



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

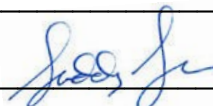
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Loudoun County
Program Title: Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards
Program Category: Community and Economic Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Buddy Rizer
Title: Executive Director
Signature: 

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards

Loudoun County Department of Economic Development

For 20 years, the Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards has celebrated the principle that *good design is good business*. Established to recognize excellence in architecture, site planning, and placemaking, the program elevates the quality of development across Loudoun County while reinforcing its position as a premier destination for businesses, residents, and visitors.

At a time when many fast-growing communities face the challenge of balancing rapid development with long-term quality of place, Loudoun has taken a proactive approach. The Signatures program highlights projects that demonstrate thoughtful design, economic impact, environmental stewardship, and community integration. By doing so, it sets a high standard for future development and encourages both public and private sector stakeholders to prioritize quality over speed.

Administered by Loudoun Economic Development in partnership with a volunteer Design Cabinet of industry experts, the program recognizes projects across categories such as commercial, mixed-use, public spaces, and adaptive reuse. Winning projects are showcased through marketing campaigns, public displays, and regional storytelling, reinforcing Loudoun's brand as a place where intentional design supports economic success.

The program is fully replicable and serves as a model for localities seeking to elevate development standards, engage the private sector, and align design excellence with economic development goals.

Program Title: Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards

Locality: Loudoun County, Virginia

Department: Loudoun County Department of Economic Development

I. Defining the Challenge: Growth Without Compromise

Loudoun County is one of the fastest-growing and most economically dynamic counties in the United States. With that growth comes a critical challenge: how to ensure that new development enhances, rather than diminishes, the community's long-term character, economic competitiveness, and quality of life.

Like many high-growth jurisdictions, Loudoun has experienced pressure to deliver housing, office, and industrial space quickly. Without intentionality, this type of growth can lead to inconsistent design, disconnected communities, and missed opportunities to create lasting economic value.

Loudoun Economic Development recognized that design is not simply aesthetic. It is a strategic economic tool. High-quality design attracts investment, supports talent recruitment, increases property values, and creates places where businesses want to locate and grow.

The challenge was clear: create a program that would elevate design expectations, celebrate excellence, and influence future development across the county.

II. Program Overview: The Signatures of Loudoun

The Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards was created to recognize and promote outstanding design in the built environment. Having celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2025, the program has become a cornerstone of Loudoun's placemaking and economic development strategy. Awards are given across a wide variety of development types, including commercial, mixed-use, industrial, public and civic, and adaptive reuse and redevelopment

The program honors projects that exemplify:

- Architectural and design excellence
- Economic impact and business viability
- Environmental sustainability
- Integration with the surrounding community

Award categories span a wide range of design excellence distinctions, including:

- Details
- Contextual Design
- Infrastructure
- Interiors
- Pace Setters
- Public Spaces
- Students' Choice

Winning projects are selected by a volunteer Design Cabinet composed of architects, planners, engineers, and industry professionals. This peer-driven evaluation ensures credibility and reinforces industry buy-in.

III. Innovation: Design as an Economic Development Strategy

While design awards programs exist elsewhere, Loudoun's approach is unique in its integration with economic development goals. Key innovations include:

Positioning Design as Economic Infrastructure

The program reinforces that design quality directly impacts business attraction, workforce retention, and long-term tax base growth.

Strategic Storytelling and Branding

Winning projects are promoted through coordinated marketing campaigns, that integrate digital assets, social media, and public displays, including a permanent feature at Dulles International Airport. These efforts showcase Loudoun as a forward-thinking, design-driven community and, with high-visibility public installations, amplifies exposure to both residents and visitors.

IV. Collaboration and Partnerships

The success of Signatures of Loudoun is rooted in strong collaboration across sectors:

Design Cabinet

A volunteer panel of industry experts evaluates submissions and provides professional insight, ensuring high standards and credibility.

Private Sector Developers and Designers

Architects, developers, and builders actively participate, viewing the program as both recognition and a benchmark for excellence.

County Departments

Collaboration across planning, zoning, and economic development ensures alignment with broader policy and growth strategies.

Community Engagement

The program solicits public nominations and fosters appreciation for design and its role in shaping everyday experiences, from workplaces to public spaces.

Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS)

A unique partnership with Loudoun County Public Schools brings high school juniors and seniors from engineering and design-focused programs into the judging process. Students are invited to sit alongside the Design Cabinet during deliberations, where they observe professional discussions, engage directly with industry experts, and ask questions about design decisions and tradeoffs. Following the session, students conduct their own evaluation and select the annual Students' Choice Award, adding a meaningful workforce development and educational component to the program.

V. Implementation: From Nomination to Recognition

The program follows a structured and repeatable process:

1. Call for Entries

Projects are nominated through an open application process promoted across industry networks.

2. Evaluation and Selection

The Design Cabinet reviews submissions based on established criteria, including design quality, functionality, and economic impact. As part of the evaluation process, LCPS students participate in the Design Cabinet judging session, gaining firsthand exposure to how projects are assessed in a professional setting. After observing deliberations, students collaborate to determine their own award recipient, reinforcing critical thinking, teamwork, and real-world application of classroom learning.

3. Recognition and Promotion

Award recipients are honored through recognition at a Board of Supervisors meeting, a formal awards event, and an integrated marketing campaign.

4. Ongoing Storytelling

Winning projects are featured throughout the year, extending the program's impact beyond a single event.

The 20th anniversary milestone provided an opportunity to reflect on two decades of design excellence while reinforcing the program's continued relevance.

VI. Financing and Staffing

The Signatures of Loudoun program is managed in-house by Loudoun Economic Development, leveraging existing staff and resources.

Estimated Program Costs:

- Event production and materials: ~\$2,000-\$3,000
- Marketing and promotion: ~\$5,000
- Staff time: Covered within departmental responsibilities

The program's efficiency is driven by strong partnerships and volunteer contributions from the Design Cabinet, minimizing costs while maximizing impact.

VII. Results and Impact

Over its 20-year history, the Signatures of Loudoun program has:

- Recognized dozens of high-quality development projects
- Elevated design standards across the county
- Strengthened Loudoun's reputation as a place for thoughtful, high-quality growth
- Influenced developers to prioritize design excellence in future projects

The program's impact extends beyond recognition. It shapes expectations. Developers, architects, and planners understand that Loudoun values quality, and that expectation is reflected in the projects brought forward.

The partnership with LCPS has added a powerful workforce development dimension to the program. By connecting students with industry professionals and exposing them to real-world design evaluation, the program helps build a pipeline of future architects, engineers, and planners. Students consistently report increased interest in design-related careers and a deeper understanding of how the built environment shapes economic and community outcomes.

As Loudoun continues to evolve into a mature economic center, the program plays a critical role in ensuring that growth is intentional, connected, and sustainable.

VIII. Model for Other Localities

The Signatures of Loudoun program is highly replicable and scalable. Other localities can adopt a similar model by:

- Establishing a design recognition program tied to economic development goals
- Engaging industry professionals in the evaluation process
- Promoting winning projects through coordinated marketing
- Aligning recognition efforts with broader growth strategies

By doing so, localities can elevate design standards, strengthen partnerships with the private sector, and enhance their overall competitiveness.

IX. Conclusion

For 20 years, the Signatures of Loudoun Design Excellence Awards has demonstrated that *good design is good business*.

By celebrating excellence, fostering collaboration, and aligning design with economic outcomes, Loudoun County has created a program that not only recognizes great projects but also shapes the future of the community.

As Loudoun enters its next chapter of growth, the Signatures program will continue to serve as both a benchmark and a catalyst, ensuring that development today becomes the legacy of tomorrow.