



Diversity

- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Racial & Ethnic Diversity
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Gender Diversity
- ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Recruitment

Inclusion

- ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ Belonging
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Accessibility
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Engagement
- ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Workforce Empowerment

Compensation

- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Living Wage
- ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ Pay Scale Equity
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Racial & Ethnic Pay Equity
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Gender Pay Equity

Health

- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Physical Health + Safety
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Well-Being

Benefits

- ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ Health Care
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Retirement
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Family/Medical Leave
- ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Professional Development

Stewardship

- ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Community Connections
- ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ Volunteering
- ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Charitable Giving
- ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Procurement

FOSTERING EQUITY & WELLNESS:

The Path to a Thriving Workplace Culture

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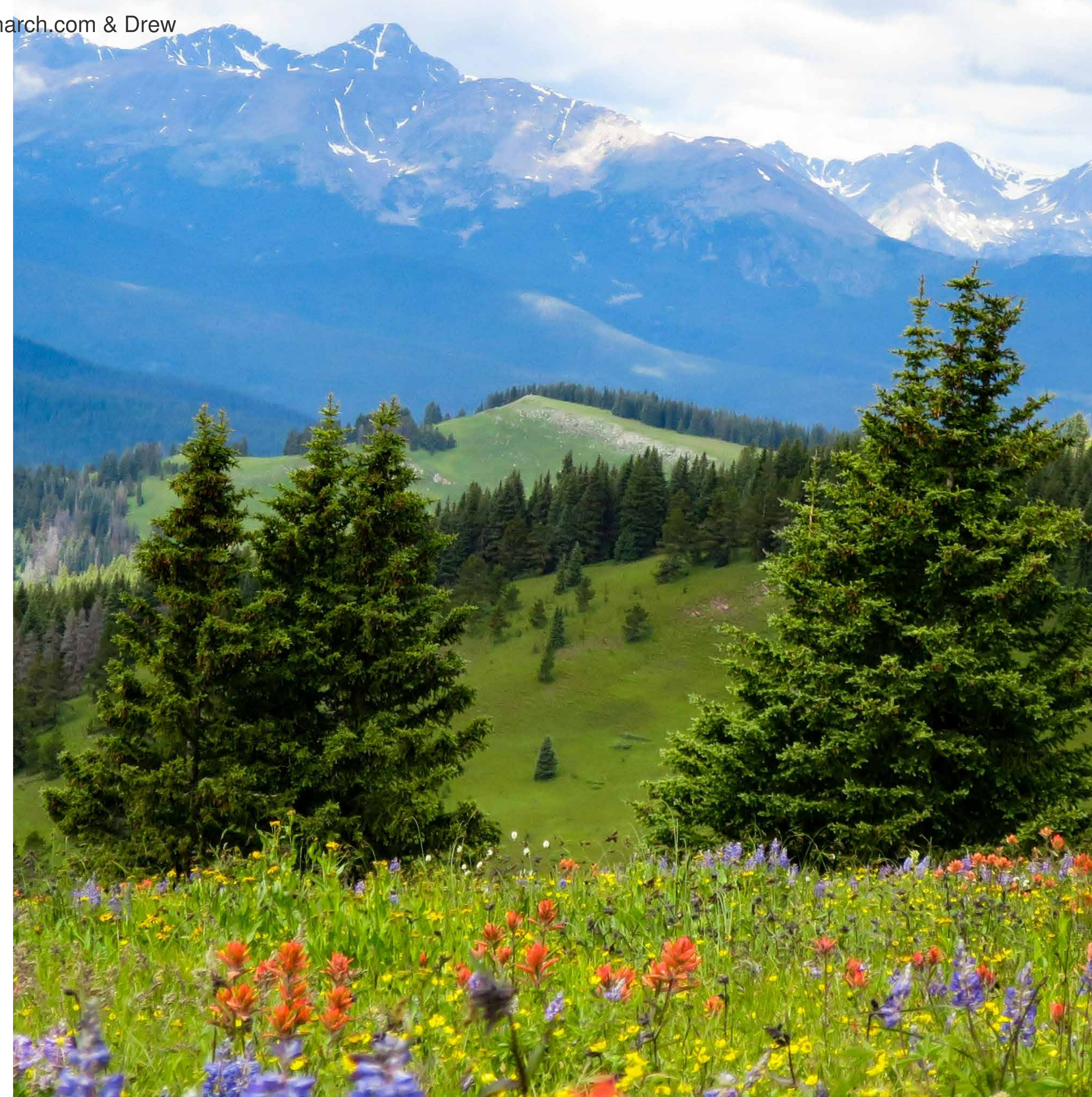
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INTRODUCTION

This special report explores the transformative journey toward organizational equity and thriving workplace cultures, making the business case that prioritizing people and the workplace environment is not only essential for our well-being, but also a forward-thinking business strategy.

The report highlights how industry leaders are driving positive change by recognizing the strengths and opportunities of supporting diverse workforces, equitable opportunities, and inclusive cultures within their organizations. Readers will gain a deeper understanding of the Just framework as a management tool for benchmarking and tracking progress by exploring key topics for advancing equity and employee wellness for long-term organizational success. Featuring firsthand insights and stories from leading firms and companies that are experiencing the tangible benefits of the Just program, this report provides a blueprint for catalyzing positive impact in the workplace.

FOREWORD

By Griso Barrios, Senior Manager, Just

As I reflect on the past year of Just, I am continually inspired by the organizations that make up this community. By creating accessible workplaces, providing quality health care, ensuring livable wages, and prioritizing purchases from local and minority-owned businesses, Just organizations are transforming lives, strengthening communities, and showing what good looks like.

To the sponsoring organizations of this report—thank you. Your leadership and dedication to this work are helping us demonstrate how to foster wellness and equity in the workplace. This report comes at a critical time. With equity work under increased scrutiny, it can feel daunting to keep moving forward. Yet the organizations featured here remind us that through thoughtful policy, intentional programming, and consistent tracking, real change is possible.

Despite challenges, our community has remained strong. Over the past year, we welcomed 48 new organizations and maintained a renewal rate consistent with previous years, with 80 percent of existing organizations continuing to renew their labels. This is clear proof that organizational equity is not a passing trend but a necessity—and that the building industry is embracing workplaces where people feel they belong, are heard, and can thrive.

What inspires me most is how this community continues to show up for one another. Just organizations hold each other accountable, share strategies, and celebrate progress. I believe that equity work flourishes in community, and ours is living proof of that reality.

The Just label plays a powerful role in shaping a regenerative building industry. It sparks conversations that lead to change, helps organizations align goals and policies with employees' needs, and provides a roadmap for turning values into action. Through testimonials and applications, I see the real impact this work is having across our industry.

Looking ahead, the future of Just is bright. The call for equity and transparency in the workplace can't be ignored, and our community is showing the way forward. Just is proving that progress is possible and that it is lasting. Together, we are building a living future where equity is the foundation of every workplace, and where people and organizations alike can truly thrive.

I invite you to read on to discover how advancing equity in the workplace not only strengthens culture and well-being; it also drives smarter, more resilient business strategies.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Griso Barrios".

Background: What is Just?

While many organizational and corporate initiatives focus on environmental and economic concerns, Just provides a framework for businesses, organizations, and institutions to meaningfully and transparently address social justice and equity from within.

Just organizations act to eliminate biases and disparities and establish systems to support both continuous improvement and an inclusive work environment that permeates all levels of the organization.

Just is a social equity program developed by Living Future in collaboration with thought leaders and progressive organizations in the building, design, and manufacturing sectors. It is not a certification, but rather a voluntary disclosure tool and framework focused on employee experience, health, well-being, and meaningful community connections. Organizations participating in Just make meaningful change over time by comprehensively addressing social justice and equity within their policies, practices, and culture.

Just provides a transparency platform where organizations can disclose their policies and practices across a wide range of social equity issues. Participating organizations earn a Just label, which they can use to communicate their commitment to social justice, the health and well-being of their employees and their families, and the vitality of the communities they serve and in which they operate.

While any business, organization, or institution may participate in Just, the program has been most widely adopted by progressive organizations involved in building design, construction, and engineering, and by manufacturers of building products.

JustSM

THE JUST FRAMEWORK

The Just program consists of 21 social justice and equity Indicators organized under six Categories: Diversity, Inclusion, Compensation, Health, Benefits, and Stewardship.

Enrollment in Just initiates a rigorous process of self-reflection and reporting. Organizations earn a Just label at the end of this process. This “nutrition label” provides a snapshot of the organization’s progress across all Categories and Indicators at the time of publication. Living Future encourages organizations to use their Just label as a starting point to begin developing more progressive policies and practices.

Each Indicator comes with a tiered structure of measurable requirements. These are recognized at four levels of performance:

Level 1 begins with organizations developing a policy. This focus on policy first is designed to prioritize codifying an organization’s commitments to equity. It also makes participation in Just possible for all organizations.

Levels 2-4 require policy, data and supporting documentation. These levels represent actions towards embodying equity and justice within each respective Indicator.

Level 4 represents the highest level of performance within the Just program. This level indicates that an organization has been able to demonstrate significant action toward “what good looks like” based on the current understanding of justice and equity.



- The goals of the Just program are simple, yet profound, and apply to all organizations, especially those within the building industry;
- To elevate the discussion around social justice and equity;
- To create a common language and measurement framework for social justice issues pertinent to organizations;
- To improve employee and community-related policies, practices, and culture; and
- To make life better for all members of the workforce.

“The Just framework gave us clarity in terms of why and what we are doing as part of an ecosystem of care — how things fit into a pattern of being equitable.”

GLADYS LY-AU YOUNG
 SIDE X SIDE ARCHITECTS

THE CONTEXT FOR JUST

“We believe that a true living future—a world of regenerative buildings and equitable communities—can only be achieved through equally powerful and transformative programs that make the world more equitable and socially just.”

LIVING FUTURE

In 2006, Living Future announced the [Living Building Challenge](#), a groundbreaking certification program for buildings of all types. The Challenge defined a holistic vision of what good looks like for buildings. Its intention was to spur the transition to a regenerative built environment that gives as much as it takes, and that supports a living future for all.

The Living Building Challenge consists of seven Petals, or performance areas. One of these is Equity, which intends building projects to “foster a just and inclusive community that enables all people to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”

When the Equity Petal was introduced in 2009, it was the first time a green building program explicitly addressed

social justice concerns. Initially, the Equity Petal focused on access to nature and accessibility within a building project and site. It has evolved to include requirements that support the creation of stable, safe, and high-paying job opportunities for people in the local community and support local, diverse businesses through hiring, purchasing, and workforce development practices.

In 2012, Living Future launched [Declare](#), a transparency platform that prompts manufacturers to disclose the constituent ingredients in their products. The program encourages manufacturers to eliminate problematic “Red List” chemicals and materials in their products. Manufacturers that do so can “declare” their products to be Red List Free.

Acting on the conviction that it is not possible to create a true Living Building without paying attention to the people who design, construct, operate, maintain and work in these spaces, Living Future launched a new transparency platform called Just in 2014. Just 2.0, released in 2019, integrated feedback from early adopters; it also sought to align with social equity standards from the Global Reporting Initiative, B Corp Certification and Edge Certification. The third iteration, Just 3.0, was released in 2024.

Just aligns with other leading green building, health, and social equity initiatives, including the Living Building Challenge, LEED, and WELL. By elevating social equity alongside other aspects of sustainability, Just supports a holistic approach to design of buildings and the specification of regenerative materials, which considers community

impacts and worker health, safety and well-being alongside embodied carbon, ecosystem health, and circularity.

Like Living Future’s other initiatives, Just aims to use the power of transparency and leverage market forces to create social change, and it will continue to evolve in response to market needs and societal changes.

“All businesses have a tremendous impact on social justice in how they operate and use their financial, environmental, and social capital. Just is a tool to better understand those relationships and make intentional decisions. This is especially true in the design world because the built environment and real estate are inextricably linked with social justice outcomes.”

ERIN ISHIZAKI, MITHUN

“I appreciate that there’s a certification for valuing individuals in firms—the fact that there’s an entity that can certify that the people in this organization care and this is why and here’s the label to prove it. I think it’s phenomenal and we need more of that kind of accountability.”

MEGAN OSBORN, d2d GREEN DESIGN

GROWTH AND EVOLUTION

Just has evolved in response to shifts in the global landscape, an enhanced comprehension of social justice issues, insights from technical advisors, and experiences of participating organizations.

Just 3.0, released in May of 2024, reflects a rigorous development process involving extensive research, collaboration with the 20 collective members of the Organizational Equity Technical Advisory Group (TAG), input from peer organizations and industry partners, and feedback from participating Just organizations. Living Future also hosted a public review period and conducted pilot testing of several new or redesigned Just 3.0 indicators with a small group of Just organizations.

“One of the most compelling things about Just is the fact that it is ever-evolving. We welcome and value feedback from current and prospective Just organizations alike, and will continue iterating the program to adapt to market needs and societal changes as well as remain representative of what good looks like.”

CHERYL TAM, DIRECTOR,
SOCIAL EQUITY, LIVING FUTURE

Just 3.0 reflects “what good looks like” based on the current understanding of justice and equity in organizational contexts. This latest iteration emphasizes continuous improvement and the fact that growth is not always linear.

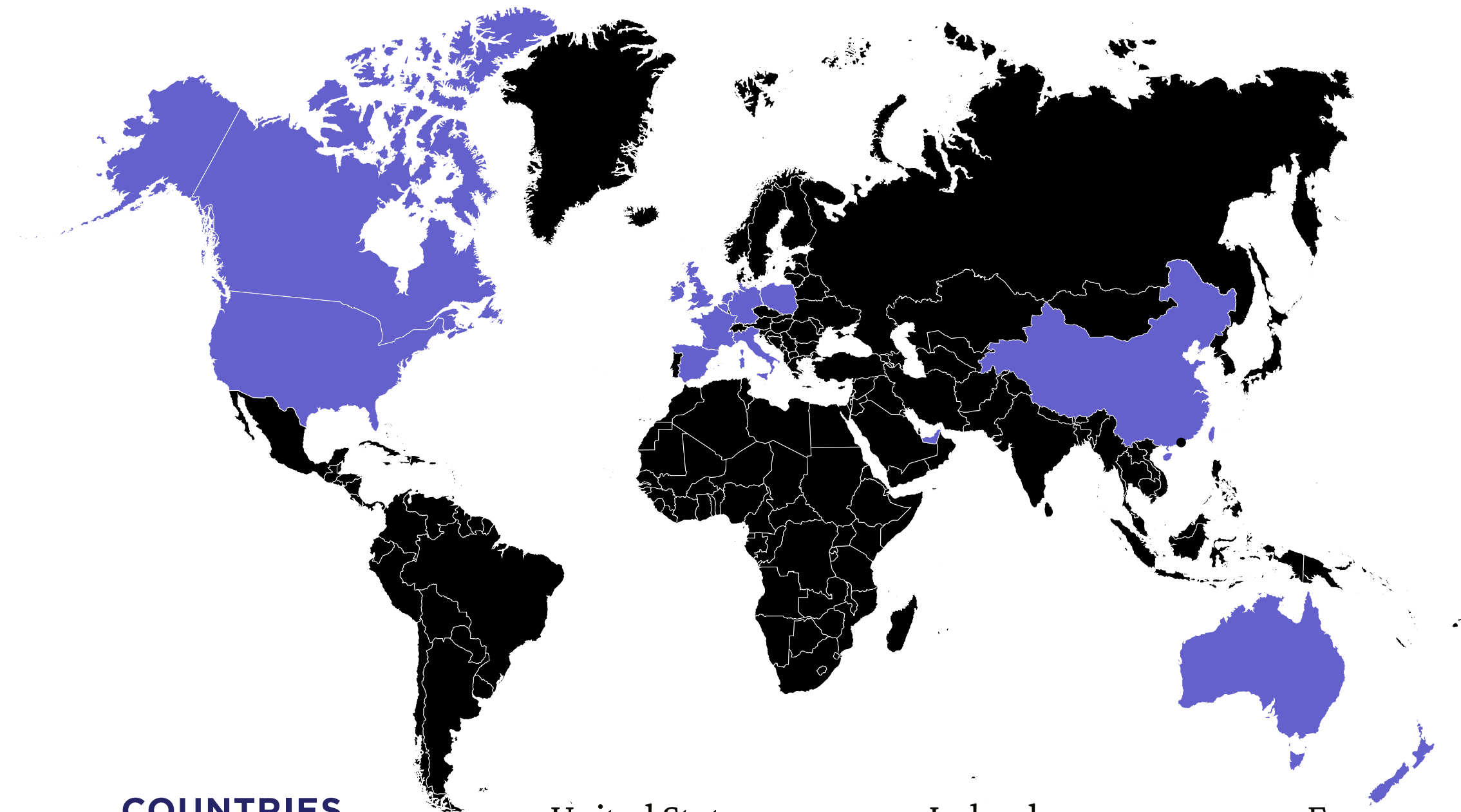
There are several significant changes between Just 2.0 and Just 3.0. The six Categories have been updated for greater conciseness. While some Indicators have remained the same or with minor enhancements, others have changed substantially. Some have been removed altogether, and new Indicators have been added.

CATEGORIES	
JUST 2.0 CATEGORIES	JUST 3.0 CATEGORIES
Diversity + Inclusion	Diversity
Equity	Inclusion
Employee Health	Compensation
Employee Benefits	Health
Stewardship	Benefits
Purchasing + Supply Chain	Stewardship

JUST BY THE NUMBERS

EMPLOYEES IMPACTED BY JUST:

95,000



COUNTRIES CURRENTLY REPRESENTED WITHIN THE JUST COMMUNITY

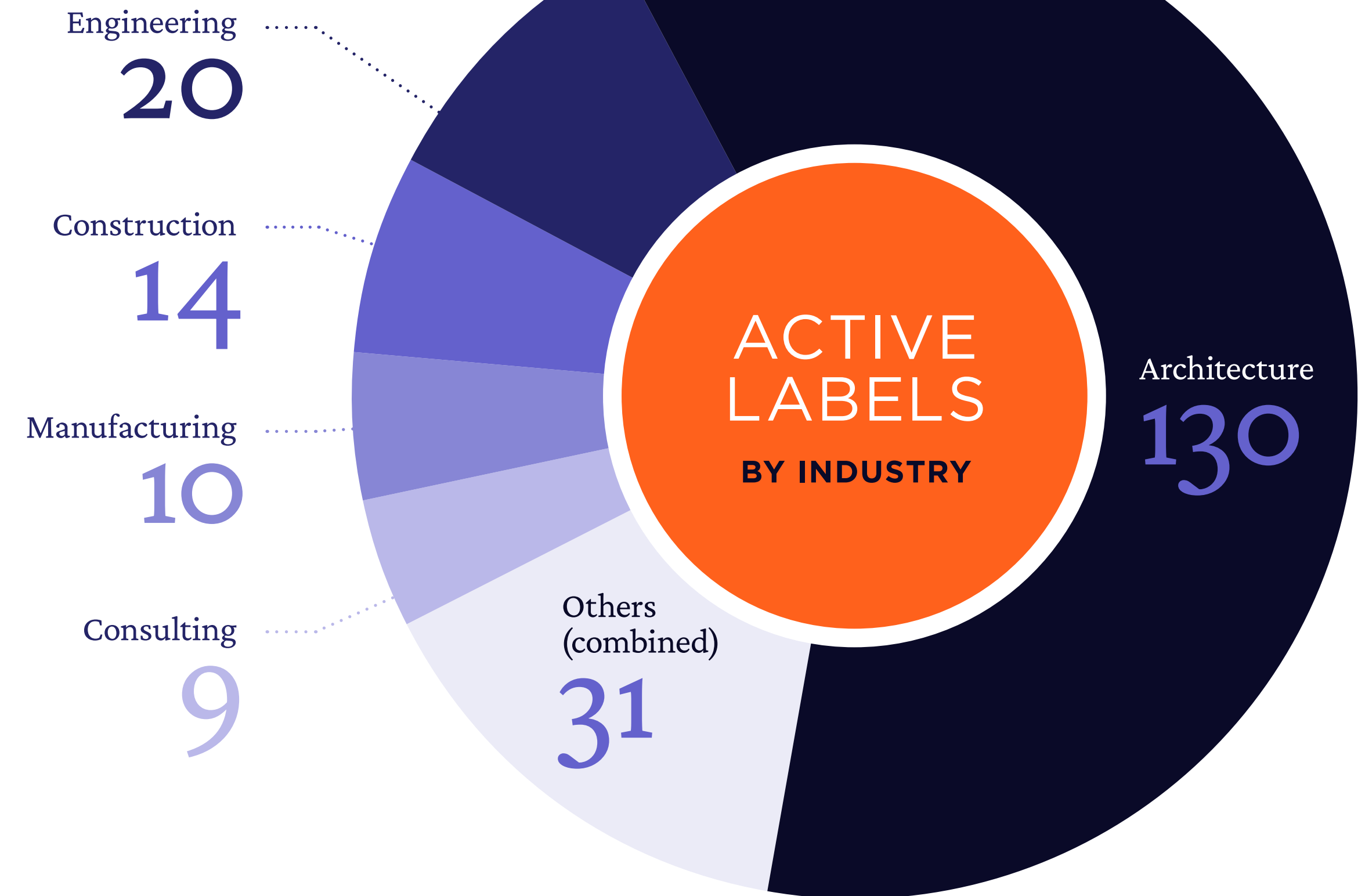
- | | | |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. United States | 7. Ireland | 13. France |
| 2. Canada | 8. China | 14. Poland |
| 3. Italy | 9. Singapore | 15. Germany |
| 4. Spain | 10. Taiwan | 16. UAE |
| 5. Australia | 11. Hong Kong | 17. Netherlands |
| 6. New Zealand | 12. Belgium | 18. UK |

TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS:

1. Architecture
2. Engineering
3. Construction
4. Manufacturing
5. Consulting
6. Non-Profit

7. Utility
8. Design
9. Accounting/Finance/Banking
10. Education
11. Development
12. Government
13. Landscape Architecture

14. Professional and Technical Services
15. Structural Engineering
16. Real Estate
17. Sustainability
18. Technology
19. Energy and Environment District
20. Other



A PIVOTAL MOMENT

This is an uncertain and troubling time in the United States and in many parts of the world, as social, political, and cultural shifts create new challenges. The U.S. is seeing a backlash against social and environmental justice, and against women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and those without citizenship. The federal government is also pulling back from climate commitments and dismantling regulations designed to accelerate a transition to a clean energy economy. This retraction is not happening in isolation, but reflects a global trend toward authoritarianism.

In early 2025, the incoming administration launched an all-out assault on programs, policies, and organizations that promote social justice and equity. The president signed executive orders that eliminated federal offices, positions, and programs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and pulled federal funding from programs that encourage or support DEI. These actions went even further, repealing previous executive orders aimed at ensuring equity in the workplace. The administration has also threatened legal action against private companies, nonprofits, universities, and other organizations that host equity initiatives or programs. In response, some entities have pulled back on their commitments. Others have doubled down.

It is fair to assume that some of the backlash to equity initiatives stems from a misunderstanding about what diversity, equity, and inclusion actually mean. These initiatives are not about “quotas” or giving a small group special treatment, but removing the barriers and biases that keep employees from reaching their potential and fully participating in their industry or profession. In fact, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion uplifts everyone, and makes organizations stronger and more resilient.

Given the backlash, the work of Just and those organizations committed to cultivating equitable workplaces is especially critical now. Just organizations are in a position to point the way toward a better, more just, and resilient future, says Living Future CEO Lindsay Baker.

“I know many of us are feeling vulnerable or nervous about how this impacts our jobs, our firms, our contracts,” she wrote in a [recent article](#) for Trim Tab. “But I want to ask us to think beyond our own firms and join us in being a part of this movement, because it needs you now more than ever.”

“We’re in the sustainability space. We have to stand up with our integrity, both as a company where somebody would work and a company that somebody would hire, regardless of what is happening at the federal government level.”

DREW LAVINE, RE:VISION ARCHITECTURE

“My thought process is we (Living Future and I) have been on a journey together to make transformational changes to create equitable workplaces.”

GLADYS LY-AU YOUNG, SIDE X SIDE ARCHITECTS

MAKING THE CASE FOR JUST

This is a challenging time on several fronts for companies, non-profits, and other organizations related to design and construction. Many of the building trades in particular face daunting workforce shortages, and it can be difficult to attract qualified applicants.

Employees are also expecting more from their employers, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. In part, this is an understandable response to the rising cost of housing, healthcare, and other essentials, all of which threatens financial stability and well-being. Employees aren't just looking for more competitive salaries and benefits packages; they also want more from their jobs. Millennials and Gen-Zers in particular want their work to have meaning and purpose. Work-life balance is important, as are resources to help support mental health.

Global trends and domestic policies are contributing to economic uncertainty. The rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI) is shifting the very nature of work, and organizations are having to anticipate how to respond even before understanding the full impact these AI tools will have on their businesses.

Collectively, these trends challenge organizations to stay healthy and competitive. Just organizations have an advantage on all of these fronts.

Cultivating a just and equitable workplace doesn't just provide tangible, quantifiable benefits to all employees;

it helps attract and retain diverse talent, especially Gen-Zs and Millennials. It reduces absenteeism and "presenteeism" and boosts employee engagement and productivity. Diverse, engaged staff are more resilient and productive, giving firms a competitive edge.

Many organizations may be motivated to do this work but don't know where to start. Just provides a tool for self-reflection, helping an organization understand how they compare to an ideal so they can start charting a path toward greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. The program helps firms develop and enhance human resources policies, programs and practices; in many cases, the guidance can help formalize and strengthen practices that were already in place.

The Just label helps a firm distinguish itself in the marketplace and sends a signal to the industry about "what good looks like." It assures prospective clients, partners, employees, and investors that a firm is walking the walk, giving credence to claims about sustainability and commitment to social equity. Just can also provide a compliance pathway and credit in green building certification frameworks such as Living Building Challenge, LEED and WELL.

On the following pages, you'll hear from owners, architects, consultants, HR directors, and CEOs as they help make the business case for cultivating a socially just and equitable culture, and for committing to the Just program as a vital tool for getting there.

"Our clients are realizing that to attract the people they desperately need on their team, they have to pay well and they have to offer more benefits than they did ten years ago, just to get those people in the door and to stay."

**KATE STEPHENSON,
HELM CONSTRUCTION SOLUTIONS**

"If there's a clear understanding of how Just can help advance a company's goals and values that are part of a company's DNA, then they can use the framework to make a five, ten, or fifteen-year plan. And then it is a sustainable solution for the company's success."

GAYATHRI UNNIKRISHNAN, LIVEABLE

"We think that cultivating this socially just and equitable culture makes our actual design work better. We think that it results in better outcomes for our clients. Everything feeds into each other."

LYNDLEY KENT, NEUMANN MONSON

Part I

TANGIBLE BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES + ORGANIZATIONS

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT

In competitive markets, today's workforces expect more benefits, from health care coverage and retirement savings to family and medical leave coverage and even continuing education and training. Organizations that provide these benefits are better able to attract and retain talent; employees are also more productive and tend to report higher job satisfaction.

The Just framework provides a roadmap for organizations to provide equitable compensation and increasing levels of benefits to all employees; for example, under the Health Care Indicator, each level corresponds with an increased percentage of comprehensive healthcare coverage that is paid by the organization.

While competitive salary and benefits packages are one of the key things prospective employees look for, pay and benefits are only part of the picture, especially for Gen-Z and Millennial applicants.

Office culture is an important part of the equation, says Becky Barnhart, CEO at Integrus Architecture. "Prospective employees want to tour the office; they want to talk about our design labs and other opportunities. It's not just an eight-to-five job, it's about that culture and how it filters out into your day-to-day life."

These younger professionals are just as interested in work-life balance and finding purpose in their work as with

stability and compensation. In a recent survey of Gen-Z and Millennial employees, Deloitte [sums up](#) the intersection of these concerns as “money, meaning, and well-being.” Impressively, 89 percent of Gen-Zs and 92 percent of Millennials surveyed said purpose was important to job satisfaction and well-being.

With a holistic emphasis that considers how an organization operates in the world, Just encourages organizations to prioritize positive social impact both internally and externally. For example, Just 3.0 includes metrics on charitable giving, paid employee volunteer hours, and guidance on the equitable procurement of goods and services.

“With the younger generations, we’re seeing a drive to be in a place that gives them the opportunity to find purpose in some greater social good,” says Nick Lindsley, Principal at Neumann Monson. “The Just label has not only changed how we recruit in a more rigorous and documented way, it’s given us a vocabulary to talk to our candidates about topics related to social good that is very appealing and helps us find alignment more quickly.”

REDUCING ABSENTEEISM AND “PRESENTEEISM”

In the United States, absenteeism [costs](#) employers an estimated \$226 billion each year, mostly due to chronic health conditions such as heart disease and depression. A related issue is “presenteeism,” where employees are

physically at work but not functioning at their full capacity because of a physical or mental health condition.

Investing in employees’ health tangibly benefits both individual employees and the organization as a whole.

[According to the McKinsey Health Institute, investing in employee health and well-being could enhance productivity and reduce presenteeism to the tune of \\$2 trillion to \\$9 trillion globally.](#)

Certainly, subsidizing healthcare coverage is key to supporting employee health, but that is just part of the picture. The Indicators under the Health category in Just 3.0 provide stepwise guidance for building comprehensive programs that foster physical and mental health and well-being. Program components include flexible working arrangements, mindfulness training, financial education, planned social/volunteer outings, and counseling programs, among others. These elements acknowledge employees as whole human beings with complex needs, not just workers.

After receiving feedback that their wellness program was too focused on physical health, building consultancy BranchPattern used the Just framework to develop a more holistic program called “A Better Built You™” that

includes social elements and flexible time off along with incentives for making healthy choices and reimbursement for recreation memberships.

Healthier employees are better able to face the challenges of a swiftly changing world, which helps firms be more resilient, too, says Gladys Ly-Au Young, Partner at Side x Side Architects. “Our regenerative future depends on the resiliency of individuals and communities.”

Neumann Monson and Stanley Center staff on-site at their future Living Building HQ in Muscatine, IA.



THE ENGAGEMENT EQUATION

High employee engagement correlates with nearly every positive aspect of an organization's health and performance, including enhanced productivity, better retention rates, reduced absenteeism, and higher profits.

Many factors affect engagement, from compensation to the relationship with managers and colleagues. Generally, employees who feel they are valued both for their work and for who they are as an individual are more engaged, as are those who feel like their voices are heard and who are rewarded for their work.

Inviting employees to help co-create the policies and practices that lead to higher engagement, productivity, and retention creates positive feedback loops.

Architecture firm Integrus has used Just to enhance practices that promote a collaborative, engaged culture. These efforts range from a mentorship program to weekly design labs to an annual all-office t-shirt design contest representing firm culture and values.

“The Just label helps us make mission-aligned decisions by translating our values into tangible benchmarks—and in turn, supports our people and strengthens the firm’s strategic lens.”

NICK LINDSLEY, NEUMANN MONSON

Neumann Monson: Engaging and empowering employees

In 2012, Iowa-based Neumann Monson Architects underwent a deliberate transition to become a more purpose-led organization. As part of this project, the firm empowered internal teams to drive strategic initiatives.

“The teams have really become a mechanism to decentralize our decision making,” says Tim Schroeder, President at Neumann Monson. “We have put those teams in charge of leading and continuously evolving key aspects of our practice.”

Internal teams focus on design excellence, client experience, and employee experience. Each team includes several staff; even a team member fresh out of school can join one and thus have a say in the firm's operations. The teams encourage staff to learn about other projects the firm is working on.

“It gives them a much more well-rounded experience rather than just focusing on one aspect of design or one project,” says Schroeder.

The employee experience team drives the content of the submission every time the firm renews their Just label; that way, it's not just the principals talking about policies.

The inclusive process also keeps the Just framework on people's minds throughout the year.

The employee experience group is also tasked with designing the onboarding process for new hires, which the Just framework has helped shape.

New employees enter a 90-day program that's less about teaching them about how to do the work and more about rapidly bringing them into the firm's culture so they feel part of the team as quickly as possible. Time is allocated between cultural activities, firm-wide initiatives and project work. New hires can also join internal team meetings so that they can begin thinking about the activities, initiatives, and programs they might like to join.

Work at Neumann Monson is serious, but the atmosphere is light. A diverse mix of personalities, skills, and experience levels fosters a design process that is collaborative, engaging, and fun.



Heightening the firm’s community engagement has also fostered more engagement, says Loretta Sachs, associate principal at Integrus. “The more volunteer events we do, the more our people become interested in being part of that conversation and planning them.”

It is critical that organizations hear directly from employees rather than relying on assumptions about them. Levels 2 and above under the Just 3.0 Engagement Indicator requires that organizations track engagement itself through employee surveys, and a [sample employee inclusion and engagement survey](#) is among the resources available through the Just Application Toolkit.

The Just framework prompted the Stanley Center for Peace and Security to measure employee engagement—something they hadn’t considered doing before. They use anonymous surveys and encourage frequent direct communication between employees and managers.

“It’s important to give people lots of outlets for expressing those thoughts. It’s equally important to be transparent about the results,” says Keith Porter, president and CEO at the Stanley Center.

“Equitable design is a very strong part of our design process and how we’re serving our clients and our communities. We also have a strong internal office culture. There’s no separation between the equitable design work that we’re doing and an equitable office culture. They blend together and reinforce each other.”

ERICKA COLVIN, INTEGRUS ARCHITECTURE

THE DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE

Diversity pays dividends. A diverse workplace has the advantage of multiple perspectives; more diverse organizations are better able to innovate and respond to crises. [An analysis](#) from McKinsey & Company reveals that the most diverse companies are more likely to outperform less diverse ones on profitability. The greater the representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance. On the other hand, organizations with high levels of bias are more likely to see higher turnover, decreased productivity, and legal challenges.

Unfortunately, inequities and biases can stand in the way of cultivating diverse and inclusive workplaces. Biases, whether conscious or unconscious, affect many aspects of workplace culture, including recruitment, hiring, promotion, and recognition of employees. Unconscious bias may prompt managers to prefer those of the same gender, race or ethnicity, and experience; it can influence how job applications are filtered, and even how interview questions are worded.

Biases often negatively impact women, minorities, and people who identify as LGBTQ, but ageism and even an unconscious preference for attractiveness or physical stature also count as biases. Victims of bias are less productive, and their physical and mental health may suffer.

HELM Construction Solutions, which consults with construction and design companies, has used the Just framework to address biases in their own practice. They

have developed a rubric for interview questions to mitigate potential bias on the part of the interviewer and implemented a fixed-tier compensation policy, so that every employee with the same job title receives the same salary. This way, applicants who are more willing to negotiate for higher pay don’t have an advantage over those who don’t feel comfortable doing so. Salary figures are also published in job postings.

“Each person we interviewed in a screening interview mentioned and appreciated not just the benefit package we offer, but our transparency on compensation and our hiring process,” says Miriam Aylward, Director of People and Operations at HELM.

Just includes metrics for racial and ethnic diversity and gender diversity, but the intent is for organizations to go beyond policy and take definitive, sustained actions to create an inclusive culture—one that will foster a genuinely diverse workforce at all levels. Awareness can be the first step toward this goal.

“Prior to Just, we didn’t really look at the gender diversity metric directly,” says Tim Schroeder, President at Neumann Monson, an Iowa-based architecture firm. “So it brought us a level of consciousness there.”

Since participating in Just, the firm has increased gender diversity from 24% to 42% and ethnic diversity from 12% to 21%.

A GOOD RETURN ON INVESTMENT

A healthier, happier and more engaged workforce can boost company performance and resilience. [Research from the University of Oxford](#) reveals a direct correlation between employee well-being and an organization's financial performance. In this study, higher levels of employee well-being correlated with higher company valuations, return on assets and gross profits. Companies with happier employees also consistently performed better in the stock market.

Of course, offering more generous salaries and benefits comes with real, tangible costs, and organizations must honestly examine what they can and cannot provide now and what they would like to provide in the future. From there they chart a course toward achieving those goals.

Miranda Johnson, director of people and culture at Stanley Center for Peace and Security, recommends doing a cost-benefit analysis to better understand the true cost of implementing a measure. For example, increasing the percentage of health insurance coverage comes with a significant up-front cost, but it can help reduce employee turnover, which is expensive.

It is possible to calculate the time and money spent interviewing, training, and onboarding new employees, says Johnson. “What is the cost of turnover? What does it cost to replace this position?” she says. “And if you make an

investment upfront, where do you stand in one, two, five, and 10 years from now?”

It's also important to understand that many of the Just Indicators are cost neutral and may benefit an organization financially in the long run. There are many things an organization can do to boost engagement, health, and well-being—creating employee resource groups, fostering an inclusive work environment, for example—that don't cost the firm anything and can help retain staff and save money in the long run.

“Creating more equitable workplaces is not just about what more an organization can give. It's also about the experience that you're creating, the culture that you're creating, and whether or not that's going to be attractive both for retaining and bringing in new people.”

**KEITH PORTER,
STANLEY CENTER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY**



HELM Construction Solutions: Helping construction firms develop Just-aligned policies

HELM Construction Solutions, a small, woman- and non-binary-owned company, seeks to be a “one-stop shop” for small and growing residential construction firms that are interested in the triple bottom line of planet, people, and profits.

Their work is especially relevant given the major challenges facing the construction industry as a whole. As more women, minorities, and queer people enter professions that have traditionally been dominated by white men, it is critical that these new entrants feel that they belong and are being treated equitably.

A big focus at HELM is helping companies think about what they need to do internally, says Kate Stephenson, co-founder at HELM. “Even if you’re a company of all white men, there are things you can do to become a workplace where it will be safe and welcoming for someone who doesn’t look like you to join the team.”

HELM has created an employee handbook template that incorporates sample Just policies. Clients who haven’t yet developed handbooks of their own can customize the templates as needed. HELM has helped a handful of clients move through the Just process, but for most, it makes more sense to pick a couple of areas to work on, rather than taking on the whole program.

HELM often connects companies and individuals with each other so they can build community and share experiences. Because they work with so many different construction companies, HELM has a unique view of best practices in the industry, which they actively share so clients don’t have to reinvent the wheel. This can be anything from a written job description for an office manager position to options for starting a 401K program to helping firms create onboarding plans and offer support, training, and mentoring for the new hire.

This is especially helpful to smaller construction firms that may not have the staff or experience in these areas.

“With a lot of these small companies, often the owner’s doing everything: they’re doing the books; they’re managing all the projects,” says Stephenson. “After we work with them for a while, we work with them to strategize how they can get some support so that they are able to delegate some of these things both for work-life balance and to create a more sustainable and resilient business.”



Re:Vision Architecture: How to be a “good” organization

Re:Vision Architecture, a small green architecture and sustainability consulting firm based in Philadelphia, has been committed to social responsibility since their founding in 2002. They were already a certified B Corp when a Living Building Challenge prompted the firm to pursue a Just label; ever since, they’ve used Just as a tool to improve and enhance their policies and benefits.

“When you’re a small business, you make the best decisions you can with the limited information that

you have and trust your gut on a lot of things,” says Drew Lavine, partner and Director of Design at Re:Vision. “What’s really great about Just is that there’s something external that helps frame out what the best practices are and where we’re headed.”

One example where Just helped advance the firm’s policies and benefits is their family leave policy. Re:Vision has always wanted to support employees during important life and medical events, but the high cost of paying

for leaves of absence out of pocket challenged their resources. As they worked through their second Just label, the Family + Medical Leave Indicator prompted them to explore creative ways to support employees while reducing the firm’s financial exposure.

“It dawned on us to see how we could create an offering that utilized and built on our short-term disability policy offering,” says Shawn Hogan, project manager at Re:Vision.

After cost modeling various scenarios, Re:Vision decided to cover the cost of short-term disability and added a non-standard FML insurance policy for every employee. The change is a win-win: the firm offers more to employees while reducing potential risk to their business finances.

Using Just as a roadmap for continual improvement has also helped Re:Vision attract talent and stand out from competitors. They also apply their Just skill set when consulting with other organizations that are seeking Just Labels.

Re:Vision staff field trip to Muhlenberg College’s Fahy Commons (1st LBC Core certified project in the world) to see their design work realized.



Part II

PROVIDING INTERNAL GUIDANCE

A PLACE TO START

Working through the Just self-assessment gives firms honest feedback about where they are in their equity journey at that moment. The Just label is a snapshot in time—or, as some describe it, a mirror. Organizations that embark on this journey should be prepared to confront reality. Doing so can be uncomfortable; sharing the results with staff and the world at large even more so.

Firms may be surprised and even distressed to learn how they rank on some of the Indicators. “Very often you think you’re doing really well—and you probably are for benefits or stewardship or even compensation,” says Gayathri Unnikrishnan, founder of Liveable and ESG advisor. “Often the hardest step is that transparency.”

The good news is that transparency builds trust. “For us, sharing our Just label results internally and externally has sparked really meaningful conversations, both at the leadership level and with the rest of our employees,” says Jessica Boesche, Human Resources Director and Associate Principal at BranchPattern. “I feel like it’s really empowered our team to co-create solutions together.”

It’s important to acknowledge that Just is a very forward-looking framework. Thinking about the elements that represent a diverse and inclusive workplace is still a fairly new exercise, says Unnikrishnan. “We are all learning; we are all making mistakes; we are all evolving together.”

Once organizations understand where they are, they can begin to address their shortcomings.

The Just process is a great starting point, says Keith Porter, president and CEO at the Stanley Center for Peace and Security. “Even if you only do the self-evaluation using the Just label, you’ll learn a lot about your organization.”

“One of our values is this idea of constant evolution, and we appreciate that Just is also evolving,” says Anne Torney, partner at Mithun, which is currently pursuing its newest label under Just 3.0. “In addition to having a third party framework with the emphasis on quantifiable measures, we appreciate the prompts in Just, and how they help us ask pointed questions.”

“You definitely have to be ready to take a look inward. You have to be ready to have honest conversations with your employees, and also be willing to take input on what we can do to get better.”

JESSICA BOESCHE, BRANCHPATTERN

“Our ethos is ‘design for positive change,’ but we want to be authentic and realistic about where we are. The focus on quantifiable measures is part of the power of Just, and we’re grateful for that. It helps us look closely at things like turnover and retention for employees who are from underrepresented groups.”

ANNE TORNEY, MITHUN

BranchPattern: A mirror and a map

BranchPattern was an early adopter of Just. A mid-sized employee-owned building consultancy with over 100 employees across six offices, the company has renewed three times and recently published their fourth label under Just 3.0.

Rather than seeking “one and done” achievement, BranchPattern uses Just as a tool for continuous improvement and growth.

“The Just label and Just program have acted as both a mirror and a map for us,” says Jessica Boesche, Human Resources Director and Associate Principal at BranchPattern. “It has helped us do a lot of reflection and to be really honest about where we are and where we need to go.”

Since their first Just label, the firm has made measurable improvements in several Indicators, including Gender Diversity (going from Level 1 to Level 3) and Gender Pay Equity (Level 4). But more important than achieving a certain level, stresses Boesche, is using the Indicators holistically to help achieve a desired outcome.

For example, supporting women in the workplace and in the industry at large are important goals for BranchPattern. While gender diversity and pay equity

are certainly part of that effort, so are things like the opportunity to speak at conferences and utilize flexible scheduling. BranchPattern has reshaped their parental leave policy to be more flexible, and they will continue to increase their paid family and medical leave time overall. Importantly, such policies benefit all employees, not just women.

Of course, their work is not done, says Boesche. “It’s been great to look back and see all of the progress that we’ve made, but it’s also important to ask where we still have room for growth and how can we keep improving—and sending that message to our employees that they’re part of the process.”



The entire BranchPattern team gathers together at the Kansas City Headquarters for their 2024 National Meeting.

CRAFTING AND IMPROVING POLICIES

Organizations can use what they learn through the Just process to develop policies, programs, and initiatives that will promote positive change within their organizations. In fact, the framework deliberately takes a “policy-first” approach for this very reason, layering on additional requirements with each level.

The Just guidance may be especially helpful to smaller or newer organizations, or those that have experienced rapid growth. Often, organizations in these cases have not had the time or resources to craft formal policies. They may not have a devoted staff member who can do the market research to understand what metrics they should be using. At the same time, they likely have informal practices that developed organically and worked well with a small group of employees. The Just program provides sample policy templates and guidance for each Indicator, along with clear metrics for achieving each level.

Keith Porter, president and CEO at the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, used to call leaders at other non-profits and ask for their policies so he could study them. “With Just, I can look at the manual and see, okay, we’re currently at a level two,” says Porter. “What would it take to get to level three or four and plan accordingly? That’s been really

helpful, not only from a management position, but for creating the kind of culture that we want.”

Moving through the framework prompted multi-disciplinary design firm Mithun to create or improve policies organized around each of the Indicators.

“Just inspired us to create more structure and transparency around some informal practices that were already happening,” says Erin Ishizaki, partner at Mithun.

For example, the firm was already compensating employees for volunteer time, but since going through the Just process they have drafted a clear and formal policy. Now, each employee is compensated for 16 volunteer hours per year.

HELM Construction Solutions initially used Just to incorporate new policies into their employee handbook. Now on their third label, the process prompts them to re-examine their policies regularly and deeply.

“As the program is intended to do, Just nudges us to think about what’s the next thing we could do to improve,” says Kate Stephenson, co-founder at HELM.

SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

Just prompts organizations to first conduct a holistic self-evaluation of current culture, policies, and benefits, then to chart a path toward continuous improvement.

For example, for the Racial + Ethnic Diversity Indicator under Just 3.0, the requirement for Level 1 is simply to write a policy that “includes commitment to a racially and ethnically diverse workforce. Subsequent levels require increasing representation of racial or ethnic minority groups; Levels 3 and 4 also require that the organization advocates for and takes action toward greater racial and ethnic diversity within its industry.

Those who participate in Just stress that true change happens incrementally—and it takes time. As important as a label is as an assessment tool, the point is not to earn a high score, but to spur change and cultivate a workplace that is beneficial to all.

“We know we have to move our company policies in increments,” says Drew Lavine, Director of Design at Re:Vision Architecture. We’re always trying to understand, what are the increments that bring the most impact to our staff and our community and don’t cause us to fracture in the process? At the end of the day, it always goes back to intent and impact.”



d2d Green Design: An employee handbook for a growing firm

Baani Singh, founder and principal at d2d Green Design, discovered Just while researching what it takes to become a B Corp.

Staff at this small, minority- and woman-owned architecture, sustainability, and interior design firm have always worked remotely but enjoy a close-knit, caring company culture, where they celebrate each other's accomplishments, birthdays, and anniversaries.

d2d has grown rapidly in recent years. With a dozen staff spread across New York State and beyond, there was a need to formalize policies that reflect the just and equitable culture they have cultivated from the beginning.

From contributing to personalized health plans to sending soup to sick teammates, d2d's benefits reflect genuine care. They've always allowed employees to pursue their own health insurance and paid toward it, but this was never spelled out anywhere.

Just helped them turn these informal practices into written commitments. For example, d2d had long hosted in-person gatherings each year. Now, they've committed to scheduling three to four annually.

They've also formalized their approach to meals during site visits, ensuring they are organic, low-sugar, and accommodate dietary needs. These policies live in a new handbook the firm developed through the Just process.

"We were so small when we started the Just process," says Singh. "Just actually helped us create that handbook from scratch and do it right the first time."

For a staff that mostly works remotely, having a central place for people to find and learn about policies and benefits is essential. Their Just label has given d2d an edge in a competitive market.

d2d consistently pushes beyond baseline sustainability, aligning every detail from policy to practice with their mission of environmental justice and human-centered design. Their Just label signals to clients and recruits that they walk the talk. "It's telling people we care about our staff," says Singh. "We are that type of organization, and we have a label to show that we are. And this label is not given to just anyone."

Enjoying camaraderie over a shared home-cooked meal at d2d Design's annual Family Day celebration.

Stanley Center for Peace and Security: Translating values into policy

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security, a foundation based in Muscatine, Iowa, discovered Just after committing to the Living Building Challenge for their new headquarters. The non-profit nurtures policy progress on three global challenges: mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The Just social equity program aligns with the organization's mission and ethos, and it made sense for them to participate.

“We’ve always had lofty values and principles and sometimes struggled—not for any lack of intent, but from a lack of information—about how to craft those values and principles into policies and culture, says Keith Porter, president and CEO at the Stanley Center. “The Just label has been more than helpful in that aspect.”

By providing clear metrics, the holistic framework has prompted them to make significant changes. For example, they now pay their interns a living wage and compensate employees for their volunteer time.

“Of course we wanted to do those things; we had just never thought to do them before,” says Mark Seaman, vice president and director of communications at the Stanley Center. “Just label has helped catalyze a more holistic approach to being better employers.”

The Racial + Ethnic Diversity Indicator has given the organization clear guidance for comparing their staff's ethnic diversity with the demographics of their region.

“There’s a strong desire for a higher level of ethnic and racial diversity in our staff, but that can sound like a cop-out if you’re not aware of your regional ethnic diversity and what you can do to create a staff that at least mirrors what you see locally,” says Porter.

The Stanley Center’s location in Muscatine, Iowa, has made it difficult to attract candidates who prefer the assets of a large, multi-cultural urban center. Though they can’t change that reality, they can investigate their recruitment and interviewing process to ensure they are drawing from a diverse pool of candidates.

“Just has been really helpful in showing you what good looks like,” says Porter, “not only by outlining what an organization can do to recruit diverse talent and cultivate an inclusive workplace, but providing the metrics to help measure progress.”

Staff members from the Stanley Center for Peace and Security volunteer at a local coat drive as part of their community’s United Way Day of Caring.



Part III

BRANDING & CERTIFICATIONS

HELPING FIRMS STAND OUT

Firms and non-profits that pursue Just are often mission-driven organizations that are also committed to sustainability, climate justice, and other aligned values. The program gives firms a concrete way to quantify and communicate values.

“We always had really strong genuine values across our three offices, but weren’t active in voicing them,” says Loretta Sachs, associate principal at Integrus, an architecture firm with offices in Oregon and Washington State. “The Just label provides a vehicle to not just show that we value transparency, but to communicate those values to everyone, from our own employees to potential clients.”

Whether displaying a Just label on the home page of a website, including Just in a job posting, or discussing the program in a social media post or blog, participation in Just can help distinguish an organization and send a strong signal about its values to potential clients, partners, employees, and even investors.

“Our clients increasingly want to work with a firm that walks the talk when it comes to equity and sustainability,” says Boesche of BranchPattern, a building consultancy firm headquartered in Kansas City. “Our Just label has really become a differentiator for us and a signal of our own integrity and commitment to social justice.”

Because BranchPattern engages in ESG reporting and has a Just label, they are also better positioned to consult with companies with social equity goals of their own.

Just can help establish a company’s reputation and brand in the market, says Unnikrishnan. It can also help a firm stand out to a potential client when submitting a proposal. And of course, whether or not that firm wins the job directly impacts their bottom line.

Iowa-based firm Neumann Monson advertises their participation in Just to help attract aligned clients.

“In every interview with a potential client, we present our Just label to say, this is a priority, and it helps filter the right clients,” says Tim Schroeder, President at Neumann Monson. “There’s that value alignment when we do work together down the road.”

A Just label may also help attract investors. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investing, an investment strategy that accounts for a company’s environmental and social impacts, is accelerating. According to [California Department of Financial Protection & Innovation](#), ESG assets now represent one third of global assets under management; increasingly, ESG investors are focusing as much on how companies address employee health and well-being as on their environmental impact.

THE ESG INVESTING EDGE

ESG investments aren’t just better for the environment and communities. The investment strategy also yields significant benefits for investors, including enviable long-term growth and resilience during market contractions compared to other S&P 500 stocks. ESG companies will also likely better weather long-term impacts of climate change.

Though challenging the status quo always comes with some risks, it can be good for an organization, says Unnikrishnan, pointing to Patagonia and Apple as prime examples of companies that have integrated social equity values within their operations. “There are companies that are widely successful who have done it already, and they have done it because it makes good business sense to do it, not just because it feels good.”

Integrus Architecture: Educating the next generation

When two legacy firms—Integrus and YGH—merged three years ago, Just was key to synthesizing two different groups of employees, says Becky Barnhart, CEO at Integrus. “It was a helpful and thought-provoking way for the conversations needed when merging cultures and locations.”

A civic and public works firm, Integrus Architecture frequently designs learning environments and is invested in educating its own staff. The firm is also actively involved in educating the next generation of architects. Staff from Integrus’ three Pacific Northwest offices participate as instructors in several regional design education programs, working with kids from K-12 to college students.

“A lot of the advocacy work we do is to improve the ethnic diversity of those who are entering the architecture profession,” says Ericka Colvin, director of sustainable practice at Integrus. “Ultimately we’re pushing towards having our practice be more reflective of the communities that we serve.”

Integrus supports the National Organization of Minority Architects by participating as board members in local chapters in Portland and Seattle, attending and speaking at the national conference, and as a signatory to the NOMA PDX “Call to Action” program. Integrus staff also work with students in NOMA summer student design camps.

Integrus All Company Rally 2025

In Spokane, architectural staff regularly host information sessions with design, engineering and construction students from area colleges and universities. They also participate in student project reviews and jury student project awards conferred at AIA Spokane events.

For Architects in Schools, a program of the Architecture Foundation of Oregon, Integrus staff work with elementary students on site at schools throughout the year. They work closely with teachers to align with current curriculum subjects including, science, social studies and history. They teach students a variety of skills, including design thinking, sketching plans, creating physical models, and explaining their designs.

Collectively, these efforts are helping build a more diverse and inclusive design industry.



ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER GREEN BUILDING PROGRAMS

Participation in Just can help a project obtain certification through certain green building programs, including the Living Building Challenge, LEED, and WELL. In fact, many organizations first encounter Just while pursuing the Living Building Challenge.

As part of the Equity Petal, the Challenge requires at least two project team members to achieve a Just label. Five additional organizations attached to the project are encouraged to complete a Just self-assessment.

LEED v4 and 4.1 (BD+C and ID+C) offer a [pilot credit](#) called “Social equity within the project team.” Under Option 2, project teams must demonstrate social responsibility on a company level. The owner, developer, designer, or builder can either create a report addressing a holistic list of equity

criteria or achieve certification under one of the listed frameworks, Just being one of them.

Living Future worked with International Well Building Institute (IWBI) to create the [WELL Alignment Tool](#). A review of strategies revealed those that are closely aligned based on the topic, criteria and intended outcome. Though not a full crosswalk, this document can help project teams that are pursuing both Just 2.0 and WELL.

For example, Just and the WELL Equity Rating both address workforce representation. Just includes gender representation goals for the workforce and senior leadership, as well as proof that they are met. The WELL Equity Rating includes an assessment of workforce demographics and an action plan that includes goal setting and annual progress tracking.

Note that requirements may not fully overlap; projects pursuing both rating systems should submit documentation using the established process for each system.

IWBI and Living Future are looking to collaborate on a similar alignment tool for Just 3.0.

Side x Side Architects: Cultivating an ecosystem of care

Side x Side Architects, a holistic, mission-driven architecture firm located in Seattle’s Chinatown International district, works “side by side” with the region’s most impacted populations, delivering projects that provide affordable, healthy housing, schools, community services, and more.

Side x Side was an early adopter of Just, helping beta test Just 2.0 and piloting six of the expanded indicators in Just 3.0.

Co-founder and Partner Gladys Ly-Au Young says participation in Just is helping her firm cultivate an “ecosystem of care,” a vision of design driven by social and environmental equity where everyone can thrive.

“The Just framework gave us clarity in terms of why and what we are doing as part of an ecosystem of care—how things fit into a pattern of being equitable,” says Ly-Au Young. “You cannot outwardly proclaim you are working towards an equitable outcome if internally you are not that way, too.”

Just helps align the firm’s external mission and internal culture. Side x Side’s staff engage deeply with the communities their projects serve—a process that requires sensitivity in how to best engage in meaningful feedback loops. They also share resources and invite



“Design for Food Equity” series presentation with [Seattle Architects Without Borders](#) and Side x Side Architects, special guest presenter from [Restaurant to Garden](#). Photo credit: Abdirahman Mohamed

aligned mission-driven organizations to utilize the community space in their office building for meetings and programs. Internally, they have used Just to reveal practice as usual blind spots and create a workplace that’s better for all.

Ly-Au Young believes such an approach can drive the transition from business as usual—a transactional system that allows harm to ecosystems and human communities and leaves vulnerable people without a voice—to a regenerative built environment.

“A regenerative environment and future rely on the collective capacity of all of us to be able to improve our ecosystem for everything—humans beings and all creatures—so that everyone can thrive,” says Ly-Au Young. “Just is part of a check system within your workplace that helps build resilient individuals and communities. Then we can all do the greater thing of building towards this regenerative future.”

Mithun: Using Just to deepen community ties

Mithun is a national practice providing integrated design services—encompassing urban design and planning, architecture, interior design and landscape architecture—from three West Coast offices. They are a mission-driven firm with a simple but powerful ethos: design for positive change.

Mithun has long held values of social justice and equity. Now on their fourth Just label, the firm appreciates how the program is continuously transforming, just as they are. The evolving framework has encouraged a deeper, more integrated approach to their work as well as their internal culture and how they engage with communities as a business.

Community Connections is a new Indicator in Just 3.0 that prompts organizations to “facilitate restorative connections and empowering relationships” with the communities they serve and in which they operate.

“This most recent version is really exciting because we’re seeing a convergence of how we engage with community on a project basis or how we engage with community more broadly,” says Erin Ishizaki, partner at Mithun.

For years, Mithun has fostered deeper relationships with communities that have experienced a

For the Resilient by Design Bay Area Challenge, Mithun team members worked closely with a Community Advisory Board comprised of 20 North Richmond residents, elected officials, local nonprofits, and agency stakeholders who shaped the design and helped capture maximum community benefits through meetings and workshops.



legacy of environmental and racial injustice—for example, expanding upon project work with additional pro bono and volunteer activities in San Francisco’s Mission District, North Richmond, California, and Seattle’s South Park neighborhood.

“It’s a nice convergence of efforts where we’re going deeper in specific places and having real relationships,” says Ishizaki.

Just dovetails with Mithun’s internal initiatives. For example, to help integrate equity into project workflow as part of the firm’s JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and

inclusion) goals, the firm developed an Equity Toolkit to help project teams structure their efforts. Teams begin by researching the history of place and identifying a community’s social justice values, using what they discover to develop a community engagement process. What they learn informs the design response.

“Understanding the perspectives of folks with whom we might not share life experiences in a deeper, longer-term way helps us to better serve those communities,” says Ishizaki. “That kind of richness benefits our work on many levels.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

An organization that achieves and advertises a Just label sets an example for what good looks like and transparently conveys how they are working to do better. Such examples can inspire other organizations that aspire to live their values—or at the very least, to ask questions they might not have otherwise asked.

On a pragmatic level, Just lends credibility to firms that provide sustainability consulting or pursue certifications such as Living Building Challenge or LEED.

“We can’t tell people to be Just certified for their Living Building project when we ourselves are not,” says Baani Singh, principal at d2d Green Architects. “If a firm is pursuing Living Building projects, they’re going to need a Just firm on the team. What better story to tell when you’re trying to get those type of projects in your portfolio?”

Social equity has lagged behind other metrics or “pillars” of sustainability, such as environmental impacts like energy efficiency, embodied carbon. That is starting to change.

Social equity is part of a holistic set of criteria that can be applied, for example, to building design or material specification for building projects. Progressive designers and builders, with support from influential and aligned organizations such as Living Future, American Institute of

Architects, and U.S. Green Building Council, are adopting this more holistic approach.

By elevating social equity alongside other aspects of sustainability, Just can help raise awareness and encourage organizations to take this introspective look. On a philosophical level, participating in Just can help drive the paradigm shift to a more equitable and regenerative ways of doing business. A tall order, to be sure, but one that feels more achievable when many organizations are working on it together.

“Just provides best practices and provides that market research for what good, better, best, excellent looks like. Because then we don’t have to go and do that market research. And that is really valuable for small businesses.”

SHAWN HOGAN, RE:VISION ARCHITECTURE

Part IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

Just Report: 10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JUST ORGANIZATIONS



1

Use Just as a mirror.

Work through the Just self-assessment to learn where your organization stands. Prepare to be surprised, but try not to judge. This is your starting place.



2

Formalize policies.

Developing formal written policies around informal practices ensures all employees are covered equally; promotes transparency, and adds a layer of accountability.



3

Analyze long-term costs + benefits.

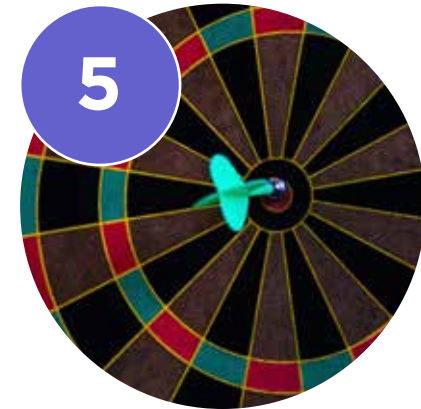
If you think your organization can't afford to provide or enhance a benefit, consider the cost against the long-term savings you will see by implementing the measure.



4

Engage employees in the Just process.

Don't assume you understand what employees desire in their workplace culture. Ask them for feedback. Doing so also helps share the responsibility of cultivating a healthy, equitable workplace.



5

Connect Just with company goals.

It's important to have a clear understanding of how the Just metrics connect with your organization's goals. Then you can use the framework to help plan a stepwise strategy for reaching them.



6

Proclaim your Just label.

Advertise your label on promotional materials, job listings, and proposals. By making Just part of your company brand, you will stand out and attract like-minded clients, partners, and employees.



7

Be patient.

Understand that real, sustainable change takes time. Set realistic goals and take an incremental approach.



8

Use Just to spur creative solutions.

The Just framework can help organizations think about out-of-the-box approaches to enhancing benefits. And don't forget: many of the Just indicators don't cost anything at all.



9

Think about health & well-being holistically.

When crafting policies and benefits, don't just consider physical health, but ways your organization can support employees' mental health and well-being.



10

Use Just to help build networks of like-minded individuals.

Doing so is critical for prompting the paradigm shift to a regenerative environment and future.

OUR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The nine organizations featured in this report are fully committed to transparency, equity, and creating Just workplaces. Most are early adopters of Just and have contributed to the evolution of the program. Many are going through the Just process for the third or fourth time. The Stanley Center for Peace and Security just received their Just 3.0 label; three partnering organizations—HELM Construction Solutions, Mithun, and Re:Vision Architecture—are currently pursuing labels under Just 3.0.

PARTNER BIOS + JUST LABELS



BranchPattern is a building consultancy dedicated to creating Better Built Environments®. Our team consists of Professional Engineers, Registered Architects and Building Scientists that focus on implementing programs and solutions to optimize human experience and environmental stewardship. The firm provides broad expertise to support the sustainability goals of the Commercial Real Estate Industry throughout North America, South America and Europe.



d2d Green Design dares to take design to a different dimension – one of sustainability, energy efficiency, and healthy wellbeing. d2d Green Architecture, PLLC, dba d2d Green Design, is a full-service Architecture, Sustainability, and Interior Design firm. Our mission is to make your vision a reality through creative collaboration, skilled project management, and a knowledgeable team.

With two core studios—Architecture/Interior Design and Sustainability, we deliver inspirational design grounded in equity, occupant wellness, environmental justice, and long-term relationships built on open communication.





Founded ten years ago, **HELM Construction Solutions** is a planet- and people-forward firm with expertise in construction, management, leadership, and training. We work with contractors and design-build firms throughout North America to help businesses thrive — with more resilient finances, a positive and inclusive work culture, and a more beneficial impact on the environment.



Founded in 1953, **Integrus Architecture** is a leading Pacific Northwest public works design firm committed to creating beautiful, functional, and resilient spaces that reflect and serve their communities. Specializing in K-12, higher education, civic design, and U.S. embassies, we are committed to promoting connection, stewardship, and social justice. A recent merger with YGH, extends firm impact from Spokane, Seattle, to Portland, and around the world.



Mithun is an integrated design firm dedicated to creating positive change in people’s lives. A national practice with offices in Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles, the firm’s architects, landscape architects, interior designers, urban designers and planners work in a wide range of typologies and scales. The firm is an internationally recognized leader in sustainability, combining exemplary design with a focus on building and site performance, human health and social equity.



NEUMANN MONSON ARCHITECTS

With studios in Iowa City and Des Moines, **Neumann Monson Architects** has created enduring, sustainable, and people-centered design for nearly five decades. Guided by empathy and collaboration, we align client vision with straightforward, functional solutions that tell the story of community and place. Our non-hierarchical culture fosters innovation and care, delivering architecture that empowers people, strengthens communities, and benefits the planet—redefining excellence through trust, responsibility, and purposeful design.



Side x Side Architects envision working side by side with communities to design socially and environmentally just places, transforming architectural practice into an ecosystem of care. The name embodies our dedication to changing the practice of architecture-as-usual by broadening the spectrum of design services. We achieve this by working side by side with mission-driven organizations to create buildings and spaces that unite the physical beauty of architectural design with the enduring resilience of equity, social justice, and environmental responsibility.





The **Stanley Center for Peace and Security** partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to nurture policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The Global Education program at the Stanley Center partners with the Muscatine, Iowa community—specifically local educators and organizations—to grow global awareness and understanding.



Re:Vision is a Philadelphia-based green architecture and sustainability consulting practice with a mission to re-vision and restore the balance between natural, built, and social environments. Since 2002, Re:Vision’s portfolio has grown to include a variety of non-profit, commercial, higher-ed, and residential projects that range from “common sense green” to deeply restorative. Our projects have achieved certifications in Living Building Challenge, Net-Zero Energy/Carbon, Passive House, LEED, SITES, WELL, as well as B Corp Certifications and Just Labels.



THE PATH TO A THRIVING WORKPLACE



STEP 1:

Center People

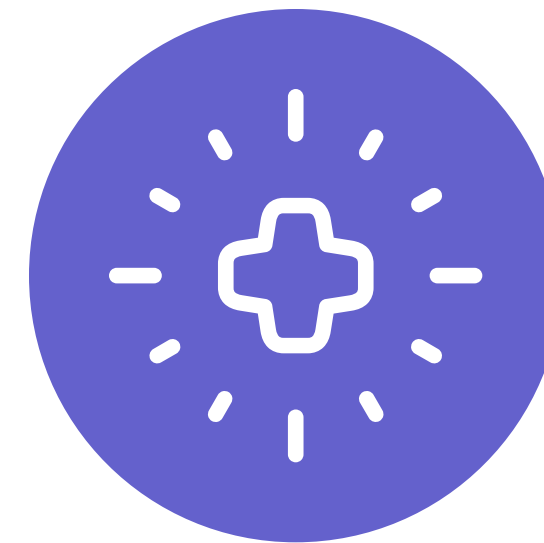
Prioritize employee well-being as essential to success.



STEP 2:

Advance Equity

Build fair opportunities and inclusive practices.



STEP 3:

Foster Wellness

Promote holistic health and supportive cultures.



STEP 4:

Measure Progress

Use the Just framework to track and benchmark.



STEP 5:

Drive Impact

Create thriving workplaces for long-term success.