**AIA** Northern Virginia

## Frequently Asked Questions about AIA Northern Virginia's Design Awards

### 2026 Important Dates
February 9 – Award cycle opens
March 24 – Award cycle closes
Mid-April – Judging takes place
On or before May 1 – Entrants are notified via email of the status of their application.
June 1 – Digital Winners Boards are due
June 25 – Winners are announced at the Design Award Gala.

### New this Year
**What changes were made to the required submittal this year?** Several changes have been made this year to the submittal format to complete the alignment of local and state design award program submissions including maximum file size of 12MB and maximum of 8 project content pages (NOTE: each component may have additional pages with specific award program information required). Steps some criteria was aligned last year, and these two additional updates are intended to make it easier for firms to submit projects to both the local and state award programs with fewer changes/edits needed.

**If you win an award, you do NOT have to PRINT a board.** Winners do have to create a digital board (same specs as the printed board) but you do not have to print it. We are trying something new this year to display the winners and will want your feedback after the gala.

### Fees
**How much does it cost to submit my application(s)?** Each entry is $200.
**How do I pay?** Entrants should complete their application online. Once finalized, applicants pay with a credit card. We can accept payment in the form of a check, if necessary. We do not honor refund requests.

*If you need to make a change to your application after payment has been made and the application has been submitted, please contact Jaclyn Toole, jaclyn@aianova.org for assistance.

### Eligibility
**For specific eligibility requirements for each award category,** refer to the category descriptions.
**Do I have to be an AIA Northern Virginia member to apply?** Yes, but AIA members of other AIA Chapters who wish to submit an entry may join AIA NoVA as an Unassigned member. Click here to get more information on unassigned membership and to join.
**Who should be listed as the submitter on the entry?** The individual AIA Northern Virginia Architect Member who had significant involvement in the project design and authorship should be listed; Do NOT list the firm.
**Can I enter a project that was previously entered in the awards?** Yes, so long as the project a) was completed or opened between June 1, 2020, and April 8, 2025; and b) has not previously received an AIA Northern Virginia Design Award.
**Can I enter a project that has won other awards or been previously published?** Yes, so long as it has not been awarded an AIA Northern Virginia Design Award previously in any category.

**What if another AIA NoVA Member submitted the project for these awards last year? Can I enter it this year?** Projects can only win once, regardless of the AIA NoVA Member who submits. You may submit the same project again if it did not already win an AIA NoVA award.

**Can I enter the same project in more than one category?** No. You may only submit your project in one category. The jury has the ability to shift the submission into another category during judging at their discretion. Please contact Jaclyn Toole, jaclyn@aianova.org, if you are unsure which category is best suited for your project.

**Do you accept entries located outside of Northern Virginia?** Yes, the project location can be anywhere in the world. The submitter must be an AIA NoVA member.

## Categories

**Where can I find more information about the categories and judging criteria?** View the full list of categories.

**What should I do if I'm not sure which category best fits my entry?** Please contact Jaclyn Toole, jaclyn@aianova.org, if you are unsure which category is best suited for your project. If the judges or the preliminary review committee feel your project belongs in another category, they will shift it during judging. Your entry will not be penalized.

**What is and is not included in the Transportation and Infrastructure category?** This category is for standalone projects, not for an element of a larger project being submitted. Submittals should include architectural elements that support transportation and/or infrastructure, such as bridges, pedestrian shelters, freestanding parking structures, transportation stops or hubs, water treatment facilities, electrical grid facilities, etc.

## Judging

**Are project entries anonymous?** Yes. The judges are not provided any information on the identity of the project team. If a judge recognizes a project, the judge must recuse himself/herself from judging that submission. Projects that include identifying information on photos and/or plans will be disqualified.

**How are the winners selected?** Judging is conducted by a panel of architects with varying expertise in areas such as commercial, institutional, residential, historic preservation/renovation, interiors, sustainability, etc. Judges may select winners in any or all categories, and judges may award more than one of each award type per category depending on the number of submissions. Awards may not be given in a category if the entries submitted do not meet the criteria.

## Photos, Images & Other Media

**What type of photos are requested in the application?** All entry forms ask for professional-quality color photos. Entrants should refer to previous winners for an idea of the standard of photography required. (*Link to video tips on architectural photography.)*

**Do I need to include high-resolution images with my entry?** Please follow the instructions on the Submittal Template.

**How many photos can I include with my application?** Applicants must include 5 high-resolution images with their application for public relations and marketing purposes if your entry wins. Each image may not exceed 5MB. The number of images that can be included in the jury PDF, is based on file size; the jury PDF must not exceed 12MB.

**Can I or my photographer use photo-enhancing programs?** All submitted images must accurately and truthfully reflect the design. Technical enhancements that improve the image are permitted provided that they do not alter the components of the design.

**Can I include photo captions?** Yes, there is an optional, separate text field to provide brief captions describing what is shown. Captions should NOT be integrated (flattened) onto the five high-resolution JPG images that are submitted.

**Is there a photo release form?** Yes. Your application is not considered complete without agreeing to the terms and conditions governing the uploaded content. The terms include the following related to photographs: I agree that by submitting these photos and/or images, I confirm that I have the authority to grant, and hereby do grant, to AIA Northern Virginia the permission to copy, publish, post, display, distribute and disseminate the submitted content (with appropriate credit) in any Chapter publication(s).

**I have a video of my project. Can I submit this?** No, please only submit 5 high resolution images to be used in various Chapter publications or by media outlets if the project wins.

**Do I need to submit plans and diagrams?** Plans and diagrams can be submitted as part of the application and typically provide the jurors with clarity when reviewing the project submission. They are not required; but jurors often look for them in the submission. If plans or diagrams are included, they must be void of all firm identifying information and easy to read.

## Additional Questions

**Do I have to include the clients name?** No, if a client has requested their involvement to be confidential, you should not include it on the application. This will ensure there is no confusion with marketing materials if the project wins.

**What if the online process isn't working?** If you experience technical difficulty with the online form or webpage, please contact Jaclyn Toole, jaclyn@aianova.org.

**What if I start my submission and cannot complete it?** You will NOT be able to save your work and return to it; therefore, we encourage entrants to prepare their responses and gather imagery ahead of time using this submittal template, permitting you to easily edit and copy and paste responses into the application fields quickly. Completed applications must be received on or before 6PM EDT on March 24, 2026.

**Applications are not considered final until payment is received.**

**Can refunds be given once I've registered?** We do not accept refund requests.

**Who do I contact if I have questions while submitting?** Contact Jaclyn Toole, jaclyn@aianova.org.

**Can I mail my application?** In an effort to be environmentally-friendly, cost-effective and more efficient, we will only accept electronic entries.

**What exposure do winners receive?**
- One (1) award certificate
- Highlighted in the new award gallery on aianova.org
- Highlighted on AIA NoVA social media
- Potential to be included in publications like Home & Design Magazine
- Potential to be featured in an AIA Northern Virginia E-Publication
- Recognition at the Design Awards Gala
- Press Release Announcement from AIA Northern Virginia
- Potential to have winning projects displayed during Architecture Month at a public venue
- Potential to have winning boards displayed during the Chapter's signature events.