

Artist Request for Proposal (RFP):

Virginia Tech Graduate School
An Exterior Public Art Installation for the Virginia Tech Graduate Life
Center at 155 Otey Street, Blacksburg, VA 24061

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: June 15, 2026

Project Description

In August 2005, under the leadership of founding dean Karen DePauw, Virginia Tech opened the Graduate Life Center – a first of its kind in the nation and an award-winning hub of graduate education and graduate community. In August 2006, the Graduate School moved into the building, bringing all graduate student services under one roof.

To commemorate these anniversaries and to celebrate graduate education at Virginia Tech, the Graduate School is spearheading the creation of a public art installation in the vicinity of the Graduate Life Center. This installation is intended to:

- Recognize the importance of graduate education at Virginia Tech and the contributions of the Graduate School and graduate students to the mission of the university;
- Celebrate the creativity, strength, and endurance of the graduate community; and
- Highlight the many and varied talents of graduate students.

The planning and creation of the art installation is designed with and for the active involvement of current graduate students, graduate alumni, and other friends of graduate education. The Graduate School seeks proposals from artists, designers, or other interested parties with experience in public arts, including public art, architectural, engineering, or infrastructure projects, for the design and implementation of an *exterior public art installation* that honors the unique qualities, purpose, and spirit of Virginia Tech's graduate community. Proposals may be submitted by individual artists or artist-led (including faculty-led) student teams.

Project Themes

The planning committee invites proposals that incorporate the influential themes that have defined graduate education at Virginia Tech in the last twenty years:

- The Graduate Life Center is a *space* and a *place* for graduate education.
- Transformative graduate education that pushes the boundaries of traditional disciplinary education and provides the underpinnings for an innovative, holistic graduate experience.

- Community that is strong, vibrant, welcoming, affirming, inclusive, curious, thriving, and growing.
- Celebrating interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches, spanning disciplines from science and engineering to arts and humanities.

Beyond the themes identified by the planning committee, additional themes derived from a community charrette and survey conducted with current and former graduate students should be considered (detailed information can be found in Appendix A):

- Connection / Belonging / Community
- Unity / Collective Identity
- Intersections / Interdisciplinary / Flow
- Experience / Interaction / Engagement
- Place / Space / Gathering
- Time / Continuity
- Emotion / Meaning
- Inspiration / Curiosity / Pioneering
- Energy / Joy / Reflection

Successful proposals will respond to the project themes from both the planning committee as well as the charrette and survey. Proposals are not required to address all of the themes, but the ideal design will incorporate several, if not all.

Additionally, proposals should describe a visually compelling, three dimensional work that invites interaction and engagement. Artists should consider how they will work collaboratively with graduate students, faculty, and staff during the fabrication and installation of the artwork, as well as through any related programming. Both the process and the final installation should reflect the vibrancy, achievements, and distinctive experiences of graduate education at Virginia Tech.

Project Site Location and Specification

The Graduate School will commission a professional artist/designer to create an outdoor, three-dimensional artwork located at a highly active crossroads of campus and community near the Graduate Life Center (155 Otey Street in Blacksburg, Virginia). The site sits at the intersection of the Newman Library, Squires Student Center, Graduate Life Center, campus bookstore, and a major pedestrian corridor connecting the Virginia Tech campus to downtown Blacksburg. The area supports constant foot traffic from students, faculty, staff, and community members and serves as a shared gathering space throughout the day and evening.

The Graduate School seeks proposals that respond thoughtfully to this setting and convey a strong sense of place, reflecting the energy, creativity, and lived experience of graduate students. The artwork will be experienced primarily by pedestrians and by community members

who gather in nearby outdoor spaces, including benches, tables and chairs, and areas used for informal gatherings and events.

Electrical access will be available on site, allowing artists the option to incorporate lighting or other powered elements to enhance visibility and/or engagement.

Proposals should consider scale, durability, and opportunities for interaction within this active public environment.

Any selected artwork must follow Virginia Tech facility, architectural, and public art requirements. The university's public art policy can be found here:

- <https://www.vt.edu/about/arts/public-art/policy.html>
- https://www.vt.edu/content/dam/provost_vt_edu/arts-virginia-tech/public-art/Public%20Art%20Policy.pdf



Aerial view of art installation site

Total green space dimensions: +/- 50 feet by +/- 88 feet

Relatively flat area marked in white 35 feet by 65 feet



Site view facing Newman Library from Graduate Life Center



Site view facing Newman Library from Squires Student Center



Site view facing Graduate Life Center from Newman Library



Site view facing Squires Student Center from main walkway in front of Newman Library



Site view facing GLC Plaza and Bookstore with Newman Library on the right



Site view facing Squires from GLC Plaza

Eligibility

This call is open to U.S. based artists with an existing affiliation to Virginia Tech and or the Graduate School, including alumni, current or former students, faculty, staff, or artists with a demonstrated history of collaboration with the university. Candidates must be professional artists, designers, or fabricators, or be partnered with professional artists, designers, or fabricators; be eligible to work in the United States; and be age 18 or older. The selected artist must be available to oversee the installation of the artwork.

Proposal Requirements

The following items, compiled in a single pdf file not to exceed 100MB, are required for consideration as a completed proposal:

- Contact information: Name, address, telephone number, email address.
- A one-page artist statement that addresses how the proposed project conceptually responds to the themes identified by the GLC Public Art Committee and through the Community Charrette and survey, and how the artist/designer is or was affiliated with graduate education and/or the Graduate Life Center at Virginia Tech.
- A one-page artwork description that outlines the artist's ideas for a three-dimensional art installation created from durable, exterior-rated materials; how this artwork will be designed and fabricated; and how graduate students may be involved in the effort.
- Three to five detailed onsite renders of the proposed artwork.
- A detailed project budget including materials, fabrication and installation costs, required equipment, and pay for students/designers/fabricators (max budget of \$100,000).
- A detailed project timeline describing how the project team will meet project deadlines. The target date for installation is by March 2027.
- Resume/CV for lead artist(s) - 1-2 pages maximum per team member, focused on experiences relevant to this project.
- A portfolio of past work(s) that includes 6-10 high resolution images of completed, built projects in installed or operational settings that demonstrate experience with comparable scale, complexity, fabrication, and installation. Up to three images taken from different angles of the same project will be allowed. These images should be embedded within the proposal PDF.
 - Past projects do not necessarily need to be of large scale public art sculptures. They could be images of as-built architectural, engineering, or infrastructural projects.
- References (minimum of 2) from individuals who have experience working with the lead artist(s) / designer(s) in the context of a successfully completed public artwork or large-scale project. Contact information should include:
 - Email address and phone number
 - Position or title of recommender
 - Relationship to the artist/designer

If selected, the artist will be required to:

- Produce a plan for the long term maintenance and repair of the installation.

Preferred attributes of the public art include:

- Interactive, user-centered design that can be experienced through multiple senses, whether visually, tactilely, and/or auditorily (this can include sculptural pavilions). Places for sitting, walking, or physically interacting with the installation are encouraged.
- Co-design (participatory design) approach that actively involves graduate students and community members.
- Collaborative work with students, faculty, and staff during fabrication and/or installation of the artwork.
- Proposals submitted by members of the graduate community (faculty, alumni, current students) at Virginia Tech will be prioritized.

Submission Instructions

All proposals must be submitted electronically by June 15, 2026.

Materials must be submitted online at <https://gs.vt.edu/publicartproposal>. A confirmation email will be sent in response to all submissions. If you do not receive a confirmation email within 48 hours of the deadline, please contact Monika Gibson via email at gibsonm@vt.edu.

Budget

The scope and scale of the proposed artwork may vary based on the artist's concept and approach. A total maximum budget of \$100,000 has been identified for this project. This amount is intended to cover all costs associated with the design, fabrication, installation, travel, shipping, materials, equipment, and required insurance for the artwork.

The Graduate School anticipates raising funds to support the project through a combination of institutional resources, philanthropic contributions, and community partnerships. As such, the project timeline and scope may be influenced by fundraising progress. The selected artist may be asked to participate in limited fundraising or grant-related activities, such as providing concept descriptions, visuals, or other supporting materials.

Proposals should clearly describe how the proposed concept aligns with the available budget and acknowledge the fundraising dependent nature of the project.

Selection Process

The [GLC Public Art Planning Committee](#) will review all completed proposals. The committee will select up to three semifinalists to interview and select one finalist for the project.

The selected proposal will be reviewed by the VT Public and Visual Arts Council, which will provide its recommendation to the president and the executive vice president and provost. Once approved by all required campus authorities, the proposal will be sent to the Virginia Art and Architecture Review Board in Richmond, VA for review and approval.

The following will be considered in the selection process:

- Proposal submitted by the deadline
- Artist met the requirements outlined in the RFP with attention to the mission and themes of the project
- Evidence of ability to create large-scale, distinctive work
- Demonstrated ability to maintain project timelines and budgets
- Originality and creativity
- Demonstrated interest in engaging students, faculty and community members in the process

Project Timeline (subject to change)

- Apr 15, 2026 Announcement and distribution of RFP
- Jun 15, 2026 Deadline for receipt of proposals
- Jul 1, 2026 All submissions reviewed and semifinalists selected
- Jul 6-15, 2026 Zoom interviews with semifinalists
- Mid-July 2026 Finalist selected; on-campus review and approval of selected work by
 - Public and Visual Arts Council
 - Executive VP & Provost
 - VT President
- Late Jul 2026 Selected artist notified
- Mid-Aug 2026 Review and approval by VA Art & Architecture Review Board
- Mid/late Aug 2026 Artist contract issued
- Sep 2026-Jan 2027 Design finalized and approved; construction
- Feb-Mar 2027 Work finalized and installed
- Mar/Apr 2027 Dedication event(s)

Ownership

The artist will retain ownership of any ideas submitted for consideration until a final selection has been made and a contract is signed between Virginia Tech and the selected artist. At that time, Virginia Tech will obtain 100% ownership of artwork produced, in whatever stage of completion, and the artwork shall become the property of Virginia Tech as a work made for hire as defined by the copyright laws of the United States. Virginia Tech shall be the sole and exclusive owner and copyright proprietor of all rights and title in and to the results and proceeds of artist's services hereunder. In addition, the artist will represent being the sole author of the Work and that all services are original by the artist and not copied in whole or in part.

About the Graduate School and Graduate Life Center

As the hub for graduate education at Virginia Tech, the Graduate School collaborates with students, faculty, and personnel within academic and administrative units across all campuses and partner institutions to champion excellence, integrity, and innovation. We cultivate a supportive community where all graduate and professional students are given the opportunity to belong, thrive, and succeed throughout their entire academic journey and beyond. We strengthen graduate education by providing critical services, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and advocating for graduate students and programs. Through our work, we contribute to Virginia Tech's land grant mission of teaching, research, and engagement to enhance regional, national, and global impact.

The Graduate Life Center brings together academics, administration, student services, and community, providing a vibrant hub for graduate education. Located near the Newman Library, Squires Student Center, academic buildings, and downtown Blacksburg, the GLC provides spaces, services, housing, and programming that meet the unique needs of graduate and professional students and encourage their active participation in the graduate community.

Major and Minor Themes (created by AI)

1. Connection & Belonging

- Core idea: The artwork as a connector across people, disciplines, time, & place
- **Minor themes:**
 - Social connection
 - Community, peers, collaboration
 - Emotional belonging
 - Welcoming, safety, empathy
 - Shared identity
 - Unity, common good
 - Connection across time
 - Memories, timelessness

2. Interdisciplinary Collaboration & Community Creation

- Core idea: Graduate education as collective making across boundaries
- **Minor themes:**
 - Co-creation
 - Physical contribution
 - Ongoing additions
 - Collective ownership
 - Buy-in, participation
 - Peer networks
 - Mentorship, collaboration
 - Community as process
 - Not individual, but shared making

3. Process, Growth & Transformation

- Core idea: Graduate experience as iterative, evolving, non-linear development
- **Minor themes:**
 - Iteration
 - Experimentation,
 - Low-risk exploration
 - Intellectual growth
 - Problem-solving, specialization
 - Personal transformation
 - Shift in thinking, identity formation
 - Non-linearity
 - Tangents, discovery paths

4. Interaction, Participation & Engagement

- Core idea: The artwork as something people actively engage with, not just observe
- **Minor themes:**
 - Physical interaction
 - Movement through space
 - Ongoing participation
 - Evolving contributions over time
 - Accessibility
 - Open to anyone
 - Engagement
 - Draw people in, invite action

5. Place, Space & Environment

- Core idea: The artwork as a spatial experience embedded in the GLC and campus
- **Minor themes:**
 - Gathering & pause
 - Sitting, lingering, conversation
 - Sense of place
 - GLC identity, Hokie stone, architecture
 - Spatial function
 - Walking, meeting, working
 - Landscape integration
 - Built + natural environment

6. Identity, Culture & Tradition

- Core idea: Expressing graduate culture and creating new traditions
- **Minor themes:**
 - Institutional identity
 - VT, GLC, Hokie stone
 - Tradition creation
 - Rituals, photo-op, shared experiences
 - Cultural expression
 - Graduate student life
 - Legacy
 - Becoming part of ongoing culture

7. Emotion, Empathy & Human Experience

- Core idea: The artwork should evoke emotional and reflective responses
- Minor themes:
 - Emotional resonance
 - Pride, belonging, resilience
 - Empathy building
 - Seeing others, shared experience
 - Psychological safety
 - Inclusion, openness
 - Reflection
 - “How do I fit into this community?”

8. Knowledge Creation & Graduate Experience

- Core idea: Representing the distinct nature of graduate education
- Minor themes:
 - Research process
 - Making, experimentation
 - Academic milestones
 - Exams, defense, mentorship
 - Responsibility & independence
 - Intellectual community

9. Temporality: Permanent + Fleeting

- Core idea: Balancing lasting structure with evolving, ephemeral elements
- Minor themes:
 - Ephemeral contributions
 - Messages, rituals
 - Long-term identity
 - Landmark, tradition
 - Time layering
 - Past, present, future users

10. Aesthetic & Experiential Qualities

- Core idea: The artwork as visually compelling and experientially rich
- Minor themes:
 - Visual identity
 - Landmark, recognizable
 - Sensory experience
 - Movement, immersion
 - Symbolism
 - Spiderweb, crossroads, flow
 - Attraction
 - Draw people in

