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 15 projects across the region, from transformative downtown parks to municipal buildings to performance venues. A full list of selected projects can be found here. By identifying design professionals with relevant expertise, 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.

Following an assessment of the program’s impact in 2020 and the launch of a new Walton Family Foundation Strategic Plan earlier this year, the Design Excellence program places 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. The program will also focus on smaller neighborhood-scale projects that build social capital, mixed-income and mixed-use residential design and housing typologies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
The Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program is defined 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

**2021 APPLICATION PROCESS**
The Walton Family Foundation is opening a new application cycle for its Northwest Arkansas Design Excellence Program. This year’s application cycle places particular emphasis on firms with experience in inclusive and equitable public engagement, firms that would be interested in innovative neighborhood-scale projects, and firms with experience in mixed-income and missing middle housing. **Now through Friday, October 1** design professionals, including those with experience in architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, are encouraged to submit their work for review at waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design.

Relevant Work in Northwest Arkansas
Please visit https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design-resources for samples of relevant work.

Recent Media Coverage about Northwest Arkansas
Please visit https://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/design-resources for a compilation of media coverage about Northwest Arkansas.

**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
- Design 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, particularly as applied to its built work
  - 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, if any, won for examples of work
References: Please include a reference letter from the following sources:
  o Two former or current clients
  o A contractor responsible for the construction of one of the firm’s designs, if firm is an architecture or landscape architecture firm

Materials should be provided in a PDF format and can be uploaded at 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 September 17, 2021. Answers to the questions will be posted to the website by 5 p.m. CST on September 22, 2021.

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, which is comprised of industry experts and Walton Family Foundation representatives, will review qualifications and invite select design firms to join the program.

Design professionals will be able to 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, nor does it guarantee that a project will ultimately 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

As projects are determined, the Selection Committee will review the project’s unique design needs and choose a core group of design professionals 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.

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 each and every term and condition hereof.

For approved projects, the grantee is provided a limited budget to reimburse each interview 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 design 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 the end of December 2021.

**KEY DATES**
- Wednesday, September 1, 2021 Application process opens
- Friday, September 17, 2021: Submit questions on application process by 5 p.m. CST
- Wednesday, September 22, 2021: Response to questions published by 5 p.m. CST
- **Friday, October 1, 2021**: Submit RFQ response for review in PDF format to the link provided above by 5 p.m. CST
- By end of December 2021: Notification of selection

**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.