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**Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program**

**2024 Request for Qualifications**

**OVERVIEW**

The Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program promotes the highest level of design in the development of future public buildings and spaces in Benton and Washington counties. Through the Design Excellence Program, the Walton Family Foundation regularly partners with local municipalities and nonprofit organizations by offering financial support for all aspects of design.

Over the last 25 years, the population in Northwest Arkansas has more than doubled, creating opportunities and challenges in planning and design. The Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program seeks to address these opportunities by encouraging the design of inclusive public spaces that put people first. Since its inception in 2015, the program has supported 17 projects across the region, from transformative downtown parks to municipal buildings to performance venues. A full list of selected projects can be found [here.](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/grants/northwest-arkansas-design-excellence)

This RFQ will result in addition of selected firms to an [approved list of design professionals](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/grants/design-excellence/selected-firms). As projects are determined in future, the [Design Excellence Selection Committee](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/grants/design-excellence/selection-committee) will review the project’s unique design needs and choose a core group of design professionals from the approved list who may be a good fit for the project. This core group will be presented to the grantee for consideration and final approval. Final decisions on the design professional and design outcome will be made by the grantee. Addition to the list of approved firms does not guarantee that a firm will be paired with a project or selected by a grantee for a project.

The program funds projects developed with a clear understanding of how people use and experience public space in the intersection of life and the built environment. It places further emphasis on inclusive community engagement and representation throughout all phases of design and development, and by utilizing collaboratively defined metrics to evaluate projects throughout their conceptualization, design and development.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program is [defined](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/grants/northwest-arkansas-design-excellence) by a set of commonly held principles. The selection of design professionals, participating projects and program success are all measured against these core values. We measure performance to learn, and to apply the lessons learned to future work. These principles are supported by goals and metrics for all stakeholders to stand behind, and they apply to different projects, at different scales and spaces.

**Strengthen Public Life**

Create opportunities for people to spend quality time in public – moving or staying, alone or with others

**Elevate Standards of Sustainability and Resilience**

Adhere to standards of sustainability, elevate ambitions and demonstrate relation of resilience to people and place

**Celebrate Local Cultures and Place**

Enhance and respond to local social history and cultures as well as climate and geography

**Build Regional Capacity**

Raise local ambitions and build knowledge and skills among design community and public

**2024 APPLICATION PROCESS**

The Walton Family Foundation is opening a new application cycle for its Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program. This application cycle is open to architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning disciplines.

**SELECTION PROCESS**

Interested design professionals must be prepared to submit a proposal of a **maximum of 25** pages, which should include the following:

* A letter of interest
* Planning firm overview, including notation on if the firm is a Woman or Minority-Owned Business (WMBE)
* Team member bios (principals and key team members)
* Statement of commitment outlining how principals will be involved in requested project interviews if admitted into the program and on-site engagement with the project and/or grantee if ultimately selected
* A statement of the design firm’s technical approach to work, including philosophy for a team-based project approach
* A statement of no more than two pages responding to the following:
  + The firm’s understanding/sensibility of the Design Excellence Program’s guiding principles, citing specific examples of completed projects
  + The firm’s approach to evaluating the success of a project, from inception through completion, giving one example where specific performance metrics were used
  + The firm’s approach to achieving design excellence while working with public sector and nonprofit clients with limited budgets
* Maximum of five examples of completed projects as lead consultant. The samples should showcase projects that demonstrate the four guiding principles of the Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program. Please include:
  + Project description outlining issues and approach used to solve these challenges
  + Visual examples
  + Awards won for examples of work
  + References: Please include a reference letter from two former or current clients

Materials should be provided in a PDF format and should be uploaded by the deadline of **5pm CST Thursday, October 10, 2024** to: [https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design-apply.](https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design-apply)

Interested parties will be able to submit questions before the application deadline closes at <http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design-contact>. Questions must be submitted by **5 p.m. CST on Wednesday, September 25, 2024**. Answers to the questions will be posted to the same link by **5 p.m. CST on** **Monday, September 30, 2024.**

**The Q&A process will be the ONLY communication allowed between interested applicants and the Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program. Walton Family Foundation Board members, staff and selection committee members should NOT be contacted directly.**

The application process for design professionals opens when the Design Excellence Selection Committee determines there is a need for specific design backgrounds, to replace firms that have been awarded projects or replace firms whose five-year term has expired. The Design Excellence Selection Committee, comprised of industry experts and Walton Family Foundation representatives, will review qualifications and invite select design firms to join the program.

Design professionals can participate in the Design Excellence Program for up to five years or until they are selected for a project. Selection does not guarantee an interview for a project or that a project will be approved.

Projects are typically selected through:

* A direct invitation from the Walton Family Foundation to apply for the program based on the organization’s potential to enhance the foundation’s efforts
* An open call for applications that complement the Walton Family Foundation’s efforts to support a specific area of design such as developing green spaces or enhancing urban design at the neighborhood scale

The Walton Family Foundation reserves the right to cancel this program in whole or in part at any time. In no event shall any person or organization have any claim or cause of action against the Walton Family Foundation or any of its members, officers, employees, agents, or affiliates arising out of, relating to, or in any way connected with this program. Submission of an application shall constitute unconditional agreement to every term and condition hereof.

For approved projects, the grantee is provided with a limited budget to reimburse each interviewed design firm’s transportation and interview presentation expenses.

This selection process is designed to accommodate firms of all sizes, including nationally recognized, multi-disciplinary firms, smaller specialty firms and young professionals who may not yet be discovered.

The program is expected to generate meaningful partnerships between in-state and out-of-state firms. However, partnership agreements are not needed during the initial review process and should only be considered after a design professional has been selected as a finalist for a specific project.

Applicants selected for the pool of designers for the Design Excellence Program will be notified by Friday, December 6, 2024.

**2024 KEY DATES**

* Thursday, September 12 Request for Qualifications Announced
* Wednesday, September 25 by 5pm CST Questions Due
* Monday, September 30 by 5pm CST Response to Questions Posted
* **Thursday, October 10 by 5pm CST** **Qualifications Due**
* Friday, December 6 Notification of selection via email

**IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS**

Design professionals are encouraged to visit [www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design](http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design) to gain

access to additional information on the program and public responses to questions submitted.