

Silver 2008 North America

Self-contained day labor station, San Francisco, USA

Project data

Type of project Architecture (infrastructure)
Estimated start of construction February 2009

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Comment of the Holcim Awards jury North America

Day labor is a challenging social issue in many cities around the globe. Although industry and commerce utilize this informal or casual source of human capital, day labor is itself not organized at all. The project's uniqueness lies in its simple and convincing approach to this problem. The idea of establishing formal stations where day laborers are allowed to stay and offer their services is unique. The stations – with a shelter, benches, toilets and facilities to buy or even prepare meals – create a sensitive living environment for people who normally live on the periphery of society. In addition the structure provides a physical location for outreach programs and also supports social cohesion amongst day laborers.

From the city's perspective, day labor stations are a considerable improvement of the quality of life, especially regarding health and security. This significant and diverse range of benefits can be achieved with little financial investment. From the demand side, labor stations facilitate hiring the required workforce and meet legal requirements and wage standards. Since day labor is common practice in the construction industry, the project contributes substantially to providing an effective response to the "target issues" ethical standards, social equity and economic performance as defined by the Holcim Foundation.

Project description by author

The *day labor station* provides a responsive solution to the land use, community, and humanitarian issues raised by informal day labor hiring sites. Over 110,000 people look for day-labor work in the United States each day. Over 75% of hiring sites occupy spaces meant for other uses, such as street corners and home-improvement store parking lots. The sites are far from ideal; their presence in spaces designated for other uses means there often is a lack even the most basic amenities (shelter, water, toilet facilities, etc.), and the lack of capacity to accommodate them within existing infrastructure often presents health, safety, and community issues.

The *day labor station* offers an innovative solution. Deployed at informal hiring locations, it provides a sheltered space for the day laborers to wait for work as well as a restroom. It can accommodate a small kitchen similar to a mobile food venue, allowing funds to be generated to support its maintenance, or if preferable, a small office from which to base administrative functions.

Green materials, such as fiber cement and used billboard vinyl, and green strategies, such as solar-generated energy, allow the station to make a minimal footprint. The day laborer system itself serves as an armature for the design; the open nature of the seating area provides maximum visual contact between workers and potential employers. Visual contact is key to workers perception of a fair hiring process. Yet, it is an element often lacking in existing worker centers.

The structure is flexible, capable of serving various uses, including employment center, meeting space, and classroom. More than just the design of a shelter, this project can help resolve the conflict about day laborers and their role within the community. The immigration debate has thrust day laborers into the spotlight, but they often are still considered as a singular, faceless mass. Lost in this, are their individual stories, which often echo tenets of the "American Dream". To this end, we developed a project website, www.daylaborstation.org, which provides more information about the project and the day laborers themselves.

A full-scale section of the *day labor station* also was exhibited last summer at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York as part of the "Design for the Other 90%" exhibition. A series of compelling portraits of the laborer clients and other media also support our advocacy efforts. Through a solution that is both environmentally- and socially-sustainable, the *day labor station* has the potential to make a concrete impact in the public realm. This project was self-initiated but we are currently in detailed discussions with several municipalities across the country about constructing the prototypes within their communities.

Relevance to target issues by author

Quantum change and transferability

A relatively small number of officially-sanctioned worker centers exist, but informal gathering sites remain the norm. This is in part because many centers are created in existing buildings, structures never designed with the day labor system in mind. By seeking out day laborers as our clients, understanding their needs, and incorporating a creative, sustainable vision, this design presents a responsive and innovative solution.

We created this design as a prototypical project. As such, we intend to ultimately release the design open source to allow communities anywhere to access it and so that other architects can continue to develop the design. In the meantime, we utilize a variety of media, from exhibitions to a project dedicated website to disseminate project information.

Ethical standards and social equity

The *day labor station* is a sustainable structure that provides a specific place for day labor gatherings, facilitating the employment process and alleviating a frequent source of community conflict. Recognizing that community needs and desires vary; the station is a prototype and can be altered to fit the realities of a given location. This site-specificity is determined through discussions and coordination with the diverse stakeholders at project locations (workers, municipality, businesses, surrounding community, etc.). Through providing laborers a more dignified presence in the public realm, the station and companion advocacy initiative elevate the debate about their role within the fabric of the community. In the end, the approach helps to foster positive social outcomes and healthier communities.

Ecological quality and energy conservation

The *day labor station* is designed to make a minimal footprint. The self-sustaining structure utilizes green materials, such as recycled PVC tiles, used billboard vinyl, fiber cement panels, and locally sourced, salvaged, or certified timber. Green strategies such as an incinerating toilet and photovoltaic modules (integrated into the canopy) allow for the potential to exist off the grid.

Economic performance and compatibility

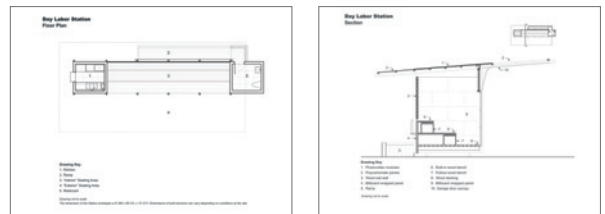
Using photovoltaics to generate its own electricity, the station is capable of existing off the electricity grid. But beyond the material performance, economic sustainability is achieved through employing laborers as the builders and maintainers of the facility. The kitchen offers the opportunity for an income-generating food business, allowing funds to be generated in support of the station.

Contextual and aesthetic impact

Day laborers are a community that traditionally has not had access to quality design environments. Workers view their hiring sites as sacred and the presence of a beautiful structure designed specifically for them, physically articulates a meaning and permanence that currently are quite ephemeral. Additionally, the station provides an attractive solution to a current source of community conflict.

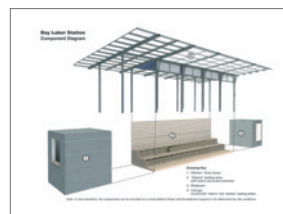


A full scale section of the *day labor station* exhibited at the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, May-Sept 2007.

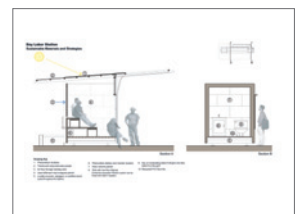


Plan.

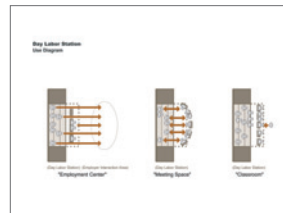
Section.



Components diagram.



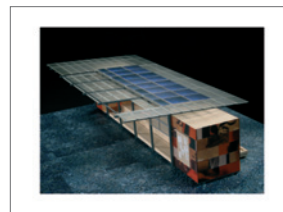
Sustainability diagram.



Use diagram.



Model view 1.



Model view 2.



Roberto, client.