The IFI was established as a neutral, dynamic, civil, and open space where people representing all viewpoints in society can gather and discuss significant issues, anchored in a long-standing commitment to mutual understanding and high quality research. The institute aims to harness, develop and initiate research of the Arab world to enhance and broaden debate on public policy and international relations.

Relocating the infirmary closer to the new university hospital presented AUB with the opportunity to build the institute on the constrained site with a 7 metre drop in elevation between its south and north boundaries. The existing AUB campus combines buildings constructed in concrete throughout the 20th Century in a variety of revivalist and modernist styles with different cladding and rendering treatments.

The 3,000 sq. m. IFI building is defined by the many routes and connections within AUB; interweaving the pathways and views within the campus to create a forum for the exchange of ideas at the heart of the university. The IFI design introduces new links between the Central Oval with the forested area of the Middle Campus and sea beyond. Existing Ficus and Cypress trees on the IFI site (aged between 120 and 180 years old) are integral to the design. The building emerges from the geometries of intersecting routes as a series of interlocking platforms and spaces for research, engagement and discourse. The IFI’s reading room, conference workshops and research rooms ‘float’ above the exterior courtyard. The 100-seat auditorium is on the lowest level with its own entrance to the north.

The building takes full advantage of the region’s tradition and expertise of working with in-situ concrete. Passive design measures, high efficiency active systems and recycled water technologies minimise the building’s impact on the local and wider environment.