



**HOUSTON DESIGN RESEARCH GRANT**  
**An open research grant advancing design**  
**solutions for Houston**

**GUIDELINES & APPLICATION FORM**  
**2021**

**RICE DESIGN ALLIANCE / RICE ARCHITECTURE**  
**Sponsored by The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation**



## HOUSTON DESIGN RESEARCH GRANT

An open research grant advancing design solutions for Houston

### Grant Summary

Since 1999, the Rice Design Alliance (RDA) has awarded grants to Houston-based architecture students and faculty from the leading architecture schools of the region through a program formerly known as Initiatives for Houston Grant. With support from The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation, RDA relaunched and expanded this grant program, now called the Houston Design Research Grant (HDRG), in 2020.

The goal of the HDRG is to promote research on Houston-specific urban conditions that need urgent attention and that can make a significant contribution to the Houston community through quality design-thinking. The grant is open to university students and faculty looking to work on research projects that contribute to the improvement of Houston's urban environment. Winning proposals in both categories (Faculty and Student) should demonstrate potential to catalyze a Houston-based design project and are awarded seed funds for their research.

### 2021 Grant Details

#### Theme

The overarching theme for the 2021 grant is *Urban Food Systems*. RDA will solicit research on the spatial implications of urban food distribution and consumption systems in Houston and its region, including the existence of food deserts and lack of accessibility to quality food. Projects will be asked to analyze and research design-oriented alternatives to current urban food networks in order to significantly diminish the growing inequity between Houston's communities based on appropriate access to healthy and sustainable food.

Researchers will be encouraged to present projects that utilize design thinking as a problem-solving tool and that incorporate or reference existing local urban farming, food distribution or agricultural entrepreneurship initiatives that are already improving the quality of food accessibility to all Houstonians. Neighborhood-specific urban research that identifies existing challenges and increases the availability of quality food to otherwise underserved populations will also be positively valued.

#### Applicants and Proposals

Applications will be accepted from students and faculty who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the U.S.



Proposals will be submitted in the form of a research paper supported by visual materials. Submission materials should include:

- Completed application form (included below)
- Written proposal for the project (1,000 words max.): the proposal should describe the relevance of the project, its connection with the overall theme, its expected impact on the community and possible next steps for implementation in collaboration with other local Houston organizations, where applicable.
- Visual materials: photographs, sketches, archival materials, drawings and/or AV materials.
- Student or faculty resume (two pages max.).
- Students will be required to include a letter of support from a faculty advisor.

### Jury and Winning Proposals

Submitted applications will be reviewed by a jury of five to seven members comprised of a diverse mix of individuals representing the Houston community, academia, city governance, and/or local and international experts and practitioners in the fields connected to the grant's theme, architecture, design, engineering, and urbanism.

The jury will assess and judge all entries with transparency and fairness, selecting one winning proposal per category. Proposals will be evaluated for their research strength and depth, the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the city and/or the region and their ability to draw connections with similar examples happening globally. While grant funds are solely provided for the research component of a project, additional consideration will be given to proposals which demonstrate potential for a future implementation with local Houston organizations.

There will be two grant categories: Student and Faculty. The winning proposal for each category will:

- Receive the grant amount of \$6,000
- Present their project at a lecture taking place at the Rice School of Architecture (in-person, safety and health circumstances permitting, or online during the duration of the global pandemic).
- Will have their paper published in RDA's *Cite* magazine (printed and online versions)
- Will have their paper published in the yearly grant booklet

Lectures and jury meetings will remain online for the duration of the current global health crisis according to Rice University regulations and restrictions on gatherings, but are expected to resume in person as soon as circumstances allow.



### **Timeline**

-Grant call for proposals launch: January 2021

- Deadline for submissions: March 31, 2021
- Jury convenes: early April 2021
- Grant winner's announcement: April 29, at the annual Rice Architecture Awards Ceremony
- Grantees submit final papers: September 1, 2021
- Grantees present a lunchtime lecture at Rice School of Architecture: during the Fall Lecture series of 2021(dates TBD)

*\*the above timeline is subject to change due to Rice University's directives and preventive measures in response to the global health crisis.*

For past grantees and awarded projects, please visit:

<https://www.ricedesignalliance.org/programs/grants>

The Houston Design Research Grant is made possible thanks to a generous gift from The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Mitsui & Co. (U.S.A.), Inc. ("Mitsui USA").



## **About the Rice Design Alliance**

[Rice Design Alliance](#) is the public programs and outreach arm of Rice Architecture. We curate public programs, architecture tours, design competitions and publications that communicate the importance of design in our everyday lives and its ability to make our lives better. We are based at and work from the Rice Architecture school as an advocacy group that believes that multidisciplinary and research-based design can improve our cities and the way we live in them.

RDA was established within Rice Architecture in 1972 by the school's first dean, David Crane, together with alumni and other civic-minded community members who believed that quality design thinking should be available to all in our community and that Houston's citizens – experts and non-experts alike – should feel empowered to act and transform our city through design.

## **About Rice Architecture**

[Rice Architecture](#) is one of the smallest professional degree programs situated within a top research university, allowing individual attention with the breadth of study afforded by a major university.

Located in the nation's fourth largest city, Rice University is a leading research institution committed to fostering a strong intellectual environment for the next generation of leaders and thinkers. Rice Architecture's small student-to-faculty ratio encourages a close-knit community that provides both undergraduates and graduates with focused instruction, particularly in the studio setting.

The school's position within a top tier university allows it to draw extensively from other disciplines to forge new territories of speculative practice, as demonstrated by the faculty's leadership role with Rice's environmental studies interdisciplinary minor; our cross-listed courses with other schools and departments, particularly humanities, business, and engineering; and numerous collaborations with the other arts groups on campus and in the city.

## **About The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation**

Established in 1987, [The Mitsui U.S.A. Foundation](#) is the philanthropic arm of Mitsui & Co. (U.S.A.), Inc., for active social contribution programs in communities where the company does business. Currently, it supports more than 50 initiatives across the U.S. in the areas of Education, Community Welfare, Arts and Culture, and Employee Matching and Volunteerism.



## Application Form

Please submit a completed application form with the additional supporting materials (resume, written research statement and visual support materials) by Wednesday, March 31, 2021 to RDA Executive Director, Maria Nicanor at [maria.nicanor@rice.edu](mailto:maria.nicanor@rice.edu) including the subject line "RDA Houston Design Research Grant 2021-*Applicant Name.*"

Legal Name (First, MI, Last) \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate (MM/DD/YY) \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

School Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Written research proposal title \_\_\_\_\_

Applying as:

- Student
- Faculty

I am a:

- U.S. Citizen
- Legal Permanent Resident of the U.S.

Attached are my:

- Written Proposal (1,000 words max.)
- Visual Materials (images + corresponding captions, in PDF format)
- Resume (2 pages max.)
- If applying in Student category, letter of support from Faculty member
- Copy of U.S. Passport or proof of US legal permanent residency (Greencard)