

COOPER HEWITT

NATIONAL
DESIGN
AWARDS

2026 SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Congratulations on your nomination for the 2026 National Design Awards!

Review this document for the **2026 Instructions for Submission** and the **2026 Terms of Agreement**.

Visit **cooperhewitt.org/nda2026** to submit your materials. We look forward to your submission!

Questions? Contact the National Design Awards office at designawards@si.edu, 212.849.8337, or visit **cooperhewitt.org/nda/submissiontips** for tips, sample materials, and frequently asked questions.



Smithsonian Design Museum

ABOUT THE NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS

Now in its 26th year, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's National Design Awards program honors innovation and impact and recognizes the power of design to change the world.

CRITERIA

The defining criteria for the Awards are **innovation** and **impact** in improving our world.

AWARD CATEGORIES

- **Design Visionary:** Given in recognition of an individual, company, or organization who has made a profound contribution to advancing the field.
- **Climate Action:** Given in recognition of a design project for its significant contributions to addressing the urgency of the global climate crisis.
- **Emerging Designer:** Given in recognition of a designer or practice who has demonstrated profound talent in the early stages of their career to contribute to the future of design.
- **Architecture:** Given to an individual or firm for their meaningful contributions to the built environment that advance the understanding of our spatial experiences.
- **Communication Design:** Given to an individual or firm for the impactful use of design in the service of information sharing, messaging, and overall communication.
- **Digital Design:** Given to an individual or firm for the innovative design of digital products, environments, systems, experiences, and services.
- **Fashion Design:** Given to an individual or firm for the forward-thinking design of apparel, accessory, jewelry, footwear, and textiles.
- **Interior Design:** Given to an individual or firm for their innovative contributions to interior environments that advance the understanding of our spatial experiences.
- **Landscape Architecture:** Given to an individual or firm for their meaningful contributions to the integration between the built, urban, and natural environments and for advancing the understanding of our spatial experiences.
- **Product Design:** Given to an individual or firm for the forward-thinking design of objects, products, and materials.

SELECTION PROCESS

Nominations are solicited from designers, educators, journalists, cultural figures, business and institutional leaders, and design enthusiasts from across the country. Once nominations close, the museum contacts nominees with instructions for the registration and submission process. The jury, consisting of prominent design leaders, reviews all completed submissions and selects the award honorees. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum and Smithsonian Institution Trustees and staff do not serve on the jury. The awards will be conferred at a special event in 2026.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility is restricted to citizens* or current long-term** residents of the United States over 18 years of age and firms, corporations, or organizations with corporate headquarters*** in the United States. Except as otherwise noted for Design Visionary, Emerging Design and Climate Design, nominees for all other award categories must have been practicing professionally or established, as applicable, for a minimum of 10 years.

*Citizen: any individual who is a citizen of the United States by place of birth, nationality of one or both parents, or naturalization.

**Long-term resident: any individual (other than a citizen of the United States) who is a lawful permanent resident of the United States in at least 8 taxable years during the period of the last 15 taxable years.

***Corporate headquarters: the place where the organization's officers direct, control, and coordinate the organization's activities.

Design Visionary nominees must have been practicing professionally for a minimum of 25 years if an individual or established for a minimum of 10 years if a firm, corporation, or organization. Previous winners of a National Design Award in any category are ineligible to win in the Design Visionary category until 10 years after receiving their first National Design Award.

Emerging Designer nominees must be in the early stages of their career with up to 7 years of professional experience if an individual or established for a maximum of 7 years if a firm, corporation, or organization. Founders and/or leadership of the firm, corporation, or organization must also be in the early stages of their career with up to 7 years of professional experience in the work of the firm, corporation, or organization. Winners of the Emerging Designer Award are ineligible to win in any other award category until 10 years after receiving the Emerging Designer Award.

Climate Action Award nominees do not require a minimum number of years of professional experience; however, the project must be in progress or realized. All previous National Design Award winners are eligible for the Climate Action Award.

A National Design Award nominee may be considered for multiple award categories but may only win in one award category per year. A previous winner of a National Design Award is ineligible to win a National Design Award in the same award category. Cooper Hewitt employees and trustees and their companies, organizations, families, and household members are not eligible. Awards are given for a body of realized work, not for any specific project (except for the project-based Climate Action Award), that represents the core criteria of the National Design Awards: innovation and impact in improving our world.



2026 Instructions for Submission

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2025, 11:59 P.M. EASTERN TIME

All materials must be submitted at: cooperhewitt.org/nda2026. The submission process is entirely digital.

REQUIRED SUBMISSION MATERIALS

- ❑ **BIO/HISTORY:** A **current and concise biography (individuals) or history (firms, corporations, or organizations) of up to 150 words**. Note any major clients and projects. **Emerging Designer** nominees should also note any substantial and recent editorial coverage or awards. *(text)*
- ❑ **WORK STATEMENT:** A **statement of up to 150 words** should provide the jury with a brief introduction to your work. Suggested topics include the distinctive qualities of your work, its impact and innovation in the field and on the local, national, or global level, efforts around addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities, your approach or process, and your mission and primary interests. *(text)*
- ❑ **PORTFOLIO:** A **digital portfolio containing 10 projects (5–10 for Emerging Designer nominees), not to exceed 5 pages per project**, with images and a brief description that clearly reflects on the awards criteria for each project: **innovation and impact in improving our world**. **Fashion Design** nominees may submit a compilation of ten collections, seasons (look books or collection books), or projects along with a description for each. **Digital Design** and **Communication Design** nominees may also include links to videos or websites showing the digital aspects of projects. Suggested page size is 8.5" x 14". *(PDF)*
- ❑ **IMAGES:** **10 digital images (5–10 for Emerging Designer nominees)** selected from your portfolio, one image per project. Images **must** be submitted with a minimum resolution of 6" x 9", 300 dpi. Please label image filenames with the nominee, image number (01–10), and project title (ex. Nominee IMAGE 01 – Project Title.tif). *(TIF or JPG)*
- ❑ **CAPTIONS:** **Image captions** that correspond with all images noted above. Captions should include image filename, project title, brief description, location, year, or season completed, project partners (as applicable), and photo credit. If possible, please also include a thumbnail of the image with the corresponding captions. *(PDF)*
- ❑ **VIDEO:** A dynamic **video** that introduces yourself and your work, not to exceed 2 minutes. Videos do not need to be professionally produced but should convey the strength of the nominee to the jury. See examples of a range of videos submitted in the past at cooperhewitt.org/nda/submissiontips. Standard HD (1920x1080) is preferable. (MOV, AVI, MP4)

IMPORTANT NOTES

- **Your submission must note the innovation and impact of your body of work in improving our world as well as how the project addresses contemporary challenges and opportunities.**
- **Your submission should best represent the body of work** that you or your firm, corporation, or organization have developed throughout your career, in relation to the category in which you are submitting. If you are submitting to multiple design categories, a customized separate submission is required for each category. The jury will consider design category nominees in the Design Visionary category as well, if eligible; you do not need to submit separately for this. The jury may move your submission to a different category, if appropriate.
- **Jurors are charged with considering the innovation and impact in improving our world, for each nominees' body of work, while also considering the following questions:**
 - Has the nominee demonstrated excellence in their process and body of work?
 - Has the nominee broadened the conventions of their discipline?
 - Has the nominee expressed extraordinary originality, authenticity, and imagination in their work with identifying and solving problems—both formally and practically?
 - Have the nominee's levels of skill, craftsmanship, and insight remained consistently high throughout the nominee's career to date?
 - To what extent have communities, on a local, national, or global level, benefited from the explorations and achievements of the nominee?
 - To what extent has the nominee exhibited professional responsibility toward securing a brighter future for all?
 - If chosen as a winner, what message would this convey to the public and future nominees about the National Design Awards and about the museum's role as a platform for design?
- **Do not send physical materials**, including, but not limited to, original artwork, product samples, letters of support, and books.
- Materials will be viewed by the jury on various personal computers or devices as well as on a large 84" monitor.
- You will receive an automated confirmation email from noreply@secure-platform.com once you submit your materials. Please check your spam.
- Visit cooperhewitt.org/nda/submissiontips for sample portfolios, sample videos, and suggestions from previous jurors.



COOPER HEWITT

NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS

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IMPORTANT DATES

- **Nomination Deadline:** Monday, June 2, 2025
- **Registration Deadline:** Monday, July 7, 2025
- **Submission Deadline:** Monday, August 18, 2025
- **Announcement of Winners:** Early 2026
- **National Design Awards Event:** Tuesday, March 31, 2026

QUESTIONS?

Contact the National Design Awards office at designawards@si.edu, **212.849.8337**, or visit cooperhewitt.org/nda/submissiontips.

2026 NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS TERMS OF AGREEMENT

By registering and submitting materials for the 2026 National Design Awards, I agree to be bound by the following terms and conditions:

I grant the Smithsonian Institution (the “Smithsonian”) and those authorized by the Smithsonian the irrevocable, perpetual, royalty-free, non-exclusive rights to use, reproduce, make derivative works based upon, publicly and display, distribute, and modify the materials I may voluntarily submit to the Smithsonian in connection with the 2026 National Design Awards during the submission process and later (the “Materials”), in whole or in part, in any manner or media (whether now known or later developed) for use in connection with the 2026 National Design Awards, promotion of the National Design Awards to the public, and for all other non-commercial, standard museum, educational, scholarly, research, or archival uses. The Smithsonian also has my perpetual and irrevocable permission to use without charge my name, biographic information, and image in connection with the 2026 National Design Awards, promotion of the National Design Awards, and for all other non-commercial, standard museum, educational, scholarly, research, or archival uses.

Prize: The Smithsonian will award one prize of \$5,000.00 to the Emerging Designer honoree. If I am selected as the Emerging Designer honoree of the 2026 National Design Awards, I will be responsible for all taxes on the prize, if any. In the event of a dispute regarding the Emerging Designer honoree, the Smithsonian reserves the right to award or not award the prize in its sole discretion. The Smithsonian will award no other prizes.

Representation and Warranty: I represent and warrant that I own all rights to the Materials I submit or that I have obtained all permissions necessary from the respective owners to give the Smithsonian the rights described above. Upon request, I promptly shall provide documentation of such permissions to the Smithsonian; failure to promptly provide such documentation may result in my disqualification.

Artificial Intelligence: I agree that I will disclose to the Smithsonian if any of Materials were created with or otherwise involved the use of generative Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) tools. I understand that any use of generative AI tools in my Materials without disclosure to the Smithsonian may disqualify my submission to the 2026 National Design Awards at the sole discretion of the Smithsonian.



Smithsonian Design Museum



Confidentiality: Information about my nomination, my submission of the Materials, and any information the Smithsonian discloses to me about the 2026 National Design Awards nominations, registrations, nominee submissions, judging, and related processes, is proprietary to the Smithsonian. I shall not disclose such information to any third party without prior written permission from the Smithsonian.

Publicity Release: I grant the Smithsonian and those authorized by the Smithsonian the irrevocable, royalty-free rights to film, photograph, or otherwise record me, my participation, performance, statements, and any of my Materials that appear at the 2026 National Design Awards related programs and events. The Smithsonian may use, edit, cut, reuse, duplicate, publish, distribute, publicly display or perform such film or recording in any manner or medium (whether now known or later developed) without charge to me. I disclaim any interest or rights I may have in connection with my appearance, participation, or statements at the 2026 National Design Awards related programs and events, as filmed or recorded or edited by the Smithsonian or those authorized by the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian is under no obligation to film or record me or my Materials or to use such film or record if made.

Liability Release: I release the Smithsonian from responsibility for any costs, damage, or injuries of whatever kind that I may incur or cause in connection with my submission to and/or participation in the National Design Awards, including related programs and events.

Indemnity: I indemnify and hold harmless the Smithsonian and its Regents, trustees, officers, employees, agents, and 2026 National Design Awards jury from and against all claims, demands, suits, judgments, and expenses, including reasonable out-of-pocket attorneys' fees, arising out of my failure to comply with this agreement or breach of the representation and warranty.

Miscellaneous: The Smithsonian and the 2026 National Design Awards jury have no obligation to select me or my submission as an honoree. The Smithsonian has no obligation to use my Materials, name, likeness, image, or participation in any manner. The Smithsonian may cancel or make adjustments to the 2026 National Design Awards at its discretion. The Smithsonian's decisions are final and binding.

I have read and agreed to the foregoing terms and conditions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why does the Smithsonian need these rights to my Materials?

The Smithsonian needs these rights to conduct the National Design Awards and to promote the National Design Awards and its honorees. The Smithsonian will only share your materials with the public if you are selected as an honoree. In the past, the Smithsonian has used honorees' materials including biographies, statements, images and captions.

What are standard museum uses?

Standard museum uses include, but are not limited to, uses in connection with education, exhibitions, public programming, archives, philanthropic-fundraising, publications, publicity, websites, and social media activities on Smithsonian platforms and on those where the Smithsonian maintains a presence.

Will the Smithsonian use my Materials if I am not selected as an honoree?

No.

Do I need to submit my original work to the Smithsonian?

No.

Will my Materials become part of Smithsonian's collection or displayed at the Smithsonian?

There are no plans for any National Design Award materials to be accessioned into Smithsonian's collections. Nor does the Smithsonian plan to display any materials at the Smithsonian's museums, except in connection with promoting the National Design Awards.





Will the Smithsonian use my Materials on products that it sells commercially?

No.

Are there any monetary awards for winning a National Design Award?

The Smithsonian will only provide a monetary award to the Emerging Designer honoree. The Smithsonian will not provide any other monetary awards to National Design Award honorees.

What is required of me if I win a National Design Award?

If you are selected as an honoree of the National Design Awards, the Smithsonian requests your full participation at the 2026 National Design Awards, related events, and programs throughout the year, which may be virtual, in New York City, or other locations around the country. The Smithsonian is accustomed to reimburse travel related expenses and offering an honorarium for your participation in its sole discretion.

The Smithsonian may also ask you to assist in providing additional images or materials for use in press media kits, on Smithsonian's websites, and poster installations at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

