



Federal Real Property: GSA Should Include Community Input Requirements to Help Fulfill Design Excellence Program Goals (GAO-23-106139)

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**Federal Facilities Council Standing Committee on Real
Property Inventory, Planning, and Transactional Real Estate
November 16, 2023**

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Research Objectives

1. Describe the requirements and guidance that govern GSA's Design Excellence Program and Art in Architecture Program.
2. Describe GSA's processes for designing new federal buildings and renovations under the Design Excellence Program and commissioning art installations under the Art in Architecture Program.
3. Assess the role of community input in the Design Excellence Program.

Methodology

- Reviewed relevant GSA policies and guidance.
- Interviewed GSA HQ officials and regional staff.
- Interviewed the American Institute of Architects and the National Organization of Minority Architects.

The Design Excellence Program

- Established in 1994 in response to criticisms that federal buildings lacked architectural distinction.
- Intended to ensure the development of exceptional public buildings that can serve as landmarks.
- Emphasizes that building design should flow from the expertise of the architectural profession.
- Aims to meet the 1962 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture—which include constructing buildings in consultation with local governments and avoiding an official architectural style for federal buildings.



John M. Roll Courthouse, 2013, Yuma, AZ.
Source: GSA (GAO-23-106139)

The Art in Architecture Program

- Established in 1972, with the intent of integrating art and architecture in federal buildings.
- Covers a wide range of artwork, including paintings, sculptures, and landscape art.

Figure: Examples of Art in Architecture Program Commissions



Fleming, 1974 (John C. Kluczynski Federal Building, Chicago, IL)



The Robes of Justitia, 2021 (Fred D. Thompson Federal Building and US Courthouse, Nashville, TN)



Community, 1989 (Joseph P. Addabbo Federal Building, Queens, NY)

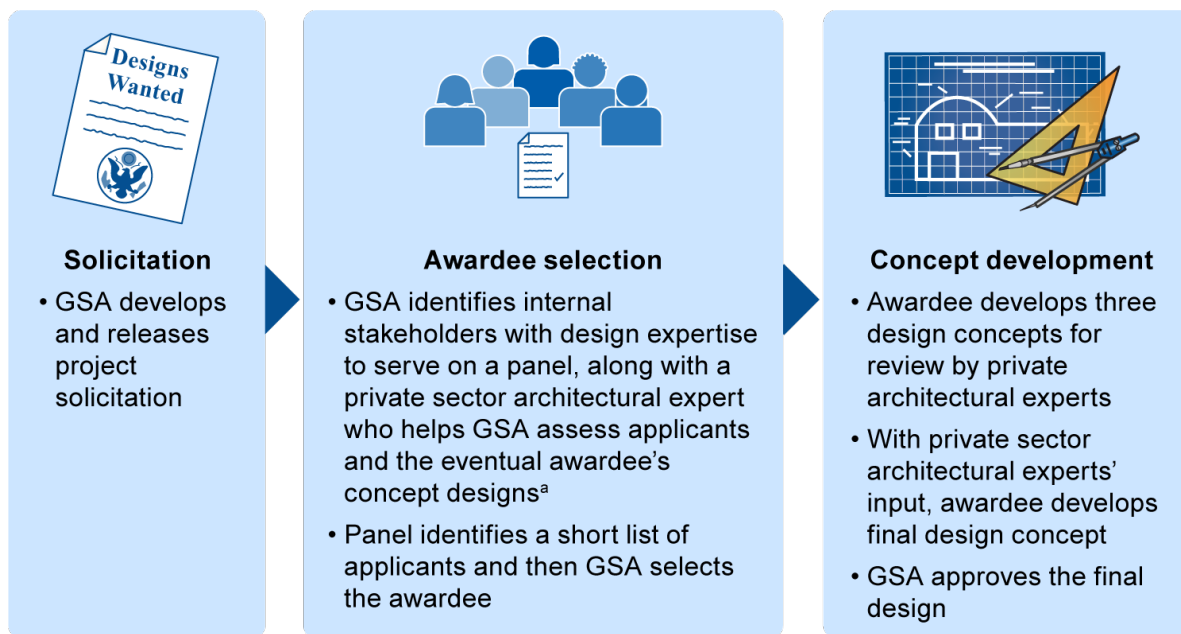
Neither Program is Governed by Statute

- The requirements for GSA's Design Excellence Program are included in GSA's Design Excellence Manual; there are no specific requirements for the program in statute or regulation.
- The Art in Architecture Program has some requirements formalized in GSA regulation. Among those are requirements for GSA to:
 - seek the support and involvement of local citizens when commissioning art,
 - ensure that commissions reflect national, regional, or local cultural heritages and
 - emphasize the work of living American artists, including those in underserved communities.

Both Programs Have Been Subject to Executive Orders





Executive Order	Summary	Dates
Executive Order 13967 (Design Excellence Program)	Directed GSA to make traditional and classical architecture the preferred style of the Design Excellence Program.	Dec 2020— Feb 2021
Executive Order 13934 (Art in Architecture)	Directed GSA to prioritize works of art that portray historically significant Americans, events of historical significance, or the ideals upon which the nation was founded. It further required that historically significant Americans not be portrayed in an abstract or modernist style.	July 2020— Jan 2022

Design Excellence Program Process







Source: GAO analysis of the General Services Administration's (GSA) Design and Construction Excellence Policies and Procedures. | GAO-23-106139

GSA's Criteria for Selecting a Shortlist of Applicants for the Design Excellence Program

Criteria	Weight	Key points
Past performance on design	35% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel reviews five examples, provided by the applicant, of similar past projects, including information on physical location, social context, site strategies, regional design and character, environmental factors, cost, and schedule Past projects should demonstrate creativity, clear design approaches, and sensitivity to context
Lead designer portfolio	25% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead designer's portfolio should demonstrate appropriate responses to past client needs, site conditions, local community, regional character, and sustainable performance Lead designer's portfolio demonstrates leadership that aligns with the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, including cooperation with local governments
Philosophy and design intent	25% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel reviews applicant's statement of philosophy and design intent for the project, which should demonstrate passion for the project goals and the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture, such as a commitment to the importance of regional architectural traditions
Lead designer profile	15% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel assesses whether the lead designer's prior education and work experiences fit the project's scope and complexity

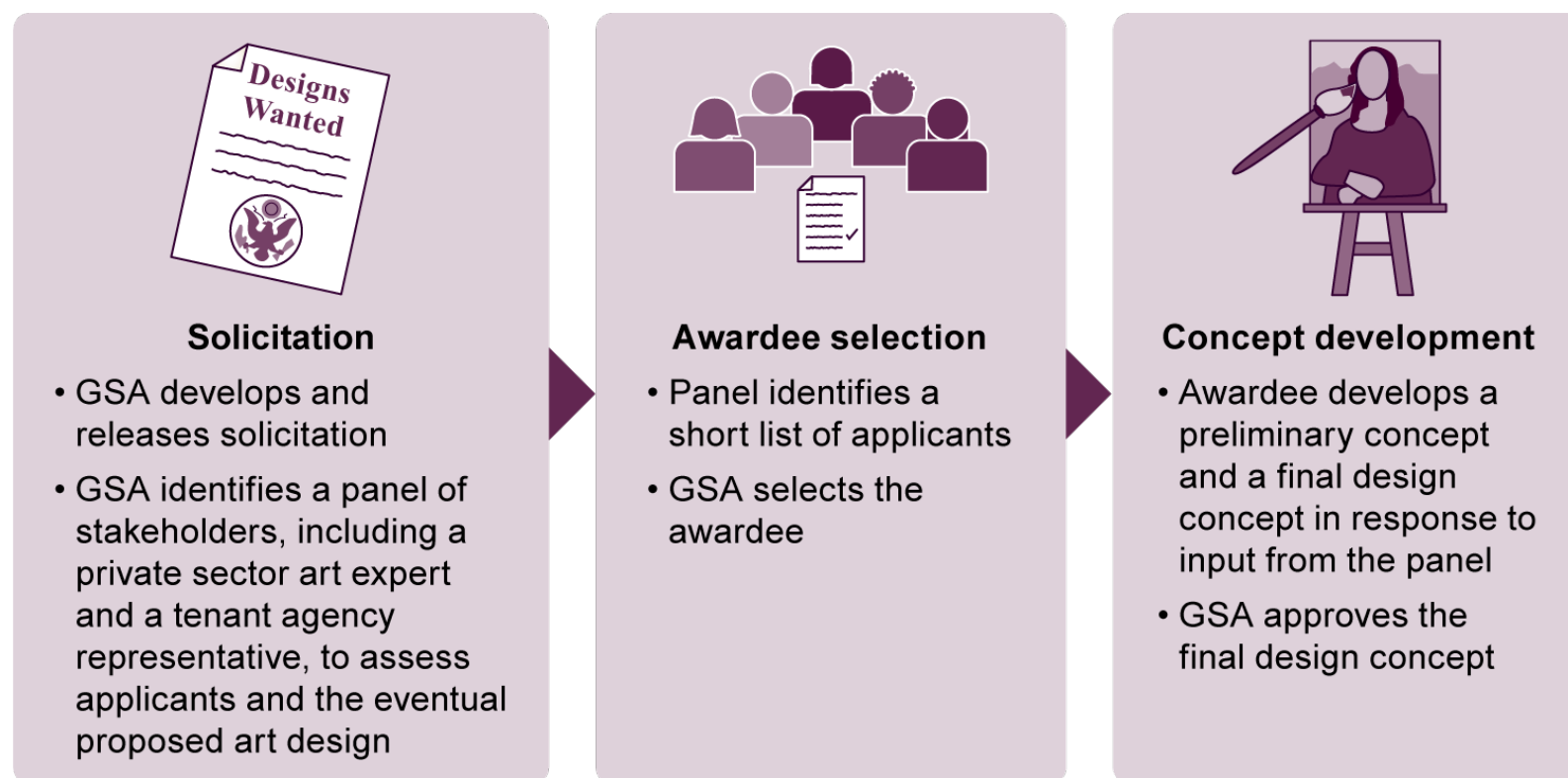
Source: GAO analysis of the General Services Administration's (GSA) Design and Construction Excellence Policies and Procedures. | GAO-23-106139

GSA's Criteria for Selecting a Final Awardee for the Design Excellence Program

Criteria	Weight	Key points
Design performance	50% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel reviews portfolio narratives to understand past project challenges and implemented solutions• Panel confirms that the applicant has experience with key topics including: community context, design image, function, sustainability, and team organization
Management plan	30% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan submitted by applicant identifies key roles, external and internal lines of communication, plans for client and community integration, and plans for quality and cost control
Professional qualifications	15% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panel assesses whether key team members have relevant qualifications and experience to manage and carry out the project
Geographic location	5% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicant has shown that at least 35% of contract services will occur within project-specific geographic boundaries

Source: GAO analysis of the General Services Administration's (GSA) Design and Construction Excellence Policies and Procedures. | GAO-23-106139

Art in Architecture Process



Source: GAO analysis of the General Services Administration's (GSA) Art in Architecture Policies and Procedures and the GSA Acquisition Manual. | GAO-23-106139

GSA's Criteria for Selecting a Shortlist and Final Awardee for the Art in Architecture Program

Criteria	Key points
Experience	Scale, range, and complexity, including media, materials, content, style, budget, and market value, of the artist's work
Past performance	Previous work on contracts with government agencies and private industry in terms of cost control, quality of work, and compliance with performance schedules
Capacity	Ability to accomplish work in the required time frame
Overall approach	Evaluation of a brief written statement of an overall approach to the project
Total evaluated price	Price for the design, development, fabrication, and installation of the artwork

GSA Has Recognized the Importance of Community Input in the Design Excellence Program

- The coordination of planning and design decisions with local community goals is one of the eight goals of the Design Excellence Program.
- When selecting a short list of applicants for a project, panelists must consider whether applicants demonstrate a commitment to stakeholder engagement.
- When selecting a final awardee, panelists must consider, among other things, whether the applicant has demonstrated the capacity to collect and integrate community and client input.

GSA Does Not Require Design Excellence Program Architects to Obtain and Consider Community Input on Their Projects

- GSA noted that the Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture make it clear that building design should flow from the architectural profession to the government and not vice versa.
- However, this does not preclude GSA from identifying requirements in the Design Excellence Manual for architects to obtain and consider community input. Such requirements could provide architects the latitude to consider the input as appropriate.

GSA Does Not Require Design Excellence Program Architects to Obtain and Consider Community Input on Their Projects

- Without clear requirements in the Design Excellence Manual:
 - architects and GSA may not always pursue the two-way communications needed to obtain and consider community input
 - GSA is at an increased risk of not achieving its objectives of integrating buildings into the local community and incorporating regional architectural traditions
 - building designs may need to be revised in response to community concerns, which can delay projects (Savannah)
 - GSA regions varied in the extent to which they required architects to obtain and consider community input

Recommendation

- The Administrator of the General Services Administration should ensure that the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service updates the Design Excellence Manual to include requirements for obtaining and considering community input on building design, including architectural style.
- Status: GSA concurred and is developing a plan to address the recommendation.

Questions and Contact

- Federal Real Property:
GSA Should Include
Community Input
Requirements to Help
Fulfill Design
Excellence Program
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