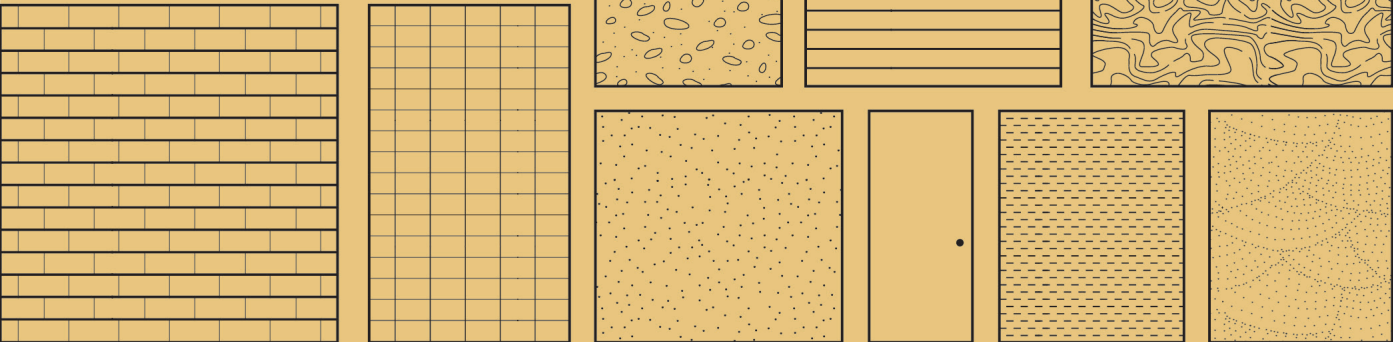
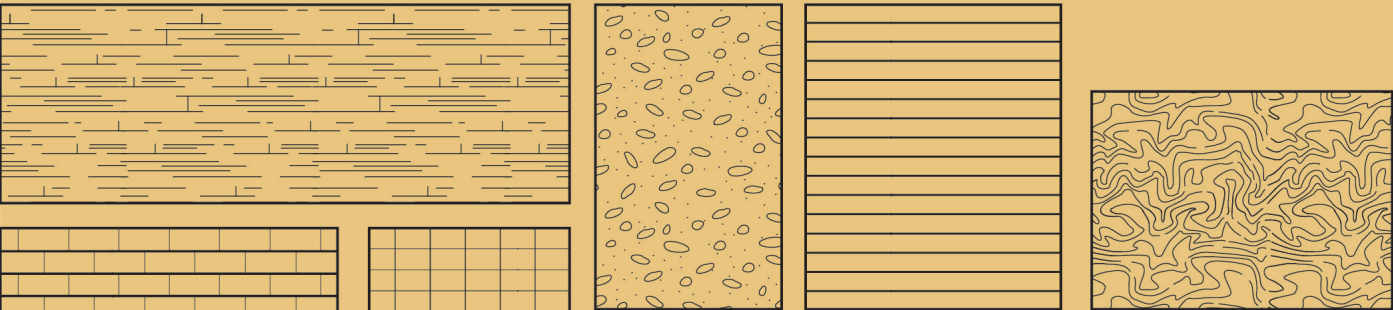
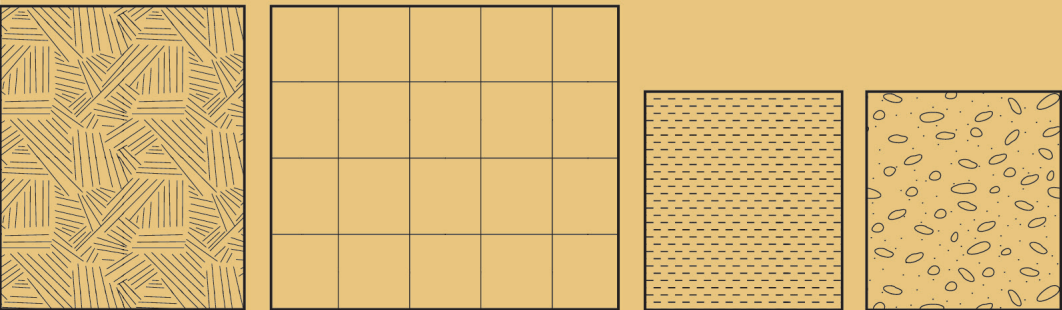
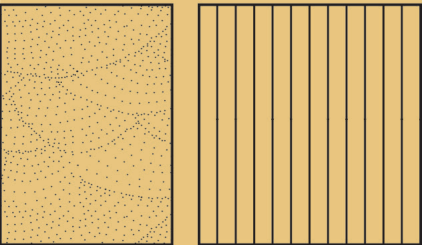


PURPOSE BUILT



Introducing the Purpose Built Series

Knowledge and tools for people who fund, lead, and evaluate capital projects

Bricks, Mortar, and Impact

Capital projects can create tangible and lasting change, representing an inflection point in the life of a nonprofit organization. The process of creating or improving a facility might begin with the realization that limited space, a hard-to-access location, or outdated infrastructure is hindering a nonprofit's ability to serve its constituents. Investing in the built environment carries inherent potential for organizations to amplify their impact and catalyze enduring positive outcomes. New or renovated facilities can enhance how people live and work, while some go even further to transform the social, economic, and environmental fabric of communities.

Many philanthropists choose to invest in bricks and mortar projects for these very reasons. The Foundation Center reports that foundations grant more than \$3 billion annually to construct or improve buildings in the United States. Data sets from 2006 to 2015 show that almost 10 percent of foundation giving—a total of \$31.6 billion—supported capital projects.ⁱ

In spite of this substantial investment in infrastructure, many funders and nonprofit leaders lack the knowledge, experience, and tools to plan and implement projects successfully. As a result, they may struggle with the process and fall short of the opportunity to leverage a capital investment to advance a nonprofit's mission. They might even inadvertently create challenges that have a negative effect on the very people and communities they seek to benefit.

In recent years, the building sector has turned its attention to creating tools to better plan and design for impact, as evidenced by the growing popularity of the United States Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.ⁱⁱ However, the current suite of evaluation tools typically focus on measuring one type of outcome—for example, assessing outputs related to environmental or economic impact, or monitoring the wellness of building occupants. There are marked gaps in the sector related to the ability to track and assess the social, mission-based, and holistic impacts that buildings can have on

i *Foundation Center, Foundation Maps data based on grants made in the United States, 2006—2015.*

ii *LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a globally recognized symbol of excellence in green building. Source: www.usgbc.org/articles/about-leed.*

organizations and their stakeholders. Additionally, there is relatively little effort to capture and share lessons that can inform others as they plan, carry out, and operate capital projects.

In response to this need, two funders—The Atlantic Philanthropies and the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation—engaged MASS Design Group to conduct research exploring the impact of the built environment, and to seek lessons with relevance to those considering or conducting capital projects. Founded by individuals who recognize the value of effective physical infrastructure, these two funders have made significant investments in capital projects to support the missions and aspirations of their nonprofit partners. Both are limited-life foundations. Atlantic approved its final grants in 2016, and the Foundation will complete its spend-down in 2020, with a sense of urgency to capture and share knowledge with the field.

MASS Design Group

For a decade, MASS Design Group, a nonprofit architecture firm, has partnered with organizations and foundations to implement impact-driven design, and has established a research team to understand and prove the value of its design work. Through this process, MASS developed a framework for assessing how the built environment changes the way people live, as well as how it can amplify the work of organizations and transform communities.

This document written by MASS describes the genesis, process, and outcomes of *Purpose Built*—a study intended to assist those who fund, lead, and evaluate capital projects.

Methodology

To begin this research project, MASS reviewed existing tools, frameworks, and metrics, and examined the efficacy of each. Following that literature review, MASS worked with staff at The Atlantic Philanthropies and the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation to learn from their direct experiences and broad knowledge of philanthropic practice. Additionally, the team engaged a larger network of design and nonprofit professionals through interviews and workshops to build an understanding of the field.

For the products of this research to be useful to the philanthropy and nonprofit sector at large, they needed to be drawn from a variety of building types, geographies, approaches, and outcomes. To pursue this intent, MASS completed 15 case studies of capital projects; The Atlantic Philanthropies or the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation had supported each project partially or in full. The case studies range from a \$40,000 primary health care facility in rural Viet Nam to a \$488 million science and education institution in San Francisco, and include projects in South Africa, Australia, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and additional locations in the United States. The types of institutions and projects span museums, educational and research facilities, health care facilities, community centers, dormitories, and parks. Some of the nonprofits had qualified and experienced internal staff to lead capital projects; others were facing the first construction effort in the history of their organization.

Each case study involved a one- to two- week on-site engagement, featuring semi-structured interviews, building tours, observations, exercises, and financial and administrative data collection. Off-site research supported the visits, including review of grantee documents, topical literature, and relevant media and articles.

Interviews with a range of stakeholders brought forward varying perspectives on the successes and challenges of the projects studied. This methodology is both rich and limited. It enabled MASS to gain a 360-degree view of each project and learn of the less tangible but vital ways a built environment shapes behaviors and outcomes. At the same time, relying on individual perceptions and recollections can surface multiple impressions that are at times difficult to coalesce into conclusive findings.

MASS aimed to take a balanced approach to assessing and reporting on the impact of each project. The research team validated conclusions through supporting literature where possible and typically included multiple views regarding the important aspects of each case. The project team also sought to remember, and encourages readers to keep in mind, that the choices and actions of decision-makers in each project took place in the context of varying constraints and resources as well as knowns and unknowns. Each set of project actors recognized and weighed trade-offs, charting courses that ultimately influenced the outcomes of their project.

Information gathering and assessment of each capital project took place at a discrete moment in time. Each case report therefore reflects the luxury of hindsight while also representing only part of the picture of its subject, as the circumstances, uses, and impact of each built facility will invariably undergo continued evolution.

The Purpose Built Series

This study found that the best results occur when a project is built with purpose—grounded in a clear and strategic mission that informs design decisions, with a scope that matches what its organization can afford to build, operate, and maintain. In response to study findings, MASS created *Purpose Built* tools and resources to help funders and nonprofits seeking to invest in, create, or evaluate capital infrastructure balance a project’s mission, design, and feasibility.

A collection of 15 *Purpose Built Case Studies* is meant to help organizations navigate complex project decisions within a specific context. *Planning for Impact* is a tool to assist those initiating capital projects with asking the right questions and anticipating unknowns. *Charting Capital Results* is an assessment tool that evaluates mission-aligned impacts, engages a wide range of stakeholders, and leaves room for context and nuance to inform lessons learned. *Making Capital Projects Work* is a collection of 10 principles that balance and make *Purpose Built* lessons actionable:

1. Envision greater possibilities for impact.
2. Commit to planning to set the right scope.
3. Engage stakeholders for insights and buy-in.
4. Combine inside knowledge with outside expertise.
5. Connect with partners to scale outcomes.
6. Define donor support as more than construction funding.
7. Invest in design excellence.
8. Be ready for organizational change.
9. See financial realities beyond opening day.
10. Identify the correct metrics for success.

These principles were distilled from the research in order to help project teams avoid common pitfalls and generate a greater return on investment in capital projects.

Like each of the cases studied, *Purpose Built* was created at a moment in time, informed by specific influences and constraints. While comprehensive and reflective of the knowledge gleaned from this study, the *Purpose Built* series is a work in progress by nature. It is intended to be improved over time as its resources and tools are used, tested, and validated. The MASS research team, along with The Atlantic Philanthropies and the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, share these resources in hopes that future projects benefit from this research effort—fulfilling their inherent potential to help funders and nonprofits achieve new and sustainable levels of impact.

See the full *Purpose Built* series online at www.massdesigngroup.org/purposebuilt.



Introducing the Purpose Built Series is an overview of the study and its core principles.



Making Capital Projects Work more fully describes the *Purpose Built* principles, illustrating each with examples.



Planning for Impact is a practical, comprehensive tool for those initiating capital projects.



Charting Capital Results is a step-by-step guide for those evaluating completed projects.



Purpose Built Case Studies report on 15 projects to illustrate a range of intents, approaches, and outcomes.

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MASS.