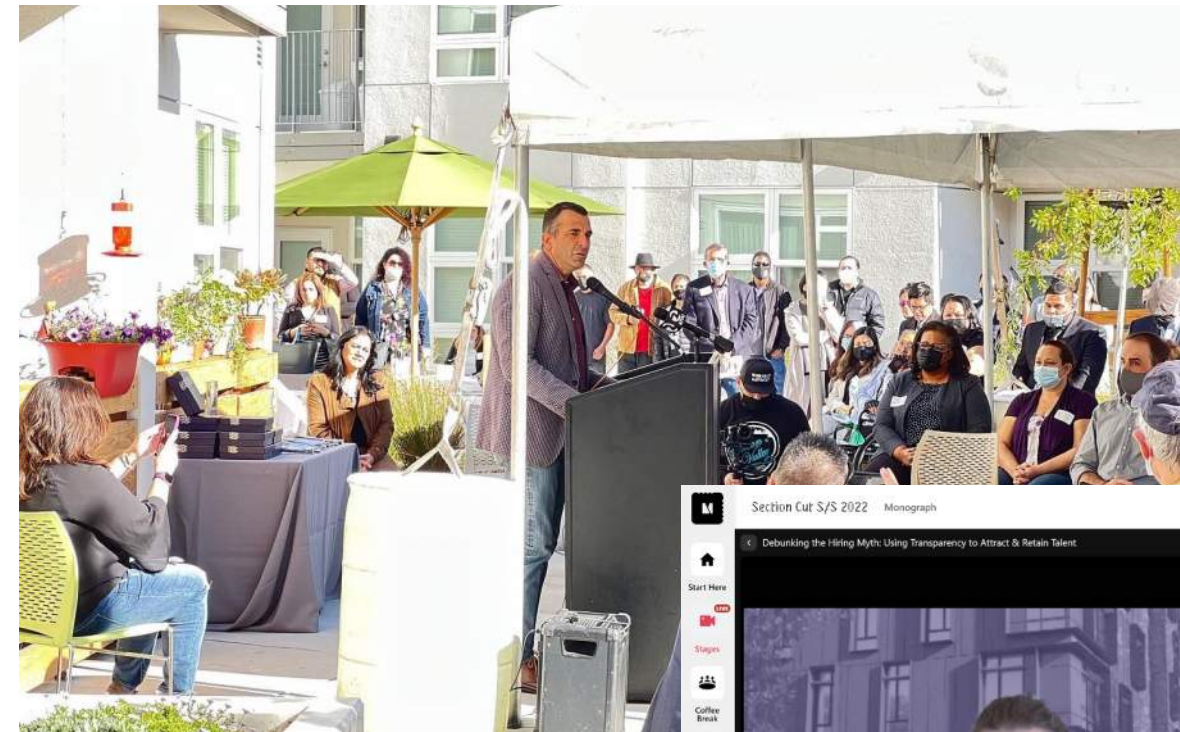
# OUTREACH, ADVOCACY, & EXTERNAL EDUCATION

/ Current

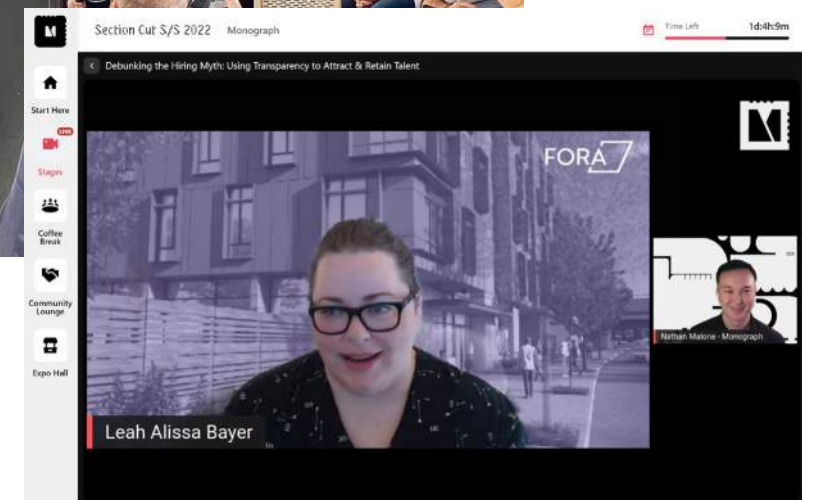
In the pursuit of positive-impact design, we believe transparency, collaboration, and knowledge sharing with our partners, community, industry, and policy makers is essential. Many of our staff members are active participants in local, regional, and national organizations that are working to improve green building practices. Architects FORA encourages participation in professional organizations by reimbursing one professional membership of the employee's choice per year for every employee. As a company, we work to grow our relationships with clients who prioritize sustainability and collaborate with knowledgeable consultants to educate others on sustainable design strategies and benefits. In addition to education, we strive to learn from our communities, our clients, and our partners whenever possible. Our team members share these experiences in podcasts, seminars, interviews, conferences and more.

## / Goals

- Report project performance on our website and on-site to leverage our buildings as educational opportunities for residents and visitors (1-year)
- Work with clients and consultants to “level up” sustainability goals. For example, work on a project pursuing Living Building Challenge. (3-year)
- Collaborate with our design team, clients and contractors to establish more effective strategies for life-cycle cost-benefit analysis earlier in the design process (3-year)
- Develop green building educational content such as white papers, blog posts, narratives, articles, conference presentations, etc. (3-year)
- Participate in advocacy efforts to influence legislation (expand this area over the next 5 years)



LEFT:  
Celebrating the  
Leigh Avenue Senior  
Apartments opening



BELOW:  
Leah presenting at  
Monograph Section Cut  
conference

An architectural rendering of a modern, multi-story apartment building at dusk. The building features a mix of brick and large glass windows. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the foreground, there are trees, a sidewalk with people walking, and a street with cars. A sign in the bottom left corner reads "PARKVIEW APARTMENTS".

# 06 / OPERATIONS & OUTLOOK

PARKVIEW  
APARTMENTS

# OPERATIONS & OUTLOOK

## / Firm Operational Impact

As a fully remote firm, we have reduced our operational impact in a number of ways, for instance, we have no commutes, no office, and no paper. The majority of our operational impact likely comes from our occasional travel around the country.

## / Firm Culture

Our fully-remote business model provides access to jobs in architecture regardless of someone's location. By allowing for flexible work, we can better accommodate a wide range of individuals across race, gender, experience level, ability, ideology, areas of interest/expertise, and other forms of expression and areas of representation. We believe that one of the most important contributions we can make to our profession is an equitable practice that promotes belonging. Improving diversity in architecture will not happen solely through passive means. Students from groups that are underrepresented in our field deserve robust, active, and sustained support. This year, we debuted our FORAship program to provide a robust financial scholarship along with a year-long internship program. Through these practices, our goal is to build a culture that supports rather than penalizes contrasting ideas.

Architects FORA believes in creating a high quality of living for its team and does so through transparent, equitable, and collaborative business practices. In recent years, we've learned how important flexibility, autonomy, and compassion are to wellbeing and ability to perform at our best, as individuals and as a group. We intentionally designed our business to put those needs first. Some of our policies and practices to promote employee health and wellbeing include:

- QSEHRA health reimbursement benefit
- Track weekly health goals and award prizes based on quarterly performance
- Promote use of mental health days
- Work from anywhere and flexible schedules

We also know that we are better together, so we have implemented practices that help us to strengthen our ties with our communities, wherever they might be. We have worked closely with our clients to develop an extensive community engagement process for our projects. We support local events in the communities we work in such as the SV Turkey Trot and AIA Women in Architecture committee. We also participate in group volunteering opportunities when our team is together.

## / Goals

- Compare typical office operations emissions to our business format and report out (1-year)
- Join the JUST Label (3-year)
- Establish a formal "perk-up" benefit (5-year)
- Add a day off for volunteering (5-year)





ARCHITECTS

**FORA**

