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## Executive Summary

# BRIDGING

## Neuroscience, Health, and the Built Environment

### *A Giving Smarter Guide*

Have you ever walked into a space with a design that immediately made you feel calmer, more focused, or creative? Has a building or design made you feel unwell, anxious, or even tired? If so, you are already intuitively aware that the built environment can significantly affect your brain and physical health.

Growing interest in the intersection of neuroscience, health, and design is fueled by a deepening understanding of human biology, rising focus on brain health and science-informed living, rapid technological advances, and greater awareness of how the built environment affects well-being. Meanwhile, demand is growing for solutions to mounting societal challenges, including urban density, the loneliness epidemic, and chronic disease and brain disorders.

An emerging approach rooted in neuroscience and design, termed neurospatial design, offers a promising, scalable way to address these challenges by supporting healthy individuals, communities, cities, and economies. Neurospatial design draws on neuroscience and health research to understand how the built environment affects human biology and to create spaces that support health, experience, and well-being. Harnessing neurospatial design's potential to equitably shape the future of work, education, and health care will require close collaboration across academia, industry, nonprofits, government, and philanthropy. However, engaging these sectors to leverage their respective strengths and align ongoing efforts has proven challenging.

In 2025, the Milken Institute [Science Philanthropy Accelerator for Research and Collaboration](#) (SPARC) began a partnership with The Pedersen Foundation to examine unmet needs, key stakeholders, and systemic hurdles to broader integration of neurospatial design. Insights from more than 90 experts and an analysis of more than 580 relevant organizations informed a *Giving Smarter Guide*, which highlights core principles, challenges, key players, and actionable opportunities to catalyze neurospatial design's growth and application. The guide also presents four interconnected philanthropic priorities as critical areas of opportunity and investment to advance neurospatial design and improve human health.

## PRIORITY 1

### Generate Actionable Evidence to Enable Implementation of Neurospatial Design

#### OPPORTUNITY 1.1:

##### Build an Interdisciplinary Research Community to Support Neurospatial Design

Initiatives that generate evidence by promoting interdisciplinary research and building a network of researchers

#### OPPORTUNITY 1.2:

##### Collect Real-World Evidence for Neurospatial Design

Real-world evidence—not solely data from biomedical studies or evaluations of completed buildings—from living labs, pilot projects, and studies of human and economic outcomes

#### OPPORTUNITY 1.3:

##### Invest in Neurospatial Design Research Infrastructure

Specialized research infrastructure to accelerate findings and foster collaboration

## PRIORITY 2

### Build a Robust, Diverse Neurospatial Design Talent Pipeline

#### OPPORTUNITY 2.1:

##### Expand Education and Training in Neurospatial Design Principles and Research

Educational initiatives that foster a diverse, sustainable workforce by broadening exposure, strengthening talent pipelines, and developing researchers and practitioners

#### OPPORTUNITY 2.2:

##### Enhance Continuing Education for Neurospatial Design Professionals

Lifelong education that equips professionals for lasting careers by providing continuing education initiatives and interdisciplinary training

## PRIORITY 3

### Fuel Integration of Neurospatial Design Across Buildings and Industry Sectors

#### OPPORTUNITY 3.1:

##### Integrate Neurospatial Design into Industry Standards

Neurospatial design principles integrated into scalable industry standards and tools to promote widespread adoption and equitable access

#### OPPORTUNITY 3.2:

##### Develop Financial Incentives for Adoption of Neurospatial Design

Financing mechanisms that incentivize integrating neurospatial design principles into the built environment

## PRIORITY 4

# Expand Neurospatial Design Awareness Across Sectors and Society

### OPPORTUNITY 4.1:

#### Leverage Associations to Expand Awareness of Neurospatial Design

Professional organizations leveraged to engage more students and professionals

### OPPORTUNITY 4.2:

#### Increase Interest in Neurospatial Design Across Related Sectors

Communications and engagement efforts to build interest among key disciplines and sectors

### OPPORTUNITY 4.3:

#### Grow Public Understanding and Demand for Neurospatial Design

Media and technology that raise public awareness of neurospatial design's benefits, driving demand for healthier spaces

We envision this  
*Giving Smarter  
Guide* as a  
framework that:



Enables organizations already invested in neuroscience, health, and/or the built environment to build upon their efforts



Introduces neurospatial design as an investment opportunity for other mission-aligned leaders in philanthropy and across sectors

Realizing neurospatial design's potential will require coordinated cross-sector efforts, and philanthropic investment is well positioned to contribute.

[View the full report](#)

