Description of the AACS Social Design Award

The Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS) Social Design Award is bestowed upon a recipient for an implemented project with an outstanding social design methodology.

Rationale of the AACS Social Design Award

AACS promotes a pragmatic, evidence-based, and rational approach to accomplish social change. Thus, AACS sponsors the Social Design Award to recognize outstanding contributions for this purpose and to foster recognition for social design as a field, encourage the sharing of practice methodologies, and advance methodological reflection and peer learning in sociological practice.

The AACS Social Design Award is a means for AACS to implement the major principles of the Association’s mission to advance sociological practice. For more information on AACS’s mission, please visit the AACS website at: http://www.aacsnet.net/mission/

What is Social Design?

Social design is an interdisciplinary activity that looks holistically at the social world and uses theories and methods from all social sciences. Social design is thought of as preparing “blueprints” to change an undesirable social situation into a desirable one. It uses sociological and social science knowledge and approaches to prepare well-thought out plans for action or change.

Specifically, social design is about using social means for organizing a social morphology to achieve goals. Social morphology (forms) include social entities, structures, processes, activities, and situations. For example, designing a volunteer or non-governmental organization (entity) to support the quality of life in a public housing project is considered as social design since the emphasis is on using social means for organizing the social morphology of activities in an entity intended to improve the quality of life in the public housing project. The social design presents a “blueprint” or model for a desired future state of the entity and activity system (or social organism, structure, or process). It is more detailed than a typical planning document that only matches goals, resources, and constraints.

In instances where the aspects of material and social design are intertwined, the AACS Social Design Award Committee will evaluate the explication of the social design portion of the project only. The material design may be considered as a context to understand the project, but it will not be evaluated for its social impact or significance apart from the social design portion.
What is not Social Design?

In contrast, when a material artefact is designed to simply change social entities and processes, it is considered material design, and is outside the scope of the AACS Social Design Award. For example, designing a public housing project, itself, or designing an application for a hand-held device such as a mobile phone or tablet to increase community cohesion, would be considered material artefact design since it is limited to the use of material or electronic artefacts to change social entities or processes for achieving goals.

Which Social Design Projects are Eligible for the AACS Social Design Award?

Projects eligible for the AACS Social Design Award should incorporate a “blueprint for action” or a “plan for change.” This requirement is intended to reward a social design rather than a research project or the research portion of a practice project. A social design project may be a program or program-planning project, an organizational design, a social intervention, a community development project, a social issue project at the community-level from a government agency or sociological practice firm. Additional examples are the design of organizational structures, staffing patterns, activities, and procedures for improving community organization and the quality of life in the community.

Which Projects are not Eligible for the AACS Social Design Award?

Applied research and evaluation projects are not eligible for the AACS Social Design Award. They are not “blueprints for action” or “plans for change,” even when they lead to recommendations for action or change. Research that is commissioned to serve external decision-makers also is not considered social design. Although the research may be a component of the social design project, it is not social design per se – even when it is considered applied or action research.

Eligibility Criteria

- The AACS Social Design Award is open to practitioners from different disciplines and professions. Individuals and firms are eligible to participate and are permitted to submit a social design project.
- Preparing a social design project for the AACS Social Design Award necessitates careful, significant, and extensive preparation. Therefore, candidates who apply for the award are strongly encouraged to “self-nominate” or initiate the process and apply personally.
- All submissions will remain in the competition queue and automatically considered for three successive years, unless withdrawn by the submitting party.
- The recipient of the AACS Social Design Award (solo practitioner or a firm representative) assumes the responsibility to attend the AACS Annual Meeting (conference) and present the project in the time-slot set by the conference Program Committee. NOTE: The 2024 AACS conference is in virtual format and there will be no travel.
Submission Requirements

- The social design project will have been successfully implemented.
- The design methodology should be explicit.
- The social design project should not be a solution for an everyday problem or endeavour. It should be complex, unique, and necessitate sociological thinking. In most cases, the social design project will be implemented at the micro (individual or small group) or meso (community or organizational) level-of-analysis or scale. Macro (institutional or societal) scale projects may be considered if they are well-structured programs designed and implemented by foundations or government agencies.
- Ideally, the social design project will be undertaken by a practicing individual or firm. A practicing academic also may submit a social design project. However, a typical service-learning course project is not eligible as a social design project for the AACS Social Design Award. A large-scale project involving extensive community participation may be considered.

Submission Stages

The submission and adjudication of a social design project occurs in two stages:

First Stage:

The applicant submits of a brief, online submission (300-word abstract) to the Chair of the AACS Social Design Award Committee, describing the social design project and the preliminary action plan or blueprint. Submissions that do not include a preliminary action plan or blueprint will be rejected. The social design award jury (committee) will inform the Chair of the Social Design Committee of its acceptance or rejection of the submission. The Chair will notify the applicant of jury decision no later than two weeks after submission. The jury decision determines the eligibility or ineligibility of the social design project for the second step.

Guidelines for the 300-word abstract:

The AACS Social Design Award Committee recognizes the wide varieties and types of social design projects. Accordingly, all varieties and types will be given due consideration. Applicants who submit a social design project for consideration by the award jury are welcome to provide any or all supportive information deemed relevant for the submission and presentation of the project – in addition to the categories suggested below:

Supportive information:

- Context of the type and/or form of social organization, community, or social situation, etc. The narrative should provide background for the jury’s understanding the environment and contextual factors of the social design project. Please keep this as succinct as possible. One or two sentences are enough.
• **Description** of the type and/or form of the social design project’s scope, goals and objectives. The narrative should provide information that will help the jury understand the parameters of, and the outcomes intended for, the social design project. Please keep this as succinct as possible. One or two sentences are enough.

• **Outline** of the tasks or steps in the social design project. The jury considers this to be the core—and most informative part—of the social design abstract. This information is critical in determining the eligibility of the submission for the next (second) stage of the review process. The narrative should expand on the tasks or steps in the social design project as much as possible within the 300-word abstract. Please use most of the word limits to describe the tasks and the steps.

• **Affirmation** or statement that the social design project was implemented (or at least approved for implementation) by the client or clients. The narrative is statement that the social design project is feasible (not theoretical) in real-world implementation and usage. Please keep this as succinct as possible. One or two sentences are enough.

**Second Stage:**

The applicant submits a three-page overview of the social design project and a diagram of the major design phases and steps. Please see *Figure 1*, below, for an example. Jurors may request a full copy of the social design project, or portions thereof, submitted to the client or clients as permitted by law. For example, a project that utilizes HIPPA patient records, or other data protected under domestic and/or international privacy laws, will be given special consideration. They jury may grant an exemption or condition specific exceptions, as appropriate.

The structure of the three-page overview of the social design project will be similar to the structure of the 300-word abstract but should expand on the supportive information outlined above. Accordingly, most of the three-page overview should describe the project tasks and steps. The three-page overview should include the objective(s) of the tasks or steps, the activities that were used (or planned) for achieving the task or steps, and the outcome(s) of the tasks or steps, along with other pertinent information. Please keep in mind that the jury recognizes this is one possible template and will consider the wide variety and types of social design projects, and categories in other models, as indicated above. Applicants are again welcome to provide any or all supportive information deemed relevant for the submission and presentation of the project. The narrative should be concisely formatted and include sociological considerations and reasoning for the decisions and solutions reached and achieved for each tasks or step.
Figure 1. The Bishop Social Design Process Model. Copyright 2018 by Johanna P. Bishop.

Adjudication

The Social Design Award Committee (jury) shall review all social design projects submitted by applicants and shall bestow awards. There will be first, second, and third place awards, and two honourable mentions.

Submission and Adjudication Timeline

All referenced dates, below, apply to the year of the AACS Annual Meeting (conference) in which the applicant submitted a social design project for eligibility and adjudication of an award by the AACS Social Design Award Committee (jury). Please submit all documents by e-mail to Lubomir Popov at Lspopov@bgsu.edu If you have questions, please call again Lubomir Popov.

- **June 15**: Call for proposals.
- **August 01**: First Stage materials are due.
- **August 15**: The jury will notify applicants about their eligibility for the Second Stage.
- **September 30**: Second Stage materials are due.
- **October 15**: Adjudication. The jury will notify winners of the awards and provide instructions for the conference presentation.

Winners

It is desirable that the winners present their project at the AACS Annual Meeting. Considering that this year the award adjudication comes close to the conference time, we understand that the winners might not be able to attend the conference. This is an exception from our usual practice.
**Proviso**

The AACS Social Design Award Committee reserves the right to withhold bestowing social design awards in any given year if it determines there are not enough quality submissions. Accordingly, there may be years in which social design awards are not presented at an AACS Annual Meeting.

**Submission Address**

This year, please submit your Social Design Award proposal by email to Lubomir Popov at Lspopov@bgsu.edu. If you have questions, please call again Lubomir Popov.