



Davis Partnership Architects

# The Colorado Health Foundation

A Healthy and Welcoming Community Space, the First of Its Kind

*Building Design + Construction, Office Building*

In 2012, The Colorado Health Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to improving health and equity in Colorado, engaged Mithun, Urban Ventures, Davis Partnership Architects, and WSP sustainability to develop and build a health-promoting office space in the North Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver.

The team utilized the LEED Health Process to formally document their approach to a “health-positive” Colorado Health Foundation office building - a building that promotes employee and community population health.

**A**s a supporter of the Mariposa Healthy Living Initiative, an innovative health-focused mixed-income housing development in Denver that began in 2009, The Colorado Health Foundation (TCHF) became an early leader within the health and built environment intersection. When their own office building lease was expiring, TCHF applied this understanding to inform their approach.

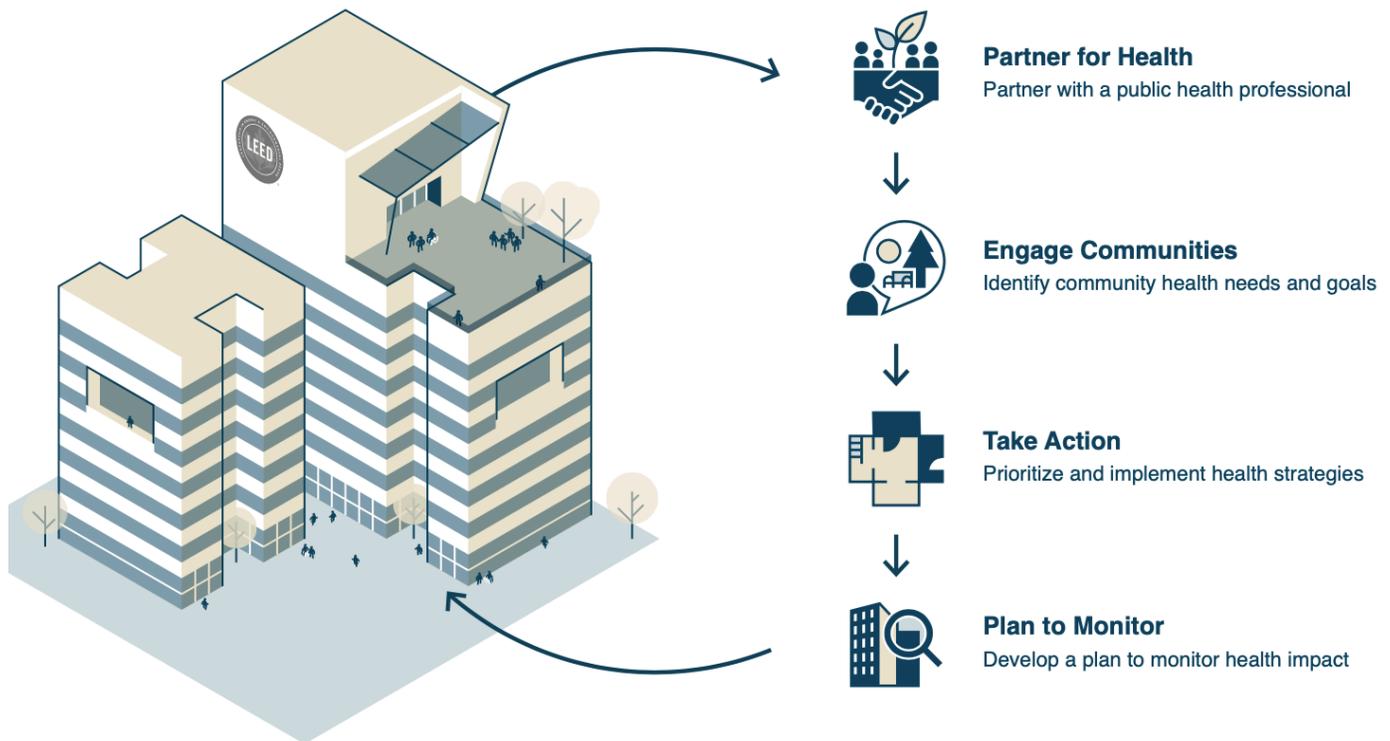
In late 2012, The Colorado Health Foundation embarked on a multi-year project to re-think their office workplace. This organization, committed to improving the health and promoting the equity of Coloradoans by investing in nonprofits, communities, and businesses, decided to design and build their new office workplace in a way that reflected their core values and shaped their culture.

The Colorado Health Foundation leadership envisioned how their headquarters could embody their mission, and be a ‘health-positive’ force in the community. TCHF sought out a few trusted advisors to help them decide whether or not to renovate their existing office space or start from scratch. To build a new office building, TCHF established criteria to assess and select a site that would maximize health promotion for both staff and visitors.

Once a site was selected, TCHF leveraged input from staff and external stakeholders, an internal advisory team, and partnerships with experts in architecture, workspace design and construction to create an active, high-performance workplace grounded in a “health-positive” vision; the seamless interaction between workplace design,

organizational values, culture, and the health and well-being of employees and visitors. TCHF strove for peak performance in both health and sustainability and made the decision to pursue both a LEED v4 Gold and WELL Gold certification using the LEED Integrative Process for Health Promotion (LEED Health Process) pilot credit. The combination of these tools and certifications made the project the first of its kind and a clear leader in the green health movement.

## The LEED Health Process



The LEED Health Process helps built environment project teams consider and promote population health and well-being as a formal part of their green building strategy.

The LEED Health Process is available as the **LEED v4 Integrative Process for Health Promotion pilot credit** and within the LEED v4.1 Integrative Process credit. The process is also aligned with 2020 Enterprise Green Communities Criterion 1.5, Design for Health and Well-Being. The Green Health Partnership, an initiative of the University of Virginia School of Medicine and the U.S. Green Building Council, developed the process in collaboration with Enterprise Community Partners and the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts.



“We hadn’t decided at that point to build a building. [We were] deciding to create a new home that’s going to reflect the values of the Health Foundation.”

- Chris Smith, Senior Program Officer at TCHF

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**Partner for Health.** As an organization with a health and equity-focused mission, The Colorado Health Foundation was in a unique position to serve as their own health partner - but did so in a creative and collaborative way. Nearly every employee at the Foundation has some background or experience working in health and equity, so when a small internal team (the Office 2016 project team) was created to advise the development of the project, they ensured that the rest of the employees were continuously engaged and maintained some decision-making power over how their workspace was to be designed.

This simple strategy to engage all employees as partners in the process helps create a more equitable office environment where everyone has value, and aligns with core TCHF values of transparency, respect, equity, and opportunity.

**PROJECT TEAM**

The interdisciplinary TCHF team included stakeholders from the following departments and disciplines:

- **HEALTH PARTNERS.** TCHF Human Resources, Board of Directors Committee, and TCHF Cross-Functional Office 2016 Project Team - particularly Vicky Cavanaugh, Rahn Porter, and Chris Smith.
- **PLANNING & REAL ESTATE STRATEGY.** Mithun and Urban Ventures, particularly Sue Powers, Urban Ventures (facilitation).
- **DESIGN.** Davis Partnership Architects.
- **MEP, SUSTAINABILITY.** WSP (formerly YR&G).
- **CONSTRUCTION.** Saunders Construction.

**THE COLORADO HEALTH FOUNDATION PROJECT STATISTICS**

LOCATION	PROJECT TYPE	CERTIFICATIONS	SITE USERS	SQ. FOOTAGE	ARCHITECT	CONSULTANTS
Uptown, Downtown Denver, CO	Office Building, New Construction	LEED v4 Gold (using LEED Health Process), and WELL Gold	60 Employees, Guests of TCHF	~ 32,000 sq. ft	Davis Partnership Architects	WSP (MEP, Sustainability and Health Framework)

**Engage Communities.** As a key shaper of public health in Colorado, integrating community needs into the design of the office was vital to the success of the project. TCHF’s health partners and stakeholders came together to identify the communities that would be impacted by the project, assess the population’s health and well-being needs based on available data, and develop health goals to achieve throughout the life-cycle of the project.

For the employees and staff that would occupy the new office space, TCHF prioritized the creation of an active, high indoor environmental quality workplace that fostered healthy behaviors. By using an internal team to act as a public health partner, TCHF was able to ensure that staff involvement and feedback was integral to the design process. Surveys and workshops were frequently conducted to assess employee working preferences and concerns about changing their workplace culture.

As each building has an impact on the place and population that surrounds it, TCHF explicitly considered how the local community’s needs and goals could be addressed by the project’s design, construction and operation. The North Capitol Hill neighborhood of Denver, an arts and cultural center for the city, was intentionally chosen as the site of the project to create opportunities to interact with community members and organizations. No local community members were displaced by the construction of the project, and the foundation was better-positioned to address some of Denver’s greatest health and sustainability challenges.

Based on research and observation from the involved health stakeholders, TCHF established a number of employee and community health goals for their new office building: improving air and water quality, access to healthy foods, and daylight, and promoting activity, interaction, stress mitigation, and comfort. They also prioritized the following sustainability goals, which are closely linked with human health: reducing climate change, decreasing toxic exposures in the supply chain, and addressing the adverse health effects of the waste stream.

### TCHF HEALTH GOALS

- Improve air and water quality, access to healthy foods, daylight, and mental health.
- Promote physical activity, social interaction, stress mitigation, and comfort.
- Decrease hazardous exposures, smoking rates, and absenteeism.

### TCHF SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

- Reduce climate change, toxic exposures in the supply chain, adverse health effects of the waste stream, and risks associated with rainwater management.
- Inspire others within the community to build and operate “health positive” green buildings.

### The Colorado Health Foundation’s “Health-Positive” Vision:

TCHF’s “health-positive” vision is the seamless interaction between workplace design, organizational values, culture, and the health and well-being of employees and visitors.



**Take Action.** Once the preferences of the staff were voiced and health goals were developed for employees and the surrounding community, the health team, design team, and stakeholders came together to prioritize specific actions in order to address the established goals. Some of the TCHF design strategies for employees included active elements like an open staircase, circulation paths, fitness rooms, and bike storage. To improve indoor environmental quality, access to daylight and views, spaces for tranquility, thermal comfort control, and biophilic elements were included. The community was able to benefit from accessible spaces at the TCHF office to engage in health discourse and connect with the TCHF mission.

Overall, the strategies were chosen to help enhance both employee and community physical and emotional well-being, support different work style preferences of employees, promote a culture of health within the community, and build a shared understanding of the organization’s culture and values.

The team began thinking about quantifying the health-related benefits of the project from the beginning. Research was extensive and spanned best practices and industry rating systems. Mid-way through design, the WELL Building Standard was formally launched and proved to be a useful tool that was complimentary to the team’s approach to LEED. These rating systems combined to represent an alignment of intention with the design team.

During the construction phase of the project, the strength of the project’s health-positive vision also had an impact on the construction team. By explicitly communicating the rationale behind the specified health strategies, the project increased awareness among the construction team regarding the connections between the built environment and health. As a result, the construction company adopted a new employee health and well-being policy, arranged to make healthier food options available on the construction site, and implemented guided stretching at the beginning of each work shift to mitigate injury.

# Needs-Based Solutions at TCHF

## Health Need

## Health Solution

### **An Active Workspace**

### **Design for Movement**

A key strategy for CHF was to implement design features that promote physical activity throughout the office space. An open, centrally-located stairway encourages movement, as do fitness rooms, circulation paths, bike storage facilities, and outdoor decks. Programmatic solutions also encourage movement and activity.

### **A Comfortable Environment**

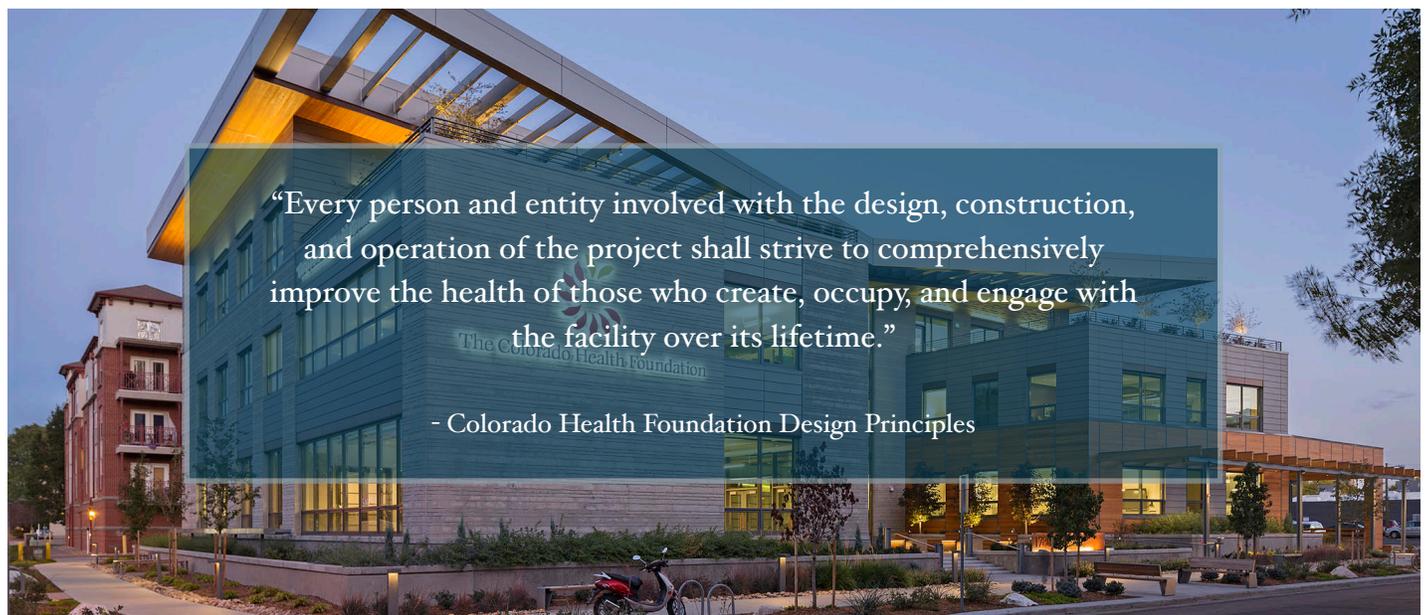
### **Design for Quality**

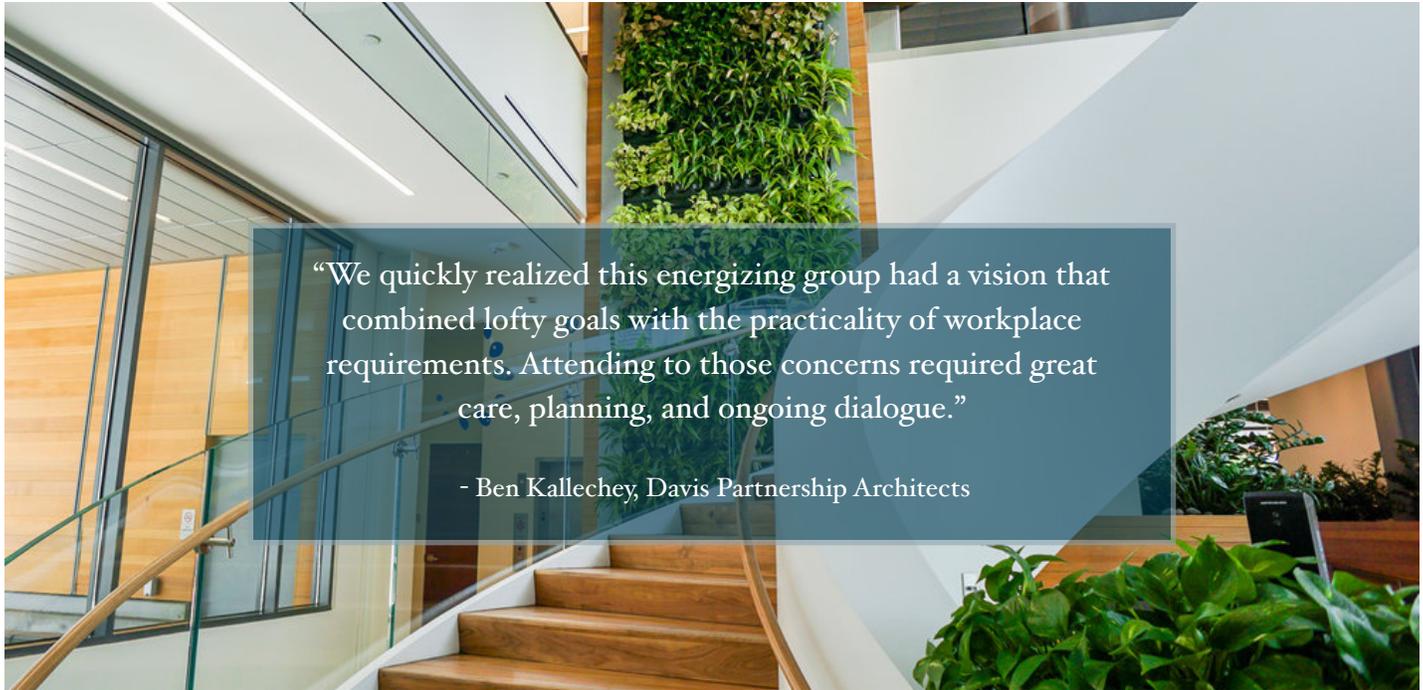
It's not easy to cater to the needs of a diverse population, but the CHF ensured that all employees would enjoy high indoor environmental quality standards, including temperature control, daylight, restoration rooms, acoustics, and flexible working stations.

### **A Place of Respite**

### **Design for Connection**

Engaging with the health needs of the Denver community was and is essential for CHF, so it's no surprise that community-accessible spaces to engage in health discourse and engage with the CHF mission were included in design strategies.





**Plan to Monitor.** After project goals were set, actions were prioritized, and construction was completed, TCHF continued the health promotion process by developing a plan to monitor the efficacy of their design and programmatic health decisions. While monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing process intended to continue throughout the life cycle of a project, the team chose to begin by monitoring the impact of healthy design strategies that would be used by staff and visitors immediately upon re-entry. These evaluation strategies included perceived stress surveys, employee satisfaction, absenteeism, quiet room usage, fitness class participation, days of poor health, bike storage usage, and fruit and vegetable order frequency.

Using the principles of an integrative process for health promotion, TCHF can reevaluate their monitoring and evaluation strategies as new health goals and challenges emerge throughout the years.

**Conclusion.** With an understanding of how the built environment can positively influence health and well-being, TCHF was able to use an intentional health promotion process to implement designs that support their targeted health goals, create health-positive policies and programs, and support their organization’s vision for health lives across Colorado.

The Colorado Health Foundation office building provides a pioneering example of how an intentional process to promote health and well-being, in conjunction with the requirements of LEED and WELL certification, can create a uniquely valuable project that promotes health and sustainability in equal measure. With a space equipped to improve the health of the people who live and work around it, TCHF can continue its important work to effect change and increase awareness of health, all while ensuring that those practices take place within their own walls.

“Inside and out, we hope to exemplify the fact that health is everyone’s business, especially ours. Every element of the building – from the construction, to design, to the central location in Denver – will allow us to further our vision of making Colorado the healthiest state in the nation.”

- Karen McNeil-Miller, President and CEO of The Colorado Health Foundation.

# TCHF's Application of the LEED Health Process

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**Partner for Health.** Leveraging the experience within their own organization, TCHF called upon their internal staff team of public health and social equity professionals to serve as health experts.



**Engage Communities.** The project team set health and well-being goals for the TCHF office based on the needs of staff and community members. Activity, comfort, nutrition, and mental health were priorities.



**Take Action.** The team selected design and programmatic strategies - like physical activity-promoting features and light, temperature, and acoustic control - that would address the health needs of the staff and their visitors.



**Plan to Monitor.** The team at TCHF will continue to monitor the effectiveness of their chosen strategies throughout the life of the office space. The health process will help them reassess their priorities in the face of new health challenges.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2012, WINTER	2013, SPRING	2013, FALL	2014, WINTER	2015, WINTER	2015, SPRING	2015, SUMMER/FALL	2016, WINTER
TCHF begins a conversation about building a new health-positive office building.	TCHF engages a cross-sector team of experts to brainstorm health-promoting office ideas and select a location in Denver.	TCHF issues an RFP for architectural services.	Davis Partnership Architects, selected for design services, conducts health promotion workshops with TCHF Staff and stakeholders to develop a design.	TCHF announces a land purchase agreement with the Denver Housing Authority (DHA).	TCHF team administers workplace satisfaction surveys and hosts additional workshops to explore staff preferences.	The TCHF team completes the schematic design. Staff are engaged for interior design preferences. Construction begins in October.	Construction concludes and TCHF staff move into the new office building in December.



## Who we are

Founded in 2013, the Green Health Partnership (GHP) is an academic research and development group between the University of Virginia School of Medicine and the U.S. Green Building Council with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. GHP utilizes the green building movement as a platform and blueprint for creating a self-sustaining, scalable market for health promotion within the real estate industry.

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## Acknowledgements

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