

2026 Design Awards Call for Entries:

AIA Northern Virginia Design Awards

Submissions are Due March 24, 2026, by 6:00 PM EDT

The AIA Northern Virginia Chapter Design Awards Program recognizes and celebrates our members' achievements in design of the built environment and their commitment to design excellence in various practice groups. These prestigious chapter awards demonstrate to the clients and the public the value of good design while identifying local firms and individuals dedicated to providing outstanding architectural design and service.

CATEGORIES* this year include:

CIVIC / CULTURAL ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving structures for religion, museums, performing arts, sports, community centers, fire stations, police stations, justice facilities and other community serving buildings.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving structures for commerce, including but not limited to office, retail, multi-family housing and food service.

CONCEPTUAL / UNBUILT ARCHITECTURE

Works that remain unbuilt but are worthy of the attention of colleagues and the public. Winning Conceptual / Unbuilt entries are not eligible for resubmission in built categories in future years.

EDUCATION ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving public and private structures for K-12, community colleges, and universities.

HEALTH ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving structures for well-being and health care.

HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, or sympathetic adaptive reuse of older structures. Projects must remain historic in character.

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

Projects involving the design of interior spaces of any building type.

RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

Single-family residential projects, including homes, additions, restorations, renovations, and interiors.

SMALL PROJECT ARCHITECTURE

Building design projects involving structures that are less than or equal to 5,000 gross square feet.

TRANSPORTATION and INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation and Infrastructure focuses on planning, architectural design and technical issues related to transportation and infrastructure, including systems and civic facilities to accommodate marine, aviation, and land-based transit, as well as data, energy, water and waste distribution networks.

**NOTE: The AIA Northern Virginia awards program does not maintain a separate category for Urban Design and Master Planning projects – however, planning projects are welcome to be submitted for consideration under the category most appropriate to the specific project.*

AWARDS

Each submission is eligible to receive one of four awards:

Award of Excellence – is the top honor in a category and is awarded to projects that exemplify many of the 10 principles of the [AIA Framework for Design Excellence](#) and excel in their design.

Award of Merit – is awarded to projects that excel in their category for overall good design.

Jurors' Citation – is awarded to projects that either lie outside of the base categories or include an exceptional aspect or detail that the jury feels represent excellence which deserves specific honor.

Jurors' Citation for Responsible Design – is awarded to projects not selected for an Award of Excellence or an Award of Merit that highlight principles of the [AIA Framework for Design Excellence](#).

Awards of Excellence, Awards of Merit, Jurors' Citations and Juror's Citation for Responsible Design may be given to as many submissions in each category as the jury believes appropriate, although jurors are required to award at least one Award of Excellence and one Award of Merit in each category that has at least six entries. Categories with five or less entries have no required minimum number of award winners.

ELIGIBILITY

Any licensed AIA Architect member of the Northern Virginia Chapter may enter a project for which the entrant has had significant responsibility for design authorship of the project submitted. All submitted work must have been completed after June 1, 2021. A project can be entered in only one category per year. Projects previously honored with an award in this program are not eligible for additional awards and should not be resubmitted for other categories. Members may resubmit any eligible projects that have not previously received an award.

In addition, eligible projects can be forwarded to the [Fairfax County James M. Scott Exceptional Design Awards](#) (annually) and the [DESIGNArlington Awards](#) (biennially). While completing the application form, be sure to indicate your preference. Projects entered into the Conceptual/Unbuilt category are not accepted by the county programs.

ENTRY FEE

The fee to submit an entry for the AIA Northern Virginia Design Awards is \$200 per project.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Read entirely prior to beginning your submission.

1. Each entry shall include project and authorship information, a horizontally-oriented 16:9 Jury PDF, five JPG image files and be [submitted electronically](#).
2. This [submittal template](#), [Jury PDF Instruction Sheet](#), and [Jury PDF Page 1 Template](#) will provide you with the information you should collect and assemble in advance.
3. You must enter each project submission in one session. There is **NOT** a SAVE & RETURN function this year.
4. Do NOT use your browser's 'Back' or 'Refresh' buttons as they will cause you to lose your work.
5. DO use the navigation buttons at the bottom of the page.
6. All required information must be entered before you can move on to the next section.
7. All project photographs must credit the photographer and have rights and permissions cleared to allow for use by the Chapter.
8. Payment is made online as part of the submittal process. Credit card payments are preferred and are collected through PayPal, but you do not need a PayPal account; you may continue as a guest to complete payment. Please contact AIA Northern Virginia Staff, aianova@aianova.org, if you wish to pay by check.
9. You will receive an email confirmation when your submittal has been successfully received.
10. View the Frequently Asked Questions.

JUDGING CRITERIA

AIA Northern Virginia Design Awards program recognizes the best design work submitted regardless of scope, budget, and size. These outstanding projects elevate the appreciation of design excellence within the profession and the communities we serve.

JURY

The AIA Northern Virginia Design Awards Committee will select a jury of distinguished architects from outside the Northern Virginia region and is selected with the assistance of another AIA component. The jurors are asked to be aware of and consider the AIA Framework for Design Excellence during deliberation. The jury may decide to award multiple awards in a particular category and/or not award any project in a category. The jury's decisions are final.

WINNING ENTRIES

Winners will be notified on or before May 1 and awards will be presented during the annual Design Awards Celebration on June 25, 2026 in Alexandria, VA.

One certificate will be provided to the winning architect. Additional award certificates can be ordered for \$50 each online.

NEW the year! Winning entrants are required to provide a DIGITAL project board for use in promotions related to the Awards Program.

DIGITAL Project Board Requirements:

- JPG or PNG file format

- Square page, 7200 x 7200 pixels, illustrating the winning entry.
- Include a “Project Title Area” across the top, up to 1050 pixels tall, that incorporates the name of the project, project location (city and state) and the firm name. The text must be white lettering on a black background, all capital letters and centered.
- Include photographers’ credit(s).
- Include the AIA Northern Virginia logo which will be provided via email.
- It must include the winning firm logo and website.

CONTACT

The Chapter encourages input from our members regarding the AIA Northern Virginia Design Awards program. Comments and questions may be directed to the Executive Director, Jaclyn S. Toole, at jaclyn@aianova.org.