NCARB

the NATIONAL
ORGANIZATION
of MINORITY
ARCHITECTS

Baseline on Belonging:
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Architecture Licensing

Overview Report

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Report Structure

NCARB will be releasing the full *Baseline on Belonging* report in seven phases, beginning with this overview report. The following reports will be released individually over the coming months, ending with the full report, which will compile the previous sections.

1	Overview
2	Experience
3	Examination
4	Education
5	Firm Culture
6	Career Development
7	Full Report

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Table of Contents

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Survey Overview
In early-2020, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) launched a joint survey in 2020 to identify and understand areas where minority professionals and other underrepresented groups experience obstacles on the path to licensure. Findings from the survey will highlight areas where NCARB and NOMA can provide additional support and other resources to encourage equity in the profession.

Background
In 2018, NCARB started to include data related to attrition in its yearly *NCARB by the Numbers* publication. This data revealed minority architects were 25-30 percent more likely to fall off the path then their white counterparts. The 2020 Baseline on Belonging survey aimed at starting to understand the "why" of these trends.

In reviewing the survey results, additional insights were revealed that can relate to all licensure candidates' journeys and identified other variables (like age) that have a positive and negative impact on those seeking licensure.

Audience
In order to understand the disparities minorities may face within the architecture profession, the survey intentionally engaged a large pool of professionals of color, as well as women. To allow for comparison, the survey was shared with white, male candidates as well. In addition, respondents had to be either recently licensed, a licensure candidate, or a professional who is no longer interested in pursuing an architecture license.

NCARB and NOMA targeted the following audiences to complete the survey:
- **Professionals who are no longer interested in becoming licensed** to understand and identify their reasoning for deciding not to become a licensed architect.
- **Inactive licensure candidates** who at some point decided to take a break from earning a license but still plan to become licensed.
- **Active licensure candidates** who are currently going through the experience of getting an architecture education, working in a firm, and/or preparing for the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®).
- **Architects who were licensed within the last three years** to ensure we are gathering data from architects who've experienced the current licensure process.
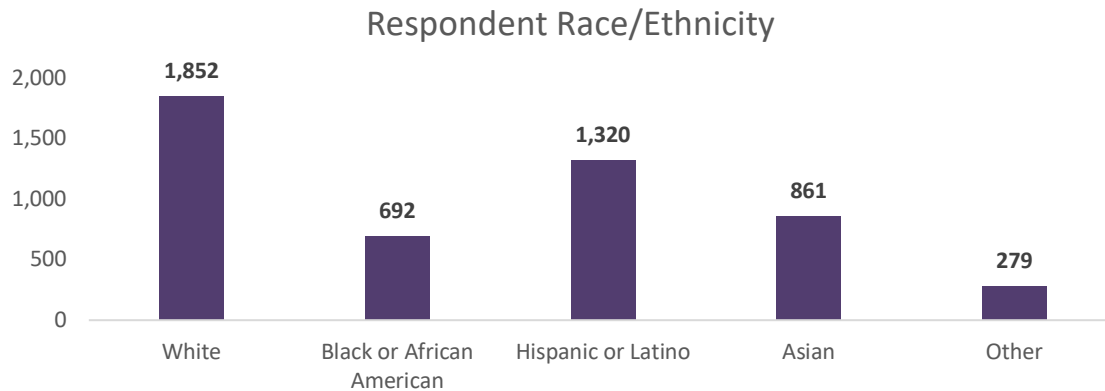
Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Response Rate and Demographics

The survey was distributed February 19 - March 4, 2020, to nearly 70,000 individuals. The survey received a total of 6,902 responses (complete and partial)—an **11 percent** response rate. The survey results include over 13,000 open text responses from optional comment questions.

NCARB and NOMA received **5,341 complete responses**. Over half were from individuals who identify as a race/ethnicity other than white.

Respondent Race/Ethnicity

| Race/Ethnicity	Count
White	1,852
Black or African American	692
Hispanic or Latino	1,320
Asian	861
Other	279

Note: other includes individuals who identified as Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian and Native American/Alaska Native, as well as people who selected "Other."
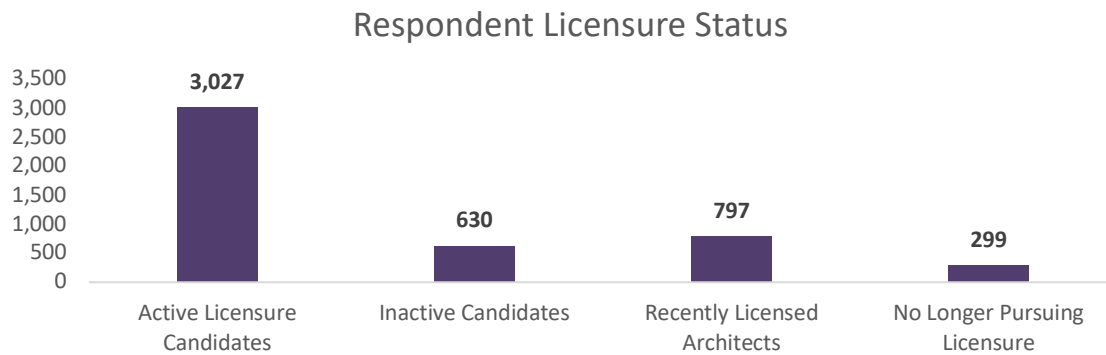
Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

The survey also had a near-even split between male and female respondents.

Respondent Gender
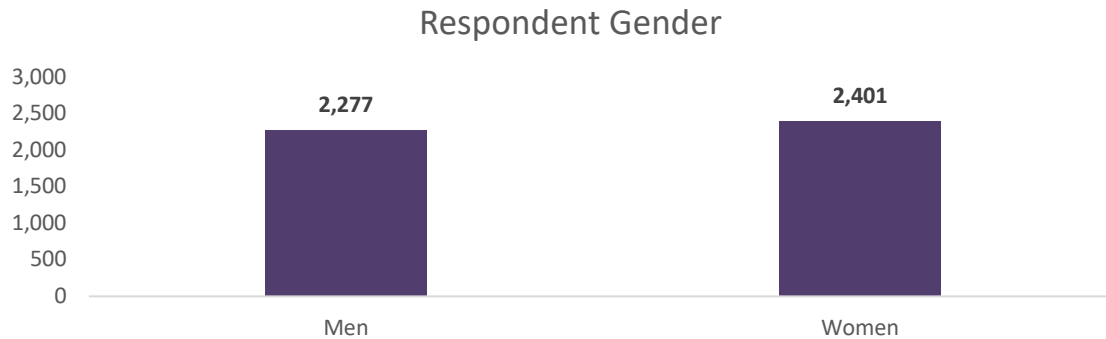
The majority of respondents were active licensure candidates, but the survey also received hundreds of responses from individuals at other stages in the licensure process and beyond.

Respondent Licensure Status

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Survey Structure
The survey was designed to take a comprehensive look at the licensure and early career experiences, based on a respondent's licensure status. It was structured around the following topics:

1. Perspective and motivation on becoming licensed
2. College education and culture
3. Finding employment at an architecture firm
4. Gaining AXP experience in an architecture firm
5. Firm culture and support
6. Supervisor/candidate relationship
7. Preparing for the ARE
8. Demographic questions

All respondents were asked to share their initial reasoning for wanting to be an architect. Professionals no longer pursuing a license were asked at what point in their career they decided not to become licensed.

All respondents who indicated they had or were currently working on earning an architecture degree were asked about their experiences with their professors and classmates, as well as what obstacles they may have faced while in school.

Respondents who indicated they were working or had worked in a firm were asked how and when they gained employment in a firm after graduation, and respondents who had earned Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®) credit were asked to share positive and negative factors that impacted their AXP experience. In addition, respondents who've worked in a firm were also asked about their firm's culture, diversity, and support for candidates preparing for and taking the ARE.

Response Segmentation
While the survey was primarily focused on assessing disparities faced by women and people of color, the responses highlighted additional areas of interest. NCARB and NOMA are currently in the process of reviewing and analyzing the data from all 5,341 respondents and 13,000 open text responses. To better understand areas of disparity, the data will be segmented by various factors including firm size, age, race, gender, licensure status, and more.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Early Findings

A broad view of the survey results indicates that there are disparities that impact women and people of color—often even more significant for women of color—along the path to licensure. Although the gaps seen are often slight in terms of percentage point differences, they are seen in nearly every area of the survey. The compounded effect of these small differences added up across the entire early career of minorities and other underrepresented individuals can have a significant impact on their ability to progress through the licensure process and is a likely contributor to the disparities in attrition levels.

In addition, the results revealed significant challenges to older candidates pursuing the AXP, and highlighted ways the ARE may pose a more significant barrier for women than for men.

Over the coming months, NOMA and NCARB will continue to analyze the survey results and release in-depth reports on key topic areas. As the findings are shared, NCARB and NOMA will determine next steps and propose possible actions to address these disparities.

Topic Areas

After review of the data, five themes have been identified to structure the release of the data and become sections of a final report:

1. Experience
2. Examination
3. Education
4. Firm Culture
5. Career Development/Employment

A report on each theme will be released individually over the coming months.

This overview report is intended to preview three of the topic areas identified above—experience, examination, and firm culture. Twelve data highlights have been selected that provide an example of what readers can expect from the full report.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Experience Preview

The experience section of the survey asked questions related to firm support for candidates completing the AXP, supervisor/candidate relationship, and overall difficulty completing the experience program.

Results for this section of the survey reveal widespread differences in the experiences of white candidates and candidates of color while navigating the AXP—with a larger gap faced by women of color. In addition, the survey revealed that age can be a significant barrier for candidates completing the AXP, as firms may be culturally conditioned to focus support on younger individuals pursuing licensure.

Four data points related to experience were selected for the initial report, providing a baseline of the overall experience section findings, which will be released later.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

African Americans Slightly Less Likely to Say Finding an AXP-Supportive Firm is Easy
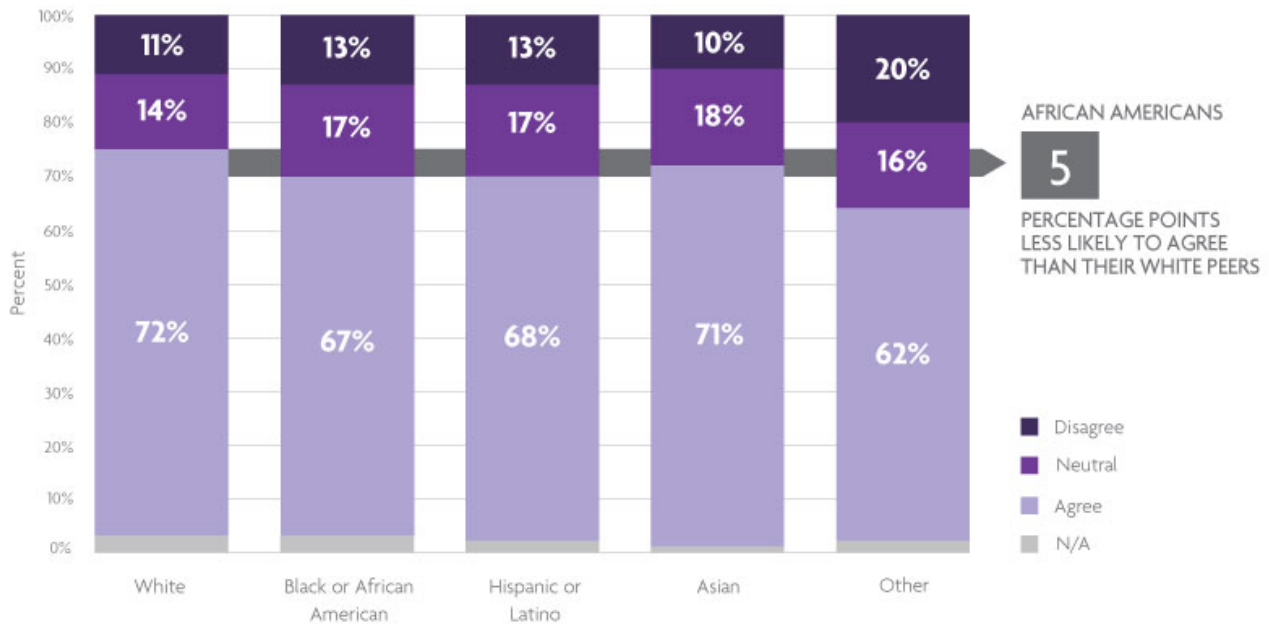
Because the AXP requires experience to be gained across six different areas, finding a firm willing to provide work opportunities in each practice area is critical to completing the program.

Most survey respondents—nearly three quarters—agreed that finding a firm to support their progress through the AXP was easy. However, licensure candidates and architects who identified as Black or African American were 5 percentage points less likely to agree than their white peers, and 4 percentage points less likely to agree than their Asian peers.

While this is a minor difference, difficulty in African American and Latino candidates' ability to find a supportive firm could draw out the time and effort needed to complete the experience program, potentially extending the licensure process and contributing to attrition on the licensure path.

Note: "Other" includes individuals who identified as a race/ethnicity other than White; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; or Asian, as well as those who wrote in an alternative response for their race/ethnicity.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

**White and Asians Most Likely to Agree AXP Supervisor Is Supportive**
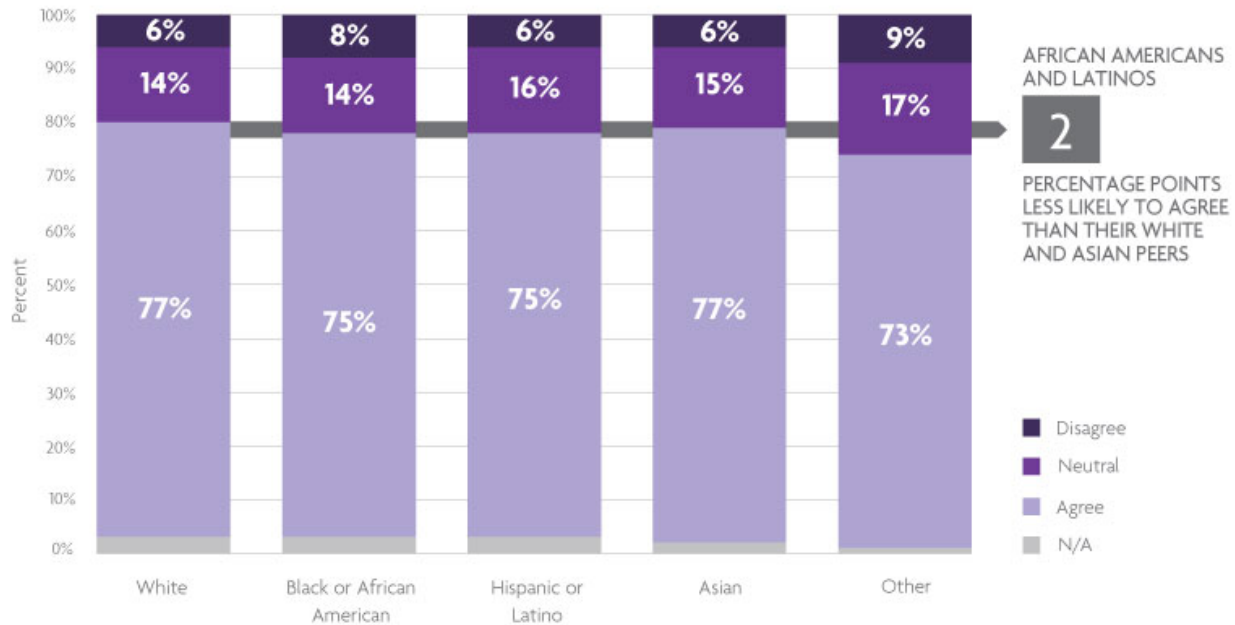
AXP supervisors play an important role in candidates' path to licensure by providing guidance, assigning experience opportunities, and reviewing experience reports.

Most survey respondents agreed that their AXP supervisor was supportive of their path toward licensure, with only a slight difference seen when broken down by race. At 77 percent, individuals who identified as White or Asian were the most likely to agree. Licensure candidates and architects who identified as Black or African American and Latino were slightly less likely to agree at 75 percent.

Though the percentage point difference is minor, the slight gap between African Americans and Latinos compared to their peers of other races/ethnicities is indicative of small but cumulative disparities for African American and Latino individuals throughout the survey results.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Asian and Latina Women Less Likely to Receive Variety of Experience Opportunities
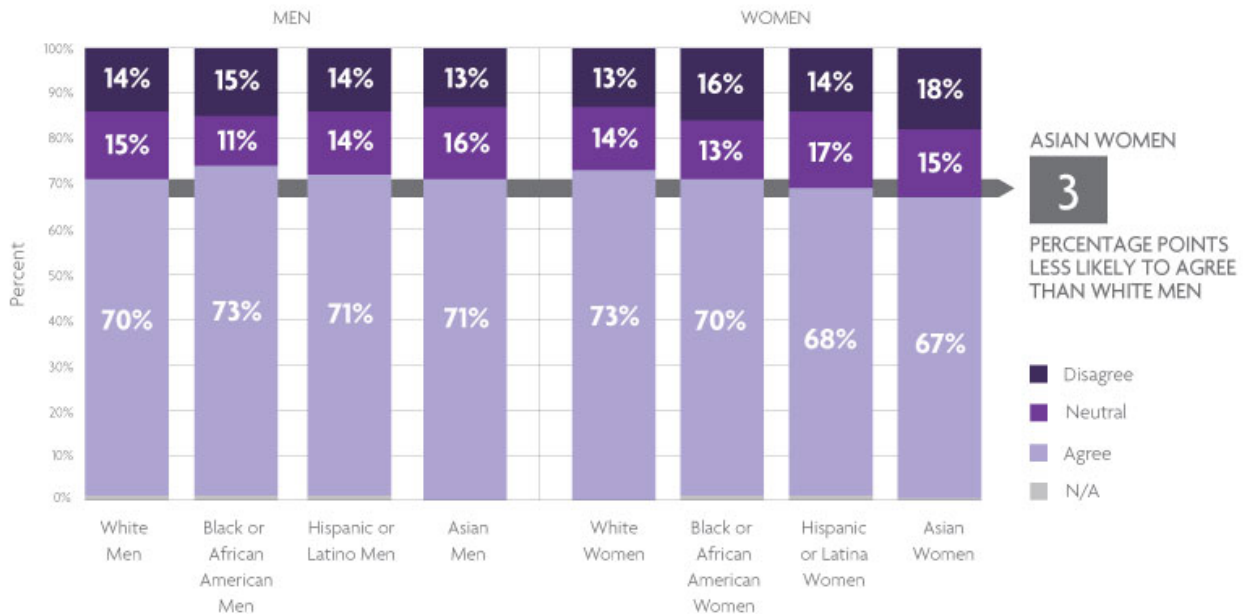
To complete the AXP, candidates must learn how to competently perform 96 key tasks spread across six experience areas. It is essential that firms offer individuals pursuing licensure a variety of work opportunities so they are able to gain the required experience.

While nearly three quarters of candidates agreed their firm provided them with a variety of opportunities to gain credit in all experience areas, breaking the responses down by race/ethnicity and gender revealed small disparities. At 67 and 68 percent (respectively), Asian and Hispanic or Latina women were the least likely to agree. This is 2 and 3 percentage points (respectively) lower than white men and 5 and 6 percentage points lower than white women and African American men, who were the most likely to agree they received a variety of opportunities.

White respondents were the only race/ethnicity where women were more likely to agree than men. For each other race/ethnicity, women were 3 percentage points less likely to agree that they received a variety of opportunities compared to the corresponding male respondents of the same race/ethnicity.

This indicates that earning the broad experience needed to earn an architecture license may be more difficult for women of color, specifically Asian and Latina women.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Reported Ease of Finding AXP-Supportive Firm Decreases With Age
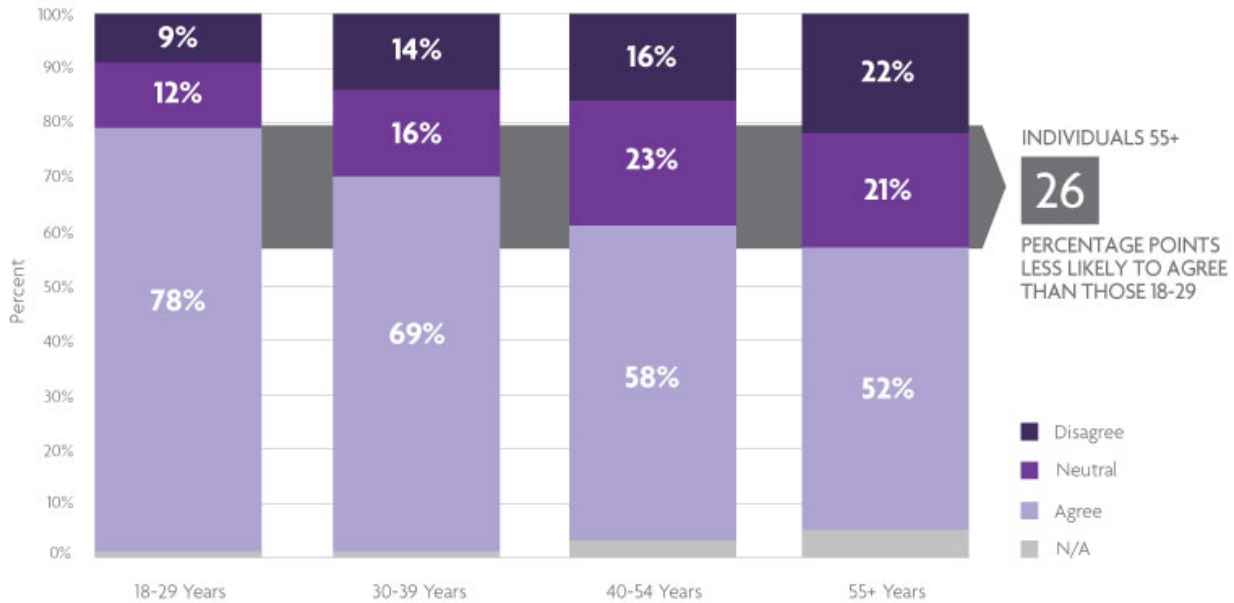
While the joint survey conducted by NOMA and NCARB is primarily exploring disparities based on race/ethnicity and gender, the results also highlighted other factors that may impact an individual's career progression, such as age.

Breaking down results based on respondents' ages revealed a large gap in areas related to the AXP. Just 52 percent of individuals aged 55 or older agreed that finding a firm to support their AXP progress was easy—26 percentage points less than individuals aged 18-29.

The percent of individuals who agree that finding a supportive firm is easy decreases with each age group, with those in the 30-39 age group 9 percentage points less likely to agree than those aged 18-29, and individuals in the 40-54 age group 20 percentage points less likely to agree.

These results indicate that despite efforts to create additional pathways to licensure, gaining the experience needed to earn a license is disproportionately difficult for older candidates.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Examination Preview

The examination section of the survey asked questions related to firm support for candidates completing the ARE, ability and confidence to afford the ARE, and overall difficulty completing the exam.

Results for this section of the survey reveal that women may face more difficulty completing the ARE, especially Hispanic or Latina women. It also highlighted that the affordability of the exam—and firm support toward the cost of the ARE—can have an impact on a candidate's ability to earn a license.

Four data points related to the examination were selected for the initial report, providing a baseline of the overall examination section findings, which will be released later.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Latinos Least Likely to Feel Confident They Can Afford the ARE
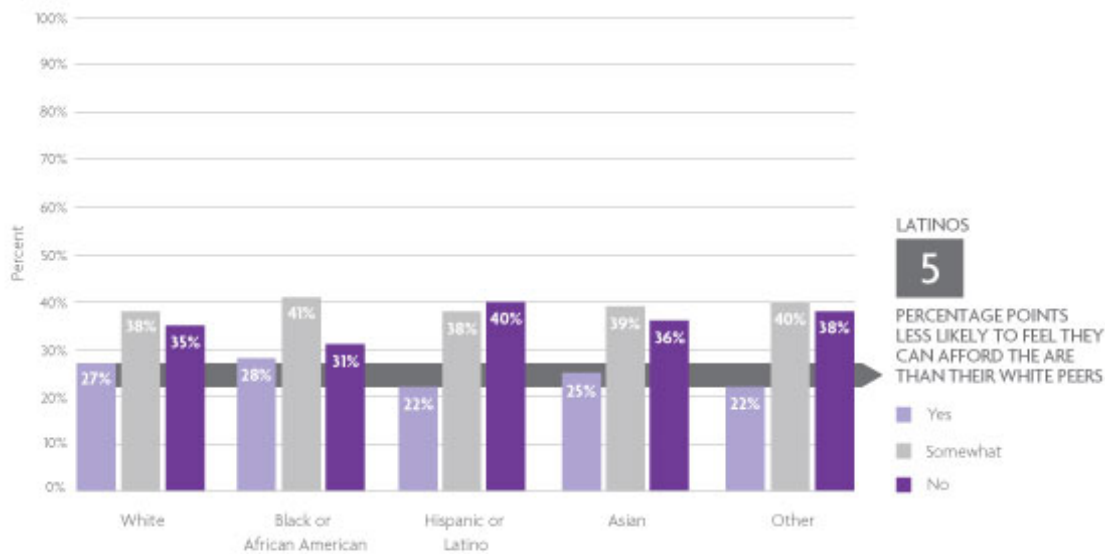
NCARB's current version of the exam, ARE 5.0, costs $235 per division. To complete the exam, candidates must pass all six divisions.

When asked whether they feel confident in their ability to afford taking the ARE, just 22 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents said yes—6 percentage points fewer than Black or African American respondents.

For most races/ethnicities, the largest proportion of respondents selected "somewhat." Hispanic or Latino respondents represent the only ethnicity where candidates were slightly more likely to select "no" when asked about if they were confident in their ability to afford taking the ARE.

Many survey respondents across all demographics indicated the cost of the exam was a significant challenge to practice; however, this may disproportionately impact Latino candidates.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Latino and African American Candidates Less Likely to Work at a Firm That Offers Them Support Toward Cost of ARE
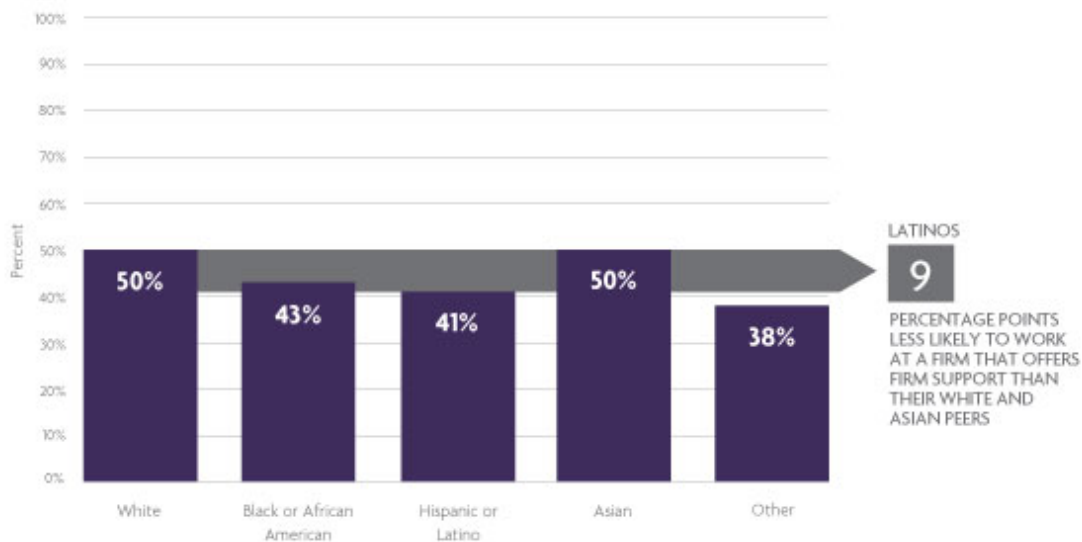
Many architecture firms support candidates by paying for the cost of the exam—although many respondents indicated that this financial assistance is often conditional on passing the ARE division.

However, just 41 percent of Latino candidates and 43 percent of African American candidates indicated that their firm would contribute to the cost of the ARE—9 and 7 percentage points (respectively) below their white and Asian peers.

While not indicative of discrimination by individual firms, this does suggest that collectively, white and Asian candidates are receiving better access to firm support while pursuing licensure, and may be more likely to work at a firm that offers support. Firm support could be impacted by a variety of factors, including individual firm culture, firm size, and more.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Latinos and African American Women More Likely to Spend Over $500 on Study Materials
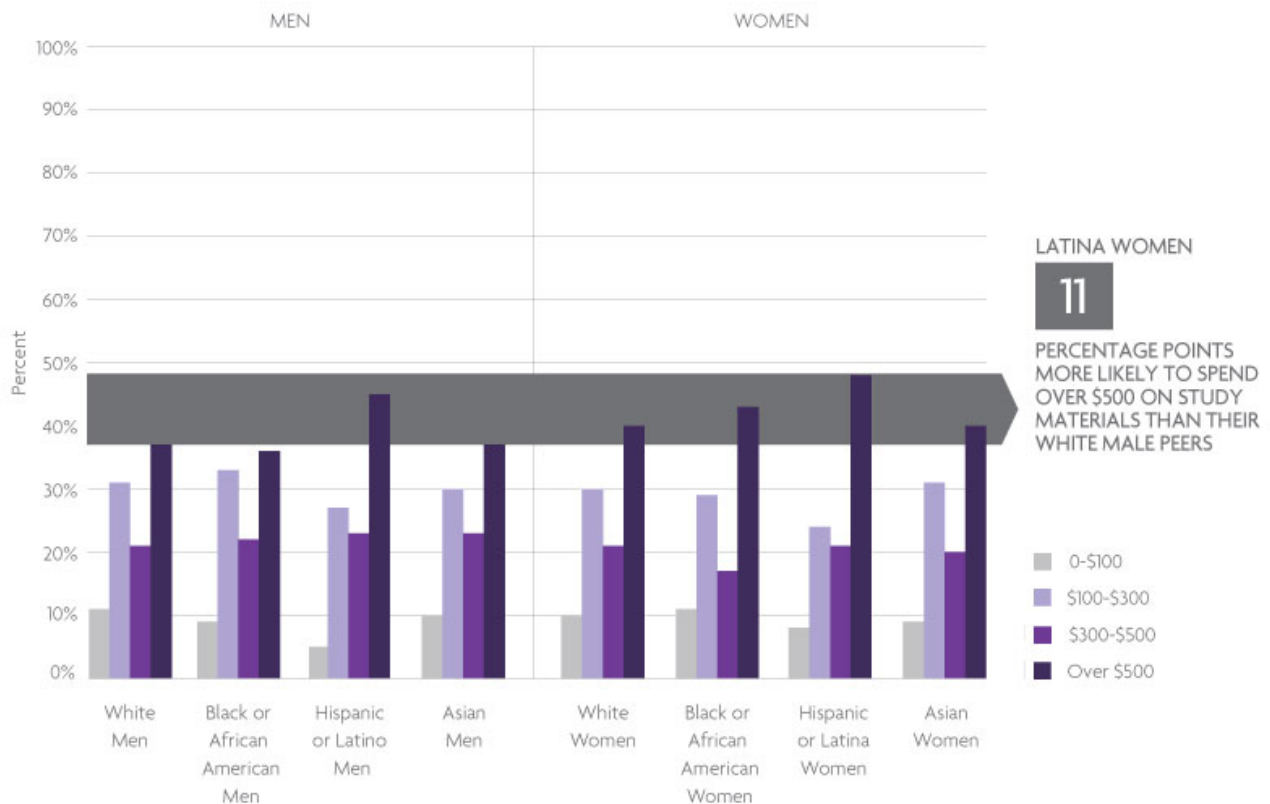
In addition to the cost of scheduling an exam appointment, many candidates purchase study materials.

When asked roughly how much they had spent on study materials, 48 percent of Latina women and 45 percent of Latino men indicated they had spent over $500, 11 and 8 percentage points higher (respectively) than their white male peers. African American women were the next most likely to spend over $500 on study materials, with 43 percent selecting this option—6 percentage points higher than white men.

With Latino and African American candidates already among the least likely to receive firm support toward the cost of the ARE, this is an additional expense that could contribute to candidates' inability to afford the exam.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Women Twice as Likely to Stop Pursuing a License After Taking ARE Division
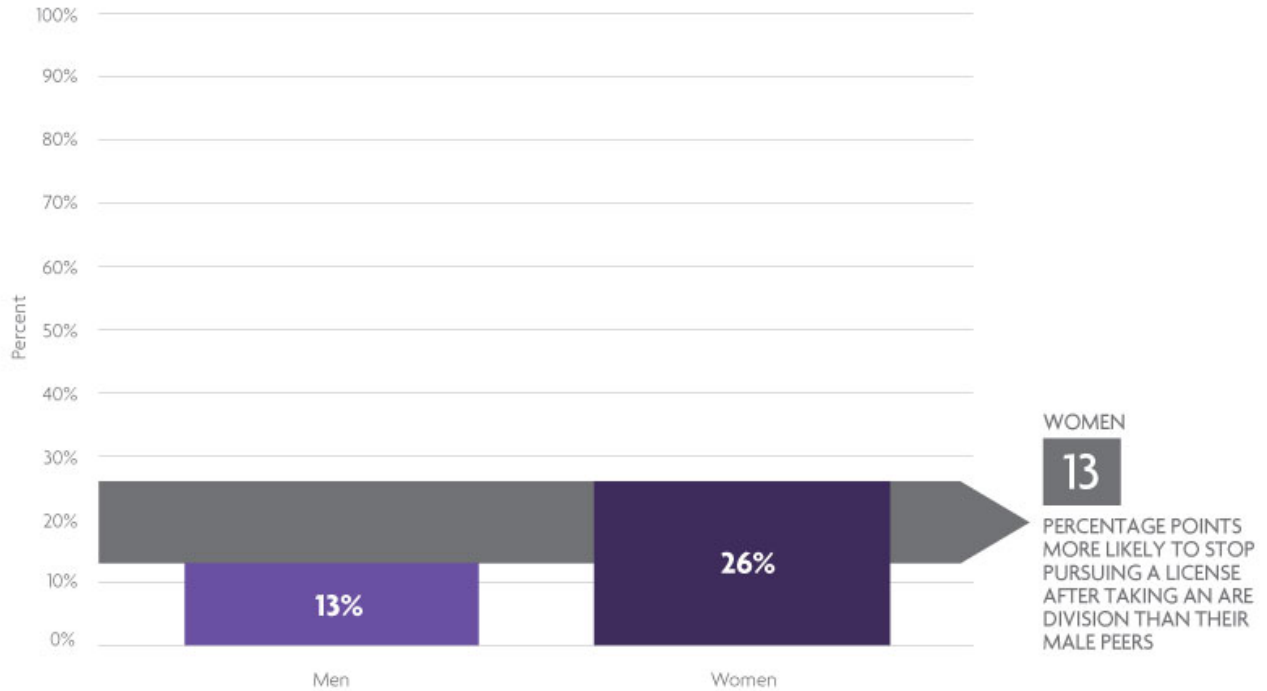
In addition to licensure candidates and recently licensed architects, the survey was also shared with individuals who decided to stop pursuing an architecture license.

When asked at what point in their career they decided not to become an architect, 26 percent of women no longer pursuing licensure selected "after taking an ARE division." This is 13 percentage points higher than their male peers.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report
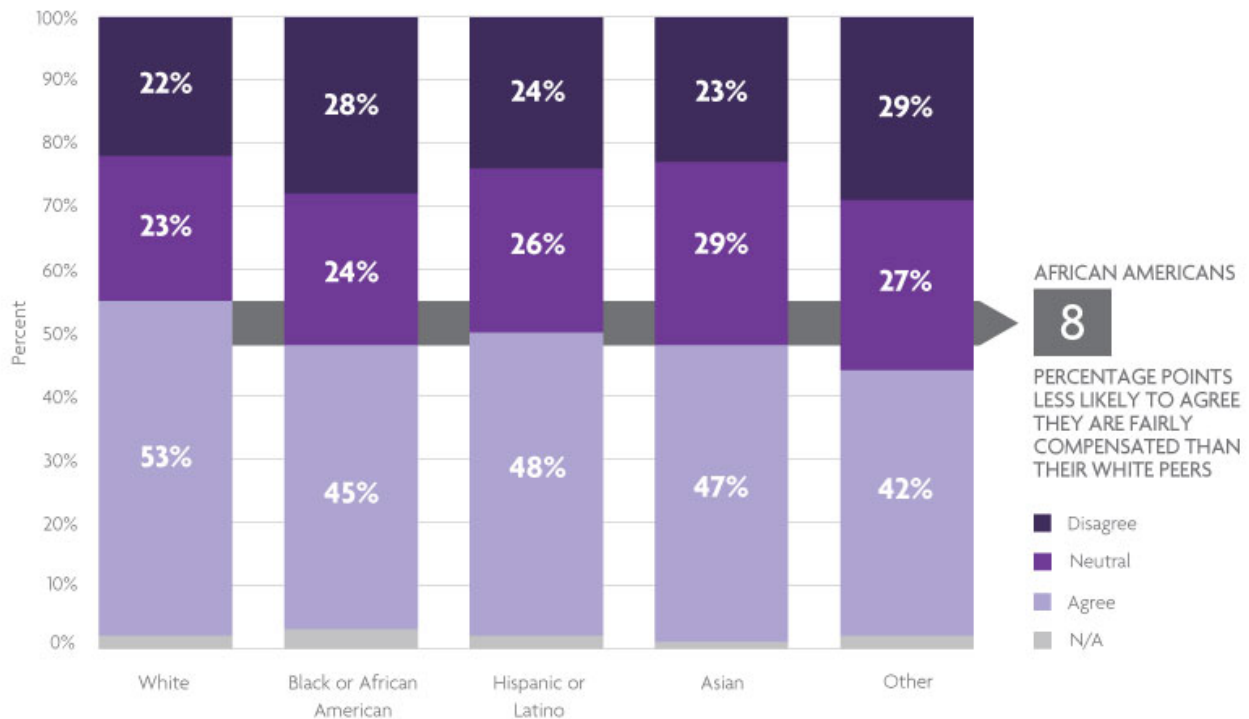
Firm Culture Preview

The firm culture section of the survey asked questions related to individual's experience working in a firm, including attitude toward licensure, firm leadership, experiences regarding discrimination, and more.

Results for this section of the survey reveal that people of color—especially individuals who identify as Black or African American—face greater difficulty regarding firm culture, and that this can impact their decision to continuing working in the architecture profession.

Four data points related to the firm culture were selected for the initial report, providing a baseline of the overall examination section findings, which will be released later.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

African Americans Less Likely to Agree They Are Fairly Compensated Compared to Peers


In addition to exploring respondents' experiences navigating the licensure process, the survey also examined firm culture and career development.

At 53 percent, white respondents were the most likely to agree they feel compensated fairly compared to their peers. Comparatively, just 45 percent of Black or African American respondents and 47 percent of Asian respondents agreed to the same statement—8 and 6 percentage points fewer, respectively.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

Two Thirds of African Americans Cannot Identify People Similar to Themselves in Firm Leadership
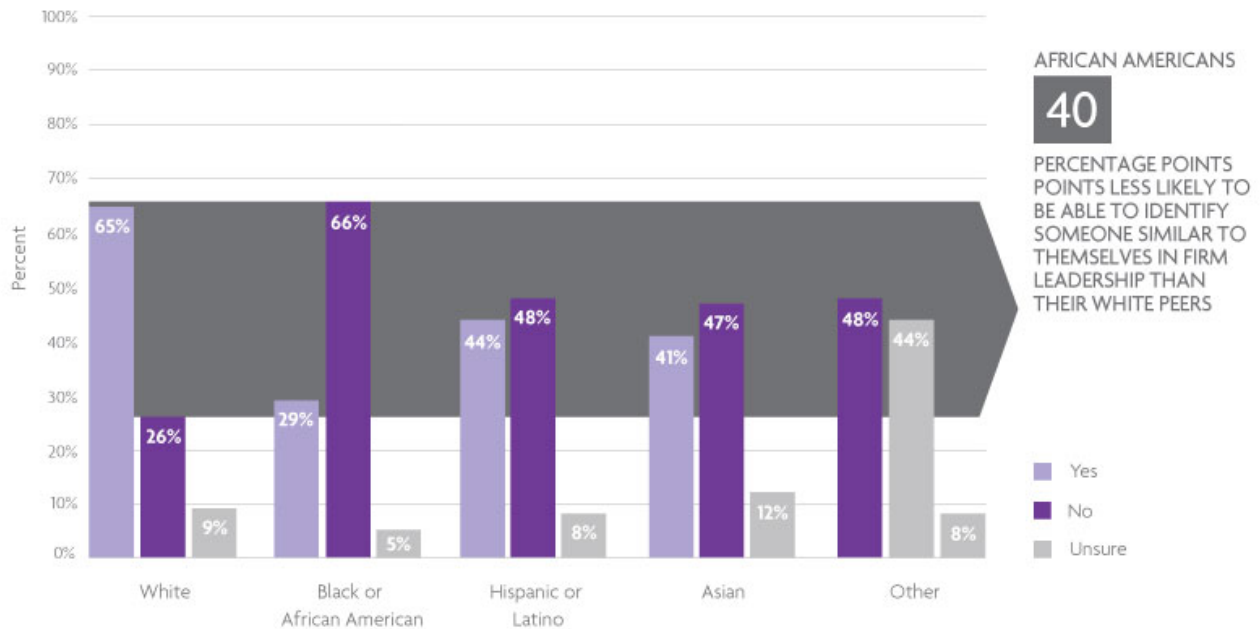

Representation in firm leadership is an important component of firm culture, and has been shown to lead to benefits such as higher employee retention and higher financial performance, among others.

When asked if they could identify people in leadership at their firm who are similar to themselves, two thirds of African American respondents indicated they could not—40 percentage points higher than white respondents. In addition, Latino and Asian respondents were 22 and 21 percentage points (respectively) more likely to indicate they could not identify people similar to themselves in firm leadership, compared to their white peers.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

**African Americans Most Likely to Face or Witness Discrimination at Work**
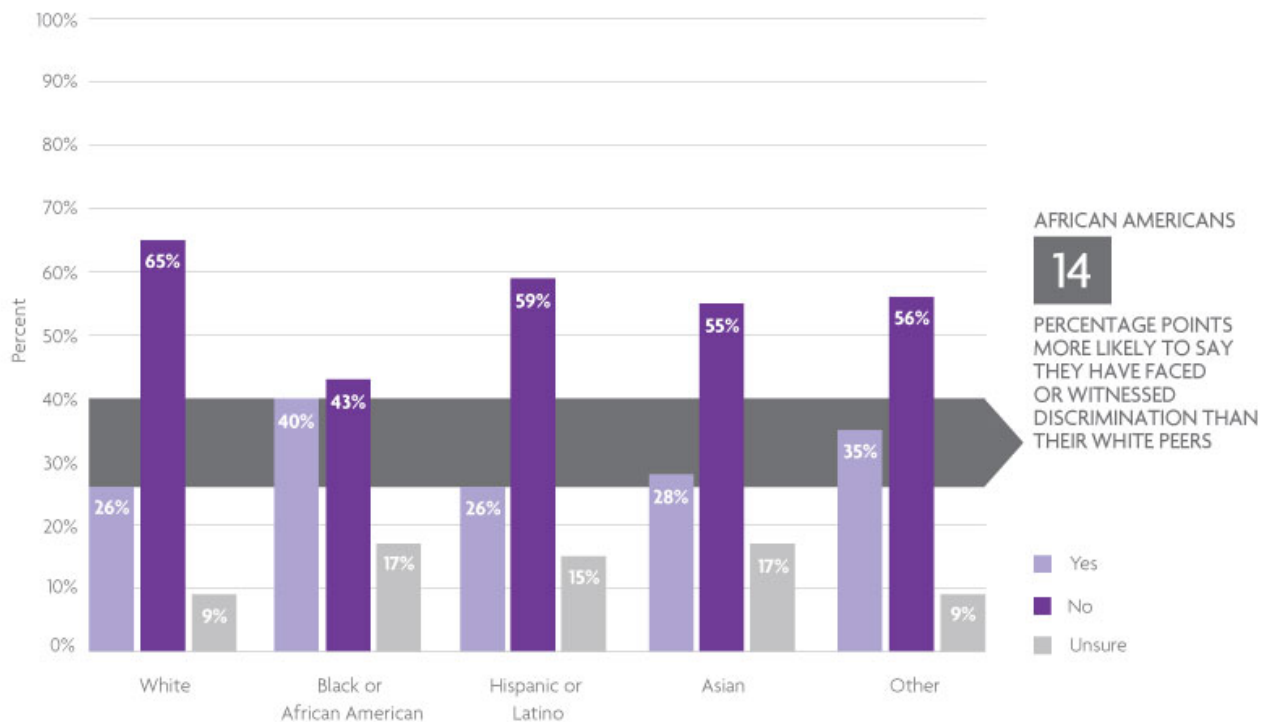
When asked if they had faced or witnessed discrimination in their work environment, 40 percent of African Americans said yes—14 percentage points higher than their white counterparts. Asians were the next most likely to report they had faced or witnessed discrimination at work, with 28 percent selecting yes—still 12 percentage points fewer than African Americans.

This statistic highlights that there is disparity in the profession, even among underrepresented groups.

Baseline on Belonging:
Overview Report

People of Color More Likely to Stop Pursuing Licensure While Working at a Firm
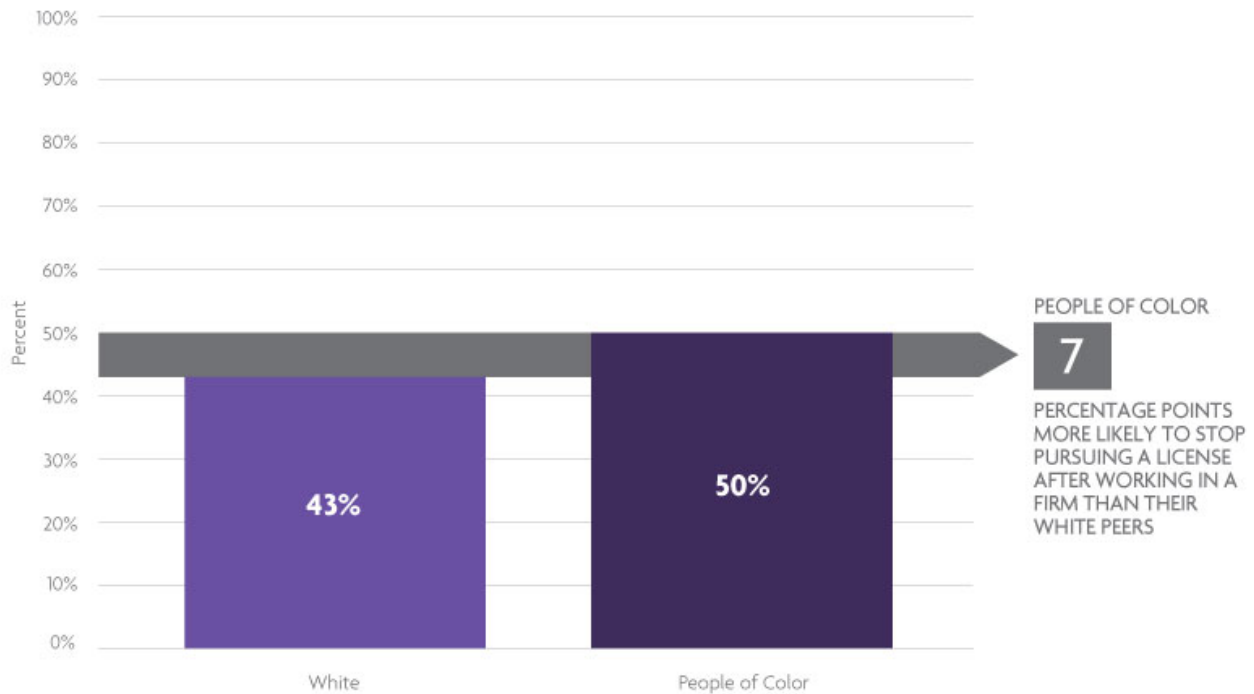
When asked at what point in their career they decided not to become an architect, 50 percent of people of color who are no longer pursuing licensure selected "while working in an architecture firm." This is 7 percentage points higher than their white peers, suggesting that people of color are more likely to fall off the path to licensure due to experiences at a firm.

Given the cumulative disparities apparent in the experiences of people of color at various points throughout the licensure process when compared to their white peers—in gaining experience, receiving firm support while taking the ARE, and in firm culture—the higher level of attrition is both understandable, and potentially preventable. These findings highlight the need for culture and systematic shifts throughout the profession.