

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Seattle, Washington

NBBJ PROJECT CASE STUDY

A Place to Solve Global Problems

BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION
Seattle, Washington



NBBJ designed a new home for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that combined five separate leased offices into a LEED Platinum campus and enables its workforce to focus on their mission: giving all people a chance to live healthy and productive lives.

Local Roots, Global Mission

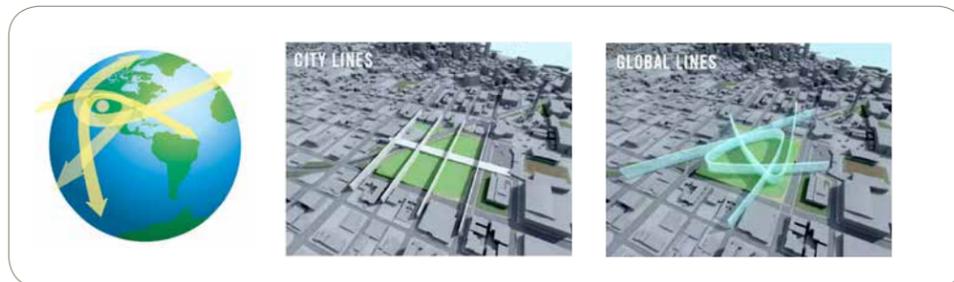
“We have big goals: eradicating polio, reducing the number of childhood deaths and hungry people in Africa by half, and overhauling the U.S. education system. Now we have one location that will help us reach those goals with our partners, while keeping us connected to this region that is the source of our values.” — MARTHA CHOE, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

In 1994, Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda formed the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to focus their charitable giving around two issues: global health and community needs in the Pacific Northwest. Self-described as “impatient optimists,” they started the foundation because they believe every person, regardless of circumstance, should have the chance to live a healthy and productive life.

The foundation applies advances in science and education to solve complex global problems. By focusing these advances on helping people improve their lives, the foundation believes that within this century billions of people will be healthier, receive better educations and have the power to lift themselves out of hunger and poverty. The foundation organizes its grants in three program areas: Global Development, Global Health and the United States.

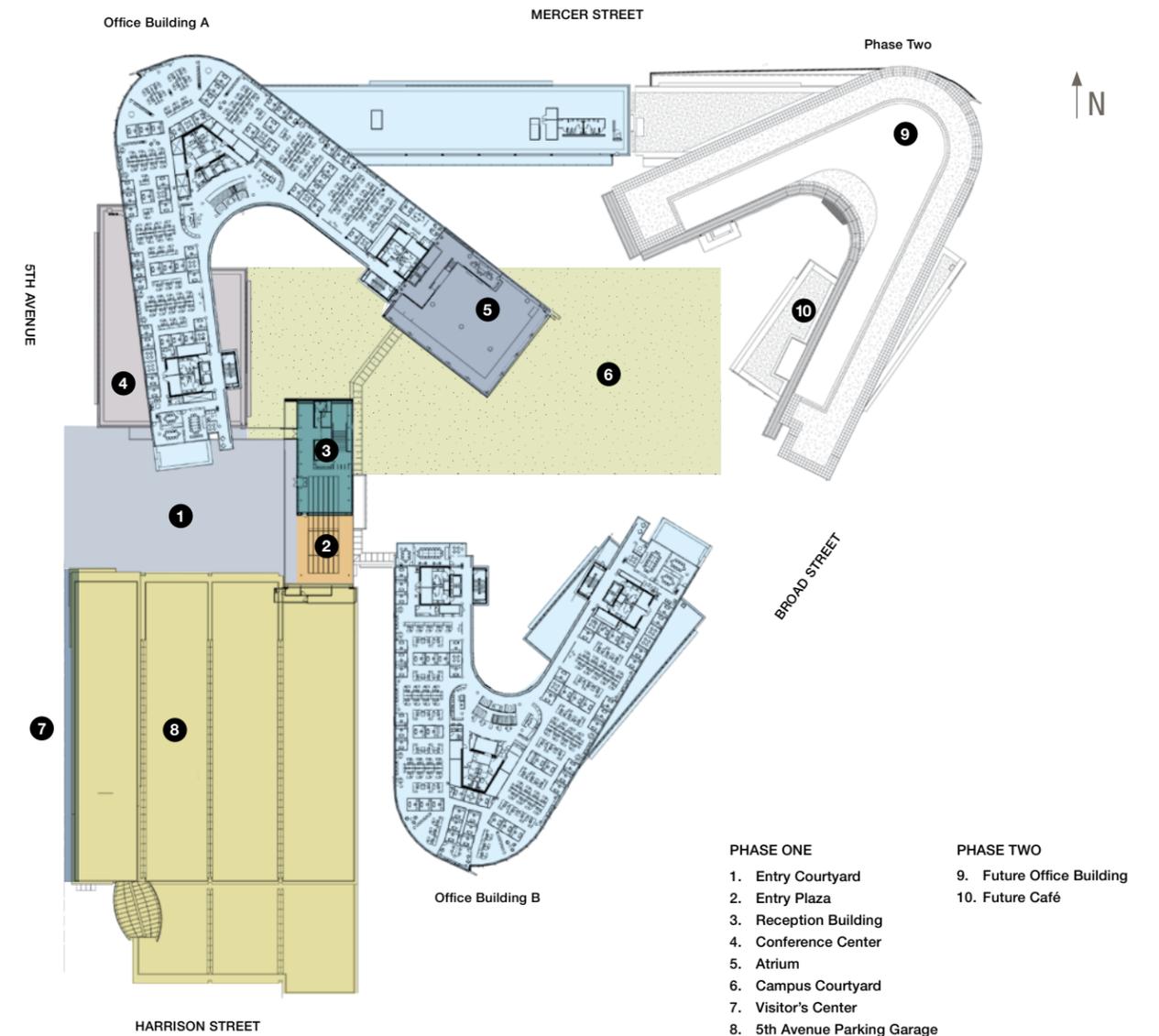
The campus design concept captures the foundation’s “local roots and global mission.”

The first two floors of the buildings align to the city grid, while the upper levels extend their reach to encompass the globe.



In 2005, having grown to become the world’s largest philanthropic organization, the foundation chose to make Seattle its permanent home and selected a site for the new headquarters across the street from the iconic Space Needle. The new campus consolidates five offices and brings the foundation staff and partners together under one roof for the first time in ten years.

SITE PLAN



Nine guiding principles were developed for the campus plan and architecture:

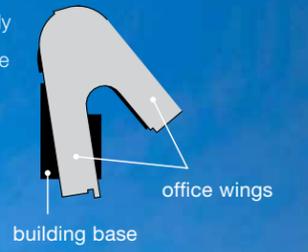
FOR NEIGHBORS

- The development will fit with the size and scale of the surrounding environment.
- The design will be inspiring and creative and fit within the neighborhood.
- The campus security will be low-profile.
- The edges of the campus will be well-defined and landscaped.
- The design will integrate sustainable materials and methods.

FOR EMPLOYEES

- The design will create a sense of place that reflects the foundation’s work in health and learning.
- The buildings will connect in a campus-like setting designed to facilitate interaction, collaboration and learning.
- The campus design will include open green spaces.
- The design will provide access to natural light for all.

The bases of the campus buildings align with the city street grid and anchor it strongly in the local community. The upper office wings, which are cantilevered above the base and rotate in different directions, extend 25 feet beyond the base structures.



Scaled to Be a Good Neighbor

When selecting the site in Seattle near the Space Needle, it was important to the foundation that the project would improve the neighborhood experience. The campus design incorporates wide walkways, public artwork, benches and landscaping along the busy streets near the Seattle Center.

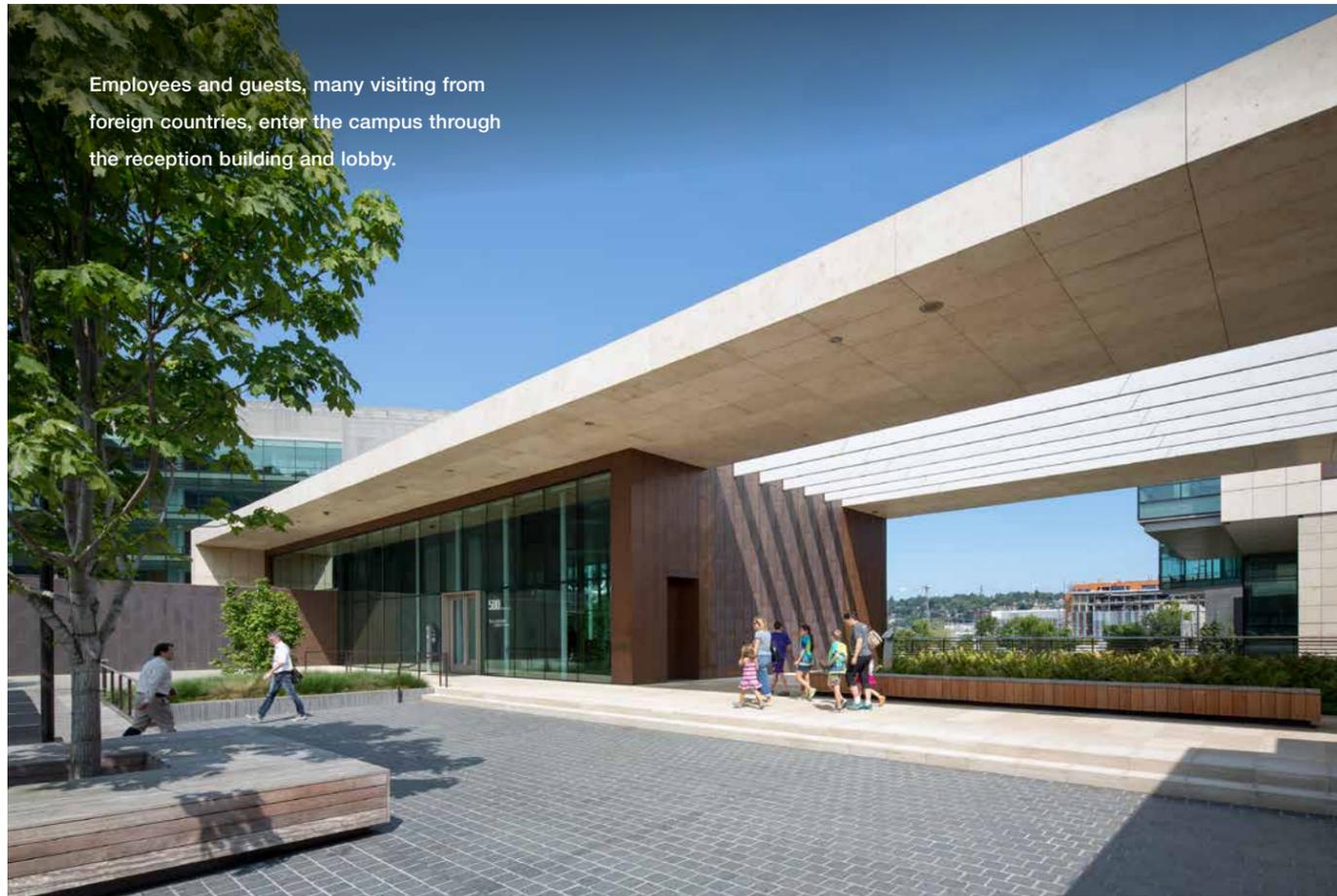
By massing the taller buildings toward the center of the site, the size and scale of the campus fits within the surrounding community. Unobtrusive security measures keep employees safe while maintaining a pedestrian-friendly experience that makes the campus approachable and welcoming.

Left: The Seattle Center Fifth Avenue Parking Garage serves the Seattle Center, Gates foundation staff and the foundation's visitor center.

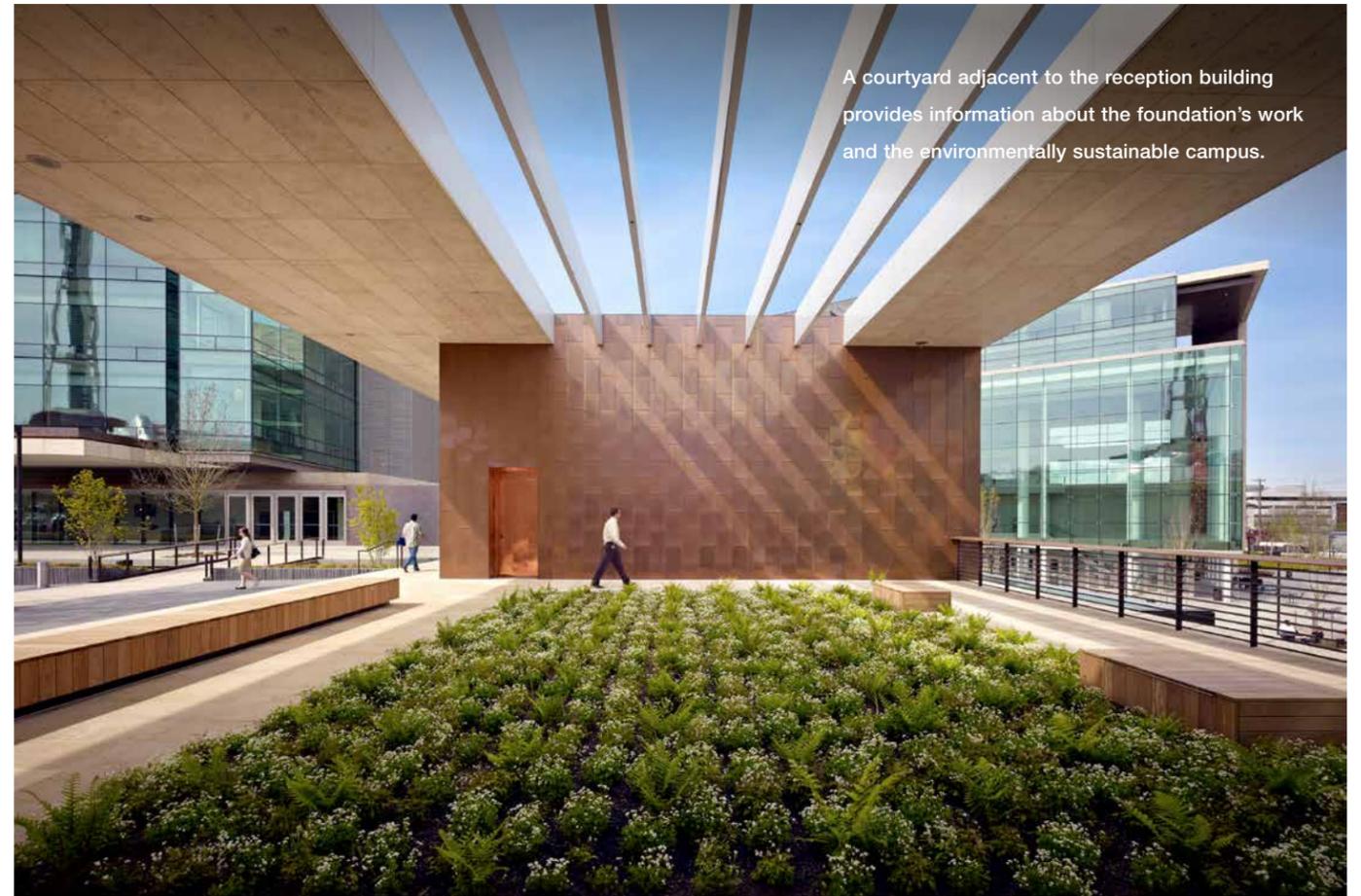


Right: The garage's living roof is designed to absorb 90% of the water that falls on it.

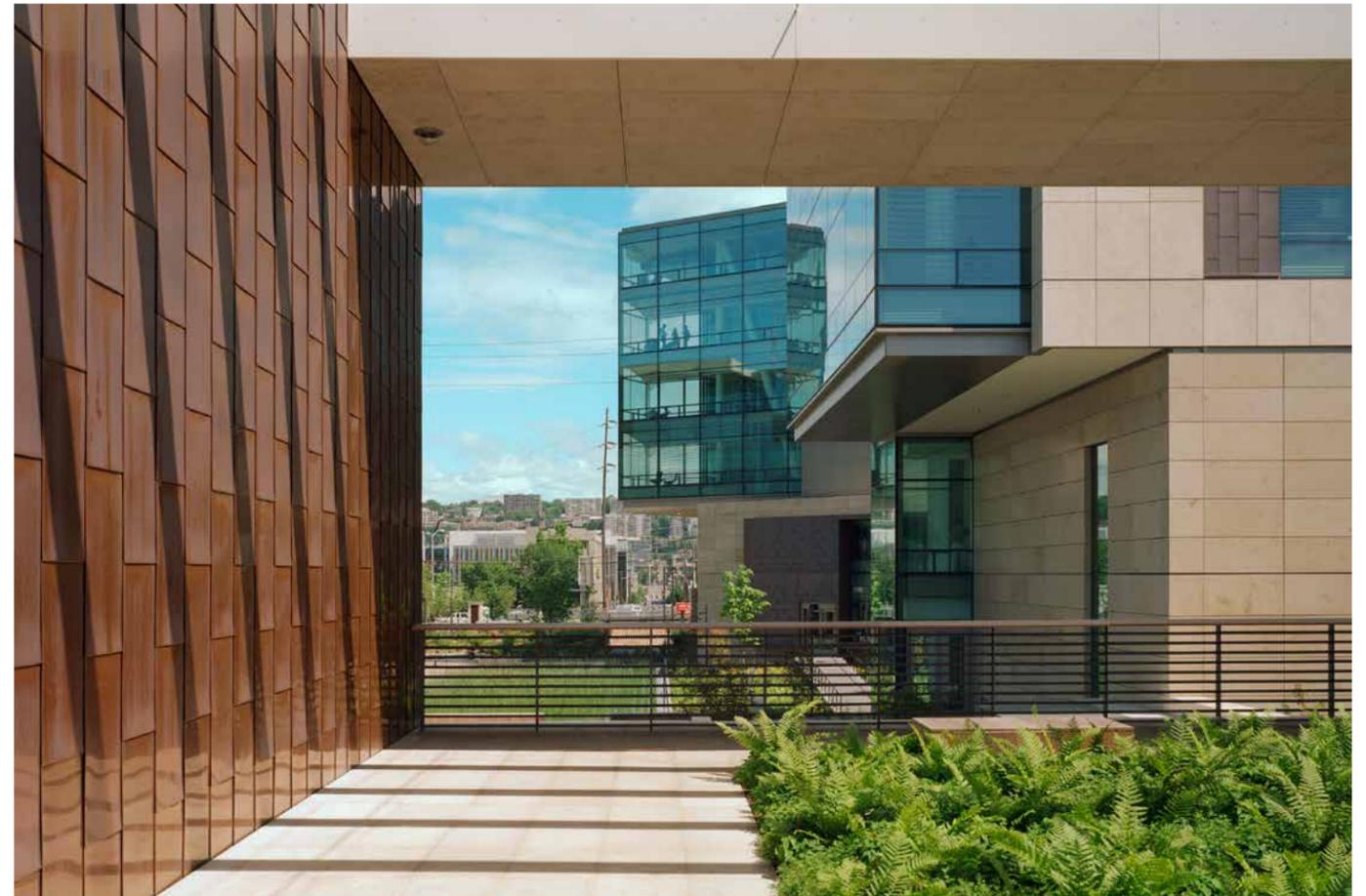
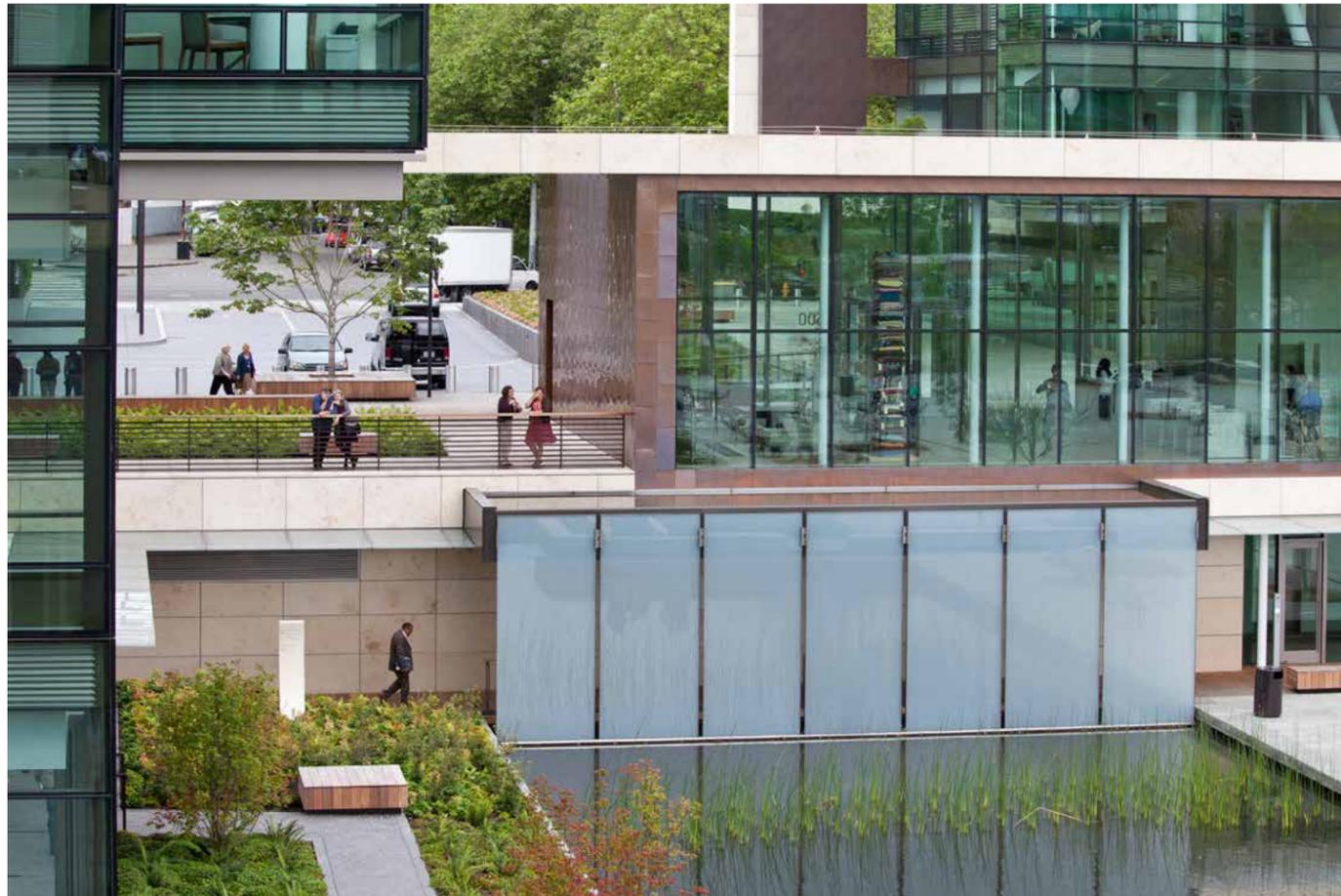




Employees and guests, many visiting from foreign countries, enter the campus through the reception building and lobby.



A courtyard adjacent to the reception building provides information about the foundation's work and the environmentally sustainable campus.



The Renaissance of an Urban Landscape

Centuries ago, the foundation's site was a large, wet meadow and dark-water bog surrounded by native plants—and an important stopover for migrating birds. By the 20th century, the area had become highly industrialized and was used to house trolleys, buses and cars in a sea of asphalt and toxic chemicals. NBBJ partnered with Gustafson Guthrie Nichol to design a landscape that would “allow nature to happen again.”

The natural history of the site has been reinterpreted into a sustainable urban space with plantings, textured paving and wooden footbridges that crisscross the campus. Many native Pacific Northwest species can't survive the glare and heat from city buildings and streets, so the foundation's landscape mixes native species—like vine and big-leaf maples—with heat- and drought-tolerant plants.

Informal meeting spaces draw people outside to work on sunny days.



The campus' landscape blurs the line between indoor and outdoor workspace and gives employees and guests a chance to enjoy the beauty of the Pacific Northwest.



Reduce. Reuse. Redefine.

LEED-NC Platinum Rating

NBBJ drove green building design decisions that resulted in the highest rating attainable and make the project the world's largest non-profit LEED-NC Platinum building. Lowering operating costs and reducing the use of power and water also means more financial resources for foundation grants.

Overall energy usage was reduced by 39%.

1. SOLAR ARRAY

A solar array made of 47 evacuated tube collectors provides energy for about 36% of the domestic hot water use and reduces natural gas usage by 4,750 therms each year.

2. SMART LIGHTS

Electric lights dim automatically in natural light and inactive spaces.

3. THERMAL ENERGY

A 750,000-gallon underground tank minimizes energy used to cool buildings by storing chilled water at night for recirculation during the day.

4. RADIANT HEAT

The atrium uses radiant heat and passive ventilation to conserve energy.

5. WINDOWS

High-performance glazing conserves energy while letting in daylight and views.

6. VENTILATION

Underfloor air ventilation saves energy and simplifies future space modifications.

7. LANDSCAPE

Landscape design features native and noninvasive, drought-tolerant plants and trees.

8. RAINWATER STORAGE

A 1 million-gallon underground tank stores rainwater for use in reflecting pools, irrigation and toilets.

9. LIVING ROOFS

Living roofs insulate, reduce the heat-island effect, limit rainwater runoff and add bird-friendly habitat.

Potable water use has been reduced by 79%.





Workplace Strategy Goals

- Ensure access to daylight and nature.
- Enhance work life by creating a choice of places to work, socialize and learn.
- Provide support for an appropriate balance between focused work and collaboration.
- Provide an environment that can change as the foundation grows and evolves.

A Workplace for Social Entrepreneurs

As a leader of a new model called “venture philanthropy” or “philanthrocapitalism”—which borrows concepts and techniques from venture-capital finance and high-tech business management—a belief in the power of innovation drives the foundation’s charter. To promote innovative philanthropic work, teams take calculated risks on promising ideas. Trying new approaches, focusing on measurable results and bringing financial, intellectual and human capital to bear on pressing global issues is key. As foundation trustee Warren Buffett noted: “Some of these risks will pay off; others won’t. But we expect to learn from them all.”

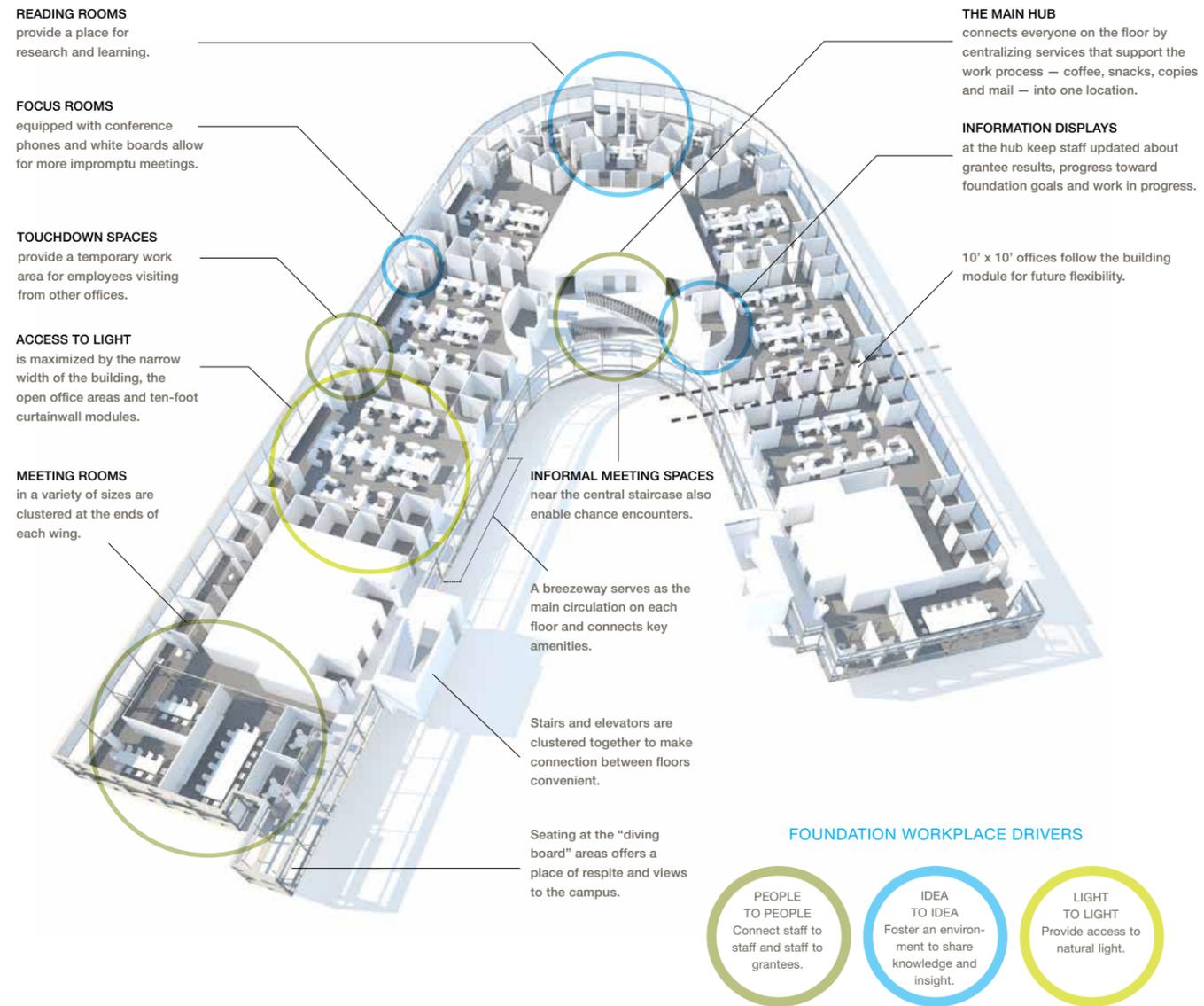
Scientists, physicians, policy advisors, activists, journalists, educators, economists, lawyers and others from 37 countries comprise a unique workforce. Most are the experts in their fields, and many have never worked in a “traditional” office environment. They travel extensively and maintain aggressive schedules as they strive to make a tangible difference in the lives of millions of people.

A Design Firmly Rooted in Research

The grantmaking process requires a clear, coherent strategy for each initiative along with appropriate measures of progress and success. Each program works with a range of partners including nonprofits, businesses and governments to whom the foundation makes grants. Work trends toward certain patterns and practices, whether seeking to improve the lives of newborns in India, high school students in Los Angeles, small farmers in Ethiopia or homeless families in Seattle. To understand how the new workplace could best support the specific dynamics of such work, NBBJ conducted research in tandem with Alexi Marmot Associates to develop a design framework.

Over the course of three years, the team engaged the foundation’s leadership and staff in visioning sessions, workshops, surveys and interviews that delivered more than 1,500 points of feedback. Taken together, the results indicated a need for a fundamental shift in the way that foundation conducted its work and pointed to the design of the new campus as a catalyst for that change.

The resulting workplace strategy balances the need for both collaboration and focused work. It addresses the need for a higher percentage of enclosed offices for groups that spend more time working individually. A mix of spaces across the entire campus, a flexible work policy and wireless connectivity let staff work where and how they need. The environment, with central services concentrated around the atrium, encourages staff to gather in shared spaces and enables impromptu interactions and “new campus moments” where people can connect, discuss issues quickly and effectively move solutions forward.



A Place to Do Their Best Work ... Inside

In order to meet the workplace goals, NBBJ devised a planning concept that capitalizes on the building's geometry. The square footage of each floor is comparable to a downtown office building, but the narrow, curved office wings enable a very different kind of office environment. Floors are 65' wide as opposed to the typical 120' wide, which places employees no more than 30' from daylight, reduces lighting energy costs and enables more face-to-face connections.

A 60/40 split between open and private office spaces accommodates both collaborative and heads-down work. Each office neighborhood consists of 20 to 25 people with a variety of conference rooms and informal seating areas to create intimate, cohesive team spaces. Shared amenities and touchdown spaces encourage the exchange of ideas, and component-based furniture, column-free space, raised floors and demountable partitions allow for easy changes in the future.

... and Out

Campus green spaces provide a variety of outdoor experiences around the campus heart. Many landscaped areas provide opportunities for individual and group activities, as well as routes that link the campus buildings together. Movement both between and within the spaces themselves support chance encounters between staff.

The transparent building façade creates internal community and provides connection with the natural world, while the entire outdoor campus serves as an extended workplace for a highly flexible workforce. Employees can turn outdoor benches into personal offices, and informal seating areas become a place for blue-sky brainstorming sessions on sunny days.





“Our open work spaces have freed us to be more connected and flexible to move around the campus and interact with colleagues. I feel part of something that is really special again, like I did when we moved into our first office.” — JENNIFER HANSEN, INFORMATION SERVICES



Supporting Individual Work



Research Insights

The nature of individual work varies significantly by role. Program officers and managers spend one-third or less of their time on individual tasks when in the office, while Program staffers' work tends to be more reflective. People spend about three-quarters of desk time on individual tasks such as computing, reading and paperwork.

Work Implications

NBBJ's research showed that while not all individual work requires focused attention, it must be readily supported. If the environment doesn't allow for concentration and focused work, then people may be forced to leave their assigned workspace or work from home.



Design Solutions

- A 60/40 split between open and private offices accommodates collaborative and heads-down work.
- More spaces, including small private rooms adjacent to open plan spaces, were designed specifically for focused work.
- "Get-away" places are distributed throughout the building and campus.
- A flexible work policy and robust IT infrastructure let employees work from a variety of locations.



Working in Teams



Research Insight

Effective group work at the foundation consists of many elements. Research highlighted the need for: planned meetings in well-outfitted conference rooms; rapid convening of team members to discuss specific issues; "drive-by" conversations; thinking and planning aids that help people brainstorm, visualize ideas and track progress on projects and tasks; and informal interactions to exchange information, support learning and develop relationships.

Work Implications

Group work at the foundation is both improvisational and planned. Tools that help with the conceptualization of ideas must be broadly available.



Design Solutions

- A variety of shared spaces close to "office neighborhood" teams enable both planned and unplanned meetings.
- Coffee bars encourage quick conversations and spontaneous interactions.
- Wireless solutions allow teams to easily access stored information at any time.
- A variety of opportunities for interactions with grantees and other visitors are available outside of dedicated team work areas.
- Portable and electronic white boards, large writing surfaces, display walls and projection surfaces are present throughout the office.



Meeting



Research Insight

The previous workplace only supported formal meetings, but in the two years prior to moving, the average number of preplanned meetings per person per week increased 20%. Adding the option for informal meetings increases idea exchange and problem solving.

Work Implications

Creating opportunities for informal meetings would help drive efficiency and robust ideation. Without insight into use patterns, many meeting rooms are underutilized for large parts of the day, yet at other times it is difficult to find a space on short notice.

Design Solutions

- Outdoor seating arrangements give people a chance to meet more informally on sunny days.
- A room booking system helps makes the most efficient use of spaces.
- Drop-in meeting spaces ease the pressure on larger conference rooms.
- A greater variety in size and character of conference rooms was introduced.



Learning



Research Insight

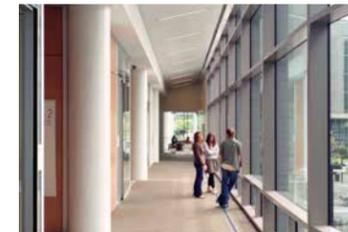
Increasing awareness of other program efforts increases understanding of the bigger picture. In surveys, more than half of the respondents said the old workplace supported knowing what was going on in their immediate team. But only 7% said it supported knowing what was going on in other teams.

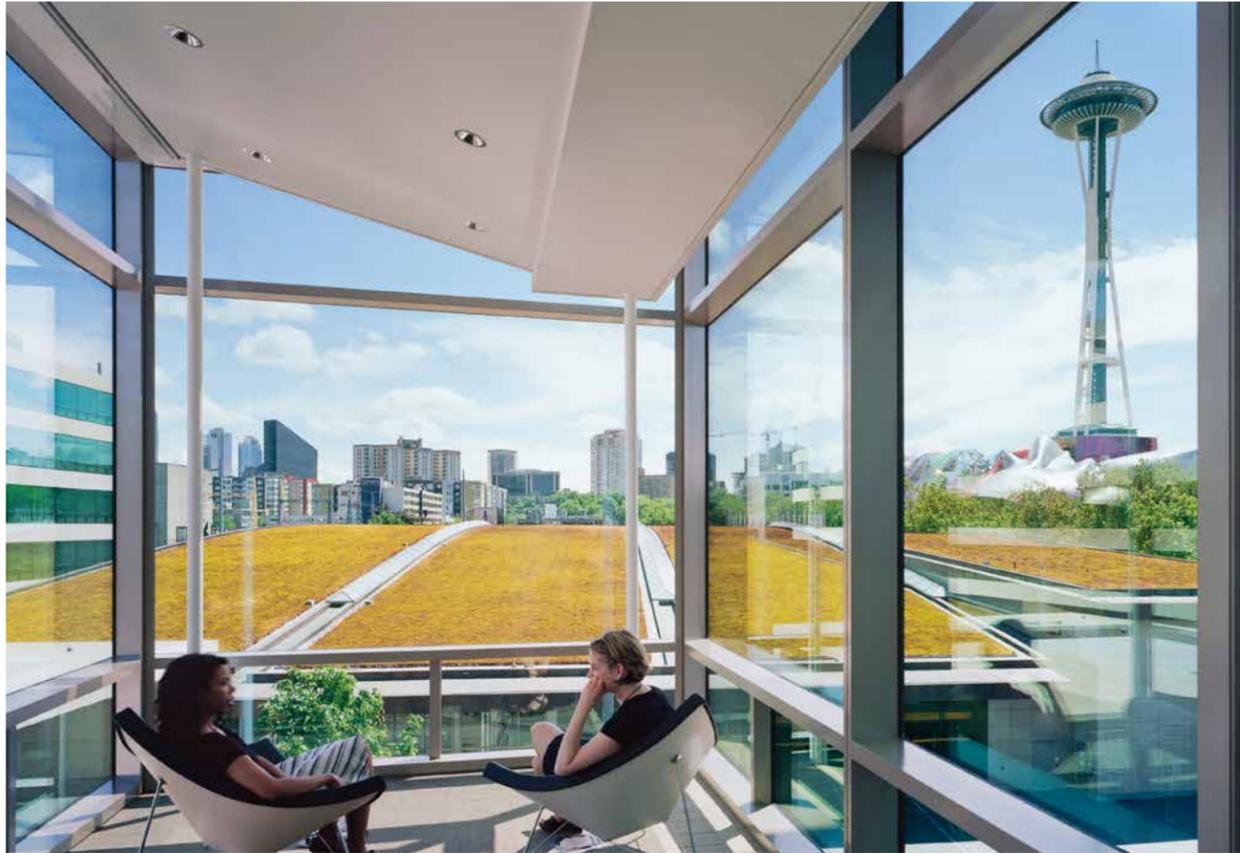
Work Implications

Building work relationships requires a variety of social interactions. Learning and knowledge development are social activities that often occur informally. Much learning also occurs tacitly by observing and overhearing.

Design Solutions

- The open “office neighborhood” layout allows teams to convey information about their work and projects to give their group an identity.
- Displays at key entry points act as another means of engaging staff.
- Accessible, comfortable spaces, including cafés and larger dining amenities, draw people together.
- Glass breezeways along the inside curve of the buildings serve as the main corridor and provide more face-to-face interaction.





Connecting



Research Insight

To succeed, the foundation must connect staff, partners and grantees across the globe both virtually and in person, which means significant travel. Up to a quarter of program staff travel more than five days a month.

Work Implications

The high rate of travel among employees results in low usage of assigned workspace and reduces the office's sense of energy. More planned meetings are needed to compensate for travel schedules.

Design Solutions

- The glass breezeway and central staircases allow sightlines through all six floors, with informal meeting spaces interspersed alongside.
- The layout, furnishing and finishes create a welcoming and comfortable environment, with places that also provide restful retreat upon return from travel.
- Throughout the day, the atrium is used for informal meetings and serves a lively lunch crowd.



"City Plot" by El Anatsui

Articulating the Mission



"Cycle" by Sopheap Pich



African textiles

Research Insight

A key workplace goal is to "inspire engagement in the foundation's global mission." Artwork and photography displayed throughout the new campus buildings bring the value and meaning of the foundation's work into the everyday experience of the workplace.

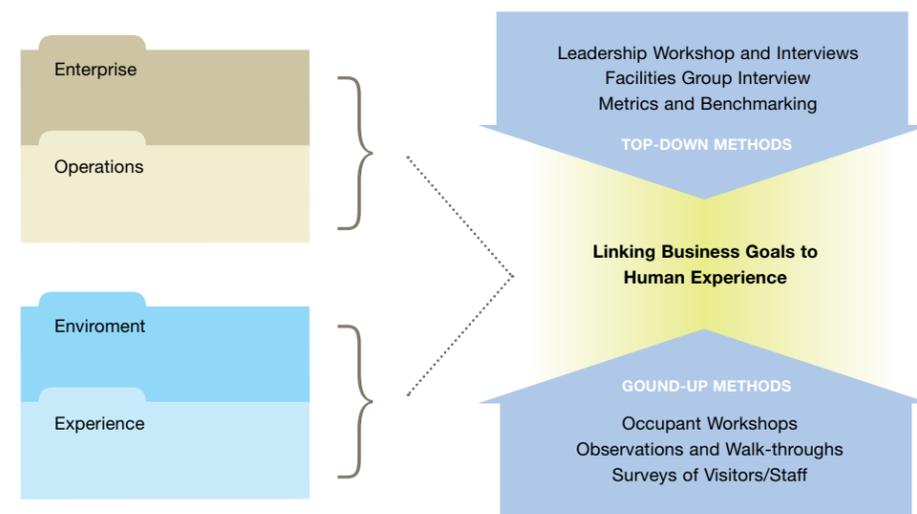
Design Solutions

- A new art program was created for critical public areas around the campus. The program's criteria was designed to reflect the foundation's values, represent a global point of view, promote young, undiscovered artists in underdeveloped countries and focus on young women's voices through art — often by representing local craft.
- Candid photography captured during Bill and Melinda Gates' travels is displayed extensively throughout the buildings and central gathering places like the main hub.
- Program managers and other employees often collect artifacts during their global travels to oversee the work of foundation grantees. Display areas were designed for each program area to share these artifacts on a rotating basis.

An Environment with Proven Impact

In 2011, approximately six months after move-in, the foundation retained NBBJ's Workplace Strategy team to conduct a post-occupancy evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine to what extent the new campus achieved the workplace goals and how effective the workplace strategy has been in enabling the foundation staff to do their best work. It was also an opportunity to identify areas for continued improvement and help the foundation focus their efforts for greatest impact on the work environment.

The final results garnered from the post-occupancy evaluation (right) are a synthesis of a variety of methodologies (below). The most pertinent findings appeared across multiple methodologies and rose to the top.



WORKPLACE SATISFACTION RESULTS		90% of survey respondents rated the new campus as “Excellent/Good.”	
Workplace Goals		Survey Results	
	Ensure access to daylight and nature for everyone.	#1	Access to daylight is highly valued. When asked to rank their favorite workplace attributes, survey respondents overwhelmingly chose “light/bright/airy” as the number one attribute. The campus outdoor workplace supports a connection to nature.
	Establish a hub of creativity and innovation while enabling collaborative work processes.	93%	93% of survey respondents rated the workspace as “Very Supportive/Supportive” of creating easy access to colleagues. Staff appreciate the informal exchanges supported by spaces like the atrium, and the conference center assists with external learning.
	Inspire engagement in the foundation’s global mission.	86%	Artwork, convening events, and the physical campus reinforce the mission and work of the foundation: 86% of respondents said the new workspace is “Very supportive/Supportive” of feeling inspired and engaged by the foundation’s mission and work.
	Provide support for both focused work and collaboration.	76%	76% of survey respondents said focus rooms were the first place they would go to improve concentration. The campus provides a significant number and array of spaces dedicated to supporting individual focus.
	Create opportunities for interconnection and visibility.	60%	60% of respondents said the new workspace is “Very Supportive/Supportive” of awareness of their colleagues’ projects. Nearly a third reported increased insight into other teams’ work, as well.
	Provide an environment that can change and flex as the foundation grows and evolves.		Groups are creating their own neighborhoods within the space and leveraging the variety of spaces to work differently—providing an early example of an environment that can adapt to meet the changing needs of staff, programs and departments.
Additional Insights			
	Staff is adopting a more mobile work culture.		Staff use of workstations aside from their desks has doubled since 2007. Observational studies reveal this is potentially due to access to a variety of work settings that encourage staff to work where it best suits them.
	Informal interactions and access to senior leadership are significantly increased.		Staff and senior leadership regularly leave their desks to work in the atrium space for hours at a time—which enables more informal conversations and creates a work environment that bustles with energy and people. The foundation believes that creating a more informal culture will allow ideas to be shared more freely and moved forward at a faster pace.



CLIENT
Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation

SIZE
900,000 SF (Phase I)

COMPLETION DATE
2011

SERVICES
Site selection, architectural
design, interior design,
workplace strategy,
strategic planning, change
management, lighting
design, environmental
graphic design

SUSTAINABILITY
LEED-NC Platinum

"The natural atmosphere of the campus is absolutely beautiful and has such a calming effect. The open space plan of the new campus gives employees opportunities to connect with each other in ways that didn't exist in the five office buildings." —SARAH WEBER, PROGRAM OFFICER, US PROGRAM

About NBBJ

NBBJ is an award-winning global design and architecture firm focused on helping clients capitalize on the relationship between people and the design of physical space to enhance organizational performance.

Partnering with some of the world's most innovative companies, including several Fortune 500 firms, NBBJ has set new standards for flexible and results-driven office environments. Our approach to corporate workplace design focuses on aligning our client's brand and business goals with design solutions that inspire innovation, leverage technology and enhance the unique business goals and culture of each company. We critically examine how a workplace functions to design environments that enable creativity, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and sustainable practices.

NBBJ has won numerous awards for our corporate design work, including the CoreNet Global Sustainable Leadership Award, the FIABCI Prix d'Excellence, the BusinessWeek/Architectural Record Award and the AIA National Honor Award. Our network of offices enables us to deliver quality projects that are regionally and locally appropriate. It allows us to act as a single, creative force by leveraging the latest thinking from NBBJ colleagues in other locations and bringing a rich blend of expertise to each project.

NBBJ Services

Master Planning

Architecture

Interior Design

Financial Analysis

Project and Cost Management

Graphic Design and Signage

Space Planning

Lighting Design

Workplace Consulting

Programming

Land-Use Planning

Construction Administration

Facility Planning

Change Management