

CREATE ✦ CONNECT

VENDING MACHINE

Vending Machine Handbook

Details and Project Scope

Created by 2024–2026 AMC Transformative Creativity Fellow Sara Heston



Message from Project Creator, Sara Heston

Hello! If you're reading this, it likely means that you're interested in learning about the details of the Create + Connect Vending Machine, or you're planning to take hold of the reins and begin making your own improvements for the next rendition of this project. Either way, welcome!

In this Handbook, I have written all the little details of this project during its two-year design period. This includes things like machine specifications, details about how submissions work, submission portal details, and more. Please feel free to deep dive into whatever you're interested in learning more about.

This machine has come a long way from its first moments of intention to support the creative students at Robert Morris University to becoming a full-blown movement that engages all creatives, not just students, but anyone affiliated with RMU, to have a new and unique platform for networking with the general public.

Before I let you get into it, I just want to note that I have spent the majority of the design project perfecting the usability on all ends of the project. This includes users who simply insert coins to use the machine and receive a submission, those who submit their art to the machine, as well as anyone who supports the machine by maintaining stock and handling online content. If you're looking to support the machine and start making improvements and changes, thank you! I hope the content of this handbook carries you through the process, helps the next iterations happen swiftly, and creates an enjoyable experience for you.

Thank you, and enjoy!

Sara Heston



Project Founder, Sara Heston, with the Create + Connect Vending Machine at the Fall 2025 Senior Show/Gold Show at the Wheatley Center Gallery.

*** Photo taken by Sara Krim, 2025***

Table of Contents

Message from Project Creator, Sara Heston.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Artist Statement.....	5
Side view of the Vending Machine shows the new iridescent vinyl stickers that were recently applied. This is how the machine currently looks - it is covered on all sides, even the bottom!....	6
Mission and Values.....	7
Acknowledgements and Thanks:.....	9
How is the Machine Funded? (AMC).....	9
A Day as the Machine Manager.....	10
Basic Tasks for Stocking the Machine.....	10
Specifications of the Vending Machine.....	11
Machine Model.....	11
Capacity.....	11
Card Size Requirements.....	11
Physical Dimensions.....	11
Head Unit Only.....	11
Overall (with stand).....	11
Machine Contents List and Details.....	12
Trading Card (Required).....	12
Stickers (Optional).....	13
Business Cards (Optional).....	13
Goodies (Optional).....	14
Sticker Creation Process.....	15
What You Need.....	15
Step-by-Step Process.....	15
Machine Jams and Troubleshooting.....	16
The Two Keys.....	16
Common Issues and How to Handle Them.....	16
The Push Mechanic is Stiff.....	16
A Slot is Jammed.....	16
The Coin Slot is Stuck or Blocked.....	16
A Slot is Completely Empty.....	16
Routine Maintenance Checklist.....	17
The Technology Behind the Submission Portal.....	17
The Submission Portal.....	17
Google Drive Integration via Apps Script.....	17
Submission Numbering.....	18
The Print Sheet System.....	18
Submission Portal Design: Transparency and Process.....	19
Claude AI as a Tool: How It Was Really Used.....	19

The Setup.....	19
What Claude Did.....	20
What Sara Did.....	20
Moments Where Human Judgment Was Irreplaceable.....	20
Claude Makes Mistakes: That Is Normal.....	21
What This Means for Using AI as a Tool.....	21
Updating the Submission Portal on WordPress.....	22
How the Portal Is Hosted.....	22
Step-by-Step: Updating the Portal File.....	22
Step 1: Get the New Portal File.....	22
Step 2: Log In to DreamHost.....	22
Step 3: Navigate to the Public Files.....	22
Step 4: Upload the New File.....	23
Step 5: Test the Live Portal.....	23
Updating the Link in WordPress (if needed).....	23
Troubleshooting.....	23
The Page Shows an Error or Looks Broken.....	23
Submissions Are Not Appearing in Google Drive.....	24
The Old Version Is Still Showing.....	24
Guidelines and Removal Policies.....	24
Content Guidelines.....	24
AI Art Policy.....	25
Copyright.....	25
The Review Process.....	25
Removal Policy: Artist Control.....	25
Manager-Initiated Removal.....	25
Future Plans.....	26
Transition to the Design Network.....	26
Growing the Team.....	26
The Gallery Page.....	27
Social Media.....	27
Expanding Beyond RMU.....	27
The Coin Dispenser.....	27
The Information Panel.....	27
Panel Specifications.....	27
What Is on the Panel.....	28
How to Update or Reprint the Panel.....	28
Logo and Graphics.....	29
Logo Origin.....	29
Brand Colors.....	29
File Formats and Asset Storage.....	30

Artist Statement

The Create + Connect Vending Machine was created to solve the issue many creative students have when it comes to networking while in undergrad. Many students have trouble socially getting out to meet with workers in the industries they are pursuing, and often have difficulty sharing the work they have created that proves they have the skills and talents to get into the industry. With this difficulty, on top of finding appropriate times to share their work, many students fail to properly network until they are usually seniors, leading to rushing into networking at a transitional period, rather than gradually, where they may make connections more naturally.

The vending machine helps relieve some of the tension many students have by creating a curated space where they can comfortably create "trading cards" that showcase one of their chosen art pieces (of any medium). Students can also design other things that can promote the process of creating personal branding, such as creating business cards or stickers.

The vending machine is a helpful tool that not only gives support to networking for free, but anyone can use the submission portal to design a trading card and other items, regardless of their level of understanding of design principles.

Networking can be a challenging task for many people. Still, with a little help, anyone can create a visually stunning trading card that contains all the information someone would need to follow, contact, and connect with the artist, thus creating and connecting with all the convenience, just from the insertion of a token and a push of a button!



Project founder (Middle) Sara Heston, speaking to fellow Media Arts Students, Evelyn Faber (Left) and Kelsey Vanderhoof (Right) about the machine and the process of submitting.

Photo taken by Sara Krim 2025

What is Create + Connect?

The Create + Connect Vending Machine is a Tattoo/Sticker Vending Machine made out of steel and plexiglass. The machine stands roughly three and a half feet tall and contains a spread of artistic materials from anyone affiliated with Robert Morris University. These materials can

include a trading card with the artist's work on the front, the artist's social media and information on the back, an artist-designed sticker, and business cards.

The machine lives inside the Wheatley Center at Robert Morris University and is used with custom 3D-printed tokens that work only for this machine. The machine is free to use for all, and submitting to the machine is free.

The vending machine was created with scholarship support from the Academic Media Center. In winning this scholarship, Sara Heston was first the Experience Design Scholar in the fall of 2024, and then by spring of 2025, she was awarded a continuation scholarship and became the 2025–2026 Transformative Creativity Fellow, which permitted more funding.

The Create + Connect Vending Machine was created to combat the issue many creative students have with networking comfortably. As a whole, Media Arts students depend on networking to secure jobs and make lifelong connections with industry professionals, which will open new doors for them. Besides the concern for Media Arts students, networking for any creatives on campus, even if just for fun, is tedious, and often, many do not participate in purposeful networking until they are seniors or looking for opportunities.



Side view of the Vending Machine shows the new iridescent vinyl stickers that were recently applied. This is how the machine currently looks - it is covered on all sides, even the bottom!

Mission and Values

The Create + Connect Vending Machine pledges to allow ANYONE affiliated with Robert Morris University to use the machine for creating a submission. And ANYONE, regardless of affiliation with RMU, can use a token on the machine and receive a submission created by an artist. We pledge to be respectful of artistic voice and accept ANY art form, including but not limited to traditional art, digital, cinematography, writing, and photography.

The Create + Connect Vending Machine does NOT permit the use of AI from a generative standpoint. Though the submission portal was created using Claude AI, it was used as a tool and does not have the appearance of AI-generated content. What we do not accept is using a generative image tool like Midjourney, DALL-E, or Adobe Firefly to create an image and then submitting it as your artwork. If the core creative vision of your piece came from a text prompt rather than from you as an artist, it does not belong in this machine.

Create + Connect is about real artists sharing real work to make real connections. Uploading a generated image is not art; it's knowing how to type a prompt. This platform is meant to help you stand out and gain traction, and that means what's in the machine has to actually be yours.

The Create + Connect Vending Machine also does NOT have an acceptance/rejection process when users submit to the machine. Unless your art is AI-generated or contains lewd content such as nudity, drug use, or harmful material, it will be accepted into the machine. If it is declined for any reason, we will email the user and have that conversation.



The machine in the Wheatley Gallery, set up for the Fall 2025 Senior Show/Gold Show, the machine contained 50 rare holographic stickers in honor of the show, along with other stickers.

Acknowledgements and Thanks:

Before we get into the information about the Create + Connect Vending Machine, I, Sara Heston, just want to take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate those who have helped me get to this point. I feel confident that I will leave RMU knowing that the Machine can go to good hands, and that future users across all parts of the machine can utilize it as a tool and as a stepping stone towards something bigger.

First, I want to thank Dr. Tim Jones for his mentorship and support all the way through this project's process. He is the reason I was accepted into becoming an AMC scholar; without his help, none of this would have been possible. Thanks, Dr. Jones! You're the best!

Next, I want to thank my best friend, Amber Holt. She was actually the whole reason I even applied to the AMC Scholarship, and she inspired this machine. When she first became the first AMC Transformative Creativity Fellow, she was just starting to make a presentation for her own project, a mural that is currently in the Elaine Boyd Library. This mural is titled "Embracing the Green Path." Thanks to her guidance and friendship, I was able to create a solid application for the AMC and begin creating a project that would change how creatives network on RMU's campus. Thank you so much, Amber. I will always love you and our friendship forever!

And to all my friends, professors, and supporters who believed in this project from the start, and picked me up when the process became difficult.



One of my best friends, Rebecca Neccai, tested out the machine during the 2025 Spring into Success Fair. The machine was full of stickers at this time. I love you, Beck, thank you!

How is the Machine Funded? (AMC)

Until the day Sara Heston graduates (May 16th, 2026), the Academic Media Center will provide funding and resource support for the machine.

In the future, when another scholar decides to work on any aspect of the machine, management will be given to the Design Network, which is a student-run organization. They receive their own funding and support internally; however, for an extended period of time, there are plenty of materials to support the machine as long as there is human support in place.

It is highly recommended that if you have not applied to the Academic Media Center Scholarship, you should!

This scholarship is extremely supportive for students and provides not only funds towards tuition, but also funds towards any project you would like to complete. It can be a new project that was created, just like the vending machine! Or it can be a project you have already begun and need extra support and funding for.

When you are chosen to be a scholar for the AMC, you are matched with a mentor, who can be anyone from the Robert Morris University Campus. When Sara started, she was matched with Branding Director Brian Edwards (who no longer works for the university), but this mentorship allowed Sara the best resources, guidance, and support to make the machine functional, useful, and exactly how she wanted it!

For more information, go to <https://www.rmu.edu/about/amc/scholarships>

Or contact

Dr. Timothy Jones
Associate Professor of Media Arts
Director of the Academic Media Center
jonest@rmu.edu

Heather H. Pinson, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean, College of Health and Human Sciences
Professor of Humanities and Media Arts
pinson@rmu.edu

A Day as the Machine Manager

When picking up the job as manager of the Create + Connect Vending Machine, you will have simple but highly important tasks to take on to ensure the machine not only runs smoothly but is full of perfectly curated submissions, and users on all ends have a great experience.

Basic Tasks for Stocking the Machine

1. Check submissions weekly in the Google Drive folder "Create + Connect Submission." Depending on the volume of submissions, try to check every Monday or Friday. Bi-weekly checks are acceptable during slower periods.
2. Check all submissions for errors, which include spelling, but can also include checking for copyright issues, extensive AI use, and plagiarism.
3. After validating submissions, calculate how many slots are currently available in the machine and how many new submissions were received that week. After deciding the count, email submitters using the address provided in their submission, letting them know how many of their items will be in the machine.
4. Print the print-ready spreads on the Media Arts printer in the Wheatley Center. Fill the cardboard sleeves, apply the holographic washi tape to the opening of the sleeve (see note below), and stock the machine based on medium, at random, or by your own organizational preference. If the machine is already stocked in a particular order, follow the current setup.
5. Periodically check the machine for jams, empty the coin box, and check stock levels. This is a key part of maintaining quality for submitters and users. Once any artist's stock runs out, email them to ask if they want to resubmit or wait.

ABOUT THE HOLOGRAPHIC WASHI TAPE

The holographic washi tape is applied to the opening of each white cardboard sleeve. Because both the sleeves and the front face of the machine are white, the tape adds a visible contrast indicator that helps users, including those who are hard of seeing, identify exactly where the items will come out. It also adds a finishing touch that fits the aesthetic of the machine. Washi tape can be purchased at most craft stores or online.

 **Print settings and paper specifications will be added to this section in a future update. Please refer to the Media Arts print lab staff for current recommended settings until this section is complete.**

Specifications of the Vending Machine

Machine Model

"Eagle Sticker and Tattoo Vending Machine," purchased at candymachines.com

Capacity

- Holds approximately 450 items total
- Approximately 150 items per column (three columns)
- Only holds individual cardboard sleeves measuring 4.5 x 3 inches (11.4 x 7.6 cm)

⚠ Card sleeves can be purchased online. Please ensure the size fits the machine requirements to prevent paper jams.

Card Size Requirements

All artists' artwork must fit inside the cardboard sleeves. The required card size is 2.5 x 3.5 inches (6.3 x 8.8 cm), which is the standard trading card size and fits standard card sleeves and binders.

Physical Dimensions

Head Unit Only

- Height: 18 inches (45.7 cm)
- Width: 15 inches (38.1 cm)
- Depth: 9 inches (22.9 cm)

Overall (with stand)

- Height: approximately 43 inches (109.2 cm)
- Width: approximately 17 inches (43.2 cm)
- Depth: approximately 17 inches (43.2 cm)



Machine Contents List and Details

Trading Card (Required)

The trading card is the only required piece that artists must design to be included in the machine. Its size is 2.5 x 3.5 inches, which is the standard size for all trading cards.

The portal accepts all standard image formats, including JPG, PNG, WebP, and the most common file types. For optimal print quality, use an image with a resolution of at least 800 x 1100 pixels. The portal includes a built-in crop tool so you can adjust exactly how your image fits the card.

Very small images (under approximately 400px wide) may appear pixelated when printed at card size. If you're scanning traditional artwork, aim for at least 300 DPI at the full card dimensions.

Basic Trading Card Appearance:



Front of Card (Art)



Back of Card (Socials and Info)

Stickers (Optional)

Stickers can be a fun way for artists to create a design that vending machine users can apply to their belongings. Nothing is better than seeing your art on someone's water bottle while out and about on campus!

Users upload an image (recommended as a PNG with a transparent background) through the submission portal. The sticker file is then saved to Google Drive and opened in Cricut Design Space for cutting. This feature has NOT been automated; Sara Heston uses her own personal Cricut cutting machine and printer. See the "Sticker Creation Process" section for the full workflow.

Artists can select one of two cut styles:

- Die Cut: The Cricut cuts around the full shape of the sticker with a customizable colored border.
- Kiss Cut: The Cricut cuts the sticker shape as-is, with no border.

Size limits are enforced by the submission portal:

- Smallest: 1.25 x 1.50 inches
- Largest: 2.50 x 3.0 inches

All stickers produced through the submission portal will have a glossy finish, which adds durability and thickness. When produced using the full process (including a laminate or UV top coat), stickers are dishwasher-safe, suitable for outdoor use, and resistant to rubbing.

 **The Robert Morris University Media Arts Department does NOT currently have a Cricut machine. Future scholars taking on this project may need to request one through the AMC or explore alternative cutting methods.**

Business Cards (Optional)

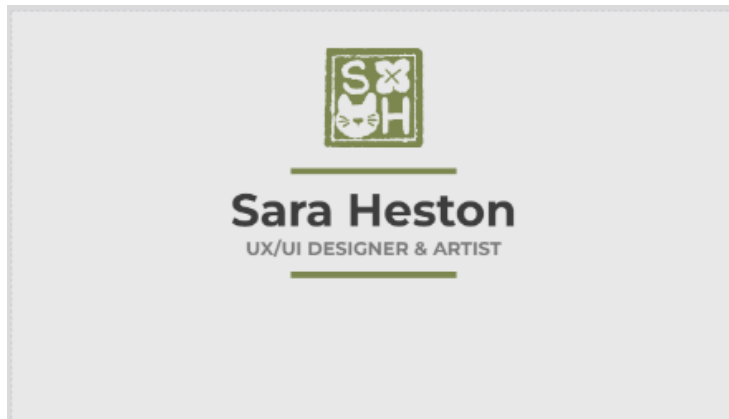
Artists can choose to create a business card through the submission portal. Options include designing one from scratch within the portal, uploading a premade design, or providing their own printed cards to hand off to the machine manager.

Adding a business card to the submission spread adds an extra layer of networking. Recipients who get a trading card with a business card may choose to pass the card on to someone else or keep it for later use. The business card also serves as a motivational nudge for artists to begin thinking about personal branding.

Standard portal-designed business card size: 3.5 x 2 inches with a 0.125-inch bleed.

If artists provide their own cards, the card can be any size below 2.5 x 3.5 inches, including custom shapes.

Basic Business Card Appearance:



Front of Card:

Back of Card:



Goodies (Optional)

Up to four extra items or "goodies" can be added by the artist. All extras must be provided physically by the artist after they are given their submission count. (The count depends on current machine stock and the complexity of other submissions.)

Goodies can include, but are not limited to:

- Doodles
- Hand-written notes
- Fortune slips (think fortune cookie, without the cookie!)
- Affirmation notes
- Mini art prints
- Additional stickers
- Color swatches

There is no strict limit on what can be included, as long as items are flat, do not cause the machine to jam, and fit within the four-item variety limit. The limit is entirely the artist's choice.

Sticker Creation Process

The sticker creation process has not been automated and requires a Cricut cutting machine and printer. This section walks through the full process from receiving a sticker submission to delivering a finished product for the machine.

What You Need

- A Cricut cutting machine (personal machine used by Sara Heston during 2024–2026; future scholars may need to purchase one through the AMC)
- A printer compatible with printable vinyl or sticker paper
- Glossy printable sticker paper or printable vinyl sheets
- Cricut Design Space software (free, available at design.cricut.com)
- Laminate sheets or clear top coat (optional but strongly recommended for durability)

Step-by-Step Process

6. Open the Google Drive folder for the submission and locate the sticker PNG file. Sticker files are saved as: [SubmissionNumber]_[ArtistName]_Sticker_Cricut.png
7. Open Cricut Design Space and start a new project. Upload the PNG file. If the sticker has a transparent background, Design Space will recognize the edges automatically for cutting.
8. Resize the sticker within the portal's size limits: smallest is 1.25 x 1.50 inches, largest is 2.50 x 3.0 inches. Use the artist's chosen dimensions from their submission.
9. Check the artist's cut preference from their submission: Die Cut (Cricut cuts around the full shape with a custom border) or Kiss Cut (Cricut cuts the sticker shape as-is, no border). Apply the appropriate cut setting in Design Space.
10. For Die Cut stickers: add a colored offset layer in Design Space, matching the artist's chosen border color from their submission.
11. Print the sticker sheet using the "Print Then Cut" feature in Design Space. Print on glossy printable sticker paper or vinyl. Allow ink to dry fully before cutting.
12. Load the printed sheet into the Cricut and let it cut. Once complete, carefully remove the sticker(s) and weed any excess material.
13. Optional but strongly recommended: Apply a clear laminate layer or UV-resistant top coat to improve durability, waterproofing, and scratch resistance. This step is what makes stickers dishwasher-safe and outdoor-resistant.
14. Cut stickers to count based on the number of submissions the artist will have in the machine. Stickers go inside the card sleeve with the trading card, placed behind or beneath the card.



The Robert Morris University Media Arts Department does NOT currently have a Cricut machine. Future scholars taking on this project may need to request one through the AMC or explore alternative cutting methods.

Trading Card Creation Process

The trading card creation process is as automated as it can be for “mass printing,” as it should be for the vending-machine scale. If you have experience with the printer in the Wheatley Center, this should be simple to do quickly and correctly without printing multiples and hogging the printer from others. (Keep in mind that EVERYONE needs to use the Wheatley printer; it may be a good idea to wait until later in the evening to print, and avoid printing during finals! - DON'T YOU UPSET PATTY!)

What You Need

- A desktop that can connect to the big Wheatley Center printer; there are desktops in the homework lab and rooms 128, 143, and 144.
- A printing guide reference page; these are often found stuck up on the wall behind some of the desktops. Though this is not exactly required for the process, making sure you have all your settings correct is a good way to print the FIRST time correctly.
- Access to the Google account where the submission files are sent; the files you want to print will be located in the drive titled “Create + Connect Submissions”
- Laminate sheets (optional but extremely recommended for durability)

Step-by-Step Process

- 1.) Make sure that you can freely print using the Wheatley Printer. Check if there are classes ongoing that are using the printer, or if there is anyone actively printing. This is for common courtesy!
- 2.) After making sure you're in the clear to print, log in to one of the various desktops in the homework lab, room 128, 143, or 144. The homework lab is always open if you have swipe access! (Please speak with Patty if you need your card swipe fixed)
- 3.) After logging in to the Create + Connect Google account, go to Google Drive, then the Google Drive folder titled “Create + Connect Submissions”
- 4.) Current submissions in the machine will be in a subfolder in the file; those are marked with a date and contain the contents used to make the machine's current stock.
- 5.) If you are planning to stock the machine with new items, create another folder titled the same, with today's date.
- 6.) To get to printing, select one of the new submission files that came in. The only file you need to focus on for making trading cards is the PDF titled “Print Sheet.” The name should look like this: “1_Sara Heston_TradingCard_PrintSheet.pdf”
- 7.) After selecting the correct file, click the printer button in the top corner. If you don't see an icon, right-click and select “Print”

The Settings you want:

Card Stock Oversized, 12x18 Heavy Weight, Print Double Sided

****You may need to fix the scaling on the cards, as it might be set to a greater zoom than 100%!****

Machine Jams and Troubleshooting

The Create + Connect Vending Machine is a mechanical device and, like all machines, may occasionally need attention. This section outlines how to handle the most common issues that come up during regular operation.

The Two Keys

There are two physical keys to the vending machine. One key is held by the current machine manager, and the second key is held by Patty Then, Studio Technician at the Wheatley Center. If the manager is unavailable or a key is lost, Patty is the point of contact for physical access to the machine.

To reach Patty Then, her email is then@rmu.edu

KEY CONTACTS

Key #1: Machine Manager (first point of contact for any machine issue). Key #2: Patty Then, Studio Technician, Wheatley Center (backup access when manager is unavailable)

Common Issues and How to Handle Them

The Push Mechanic is Stiff

The machine is new equipment, and the push mechanism will naturally be stiff when first installed. With regular use, it loosens over time. If a user reports difficulty pushing, reassure them that this is normal and will improve. If the mechanism becomes genuinely stuck and will not move at all, use the key to open the machine and inspect the internal mechanism for anything visibly blocking the push plate.

A Slot is Jammed

If a card sleeve gets stuck inside a slot and does not dispense after a push, use the key to open the machine and gently remove the obstruction. Check the sleeve for any items that may be too thick or rigid for the slot. All items in the sleeve must be flat and must not exceed the sleeve dimensions of 4.5 x 3 inches. Overfilling a sleeve is the most common cause of jams.

The Coin Slot is Stuck or Blocked

If the coin slot becomes blocked, use the key to access the coin collection area and clear any buildup. Empty coins from the coin box periodically during routine maintenance visits to prevent overflow.

A Slot is Completely Empty

If a slot runs out entirely, it will dispense nothing when a coin is used. Check stock weekly and restock any empty or low slots during your regular maintenance visit. Refer to the "A Day as the Machine Manager" section for the restock process.

Routine Maintenance Checklist

- Check all slots for stock levels and restock anything low or empty
- Empty the coin box
- Test the push mechanics on all three columns
- Wipe down the exterior with a soft, dry cloth
- Check for any visible damage to the plexiglass or frame
- Confirm the holographic washi tape on card sleeves is intact and replace any that have worn off

 **If the machine sustains physical damage that cannot be resolved by the manager, contact the Academic Media Center immediately. Do not attempt structural repairs without AMC guidance.**

The Technology Behind the Submission Portal

The Create + Connect submission portal is a single, self-contained HTML file hosted at createconnectvending.com. It was built entirely using web technologies (HTML, CSS, and JavaScript) with no backend server, no database, and no login system required. Everything runs in the user's browser.

This section documents how the technology works so future managers and scholars can understand, maintain, and build on it.

The Submission Portal

The portal is one HTML file: `create-connect-combined-submission.html`. Inside that single file lives approximately 3,822 lines of code and 331,358 characters, including the full submission interface, trading card designer, business card builder, sticker upload section, extras form, PDF generator, crop tools, QR code generator, Google Drive integration, and the holographic background image (embedded directly as base64 data).

Key libraries used inside the file:

- jsPDF: generates the print-ready 12x18 inch PDF print sheets
- html2canvas: screenshots the live card preview to use as the back page in the print sheet, guaranteeing the printed back matches exactly what the artist designed on screen
- QRCode.js: generates QR codes from the artist's submitted URL
- Google Fonts (Montserrat): the interface font, loaded externally

Google Drive Integration via Apps Script

When an artist submits, the portal cannot upload files directly to Google Drive due to browser security restrictions. Instead, the portal sends each file one at a time to a Google Apps Script endpoint, which is a small script that lives inside Google's ecosystem and acts as a middleman.

The Apps Script endpoint URL is:

```
https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbzxcvuqjRx1taE0fQCPzaD3hG6OUAaZb9CpZzEpNUWvVINPzz-CgIjZmXh8abtlzjw/exec
```

Each file is sent as a separate request. The Apps Script receives the file, reads the submitter's name and submission number, creates a folder in Google Drive, and saves the file there. Folder names follow the format:

```
{SubmissionNumber}_{SubmitterName} - {Date}
```

Files saved per submission:

- [N]_[Name]_TradingCard_Front.png: the raw uploaded artwork
- [N]_[Name]_TradingCard_Back.png: a screenshot of the live card back preview
- [N]_[Name]_TradingCard_PrintSheet.pdf: the 12x18 inch print-ready sheet (2 pages, front and back)
- [N]_[Name]_Sticker_Cricut.png: the sticker file, if submitted
- [N]_[Name]_BizCard_Front.png and _Back.png: business card images, if designed
- [N]_[Name]_BizCard_PrintSheet.pdf: business card print sheet, if applicable
- [N]_[Name]_SubmissionDoc.pdf: a full summary document of the submission
- submission-summary.txt: plain text summary of all submission fields

Submission Numbering

Each submission is assigned an invisible number stored in the user's browser (localStorage). The number starts at 1 and increments with each submission. This number is never shown to the artist. It is only used in the Drive folder and file names to help the manager organize submissions in order. It is not a tracking or identity system.

The Print Sheet System

The print sheet is a 12x18-inch, two-page PDF generated automatically at submission time:

- Page 1 (Front): The artist's uploaded artwork is rendered using a COVER-fit canvas at 300 DPI and tiled 3x4 across the sheet (12 cards per page). Cut marks are included at each corner.
- Page 2 (Back): html2canvas takes a 4x resolution screenshot of the live card back preview (exactly as it appears on screen) and tiles it the same way. This guarantees the printed back matches the design preview exactly.

The print sheet is designed to be printed on 12x18-inch cardstock at the Media Arts printer in the Wheatley Center. Print at 100% scale. Do not scale to fit.



If the Apps Script endpoint ever stops working (for example, if the Google account changes or the script is removed), submissions will fail silently. If Drive

folders stop appearing, check that the Apps Script is still active and redeploy it if needed. The script source is accessible through the create.connectvending@gmail.com Google account.

Submission Portal Design: Transparency and Process

When the submission portal was created, the plan was to get multiple students who had majored in computer science to assist with the code. However, it proved difficult to collaborate with students, given the amount of time needed for testing and usability work.

The biggest challenge came with the choice of using Artificial Intelligence. With support from the Academic Media Center and the faculty in Media Arts, it was deemed testable, though not initially thought to be fully viable. It was decided that Claude AI would be used as the artificial intelligence engine. Claude AI has an advanced code processing system and a more personified interactivity style. Over the course of designing the submission portal, Claude was used solely as a tool, not as a source.

Acting in place of a computer science major, Claude built the JavaScript code while Sara Heston stood as the designer. This led to many versions, progressively improved errors, and details inserted based on what users actually needed, rather than placing a generated system and calling it complete.

- 3,822 lines of code and 331,358 characters
- 12 major versions with structural changes
- Over 30 versions with tweaks and bug testing
- Created in 34 days

Google Drive was also implemented for print-ready trading card pages. This was done using Google Apps Script, which allowed the custom code to interact with files in Google Drive.

Claude AI as a Tool: How It Was Really Used

*****This section was written with playback by the Claude.AI engine for clarity and correctness*****

The submission portal transparency section above gives a brief overview: Claude was the coder, Sara was the designer. This section goes deeper, for anyone who wants to understand what that actually looked like in practice and what it means for how AI can be used responsibly in creative and technical work.

The Setup

The original plan was to collaborate with computer science students to build the portal. When that proved difficult to coordinate, given the time and testing demands of the project, the Academic Media Center and Media Arts faculty agreed to test the viability of using Claude AI instead.

Claude AI was chosen specifically because of its advanced code processing and its more conversational, human-like interaction style. Over 34 days across 9 working sessions, the portal was built from the ground up, growing from a simple card builder to a full multi-tab submission system with Drive integration, print-ready PDF generation, and a QR code tool.

What Claude Did

Claude wrote all of the JavaScript, HTML, and CSS code. When given a design requirement (a new feature, a layout change, a bug to fix), Claude would produce the code to implement it. Claude also suggested technical approaches when multiple options existed, explained tradeoffs, and kept track of context across long sessions.

In numbers, the result was:

- 3,822 lines of code
- 331,358 characters
- 12 major structural versions
- Over 30 total versions, including tweaks and bug fixes
- 9 working sessions over 34 days

What Sara Did

Sara directed every decision. This is the part that is easy to misunderstand about AI-assisted work: Claude could not have built this portal without continuous human direction. Here is what that direction actually looked like:

- Defined the entire concept, purpose, and structure of the tool from scratch
- Specified every design requirement: card dimensions, bleed specs, field limits, color systems, font choices, layout templates
- Tested every version by actually using it and identifying what was broken or wrong
- Sent screenshots with every bug report, making diagnosis possible rather than guesswork
- Made every judgment call about what felt right versus what did not
- Caught errors Claude introduced and directed corrections
- Wrote the loading jokes, the thank-you message, and all copy in the interface, word for word

Moments Where Human Judgment Was Irreplaceable

Several specific decisions in the project could only have come from a person who understood the real-world context:

MERGING THE TOOLS

The original plan was two separate tools: a card builder and a goodies tool. After building both, Sara made the call to combine them into one portal. This was a structural decision

that shaped everything that followed. Claude had no basis to suggest this. It did not know the two tools existed independently or how unmanageable two separate files would be in practice.

THE 100-CHARACTER QUOTE LIMIT

Claude suggested 160 characters for the quote field. Sara brought it to 100 after physically testing how a full-length quote looked alongside three social media handles on a 2.5-inch card. That is design knowledge that only comes from looking at the actual output.

CATCHING "SEE YOU AT THE SHOW"

Claude wrote a thank-you message that said: "See you at the show." Sara corrected it immediately: this is a permanent vending machine, not a one-time event. Claude had no way of knowing this. No amount of prompting could have caught this. It required someone who understood the project's actual context.

THE LOADING JOKES

The personality of the submission portal, including "Probably contacting Patty for help with the printer," came entirely from Sara. Claude executed the implementation. The voice of the project is human.

SCRAPPING THE JSPDF BACK PAGE RENDERER

After multiple failed attempts to recreate the card back inside jsPDF (which kept producing results that did not match the preview), Sara made the call: "Okay, whatever the issue is, it is not working. Can we try something else?" That decision opened the door to the HTML2Canvas screenshot approach, which solved the problem entirely. Claude could suggest alternatives, but Sara had to decide to abandon the approach that was not working.

Claude Makes Mistakes: That Is Normal

Claude made errors throughout the project. Code that should have worked did not. Functions got deleted during refactors. Features broke unexpectedly. The print sheet front page was blank for two full versions before the cause was identified.

This is not a failure of the tool. It is the reality of working with AI at its current stage of development. The key is knowing how to work with it: test everything, report what is wrong specifically, and treat AI the same way you would any other piece of software that requires troubleshooting.

The portal works because Sara caught those errors, documented them with screenshots, and directed corrections. An AI working alone would have no way to know something was wrong.

What This Means for Using AI as a Tool

The lesson from this project is not "Claude can build anything." The lesson is that AI can dramatically accelerate execution when paired with a human who has clear creative direction, real-world judgment, and the ability to evaluate output critically.

Claude did not build the submission portal. Sara Heston built the submission portal, using Claude as the coding instrument, the same way a designer uses software, a sculptor uses a chisel, or a filmmaker uses a camera. The tool does not make the work. The person does.

FOR FUTURE SCHOLARS

If you decide to continue using Claude or another AI tool to develop this project, approach it as a collaborator that needs direction, not a system that takes over. Define what you want clearly. Test everything. Push back when something is wrong. Your judgment, your taste, and your understanding of the project's context are what make the difference between a tool and a finished product.

Updating the Submission Portal on WordPress

The submission portal is a standalone HTML file that opens in a new browser tab when users click the link from the Create + Connect website. This section explains how the portal is hosted and how to update it when a new version of the file is ready.

How the Portal Is Hosted

The portal file (create-connect-combined-submission.html) is uploaded directly to the website hosting through DreamHost, which hosts the createconnectvending.com domain. It is not embedded inside a WordPress page. Instead, it lives as a standalone file on the server, and WordPress simply links to it.

This means updating the portal does not require touching WordPress at all. You only need to replace the file on the hosting server.

Step-by-Step: Updating the Portal File

Step 1: Get the New Portal File

When a new version of the portal is ready (either updated by you, with Claude, or by a future developer), you will have a file called create-connect-combined-submission.html. Make sure this is the final, tested version before uploading. Rename the file to submit.html

Step 2: Log In to DreamHost

15. Go to panel.dreamhost.com and log in with the create.connectvending@gmail.com account credentials.
16. In the left sidebar, click "Websites" and then select "Files" or use the File Manager.

Step 3: Navigate to the Public Files

17. In the File Manager, open the folder for your domain: createconnectvending.com
18. Look for the folder called public_html. This is the root folder of your website, where all public files live.
19. Locate the current version of submit.html inside this folder.

Step 4: Upload the New File

20. Before uploading, rename the existing file as a backup. Right-click it and rename it to something like submit.html.
21. Click the Upload button in the File Manager toolbar.
22. Select your new submit.html file from your computer.
23. Wait for the upload to complete. The File Manager will show a progress indicator.

Step 5: Test the Live Portal

24. Open a new browser tab and go to: createconnectvending.com/submissions
25. Test all four tabs of the portal (Trading Card, Sticker, Business Card, Extra Goodies) to confirm everything loads and works correctly.
26. Do a test submission and confirm the files appear correctly in the Google Drive folder.
27. If everything looks good, the update is complete. If something is broken, rename the bad file and restore your backup by renaming it back to submit.html.

Updating the Link in WordPress (if needed)

The link to the portal on your WordPress site points to the URL above. As long as the filename stays the same, you never need to change the WordPress link. The link will always point to whatever file is currently at that URL.

If you ever need to change the filename or URL, here is how to update the link in WordPress:

28. Log in to your WordPress dashboard at createconnectvending.com/wp-admin
29. Go to Pages (or the menu item where the portal link lives).
30. Find the page that contains the "Submit Your Art" or portal link button.
31. Click Edit and find the button or hyperlink.
32. Update the URL to the new file path.
33. Click Update or Publish to save the change.

Troubleshooting

The Page Shows an Error or Looks Broken

This usually means the file was uploaded incorrectly or is incomplete. Restore the backup file (see Step 4 above) and try uploading again. Make sure the file is fully downloaded on your computer before uploading it to the server.

Submissions Are Not Appearing in Google Drive

This is likely a Google Apps Script issue, not a portal file issue. Check that the Apps Script endpoint is still active (see the Technology section of this handbook). If the script has been deactivated or the Google account password has changed, the Drive connection will need to be re-established.

The Old Version Is Still Showing

Your browser may be caching the old file. Try opening the portal in a private/incognito window, or clear your browser cache and reload. If others report seeing the old version too, wait a few minutes as server changes can take time to propagate.

 **Always keep at least one backup version of the portal file on the server and one saved locally on your computer. The portal is the core of the entire submission system. Losing it without a backup would mean rebuilding from scratch.**

Guidelines and Removal Policies

This section documents the full content guidelines for the Create + Connect Vending Machine, the reasoning behind them, and the process for removing submissions when necessary. This is important reading for anyone managing the machine.

Content Guidelines

Create + Connect accepts art in all its forms. The machine is designed to be inclusive of every medium, skill level, and artistic voice. The only types of content that may result in a submission being declined are:

- Fully AI-generated imagery (see AI Art Policy below)
- Unwarranted explicit nudity or sexual content
- Graphic violence or gore
- Content that promotes or glorifies drug use
- Deliberately harmful, hateful, or targeted content

The word "unwarranted" is intentional. Art is a form of truth, and themes of the human body, conflict, and difficult experiences are valid and powerful subjects in artistic tradition. The concern is not the subject matter itself. It is whether the content is appropriate for a public-facing platform open to everyone on the RMU campus, including people of all ages and backgrounds.

If an artist is uncertain whether their work falls within these guidelines, they should reach out before submitting at create.connectvending@gmail.com. The decision will always be made in conversation with the artist, not without them.

AI Art Policy

The Create + Connect Vending Machine does not accept fully AI-generated artwork. This means images produced primarily through generative tools such as Midjourney, DALL-E, Adobe Firefly, or similar platforms.

Using AI as part of a creative process is permitted. The distinction is intention and authorship: if the core creative vision of the piece came from a text prompt rather than from the artist, it does not belong in this machine. If AI was used as a supporting tool (for reference, enhancement, or iteration) while the artist remained the primary creative force, that is acceptable.

It is worth noting that the submission portal itself was built in collaboration with Claude AI, used as a coding tool. The distinction between "using AI as a tool" and "submitting AI work as your own" is exactly the line this policy draws.

Copyright

All submissions are reviewed for potential copyright issues. Artists should only submit original work they created and own the rights to. Work that directly reproduces copyrighted characters, logos, or intellectual property will not be accepted. Work that is clearly inspired by or pays homage to existing work (without reproducing it) is evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The Review Process

All submissions are reviewed by the machine manager before printing. The review checks for:

- Spelling and grammar errors in card text fields
- Color visibility issues (for example, dark text on a dark background that will not be readable when printed)
- Plainly AI-generated imagery
- Copyright concerns

If an issue is found, the manager contacts the artist before printing and allows them to correct it. Submissions are never declined silently.

Removal Policy: Artist Control

Artists have full control over their submissions at any time. If an artist wants their cards removed from the machine for any reason, that request will be honored immediately, without question, and without requiring an explanation.

There should never be any regrets when submitting to Create + Connect. The machine is meant to be a positive, low-pressure platform. If an artist changes their mind (about their design, their information, or their participation), they only need to reach out at create.connectvending@gmail.com, and the removal will be handled as soon as possible.

Manager-Initiated Removal

The machine manager also has the authority to remove a submission if it is found to violate the content guidelines after it has already been loaded into the machine. This is a rare scenario since all submissions are reviewed before printing, but the process is:

34. The manager identifies the violation.
35. The manager contacts the artist directly by email to explain the concern.
36. The manager removes the submission from the machine.
37. The artist is allowed to resubmit with a modified version if they choose.

The exception is content that is clearly harmful, illegal, or directed at a specific person. In those cases, removal happens immediately, and the conversation follows.

During the 2024–2026 fellowship period, Sara Heston holds final decision-making authority on guideline enforcement. After the project transitions to the Design Network, the manager of the machine takes on this responsibility.

 **When in doubt, talk to the artist first. The goal of every guideline and every removal policy is to protect the community and the artists, not to gatekeep. Always approach these situations with that intention.**

Future Plans

Create + Connect was built as a foundation, not a finished product. The following are areas where the project is expected to grow, improve, and evolve beyond its first iteration.

Transition to the Design Network

When Sara Heston graduates in May 2026, management of the machine will transition to the Design Network, a student-run organization at RMU. The Design Network receives its own internal funding and support. For an extended period following the transition, existing materials and resources will be sufficient to continue operating the machine with human support in place.

Any future AMC scholar who chooses to take on the machine as a project may receive additional funding and resources through the AMC scholarship program, as Sara did through the Transformative Creativity Fellowship.

Growing the Team

Currently, Sara Heston handles all printing, loading, reviewing, and maintenance alone. As the project grows in submissions, visibility, and scope, a small team will be needed. Future roles might include a dedicated machine manager, a social media coordinator, a print technician, and a web maintainer.

The Gallery Page

A Gallery Page is planned for the Create + Connect website (createconnectvending.com). This page will allow anyone to browse all current and past submissions, learn about each artist, and discover their work without needing to use the machine physically. It will serve as a permanent, searchable archive of every artist who has participated in the project.

Social Media

Official social media pages are in development. These will be used for artist spotlights, new submission announcements, behind-the-scenes content, and community engagement. The social media presence is intended to extend the networking mission of the machine into the digital space, making it possible for artists and collectors to connect even when they are not on campus.

Expanding Beyond RMU

The long-term vision for Create + Connect is to grow beyond the RMU community. As the project matures and infrastructure is in place, opening submissions to artists from other institutions or expanding to additional machines on campus or elsewhere becomes possible. The foundation built during the 2024–2026 fellowship period (the portal, the Drive pipeline, the print system, and the machine itself) is designed to scale.

The Coin Dispenser

A fully automated 3D-printed coin dispenser system is in development. The goal is a dispenser that provides one token per use with a built-in cooldown period to prevent misuse. As of the writing of this document, the dispenser is still a work in progress and is not included in the primary machine specifications. Updates to this system will be documented in future versions of the handbook.

The Information Panel

The information panel is the printed sheet displayed on the front of the Create + Connect Vending Machine. It serves as the first thing a passerby sees and gives users the essential context they need to understand the machine, find the website, and connect with the project.

Panel Specifications

The panel is a printed sheet of paper (cardstock is recommended for added durability and a more polished appearance) that slides behind the plexiglass panel on the front of the machine. The plexiglass is locked into the machine frame, so no adhesives, frames, or mounting hardware are needed. The paper simply sits behind it, held flat by the plexiglass.

The exact dimensions of the plexiglass viewing area have not yet been formally measured and documented. Before reprinting or redesigning the panel, measure the plexiglass opening carefully with a ruler to confirm the printable area. Design the panel to fit within those

dimensions, leaving a small margin on all sides so the edges of the paper are not visible or cropped behind the frame.

 *The panel dimensions should be measured and added to this section in a future update. Until then, physically measure the plexiglass opening before printing a new version.*

What Is on the Panel

The information panel is intentionally minimal. Its job is to orient the user quickly, not to explain the entire project. The current panel includes:

- The Create + Connect Vending Machine name and branding
- A QR code that links to the main website at createconnectvending.com
- Social media handle(s) so users can follow and connect with the project online

The QR code is the most important functional element on the panel. It gives users immediate access to the website, where they can learn more about the project, find the submission portal, and explore current submissions. When reprinting the panel, always test the QR code by scanning it before installing the panel in the machine.

If social media handles or the website URL change in the future, the panel will need to be reprinted, and the QR code regenerated. Do not leave outdated contact information on the panel, as it is the primary connection point between the machine and the outside world.

How to Update or Reprint the Panel

When the panel needs to be updated (new social media handles, new QR code destination, redesign, or damage), follow this process:

38. Use the key to unlock and open the plexiglass panel on the front of the machine. Carefully slide out the existing paper panel.
39. Open the original panel design file in Adobe Illustrator (or whichever design tool was used for the current version). Update any changed information — social media handles, QR code, or layout as needed.
40. If the QR code destination has changed, regenerate the QR code using a reliable QR code generator (such as qr-code-generator.com or similar). Export the new QR code as a high-resolution PNG and replace the old one in the design file.
41. Export the updated design as a PDF or high-resolution PNG. Print on cardstock using the Media Arts printer or any color printer available. Trim the paper if needed to fit the plexiglass opening.
42. Slide the new panel behind the plexiglass, close and lock the plexiglass panel, and confirm the panel sits flat and is fully visible through the front of the machine.
43. Scan the QR code one final time after installation to confirm it works correctly in place.

 *The original panel design file should be stored in the Create + Connect Google Drive alongside other project assets. If the file cannot be located, the panel can be redesigned from scratch using the brand colors, fonts, and logo documented in the Logo and Graphics section of this handbook.*

Logo and Graphics

The Create + Connect visual identity was designed by Sara Heston and is intended to be consistent across all materials: the vending machine, the information panel, the submission portal, printed trading cards, stickers, and any future social media or web presence. This section documents the origin of the logo, the brand color palette, the fonts in use, and where to find the original asset files.

Logo Origin

The Create + Connect logo was designed by Sara Heston using Adobe Illustrator. The logo takes the form of a circular stamp or badge, a deliberate design choice that evokes authenticity, craft, and the physicality of the vending machine itself. The text “CREATE • CONNECT • VENDING • MACHINE” runs around the outer edge of the circle, and a four-pointed star sits at the center.

The star motif was chosen as a symbol of creative spark and the moment of connection between artist and audience. The circular badge format also lends itself naturally to use as a sticker, a stamp, and a profile image, making it versatile across both physical and digital contexts.

The logo exists in two primary versions: a full-color version on the purple background (the primary logo) and a version with the background removed (transparent PNG), suitable for placing on any colored surface without a white box behind it. Both versions should be stored in the project’s Google Drive.

CREATE + CONNECT

VENDING MACHINE



Brand Colors

The Create + Connect color palette was derived from the logo and carried through all project materials. The palette uses three primary colors:

Deep Purple — #6E4F93

The primary brand color. Used for the outer ring of the logo, headings, rules, and key UI accents throughout the submission portal and printed materials.

Medium Purple — #836AA3

The main fill color of the logo circle. Used as a secondary background or fill tone on printed materials and branded surfaces.

Light Blue — #ADD9F2

The accent ring color inside the logo. Used sparingly as a highlight or contrast color to soften the heavier purples.

All text on dark purple backgrounds should be white or near-white for legibility. All text on white or light backgrounds should use the deep purple (#6E4F93) or standard black (#1D1D1D). Avoid placing medium purple text on the light blue background or vice versa, as the contrast is insufficient for readability.

Brand Fonts

Two typefaces are used across Create + Connect materials:

Fields Display

The typographical logo's font and primary font for displaying the name are used for the name "Create + Connect Vending Machine" only.

Montserrat

The primary display and interface font. Used throughout the submission portal for headings, labels, card back text, and UI copy. Montserrat is a free Google Font available at fonts.google.com.

Arial

Used in printed documentation, including this handbook. Arial is a universally available system font and ensures consistent rendering across all computers and printers without requiring font installation.

When creating new materials for the machine, use Montserrat for anything that will be displayed digitally or on printed creative assets (trading cards, stickers, the information panel). Use Arial for documents, reference materials, and anything intended to be read as plain text.

File Formats and Asset Storage

All logo and graphic asset files should be stored in the Create + Connect Google Drive under a clearly labeled "Brand Assets" or "Logo Files" folder. The following versions of the logo should be available:

- Primary logo — full color on purple background (.PNG, high resolution)
- Transparent logo — background removed, suitable for placing on any surface (PNG with transparency)
- Source file — the original editable vector file (.AI for Adobe Illustrator)
- Favicon or small-use version — a simplified or cropped version suitable for social media profile images or small digital use

When exporting the logo for print use, always export at a minimum of 300 DPI at the intended print size. For digital use (websites, social media), 72–96 DPI is standard, but higher resolution exports are always safe to use at smaller sizes. Never scale a raster (PNG/JPG) logo up beyond its original size, as this will cause visible pixelation.

 *If the original Adobe Illustrator source file is ever lost, the logo will need to be recreated from scratch as a vector. Keep the .AI file backed up in at least two locations: Google Drive and a local copy on a personal computer or external drive.*

Create + Connect Vending Machine

Founded by Sara Heston · 2024–2026 AMC Transformative Creativity Fellow
create.connectvending@gmail.com · createconnectvending.com