+1RI ADU DESIGN COMPETITION

Executive Office of Housing
State of Rhode Island
Housing Solutions. Thriving Households. Stronger Communities.

AARP COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

Grants to make communities livable for people of all ages
aarp.org/CommunityChallenge

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The State of Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing invites design professionals and students to participate in the +1RI ADU Design Competition. This competition will strive to make Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) development more accessible and affordable for homeowners in our state. Participants will be asked to design an attached or detached ADU for one of three case study sites.

This competition is led by the Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing (EOH) and in partnership with its +1RI ADU Design Competition Steering Committee.

The prize money for the winners of this competition is funded by the AARP Community Challenge Demonstration Grant. Awards made to winning design teams will be made with privately acquired funds and no public dollars will be awarded to Challenge winners.

The state of Rhode Island will hold a non-exclusive, unlimited license to all design plans. These plans will be available for use by the general public.

ADU Design Competition Goals

The goal of this design competition is to create a menu of ready-to-use design plans for Rhode Island homeowners to use when exploring building an ADU on their property. The design submissions should provide a dignified, realistic, and replicable prototype that can address common challenges faced by Rhode Islanders wanting to explore ADU's— including financial and educational barriers to beginning the process of building an ADU.

Submitted designs should adapt to or address varied zoning and land use requirements that will empower homeowners to confidently site the ADU on their unique lot with limited additional design work needed. The end goal is for the chosen designs to be pre-approved or easily approved by building and life safety officials.

This competition encourages design plans that will reduce the cost of ADU design development and streamline the permitting process. EOH will make the selected ADU designs available to the public for no cost. Property owners can select from these options the ADU design that best fits their needs and their property. EOH will also make available to the public a list of parties who submitted designs to this competition in an effort to connect designers and homeowners to help homeowners develop site specific plans.

Another objective of this competition is to aid communities in meeting their *Housing 2030* goals, including the statewide goal of creating 525 ADUs by the end of 2030. This competition will showcase ADU designs that address Rhode Island's housing challenges by reducing construction costs, expanding affordable housing opportunities through creative building and design approaches, and providing accessible, flexible housing solutions that meet the evolving needs of residents across the state. With the passage of RIGL 45-24-37, which allows for by-right ADU use statewide under certain conditions, utilizing this alternative form of housing has never been easier.

ADU Laws in Rhode Island - RIGL 45-24-73

What is an ADU?

An additional (or "accessory") residential living unit on the same lot where the principal use is a legally established single-family dwelling unit or multi family dwelling unit.

An ADU provides complete living accommodations for one or more persons. It may take various forms including but not limited to a detached unit; a unit that is part of an accessory structure, such as a detached garage; or a unit that is part of an expanded or remodeled primary dwelling.

What is a Dwelling Unit?

A structure, or portion of a structure, providing complete living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation, and containing a separate means of ingress and egress.

What size ADU can I build?

A property owner is entitled to build an ADU anywhere in the state in any of the following three circumstances: 1) On an owner-occupied property as a reasonable accommodation for family members with disabilities; 2) on a lot with a total lot area of twenty thousand square feet (20,000 sq. ft.) or more for which the primary use is residential; or 3) where the proposed ADU is located within the existing footprint of the primary structure or existing accessory attached or detached structure and does not expand the footprint of the structure. Some municipalities have laws allowing ADUs in circumstances beyond these.

A municipality may establish a maximum unit size for an ADU, but such limitation must allow, subject to applicable dimensional requirements:

(i) A studio or one-bedroom ADU of at least nine hundred square feet (900 sq. ft), or sixty percent (60%) of the floor area of the principal dwelling, whichever is less; and

(ii) A two (2) bedroom ADU of at least twelve hundred square feet (1,200 sq. ft.), or sixty percent (60%) of the floor area of the principal dwelling, whichever is less.

Are there restrictions on who can live in an ADU?

Yes and no! Municipalities may not restrict ADU's to family members, elderly or disabled renters, or low-income renters, however it's best to check with your local municipality. Owners may not use ADU's for short-term rental.

Can municipal zoning or building ordnances restrict ADU development?

State law supersedes local authority. Any local restrictions would only be permissible if they do not conflict with state law.

Timeline

The ADU Design Competition will follow the timeline below. This timeline is subject to change. Any changes will be publicly announced and updated on EOH website here.

Design Competition Kick-Off Event and Webinar – August 12, 2026

Introduction to competition and application portal open.

Register for webinar here.

Q&A Session – September 9, 2026

Optional online session for applicants to ask questions and get clarification.

Register for webinar here.

Submission Deadline – October 23, 2026

Application portal to close at 11:59 PM.

Notification of awards to submitters – On or about November 30, 2026

Winners will be notified via email and phone.

Final Event and awards –On or about December 11, 2026

Public ceremony and statewide promotion of winning designs and teams.

Winning designs will be posted to the EOH website and press release will be issued.

Eligibility

- Entries may be submitted by individual competitors or by teams of a maximum size of five (5). A firm that has more than five employees may submit an entry but the team that worked on the entry should be limited to five participants.
- Applicants should identify all team members and partners.
- Individuals can be students, architects, designers, builders or contractors duly licensed in their respective profession.
- Professional applicants must be currently licensed/registered or actively working for a licensed architect or licensed/registered contractor who can endorse the submission to ensure strict adherence to state and local building and life safety codes.
- Student entries must be submitted in collaboration with a licensed/registered professional team member or professional mentor to endorse submission products.

Submission Requirements

Submit your digital Design Competition entry online via the EOH application portal here. Review the official guidelines carefully to ensure your submission is complete and eligible. Application portal opens on **August 11, 2026,** at 8:30 AM. All submissions are due on **October 23, 2026,** at 11:59PM. Any submissions emailed to EOH will not be accepted or reviewed by the jury.

For technical assistance, contact support at: EOH.production@housing.ri.gov.

- All entries must conform to 2021 Rhode Island State One- and Two-Family Dwelling Code (RISBC-2 Rhode Island State One and Two Family Dwellings)
- All ADU's should include areas for sleeping, eating/cooking, and no less than one full bathroom
- Designs can be for detached or attached ADUs

All attachments must be anonymous. Design board and individual drawings should not include firm name, graphics, branding, team member names or any contact information. The only identifying information should be used in the application submission checklist and cover sheet. Fill out project over sheet here: Design Application Submission Checklist.

A complete submission will **separately** attach Design Boards, a Highlight Image, Site plan, Floor plans, Elevations, Sections, Wall Section and a Rendering or Axon drawing. **File size of individual drawing PDFs should not exceed 20 MB each. Full deliverable set should not exceed 256MB in total.**

Design deliverables **must include** but are **not limited to**:

1. **Digital Design Boards** – Design boards should communicate the overall vision for the ADU. Boards can be comprised of any combination of required deliverables and any additional deliverables of your choice.
    a) 24"x36" Landscape Orientation, 50MB maximum
    b) PDF format: [team name] _DesignBoard_01
    c) Maximum of 3 pages, full color, drawings may be at any scale
2. **Highlight Image** – Single image that best showcases design submission.
    a) 300 DPI minimum
    b) JPG or PNG format: [team name] _HighlightImage_01
3. **Site Plan** – with appropriate site analysis or assumptions using one or more of the design site examples described in the Design Categories below.
    a) 1" = 50' scale
    b) PDF format: [team name] _SitePlan_01
4. **Floor plan(s)**
    a) ¼" scale
    b) PDF format: [team name] _FloorPlan_01
    c) Label each room and room size, general dimensions, include FFE

5. **Elevations** (min. 2)
    a) ¼" scale
    b) PDF format: [team name] _Elevation_01
    c) Label materials
6. **Sections** (min. 2)
    a) ¼" scale
    b) PDF format: [team name] _Section_01
7. **Wall Section**
    a) ¾" scale
    b) PDF format: [team name] _WallSection_01
    c) Label materials, identify structural system and foundation system
8. **Rendering or axon drawing** (1)
    a) PDF format: [team name] _Rendering/Axon_01

Additional deliverables **must** include:

9. **Project narrative** – must include any necessary code and zoning analysis or assumptions
    a) Max 750 words
    b) .docx or PDF format: [team name] _Narrative_01
10. **Basis of Design** information about structure, building envelope, finishes, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. May be a separate document or included in the Project Narrative.
    a) .docx or PDF format: [team name] _Basis_01
11. **Conceptual Cost Estimate**
    a) .docx, .xlsx or PDF format: [team name] _Financial_01
12. **Competition Submission Agreement**
    a) Download Here
    b) [team name] _Legal_01

To the extent professionally feasible, submissions should aim to be easily transmitted into a permittable drawing set. If competition winning designs require additional design and specification enhancement to result in constriction permit-ready documents, the competition may provide reasonable services to advance their winning design and specifications to construction permit ready design documents.

Design Categories

ADU designs can be attached or detached to the primary dwelling unit on the site.

Designs will need to be sited on **one** of the case-study lots below. ADU designs should illustrate the relationship to the primary dwelling, identified setbacks shown in the dashed line and, if a detached design, should be no less than 10'-0" away from the primary dwelling. Submissions may include additional site features such landscape elements, parking, circulation routes, etc.

Urban – 5,238 sq ft- Urban Site Download

- 15' foot front setback
- 5' side and rear setback

Suburban – 29,655 sq ft - Suburban Site Download

- ADU footprint must be completely behind front wall of primary dwelling
- 10' side and rear setback

Rural – 98,746 sq ft - Rural Site Download

- ADU footprint must be completely behind front wall of primary dwelling
- 25' side setback
- 30' rear setback

Prizes

A jury comprised of architects, builders, and advocates will evaluate designs based on the scoring criteria. Awards will be given to the top overall 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners. Additional awards will be given to two design submissions that demonstrate exceptional consideration for the special conditions of accessible and innovative ADU's. In addition to these awards, all design submissions will be promoted and highlighted on the Executive Office of Housing's website and at public events related to the +1RI ADU Design Competition.

1st place - $10,000.00

2nd place - $6,000.00

3rd place - $ 4,000.00

Best Accessible ADU - $3,000

Most Innovative ADU - $2,000 (could be innovation of materials, construction method, sustainability, etc.)

Scoring

Design Submissions will be scored on a scale of 100 points. Designs will be evaluated by the following 6 criteria:

Architectural Concept (20%): Design submission showcases an ADU design that is visually captivating, contextual to both its site and adjacent structure, appropriate in scale and has a strong core concept. The submissions should be highly intentional in their design as it relates to small-scale living. The concept is driven by a well written project narrative that thoughtfully describes the big moves, aesthetic intent and how this design can contribute to the landscape of ADU's in Rhode Island.

Functionality and Spatial Planning (20%): Design submission demonstrates effective and thoughtful interior and exterior layouts that consider the prime user and the general human experience in the space. The floor plans support the rhythm of daily life and volumetric efficiency.

Accessibility and Usability (20%): Design submission seamlessly addresses concepts of universal design and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility by supporting occupants of all ages, sizes, and physical abilities across every stage of life. These designs should enhance independence and safety for one user with accessibility needs while simultaneously improving daily convenience and comfort for anyone living or visiting the ADU. Designs address either ADA Type A, B or C. (Type A -20pts, Type B- 15 pts, Type C-12pts, accessible elements up to 10 pts)

Sustainability and Performance Design (15%): Design submissions should deliver a high-performing, climate-resisting building envelope that operates with minimal energy demand. This design should leverage the natural efficiency of a smaller ADU with innovative building science techniques, passive and active climate control and exceptional material selections.

Feasibility, Replicability and Market Relevance (15%): Design submissions should be architecturally striking and easily translated into a scalable, viable housing solution. Designs should be grounded in economic reality with the ability to be built within typical municipal constraints, budget expectations, and current supply chain capabilities. Designs should be able to address more than one site and provide a solution that can be used across the state in different site contexts. Feasibility includes compliance with State Building Code for single family residential.

Presentation materials (10%): Design submission should communicate its vision clearly, persuasively, and beautifully to judges, stakeholders, and the broader public. Design submission materials will be judged on its graphic rigor, visual clarity, and compelling narrative alignment.

*Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any materials, postings, or other documents related to the +1RI ADU design competition, or any statements made, express or implied by an employee, representative, agent or spokesperson for or on behalf of the EOH or the state of Rhode Island, the EOH reserves the right to terminate at any time the +1RI ADU design competition or not award any submissions a winning position in EOH's sole and absolute discretion.

Webinar and Q&A Session

Design Competition Kick-Off Event and Webinar – August 12, 2026 at 1:00 PM EST.

Introduction to competition and application portal officially open.

Register for webinar here.

Q&A Session – September 9, 2026 at 11:00 AM EST.

Optional online session for design teams to ask questions and get clarification.

Register for webinar here.

Please email additional questions to: EOH.production@housing.ri.gov

Legal

Applicants are directed to the +1 RI ADU Design Competition Submission Agreement which must be submitted with each applicant's design submission in order for such design submission to be considered.