LEARNING LABORATORY

SOLUTION OVERVIEW
Sustainability is one of Aeon’s core values and sits at the forefront of all project and operational considerations. As part of that core value, Aeon is committed to minimizing its negative effects on the environment and maximizing its positive impact on residents’ lives, as well as aiming to transform how developers design, build, and operate multifamily affordable housing developments. Aeon believes that sharing lessons learned and best practices among developers will bring more frequent and deeper advances in green building technology and techniques to the affordable housing industry.

Through its experience of implementing LEED® Platinum, Passive House and Living Building Challenge standards in multifamily projects, Aeon realized that a space did not exist for multifamily developers and owners to share their successes, challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. Using one of their recent projects, “The Rose,” as a case study, Aeon pledged to share its experience with others as part of the work by finding a meaningful way to organize, communicate, and disseminate information. To this end, Aeon convened a diverse group of local and national partners and industry stakeholders as an advisory board. The board was charged with identifying a methodology and framework to capture knowledge and promote best practices with the goal of sharing the information with interested parties nationwide. Aeon called this group the Learning Laboratory Advisory Board.

By focusing on practicality and replicability, and by actively sharing the results of its work with broad stakeholder groups, Aeon hopes to magnify the benefits of high-performance, healthy multi-family housing development.

ORGANIZATION TYPE
Aeon is a nonprofit developer, owner, and manager of affordable housing based in Minnesota

BARRIER
A lack of common language and collective tools for sharing insights and comparing results of high-performance, sustainable, multifamily housing across building types and regions

SOLUTION

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Using The Rose as a case study, Aeon collaborated with key sustainability leaders to develop replicable blueprints and templates to support the collection and exchange of ideas and solutions that advance sustainability efforts across the country.

OUTCOME
The Learning Laboratory developed a project communications blueprint, shared language, and a shared framework for advanced green initiatives.

POLICIES
The policies of the group were based on the following end goals:

1. Create industry-wide synergy.
2. Identify best methods for packaging and sharing outcomes and lessons learned for sustainability practices, high-performance information, and replicable solutions.
3. Encourage excellence in sustainable affordable housing across the country through information sharing.

PROCESS
Aeon formed the Learning Laboratory as a collection of experts, pulling the advisors for the Learning Laboratory from leading local and national sustainability groups with strong green agendas. These efforts were supported by a grant from the Kresge Foundation.

Aeon and its Learning Laboratory team held three in-person meetings and many phone calls and webinars throughout this process. The team divided into working groups focused on specific topic areas, which met as needed to ensure all topics were covered thoroughly and efficiently.

The four working groups included:

1. **Investors/funders** – those that finance developments and who are interested in a return on their funds and/or investing in the public good.
2. **Practitioners/co-creators, research and development** – developers, architects, engineers, universities, etc.
3. **Policy makers and advocates** – some public funders, sustainability programs and/or organizations, etc.
4. **Community** – residents, neighborhoods, local business, schools, public services, etc.

The working groups were charged with creating the following deliverables:

1. A **shared language & framework**, developed for consistent and transparent project-to-project comparisons and for communicating translatable metrics to diverse stakeholders. The language and metrics are understandable, adaptable, and inclusive to accommodate the
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increase and evolution of technical knowledge. The tool can be used as a planning framework, as well as a template for capturing data and goal motivations.

2. A project communications blueprint, in the form of a “tool kit” for communicating the decisions, process, and components of sustainable projects. The blueprint includes common themes and opportunities to share and compare diverse and complex projects.

3. A repository to advance industry-wide collaboration for advanced green initiatives. The Learning Laboratory identified the best options for a repository to collect and disseminate data and knowledge gained. Aeon is working with regional and national intermediaries in the final planning of this resource. The goal is to have a “place” to foster technical support, mentorship, and knowledge and information exchange between peers on leading-edge projects.

OUTREACH
Aeon has been working with national and regional intermediaries including Enterprise, NeighborWorks, LISC, International Living Future Institute, Palate 2030, and University of Minnesota’s Center for Sustainable Building Research to create templates and expand this work to the national level. This effort will eventually include a broad launch of the tools and resources developed in order to reach a national audience.

Aeon is investigating additional opportunities for outreach, as well as the potential of creating a path for affordable housing in the Living Building Challenge.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES
Learning Laboratory working groups developed templates that Aeon and the Center for Sustainable Building Research are preparing for widespread industry use.

Those tools will include:

- A template to permit consistent and transparent project-to-project data comparisons for sharing with diverse stakeholders, which includes language and metrics that are understandable, adaptable, and inclusive as technical knowledge increases and evolves.
- A narrative blueprint that will serve as a “tool kit” for communicating the decisions, processes, and critical components of The Rose, allowing the sharing and comparison of diverse and complex projects.

OUTCOMES
Aeon envisions a future in which creating high-performance, sustainable, affordable housing is achievable by all industry partners and practitioners.

To that end, the Learning Laboratory has been instrumental in:

- Developing an understanding of the needs of four key stakeholder groups as well as planning to effectively communicate and disseminate information to each.
- Creating a template to permit consistent and transparent project-to-project data comparisons

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for sharing with diverse stakeholders industry-wide.

- Developing a tool kit for communicating the decisions, processes, and critical components of Aeon’s project The Rose, and allowing the sharing and comparison of additional diverse and complex projects. This blueprint is a model for others to use.
- Sharing best practices for developing high-performing, sustainable, affordable housing developments to influence industry change.
- Identifying the best options for a repository to collect and disseminate information (the plan is currently being finalized), and sparking potential collaborations to mentor leading-edge sustainable projects and provide technical support.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Success of Learning Laboratory efforts will be measured by:

1. Improved ability of Aeon and the industry to document and communicate data, decisions, processes, and critical green project components.
2. Capacity of Aeon to learn from its groundbreaking work at The Rose and to share its newfound knowledge with a much broader audience.
3. The growth of industry-wide synergy with the capacity to advance industry change.
4. Growing excellence in sustainable affordable housing across the country.
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