

# ABSTRACT

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Please answer questions in space provided. Applicants should feel free to use photocopies of the application forms if needed. If possible, answers to all questions should be typed or written directly on the forms. If the forms are not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds, and the length of each answer should be limited to the area provided on the original form.

Project Name **The Community Chalkboard & Podium: An Interactive Monument to Free Expression**

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Address **City Hall Plaza**

City/State/ZIP **Charlottesville, Virginia**

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1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

The Community Chalkboard and Podium are a tangible, enduring and interactive embodiment of the concept of free expression. Located directly in front of Charlottesville's City Hall and beside the city's amphitheater, the monument consists primarily of a two-sided wall of Buckingham slate, approximately 54 feet long (108' of writing space) by 7.5 feet high, on which members of the public may express their views, in chalk, on any subject they choose.

In addition, the monument's design includes a podium intended to serve as a contemporary soapbox from which individuals may address both planned and impromptu public gatherings. This has become the place of choice for political rallies and demonstrations for the city.

The primary goals of the project were to provide the public with a place where they could actively engage their right to free expression in a multitude of forms while enlivening a formerly under-utilized area of downtown Charlottesville. It was important that this monument was intellectually accessible to all people and that it did not "self-select" a certain demographic of users. This has proven to be the case. It is important to note that this project was conceived as a component of the extension of the existing pedestrian Mall and as an important companion piece to an expanded downtown outdoor concert venue.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

The first of its kind in the public realm of the U.S, this interactive, democratic and uncensored monument to the first amendment provides a venue for the practice of the right to free expression on a daily basis. It is operated in an open-ended manner that does not segregate or discriminate on any level. People of all walks of life, every economic stratum, all political affiliations, all races, religions and sexual orientations, all levels of education and of every age actively engage the monument. People express themselves with chalk words and images and utilize the podium to present their opinions to the public. The project is purposefully confrontational to embody and express the primary intention of the first amendment to protect our right to petition our elected officials and to act as an additional check in the checks and balance system. It has become a destination for both the community and for people from outside of the region and has become the place of choice for political demonstrations, art installations and ad hoc oration. Expressions of political opinions, love and hatred, tolerance and prejudice, religious faith and skepticism, worries, hopes and resolutions for the future sit side by side on the wall.

It creates a unique place for community involvement that is inherently dynamic and flexible. In the words of one downtown resident, "it has a gravitational pull, you feel compelled to write something as you pass by and to peruse what others have written, which is sometimes funny, sometimes profound and sometimes offensive, but always free".