

Project Name Center in the SquareLocation Roanoke, Virginia

## 1. Describe briefly the project's design and implementation.

Center in the Square (Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences) is the exciting cultural complex in Roanoke's historic downtown farmers' market. Five independent cultural organizations thrive in a restored 1914 warehouse:

- Art Museum of Western Virginia
- The Arts Council of the Blue Ridge
- Mill Mountain Theatre
- Roanoke Valley History Museum
- Science Museum of Western Virginia and Hopkins Planetarium

Each of the organizations has its own budget and its own board. Center in the Square provides rent-free space, utilities, maintenance, security, custodial service, and other benefits. Center was conceived in order to provide the community with accessibility to major arts and cultural organizations, and in so doing, to transform a dying urban area into a vital entertainment, shopping and tourist center. The facility opened in 1983.

The idea originated as early as 1976, when a business league was formed to promote business growth in downtown Roanoke and urban revitalization. This group of prominent citizens formed a new group, the Central Roanoke Development Foundation, and the major outgrowth of this group was *Design '79* (see Appendix). Center in the Square was the resulting centerpiece -- the 'jewel in the crown of *Design '79*.' In a storefront office in a very visible and much-publicized window on Roanoke's busiest street, *Design '79* positioned an architect drawing plans for possible downtown improvements. Citizens were encouraged to observe and offer suggestions. Four months of call-in television broadcasts created a public wish-list of 3600 ideas, and more than 1200 were used.

## 2. What local urban issues did this project address? What were its goals? Were there issues that, in your judgement, might have been addressed but were not?

The issues included:

- the renewal and transformation of a "lost," crime-ridden urban area
- the adaptive reuse and preservation of abandoned but historic buildings
- the input of the local population
- the cooperation of numerous public and private groups
- easy, safe accessibility to arts and cultural organizations, all in need of new homes for one reason or another

The Science Museum operated in an abandoned schoolhouse in a flood-prone area. Mill Mountain Theatre's original home had burned; the Art Museum was inaccessible to large segments of the population. The local Historical Society occupied a storefront, and The Arts Council moved from one donated office to another. By moving into the restored 1914 warehouse in the center of the market area, all five organizations have flourished in their new location, as has the surrounding historic market area and downtown Roanoke. Had we anticipated the extent of our popularity, we would have planned a larger facility complete with a larger parking garage with adequate deck clearance for the many visiting buses.

## 3. Describe the financing of the project. Do you think it could be replicated?

Partnerships had to be forged with individuals, regional governments, state governments, regional businesses, the Federal government and the five organizations selected to occupy the cultural and educational complex. The cost for the original Center in the Square building was \$7,500,000, including all land, construction, architects, engineers and consultant fees. At the beginning of the project, pledges were quickly obtained for \$4,000,000 from the private sector and a State of Virginia grant of \$2,600,000 to purchase and remodel the McGuire building. The Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences entered into a Trust Indenture with First National Exchange Bank (actually a consortium of six banks and a life insurance company, all headquartered in Roanoke), whereby \$2.5 million in bonds were issued to complete construction on the project. The property, state grant money and pledge commitments were pledged as security for the bonds. The General Assembly exempted all non-profit real estate and personal property of the Foundation, the Center and its resident organizations from local taxation. All payments on the bonds were paid off in 1989, three years ahead of schedule. In 1988, the Foundation obtained donations and pledges of more than \$3,000,000 to purchase and remodel an adjoining building built in 1918. The remodeling of that building (now called Center on Church) and a large portion of the original building was completed in November 1990. The cost of this project (\$3,075,000) was paid from pledges, one of which was a state grant of \$1,500,000. This project is absolutely replicable, with individual situations and locations requiring careful study. Center in the Square's administration receives calls monthly from cities across the country inquiring about its success.

## 4. Why does the project merit the Ruby Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment?

*Virginia Town and City Magazine* (October 1996) noted that "Roanoke...was one of the first downtown areas in the nation where leaders recognized the importance of preserving heritage, forming public/private partnerships and involving citizens in charting the future." Center in the Square was one of the wonderful results; it is truly an outstanding example of urban excellence. Center in the Square merits the award because it has not only served to truly create excellence in the urban environment, but also it has virtually recreated the heart of our city, providing a happy meeting place for all cultures, classes, and races. The idea of housing multiple organizations under one roof, centralizing support services, utilizing a sound older structure and minimizing overhead makes this idea practical and sustainable for any community, anywhere. Thirteen years after its opening, Center in the Square continues to represent an outstanding public/private partnership that is a cost-effective solution for bringing educational opportunities, economic development, and added quality of life to a community. Center in the Square is a perfect example of community, government, and business working together for excellence.

**PROJECT PROFILE**

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Project Name Center in the Square Location One Market Square  
Roanoke, Virginia 24011

Owner Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences

Project Use(s) Cultural center housing the Art Museum of Western Virginia, Mill  
Mountain Theatre, Rke. Valley History Museum, Science Museum of  
Western VA, and The Arts Council of the Blue Ridge

Project Size 150,000 square feet Total Development Cost \$10,575,000

Annual Operating Budget (if appropriate) \$1,093,221.00

Date Initiated 1979 Percent Completed, December 1, 1996 100%

Projected Completion Date (if appropriate)  
(Attach, if you wish, a list of relevant project dates)

**Application submitted by:**

Name Carolyn G. Nolan Title Grants Officer

Organization Center in the Square

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**Key Participants (Attach an additional sheet if needed)**

Organization	Key Person	Telephone
■ Public Agencies <u>City of Roanoke</u>	<u>City Manager W. Robert Herbert</u>	<u>(540)981-2333</u>
■ Developer <u>Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences</u>	<u>James C. Sears, Ed.D.</u>	<u>(540)342-5701</u>
■ Professional consultants:		
Architect <u>Hayes, Seay, Mattern &amp; Mattern</u>	<u>Timm Jamieson</u>	<u>(540)857-3112</u>
Landscape architect <u>N/A</u>		
Urban designer		
Planner <u>Hayes, Seay, Mattern &amp; Mattern</u>	<u>Timm Jamieson</u>	<u>(540)857-3112</u>
Lawyer <u>The Honorable William B. Hopkins, Sr.</u>		<u>(540)982-1000</u>
Other <u>Contractor - J.M. Turner &amp; Company</u>	<u>Jay Turner, Jr.</u>	<u>(540)343-6749</u>
■ Community group(s) <u>Downtown Roanoke, Inc.; Design "79; Roanoke Area Market Assoc. Elfun Society, The Athenian Society for the Arts and Sciences, The Regional Partnership, Central Roanoke Development Foundation, City of Roanoke Planning Commission, Roanoke Chamber of Commerce</u>		
■ Sponsor <u>Western Virginia for the Arts and Sciences</u>		

Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award in Urban Excellence. (Check all that apply)

mailing       media       previous RBA entrant       other

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Signature Carolyn G. Nolan, Grants Officer