

African American Design Nexus

Explore the Intersection of Design, Identity and Practice



The Hill District Greenprint project, by Hood Design Studio, leverages the unique ecological and industrial landscape of the Hill District of Pittsburgh, PA, to combat the historical disinvestment and abandonment of the community.

Harvard University's Graduate School of Design

The Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD) has a rich legacy of design leadership and innovation, pushing the frontiers of knowledge and research across all design disciplines for more than 80 years. As the largest and most comprehensive design school worldwide, the GSD offers programs in architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning and design, design studies, and design engineering. And as a global leader in each of these fields, the GSD is redefining design as a critical response to increasingly complex issues faced by people and cities and ecologies, across the United States and around the world.

The GSD's method of design education involves transdisciplinary collaboration across departments, masters and PhD degree programs and the universities' schools. It is through this cross-practice that the GSD fosters a deep connection between design and other academic fields which are reflected in the joint degree programs with the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and the Harvard Law School.

The GSD is educating leaders in design, research and scholarship, who will directly impact and improve the built environment to create a resilient, just and beautiful world, now and in the future.

The African American Design Nexus

It is no secret that the design industry faces a problem of representation. Centuries of racial oppression and inequality in the United States of America have created barriers to entry for everyone outside of the white male archetype. Aspiring black designers have felt this discrimination in very real ways.

There is no better moment than *now*, to use our Harvard GSD platform to change this oppression and move in a new direction. We need your help.

The African American Design Nexus seeks to promote the presence of African Americans in the design industry, showcase their craft, explore different geographies of design practice, and inspire change within design institutions to participate in adopting new approaches to elevate black designers. The Design Nexus emerged from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design's inaugural Black in Design Conference where Dana McKinney MArch '17, MUP '17, the President of the GSD's African American Student Union and other students discussed ways of connecting and representing black designers. Dana created a list of over 2,000 African and African American designers that is a growing volume of work the Design Nexus is using to populate its content. When renowned architect Phil Freelon and Dean Mohsen Mostafavi discussed the potential for housing this project at the GSD, the idea of the African American Design Nexus was born.

The African American Design Nexus was developed by the Frances Loeb Library in collaboration with the GSD's African American Student Union. As an initiative housed in the library, this project is about showcasing black designers as well as providing a resource to be accessed and used by everyone. This underscores the mission of creating a "nexus" of individuals and institutions that are pursuing a pattern break in design education and practice.

The GSD is seeking visionary partners to help build and enrich the African American Design Nexus program. As the scope of the world explored and compiled becomes wider, the cost of maintaining and expanding this effort requires additional partners. By making a gift to the Design Nexus Fund, you support the ongoing effort of Harvard and partner design schools to maintain the robust archive and contributions of African American designers. Our goal is to feature craft, explore different geographies of design practice, and inspire change within design institutions to participate in adopting new approaches to elevate black designers and enrich the experience and enhance vision for all of our students. We plan to promote ideas, energy, and deliverables that will inform the design industry culture, designs solutions for complex problems and impact society in the years to come.

It is vital for our shared future that these diverse backgrounds and experiences for our practitioners, scholars, and students converge to create solutions that link science and humanities, landscape and ecology, planning and policy, and art and architecture to create diverse inclusive opportunities for innovation and progress.

Our Vision

We believe that the work of black designers is a volume of work that has never been more important in this country's history. At a time of unprecedented inequality and environmental crisis, the designers of our homes, cities, landscapes, public art, fashion, music, movies, and other media have a crucial role in shaping the future.

Our Goal

We must create a future that reflects the diversity of the world's experiences, voices and perspectives. The AADN is the hub where new paradigms for design practice and education will emerge.

Named and Endowed Program \$2.5M

Program Support:

Content Collection and Curation..... \$25K annually

- Includes stipends for student support and engagement
- Hardware and software required for podcasts and other forms of interviews
- Software tools for GIS and visualization creation
- Ongoing website maintenance for aadn.gsd.harvard.edu
- Copyright permission fees that may be required

Program Support and Expansion..... \$25K annually

- Provides programming support that engages a larger audience
- Potential meetings between AADN team members and other collaborating institutions and organizations
- Provides web support for aadn.gsd.harvard.edu

Project Manager..... \$100K annually

- Oversee & Coordinate Logistics for Project Coordinators
- Provide Executive Guidance to Project Coordinators
- Be a supportive & creative partner to the Project Coordinators

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