

The Inspiration Exchange

Our vision builds a community cultural hub that overcomes social barriers, creates opportunity, and models climate justice to Chicago and the world.

The Inspiration Exchange fundamentally transforms a Downtown Loop site into a community cultural hub that overcomes social barriers, creates opportunity, and models climate justice to Chicago and the world. The project provides essential services to individuals experiencing homelessness in an around the downtown Chicago area while advancing climate action through a concentration of resilience strategies, including an innovative food waste recovery network, net zero carbon construction, affordable and permanent supportive housing, counseling and health services, an emergency resilience hub, waste recovery, nutrition, urban agriculture, and job training.

A unique coalition of service providers will gather in one space, inviting all Chicagoans to together take action to end poverty in the city. The proposed Inspiration Exchange building includes locally and internationally renowned organizations such as Food for Soul, founded by Chef and UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Massimo Bottura and his wife Lara Gilmore, Inspiration Corporation, founded in 1989 by former Chicago Police officer Lisa Nigro, Turnstone Development, Heartland Alliance Health, Brown Planet Productions, Back of the Yards Coffee, and others. These organizations and services are individually invaluable to their constituents and communities. Together in one place, this convergence will anchor an environmentally, economically, and socially just center of a Global City.

Our mission extends beyond the unsheltered population we hope to serve. The space provides an opportunity for all who work, play, and live in Chicago's city center to break down their own perceptions of social equity through volunteer and mentorship activities that promote empathy, compassion and motivate people to take an active role in their community towards a more equal, fair and just planet.

The Inspiration Exchange will strive to uplift communities that have faced historical disenfranchisement and disinvestment on the City's South and West sides by providing pathways to sustainable careers and a platform to participate in the enormous economic engine located in the geographical heart of the City. Beyond the opportunity to radically transform the site itself from an environmental perspective, there is also an opportunity to reclaim a physical footprint in the city's heart for communities that have struggled to be welcomed. Inspiration Exchange will provide south and west side communities with a direct link to the Loop where they can build careers, businesses, and a shared appreciation of the richness of diverse cultural exchange.



Inspiration Exchange doesn't just aim to welcome you whether you are in need of refuge, seeking a way to respond to the social head that surrounds you, or simply curious about your community.



The Inspiration Exchange creates a community hub in which no one individual is left behind. The Exchange grows civic empathy and compassion through engagement, celebrates diversity, and benefits all Chicagoans. Students, academics, industry experts, tourists, community members will come to visit, dine, volunteer, research, learn, engage and contribute to the innovative design and integrated services.



This project transforms a plot of land that is too often a flash point in the adversarial relationship between the Loop's unhoused community and those who own property or operate businesses in the area into a place that truly belongs to everyone who lives, works, and plays in the City of Chicago.

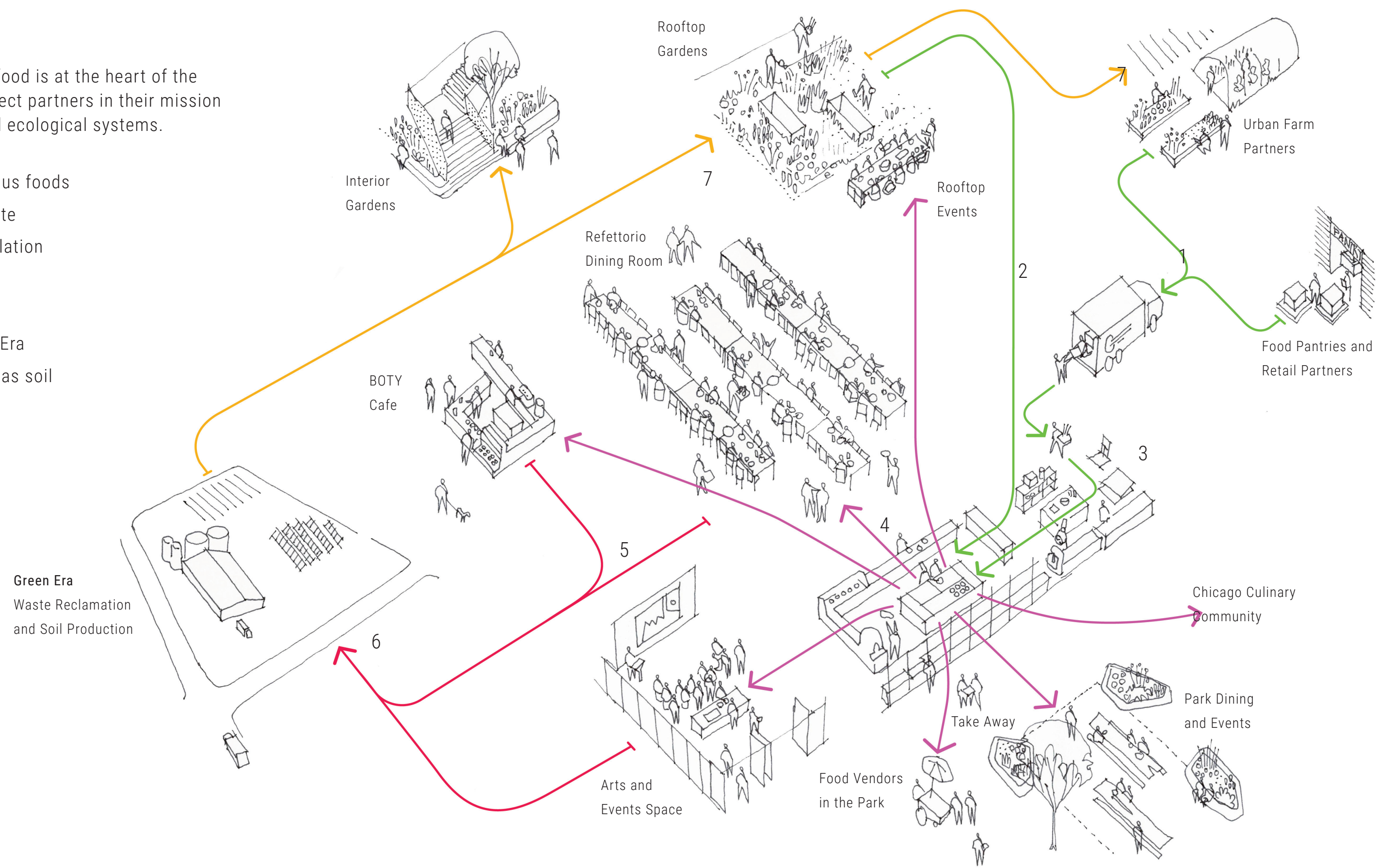
C40 Reinventing Cities Competition
Chicago Downtown Loop Site
Phase 2 - Request for Proposals
February 5, 2021

The Inspiration Exchange
Turnstone Development + Refettorio Chicago Team

A Circular Food System

Growing, cooking, and sharing food is at the heart of the project and serves to bond project partners in their mission to improve our food, social, and ecological systems.

- 1 Arrival of rescued and surplus foods
- 2 Harvested food grown on site
- 3 Cleaning, storage, and tabulation
- 4 Cooking and Meal Sharing
- 5 Organic waste collected
- 6 Organics diverted to Green Era
- 7 Composted waste returned as soil



A cultural center and community kitchen, called "Refettorio" is the culinary heart of the project. Created by Food For Soul, an international nonprofit organization, the Refettorio food program will reclaim and transform food surplus into nourishing meals provided in a dignified dining experience to 150 individuals facing social vulnerability at each seating.

Climate Justice

The Inspiration Exchange takes seriously the notion that climate and social justice, equity, and action are indivisible. The C40 Reinventing Cities Competition offers the City of Chicago a once-in-a-generation opportunity to be a leader of climate action, and advance community resiliency and social and economic equity through a unique cultural project that addresses the immediate needs of the City's most economically disadvantaged residents while providing an opportunity for all Chicagoans to become socially responsible and active stewards in creating a more equal, just and sustainable planet.

First, the Inspiration Exchange models Net Zero Carbon construction on a budget commensurate with affordable housing. Demonstrating the use of accessible and familiar construction materials and methods to achieve Net Zero Carbon is a critical step in minimizing perceived obstacles of cost or accessibility to inclusive sustainable development.

Second, the project advocates that people with less means can find choice and agency in their immediate environment, their community, and the world. This proposal offers an important opportunity to recognize the critical contribution of all solvers and all populations in the global imperative to reduce carbon consumption, steward our built and natural environment, and affect change.

Innovative Climate Justice Solutions include:

Net-zero carbon construction development on a below-market budget

Co-location of affordable and permanent supportive housing and homeless services, including Heartland Alliance Health federally qualified health clinic, and data and research sharing across complementary organizations

Circular food network, including food waste recovery, nutrition, cultural exchange, urban agriculture, and landscape stewardship

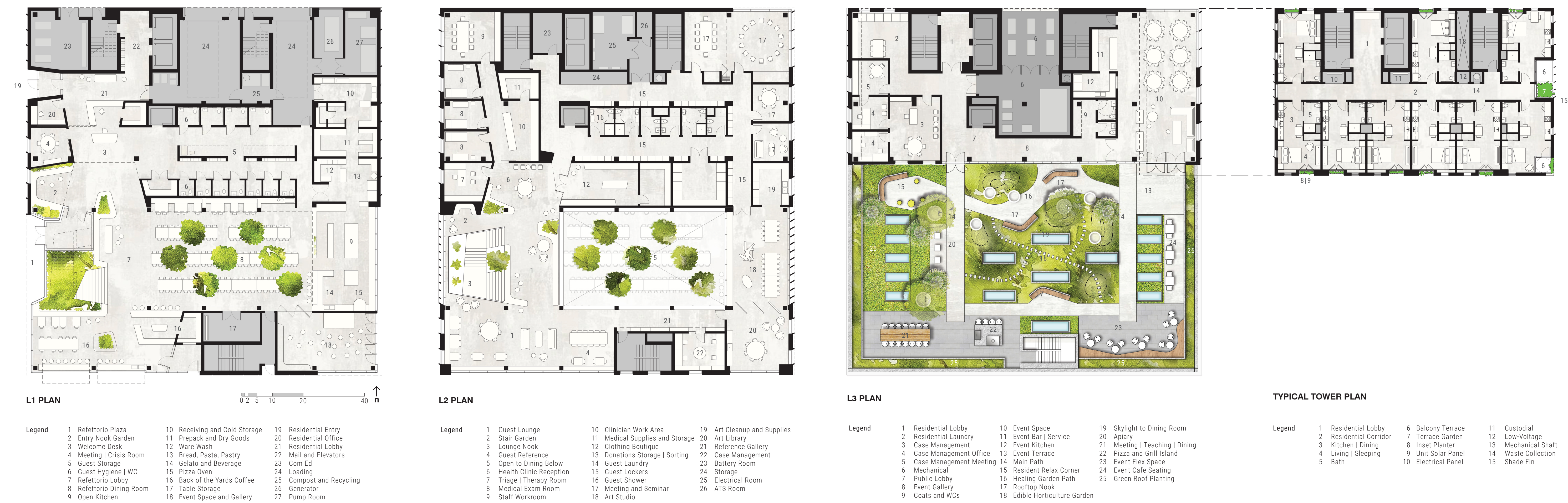
A resiliency hub to support residents, and coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, or after a natural hazard event. In addition to the day-to-day benefits, hubs can provide a safe place for temporary shelter and relief during days of extreme heat, or operate as centers for distributing necessities such as food and information after disaster events such as floods. Year-round, they can offer space and programming for community-building efforts that increase resilience when emergencies occur.

Job creation including 60+ temporary jobs and 115+ permanent jobs focused on disadvantaged youth and city residents. Construction will include local hiring strategies and a 40% diversity participation commitment by the project general contractor

Job training, including career counseling, social enterprise opportunities, and apprenticeships with Inspiration Kitchens + Refettorio, Urban Growers Collective, and Back of the Yards Coffeehouse

Catalyst for economic development in Chicago's southwest historic neighborhoods through renewable energy business investment





A Place Where Everyone Belongs

The Inspiration Exchange uses cultural exchange surrounding food, art, and landscape stewardship to support a holistic regeneration of our environment. The space shines a light on the hidden potential that surrounds us, the power of beauty hospitality, and exchange of ideas to transform lives.

Imagine an interconnected web of engagement where Chicagoans travel to the Loop to volunteer in the Inspiration Corporation's meals program, attend lectures on social justice, sustainability and related issues, and browse the galleries of art created by individuals with lived experience of homelessness. Nearby residents and businesses reserve the Refettorio dining space for a wedding or special event, choosing catering and event service providers from the City's South and West sides. On the weekends, tourists stop by our event spaces in Pritzker Park for demonstrations on culinary techniques for repurposing foods and combining odd ingredients run by notable Black Chicago chefs who are assisted by apprentices in the Inspiration Corporation's training program. On weeknight evenings in our dining space music students from nearby colleges provide entertainment with pro-bono recitals, and Chicago artists visit the space to provide guests with classes on photography or writing. This is what true community looks like.

"Culture brings knowledge. Knowledge leads to consciousness. And when we become conscious we are one short step away from becoming socially responsible. Culture is the key."

- Massimo Bottura

"I wanted to create a space where it didn't matter if you were a lawyer, a battered woman, a senior citizen or someone who had AIDS. We all have a common ground and when you go into Inspiration, all of those labels melt away."

- Lisa Nigro, Founder of Inspiration Corporation

"A place of gathering where you can discuss ideas and create art over a cup of coffee."

- Jesse Higuera, Back of the Yards Coffee Co.

"One of the most creative and advanced green buildings in Chicago - a constant development of nature and ideas."

- Carlos Javier Ortiz, Brown Planet Productions

"This is the only place that doesn't make me depressed. It's everything - the staff, the space, the windows, the plants, the food is art on a plate. Everywhere else it's like losing energy, like people and places suck energy from you. This place gives energy."

- Guest, Refettorio Felix at St Cuthbert's



A flexible gallery space hosts arts and cultural events and connects to the adjacent Pritzker Park. Its highly visible location positions it to encourage positive public dialogue and overcoming social isolation.



A Studio for community arts and Artist-in-Residence creates an inviting environment for healing, creativity, and connection.



A multi-functional lounge on the second floor provides space for meeting, counseling, learning, for everyday use. It also serves as a cooling and warming refuge in extreme weather.



The roof deck supports biophilic therapy spaces, urban agriculture and support healthy programs, and special events.