

MOONLIGHT BAY

Residency Program

Program Guidelines & Application Process

What is Moonlight Bay?

Moonlight Bay is SCD's dedicated short-term residency space — a room you can genuinely take over and make your own. Whether you're building an immersive installation, developing a body of work, running a pop-up brand experience, or deep in a creative sprint, this is a place where that kind of focused, committed energy belongs.

We're not just giving you a room. We're genuinely interested in what you're making — we'll help promote it, connect you with people who should know about it, and make sure your time here actually works.

Moonlight Bay residencies have been home to a VR installation that turned star data from Antarctica into a collaborative performance of light and sound. They've held a multigenerational exploration of Black life at Illinois, complete with a front porch, a family archive, and a portrait studio. They've hosted pop-up brand experiences built by student advertising agencies and escape rooms designed to pull people into a world entirely of someone else's making.

Different projects, same spirit: something worth showing up for. That's what we're looking for.

This isn't a room booking.

Anyone can book a conference room. A residency is different.

When you take up residence in Moonlight Bay, we learn about your work, we promote it, we check in on you, and we connect you to the community here. In exchange, we ask that you show up with real intention — and share something with the people in this building while you're here.

What We're Looking For

Our guiding question is pretty simple: would this be something interesting to encounter if you were walking through the building? Does it feel alive? Does it invite people in?

Moonlight Bay residencies don't need to be about design — but they should feel like they belong in a place that gets excited about creativity, human experience, and ideas that matter. Here are some of the things that have defined the residencies we're most proud of:

→ **A clear intention.** There's something at stake.

You have a project. You know what you're going to do with the space. You might not have every answer yet — that's fine — but you can tell us what you're chasing.

→ **An experience, not just a workspace.** It invites people in.

The best residencies here have been ones where something was happening — you could feel it when you walked by. An open studio, a participatory moment, a work in progress that pulls people into the conversation. This is a building full of curious people, and we love when residents take advantage of that.

→ **A human dimension.** It connects to people, community, or culture.

This doesn't mean your work has to be social impact-oriented or activist in nature. It just means there's a person — or many people — somewhere in what you're making. Craft, memory, play, storytelling, criticism, celebration: all of this counts.

→ **Real commitment.** You're going to see it through.

We've had residents who were accepted, then never quite materialized. We want to build a program where a Moonlight Bay residency means something. That starts with applicants who are actually ready to go.

What's not a fit

- Storage, informal hangout space, or anything without a defined project
- Commercial ventures with no educational or community dimension
- Applicants who can't describe what they'll actually be doing
- Work that conflicts with university policy or the values of SCD

Who Can Apply

We welcome applications from a wide range of people and groups — the common thread is intentional, community-connected work, not a particular discipline or credential.

Faculty & researchers	Creative projects, research in progress, interdisciplinary experiments, course-connected studios
Graduate & undergrad students	Independent or supervised projects with real substance and a clear timeline
RSOs (Registered Student Organizations)	Student groups are especially encouraged to apply. If your RSO has a project, showcase, experience, or activation that would thrive in a dedicated space — this is for you.
External artists & practitioners	Artists, designers, educators, researchers with a connection to the university or to the community here
Community partners & organizations	Non-profits, civic groups, and community-based orgs doing work that resonates with SCD's values
Staff & program teams	SCD-adjacent projects, programming ideas, or community-facing work that needs dedicated space and support

Residency Types

We offer three formats, depending on what your project needs:

Micro Residency · 2–5 days

Great for visiting practitioners, focused sprints, intensive workshops, or short-window activations. Lighter community engagement requirement — a brief talk, open work session, or informal walkthrough works well.

Standard Residency · 1–3 weeks

Our main format. Room to develop, build, and share something. Comes with the expectation of at least one community-facing moment during your stay.

Extended Residency · 3–8 weeks

For longer-arc projects that benefit from a sustained presence. These are more selective — we'll want a stronger plan for what engagement and documentation looks like over time.

A few scheduling things to know

- We recommend applying 4–6 weeks before your desired start date — earlier is better.
- We run residencies across Fall, Spring, and Summer terms.
- All accepted residencies need a confirmed start date and a real plan. We don't hold the space for maybes.
- Multiple residencies from the same applicant within a year require extra context.

Past Residents

Here's a sense of the range of work that has called Moonlight Bay home:

Artist Residency · 4 weeks

Jameel Bridgewater — Have a Seat, Take a Seat

Chicago-based artist Jameel Bridgewater transformed Moonlight Bay into a living archive and gathering space — part front porch, part family museum, part portrait studio. Drawing on the University's archives and his own family history, Jameel's installation explored the multi-generational experience of Black students at Illinois, from his grandmother's 1937 graduation to students on campus today. He invited DJs, drew crowds, photographed every Black student who came through, and created a space that felt like it belonged to the community as much as it did to him. Covered by the News-Gazette; an interview and full gallery are on the SCD site.

[Artist residency](#) · [Community & identity](#) · [Archival research](#) · [Installation](#) · [Standard residency](#)

Visiting Researcher Residency · 1 week

Ruth West — INSTRUMENT | One Antarctic Night

Ruth West, director of the xREZ Art + Science Lab at University of North Texas, brought her multiplayer VR installation to Moonlight Bay for a week-long residency. INSTRUMENT | One Antarctic Night turns 160,000-year-old starlight captured by telescopes at the South Pole into a collaborative sound and light performance — where players appear as trails of light and compose music together with their movements. Ruth gave a public lecture on designing VR experiences for everyone in the room (not just the people in headsets), followed by a public installation experience open to the full building. Sponsored by the NEA, the UI iSchool, and the IMMERSE Center.

[VR installation](#) · [Art + science](#) · [Data visualization](#) · [Visiting practitioner](#) · [Micro residency](#)

RSO Residency · 1-2 weeks · Spring semester

American Advertising Federation — AAF Build-It Agency Pop-Up Brand Experience

AAF at Illinois' student advertising agency uses Moonlight Bay each spring to build an immersive pop-up experience around a brand they've developed from the ground up. The space becomes a fully realized brand world — visitors walk into something designed, considered, and surprising. It's a showcase of student work that invites the whole building to participate in what they've made. The connection to experience design and to the idea that a brand is something felt, not just seen, is a perfect fit for SCD.

[RSO](#) · [Advertising & branding](#) · [Immersive experience](#) · [Student showcase](#) · [Standard residency](#)

Experiential Design · Varies

Escape Rooms & Immersive Experiences

Moonlight Bay has also hosted a number of escape rooms and similar immersive experience designs — projects where the entire room is the medium. These have ranged from fully realized puzzle environments to narrative-driven spaces that draw visitors in and ask them to interact. When a team wants to test and share a designed experience with a real audience, the space is ideal.

Immersive design · Experience design · Game design · Student project · Micro or standard residency

What We Provide

An accepted residency comes with real support — not just access to a room.

Dedicated space	The room is yours for the residency period to use how your project needs
Promotion	Feature on the SCD website, social channels, and internal comms — we'll make sure people know you're here
A dedicated contact	One person on our team who knows your project and is available before, during, and after
Documentation support	Help with photography or a written summary of your residency for our archive and yours
Community connections	Introductions to relevant faculty, students, staff, or SCD programs where it makes sense
Building resources	Access to shared tools, printing, and lab spaces (subject to availability and training requirements)

What We Ask in Return

A residency is a two-way thing. Here's what we're counting on from you:

- Show up with a real project. Day one, you're ready to go.
- Tell us when things change. Life happens — just communicate early, not after.
- Do at least one community-facing thing. Open studio, talk, walkthrough, workshop — we'll figure out what makes sense for your work.
- Send us your promo materials at least 10 days before you start. Bio, project description, an image. We'll take it from there.
- Fill out a brief reflection within two weeks of finishing. What happened? What surprised you? We use this to build the archive and improve the program.
- Leave the space how you found it.

Focus Areas

You don't have to check these boxes — they're more like a constellation of things that feel alive at SCD. Work that touches multiple of these areas is especially welcome.

- Creative and artistic practice with a public or participatory dimension
- Experiential and immersive design — spaces and environments that do something to you
- Community-rooted work: history, identity, place, belonging
- Social impact and equity-centered projects
- Research and making that cross disciplinary lines
- Education, pedagogy, and the design of learning experiences
- Technology and its relationship to how people live and feel
- Student organization work with a showcase, activation, or experience dimension

HOW TO APPLY

The Application Process

Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, with windows aligned to each academic term. We recommend applying at least 4–6 weeks before your ideal start date — not because we're slow, but because we want to do your residency right.

1	Complete the Moonlight Bay Residency Application (all sections)
2	Submit supporting materials: bio, project image(s), and any relevant links
3	The Programming Committee reviews your application — typically within 2 weeks
4	Shortlisted applicants may be invited for a quick conversation (30 min, your choice of format)
5	Decision communicated; accepted residents move into onboarding and scheduling

Application Link:

<https://airtable.com/appHIHMLGiR6NQcUR/pagDSTR4vsikzxH50/form>

Review Criteria

Applications are scored using the rubric below. But numbers aren't the whole story — the committee thinks holistically about the mix of residencies each term, balance across disciplines and applicant types, and what the space can actually support.

Criterion	Points	What we're looking for
Clarity of intent	0–20	<i>You have a project, a plan, and a sense of what you're making. Day one, you're ready.</i>
Connection to SCD values	0–20	<i>Your work connects to human experience, community, creativity, and/or making things that matter — broadly construed.</i>
Community engagement plan	0–20	<i>There's a real, specific plan for sharing your work with the building. Not vague. Not theoretical.</i>

Readiness	0-15	<i>You have what you need to execute. Materials, collaborators, and a realistic timeline are in place.</i>
Distinctiveness	0-15	<i>Something about this project is unexpected, surprising, or particularly compelling for this space.</i>
Feasibility & fit	0-10	<i>The ask — timing, duration, resource needs — is realistic and appropriate.</i>
TOTAL	100	

Heads up on incomplete applications

If you don't tell us what you're making, what your community engagement plan is, or if you haven't attached any supporting materials, we can't do much with it.

Not sure if your project is a fit? Reach out before applying — a short conversation is way better than an application that goes nowhere.

Timeline at a Glance

Apply	Rolling; 4–6 weeks before your desired start date is the sweet spot
Initial review	2 weeks from submission
Conversations (if needed)	Within 1 week of initial review
Decision	Within 3 weeks of submission
Onboarding call	At least 2 weeks before your residency starts
Pre-residency check-in	1 week out — confirm logistics, finalize community event, submit promo materials
During residency	Your program contact checks in throughout
Post-residency reflection	Due within 2 weeks of your last day

After Your Residency

The end of your residency isn't the end of the relationship. Within two weeks of wrapping up, we'll ask for:

- A short reflection (250–500 words) — what you made, what surprised you, what you'd want future residents to know
- Any documentation you're willing to share: photos, writing, video, data — for our archive and, with your permission, for public promotion
- Optional: joining a future panel, open studio, or community event as a past resident

We're building an archive of everything that's happened in this room — because the history of a space is part of what makes it worth being in.