

design for freedom grace farms



Design for Freedom Pilot Projects model more transparent and ethical supply chains in built works.

pilot project case study

Humanscale Showroom
Humanscale, REDDYMADE, The Sheward
Partnership, bKL Architecture, WSP, Interface
Engineering Inc., CDI Construction Group, Inc.
Chicago, Illinois
Completion date: June 2024



Pilot Project Program and Humanscale Showroom

Design for Freedom is the global movement, led by Grace Farms, to eliminate forced and child labor from the building materials supply chain. Through Design for Freedom Pilot Projects, Grace Farms partners with manufacturers and project teams to trace building materials into their supply chains, identify where labor risk is highest, and document what responsible sourcing requires in practice.

This case study examines Humanscale's 4,000-square-foot Chicago showroom in the Fulton Market District. The showroom was built to align with the rigorous sustainability standards of the Living Future and Design for Freedom principles to ensure ethical sourcing of materials.

Humanscale has been part of the Design for Freedom movement since 2021 as a member of the Design for Freedom Working Group and a supporter of the Design for Freedom Summit. The company undertook this Pilot Project to examine its own supply chain and share its learnings with the broader industry. As a manufacturer of furniture and ergonomic products for the workplace, Humanscale worked with Grace Farms throughout the project to advance ethical supply chain practices.

Humanscale is headquartered in New York City, with over 50 showrooms in design districts around the world, including London, Singapore, and Sydney. Its new Chicago location in Fulton Market is home to the annual Fulton Market Design Days, which draws 50,000 to 70,000 design professionals each June. The showroom was conceived as a high-quality space to engage the commercial interior design industry year-round. It is also the brand's first showroom to demonstrate responsible supply chains and the first to display products in a ground-floor retail space open to the public. The expansive open space is lined with full-height windows and includes an interior fit-out for meetings and other workspace needs.

From the beginning, the design approach aligned with the International Living Future Institute's Living Building Challenge (LBC), a rigorous green-building standard that evaluates projects across seven performance areas. Humanscale had explored the LBC on previous projects, and the Chicago Showroom presented an opportunity to put this longtime goal into practice. The LBC framework helped inform the design direction and was integrated throughout the process. The Sheward Partnership guided the work to meet LBC requirements.

As a result of Humanscale's commitment to LBC, the team began documenting material transparency in greater detail. Drawing on Humanscale's strong relationships within the commercial manufacturing industry, the project team reached out to trusted collaborators that share its commitment to sustainability as a market differentiator for their products. Once the project became an official Design for Freedom Pilot Project, Humanscale engaged The Sheward Partnership to work with the Design for Freedom team to connect with suppliers, prioritizing those with an established relationship, about participating in the Pilot.

Humanscale is also a Certified B Corp, reflecting a broader commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility across the organization – a commitment detailed further in the Certified B Corp section on page 8.

“Architects and designers have 40% more purchasing power than a normal person. So, when you think about the fact that we have 40% more power than everyone out there to make a difference, including students, what are we doing with that?”

And that's why [Design for Freedom] exists, to really think about that kind of multiplier that already exists, whether it's in purchasing power, or the ability to really transform a profession, a field... This is big.”

Suchi Reddy, FAIA, Founder, REDDYMADÉ
From the 2025 Design for Freedom Summit at Grace Farms



Pilot Project Outcomes:

Analyzing the Humanscale Supply Chain

The Humanscale Chicago Showroom is the first Design for Freedom Pilot Project in which the manufacturer and owner put their own supply chain under examination. The team chose to analyze the Mio Monitor Arm for its versatility and to illustrate the complexity of manufactured products: the product alone contains 80 different components, including several materials at high risk for forced labor, such as aluminum, copper, iron, and zinc. During the project, Humanscale encountered several barriers during the procurement process, providing important data that can inform the industry about needed changes.

Aligned Certifications Enhance Transparency

Several certification programs and frameworks supported greater transparency throughout the project. Humanscale earned its B Corp certification in 2024, the same year the Chicago Showroom opened. Together, the Design for Freedom and Living Building Challenge commitments shaped material selection, and the resulting partnerships are helping to push the industry toward more standardized responsible practices. The Humanscale Chicago showroom achieved Living Building Challenge Petal certification with the Materials and Health + Happiness Petals in 2026.

Building Awareness Early in the Construction Process

As with many design-bid-build projects, the Humanscale Showroom design team faced contractor substitutions – a common risk due to schedule or supply chain constraints. The team responded by educating stakeholders, including the General Contractor, about the project's commitments. The team also recommended pre-construction meetings with subcontractors on future projects to establish requirements from the outset.

Convening & Raising Industry Awareness

The Humanscale Chicago Showroom welcomed more than 10,000 visitors during its opening weekend for the Fulton Market Design Days and NeoCon conferences in June 2024. To celebrate the opening, Jane Abernethy, Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) at Humanscale, led a public discussion about Design for Freedom Pilot Projects and opportunities to accelerate change through industry alignment. Joining the conversation were Nora Rizzo of Grace Farms, Suchi Reddy of REDDYMADÉ, Mike Johnson of Living Future, Chloe Bendistis of The Sheward Partnership, and Laurel Chadzynski of mindfulMATERIALS. The showroom continues to serve as a public invitation to consider the role of responsible supply chains.



Pilot Project Outcomes:

Global Reach

The Humanscale Chicago Showroom marks the beginning of a long-term global partnership between REDDYMADE and Humanscale, extending to additional showrooms in Paris, Sydney, and Singapore. The Chicago Showroom has received global recognition including a 2024 *METROPOLIS* Planet Positive Award, recognizing excellence in sustainable, healthy, and just design at every scale across the built environment.

Vendor Relationship with UNICOR (Federal Prison Industries)

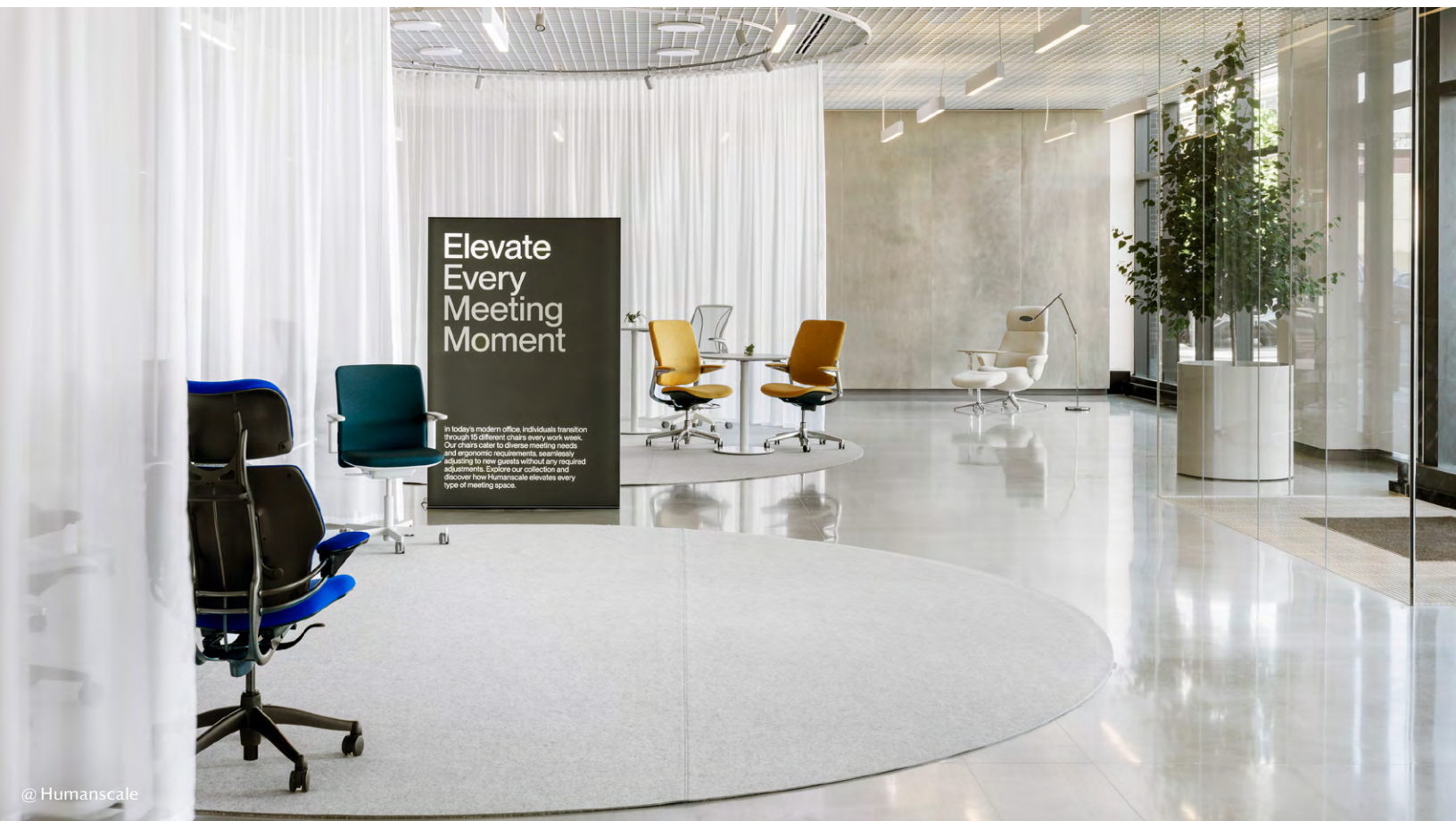
While Design for Freedom launched in 2020 with the initial focus on global forced and child labor, it has since expanded its research and awareness-building efforts to include prison labor. Design for Freedom's research into forced labor in the United States Prison System emerged in late 2024 with a dedicated essay in the [***Design for Freedom International Guidance & Toolkit***](#).

Given this additional focus, Humanscale was transparent about its over 20-year partnership with UNICOR, sharing its process and motivation for participating in the vendor partnership, which included products such as the Freedom Chair, an office chair that has received numerous awards for its ergonomic design. The commitment to ethical and sustainable sourcing in this Pilot Project further elevated awareness across Humanscale's supply chains about the complexities of corporate vendor relationships with prisons and their responsibilities to the incarcerated program trainees.

Biophilic Design Workshop

Design for Freedom's collaboration with Humanscale continued in April 2026, when Jane Abernethy, CSO of Humanscale, led a workshop with Humanscale's design team at Grace Farms. The 80-acre landscape offered a meaningful place to explore Biomimicry and Life's Principles in action, which emulate nature's forms, processes, and ecosystems to create more sustainable designs.

Together with Kim Kelly, Grace Farms' Director of Horticulture, the team explored the Grace Farms landscape, taking advantage of the opportunity to slow down, observe, and reflect on how nature can guide more sustainable design. The day-long workshop reinforced the value of learning directly from the natural world and how those lessons can be integrated into future design choices that benefit both people and planet, including through responsible supply chains.



@ Humanscale

The Humanscale Chicago Showroom opened in June 2024

Materials Tracked (Types of Materials)

Porcelain Wall & Floor Tile, Textiles, Area Rug, Timber Laminate, Furniture

Materials Sourced (Countries)

U.S.: New Hampshire, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia

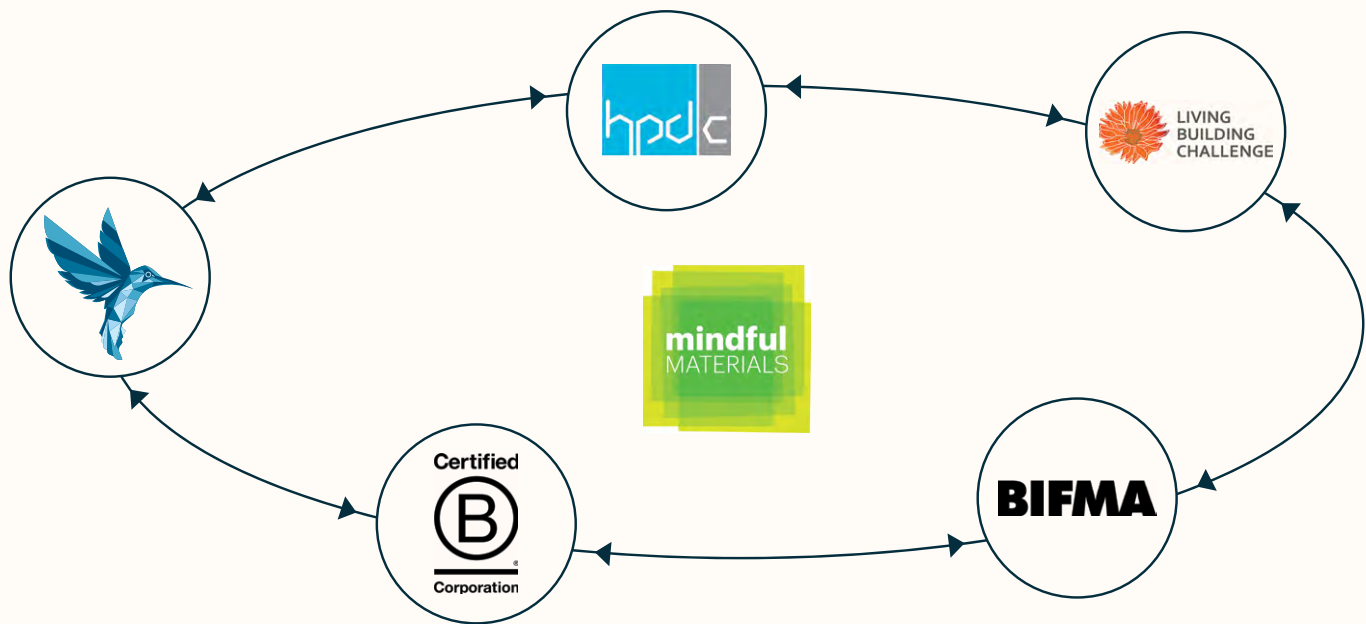
International: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Germany, Ireland, Iraq, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, United Kingdom

Certification and Labels

Living Product Challenge, Declare – Red List Free, HPD, GREENGUARD Gold, SA8000, CDPH, Foventech's Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement, CSR Report, Supplier Audit Form, FSC, Responsible Forestry Certified, SCS Global Chain of Custody Certification for Raw Materials, BIFMA LEVEL® 3, SCS Indoor Advantage, MID

Suppliers provided the following documentation

Supplier Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Ethical Material Tracking Schedule, WAP Sustainability Value Chain Chemical Management System



Key Industry Partners and Certifications within the Pilot Project

Industry Alignment

The project team approached this Design for Freedom Pilot Project by drawing on knowledge and key indicators from leading organizations across the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) industries to identify products with more transparent and sustainable supply chains. Pursuing multiple certifications, standards, and industry frameworks created a versatile guiding network, including the Living Building Challenge, Health Product Declarations Collaborative, Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers and B Corp, to identify products with known transparency, supply chain visibility and aligned values for fair labor practices.

Living Building Challenge

The Living Building Challenge (LBC) served as a framework to identify leading sustainable and transparent materials available in the marketplace today. The LBC certification process requires engaged conversations with manufacturers to advocate for healthier materials and enhance transparency in the supply chain. Design for Freedom and LBC share similar values and work together to enhance material selection and ensure the project team selected, invested in, and installed materials that have redefined responsible and ethical manufacturing processes within the industry.

To begin the Design for Freedom Pilot Project, The Sheward Partnership, a premier architecture, planning, urban design, and sustainability consulting firm, and Humanscale identified 16 leading manufacturers from the more than 200 materials specified for the project. These 16 potential manufacturers were prioritized based on a Declare label or Living Product label that demonstrates increased contact and negotiation with the supply chain around material ingredients, creating a foundation for human rights conversations.

Material Health with Health Product Declarations

Health Product Declaration (HPD) is a standardized transparency reporting format that allows manufacturers to disclose the compositional chemistry and associated health information of their products, particularly those used in the built environment.

An initial selection of materials on the Pilot Project was identified because they had an HPD, which provided transparent ingredient reports, avoidance of prohibited contaminants and chemicals called Red List ingredients, low-VOC emissions. The LBC Red List is a list of chemicals representing the “worst in class” substances prevalent in the building industry that pose serious risks to human health and the environment. Enduring hazardous conditions



Humanscale Chicago Showroom

is a negligent risk within supply chains and can be considered an indicator of manufacturing practices at risk of forced and child labor.

The AEC industry's focus on building occupant health often does not take into account the fabricators, extractors, factory workers, and suppliers who encounter these products throughout the supply chain, or the fenceline communities neighboring production facilities that are exposed to toxic chemicals in the air and water. Providing "working conditions that are safe and hygienic" is considered a standard of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) Base Code, developed by the International Labour Organization as a guideline of fair labor practices. Design for Freedom addresses the intersection of human health impacts as an indicator of supply chain practices at risk of forced labor or hazardous working conditions on Pilot Projects.

Certified B Corp

Humanscale became a Certified B Corp in 2024, recognizing its focus on sustainable practices and human rights policies. As Humanscale continued to incrementally expand its environmental stewardship goals, the company recognized that the next logical step was to evaluate its human rights policies and align with Design for Freedom principles.

BIFMA

Humanscale began responsible sourcing conversations with its supply chain in 2010 in pursuit of BIFMA LEVEL® certification, a third-party certified program that signals the environmental and social sustainability of furniture products in the built environment. This foundational commitment informs Humanscale's product line today. The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) was founded in 1973, driven by the need to establish uniform safety and performance standards for the commercial furniture industry.



Nora Rizzo, Suchi Reddy, Dave Lemont, Myrrh Caplan, and Amy Musanti at the 2025 Design for Freedom Summit

External Approach: Identifying Materials

To begin an active dialogue with each manufacturer, The Sheward Partnership contacted the manufacturer's sustainability lead identified on the Health Product Declaration (HPD). In the absence of a recognizable contact, the design team reached out to the local sales representative.

Overall, manufacturers that had already been filtered by LPC or HPD standards were motivated to learn more about the Design for Freedom Pilot Project program and eager to participate. The project team held meetings with each manufacturer to discuss documentation and timeline.

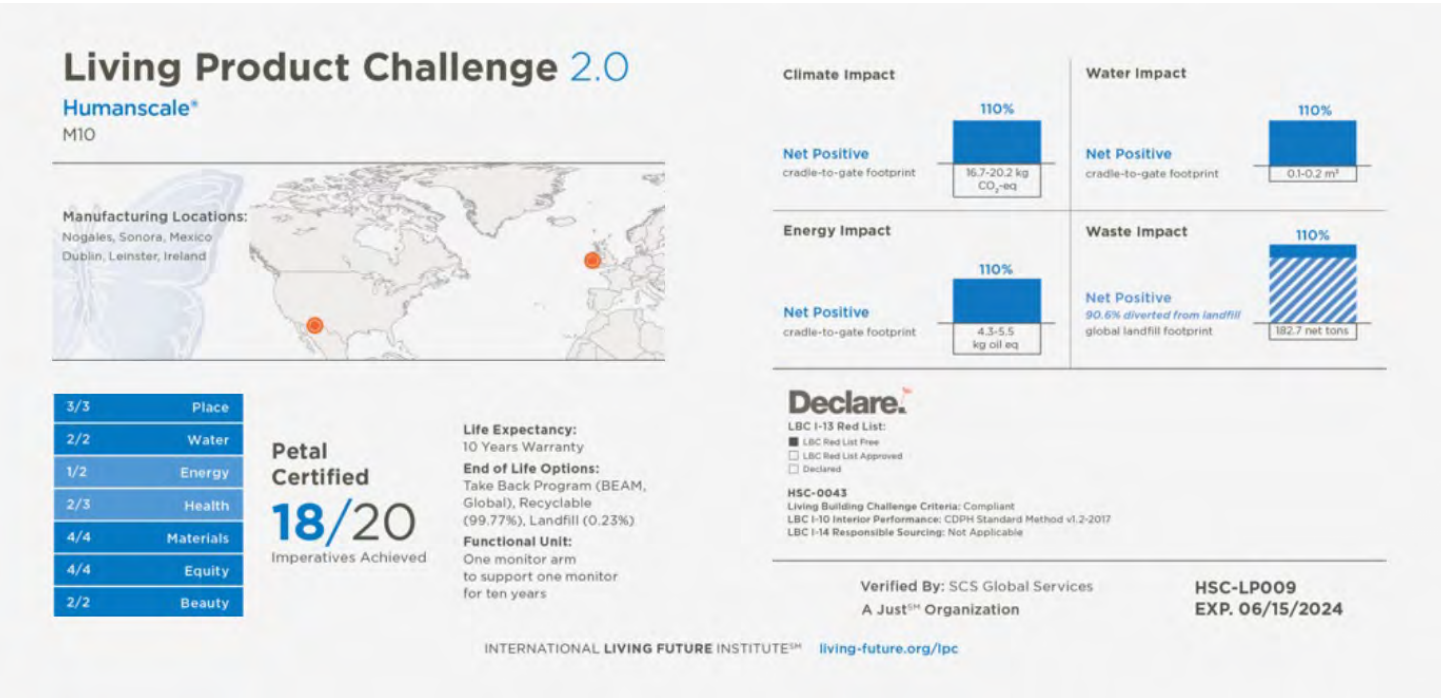
The identified manufacturers completed the Design for Freedom Supplier Questionnaire. The team used responses as an initial screening of suppliers that were being considered, similar to the information-gathering process of a Request for Proposal (RFP).

The next step was to collect provenance documentation to substantiate responses to the questionnaire, such as:

- raw material extraction locations
- list of suppliers
- receipts
- chain of custody
- certifications
- written statements indicating responsible labor practices

As a manufacturer and contributor to the Supplier Questionnaire within the original *Design for Freedom Toolkit* published in 2022, Humanscale was eager to see how the process would unfold using the tools in real time. The documentation provided was effective in providing a greater understanding of the suppliers' commitment to transparency.

Many manufacturers were interested in participating but unable to provide necessary documentation, whether based on availability or confidentiality of information. It became clear that while policies are easy to outline, answering the real questions about the experience within the supply chain requires significant effort. The Sheward Partnership reached out to a total of 16 different manufacturers, often competitors with similar products. The gathered information helped inform the project team's decision-making process



M10 Monitor Arm Living Product Challenge Declare Label

The Humanscale Showroom became an official Design for Freedom Pilot Project in 2023. Parameters for Pilot Projects at that time required tracking at least five identified building materials as far back as possible into their supply chains. For each material identified, project teams were required to provide significant documentation on the product’s supply chain labor practices. With a growing industry body of knowledge and learnings compounding with each project, Pilot Project teams take on more informed research and product analysis every year. By 2024, the Pilot Project standard had doubled to 10 materials, including one circular product.

Manufacturers shared a variety of documents to substantiate their responses to the Self-Assessment Questionnaire. Design for Freedom continually asks the industry to improve upon existing standards through Digital Product Passports, real-time supply chain mapping data, and third-party verified audits to provide accurate, product-specific information.

M10 Monitor Arm Exploration

The M10 Monitor Arm (introduced in the Outcomes section above) is commonly sourced across many of Humanscale’s workplace and showroom projects.

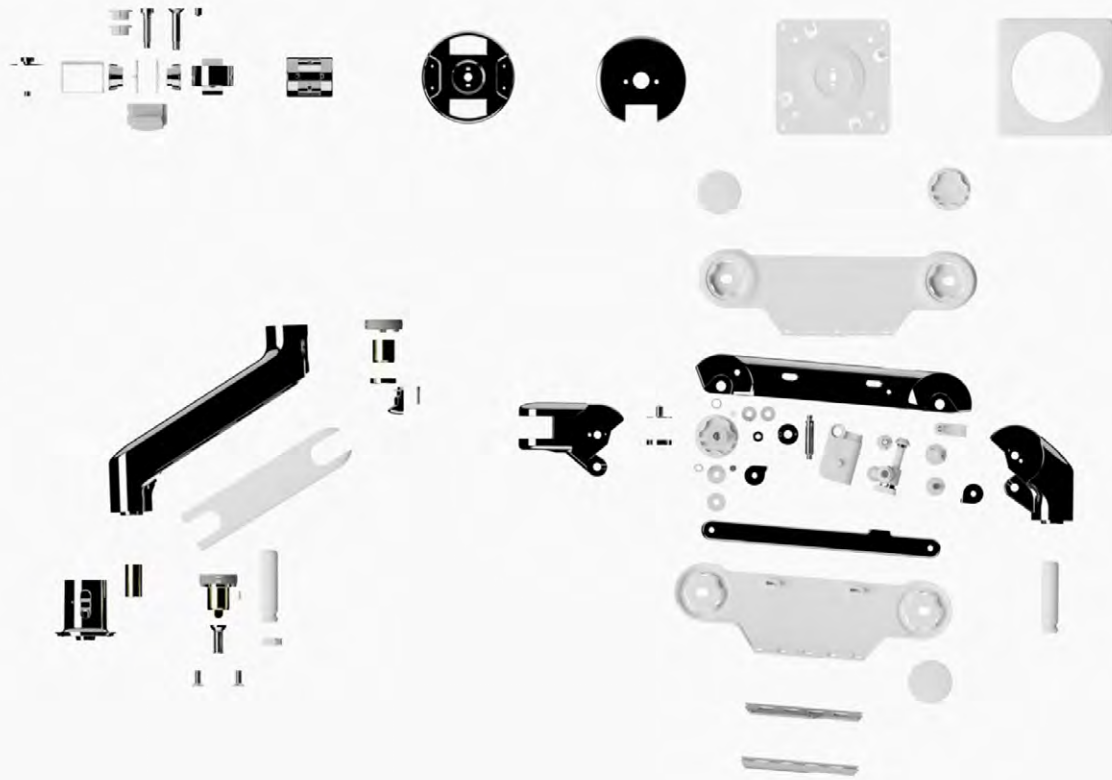
Tracing the materials along the tiered supply chain is complex and challenging. The M10 is a Living Product with a Declare label and is assembled in

Mexico and Ireland. The Monitor Arm is composed of several materials identified by Design for Freedom as being at high risk of forced and child labor, including iron, aluminum, copper, zinc, steel, plastics, and foams.

Documentation

Humanscale provided its Corporate Social Responsibility report, which details the company’s commitment to ethical labor practices in its facilities and expectations of its suppliers, providing a framework for establishing the commitment and transparency goals of the organization.

Humanscale also provided documentation related to the first tier supplier who produced the various M10 Monitor Arm components, including its organizational statement prohibiting child and forced labor and its Supplier Code of Conduct, a contractual agreement administered to its suppliers (second tier suppliers) requiring responsible labor practices. Suppliers provided raw material extraction locations, including the names and locations of mines for metals. Elements in metal alloys were extracted in Asia. Raw materials for plastic were sourced from oil and natural gas originating from Asia, Middle East, and South America.



Components within Humanscale Mio Monitor Arm

Partnership with UNICOR

Preparation for the [***Design for Freedom International Guidance & Toolkit***](#), which was published in December 2024, identified prison labor as a critical issue related to labor practices in the United States. Subsequently, Grace Farms began developing an understanding of how prison labor makes its way into interior furnishings and other products within the supply chain by partnering with advocacy groups, industry professionals, and universities to gain insight into the use of prison labor specific to manufacturing and material procurement.

Through this research, the longstanding partnership between Humanscale and UNICOR emerged. With the Pilot Project complete, the team decided to pursue additional research to understand the drivers for manufacturers to participate in these partnerships and to bring greater awareness to systemic issues and concerns common in prison labor programs. There is an active and ongoing dialogue, and the team continues to pursue this 360° approach to better understand the origins and drivers of prison labor within the U.S. furniture manufacturing industry.



Brigid Abraham leads a breakout group with Jane Abernethy of Humanscale, Chloe Bendistis of The Sheward Partnership, Jessica Murray of Cushing Terrell, and Tim Conway of Shaw at the Design for Freedom Summit

Identifying Roadblocks

Educating the Team

Working within a tight deadline in order to open for Fulton Market Design Days, Humanscale Chicago encountered challenges with material substitutions. Although materials had been researched, the General Contractor submitted and installed an alternate material. The design team held an education session with stakeholders, including the General Contractor, to explain the Living Building Challenge and Design for Freedom Pilot Project program. The design team recognized the need for and recommended pre-construction meetings with subcontractors to explain the granularity of the material specifications and the importance of using the specified manufacturers. In two instances, The Sheward Partnership had to pivot away from a manufacturer that was willing to participate in the Design for Freedom Pilot Project program because the product was no longer being used on the project for schedule or supply chain reasons. The design team's decision to research a total of 16 materials helped mitigate the impact of the unexpected substitutions.

State of the Industry

Across the board, documentation and language were not standardized among suppliers in response to the questionnaires. This research reinforces the need to standardize requirements and utilize a common language surrounding responsible sourcing.

Through this outreach, The Sheward Partnership noticed a significant uptick in company representatives who were open to responding to questions related to specific legislation, which has been a valuable motivator for greater market transparency.

As a manufacturer, Humanscale has started to notice a shift in consumer interest toward ethical transparency. Scaling across the organization, this attention to detail is becoming a key differentiator for Humanscale, which has continued to apply the Design for Freedom Principles across its supply chains and retail spaces.

The mindful MATERIALS Common Materials Framework (CMF) promotes social equity by encouraging the use of sustainable building materials that support human rights and fair labor practices throughout the supply chain. The framework is structured around five key sustainability areas: human health, climate health, ecosystem health, circularity, and social health and equity. By integrating social health and equity, CMF encourages companies to adopt practices that respect and protect human rights, minimizing exploitation, and promoting equitable outcomes across global supply chains. The CMF multi-attribute approach illustrates how ethical sourcing works hand-in-hand with sustainable, healthy, and economic material solutions.

Making The Commitment

Humanscale

"Our top priority when working on this space was to uphold the highest environmental standards, even if it had never been done before. We hope this encourages other manufacturers to be more aware regarding their physical footprint."

-Jane Abernethy, Chief Sustainability Officer, Humanscale

From the 2024 Design for Freedom Summit at Grace Farms

Living Future

"Today, through our work at Living Future and our community of collaborators including Design for Freedom, we are working to make it easy to build with positive impact – we call this regenerative building. When we say that a building or a design is regenerative, we mean that it has a positive impact on the environment, on our health, and on the health of our communities...."

When we learned about Design for Freedom at Grace Farms, we were thrilled to find kindred spirits dedicated to a critical piece of the impact that a building has on the world, and it is a piece that has not received the attention it deserves. The Design for Freedom tactics and community are a key complement to the movement for regenerative buildings as we seek better ways to ensure that buildings are not only environmentally beneficial, but also beneficial for human health and social justice around the world."

-Lindsay Baker, CEO, Living Future

From the Ethical Supply Chain Workshop in November 2023 at Grace Farms



Suchi Reddy of REDDYMADE, Laurel Chadzynski of mindful MATERIALS, Jane Abernethy of Humanscale, Mike Johnson of Living Future, Nora Rizzo of Grace Farms and Chloe Bendistis of The Sheward Partnership

The Sheward Partnership

"And the challenges that we're having now is finding raw material extraction locations and then working through the supplier's suppliers. The challenge is going up that chain. And I do believe that there are many manufacturers that you ask the question, they have no idea. They have no idea where their suppliers are getting their materials from. It's not so much that they don't want to respond, it's that they really don't have the data available at their fingertips."

-Chloe Bendistis, Assistant Director Sustainability Practice, The Sheward Partnership, LLC

From the 2024 Design for Freedom Summit at Grace Farms



@Melani Lust

Sharon Prince and Jane Abernathy open a Design for Freedom Working Group meeting held at Humanscale

Project Timeline

2010 – Humanscale pursues BIFMA LEVEL® Certification

2021 – Humanscale begins working with Design for Freedom. Jane Abernathy helps develop the original Design for Freedom Supplier Questionnaire

March 2022 – *Design for Freedom Toolkit* launches. Jane Abernathy speaks at the first Design for Freedom Summit

November 2022 – Humanscale Chicago commits to the Living Building Challenge

June 2023 – Humanscale commits to a Design for Freedom Pilot Project for the Chicago Showroom

August 2023 – Alongside Grace Farms, the project team identifies materials to research; Design for Freedom reviews responses from manufacturers, advising on next steps

September 2023 – The design team makes informed decisions regarding ethical sourcing of the five identified products

October 2023 – The project team provides final documentation of its choices

December 2023 – Jane Abernathy becomes Design for Freedom Working Group Member

March 2024 – Humanscale receives B Corp certification

June 2024 – The Humanscale Showroom in Chicago opens during Fulton Market Design Days

September 2024 – Humanscale New York hosts the Design for Freedom Working Group and welcomes Suchi Reddy as a new member

March 2025 – Suchi Reddy speaks at the 4th Annual Design for Freedom Summit alongside industry Working Group Members from ASSA ABLOY, Skanska, and Acelab



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Design for Freedom Pilot Projects

Design for Freedom by Grace Farms reimagines architecture by raising awareness and inspiring responses to disrupt forced labor in the building materials supply chain. Grace Farms developed the Design for Freedom Pilot Project Program to model more transparent and ethical supply chains. These projects engage project teams, yield new research and partnerships, and uncover challenges and opportunities of how to build more humanely. This process challenges each team to examine their supply chain for fair labor and galvanize change to create new outcomes for the industry.

Learn More about Design for Freedom

Read the [***Design for Freedom Report***](#) to understand the scope of the problem and challenges facing the eradication of forced and child labor from the built environment. For material specific information, explore the [***Design for Freedom International Guidance & Toolkit***](#) to learn more about the 12 high-risk materials within the built environment and utilize tools to start tracing materials.

About Grace Farms Foundation

Grace Farms is a cultural and humanitarian center that brings together people across sectors to explore nature, arts, justice, community, and faith at the SANAA-designed River building, on 80 acres of publicly accessible natural landscape. Its humanitarian work to end modern slavery and foster more grace and peace in the local and global community includes leading the Design for Freedom movement.

For more information visit gracefarms.org

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