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Cut through the noise

The companies getting the most from AI are building a smarter way to evaluate it

- Tips for preparing for CAM reconciliations
- Complexities of condo management
- Building human-centered workplaces

Sneak peek

“As AI becomes commonplace across virtually every software platform, organizations will need to become increasingly comfortable saying no and distinguishing between novelty and actual value. P14



Image: iStock.com/suyu li

Every lease should spell out what expenses are included and the methodology used to determine a tenant’s CAM share. P7”

“If governance is the structure of condominium management, communication is the mechanism that makes it work. P18



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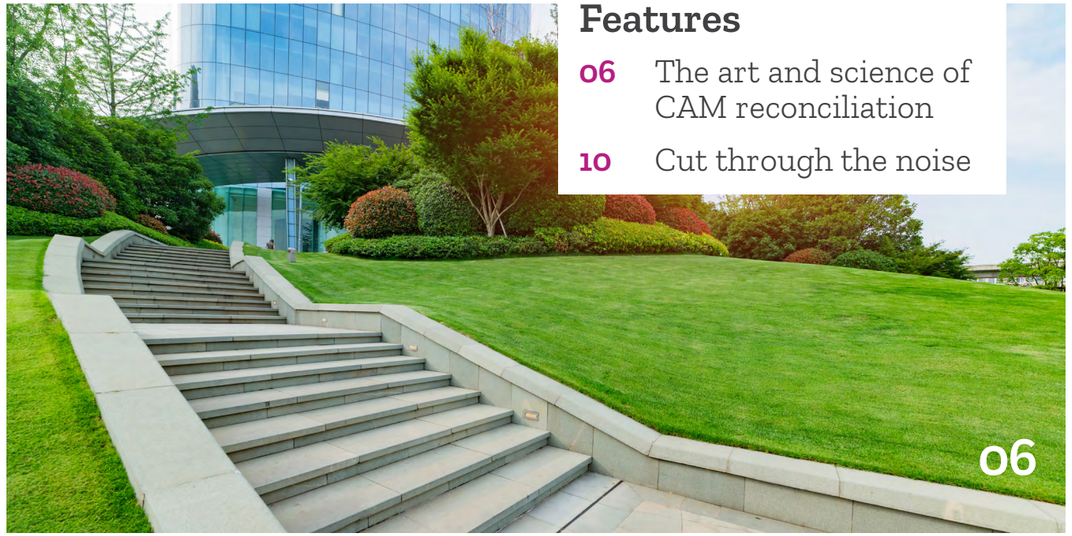

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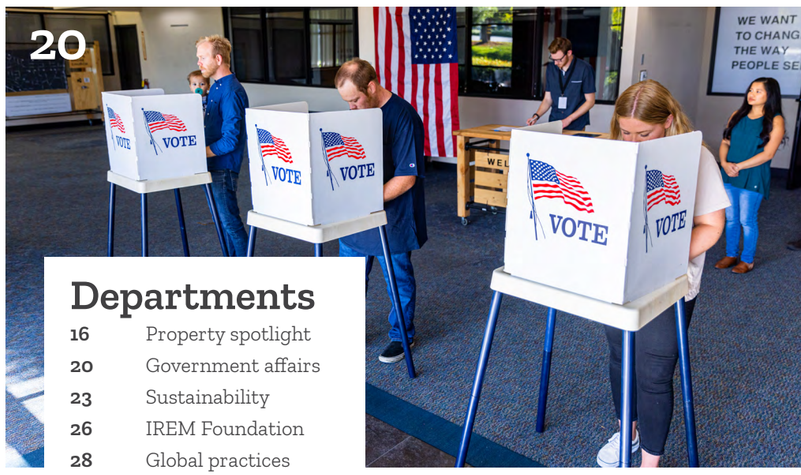

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Chief Product Officer
Wendy Becker, J.D. | **wbecker@irem.org**

Vice President, Marketing and Communications
Bridget Terrones | **bterrones@irem.org**

Advertising and partnerships
irempartners@irem.org

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President's letter



Mindy Gronbeck, CPM®, CCIM, CSM, CRX

Leading through change, embracing the future



2026 IREM President Mindy Gronbeck, CPM®, CCIM (fifth from left), and 2026 IREM President-Elect Kim Collins, CPM® (fourth from right), celebrate with family and IREM members from around the world at the swearing-in ceremony at the IREM Annual Meeting in Nagoya, Japan.

As property managers, we're accustomed to change. The properties we manage change. Technology changes. Resident and tenant expectations change. What makes our profession unique is that through all of it, we remain focused on people.

That theme runs throughout this issue of JPM®.

Whether we're discussing the future of the workplace, sustainability, public policy, or workforce development, one thing becomes clear: property management has never been more important. The decisions we make every day help shape where people live, work, learn, and connect with their communities.

On **P28**, in a column about the future workplace, researchers remind us that buildings are more than physical spaces. They're ecosystems shaped by the interaction of people, technology, management, and the built environment. As hybrid work continues to evolve, successful workplaces will be designed around human needs and informed by data, not assumptions. Property managers are uniquely positioned to bring those elements together.

A similar people-centered approach is evident in sustainability efforts across our industry. New research cited in the article on **P23** shows that building owners and operators increasingly view sustainability as an operational strategy, one that supports investor expectations, enhances performance, and recognizes the critical role onsite teams play in achieving results. Sustainability is no longer something that happens only in the design phase of a building. It's happening every day through the actions and expertise of property management professionals everywhere.

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in property management, the companies seeing the greatest success are not necessarily the ones adopting the most tools, but the ones taking a disciplined approach to evaluating them. This issue's feature on **P10** explores how property managers are focusing on business outcomes, establishing clear guardrails, and ensuring technology enhances, rather than replaces, the human relationships that define our profession. Successful AI adoption starts with people, purpose, and a willingness to distinguish meaningful innovation from the latest trend.

At the same time, housing affordability, workforce shortages, insurance costs, technology, and regulatory issues remain front and center for our industry, as you'll see in the article on **P20**. As policymakers debate solutions in the face of the 2026 midterm elections, property managers will continue to provide the practical expertise to legislators—expertise they need to understand how advancing housing development helps communities thrive. The voice of our profession matters because we understand firsthand how policy decisions affect the real estate industry, a key component of the U.S. economy.

While the topics in this issue vary, they share a common thread: progress happens when people work together across disciplines. Property managers have long excelled at bringing diverse perspectives together to solve complex challenges. That ability will continue to be one of our greatest strengths.

On a personal note, I'm wrapping up my term as IREM® president at the end of the year. Serving this organization has been one of the greatest privileges of my career, and I'm deeply grateful and honored to have had this experience. I've been lucky to have met so many members and experienced what IREM membership feels like in a lot of places around the world. While it's difficult to say goodbye, I'm confident that IREM's future is in very good hands and will be expertly led by IREM's 2026 President-elect Kim Collins, CPM®, whose vast experience and commitment to our members will continue to advance the IREM mission.

Never forget that our time is now: to lead with purpose, to connect across borders, and to make a lasting impact.



Mindy Gronbeck, CPM®, CCIM, CSM, CRX
IREM President

AI usage in the industry



Image: iStock.com/rezzillaz

11%

Percentage of property managers who use specialized AI products built specifically for property management, according to the 2026 IREM®-AppFolio AI adoption survey report. For more about how some property managers are deciding which products are best for their businesses, turn to **P10**.

Fun with fundraising

The IREM Foundation's 2026 Impact Icon Challenge is underway, and there's still time to get involved. More than a dozen participants are engaged in a friendly competition to see who can raise the most support for Foundation initiatives. The challenge runs through Nov. 17, so you can still join the competition or contribute to one or more participants.

Curious about the impact these funds make possible? Turn to **P26** to read how Foundation support is empowering the next generation of sustainability leaders.



Image: iStock.com/nd3000

Community association management by the numbers

For many property managers, overseeing a condominium association means balancing board governance, finances, maintenance, compliance, and resident relations, often all at once. See **P16** for a closer look at the factors driving greater complexity in condo management.



Source: Foundation for Community Association Research, 2025 U.S. National and State Statistical Review.

60,000–65,000
community association managers work nationwide.

9,000–10,000
management companies support associations.

105,000–110,000
employees work for management companies or onsite for associations.

Flashback: 2013

Just over a decade ago, the idea of working from home was new—and hotly debated.

The article "Telecommuting: Is it right for you and your business?" in the July/August 2013 issue of JPM discussed the "dos, don'ts, perks and drawbacks to a controversial issue in the changing office landscape." It included research from Stanford University about the potential productivity and cost savings attributed to employees working remotely, as well as tips to succeed if you decided to take the plunge into this new concept.

Now, remote and hybrid work is much more common, and the discussion has turned instead to how property managers can create spaces that support collaboration and well-being in the age of flexible work. The question is no longer "should people work from home?" but "how can we make the office more appealing, so people want to spend time there?"



Read more about the idea of a "human-centric" workplace on **P28**.

feature | CAM



(The art + science) of CAM reconciliation

Tips to get an early start on this important property management function

The end of 2026 is approaching. Have you thought about 2027 common area maintenance (CAM) reconciliations? If not, this is the perfect time to do so.

"The best time to start preparing is before the year even begins with a realistic operating budget," says Will Curtis, CPM®, CCIM, managing director & principal at Crossed Sabers Commercial Real Estate in San Antonio, Texas.

One of the most important lessons Curtis has learned over the years is that CAM reconciliation isn't just an accounting function; it's also a lease administration and relationship management function. And it's too important to put off until the last minute.

What is CAM reconciliation?

In a nutshell, CAM reconciliation is the process of ensuring each tenant is fairly charged for their share of expenses related to running the property.

Shared expenses include things like landscaping, lighting, parking lots, snow removal, and trash and recycling services. But there are many others. Consider the open spaces of an outdoor shopping mall—who pays for those areas to be maintained? Typically the tenants, through CAM reconciliation.

Every lease should spell out what expenses are included and the methodology used to determine a tenant's CAM share.

Tenants usually pay estimated CAM expenses throughout the year, often monthly. At the end of the year, if the actual expenses are lower than what was collected, the tenant receives a credit or refund. If the actual expenses are higher, the tenant owes the difference according to their lease.

"It's a complicated, simple process," says Salvatore Dragone, CPM®, CCIM, principal/director of property management at Rubenstein Partners in Philadelphia. He explains that, while CAM reconciliation sounds like a straightforward calculation of budgeted-to-actual expenses, property managers must consider a variety of lease and occupancy factors to ensure each tenant is charged fairly.

"You need to make sure you have the right numbers to do that simple math," he says.

Get organized

According to Angela Gomez-Jones, CPM®, RPA, partner at Endeavor Agency in Southern California, the first step to prepare for CAM reconciliations is to tighten up your budgeting and record-keeping practices.

Images: iStock.com/snvv; nigelcarse

"You're reviewing your general ledgers monthly for accuracy, making sure items that are intended to be tenant-specific do not end up in the overall CAM pool. You're making sure that utilities are being paid on time so it doesn't mess up your general ledger. You're tracking occupancy for gross-ups," she says.

She emphasizes that budgeting is not a set-it-and-forget-it exercise. "A property manager should be doing things throughout the entire year that prepare them for the close of that year's financials in order to effectively start the reconciliations at the beginning of the next year," she says.

The next step is to make sure you have all the information you need for CAM reconciliations. Efforts to gather this information should also be happening throughout the year.

"Before I begin the reconciliation, I like to have everything I need in one place," Curtis says. This includes:

- General ledger
- Trial balance
- Year-end financial statements
- Operating budget
- Rent roll
- Lease abstracts
- Property tax bills
- Insurance invoices
- Square footage schedules
- Supporting documentation for significant expenses



"It's very important to make sure building components are clearly listed in the lease.

—Angela Gomez-Jones, CPM®, RPA, Endeavor Agency

Start early

Many leases have deadlines requiring CAM reconciliations to be delivered within a specific period after the end of the year. Meeting those deadlines helps avoid collection issues and benefits both parties.

"Timely reconciliations build trust with tenants because they know they're receiving accurate information while it's still relevant," Curtis says. "Also, owners need timely reconciliations to understand the property's financial performance and cash flow."

Starting your process early will make CAM reconciliation more successful and less stressful.

"Set yourself up with enough time to complete your CAM reconciliations, so you don't overwhelm yourself and you're not left with the bulk of them at the end of your timeline," Gomez-Jones says. "That timeline is typically done by April at the latest, so reconciliations can be billed on May statements."



"You need to make sure you have the right numbers to do that simple math.

—Salvatore Dragone, CPM®, CCIM, Rubenstein Partners

Tips and best practices

Curtis, Dragone, and Gomez-Jones are seasoned property management professionals, with a collective 65 years of CAM reconciliation experience among them. Here are three practices they recommend:

1 Understand your tenants and their leases.

"Every tenant may have different expense responsibilities, caps, exclusions, or expense stops," Curtis says. That's why it's important to know every tenant and thoroughly review their leases. For example, if a new tenant moved in, do they have a base year? When do their CAM obligations start? If it's a mixed-use building, how are different tenants' portions determined?

"Even though the retail portion may take up 10% of the space, they're probably not using 10% of the services," Gomez-Jones gives as an example. "So it's very important to make sure building components are clearly listed out in the lease."

Dragone advises property managers to review leases and ask questions until they understand all the CAM expenses and methodologies. "Because when the tenant calls, they're not going to call your accountant. They're going to call you to say, 'Explain to me my reconciliation,'" Dragone says.

2 Forecast throughout the year.

Experienced property managers don't wait until the end of the year to compare budget-to-actual expenses. They make it an ongoing process throughout the year.

"I monitor budget-to-actual expenses on a regular basis, so I know where the property is heading. By the time December arrives, I should already know within a few percentage points where the property will finish," Curtis says.



Image: iStock.com/Drazen_

Dragone calls these reforecasts "mini recs," and he does them quarterly. He views the first quarter as an opportunity to check the accuracy of his data, while the second and third quarters help him determine if adjustments are needed before the end of the year.

"We spend a lot of our time in Q1 making sure we've got all the tenants in there, the right proportionate shares, the right caps, the right base years—anything that's changed since the budget or the end of the year. In Q2, you're focused more on the expenses themselves," he says.

This upfront work helps property managers know what's coming and potentially get back on budget, if needed. "A year-end CAM reconciliation should never come as a surprise to the property manager," Curtis says.

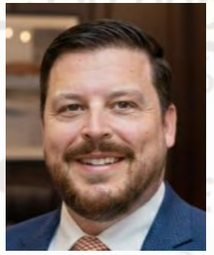
3 Communicate with tenants.

Reforecasting throughout the year also gives property managers the chance to proactively communicate with tenants about notable discrepancies between estimates and actual expenses.

No estimate is perfect, and it's always possible for unforeseen circumstances to affect a property's CAM spend. When that happens, it's vital to communicate with tenants.

"We've had years with major snow removal costs where we've given the tenant a warning even at the end of Q2," Dragone recalls. "I want to make sure the tenant knows what's going on. To simply give somebody a bill in February or March that they didn't know was coming is completely irresponsible. It's a great way of making enemies."

Curtis points out that many tenants would prefer to see their CAM payments adjusted during the year rather than receive a one-time bill after CAM reconciliation is complete.



"Timely reconciliations build trust with tenants because they know they're receiving accurate information while it's still relevant.

—Will Curtis, CPM®, CCIM, Crossed Sabers Commercial Real Estate

Upfront communication gives tenants the opportunity to choose the option that's best for them.

Even a refund at the close of reconciliation might not be greeted as good news. "To some tenants, it's, 'Well, you're holding onto my money. I don't want you holding onto my money,'" Dragone says.

Keeping tenants informed will go a long way to resolving disputes before they emerge.

Tenants may still have questions about their CAM reconciliation bills, but when you're familiar with a tenant's lease, their CAM share, and how expenses have tracked throughout the year, you should be able to quickly provide the supporting information behind the charges.

However, conversations about CAM reconciliation aren't just about the numbers. They're also a chance to listen to tenants' concerns, explain the process, and focus on how to prevent surprises in the future.

"A good manager is going to say, 'I'm happy to sit down with you and go over all this,'" Dragone says. "But a great manager already told them it was coming."

Look beyond the numbers

It's easy to think of CAM reconciliation as just another financial exercise. But in fact, says Gomez-Jones, it's an art and a science. While some costs are fixed or capped, there's an art to understanding how to keep expenses equitable and defensible. And there's an art to making tenants feel valued while running efficient billing and collections.

"At the end of the day, a successful CAM reconciliation isn't just about accurate accounting," Curtis says. "It's about maintaining credibility with both the owner and the tenant while making sure everyone pays exactly what their lease requires."

Cut through the noise

The companies getting the most from AI are building a smarter way to evaluate it

Evaluating technology for a property management company was relatively straightforward not too long ago. New software promised to solve a specific problem, say, streamlining accounting or digitizing maintenance requests, and leaders could weigh the investment against a clearly defined operational need.

Artificial intelligence has complicated that equation.

Today, nearly every technology provider claims AI capabilities, and new startups appear almost weekly, promising to do everything from automating workflows to predicting leasing trends. Even general-purpose platforms like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini continue to evolve rapidly.

Image: iStock.com/pixdeluxe

AI's rapid, unstructured adoption

While property management professionals are embracing AI quickly, organizational policies and training programs aren't necessarily keeping pace.

58% of property management professionals use AI in their role.

The industry has seen a **29%** year-over-year increase in AI adoption.

8% of property managers say their company has a comprehensive written AI policy.

26% of property managers have received formal AI training from their company.

44% of property managers report receiving no AI-related training or education at all.

Source: 2026 IREM®-AppFolio AI adoption survey report

For property managers, the abundance of options has created a new challenge: deciding which AI tools deserve a place in their business.

"It's easy to feel like you're getting behind because there's so much out there," says Amanda Cox, CPM®, president & COO at Bellaire Multifamily Management.

But Cox has learned to resist that pressure, noting that the better question isn't whether an organization is adopting AI quickly enough, but whether the technology solves an operational problem, creates measurable value, and increases productivity.

In a technology market defined by rapid change, the advantage doesn't necessarily belong to the company with the most AI tools. It belongs to the company with the discipline to determine where AI creates value and where it doesn't. "In property management, moving fast doesn't mean adopting every new tool," Cox says. "Our philosophy is 'fast in learning and deliberate in scaling.'"

Where to start

Regardless of business size, organizations need to build discipline in evaluating new AI technologies.

"What is the business outcome you're trying to drive?" asks Cat Allday, vice president of product at AppFolio. "Is it reducing vacancy days? Your renewal rate? Portfolio growth?"

Organizations that begin with desired outcomes tend to evaluate technology differently from those that begin with software demonstrations. Cox's team has adopted a similar philosophy, assessing operational challenges before discussing vendors or products. Where does friction exist inside the business? Where are employees spending disproportionate amounts of time? Which problems meaningfully affect residents, associates, or clients?

Cox's team establishes benchmarks before a pilot begins. "That might be how many hours we would save, improved leasing conversion rates, or faster response times," she says. "ROI is ultimately the deciding factor, but more broadly than the cost savings, is there efficiency? Does it empower our team?"

That framework helps explain why some areas of property management have emerged as particularly useful for AI. "Leasing workflows, resident communications, maintenance, and accounting are where we're seeing the strongest returns today," Allday says. "They combine high volumes of repetitive work with direct impact on revenue, cost, and customer experience."

For all the "revolutionary" attention AI receives, sometimes the most effective implementations involve simplifying and removing work.

As the managing director of WatchPoint Commercial Real Estate, a smaller commercial firm, David Barrow, CPM®, recognizes that time and technology budgets must be used carefully. Rather than beginning with what AI can do, he considers the consequences if it gets something wrong.



You're paying somebody a salary, and you want them to be able to achieve the purpose of their job. If you have limited support, like with small companies, you have to figure out how to minimize the amount of time you're spending on everything.

—David Barrow, CPM®, WatchPoint Commercial Real Estate

"I look at it very subjectively as what tasks have low risk if there's an error, and what tasks have higher returns through automation," Barrow says.

That philosophy has produced dozens of small improvements rather than one sweeping transformation. For instance, he's using AI to help with summarizing lengthy association documents that once required careful manual review, drafting contracts using tightly controlled prompts and reference materials, and extracting key dates, meeting requirements, and responsibilities from governing documents that might otherwise take hours to navigate.

One of Barrow's favorite use cases grew out of a practical operational problem. Using automation software connected to an email inbox, his company created a workflow to monitor incoming maintenance messages for emergencies. If an email mentions something like an active roof leak or storm damage, the system summarizes the message and immediately sends a text alert to the appropriate team members.

Similarly for Bellaire, rather than having associates manually enter invoice information throughout the approval process, AI now handles much of the administrative work, allowing employees to focus on quality control and exceptions. The cumulative time savings, Cox says, have been significant because the process touches multiple people throughout the organization.

Learn the value of "no"

While AI experimentation has been the norm for years, less attention has been paid to an equally important skill: knowing when an experiment has run its course.

Cox estimates that her company has killed roughly eight out of every 10 AI pilots, a rate she's okay with. An unsuccessful pilot can reveal how employees actually work, what residents value, or where automation creates more friction than efficiency. The important thing is learning those lessons before an organization commits to a full rollout, she says.

For instance, Bellaire explored using AI as the initial point of contact for leasing inquiries, an application that made sense in theory: Prospective residents would receive immediate responses, after-hours inquiries could be captured, and leasing teams would spend less time fielding repetitive questions.

In practice, lead conversions declined, and feedback made clear that prospects still wanted to talk to people. Cox's team pulled back quickly, then found a narrower role for the technology. Today, associates have ample opportunity to answer incoming calls before AI steps in after repeated rings, allowing the company to capture a lead it might otherwise miss without sacrificing the human interaction that helps build rapport.



What is the business outcome you're trying to drive? Is it reducing vacancy days? Your renewal rate? Portfolio growth?

—Cat Allday, AppFolio



An unsuccessful pilot can reveal how employees actually work, what residents value, or where automation creates more friction than efficiency.

Image: iStock.com/ridvan_celik



“In property management, moving fast doesn’t mean adopting every new tool. Our philosophy is ‘fast in learning and deliberate in scaling.’

—Amanda Cox, CPM®, Bellaire Multifamily Management

Barrow has reached similar conclusions through his own experimentation. His enthusiasm for AI is tempered by skepticism toward features that seem to exist primarily so a software company can say it has AI. If a new capability simply accomplishes something he could already do easily, the label doesn’t make it valuable.

As AI becomes commonplace across virtually every software platform, organizations will need to become increasingly comfortable saying no and distinguishing between novelty and actual value.

People first

The public conversation around AI often gravitates toward automation and job displacement, but property management leaders are finding that the more immediate change is in the nature of the work itself.

For Barrow, that’s part of AI’s appeal. “What I’m most excited about is not having people spend time on things that they don’t need to,” he says. “You’re paying somebody a salary, and you want them to be able to achieve the purpose of their job. If you have limited support, like with small companies, you have to figure out how to minimize the amount of time you’re spending on everything.”

AI can free property management professionals from administrative work, allowing them to focus more on relationships, strategy, and proactive problem-solving. In this way, tools can change staffing not by eliminating employees but by raising the value of what only people can do.

Similarly, Cox sees technology automating and accelerating administrative work while leaving judgment, empathy, accountability, coaching, and relationship-building firmly in human hands.

Allday adds an important management challenge: Giving employees time back isn’t enough. Leaders need to decide how that reclaimed capacity should be used, redesigning work around more strategic and relationship-driven responsibilities.

Establishing guardrails

As organizations become more comfortable experimenting with AI, they also need to address data privacy, employee training, approval processes, cybersecurity, resident expectations, and organizational culture.

Boundaries need to extend well beyond a generic warning not to share sensitive information like residents’ personally identifiable information and owner or financial data, Allday says. “You need to know where the data goes, how it’s retained, whether it’s used to train those models, and who can access it,” Allday says, adding that leaders must understand the terms of service for these tools.

When AI is used for appropriate business information, Barrow prefers paid accounts with stronger controls around data use. In general, though, he says, “If you wouldn’t leave it sitting on your desk in an open area, you probably don’t want to enter it into AI.”

Organizations also need to decide what AI is authorized to do, what requires review, and where human judgment remains nonnegotiable. Transparency matters, too: If a resident is interacting with a company’s AI tool, should that be disclosed to the resident, and is there an easy path to a staff member when the situation requires empathy or judgment?

Guardrails are just as important for checking the work AI produces. Barrow once asked an AI tool to compare contractor bids. The system produced a polished chart showing bidders and prices across different components. “Except it got the lowest bidder wrong,” Barrow says. “How did it get that wrong? It was clear that the number was higher than the other bid.”



Image: iStock.com/Thai Liang Lim

Cox encountered a similar limitation while testing lease file auditing software. The platform returned hundreds of exceptions requiring manual review, ultimately consuming so much staff time that employees could have performed the original task just as efficiently themselves. “AI is not a substitute for industry experience or sound judgment,” Cox says. “Some tools promise complete automation but still require a lot of human oversight.”

Building adaptability

Cox expects the AI evolution to eventually “be embedded in nearly every core function of property management,” she says. “We’ll see AI as standard in leasing and resident communications, predictive maintenance, automated financial workflows, real-time operational insights, and more.”

Accordingly, choosing the “right” AI tool at any single moment becomes less important than developing an organization capable of adapting as the technology changes.

The best AI companies today already understand that distinction, Allday says. “Organizations that are seeing a lot of success with AI are treating this as a business transformation and not a tech deployment.”

That transformation starts at the top, with executives using the technology themselves. It also involves the employees who understand how work actually gets done. Just as importantly, Allday says, leaders need to recognize that implementation isn’t a moment when one system replaces another, and the work is finished. “During these early phases of a rollout like this, you have to recalibrate,” she says. “It’s not like you just flip a switch and the AI takes over.”

The goal, ultimately, is to build what Allday describes as AI fluency: enough technical familiarity, operational understanding, and organizational confidence that a company can absorb technological change without scrambling to catch up.

For Cox, the same idea takes the form of an AI-ready culture in which employees understand not only how to use the technology but also why they’re using it and how it improves their work.

“I’ve relinquished the pressure of feeling like we’re falling behind and really focused on creating a disciplined framework that allows us to innovate responsibly,” Cox says. “Keep the focus on people, not the technology. AI adoption will succeed when your associates understand how it makes their job better.”

Choosing the “right” AI tool at any single moment becomes less important than developing an organization capable of adapting as the technology changes.

Building AI know-how

As AI uptake increases, property managers need to know the best times to use AI, when human judgment should take the lead, and how to recognize risks involving privacy, bias, fair housing, accuracy, and accountability.

IREM’s AI and Ethical Decision-Making for Property Managers is a four-hour, live online course specifically designed around those questions. Using real-world property management scenarios, peer discussion, and hands-on work with AI tools, participants learn how to evaluate AI through a practical and ethical lens grounded in IREM’s principles and professional standards.

Upcoming sessions:

- Nov. 4, 2026, with instructor Toni Harris, CPM®, ARM®
- Dec. 7, 2026, with instructor Christy Mays, CPM®, CCIM

The new reality of condominium management

Focusing on governance, finance, and communication

By Lenys Camacho, CPM®, CAM, MSIRE



Image: iStock.com/buzbuzzer

Condominium management is becoming more complex as governance requirements, financial pressures, and communication demands increase. Along with handling daily operations, today's property managers are expected to guide boards through regulatory compliance, long-term planning, and difficult decisions. Success depends on integrating governance, finance, and communication into one cohesive system.

For property managers, especially those working in high-density, regulation-driven markets like South Florida, the role has evolved from administrator to strategic guide.

Why governance shapes every decision

Unlike multifamily or traditional commercial real estate, condominium management begins with a legal framework, not an operating model. Before the first resident moves in, the condominium declaration establishes ownership rights, cost allocations, maintenance responsibilities, and governance authority. In effect, it becomes the property's "operating DNA."

This distinction affects nearly every management decision, from budgeting to board communication. In a rental property, the manager reports to a centralized owner. In a condominium, authority flows through an elected board representing multiple owners, each with a financial and personal stake in the property. The manager's role shifts accordingly, from executing directives to guiding a governance process.

This governance structure introduces both complexity and opportunity. It creates a system of checks and balances but also demands a higher level of expertise in decision-making, documentation, and compliance.

Lenys Camacho, CPM®, CAM, MSIRE, was part of a panel discussion at IREM's 2026 PropertyCon that focused on navigating the complexities of condo property management. This article expands on themes raised during the panel and is intended as a practice-based resource from the perspective of a South Florida management company working directly with boards, owners, and communities.

What governance requires from property managers

At the core of condominium management is operationalizing governance, not just understanding it.

Boards are responsible for budgets, reserves, maintenance, and compliance with evolving regulatory requirements. However, most board members are volunteers with limited experience in these areas. Managers bridge that knowledge gap by preparing clear options, explaining tradeoffs, and helping boards make informed decisions they can stand behind.

This role has become more pronounced in the wake of regulatory changes following the 2021 Champlain Towers South collapse in Surfside, Florida. In Florida and similar markets, new requirements around structural inspections, reserve funding, and board education have elevated accountability standards.

Managers now play a critical role in helping boards:

- Understand and meet documentation and compliance obligations
- Plan and fund long-term capital needs
- Implement timelines for inspections and studies
- Maintain proper records and communication protocols

Governance is no longer an informal framework. It is a structured system, and effective managers are central to making it work.

How condominium finances differ

Condominium finance is fundamentally different from other property types because it is assessment-based, not revenue-generating. The goal is not profit, but stability. That distinction introduces several challenges:

Residential condominiums: Operating budgets are funded entirely through owner assessments. Financial health depends on disciplined budgeting, consistent collections, and robust reserve planning. Managers must help boards balance current operating needs with long-term capital obligations.

Commercial and mixed-use condominiums: These properties often use common area maintenance-style cost allocations, where expenses are allocated proportionally based on factors such as square footage or usage. The complexity increases with multiple user groups—residential, retail, office—each with different needs and expectations.

Multi-condominium structures: When systems are shared across multiple associations, financial decision-making becomes more complex. Cost allocation, maintenance responsibilities, and governance authority may differ across user groups, requiring careful coordination.

Across all types, the manager's role extends beyond accounting. It includes:

- Ensuring fairness in cost allocation
- Communicating financial decisions clearly
- Anticipating future expenses through forecasting
- Guiding boards through funding decisions

Financial management in condominiums is not just about numbers. It is about transparency, trust, and long-term planning.

> At the core of condominium management is operationalizing governance, not just understanding it.



Image: iStock.com/RealPeopleGroup

The reality of underfunding

One of the most common challenges in condominium management is underfunding. Many associations operate with budgets that do not fully reflect the cost of maintaining aging infrastructure.

Addressing this requires a structured approach:

1. **Visibility:** Identify gaps between current funding and actual operating or capital needs
2. **Prioritization:** Distinguish between essential and discretionary expenses
3. **Funding strategy:** Present clear options to the board, including budget increases, special assessments, or financing
4. **Reserve integrity:** Ensure reserve funds are used appropriately and in compliance with regulatory requirements

Managers must guide boards through difficult decisions, often involving increased costs for owners. The key is ensuring that funding decisions are tied directly to risk, safety, and long-term value.

Expectation framing and communication

If governance is the structure of condominium management, communication is the mechanism that makes it work.

Unlike other property types, condominiums involve multiple stakeholders with varying levels of authority—owners, board members, residents, vendors, and service providers. Miscommunication is common, not because of a lack of information, but because of a lack of clarity around process and roles.

Effective managers approach communication as a strategic discipline.

One of the most effective tools is expectation framing—explaining where stakeholders are in a process, what happens next, and who has decision-making authority. This reduces confusion and helps prevent conflict.

For example:

- Providing context before a reserve increase vote leads to more productive discussions
- Outlining project timelines in advance prevents unrealistic expectations

When conflicts arise, managers often need to "zoom out" to the broader context before addressing specific issues. This helps stakeholders understand the full process rather than focusing on isolated details.

In high-pressure situations, tone can significantly influence outcomes. A calm, measured approach can de-escalate tension and create space for collaboration.

Ultimately, communication in condominium management is not just about delivering information. It is about guiding stakeholders through a complex system in a way that builds trust and alignment.



Image: iStock.com/kate_sept2004

Turning documents into systems

Another defining feature of condominium management is the complexity of governing documents. Each property has its own declaration, bylaws, and rules, which must be interpreted and applied in daily operations.

The challenge is not just managing these documents but turning them into practical systems.

Effective onboarding includes:

- Reviewing and extracting operational requirements from governing documents
- Entering key information into management systems
- Creating workflows for compliance, enforcement, and communication

Examples of operational elements that must be systematized include:

- Late fees and collections processes
- Maintenance responsibilities
- Architectural approval requirements
- Insurance obligations
- Cost allocation formulas

Even with strong systems, not every scenario fits neatly into a database. Managers must be prepared to return to the original documents for guidance, reinforcing the importance of governance literacy.

Opportunity in a changing market

The challenges facing condominium associations today are also creating new opportunities for property managers. In markets like South Florida, several factors are driving demand for higher-level management:

- Aging building inventory requiring increased maintenance and capital planning
- Enhanced regulatory requirements around inspections and reserves
- Greater accountability for boards and decision-making processes

During its 2026 session, the Florida legislature considered, but ultimately did not pass, legislation that would have required certain condominium, cooperative, and homeowners' associations to retain professional community association management. These pressures are shifting expectations. Associations are no longer looking for administrative support alone—they need expertise in governance, finance, and long-term planning.

For managers in the South Florida market, this creates opportunities to differentiate through:

- Advanced financial and reserve planning capabilities
- Strong governance and compliance knowledge
- Effective communication and conflict resolution skills
- Strategic guidance in capital projects and long-term operations

The profession is evolving toward a more advisory role. Technical training matters, but governance literacy and discipline are what allow a professional to operate well once the work begins.

Beyond licensure

For those entering condominium management, licensure is only the starting point for a successful community association manager. While regulatory requirements establish a baseline, real effectiveness comes from deeper competencies.

Successful managers develop expertise in:

- Interpreting governing documents
- Managing board meetings and processes
- Understanding financial reports and reserves
- Communicating clearly under pressure

Professional organizations such as IREM® and CAI help managers build these skills through education grounded in real-world practice, peer learning, and ethical standards. Ongoing learning is essential, particularly in jurisdictions with rapidly changing legal frameworks.

Key takeaways for property managers

- Condo management starts with governance documents, not operating preferences.
- Managers play a critical role as guides for volunteer boards navigating regulation and risk.
- Financial stability depends on disciplined reserves, transparency, and long-term planning.
- Clear, structured communication reduces conflict and builds trust.

Integration is the skill

The most consistent lesson from practice and from the PropertyCon discussion is that condominium management is not defined by any single discipline. It exists at the intersection of:

- Legal structure
- Governance processes
- Financial planning
- Human dynamics

This overlap is where most real-world challenges show up. Successfully addressing these challenges lies in skillfully integrating these elements into a cohesive system that supports stability, transparency, and long-term success.

Managers who excel in this environment do more than maintain properties. They:

- Translate legal frameworks into operational systems
- Guide boards through complex decisions
- Communicate with clarity and purpose
- Align short-term actions with long-term goals

As the industry continues to evolve, these capabilities will define professional success.

The most effective condominium managers don't treat governance, finance, and communication as separate tasks. They integrate them into a system that supports informed decisions, reduces risk, and builds trust over time. In a more regulated and scrutinized environment, that ability isn't optional; it's what defines professional condominium management today.

Lenys Camacho, CPM®, CAM, MSIRE, is president of Upper Real Estate Management, a South Florida property management company focused on condominium associations and multifamily properties, with an emphasis on governance, budgeting, building safety, and operational structure. She serves on the 2026 Miami Commercial Board of Governors and on the 2026 CCIM Miami Board.



An eye on election season

How the 2026 midterms could affect property management



Image: iStock.com/adamkaz

The outcome of the 2026 midterm elections may have significant implications for the rental housing industry. While election results will dominate headlines, property managers should focus on what comes next: policy decisions that could affect housing supply, regulations, taxes, workforce development, insurance costs, and technology oversight. These decisions will shape how housing providers operate, maintain, and expand rental housing in communities nationwide.

> IREM will continue supporting policies that reduce barriers to housing production and promote sustainable property operations.

For IREM® members, elections aren't just political events. They help shape the policies that affect housing providers, property operations, investment decisions, and resident experiences.

Housing supply remains a priority

As the 2026 midterms approach, one issue stands out: housing. Recent estimates place the nation's housing deficit at more than 4 million homes, while the multifamily sector alone will need 4.3 million additional apartment homes by 2035 to meet future demand.

No matter which party controls Congress or state legislatures, policymakers will continue searching for housing solutions. Housing supply is one of the few issues where there's growing agreement across party lines, and they will need input from property management professionals who manage and preserve housing every day.

For IREM members, more housing means more opportunity to put their expertise to work. New apartment communities, mixed-income developments, and affordable housing projects all depend on professional property management to succeed. IREM members help keep properties operating efficiently, maintain housing quality, support compliance, and create positive resident experiences. Those contributions will only become more important as new housing opens.

IREM will continue supporting policies that reduce barriers to housing production and promote sustainable property operations.

Housing policy could shift

The balance of power in Congress will help shape future housing priorities.

A Democratic-controlled Congress may place greater emphasis on renter protections, fair housing enforcement, fee transparency, tenant screening practices, and affordable housing investments.

A Republican-controlled Congress may focus more heavily on reducing regulatory burdens, encouraging private investment, streamlining development, and limiting federal involvement in landlord-tenant matters.

Regardless of the outcome, housing will remain in the spotlight. Property managers will continue to provide the real-world expertise that helps housing investments, protections, and regulations succeed and deliver lasting impact.

State and local decisions matter most

While congressional races often dominate the headlines, many of the policies that directly affect property managers are decided at the state and local levels.

Following the midterm elections, newly elected officials may shape policies on rent control, eviction procedures, security deposit requirements, licensing standards, source-of-income protections, and fair housing regulations. As housing affordability remains a top concern, some jurisdictions may pursue expanded tenant protections, while others may focus on increasing housing supply, reducing regulatory barriers, and encouraging investment.

For property managers operating across multiple markets, navigating these evolving regulations can be increasingly complex. That makes IREM's advocacy efforts at both the federal and state levels more important than ever, ensuring policymakers understand the role professional property management plays in maintaining housing stability, affordability, and investment in communities.

Tax policy and housing investment

Tax policy will likely become a significant topic following the midterm elections. Potential debates may include depreciation schedules, business tax deductions, Opportunity Zones, capital gains treatment, and enhancements to the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).

These policies directly influence housing investment, development activity, property acquisitions, and capital improvements. While changes to tax policy may not immediately affect day-to-day operations, they can significantly impact the availability of housing and the long-term growth of professionally managed real estate portfolios.

IREM will continue supporting policies that encourage housing investment and help create the housing inventory needed to meet growing demand.

> These policies directly influence housing investment, development activity, property acquisitions, and capital improvements.



Image: iStock.com/Ludmila Chernetska

Key takeaways for IREM members

- Housing supply is likely to remain a bipartisan priority, creating opportunities for professionally managed housing.
- State and local elections will continue to shape many of the regulations property managers deal with every day.
- Tax, insurance, workforce, and technology policies could directly affect property operations and investment decisions.
- Property managers' expertise will remain essential as policymakers look for ways to address housing affordability and availability.
- IREM will continue bringing members' real-world experience into housing policy discussions.

Insurance costs remain a top concern

Rising insurance costs and limited coverage availability continue to challenge property owners and managers across the country. According to a Federal Reserve survey, multifamily property owners reported average insurance premium increases of 45% between 2023 and 2024, with some markets experiencing costs that have more than doubled in recent years.

These increases directly affect operating expenses, housing affordability, and investment decisions.

Insurance regulation is typically driven at the state level, but federal policymakers are increasingly examining issues related to disaster resilience, risk mitigation, and market stability.

IREM will continue elevating members' concerns and working to advance policies that enable affordable, sustainable housing operations.

Workforce development will continue to be essential

The property management industry continues to face workforce shortages, particularly among maintenance technicians, skilled trades professionals, and experienced property managers.

Election outcomes could influence workforce development programs, apprenticeship initiatives, immigration policies, and vocational training investments. Policymakers from both parties recognize that addressing the housing shortage requires a skilled workforce capable of building, maintaining, and operating residential communities.

For IREM members, workforce development is not simply a labor issue; it's a housing issue. Maintaining quality housing and meeting resident expectations depends on attracting and retaining qualified professionals.

Increased attention on technology and artificial intelligence

Technology continues to transform property management. Many IREM members use AI automation tools, data analytics, and digital resident services to improve efficiency, enhance operational performance, and deliver the seamless, on-demand experiences residents increasingly expect.

At the same time, policymakers are paying greater attention to AI governance, cybersecurity, data privacy, and algorithmic decision-making. Discussions surrounding automated rent-setting tools and consumer data protections are likely to continue regardless of election outcomes.

As technology evolves, IREM will advocate for policies that support innovation while ensuring transparency, accountability, and responsible use of emerging technologies.

Looking ahead

No matter the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections, one reality remains clear: Addressing America's housing challenges will require the expertise of professional property managers.

IREM members manage millions of housing units, including more than 60% of federally assisted housing, giving the organization a unique perspective on the policies needed to expand housing opportunities and strengthen communities. As lawmakers consider solutions to the nation's housing challenges, IREM will continue supporting policies that encourage investment, increase housing supply, and recognize the critical role of professional property management.

For property managers, staying engaged in the legislative process is more important than ever. Decisions made in Washington, D.C., state capitals, and city halls will continue to shape the business environment for years to come. Through its advocacy efforts, IREM will ensure the industry's voice is heard and that policymakers understand the real-world impact of their decisions on housing availability and communities.

More ways to showcase management excellence

Why owners and management companies pursue the IREM® Certified Sustainable Property certification for their portfolios



Images: iStock.com/very good; photoart23D

Not long ago, sustainability certifications were often associated with new construction. If a property wasn't built to green standards, many owners assumed certification wasn't a realistic option.

That's changing.

As investor expectations evolve and sustainability reporting becomes more common, owners and management companies are looking for practical ways to demonstrate sustainability performance across existing assets. For many, the IREM® Certified Sustainable Property (CSP) certification has become one of those tools.

Research recently published in the Journal of Sustainable Real Estate and awarded the best manuscript in the Apartments category by the American Real Estate Society (ARES) sheds light on why. The study, conducted by Erin A. Hopkins, Ph.D., of Virginia Tech, included interviews with owners, management companies, owner-operators, and consultants active in the multifamily sector. The goal was straightforward: understand what's motivating organizations to pursue the IREM CSP.

> The goal was straightforward: understand what's motivating organizations to pursue the IREM CSP.



> *The study highlights the CSP as a viable alternative pathway that can be useful for owners and managers deciding where to allocate limited sustainability budgets across a portfolio.*
>
> —Erin A. Hopkins, Ph.D., Virginia Tech

"This research fills a gap as most prior research has focused on building design and construction and energy efficiency certifications like LEED® and ENERGY STAR®," Hopkins says. "Since most of a building's lifecycle happens during the operations and management phase, this is the first study to look specifically at what drives adoption of the CSP, a certification specifically created for this building lifecycle phase."

She adds that the findings show the CSP is seen as a "human-centered" certification, helping make the case that property management significantly affects a building's sustainability profile and market position.

Investors are paying attention

The most common reason participants gave for pursuing the CSP was investor pressure. Sustainability reporting has become a larger part of how many institutional investors evaluate opportunities, and certifications help provide a credible way to demonstrate performance.

For some firms, the conversation starts long before a property is acquired. Investors want to know what sustainability programs are in place, how performance is being measured, and whether third-party certifications support those efforts. The CSP helps answer those questions.

Competition is also a factor. When neighboring properties promote sustainability credentials, owners don't want their communities to be a step behind. Certification helps communicate that a property's operations align with current market expectations.

A practical way to support GRESB goals

The Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB) was another major factor cited by interview participants. As sustainability benchmarks become increasingly important to real estate investors, firms are looking for ways to strengthen portfolio-level performance.

That's where the CSP fits naturally. Property-level certifications can support broader reporting objectives while giving site teams a framework for improving day-to-day operations. In other words, what's happening at the property level is no longer separate from what's happening at the portfolio level. The two are increasingly connected.

Existing buildings need a different path

One of the more interesting findings from the research was how often participants compared the CSP with LEED.

Many interviewees acknowledged that some older properties simply weren't designed with design-based certifications in mind. Significant upgrades may not be financially feasible, and even large investments don't always guarantee a building will qualify.



Image: iStock.com/sh-f

What appealed to many respondents was that the CSP focuses on how a property operates. It provides a pathway for existing buildings to demonstrate sustainability performance without requiring extensive capital projects.

For owners of mature assets, that's a meaningful distinction.

It's really about people

Perhaps the most distinctive takeaway from the research is that the CSP recognizes the role people play in sustainability.

Many green building programs focus primarily on physical building features. Participants described the CSP differently. They saw it as recognition of the policies, procedures, and everyday decisions that drive performance.

In practical terms, that means acknowledging the work property managers, maintenance teams, and on-site staff are already doing. This is important because successful sustainability programs rarely come down to equipment alone. They're built through consistent execution, communication, and operational discipline. The IREM CSP helps bring those efforts into focus.

The ROI question

One of the more interesting findings was what respondents didn't emphasize. Most participants didn't identify direct financial return as the primary reason for pursuing the CSP, even though financial benefits are often central to conversations about green building certifications. However, efficient operations can have a meaningful impact on net operating income (NOI), particularly through lower utility expenses.

Cumulative ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager® metrics from certified properties, updated in April 2026, show energy costs 60% lower than the national median, an average ENERGY STAR score of 77, greenhouse gas emissions 24% better than the national median, and water use intensity 32.5% better than the national median.

That suggests the CSP is less a financial strategy than an operational strategy with financial benefits. Companies may pursue certification to meet investor expectations, improve operations, or showcase management excellence, but the resulting efficiencies can help reduce operating expenses and strengthen NOI and long-term asset performance.

As sustainability benchmarks become increasingly important to real estate investors, firms are looking for ways to **strengthen portfolio-level performance**.

What this means for property managers

The biggest takeaway may be that sustainability is becoming part of good property management.

The organizations interviewed weren't pursuing the CSP simply to add another logo to a marketing brochure. They were using it to demonstrate operational excellence, support investor expectations, provide structure for sustainability efforts, and recognize the work happening onsite every day.

For property managers, Hopkins says the practical takeaway is clear. "Given that LEED O+M is often financially and logistically out of reach, especially for Class B/C assets, the study highlights the CSP as a viable alternative pathway that can be useful for owners and managers deciding where to allocate limited sustainability budgets across a portfolio."

She also notes that "the IREM CSP can provide a competitive advantage, particularly in markets where neighboring properties are already certified."

As sustainability continues to move into the mainstream, owners and investors will increasingly expect evidence of performance, not just intentions. Property managers are uniquely positioned to provide that proof because they're the ones translating sustainability goals into everyday action.

The IREM CSP gives them a way to show that the work they're already doing matters. Judging by the findings of this research, that's becoming just as important as the certification itself.

Source note: Adapted from Erin A. Hopkins, Ph.D., Motivating Factors for IREM Certified Sustainable Property Adoption Within the United States Multifamily Rental Sector, Journal of Sustainable Real Estate, and cumulative ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager metrics from certified properties in the CSP environmental stewardship infographic, April 2026.

Empowering the next generation of sustainability leaders

The impact of EcoRise and Elaina's Sustainability Fund



Image: iStock.com/FG Trade Latin

At the intersection of environmental education, youth leadership, and workforce development, EcoRise is helping young people become the environmental leaders their communities need. Through the support of the IREM® Foundation's Elaina's Sustainability Fund, EcoRise has empowered thousands of students to turn innovative ideas into tangible environmental improvements while building the skills needed for future careers in sustainability.

EcoRise mobilizes a new generation of leaders to design healthy, thriving communities for all. Through sustainability-focused curricula, student innovation grants, youth leadership opportunities, and green workforce programs, EcoRise equips students with the knowledge, confidence, and resources to address real-world environmental challenges.

Turning student ideas into lasting impact

The partnership between EcoRise and the IREM Foundation began through Elaina's Sustainability Fund, which was created in 2019 and honors the legacy of Elaina Tattersdale and her belief in the power of individuals to improve the environmental impact of buildings. By investing in student-led sustainability initiatives, the fund helps transform schools into living laboratories for environmental innovation.

With the support from Elaina's Sustainability Fund, EcoRise has enabled students in underserved communities to conduct environmental audits, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement projects that directly benefit their schools and neighborhoods. These projects range from recycling initiatives and composting programs to developing outdoor learning spaces, school gardens, habitat restoration, and waste reduction campaigns.

During 2021–2022 alone, IREM funding supported nine student innovation projects across five school communities through EcoRise's Student Innovation Fund. These projects were directly led by 218 students, engaged more than 75 volunteers, and positively impacted more than 9,500 students and community members. Positive environmental outcomes included the conversion of public spaces into outdoor learning environments, hundreds of pounds of waste diverted from landfills, advancing water conservation efforts, and promoting ongoing sustainability education initiatives.

> In 2025 and 2026, six projects were directly led by **1,310** students and reached more than **2,800** additional students and community members.

Growing impact year after year

The partnership continued to expand in 2024 and 2025, producing even better results. With a $5,000 funding contribution from the IREM Foundation, EcoRise supported six student innovation projects in five school communities. These projects were directly led by 1,310 students and reached more than 2,800 additional students and community members.

Notable accomplishments included:

- **Diverting more than 553,000 pounds of waste** from landfills through student-designed recycling and waste reduction initiatives.
- **Converting more than 3,100 square feet** of school greenspaces into environmentally beneficial learning and gathering areas.
- **Creating recycling infrastructure** and long-term waste management systems that will continue benefiting schools for years to come.

One standout project at Twin Lakes Elementary School in Florida diverted an estimated 27,000 pounds of waste from local landfills by creating a new cafeteria recycling station. Another project at Desert Sunrise High School in Arizona diverted more than 526,000 pounds of waste when it transformed campus spaces into more sustainable environments.

Building future sustainability professionals

Beyond environmental improvements, EcoRise is helping develop the next generation of sustainability professionals. In 2025, Elaina's Sustainability Fund awarded $10,000 to support the Green Careers Academy, where students gain hands-on experience, mentorship, and exposure to careers in green building, climate resilience, environmental management, and sustainable property development.



Image: iStock.com/Frazao Studio Latino

The Green Careers Academy provides underrepresented high school students with paid internships, workforce readiness training, leadership development, mentorship from industry professionals, and immersive field experiences.

This connection between sustainability education and workforce development aligns closely with IREM Foundation priorities. By exposing students to real-world sustainability careers and connecting them with professionals, EcoRise creates pathways into industries that will shape a more sustainable future.

Eyes on the future

EcoRise and the IREM Foundation are demonstrating that investing in young people creates a dual impact: improving the sustainability of communities today while cultivating the leaders, innovators, and professionals who will build a more resilient tomorrow. Through Elaina's Sustainability Fund, students are not only learning about sustainability but actively shaping it.

As Jonathan Stott, co-executive director of EcoRise, reflects, "IREM's partnership helps us inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, sustainability leaders, and problem-solvers while creating healthier, more resilient communities."

About Elaina's Sustainability Fund



Image: iStock.com/donald_gruener

On June 5, 2019, Elaina Tattersdale passed away after a short battle with cancer. Elaina believed that one person could make a difference. She worked as an enterprise project manager for Canada-based real estate firm Morguard Investments and dreamed of improving buildings' environmental impact through a career in sustainability. Sadly, that opportunity never came.

To honor her passion, Elaina's parents, 2020 IREM President Cheryl Gray, CPM®, and Rick Gray, CPM®, launched Elaina's Sustainability Fund with a donation of $50,000 to the IREM Foundation in 2019. Through generous contributions from donors, the Fund continues to support innovative ideas that become real-world solutions for reducing the environmental footprint of commercial real estate.

Donations can be made to Elaina's Sustainability Fund at **iremfoundation.org/causes/sustainability/donate**.

Beyond spaces

Using data to build human-centered sustainable workplaces



Image: iStock.com/Jacob Wackerhausen

With almost 2,100 members outside the United States and many more professionals who take IREM® education courses, IREM's global reach has been steadily increasing. Issues like hybrid work and returning to the office affect property managers all over the world, and understanding the local context of a given country is just as important as understanding the individual needs of the company.

While workplace practices differ across regions and industries, organizations everywhere are grappling with similar questions: How can offices support collaboration, well-being, and productivity in an era of flexible work? How can managers make informed decisions about space when employee workplace preferences have become increasingly diverse? These challenges require a deeper understanding of how people actually use and experience workplaces, rather than relying on traditional assumptions about office use.

You can read Professor Appel-Meulenbroek's full inaugural lecture here: **research.tue.nl/en/publications/beyond-spaces-towards-human-centric-data-driven-and-sustainable-w** or watch the recording of the live event at **vimeo.com/event/5844995** (starting around 14 minutes).

IREM® recently had the opportunity to connect with Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek, a professor at Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands and leading expert on rethinking the modern workplace. As property managers around the world are tackling the challenges brought on by the increase of remote work and hybrid workspaces, the question of how to make the office more appealing is an important one. For managers of office assets, and even managers of property management workspaces, creating an inviting in-person work environment is essential to attracting and retaining tenants, supporting occupancy goals, and maximizing the value of office amenities and services.

Below are edited highlights of Professor Appel-Meulenbroek's inaugural speech at Eindhoven University of Technology. In it, she outlines some innovative ways for property managers to think about this new era of office space, regardless of where in the world they practice their profession.

The value of an inviting workplace

The offices where we work are fundamental to our human experience. Spending many of our days in the office, the space we're surrounded by shapes our lives. We often think of ecosystems in terms of the natural world, but workplaces are ecosystems as well, shaped by the interactions, experiences, and environments that influence productivity and engagement.

As in nature, the kinds of workplaces we see today are widely diverse, with different people needing different spaces. Work environments comprise a multitude of synergies between people, technologies, management, and space. So to create healthy workplaces that promote effective work and financial viability, we need to understand the spaces we are surrounded by as we work.

Office space is typically defined by meeting core business processes to add maximum value. But that definition leaves out the human element. Work performance is important, of course, but beyond that, the actual workplace shapes behaviors in everyday lives.

Studying the interaction between humans and their workspace is a transdisciplinary field that combines many different fields: ergonomics, real estate management, spatial design, digital tech, environmental psychology, human resources management, organizational behavior, and more. Understanding this complex picture requires new methods, ways of thinking, and collaborations to implement more effective management strategies and use of space. The main thing to remember is the human element.

Hybrid workforce

In recent years, the shift to hybrid work has shaped discussions about the workplace. With Industry 5.0 right around the corner, it's imperative that we create human-centered workplaces. Industry 5.0, as defined by the European Union, "provides a vision of industry that aims beyond efficiency and productivity as the sole goals, and reinforces the role and the contribution of industry to society." This vision of the future workplace puts emphasis on sustainable human-centric industry; that is, balancing the needs of the organization with the needs of the people working there, while maintaining environmental considerations.

Hybrid work is here to stay, and office strategies must evolve accordingly. As organizations look for ways to encourage employees to return to the workplace, one challenge is managing the unpredictable occupancy patterns that come with flexible schedules. In the Netherlands, for example, office attendance often follows a "camel" pattern, dipping on Wednesdays when many children finish school early and parents opt to work from home.

That's just one example, as people can work in a variety of places. That diversity in workplace options makes it difficult to see how to provide a meaningful workplace experience. But it also presents an opportunity to move beyond traditional occupancy assumptions and manage workplaces based on actual usage patterns.

Looking to the future

What we can say for certain is that office management operations need an update. Companies collect a ton of data, but management decisions are broadly aimed at the average employee. There is, however, no such thing as an average employee.

Moreover, the workplace surrounding employees is made up of several entities. Workplace management, human resource management, and other supportive services like IT are all trying to provide for the average worker. But it's fragmented. Each of these pieces are siloed off with their own metrics, utilizing their own methods and expertise to make decisions that may not be readily understood by everyone at the organization.

All these disparate departments need to work in tandem, as they are all pieces of the total workplace ecosystem. The trouble with implementing meaningful change is that many tools and departments use sector-specific language and metrics to determine success. A human-centric workplace needs more shared data definitions. The default mode of the workplace should be collaboration.

Conclusion

With the recent advances in technology across sectors, we should look forward to emerging technologies not replacing humans but supporting our human judgment with easy-to-understand data. By promoting interdisciplinary data-driven management in the workplace, we promote transparent decision-making to reveal changes that suit the needs of the organization.

Property managers must combine different disciplines in their work, taking into consideration the needs and data ranging from accounting to human resource management to customer service and compliance with applicable local laws. By doing so, property managers get a more accurate view of their office space and can make more informed recommendations to clients and owners.

It's difficult to untangle the different pieces of the workplace, but the complexity we face is not a barrier—it's an opportunity. Working on this future workplace with people from a variety of backgrounds and expertise will help make a better workplace for all.

Global examples

As professionals continue to navigate an increasingly globalized world, understanding different scheduling customs can help to successfully create human-centered workspaces that meet the needs of the owner and the employees. For example, an interesting challenge that hybrid work has helped bridge is the human-centered work week. While the Netherlands has made modifications to facilitate family scheduling around school times, other countries have their own challenges. In the United States, professionals don't typically work Saturday and Sunday, but in the Middle East, the work week is typically Sunday through Thursday to accommodate Friday prayers.

However, in 2022, the United Arab Emirates government officially implemented a Monday-through-Friday schedule for government and public schools, with Friday being a flexible half day to accommodate both prayer and international business needs. Other countries like Japan have seen real estate companies in particular allowing Wednesdays off in exchange for working either Saturday or Sunday, to promote better work-life balance.