

# Universal Symbols in Health Care



## Developing a Symbols-Based Wayfinding System: Implementation Guidebook



### Part 5:

### Symbol Support and Education

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## PART 5: Symbol Support and Education

Health care wayfinding systems are most effective when they provide users with additional support to aid them in navigating the facility. Successful health care wayfinding systems supplement sign-based wayfinding with other resources, including printed handouts, websites, maps, directories, and staff assistance.

Different health care facilities have widely divergent resources and support needs, and these unique circumstances will determine the support and education required. Implementation of wayfinding programs at the four Innovator sites revealed several key factors that affect the level of support needed:

- **The design of the facility’s information architecture** – Some Innovator sites, such as Grady Memorial Hospital and Women & Infants Hospital, have large visitor information kiosks near the main entrance, allowing for more human and print support than clinic environments such as ICHS, which have no information desk.
- **The level of human assistance in the facility** – Busy hospitals like Grady Memorial have much in common with transportation facilities, which have fewer staff to help with directions and require systems of kiosks and directories to attract attention and provide support.
- **The complexity of the hospital** – Facilities with a simple layout, such as ICHS or Women & Infants Hospital, found that a printed handout is more effective than a map in orienting visitors in the facility.

Research at the sites also revealed several key strategies for providing symbol support:

- **Directory Size, Location, and Contrast** - In the case of every Innovator Facility, testing showed that wall directories were too small, often the size of handout graphics. Directories can only be effective when they are easy-to-spot landmarks with symbols and text that can be easily seen in the environment.

### **Symbol Support and Education**

*Outline a support and educational strategy based on the facility’s resources and visitor needs.*

*Large, well located, and easy-to-identify directories are important to users trying to comprehend the entire wayfinding system.*

*Simple-to-update directories, kiosks, print handouts, and web-based content are the best places to define symbols using multiple languages.*

*To be most effective, maps should contain only a few layers of information and should be closely linked to the destination hierarchy.*

*Staff should be trained to use the wayfinding system and support materials, and to assist visitors in using them.*

At Women & Infants Hospital, directories were placed just beyond the large information desk at the entrance of the facility, and blended with the interior palette to such a degree that visitors found them difficult to spot. Symbol support is most effective when the directory is the first element the visitor sees on arrival at the facility and is a contrasting visual landmark in the environment.

- **Handouts** - When symbols are explained to visitors early, they are more likely to understand their use on signs. Printed handouts have proven to be especially effective as an educational tool for introducing symbols. They are easier to correct when updates or revisions are needed.

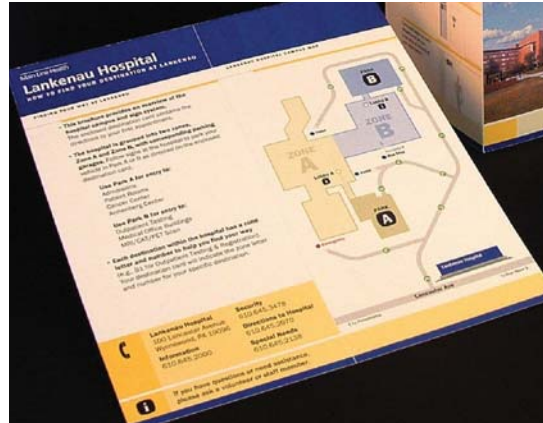
*At the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston (right), unique symbols and universal symbols are reinforced on the hospital website, in printed handouts, and via kiosks and maps. This support allows the sign system to be simpler and less obtrusive.*



*Large facilities like Grady Memorial Hospital (right) provide a range of resources to support wayfinding signage. These include interpreter support, directories, maps, and printed handouts.*



- **Maps** - Traditional printed maps are not effective in familiarizing visitors with symbols, because they are often very complex and include symbols and text that are small and difficult to read. To effectively support a wayfinding system, maps should contain only information linked to finding specific destinations, and should use symbols, colors, and other elements linked to the sign system and other print support materials.



*Rather than providing one overly complex map, Lankenau Hospital created multiple simplified maps that include only a few symbol references.*

- **Interactive and Web-based Technologies** - Health care symbols are increasingly being incorporated into websites, interactive kiosks, and cell-phone applications. **Attachment D, Interactive and Web Best Practices**, provides an overview of these technologies.
- **Human Assistance** - Health care staff should receive training on the symbols being used in their facilities, including training on how to use support materials and how to help visitors use them. Training on providing verbal directions is also important. Staff should be also be trained to avoid “Show don’t tell” assistance, which wastes time and discourages visitors’ ability to learn on their own. Innovator site testing showed that visitors who relied completely on staff assistance did not understand how to use signs for wayfinding, even in their own language.

## Case Study: Symbol Support and Education

### International Community Health Services and Grady Memorial Hospital



ICHS (above) used a small directory in its lobby to orient visitors around key destinations. After the prototype testing, the directory was made larger.

Both of these facilities relied on directories and print support for opposite reasons. ICHS, a small clinic with no information desk, needed a small directory to explain the services found in the facility. Grady Memorial Hospital, a complex facility with multiple entrances, sections, and floors, needed a large directory containing maps, symbols, and destination names in multiple languages.

User testing in both facilities found the directories at the main entrances of the facilities were well placed, but needed to be much larger, easy-to-spot landmarks with clearly highlighted symbols. Testing also showed that printed handouts in multiple languages should be used to explain the symbols used on the directories. Grady Memorial Hospital in particular, with four color-coded zones, needed a series of graphic and map elements to reinforce the destination hierarchy.



Grady Memorial Hospital (right) utilizes large table directories at key entry points.

## **PART 5: Additional Resources**

### ***Attachment D: Interactive and Web Best Practices***

This report provides an overview of best practices for new health care wayfinding technologies including interactive kiosks, mobile web, and map programs.

### ***Phase I Hablamos Juntos Research Report***

This report analyzes the issues linking print graphics and maps to symbols-based wayfinding signs.

### ***Case Study: MD Anderson Cancer Center***

This presentation provides an overview of the facility's wayfinding program and the non-signage elements developed to support it.

### ***Sample Symbols Handouts***

These handouts in multiple languages can be used as templates for health care facilities developing their own support materials.





# ATTACHMENTS

## **Attachment A:**

**Innovator Facility Matrix**

## **Attachment B:**

**Symbols-Based Wayfinding Program**

**Design and Implementation Checklist**

## **Attachment C:**

**Universal Symbols in Health Care**

## **Attachment D:**

**Interactive and Web Best Practices**