

Population Health Building and Site: Marshalling Collective Benefits

January 19, 2018

A key goal of the development, design, and execution of the Population Health Building and its surrounding site is to stimulate and sustain interactive creativity and investigation, leading to collective innovation. Major audiences of that goal include the building's tenants, UW students, campus groups interested in the Population Health Initiative, donors, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The building and site must serve this purpose together, but they alone cannot carry the full weight of this goal. The tenants must bear much of this weight, by fulfilling their missions and maximizing what they have found to work already in terms of community-building, cooperative work, communication, and creativity, while at the same time evolving to take on new challenges and opportunities. We must maximize the *potential* for the building and site holistically to catalyze the work of the major tenants and provide an environment ideal for emphasizing and cultivating constructive new interactions, leading to opportunities to address population health issues more fully and successfully than ever before.

Creative interaction, investigation, and innovation take place in at least three settings – *within a given organization, between organizations, and between organizations and other stakeholders outside of the building*. The building and site must provide all three settings; and all three settings should be represented throughout in distinctive ways. We want to suffuse the building and site with this type of joint work and the ability to meet evolving needs. By interweaving the means, symbols, and mechanisms of creative interaction throughout the entire building and site – rather than concentrating it in just one area – we elevate the importance, relevance, and accessibility of working together in transformative ways. At the same time, we must honor and respect that advancing the work of the specific organizations also requires individual reflection and intellectual replenishment. We do not want to promote one monolithic approach to working or one iconographic display of collaboration; instead we want to locate multiple distinct and readily identifiable places for multifaceted interaction and intellectual contemplation throughout the building and site. These markers should themselves reflect a path of exploration through, up, and around the building and site, with opportunities for creative interaction indelibly imprinted on each floor and the outdoor landscape in different ways.

Individually transformable spaces throughout the building and site will act as beacons of engagement and will also seed the spread of vibrant activity. We seek to attain the sense of a building alive at all times, teeming with ideas and engagement, without ominous lacunae where activity is meant to take place, but where no one ventures. There should not be one signature feature that highlights the theme of collective work; there should be multiple that fit so well into the environmental context for staff and visitors that interaction and exchange becomes a part of their everyday routine.

Imagine the following: Printed graphs and charts of results spread across the floor, and researchers walking amongst them to see patterns. An instructor at the head of a crowded classroom. Two people huddled over a puzzle table, exercising their minds on something that is not formal work. An individual engaged in a Skype session with colleagues from a dozen countries. A room with project plans and timelines festooning the walls, marked over in pen as a group actively problem-solves together. Someone in front of a computer monitor reflecting upon a thorny coding problem. A student and faculty member debating animatedly a thesis draft. People laughing over lunch about the last great mistake that led to innovation in their projects. A group of staff with packing boxes surrounding them as they ready themselves to conduct an intervention project in the field. *All* of these images are part of the everyday of this building, this site, these organizations, and their missions.

Within organizations: emphasize working together in local neighborhoods

Each of the major tenants has cultivated a community over time that we want to continue to flourish – and wherever possible be enhanced and evolve – in the new building. People want a sense of agency over their community, and they want to feel as if they can transform it to meet their needs. Information exchange, project planning, open critiques of research results, collective paper writing, and even team coding exercises are hallmarks of established practice. We want to encourage these activities while strengthening existing communities in the following ways:

- Make each floor into its own set of neighborhoods, sharing common local amenities. Neighborhoods in cities can be defined by their populations, style of design, types of activity, or geographic features. They are unique from one another while sharing some common attributes. The neighborhoods in the building should take this into account. There can and should be unique ‘destinations’ even within neighborhoods – both in the building and on the site.
- Make individual office spaces and various meeting rooms easily transformable: plenty of white boards and writeable walls; flexible seating and furniture arrangements that can be moved around or adapted to fit multiple people and needs; plug-in technology capabilities in meeting rooms; moveable tables and other accessories in offices so that they can turn into collective workspaces at a moment’s notice.
- Preserve the possibility for quiet places for individual rumination and strategic thinking or where sensitive conversations can take place without interruption.
- Create local gathering spaces, as simple as a front desk to reinforce identity and community; or printer stands, lounge areas, or open workbenches where people can congregate.
- Allow adaptability of spaces. Different people and units have varying needs. Limit the footprints of different types of workspaces, but make them easily adaptable to accommodate multiple people, impromptu meetings, brainstorming sessions, or displays of results.
- Create spaces both inside and outside that encourage rumination and strategic thinking spurred visually by the natural environment and a sense of creativity and variety.

Between organizations: engender interaction between tenants

Having the major tenants in one place could yield immense dividends in the right context. We want to encourage intermingling between the groups, as casual interactions can often spark innovative ideas and opportunities. Yet people often feel tentative around strangers, and there will be many people in the building. To break down artificial social barriers while preserving a sense of identity, we will:

- Democratize spaces like the external patios. We intend to place specific and unique amenities in each outdoor area to encourage people to use them everyday, not just on special occasions.
- Utilize interconnecting stairwells wherever possible to promote ease of getting from one unit to another, fluid flow of foot traffic, and verbal communication exchange.
- Make the surrounding site inviting to building tenants and create a natural environment that encourages reflection and rejuvenation in a public setting. Create variety in the landscape with a sense of discovery that will entice staff to walk around the perimeter and stop along the way, where they might encounter others in an unplanned way.
- Create spaces outdoors that encourage both large and small interactions; spots off the beaten path and away from the crowd for more focused discussions alongside of larger spaces for convening. Create spaces for both reflection and rejuvenation through exposure to the natural environment.
- Imprint each floor with its own set of transformable and interactive spaces. In some settings, people choose to locate all of the group work facilities in one location. We believe that practice leads to isolation and fewer people using such facilities. Instead, we want to integrate some of

those spaces on each floor to increase use and so that staff on each floor witness joint work and exchange taking place daily.

- Draw staff to different floors by creating distinctive and original spaces for inter-organizational interaction. Think of them as local attractions vested with value and utility. They should motivate tenants and their key partners to actively want to go somewhere in the building outside of their office because it *helps them to accomplish an important task*. One upper floor could feature an open space to lounge, work, and discuss ideas freely without being buffeted by outside noise and interruptions. Another could have an adaptable multipurpose activity room with workbenches and monitors. A third could have a set of small workrooms with extra white boards and technology readiness.

Between organizations and outside stakeholders: emphasize the vibrancy of and sense of discovery within population health

Improving population health requires a breadth of diverse audiences, both on and off campus. The building and site must be the physical marker of the permeability between those settings. We must make the emphasis on working together visible to those who pass by and through the building and site. To highlight that effect and establish the building and site as a purpose-driven destination we will:

- Make visible multifaceted convening spaces on the entry-level floors and the external site, spaces for tenants and external groups to host workshops, have classes, or sit down with individual collaborators and explore research and related activities together. Meld the building and the site by extending the capacity to host meetings, celebrations, and small group sessions outdoors. Blur the line between the two where possible by making the transition to the outdoors seamless.
- Situate the Population Health Initiative offices in a prominent and accessible setting that identifies it as the neural center of the building. Support it with sustained and recognizable activity: spaces to which it can invite other groups – both large and small – such as visitor offices, interactive display space, pods for small workgroups, seminar or small meeting space. Promote access to interactive spaces woven in a network throughout the building.
- Make the activities within the entry levels as visible to those outside the building as possible. Since people will not be able to see much of what transpires above the first floors, ensure the façade is transparent enough so that people sense that the building is buzzing with activity.
- Create a sense of arrival at the entryways; do not hide them. Make them inviting and characterize them in a way that conveys the story of population health. Design and implement story-telling techniques for each of the entrances and the external façade that highlight the multiple actors who contribute to population health.
- Create points of discovery and reflection within the physical site, both inside and outside of the building.
- Reinforce visually on the site the global reach of the work of the Population Health Initiative and reinforce the important connections to the UW as a respected, innovative institution.

We must intentionally promote collective thinking, planning, knowledge exchange, engagement, and informal activities to strengthen the sense of purpose-driven community throughout the building and site. These spaces' transformable nature speaks to evolving needs. By making the reminders about and options for active exchange as commonplace as other building attributes, we intend to have the building and site be a wellspring of creativity and cross-fermentation of ideas, activities, and action.