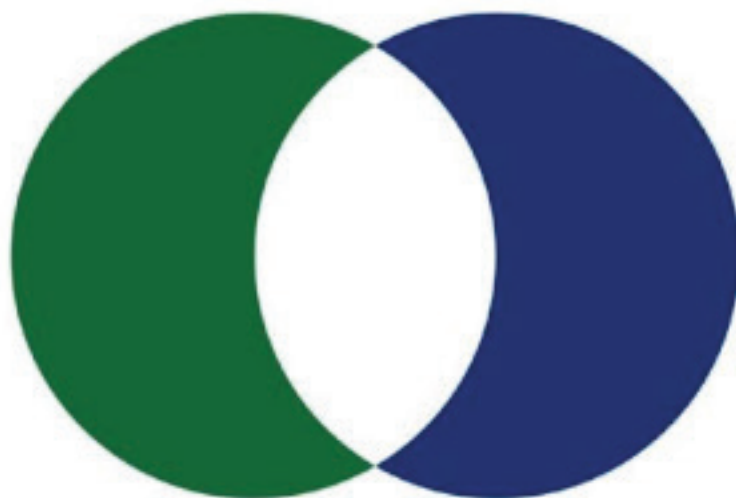

Certificate of Research Excellence



edra core

improving environments through research excellence

2026

Application Brochure

about core

The Certificate of Research Excellence (CORE), sponsored by the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA), is a professional recognition that recognizes and celebrates exceptional, rigorous, innovative, and impactful practice-based environmental design research studies.

Applications to CORE undergo a rigorous, double-blind review by an interdisciplinary panel of experts. Evaluations are based on two main dimensions: (1) Research Rigor—the use of recognized research approaches (in research design, tools, and data collection) to produce valid results (including in data analysis and interpretation of findings); and (2) Research Impact—pushing the boundaries of practice through impact on stakeholders and the design industry.



CORE's unique evaluation framework:

- Identifies practice-based environmental design research that is not only rigorous, but also offers measurable value, meets industry challenges, and advances design thinking;
- Recognizes the importance of design research in practice;
- Provides a compass to guide designers, researchers, organizations, and manufacturers in their design research and evidence-based design efforts; and
- Builds on EDRA's tradition of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and commitment to innovation.

CORE is a professional recognition of individual design research studies, recognizing design research excellence by evaluating each application on its own merit against the CORE evaluation criteria. It is not a competition or awards program, where jurors compare applicants against other applicants. Further, there is no set number of CORE recognitions issued each year; all design research studies that sufficiently meet the CORE criteria receive recognition.

core stands for excellence

As the program name suggests, CORE is committed to excellence. Research rigor and a study's value to the industry and project stakeholders are key components of what defines a CORE-worthy study— but EDRA also finds merit in those studies that advance the practice of design research. Excellence comes in many forms, and CORE aims to challenge applicants—and the industry—to find inventive and interesting ways to conduct and apply research in practice. Whether by way of an innovative tool or methodology, new techniques for analysis or excellence. means of disseminating a study's findings, CORE aspires for design researchers to push the boundaries of professional practice. At its heart, CORE encourages and expects research excellence.

who should apply?

If you have completed a rigorous, innovative, or impactful practice based design research study and share EDRA's commitment to advancing design research, you should submit your study for CORE recognition.

EDRA Core is a unique program and community that motivates my organization to push the boundaries of practice through innovative research"

- CORE Applicant

why apply?

CORE recognition provides design researchers the opportunity to gain professional recognition for the rigor and value and join those pioneering design research in of their practice-based environmental design practice. research studies. There are many reasons why someone should apply to CORE, both to benefit the applicant as well as for the design industry at-large:

CORE has always been at the forefront

When CORE was launched by EDRA in 2015, it was the first of its kind in the industry. Ever since, CORE has helped spearhead the advancement of design research in practice. CORE enables design researchers to showcase the proficiency and impact of their work, beyond the more traditional, academically-focused routes of recognition (e.g., peer reviewed publication). By applying to CORE, you become a part of this new and exciting opportunity to advance the industry

"There is nothing like it in value, rigor, and esteem."

- CORE Applicant

"I was thrilled to get to see first hand the research/ practice mix because I can make sure to bring this type of knowledge into the design studio [and] classroom."

- CORE Reviewer

CORE is sponsored by the Environmental Design Research Association

Founded in 1968, EDRA is an industry-recognized professional organization that is committed to linking research and practice to create environments responsive to diverse human needs. CORE was developed by EDRA to acknowledge and advance rigorous and impactful design research in practice. CORE certified studies not only uphold the program's mission and can wear its name, but also that of EDRA (e.g., "2026 EDRA CORE Certified Study").

CORE is not limited to any one sector of the design industry

Unlike other recognition programs focused on just one sector of design, CORE recognizes the work of design researchers in ALL fields. CORE is a way for design researchers in ANY sector of the design industry to seek professional recognition of their work.

[CORE] is a thorough program with a sophisticated evaluation process that helps call attention to valuable research that wouldn't otherwise receive this level of professional scrutiny."

- CORE Applicant

CORE understands that practice-based research may be different than academic pursuits, yet still deserves a means of third-party recognition

Design professionals tend to focus on project delivery and business, and are less likely to prepare formal scientific reports or submit for peer-reviewed publication. CORE's structured evaluation system, based on criteria applied by a panel of industry experts, allows validation and credit for the quality and impact of practice-based design research studies.

The client disseminated the news widely and was quite proud that the research had been recognized this way."

- CORE Applicant

CORE offers a strong value and ROI

Understanding the demand on professionals' time and the importance of a return on investment (ROI), CORE has been designed to be a relatively inexpensive and painless application process, while still providing sufficient content for evaluation. Further, earning a CORE recognition

establishes the value of the research conducted, showcasing the applicant's expertise—a notable advantage when pursuing new business or addressing the design or media community's established public forums. This designation provides certified studies the opportunity to be branded as quality research, to both current and future clients, and is backed by the Environmental Design Research Association. Refer to the Recognition section of this brochure for additional information about what CORE recognition includes.

Getting a CORE [certificate] was very helpful. My firm is utilizing this recognition [for] branding."

- CORE Applicant

For architectural and design (A&D) firms, specifically, CORE recognition demonstrates a firm's position as a recognized thought-leader in the industry—going beyond traditional methods of marketing and branding. CORE recognition is also an industry recognized designation that can be included in proposals and regularly scheduled marketing materials to potential clients.

I strongly believe in the translational value of environment-behavior research and this review process is integral to building a very strong foundation for good research."

- CORE Reviewer

For vendors (materials/furniture manufacturers), research that has achieved a CORE recognition communicates to both A&D clients as well as end users a focus on the quality and value of both the product and service provided. In addition, when advertising educational seminars with stakeholders within the A&D industry (e.g., Lunch & Learn presentations), CORE-certified design research studies provide an unbiased designation demonstrating the value of the product and service.

CORE can change the industry

With increased recognition of the practical benefits of evidence-based design and a greater emphasis on the importance of the occupant experience in the built environment, design research has taken on greater significance in the field. Thus, in addition to recognizing and celebrating exceptional, rigorous, and impactful practice-based environmental design research, CORE recognition offers a way to show how design research is making a real impact on the design industry. CORE recognition indicates to industry stakeholders that the research conducted is not only done with precision, but also provides value in the advancement of evidence-based design and its impact on the human experience.

minimum requirements

To apply for CORE recognition, the design research study must have:

- Been applied to or based on a real-world design project(s) or ongoing design program/effort;
- Considered the relationship between identified human and environmental variables; • Included an interdisciplinary team of designers and researchers;
- Been completed in full — i.e., not only has data been collected and analyzed, but also the findings have been determined, documented, and shared; and,
- Been completed within the last two years — i.e., since Fall 2022 (though the study, itself, may have begun before Fall 2022 and taken longer than two years to conduct in full).

Note: We highly encourage studies to go through the process of review by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) if they involve human subjects. If the study involves human subjects, but IRB review is not sought and/or obtained for the study, then we ask the applicant(s) to provide a rationale for why the IRB process was not included in the research protocol.

IRB Process Requirement

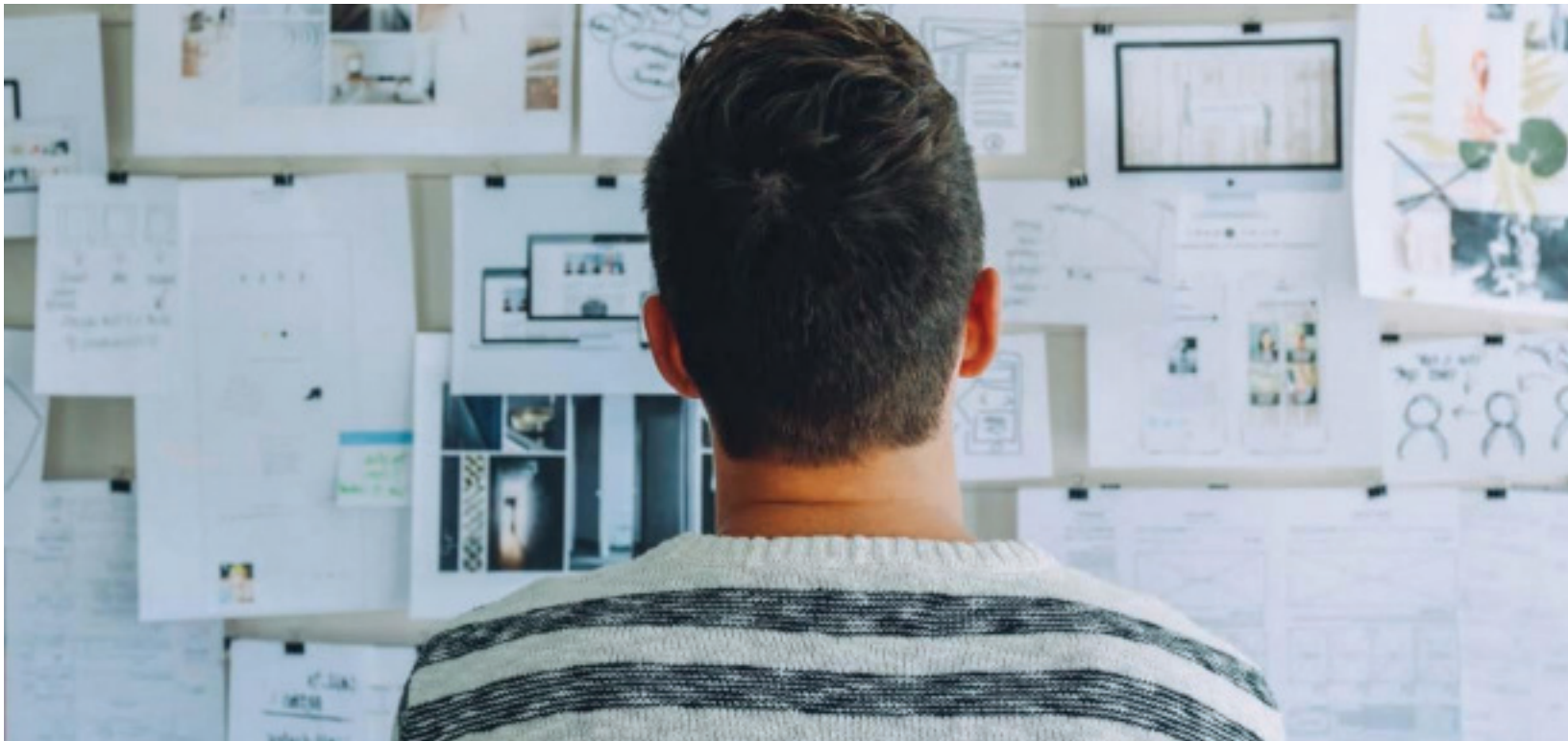
In the United States, and many other countries, there are established protocols for the protection of human subjects in research (HHS, 2016). Studies that identify as research and use human subjects are obligated to adhere to specific ethical standards (as defined in the Common Rule 45 CFR 46) and are to be reviewed by an independent ethics committee, or what is commonly referred to as an Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB review is an essential part of the human subjects research process, and is intended to provide an objective and impartial assessment of risks and benefits, helping to ensure ethical and unbiased practice in any field of research.

As examples of exemplary work in the field, CORE certified studies are expected to meet these standards of practice. Thus, all studies being submitted to CORE that involve human subjects must have gone through the IRB process—with the understanding that a study may be deemed exempt or may not meet the definition of research and would, therefore, not require IRB review.

The determination of exemption and/ or minimal risk is made by the IRB, not the

researcher(s) or project client. Many research institutions, like academic hospitals and universities, have their own Institutional Review Boards. Accredited, independent IRBs are also available for studies done in the private sector, though a fee may be involved. It is advised to consult with the client or organization where the research is being conducted to see if they have an internal IRB. If not, third-party IRB review is recommended.

As indicated above, however, a study that meets the definition of research, but does not involve human subjects, does not need IRB review. In addition, some research studies that use human subjects may be deemed "exempt" from review if the study meets certain criteria for minimal risk. A study may also involve human subjects, but not meet the definition of research and would, therefore, not require an IRB review. Examples could include but are not limited to: the study was part of an internal effort or part of a quality improvement project; the study's country of origin did not require IRB review; etc. If an IRB was not required for your study, or was waived, an explanation of such exemption can be made on the application form.



evaluation process

Each application to CORE that is completed-in-full will receive a rigorous, double-blind review, such that the panel of Reviewers do not know the applicants, and the applicants do not know who is doing the reviews. As a blinded review, identifying content is withheld from the Reviewers. This redacted content includes team member names, organizational names, or other identifying factors.

Reviews are conducted by an interdisciplinary panel of experts, including academic researchers, practice-based researchers, and/or designers.

As noted earlier, applications to CORE are evaluated on two main dimensions: research rigor and research value. Each design research study that applies for CORE recognition is evaluated on its own merit against the CORE evaluation criteria. Studies applying for CORE recognition are not in competition against other submitted studies. If an application sufficiently meets the CORE evaluation criteria, it receives recognition.

CORE recognition can be assigned in one of two categories: "CORE Certified" and "CORE Merit Certified." Studies that achieve recognition status have met or surpassed the minimum required total score during assessment against the evaluation criteria; studies that achieve Merit status have obtained the highest tier of total score possible during the evaluation process and are designated as Merit recipients to acknowledge this achievement.

The evaluation criteria include:

RESEARCH RIGOR

- Suitability of research question(s)
- Consideration of previous research
- Suitability of the study's design, methodology, and timeline
- Suitability of the team of researchers and study participants, if human subjects were involved
- Quality of data collection and analysis

RESEARCH IMPACT

- Translation to practice
- Dissemination of findings
- Impact on the study stakeholders
- Impact on the industry at large
- Research innovation and pushing the boundaries of practice

recognition

2026 CORE certified studies not only attain recognition of their achievement and will be celebrated at the CORE Recognition Ceremony during the annual EDRA conference, but also receive a Standard Recognition Package, which is included in the application fee (\$0 additional cost).

The Standard Recognition Package includes:

- One framed certificate, to be accepted in person at the CORE Recognition Ceremony at the annual EDRA conference (or shipped at an additional cost invoiced at the time of shipping).
- Complimentary attendance to the CORE Recognition Ceremony at the annual EDRA conference. (Note: Any team member of a 2026 CORE certified study is welcome to attend the CORE Recognition Ceremony, but registration for either the day of the ceremony or for the full conference is required to attend any other event or session during the EDRA57 conference.)
- An opportunity to present at the annual EDRA conference alongside other CORE certified studies. (Note: Each presenter invited to participate in the CORE session at EDRA57 will be required to register for the conference, either for the day of the CORE presentation session or for the full conference. Neither EDRA nor CORE will provide funds or discounts to CORE certified research study team members to participate in the CORE presentation session at EDRA57.)
- A "CORE Recipient" name badge ribbon for any team member of a 2026 CORE certified study in attendance at the annual EDRA conference.
- Inclusion in the list of CORE certified studies in the proceedings of the annual EDRA conference.
- A press kit from EDRA for personal marketing efforts of the CORE recognition.
- Permission to list/describe the study as a "2026 EDRA CORE Certified Study" and to use the "EDRA CORE Certified" graphic (at right) in reference to the study.
- Knowledge sharing and promotional marketing by EDRA, which may include such opportunities as a link to the CORE certified study's report on the EDRA CORE webpage, a white paper highlighting 2026 CORE certified studies, and highlighting certified studies and their associated research teams in EDRA communications (e.g., e-newsletters and social media).



The 2026 CORE program is also offering optional additions to the Standard Recognition Package, which allow CORE certified research study team members the opportunity to customize the manner of recognition they wish to receive. Upon notification of receiving CORE recognition, study team members will be given more detail about the Recognition Kit Options, including associated deadlines and instructions for placing orders and payment.

The Recognition Kit Options include:

- Recognition Kit Option #1 – \$75 additional cost per item = one framed certificate. Framed certificates may be accepted in person at the CORE Recognition Ceremony at EDRA57, or can be shipped at an additional cost (invoiced at the time of shipping). There is no limit on the quantity of framed certificates that can be purchased. Payment is due at the time of order.
- Recognition Kit Option #2 – \$175 additional cost per item = one engraved statue. Engraved statues may be accepted in person at the CORE Recognition Ceremony at EDRA57, or can be shipped at an additional cost (invoiced at the time of shipping). There is no limit on the quantity of engraved statues that can be purchased. Payment is due at the time of order.

how to apply

The 2026 CORE application process will take place entirely online, using an online application portal. You may, however, use the list of application form questions at the end of this document to prepare your application offline. Applications that are mailed or e-mailed will not be accepted. There is no limit on the number of applications you may submit.

Steps to apply

1. Read this document and the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for full details about the CORE program and application process, including the application form questions that can be used to prepare an application offline.
2. Click the "APPLY TO CORE" button on the [EDRA CORE webpage](#) (available November 4, 2025 through February 11, 2026). This will redirect you to the online application portal website.
3. Once in the online application portal, you will need to make payment and provide your answers to the application form questions.

Notes about applying

- It is strongly recommended that you start filling out your application form(s) within the online application portal at least three business days prior to the application deadline, if not sooner. (This allows you to reach out for assistance prior to the deadline if you experience any glitches.)
- If you are submitting more than one study, you must complete a separate application form and make payment for each design research study being submitted to CORE.
- You may log back into the online application portal at any time prior to the deadline to view, resume, edit, or withdraw any application(s) you have begun.
- Any application form that is incomplete after the deadline to apply will not move on to the next stage: evaluation by the panel of Reviewers.
- It is required for all submitters to download, sign, and attach the [copyright disclaimer](#) to their application.
- Entrants hereby declare and warrant that they are the copyright owner of the image being submitted to EDRA, or that they have written permission to use this image from the rightful copyright owner. Entrants hereby grant a non-exclusive license to EDRA to use, reproduce, exhibit, publicize and distribute this photograph in whole or in part, in any manner and media now known or hereinafter invented, including, but not limited to, print, publications, the EDRA website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn or other social media platforms, in perpetuity throughout the world, in support of and/or to promote the EDRA mission, and for archival purposes. Entrants represent that they have the legal right and authority to grant such a license.
- Entrants agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless EDRA, its Board, employees, volunteers and agents from any and all liability, damages, and expenses including reasonable attorney's fees arising from the use of the photo, including any claims brought by any person claiming an interest in the photos or their subject matter.

cost to apply

The cost to apply is \$300 per application. Note: For the application to be evaluated by the panel of Reviewers, the application fee must be completed and paid in full.*

** Refund Policy: Should you choose to withdraw an application, you must submit your cancellation request to EDRA Headquarters by 11:59 PM CST on January 21, 2026. You will receive a refund of the application fee, less a \$50 processing fee per withdrawn application.*

key dates

November 4, 2025 | 2026 CORE online application portal opens

~~February 1, 2026, 11:59 PM CST | 2026 CORE online application portal closes~~

February 11, 2026, 11:59 PM CST | 2026 CORE online application portal closes (EXTENDED DEADLINE)

March 31, 2026 | Results notifications sent to applicants

May 27-30, 2026 | EDRA57 Amherst 2026 CORE Recognition Ceremony

June, 2026 | Public announcement of the results

questions?

Refer to this document and the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for full details about the CORE program and application process. If you have questions about the CORE program and/or the application process, please contact EDRA Headquarters at headquarters@edra.org. If you need technical help with the online application portal, you can contact [Confex's technical support](#) or call (401) 334-0220 Monday through Friday 8:30am-6:00pm Eastern Time.

notes about the application form

- Applications to CORE **must be submitted through the online application portal**, but you may use the following list of questions to prepare your application offline.
- Though the formatting and order of questions may look different here when compared to the online application portal, the sections and question content are the same.
- Each question must be answered.
- Character limits include counts of all alpha-numeric characters, spaces, punctuation marks, and symbols.
- To ensure that your application receives a proper review, it must be written in English as EDRA currently does not have the capacity to accurately translate applications (though the design research study, itself, can have been conducted using any language).
- If you plan to submit more than one application to CORE, you must complete a separate application form and provide payment for each design research study being submitted.

application form questions

Step 1: Study Identification

This section is to be used for administrative purposes and will be excluded from the blind review.

1. Declaration of Integrity: By my digital signature below, I certify the information provided in this application is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I also understand that any false statement, misrepresentation, and/or deliberate omission in this form may be grounds for disqualification and may result in EDRA revoking CORE recognition now or in the future. *You will be prompted to provide your digital*

signature in the online application portal. 2. Title of the research study

3. What domain(s) does this study fall under? Note: This information will be used to help match your application to a Reviewer. (select up to three)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail & Commercial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary & Secondary Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Large Scale Mixed-Use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation & Infrastructure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science & Technology/Labs | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning/Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational/Sports & Exhibition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Workplace | <input type="checkbox"/> Civic & Cultural |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Design/Natural Settings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Living | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Residential | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

4. Select the study's methodology (choose multiple options if needed)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action/Participatory Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Meta-Analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Case Study | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed Methods |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Design Methods | <input type="checkbox"/> Occupancy Evaluations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography | <input type="checkbox"/> Observation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Experimental/Quasi-Experimental Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo-based Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice-based Research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grounded Theory | <input type="checkbox"/> Sensor, Technology, or Artificial Intelligence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretive-Historical Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Statistical/Modeling Analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey |

Step 2: Study Description

Note: The content from this point forward will be given to the panel of reviewers for evaluation. Thus, everything from this point forward must be BLINDED (i.e., no team member names, organizational names, or other identifying factors about the study or participants).

1. Provide a brief overview description of the study (3-4 sentences) about the study's purpose, process, outcomes, and impact. Note: If your study receives CORE recognition, this text may be used in EDRA marketing and communications. (limit: 75 words)

2. What was the approximate range of funds expended on various aspects of the research study, as distinct from the primary design effort? (select one)

\$0 - \$5,000

\$5,000 - \$10,000

\$10,000 - \$25,000

\$25,000 - \$50,000

\$50,000 - 100,000

More than \$100,000

3. How was the research study funded? (write a whole number 0 to 100 for each row, such that the addition of all answers equals 100)

___ % Client Provider funding

___ % Manufacturer funding

___ % Design Firm funding

___ % Academic Institution funding

___ % Grant funding

___ % Other funding

Step 3: Research Rigor & Research Impact

Reminder: Please do not identify people in your responses to these questions.

Research Rigor

1. Describe the research question(s) or study objective(s). *Limit: 300 words max*

2. Describe the study team's understanding and application of existing literature or previous research. Please explain how this existing knowledge impacted the study (e.g., to fill a known gap, build upon current work, or advance the understanding of a critical issue). *Limit: 400 words*

3. Describe who was involved in the study, why they were engaged (e.g., their backgrounds, areas of expertise, etc.), and how they interacted. Consider both the study team members as well as the study participants (if human subjects were involved). *Limit: 300 words*

4. Describe the study's methodology, tools, and timeline (approximate dates for study initiation, start and end of data collection, and completion). Please explain why these tools and methods were chosen, and how they were used to gather data. *Limit: 300 words*

5. Describe your findings and approaches used to data analysis. *Limit: 400 words.*

Research Impact

1. Describe approaches used and audience group(s) targeted for dissemination of the study's findings. Consider both the people directly associated with the project as well as the design industry at large. *Limit: 300 words*
2. Describe how the research study's findings were translated into practical solutions applicable to practice. *Limit: 300 words*
3. Describe the study's impact on the design project, occupants and stakeholders, or surrounding environment associated with the project. *Limit: 300 words*
4. Describe how the study pushes the boundaries of practice. This could include the study's potential impact on the body of knowledge or design industry at large. *Limit: 300 words*
5. Describe how this study uses innovative ways to conduct or apply research in practice (e.g., new tools or methods to collect data, new techniques for analysis, or fresh ways of dissemination or application to the field). *Limit: 300 words*

Step 4: IRB Process

1. Indicate the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process involved with this study. (select one, and provide additional information as necessary)

- This study did not involve human subjects so did not submit to an IRB
- This study involved human subjects and was granted approval by an IRB
Date approval was granted

Name of Institutional Review Board

- This study involved human subjects and was deemed exempt by an IRB
Date exemption was granted

Name of Institutional Review Board

- This study involved human subjects, but IRB review was not sought and/or obtained for this study. Describe the rationale for why the IRB process was not included in the research protocol. *Limit: 250 words*

Step 5: License and Submission Agreement

Please fill out the EDRA License and Submission Agreement form and upload the signed agreement into the system.

Step 6: Additional Content (OPTIONAL)

You have the option to upload additional content to be included in the evaluation of your application. Consider providing such visual content as graphs, charts, illustrations, and/or photographs that are helpful in making your case or describing your study. These may include but are not limited to: a research process flow chart, a matrix or chart of key data reflecting insights acquired, a simple sketch or field photo of the environment studied, etc.

It is highly recommended that you incorporate a brief description of the content and its purpose for inclusion in your application in order to provide context for the panel of Reviewers (e.g., an introductory paragraph and/or captions). (Without such clarifying information, the panel of Reviewers may not be able to easily connect your visual content to your application form answers.) You may also opt to key major points in your application form answers to content within this document, such as "see Figure 2 on the uploaded PDF."

Content limitations:

- Up to two 8.5"x11" pages are allowed.
- The upload must consist of one PDF file up to 5 MB in size.
- Additional content should not be redundant to information provided in the application form.
- Content must be blinded (i.e., submitted without any identifying information).

Step 7: Applicant and Team Information

This section is to be used for administrative purposes and will be excluded from the blind review.

In the online application portal, this question will appear as a table into which you will add information about the Applicant and Study Team Member(s).

- The people being added to this table may already exist in the EDRA database. If this is the case, you will simply have to search for them and add them to the table. If someone does not already exist in the database, you will be prompted to add their information.
- One Applicant is required, and at least one Study Team Member is required.
- If the Applicant is also a Study Team Member, you must select both the "Applicant" and the "Study Team Member" check boxes for this person.
- If more than one Study Team Member is entered, you must list these people in the order they should appear in any publicity produced by EDRA should your study receive CORE recognition.

Step 8: Payment

This step collects payment via credit card using a secure webpage. Note: For the application to be evaluated by the panel of Reviewers, the application fee must be paid in full. Provided information is to be used for administrative purposes and will be excluded from the blind review.

Step 9: Confirmation

The steps completes the application process.