



## 2026 Excellence in Design Awards

### CALL FOR ENTRIES

DEADLINE: MONDAY, JULY 20 11:59PM

IMPORTANT: Please carefully read the Call for Entries information below before entering a project!

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#### PURPOSE

The AIA Potomac Valley Excellence in Design Awards program is designed to encourage and recognize distinguished architectural achievement; to honor the architectural team, their clients and consultants who work together to improve the built environment; to demonstrate the breadth of services architects provide; and to celebrate and raise public consciousness of the architect's role in shaping the quality of life through design excellence.

#### FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGN EXCELLENCE

In response to [AIA's commitment to climate action](#), the Maryland chapters have included the [Framework for Design Excellence](#) (FDE) for all awards entries. While responses are optional, entries are encouraged to address those measures that are relevant to the project. (Jurors appreciate the additional context provided by these responses.) You may enter "N/A" when not applicable or explain why a particular measure is not relevant to the project. Please provide as much accurate data as possible. Our goal is to inspire sustainable, resilient and inclusive design and to support AIA's commitment to climate action. **Read AIAPV's Framework for Design Excellence Considerations for jurors and applicants [here](#).**

#### ELIGIBILITY

Participation is open to built and unbuilt projects completed after January 1, 2016 that have not been previously awarded by AIA Potomac Valley (exception: projects that were previously awarded in an unbuilt category may be resubmitted in a built category).

***Please carefully read through the eligibility requirements below to ensure you meet ALL criteria before submitting an entry because NO refunds or deferrals will be given due to errors in submission.***

#### ENTRANT

- Entrant must be an AIA Member (from any chapter).
- Entrant must be either a **key** participant on the design team or a **primary** Principal\* of the submitting Firm responsible for the project.

*\*Owner / Partner / Top-tier Principal*

## LOCATION

- If entrant is an AIA Potomac Valley member, project (built or unbuilt) may be located anywhere.
- If entrant is a member of another AIA chapter, project (built or unbuilt) must be located within the geographic boundaries of the Potomac Valley chapter (Allegany, Charles, Frederick, Garrett, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Washington counties in Maryland).

## PROJECT STATUS

- Project may be built or unbuilt.
- Unbuilt submissions may not be under construction at the time of submission.

## PRIOR AWARDS

Project must not have previously received any award from AIA Potomac Valley, with the exception that a Built project may have previously been awarded as an Unbuilt project.

## QUANTITY

There is no limit to the number of projects that may be entered by a firm or individual.

## PUBLICATION

- All materials included in submissions must be cleared for public publication.
- There are no restrictions related to prior publication of project.

## AIA Potomac Valley Schedule

- **Monday, July 20** Submission Forms, Material Uploads and Entry Fees are **due by 11:59pm EDT**. Entry fee payments must be made by credit card in the awards submission portal when the project is ready for final submission. **NO LATE ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED, AND NO REFUNDS OR DEFERRALS WILL BE ISSUED.**
- **August 2026** Jury review (independent & collective). Project entries will be evaluated by an accomplished team of design leaders organized by Head Juror [Marlon M. Blackwell, FAIA](#) (AIA Arkansas), Founding Partner + Design Director, Marlon Blackwell Architects.
- **Thursday, October 22** Design + Leadership Awards (venue TBD)

[CLICK HERE TO ENTER A PROJECT](#)

## Entry Fee

- AIAPV Members: \$180 per project entry
- Other AIA Members: \$300 per project entry
- Small Projects and Unbuilt Architecture only:
  - AIAPV Members: \$90 per project entry
  - Other AIA Members: \$150 per project entry
- By submitting a project, the submitting architect affirms that he or she has provided a complete list of participants who contributed substantially to the design of the project (regardless of discipline) and absolves AIAPV of any responsibility for omissions.

- Entry fees are non-refundable and non-deferrable.

## Submission Categories

Categories are for organizational purposes only. It is the jury's discretion whether to bestow awards in each category as the jury believes is justified by the quality of the submissions; the jury may not make awards in all categories. **A project can be entered in only one category.** Projects of all types and scales, including new construction, additions, renovations, and historic preservation projects are encouraged in each of the following categories:

- Commercial or Mixed-Use Architecture
- Institutional Architecture
- Interior Architecture
- Multi-Family Architecture
- Residential Architecture
- Unbuilt Architecture
- Urban Design & Master Planning
- Small Projects (in any of the above categories)

Entry shall be any of the following:

- less than 1,000 sf
- cost less than \$300,000
- an object

The size, scope, category or cost of a project in no way limits its eligibility or level of award. The jury evaluates entries based on how successfully projects meet their individual requirements. Entries are judged individually—not in competition with each other.

## AWARDS AND JUDGING

### Design Awards

- **Gold** – (*Best in Show*): Best project selected from the awarded projects, for the following two categories:
  - One Residential
  - One Non-Residential
- **PV Award** – Recognizes the best project exemplifying elements of the AIA's Framework for Design Excellence. Entrants must complete the optional section and check the box on the submission form to be considered for this award.
- **Honor** – Projects with consistently outstanding character and quality in all aspects.
- **Merit** – Projects exemplifying superior achievement in most aspects.
- **Commendation** – Projects with an exceptional aspect, detail, feature, or other characteristic, which may include ethical or responsible design principles.

### Judging

The AIAPV Awards Committee will select a Jury Chair. Following AIAPV guidelines for diversity, the Jury Chair selects a jury team of distinguished architects from outside the Potomac Valley Chapter. The jury shall consider projects on their own merits regardless of size, scope, or cost, and shall evaluate entries based on how

successfully projects meet their individual requirements. At the jury's discretion, award recognition in any category may be given to as many or as few projects as are deemed worthy by the jury. The jury's decisions are final and not subject to review.

Prior to the awards ceremony, all entrants will be notified by email as to whether they have won an award. However, the level of award will not be disclosed until the awards ceremony. *We ask that all publicity about winning projects be held until after the awards ceremony.*

AIAPV has three Perspectives that jurors use to independently pre-score submissions, which you should address in the Project Summary narrative in the JURY PDF:

- 1. DESIGN EXCELLENCE:** Does the design elevate the human experience while addressing the project's practical needs?
- 2. SUSTAINABLE DESIGN / RESILIENCY:** Does the design take a progressive approach to advancing the missions of sustainability and/or resiliency?
- 3. COMMUNITY IMPACT:** Does the design provide significant improvement to its social or physical setting?

### Winning Entries & Publicity

Prior to the awards ceremony, all entrants will receive an email notification regarding their award status. However, the specific level of award will not be disclosed until the awards ceremony. Winners are requested to inform their clients, general contractors, construction managers, and consultants about the project's award and to invite them to the celebration. Additionally, winners and the entire project team are asked to refrain from publicizing their award until after the awards ceremony.

After being notified of the jury's decision, all winners shall provide a team photo and a 75-word description to be used in the awards ceremony. The awards ceremony is expected to be held on October 22. At the ceremony, award winners will be announced and award certificates presented to the Architect, Owner/Developer and General Contractor/Construction Manager (additional award certificates for Consultants and/or extras must be requested by email to [pam@aipv.org](mailto:pam@aipv.org) *no later than 2 weeks prior to the awards event*).

AIA Potomac Valley will showcase the winning projects on the AIAPV website and across social media platforms, as well as in *Potomac Valley Architect* newsletter and the online Maryland Architecture Excellence in Design Awards Gallery. A press release will be distributed to local media outlets.

## PROJECT SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Each entry shall be accompanied by an entry fee to cover jury and program expenses with all documents and images submitted as outlined in the specific requirements below. AIA Potomac Valley and/or the Jury reserves the right to disqualify any entry not submitted in the manner specified.

Links to resources to consider while preparing your entry:

- [Tips for Creating Strong Awards Entries](#)
- [Preparing Successful Design Awards Entries \(Webinar - April 2022\)](#)

A complete project submission includes the following and must be finalized within the online submission portal with full payment by **Monday, July 20, 11:59 pm EDT**:

1. Completion of the online SUBMISSION FORM
2. IMAGE FILES (3-8 digital images with caption and image credit for each image)
3. JURY PDF (10MB, 10 pages max)
4. PRESENTATION PDF (6MB, 3 pages max)
5. PAYMENT of Entry Fee

## SUBMITTING A PROJECT

Your design entry must be prepared and formatted as described below for submission through the online submission portal.

If you have submitted a project in the past, you already have an account and can log in using your existing credentials. If this is your first time creating an entry application, an account will be automatically established for you. Please review [detailed instructions on the awards portal home page](#) if you experience any technological issues using the portal.

All submission forms, file uploads and payment of fees will be handled through the online submission portal. You may save your work as you go and return to the site as often as needed, but all submission materials and entry fee payments must be completed and submitted by the submission deadline.

Once an entry is completed for a project, that entire project submission may then be submitted to another Maryland chapter awards program without any re-entry or re-uploading. Simply check the box: **"I Want to Submit This Project to Another Chapter Awards Program"** on the last page of the submission, 'Entry Uploads,' **BEFORE** finalizing the initial entry.

Entries will include:

- An anonymous JURY PDF presentation file for jury review and evaluation purposes only.
- A PRESENTATION PDF for public presentation purposes.

## JURY PDF (10MB, 10 PAGES MAX)

Entries shall conform to the following page requirements:

- The total size of each entry—all pages combined—may not exceed 10MB of data.
- Each submission may contain a maximum of 10 pages. At your discretion, submit individual images on separate pages, or arrange multiple elements in a layout on a single page.
- Each page must be 11" x 8 1/2" in **landscape orientation** and developed as a PDF presentation file.
- Use this naming convention: JPDF\_ProjectName.pdf
- Please remember **you must conceal references to the architecture firm or team members** in the JPDF submitted for jury review. Identification of project authorship within the Project/Jury PDF will disqualify the submission.

## First Page: Project Description and Introduction

### Format:

- 11" x 8 1/2" landscape orientation (all pages)
- Combination of text and images, 12 pt. minimum font size, formatted and designed at entrant's discretion.

### Project Information:

- Project Name
- Project Location (City, State, if applicable)
- Project Category (a project may be entered in only one category)
- Project Summary describing the "Site," "Program," and "Solution." As part of this synopsis, discuss key design aspects (intent, concepts, and contextual relationships), technical aspects (structure, materials, mechanical systems, etc. where informative), and the social, environmental or other benefits of the project to the public and its users.

## Subsequent Pages (2–10): Visuals

Include images along with additional succinct annotation. The format and design of the pages are at the entrant's discretion while maintaining 11" x 8 1/2" landscape orientation. Renderings are discouraged for built work—diagrams and images should speak to the design process and completed built work.

- Images should provide a clear understanding of the extent and quality of the finished project. A site plan is encouraged. Photographs should depict the whole project.
- Address sustainability in your narrative (and/or with diagrams or metrics).
- Label images with suitable titling and captions. Photographer credit on the images used in the Project/Jury PDF is permitted *except* those identifying the firm and/or team members.
- Renovations, restorations, additions and conversions should present “before” and “after” photographs. For projects involving changes to existing structures, documentation of original conditions is highly recommended. Process sketches that communicate the development of the project and/or its construction are encouraged.
- Indicate the project's physical context or site character through graphics and/or imagery.
- Unbuilt projects should include floor plans, elevations, sections, renderings, graphic images, and/or site plans as necessary to provide a clear understanding of the project. If client-commissioned, include photos of the site location.

## IMAGE FILES (3–8 IMAGES, JPG)

Provide no more than 8 images in JPG format (10MB max per image) for use in the presentation of entrants, awards and publications. The Jury will *not* see these files. List captions and photographer or rendering credit for each image. Three of the images are to be of high resolution of the best representation of the project—one

thumbnail, one exterior photo and one interior photo. The Thumbnail image can be a repeat of one of the other two, or a different image entirely. The three high-res images should be at least 300 dpi and 8'x10" and labeled 1) Project Name\_thumbnail, 2) Project Name\_high res ext and 3) Project Name\_high res int. Subsequent images must be at a maximum of 6" x 9" at 150 dpi for horizontal images, and a maximum of 6" x 7.5" at 150 dpi for vertical images.

## PRESENTATION PDF (6MB, 3 PAGES MAX)

Select three images that best represent your project. A slideshow of all entries will be displayed during the design awards celebration, and images of award-winning entries will be displayed during the awards presentations.

Prepare Presentation PDF in the following format:

- Three pages maximum—may not exceed 6MB of data.
- Format pages 11" x 8.5" in landscape orientation saved as a PDF.
- On each page add project title, firm name, firm logos or other identifiers as desired.
- Use this naming convention: PPDF\_Firm Name\_ProjectName.pdf

Questions? Contact Pam Rich at [pam@aiapv.org](mailto:pam@aiapv.org).

[CLICK HERE TO ENTER A PROJECT](#)

## Frequently Asked Questions

- ▶ *I'm not a member of AIA Potomac Valley, but a key member of my project team is. Can I submit at the lower "member rate?"* Yes, you can; the AIA PV member should be listed as the eligible entrant.
- ▶ *I will be submitting three projects. Should I complete three registration forms?* Yes, you will need to complete three separate entry applications.
- ▶ *Can I include the project name in the Project/Jury PDF?* Yes, you may—just make sure you don't identify the submitting firm or designer. Submissions are to remain anonymous.
- ▶ *What happens if I exceed the 10MB file limit?* You will be asked once to reduce the size of the file and resubmit your project.
- ▶ *How will I know my submission has been received?* Upon submitting your entry, you will receive a confirmation e-mail message containing your submission details.
- ▶ *What should I do if I did not receive a confirmation e-mail containing my submission details?* First, check your junk mail folder—the most likely problem is that your spam filter sent the e-mail there. If you don't find it in your junk mail folder, please contact the chapter program administrator for assistance.

- ▶ *Do I have to start and finish my submission in one session?* No. You can start your submission and come back to finish it before the applicable program deadline date by 11:59pm EDT.
  
- ▶ *Can I revise my submission after I've hit the "Save and Finalize" button?* Yes, provided your request is made and changes are complete by the entry deadline. You will need to ask the program's administrator to open your submission to allow you to make the change yourself through the portal.
  
- ▶ *Can we submit a few days late?* No. In the interest of fairness to all participants, no late entries will be accepted.