NCARB

The Standards
for NCARB's Competency-Based Licensure Programs

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Executive Summary

This document is for policymakers, legislators, regulatory boards, professional organizations, individual advocates, and other stakeholders evaluating, developing, or amending architectural licensure requirements. The recommendations herein are advisory and serve as a resource to guide decision-making and support the adoption of regulations that evolve and enhance public protection.

The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) is updating its licensure programs to align with a nationally recognized competency standard that reflects evolving practice while continuing to ensure public protection. A "competency standard" is a clearly defined description of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that a person must demonstrate to perform a role, task, or responsibility successfully. The updates will build upon and modernize a longstanding approach to architect licensure programs. The term "architect" is defined by law in each state or territory, and a license granted by a state or territory is required to provide architectural services. Jurisdictions regulate architecture and other professions to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. NCARB's competency-based licensure programs will simultaneously advance public protection, expand access to the profession, and continue to provide professional mobility.

Rather than replacing the foundational elements of architectural licensure, the proposed system represents the next evolution of NCARB's education programs, the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®), and the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®), aligning each component to a nationally recognized competency standard.

NCARB's competency-based licensure programs preserve commitment to rigorous standards and public protection while creating more accessible and responsive pathways to licensure. For decades, architectural licensure has relied on three complementary mechanisms to prepare candidates for independent practice: education, experience, and examination. These elements have served the profession well by providing structured opportunities to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to protect the public. The proposed competency-based licensure programs build on these proven foundations by focusing more directly on the underlying competencies that education, experience, and examination have always been intended to develop and assess.

At the center of competency-based licensure programs is the *NCARB Competency Standard for Architects*. Adopted in 2024, it represents a nationally validated benchmark developed through extensive research, engagement with regulators, practitioners, and educators, and rigorous psychometric analysis. The *Competency Standard* identifies the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for safe and effective independent practice and establishes a common national standard against which all licensure candidates are assessed.

NCARB's educational programs will evolve to recognize architecture-related education of all forms as well as recognizing demonstrated achievement of competencies through accredited degree programs or approved coursework. The AXP will evolve from broad experience areas to a program that emphasizes demonstrating and applying focused professional competencies across work settings, while maintaining

the important role of supervised employment and time in practice. The ARE will evolve from a large-format model of six divisions into a suite of more focused assessments that include traditional standardized assessments and guided learning with a standardized assessment component.

This evolution reflects a simple but important principle: all candidates should meet the same standard of professional competence, regardless of how they acquire it. By measuring outcomes rather than prescribing a single pathway, NCARB's competency-based licensure programs enable licensure candidates to develop competencies through education, professional practice, military service, apprenticeships, alternative educational experiences, and other validated learning, while ensuring every individual meets the same minimum threshold for independent practice.

Historically, policymakers and regulators have often viewed rigor and accessibility as competing objectives. NCARB's competency-based licensure programs demonstrate they can be achieved together. The proposed programs build on existing rigorous standards by evaluating individuals on demonstrated competency, improving confidence that individuals are truly prepared for independent practice. At the same time, the proposed programs create a more accessible licensure process that will allow all qualified individuals the opportunity to demonstrate competence and become licensed as architects.

Ultimately, NCARB's competency-based licensure programs represent the natural progression of NCARB's longstanding focus on removing unnecessary barriers to licensure. By integrating and updating the principles embodied in current education, experience, and examination programs, the licensing boards can preserve their commitment to public protection while creating a more accessible licensure process that evolves alongside architectural practice.

1. Introduction and Overview

1.1 Purpose of This Document

This document provides a comprehensive overview of the planned full integration of the *NCARB Competency Standard for Architects* (hereafter, the *Competency Standard*) into the existing licensure framework. This document provides details about the requirements, programs, and policies for updating architectural licensure statutes, regulations, and administrative policies related to initial licensure requirements. It establishes standards and guiding principles intended to support the consistent regulation of granting a license to practice architecture that protects public health, safety, and welfare.

The standards presented in this document reflect a commitment to protecting the public through rigorous yet accessible pathways to licensure. They are intended to promote consistency among jurisdictions while preserving the authority of individual licensing boards and legislative bodies to address local legal, regulatory, and public policy considerations.

As the practice of architecture continues to evolve in response to advances in technology, project delivery methods, and societal needs, regulatory systems must adapt to remain relevant and effective. This document provides jurisdictions with an overview of policy recommendations and implementation considerations that support regulatory modernization while maintaining the fundamental competencies necessary for the independent practice of architecture.

By promoting greater uniformity in licensure requirements and regulatory practices, this document seeks to advance mutual recognition among jurisdictions, reduce unnecessary licensure barriers, and support national professional standards that benefit regulators, practitioners, and the public.

1.2 Scope and Applicability

This document is designed for policymakers, legislators, regulatory boards, professional organizations, individual advocates, and other stakeholders engaged in developing, evaluating, or amending architectural licensure requirements. The recommendations herein are intended to help jurisdictions align with contemporary standards of professional practice, licensure, education, experience, examination, and mobility.

Approved by the NCARB Board of Directors, this document serves as an advisory resource. Its recommendations do not supersede existing statutory authority. Like all NCARB policy and program documents, it is intended to inform decision-making and encourage regulatory approaches that protect the public, promote professional mobility, and strengthen the architectural profession.

1.3 Public Protection

Public protection is the primary purpose of architectural licensure and the foundation for all regulatory requirements governing the profession. Any modernization of licensure laws, regulations, or administrative processes also can serve to preserve and strengthen safeguards that ensure architects possess the competencies necessary to protect the health, safety, and welfare of building occupants and the public.

Consistent with its underlying mission to protect the public, regulation focuses on validating the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for independent practice, while ensuring licensure standards remain responsive to changes in technology, project delivery methods, and society's evolving needs.

Competency-based licensure models strengthen public protection by focusing regulatory requirements on those key elements of knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary for the safe and independent practice of architecture. However, rather than relying solely on fixed requirements such as required educational degrees or broad experience area requirements, competency-based approaches assess whether an individual has demonstrated the capabilities required to perform professional responsibilities in a manner that protects the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

NCARB's competency-based licensure programs enable regulators to evaluate individuals against clearly defined professional outcomes and performance expectations. This approach ensures that licensed architects possess the competencies necessary to exercise professional care, coordinate complex building systems, address regulatory requirements, and manage risks inherent in the design and construction process. By emphasizing demonstrated competence, jurisdictions can maintain rigorous standards while supporting pathways to licensure that reflect the wide-ranging educational and professional experiences individuals have acquired.

The *Competency Standard* establishes a nationally recognized benchmark for the minimum competencies required to enter the profession. Developed through a psychometrically rigorous process that included surveys of thousands of professionals and ongoing engagement with regulators, practitioners, educators, and subject matter experts, the standard identifies the core competencies necessary for the safe and effective practice of architecture at the point of initial licensure.

The *Competency Standard* serves as the foundation for NCARB's competency-based updates to existing licensure programs. By aligning existing programs with validated competency expectations, NCARB will provide jurisdictions with an improved, defensible, and data-driven mechanism for assessing whether individuals have achieved the minimum threshold for independent practice.

Importantly, a competency-based approach has been shown to not lower licensure standards. Rather, it provides as good as, or potentially even stronger, public protection by ensuring licensure decisions are based on demonstrated readiness to practice in addition to completing procedural requirements. The *Competency Standard* safeguards minimum competency thresholds by setting consistent expectations and giving jurisdictions reliable programs to evaluate qualifications. This approach lets jurisdictions support modernization and flexibility in licensure pathways while preserving the rigorous standards needed to protect the public and maintain confidence in the profession.

1.4 Enhanced Access

A competency-based approach enables regulators to evaluate all individuals against the same professional standards while providing flexibility in how those competencies are acquired. The integration of competency-based standards for architectural licensure into existing programs currently under development by NCARB is grounded in transparency, consistency, and accountability.

Licensure requirements, competency expectations, and evaluation criteria are clearly defined and readily accessible to applicants, regulators, employers, educators, and the public. Transparent standards promote confidence in the regulatory process by ensuring that qualification decisions are based on objective, measurable, and professionally validated criteria. Likewise, accountability mechanisms will enable jurisdictions to monitor outcomes, assess the effectiveness of licensure requirements, and make data-informed adjustments when necessary. A transparent, accountable regulatory framework supports public trust while ensuring licensure decisions are fair and defensible.

This updated framework will enable licensing boards to remove unnecessary impediments to licensure while also providing a valid pathway for qualified individuals pursuing non-traditional routes to licensure, including those with alternative educational backgrounds, military experience, apprenticeship-based learning, or other forms of validated professional development. By expanding access to licensure opportunities without compromising competency expectations, jurisdictions can strengthen workforce development, widen the pool of qualified candidates, and better position the architectural workforce to meet the needs of the communities it serves.

1.5 Enhanced Opportunities

The proposed updates to current licensure programs represent a logical evolution from a focus on educational pre-requisites, prescribed broad experience areas, and large-format standardized assessments to a more accessible process inclusive of substantially equivalent options that are psychometrically sound and equally rigorous.

Current national model approaches rely on completing specific academic degrees and accumulating prescribed experience as stand-ins for actual proof of skill. These measures support skill development, but there is an opportunity to move beyond this less flexible approach. NCARB's approach better recognizes that individuals acquire professional competencies through a variety of educational, experiential, and developmental pathways. NCARB's approach supports enhanced opportunity by allowing individuals to develop required competencies through multiple forms of learning, including accredited education, professional practice, alternative educational experiences, military service, apprenticeship models, and other forms of professional development.

The competency-based updates to architectural licensure programs currently under development by NCARB will ensure all individuals are evaluated against consistent competency expectations and professional standards. This approach expands access to the profession, supports workforce development, and accommodates the diverse ways in which aspiring architects acquire the capabilities necessary for safe and effective practice, while maintaining consistent standards for public protection.

1.6 The Development Process

NCARB's competency-based updates to its licensure programs result from a multi-year, data-driven, psychometrically validated effort to modernize architect licensure programs and expand access and opportunities to demonstrate qualification to be a licensed architect.

NCARB's 2022 Analysis of Practice, one of the most comprehensive studies of the architectural profession ever conducted, provided initial research findings that guided the development of the *Competency Standard*. The study engaged nearly 20,000 architects and other stakeholders to examine how architecture is practiced, the knowledge and skills required for professional performance, emerging trends affecting the profession, and the competencies necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. The findings provide empirical evidence regarding the capabilities required at the point of initial licensure and serve as the basis for the ongoing evolution of NCARB's licensure programs and standards.

Building upon the Analysis of Practice, NCARB convened a Competency Task Force composed of licensing board members, practitioners, and educators from across the profession. This task force conducted extensive research into professional competency frameworks, reviewed licensure models used by other regulated professions, evaluated emerging workforce and educational trends, and identified the competencies necessary for independent practice. Nearly 5,000 licensed architects further validated the draft competencies. This work resulted in the *Competency Standard*, developed in 2024, which establishes a nationally validated standard of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for initial licensure.

To determine the most effective way to integrate the *Competency Standard* into NCARB's licensure programs fully, NCARB convened a multi-year Licensure Process Research and Development Task Force composed of licensing board members, practitioners, and educators from across the profession. This task force researched licensing best practices in other U.S. professions and how other countries license architects. In collaboration with several NCARB committees, the task force refined a proposed update to the licensure process that would allow for individual assessment of each competency as defined in the *Competency Standard*. In addition, this task force researched a variety of assessment options and developed a preliminary set of potential assessment methods that could effectively assess architectural competencies.

Through further work by NCARB's program committees, multiple external consultants, and several iterations of licensing board and stakeholder feedback, the resulting proposed competency-based programs establish a common, rigorous competency-based licensure process that applies across multiple routes to licensure. Regardless of the pathway pursued, all individuals must demonstrate the same minimum level of competency required for independent practice, ensuring that modernization in licensure pathways does not compromise the rigor of the licensure process or the profession's responsibility to protect the public.

NCARB's competency-based licensure programs reflect a commitment to maintaining high standards of public protection while creating a licensure system that is more accessible, adaptable, and responsive to the needs of future generations of architects.

2. Alignment With the *NCARB Competency Standard for Architects*

The *Competency Standard* establishes a nationally recognized framework describing the minimum competencies necessary for safe and effective professional practice. These competencies provide a consistent benchmark against which NCARB programs can evaluate individuals, ensuring that licensure decisions are grounded in demonstrated capability rather than assumptions based solely on credentials or time spent completing requirements.

2.1 Overview of NCARB's Competencies

The *Competency Standard* is organized into three broad domains that reflect architects' primary responsibilities throughout the project lifecycle: Design & Documentation, Construction Administration, and Practice & Project Management. Together, these domains encompass the technical knowledge, professional care, and management capabilities necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

Within these domains, the *Competency Standard* identifies 16 distinct competencies, each defining the professional capabilities required. These competencies are further supported by detailed criteria that describe the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors necessary to practice independently. These criteria clarify the abilities and the level of proficiency required for independent practice.

2.2 Required Competency Outcomes for Licensure

By organizing licensure requirements around validated competencies rather than solely educational credentials or fixed experience areas, NCARB gives jurisdictions a consistent, ability-based method for evaluating readiness for professional practice. The competencies establish a common standard against which all individuals are assessed, ensuring consistent expectations for professional competence and public protection while maintaining flexibility in licensure pathways.

2.3 Updating Competency Standards Over Time

As the profession evolves, the competency standard provides a scalable structure for updating licensure requirements to reflect emerging technologies, project delivery methods, and practice responsibilities while maintaining the fundamental competencies necessary for the independent practice of architecture. Through this approach, the *Competency Standard* supports regulatory modernization and NCARB's mission of safeguarding the public through rigorous, consistent standards for initial licensure, while ensuring professional mobility.

3. Governance and Administrative Structure

3.1 Role of the Jurisdictional Licensing Board

The jurisdictional licensing board serves as the regulatory authority responsible for administering and enforcing the jurisdiction's architectural licensure laws and regulations to protect public health, safety, and welfare. In some cases, the board's function is advisory to a jurisdictional agency or other entity. Acting under authority granted by statute, the board either establishes or provides advice regarding licensure procedures, evaluates applicant qualifications, issues licenses, investigates allegations of misconduct, and takes disciplinary action when necessary. The board's primary responsibility is not to advance the profession's interests, but to ensure that only individuals who have demonstrated the minimum competency required for the independent practice of architecture are authorized to offer professional services to the public. Through effective oversight and administration, the licensing board gives the public confidence that licensed architects have the qualifications to practice safely, ethically, and independently.

3.2 Board Oversight Responsibilities

Through NCARB, architect licensing boards shape and adopt nationally recognized standards that ensure consistent, rigorous evaluation of initial candidates for architectural licensure, as well as licensed architects seeking reciprocal licensure in their jurisdiction. While NCARB develops, administers, and maintains national competency standards and assessment programs, the jurisdictional licensing board retains the authority to grant, deny, renew, suspend, revoke, or otherwise regulate a license to practice architecture.

Where applicable, licensing boards will continue to establish jurisdiction-specific licensure requirements, issue licenses, enforce professional conduct standards, investigate complaints, adjudicate disciplinary matters, and oversee continuing competency requirements. Where applicable, Boards will also retain authority over matters related to practice regulation, firm registration, reciprocal licensure, and compliance with state statutes and administrative rules.

Jurisdictional licensing boards retain ultimate responsibility for ensuring that any assessment used to support architectural licensure decisions adequately protects the public health, safety, and welfare. Such approval is best based on proof that assessments are developed through accepted psychometric practices, informed by current analyses of professional practice, and designed to evaluate the competencies required for safe and effective independent practice.

This approach preserves the traditional balance between national standards and state regulatory authority while enabling greater consistency, mobility, and flexibility in pathways to licensure.

4. Eligibility Requirements

4.1 Education Requirement

To gain access to NCARB's licensure programs, an individual needs a high school diploma or its equivalent (such as a General Educational Development, or GED, credential). Unlike the current educational requirement, obtaining a specific college degree will no longer be the national model for commencing the journey through the licensure process.

Instead, individuals seeking entry into NCARB's competency-based licensure programs shall establish a record with NCARB and provide documentation acceptable to NCARB demonstrating successful completion of secondary education or an equivalent or greater credential. Acceptable documentation may include a high school diploma, general educational development (GED) credential, recognized secondary school equivalency certificate, or other documentation determined by NCARB to represent substantially equivalent or greater achievement.

Establishing a minimum educational threshold supports the integrity of the licensure system while providing a clear and accessible point of entry for all individuals who may be pursuing a variety of educational and professional pathways toward architectural licensure.

NCARB shall maintain policies and procedures for reviewing and validating education documentation and may establish standards for accepting domestic and international credentials. Jurisdictional licensing boards can rely upon NCARB's verification of this requirement in determining an individual's eligibility to participate in NCARB's competency-based licensure programs.

4.2 Approval Requirement

An individual must receive approval from the jurisdiction where they are seeking initial architectural licensure before participating in any NCARB-administered competency assessment. If an individual is undecided on a jurisdiction in which to seek initial licensure, the individual must receive approval from NCARB before participating in any competency assessment. Anyone approved by NCARB must still choose a jurisdiction before NCARB sends their results to a jurisdictional board.

The jurisdictional approval process recognizes the authority of architectural licensing boards to determine participation in the licensure process within their respective jurisdictions. By allowing individuals to select their preferred jurisdiction for initial licensure, the licensure system promotes appropriate regulatory oversight. In addition, allowing undecided individuals to be approved by NCARB to begin taking NCARB-administered assessments facilitates initial access to the licensure process. Undecided individuals must select a jurisdiction for initial licensure before NCARB transmits any competency information to a board of architecture, therefore maintaining jurisdiction-appropriate regulatory oversight.

This approval requirement establishes a consistent national entry point into the assessment process while preserving jurisdictional licensing boards' authority to oversee access to licensure within their respective jurisdictions.

5. Competency Assessments and Licensure Program Requirements

The assessment methods utilized in NCARB's competency-based licensure programs evaluate an individual's ability to apply professional competency in practice-relevant contexts. The system prioritizes performance-based measures that assess an individual's capacity to integrate technical knowledge, regulatory requirements, ethical responsibilities, risk management principles, and professional decision-making. Assessment outcomes will provide reliable and defensible proof that an individual can perform at the minimum level necessary to protect the public.

NCARB's competency-based licensure programs include education, experience, and examination components that validate readiness for licensure. The three primary components are evolving from today's requirements to an integrated system that allows applicants options for demonstrating their qualifications for licensure. As all assessments are being measured against the same competency standard, jurisdictional licensing boards can have confidence in each assessment decision, regardless of which assessment was used to demonstrate competency.

Using multiple assessment approaches allows NCARB to evaluate competencies in the most appropriate manner aligned with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors being measured. Regardless of the assessment method used, every individual must demonstrate achievement of the same minimum competencies established by the *Competency Standard*. The validity of the licensure system is grounded not in a single assessment instrument, but in the consistent application of a common competency threshold for all individuals.

By focusing on demonstrated competence and measurable outcomes, the system provides jurisdictions with confidence that all licensure candidates have met a common standard for entry into professional practice, regardless of the pathway through which those competencies were acquired and demonstrated.

5.1 Education Program Requirements: NCARB's Education Programs

Education plays a critical role in developing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for the safe and independent practice of architecture. Consistent with a competency-based approach to licensure, NCARB will evaluate educational preparation based on demonstrated achievement of validated competencies that align with the *Competency Standard*. Rather than serving solely as a prescribed credential requirement, education functions as a mechanism through which individuals may acquire and demonstrate professional competencies necessary for licensure. Accreditation standards, program learning outcomes, and/or validated assessment practices provide evidence that graduates have achieved specific competencies and may therefore be awarded competency credit toward licensure requirements. This approach preserves the important role of architectural education in protecting the public while creating a more transparent, outcomes-focused system that recognizes demonstrated competency as the primary measure of readiness for professional practice.

5.1.1 Competency Credit for Completion of a Degree from a NAAB-accredited Program

This program lets a candidate earn competency credit for an earned degree from a National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB)-accredited program, rather than needing to redemonstrate those competencies again through a separate assessment. An accredited architecture degree still

carries value, as it can earn competency credit and develop candidates' abilities toward competency, but the lack of that specific educational credential is no longer a barrier to entry. A "competency credit" is official recognition, recorded by NCARB, that a person has proven one required competency.

NCARB shall recognize the successful completion of a NAAB-accredited professional degree program as confirmation of achievement of certain competencies within the *Competency Standard*. NAAB reviews and accredits professional architecture degree programs; a degree from a NAAB-accredited program meets nationally recognized quality standards. Competency credit awarded for completion of a degree from a NAAB-accredited program shall apply only to those competencies that have been determined to be adequately addressed and assessed through the accredited educational program.

As the NAAB updates its accreditation standards, NCARB will evaluate those standards to determine the specific competencies for which competency credit will be awarded to individuals graduating from programs accredited under the corresponding standards. Such validation shall be based on input from the NAAB and demonstrated alignment between program learning outcomes, accreditation criteria, and the *Competency Standard*.

Individuals seeking competency credit for completion of a NAAB-accredited degree program shall register their degree completion with NCARB. The candidate shall authorize the submission of an official transcript, degree verification, or other documentation to confirm the successful award of the degree and the accreditation status of the program at the time of graduation.

Upon receipt and verification of the required documentation, NCARB shall evaluate the degree for eligibility under applicable competency credit policies and record any associated competency credit(s) within the candidate's NCARB Record. An "NCARB Record" is a secure, official online file NCARB keeps for each candidate—approvals, competency credits, and results. NCARB shall maintain administrative procedures for transcript submission, credential verification, record maintenance, and periodic auditing to ensure the accuracy and integrity of degree-based competency determinations.

5.1.2 Pre-approved Course(s) with an Integrated Competency Assessment

Separate from degree-based competency, this NCARB program lets a candidate earn competency credit through a specific course or training program once NCARB has reviewed and approved that course as teaching and testing the relevant competency(ies). NCARB shall grant competency credit for the successful completion of a pre-approved course, pre-approved courses, or an educational program that includes an integrated competency assessment aligned with one or more competencies contained within the *Competency Standard*. To qualify for competency credit, NCARB or its designee must review and validate the educational curriculum and its associated assessment to ensure the learning objectives, instructional content, assessment methodology, and performance standards adequately measure the identified competency or competencies.

Competency credit shall be awarded only upon satisfactory demonstration through the integrated assessment and shall be limited to those competencies specifically approved by NCARB. Neither educational participation nor a passing course grade alone shall constitute achievement of a competency.

NCARB will require all pre-approved course(s) with integrated assessment to be completed through a post-secondary institution that holds accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. NCARB shall establish criteria for course approval, assessment validation, performance thresholds, quality assurance, and periodic review to ensure that competency credits awarded through approved coursework remain reliable, consistent, and aligned with current licensure standards.

Individuals seeking competency credit for completion of an NCARB-approved course that includes an integrated competency assessment shall supply documentation of competency completion to NCARB in accordance with procedures established by NCARB.

NCARB will maintain requirements for provider reporting, candidate documentation, identity verification, record retention, auditing, and quality assurance to ensure the accuracy and integrity of competency credit awards. Registration of a pre-approved course completion shall result in the award of competency credit only for the approved competencies successfully demonstrated through the integrated assessment and shall not, by itself, satisfy all requirements for architectural licensure.

5.2 Experience Program Requirements: Architectural Experience Program (AXP) 2.0

Professional experience plays a critical role in developing and demonstrating one's competence for the safe and independent practice of architecture. NCARB will evaluate one's competency based on documented hourly requirements and evidence of practice-level performance through associated and aligned standardized assessments.

This approach recognizes that meaningful competency development occurs across a wide range of professional, educational, military, research, public-sector, and practice environments while ensuring that all experience-based competency determinations are measured against consistent national standards. By focusing individual's development on demonstrating the underlying competency criteria requirements, the experience requirement encourages development of professional ability, creates greater alignment with required competency assessments, provides a more direct and transparent measure of readiness for independent architectural practice, and strengthens public protection.

5.2.1 Required Experience

This program provides a structured experience-based pathway through which individuals may demonstrate the development and application of specific competencies contained within the *Competency Standard*. This program recognizes the value of supervised experience in guiding competency development as well as the use of standardized assessments in validating an individual's competence.

Individuals seeking competency credit through this program shall document and report professional-level experience aligned to applicable competencies. In addition, to earn competency credit, the individual will need to pass an associated standardized assessment.

A candidate may begin demonstrating the minimum period of supervised employment at any time after they complete the secondary education required for eligibility in NCARB's competency-based

licensure programs, as outlined in Section 4. NCARB shall establish procedures to document, validate, and verify compliance with these requirements.

Experience reported under this program shall reflect activities that directly relate to the competency criteria established for the applicable competency. A minimum number of experience hours will be required from employment in an architecture firm that engages in the lawful practice of architecture under the direct supervision of a U.S. licensed architect. Additional experience hours can be acquired through public-sector employment, military service, academic or research activities, design-build organizations, or other qualifying environments approved by NCARB.

NCARB shall establish a minimum number of experience hours required for each competency. An individual seeking competency credit through this program shall record experience hours in accordance with NCARB-established procedures. When submitting experience hours, the individual must attest that the reported experience accurately reflects work performed by the individual and that the activities completed align with the applicable competency criteria. The attestation shall confirm that the candidate has personally participated in professional activities that contributed to the development and application of the identified competency.

To ensure the integrity and reliability of reported experience, all experience hours submitted by the individual shall be reviewed and approved by the individual's supervisor. The supervisor shall attest that the reported experience hours are accurate to the best of their knowledge and that the individual meaningfully participated in the activities being reported. The supervisor shall be responsible for providing oversight, mentorship, and for verifying that the individual has authentically participated in work involving the application of architectural competencies. Supervisory approval shall serve as verification of the authenticity of the reported experience but shall not, by itself, result in the award of competency credit. NCARB may establish additional validation, auditing, documentation, and review procedures to ensure the accuracy and integrity of reported experience.

This program will appropriately recognize how formal architectural education contributes to the development of professional competencies by providing experience credit for prior learning. The number of credited experience hours shall vary based on evaluation by NCARB of formal architectural education programs against the *Competency Standard*. NCARB shall establish a process and periodically review the applicable experience hour thresholds to ensure they remain aligned with formal architectural education programs and that all individuals, regardless of educational pathway, demonstrate the minimum competencies necessary for safe and independent architectural practice.

Individuals seeking experience credit for prior learning for completion of an architecture-related degree program shall register their degree completion with NCARB. The candidate shall authorize the submission of an official transcript, degree verification, or other documentation to confirm the successful award of the degree.

Competency credit shall be awarded only when the submitted documentation has fulfilled the required number of experience hours based on the candidate's education, and the candidate has

successfully completed an associated standardized assessment that has been developed, validated, and administered by NCARB.

Through this approach, the program recognizes multiple educational pathways while ensuring that all individuals demonstrate substantial experience applying critical professional competencies under appropriate supervision. The program promotes accessibility and flexibility while maintaining consistent standards for public protection and readiness for independent architectural practice.

5.3 Examination Program Requirements: Architect Registration Examination (ARE) 6.0

Assessment through examination remains an essential component of architectural licensure by providing a consistent, objective, and defensible means of verifying an individual's readiness for independent practice. Consistent with NCARB's competency-based approach to licensure, examination requirements are organized around the direct assessment of discrete competencies identified in the *Competency Standard* rather than solely through a broader comprehensive testing format.

NCARB is developing a modern competency assessment through a combination of standardized assessments and structured guided learning programs that culminate in validated standardized assessments. Standardized assessments provide reliable measures of an individual's ability to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for safe and effective practice, while guided learning pathways support competency development through flexible educational resources, formative feedback, and independent study before a summative evaluation.

Together, these assessment methods create a comprehensive examination suite that maintains rigorous and consistent standards for public protection while expanding opportunities for individuals to develop and demonstrate competency. By focusing on validated assessment outcomes and demonstrated achievement of professional competencies, the examination requirement provides licensing boards with meaningful evidence that all candidates have satisfied the standard of readiness for architectural practice.

5.3.1 Standardized Assessments

This program is an NCARB-built exam that licensure candidates can take to prove competence, independent of any specific school or course. NCARB shall grant competency credit for the successful completion of a standardized assessment that has been developed, validated, and administered by NCARB to measure achievement of one or more competencies contained within the *Competency Standard*. Standardized assessments shall be designed to evaluate an individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors using objective and defensible evaluation criteria aligned with the competency or competencies being assessed.

Competency credit shall be awarded when a candidate achieves or exceeds the established performance standard for the applicable assessment. Each standardized assessment shall undergo appropriate validation, quality assurance, and periodic review to ensure assessment results are reliable, fair, and representative of the minimum competency required for safe and independent architectural practice.

Using standardized assessments, NCARB can provide a consistent, scalable, and objective means of evaluating competency while ensuring that all individuals are held to the same minimum standard regardless of educational, experiential, or professional pathway.

Individuals seeking competency credit through a standardized assessment shall schedule their assessment through NCARB or an assessment administration provider authorized by NCARB and pay any applicable fees established by NCARB. NCARB shall maintain procedures for assessment registration, scheduling, rescheduling, cancellation, candidate identification, and examination security. Individuals shall be responsible for selecting an available assessment appointment and complying with all applicable scheduling policies and assessment administration requirements. NCARB may offer assessments through testing centers, remote proctoring platforms, or other approved delivery methods designed to ensure the integrity, security, and accessibility of the assessment process.

Upon successful scheduling, NCARB shall provide individuals with confirmation of their assessment appointment and any instructions necessary for participation. Assessment results and any associated competency credits shall be recorded in the candidate's NCARB Record following completion of applicable scoring, validation, and quality assurance procedures. Scheduling an assessment does not guarantee competency credit; NCARB will grant credit only upon achievement of the established performance standard for the applicable competency or competencies.

5.3.2 Guided Learning with a Standardized Assessment

This program allows a licensure candidate to study on their own schedule using NCARB-provided materials, then earn competency credit by passing a standardized test at the end. NCARB shall grant competency credit for the successful completion of an NCARB-developed and administered guided learning curriculum that includes a final summative assessment, a comprehensive test at the end of the curriculum.

Such curricula may include structured learning modules, readings, case studies, simulations, practice exercises, and other educational resources designed to support independent competency development. The curriculum will include formative assessments throughout the learning process that provide feedback, guide individuals on their progress, reinforce key concepts, identify areas requiring additional development, and support successful competency attainment. Formative assessments are intended to facilitate learning and preparedness but shall not, by themselves, result in the award of competency credit.

To receive competency credit, individuals must pass the final summative assessment validated by NCARB. The summative assessment shall evaluate the candidate's ability to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors at the minimum proficiency level established for licensure. Competency credit shall be awarded only upon successful completion of the summative assessment and achievement that meets or exceeds the established performance standard.

NCARB shall establish requirements for curriculum approval, assessment validation, candidate identity verification, quality assurance, and periodic program review to ensure that competency credits awarded through guided learning remain consistent, reliable, and defensible. Through this approach, individuals can develop competencies through flexible, accessible learning opportunities while demonstrating achievement through a rigorous, standardized assessment process.

Individuals seeking competency credit through a guided learning curriculum with an integrated standardized assessment shall register for the program through procedures established by NCARB. Registration shall include identifying the competency or competencies to be pursued, confirming eligibility requirements, and paying any applicable fees established by NCARB.

Upon registration, NCARB shall provide individuals with access to the approved learning materials, curriculum requirements, formative assessment activities, and instructions for completing the associated standardized summative assessment. Individuals shall complete all required learning activities and formative assessments designed to support competency development before attempting the final summative assessment.

NCARB shall maintain procedures governing enrollment, candidate identity verification, progress tracking, assessment access and security, completion deadlines, and record retention. Upon successful completion of the required curriculum and achievement of the established passing standard on the integrated summative assessment, NCARB shall award the applicable competency credit and record such credit within the candidate's NCARB Record.

5.4 The Assessment System and Potential Means of Demonstrating Competency

Figure 1 illustrates the assessment methods through which candidates may demonstrate achievement of the competencies required for architectural licensure. While all competencies are evaluated against the common benchmark established by the *Competency Standard*, a candidate may demonstrate competency through multiple assessment approaches depending on their preference. These approaches include competency credit awarded through completion of a NAAB-accredited degree program, pre-approved coursework with integrated competency assessments, experience assessments based on documented professional experience and accomplishments, standardized assessments, and guided learning programs that culminate in a standardized summative assessment.

The NCARB competency-based licensure programs include assessment methods that create a comprehensive system that recognizes the varied ways individuals acquire professional competence while ensuring every competency determination is based on validated assessment processes and consistent performance standards. The graphic provides an initial example of how multiple pathways and assessment formats will be integrated into NCARB's competency-based licensure programs, allowing all candidates to be evaluated against the same minimum standard for safe and independent architectural practice regardless of the path used to develop or demonstrate competency. The assessment methods available for each competency may evolve.

Figure 1. *Assessment methods through which candidates may demonstrate achievement of the competencies required for architectural licensure*



6. Administration of Assessments

6.1 Candidate Registration and Scheduling

To participate in NCARB's competency-based licensure programs, an individual must meet the eligibility requirements detailed in Section 4 and shall maintain an active NCARB Record in good standing. An active NCARB Record shall be required for registration, scheduling, administration, evaluation, and recording of any competency assessment.

Individuals are responsible for maintaining accurate, current information in their NCARB Record and for complying with all applicable NCARB policies governing eligibility, documentation, fees, conduct, and record maintenance. Failure to maintain an active NCARB Record in good standing will result in ineligibility to register for, complete, receive credit for, or otherwise participate in competency assessment activities.

NCARB shall use the NCARB Record as the official repository for candidate approval status, assessment registrations, acquired competencies, assessment results, and other licensure-related information. Maintaining a single, authoritative record promotes consistency, accountability, credential portability, and efficient communication among individuals, licensing boards, and NCARB throughout the licensure process.

6.2 Identity Verification and Anti-Fraud Measures

NCARB shall implement and maintain identity verification, security, and anti-fraud measures designed to preserve the integrity of the architectural licensure process and ensure that competency assessments accurately reflect the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors of the individual seeking licensure. Such measures shall apply throughout the licensure process, including candidate registration, eligibility determination, assessment administration, submission of evidence, recording of competency credits, and maintenance of candidate records.

NCARB shall establish procedures for verifying candidate identity through approved methods, which may include government-issued identification, secure authentication technologies, proctoring protocols, identity validation services, and other measures deemed appropriate to ensure the authenticity of candidate participation. NCARB may require identity verification at multiple stages of the licensure process and will implement additional verification measures when warranted by risk, assessment type, or delivery method.

NCARB shall also maintain policies and procedures to prevent, detect, investigate, and respond to fraud, misrepresentation, misconduct, unauthorized collaboration, falsification of records, examination irregularities, and other actions that compromise the validity of competency determinations. Individuals found to have engaged in fraudulent or unethical conduct may face denial of competency credit, invalidation of assessment results, suspension of assessment privileges, disciplinary action, or other sanctions as determined by NCARB and applicable licensing boards.

Through ongoing monitoring, security reviews, auditing, and continuous improvement of its identity verification and anti-fraud controls, NCARB shall ensure that all competency credits and assessment

outcomes are earned through legitimate demonstration of competency and that jurisdictional licensing boards can rely on them when making licensure decisions.

6.3 Accessibility and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance

NCARB shall ensure that all components of the licensure process are accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities and are administered in compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws relating to accessibility and equal opportunity. All competency assessments, registration processes, candidate resources, learning platforms, technology systems, and related licensure services shall be designed and administered to provide eligible individuals with a fair opportunity to demonstrate competency.

NCARB shall maintain procedures through which individuals can request reasonable accommodation for disabilities or other qualifying conditions. NCARB shall review accommodation requests through a consistent, confidential, and timely process based on appropriate documentation and applicable legal requirements. NCARB will ensure approved accommodations to the assessment process without altering the competency being measured, the validity of the assessment, or the minimum standards required for licensure.

NCARB shall periodically evaluate its assessment programs, technologies, policies, and candidate services to identify and address accessibility barriers. This evaluation may include reviews of testing platforms, instructional materials, communication methods, identity-verification processes, and assessment delivery systems to ensure individuals can participate in the licensure process regardless of disability status.

Through its commitment to accessibility and reasonable accommodation, NCARB shall promote access to licensure opportunities while maintaining the validity, reliability, integrity, and public protection objectives of its competency-based licensure system.

6.4 Retake Policies and Remediation Requirements

NCARB shall establish and maintain policies related to retake and remediation requirements that support candidate success while preserving the integrity, validity, and public protection objectives of the licensure process. Individuals who do not meet the required competency threshold on an assessment may pursue additional attempts in accordance with policies established by NCARB. Retake policies may include reasonable waiting periods or other measures designed to maintain assessment integrity without unreasonably limiting an individual's access to the licensure process.

NCARB shall provide individuals with appropriate feedback regarding assessment performance to help identify areas requiring further development.

NCARB shall apply all retake and remediation requirements consistently and design them to ensure competency credit is awarded only upon successful demonstration of the applicable competency at the established performance standard. Through these policies, NCARB shall promote continuous learning, support candidate progression, and maintain confidence that all competency determinations reflect the minimum level of proficiency required for safe and independent architectural practice.

7. Evaluation, Review, and Quality Assurance

7.1 Setting the Passing Score

NCARB shall establish and maintain scoring methodologies and competency thresholds that provide valid, reliable, and defensible determination of whether a candidate has achieved the minimum level of competency required for safe and independent architectural practice. Scoring models will measure performance against established competency standards rather than relative performance among individuals. Assessments shall be criterion-referenced, graded against a fixed standard rather than ranked against other test-takers—everyone who meets the bar passes. Criterion-referenced assessments ensure that competency determinations are based on demonstrated achievement of defined performance expectations.

For each competency and assessment type, NCARB shall establish minimum performance thresholds that reflect the proficiency level necessary to protect public health, safety, and welfare. NCARB shall develop competency thresholds using accepted standard-setting methodologies and informed by professional practice analyses, subject matter expert input, assessment performance data, and other relevant documentation. NCARB shall periodically review and adjust thresholds as necessary to ensure continued alignment with the *Competency Standard* and the evolving practice of architecture.

Where multiple assessment methods are used to evaluate competency, NCARB shall employ validation and quality assurance processes designed to support comparable and consistent competency determinations across assessment formats. NCARB may use scaled scores, performance ratings, rubric-based evaluations, or other validated scoring mechanisms appropriate to the assessment method used. NCARB shall document, standardize, and support all scoring procedures with quality assurance measures designed to promote consistency and accuracy.

A candidate shall receive competency credit only upon demonstrating performance at or above the established threshold for the applicable assessment. Through these measures, NCARB will give jurisdictions confidence that competency determinations are based on rigorous, objective, data-driven evaluation standards.

7.2 Psychometric Review and Quality Assurance

This section explains how NCARB makes sure its tests are fair, accurate, consistent, and legally sound, guided by specialists called psychometricians, experts in the science of testing and measurement.

NCARB shall maintain rigorous standards to ensure that all assessment methods used within the licensure system are valid, reliable, fair, and legally defensible. NCARB shall develop each assessment and periodically review it using established professional, educational, and psychometric principles to ensure it accurately measures the competency or competencies it is intended to assess. NCARB will directly align assessment content, performance standards, scoring methodologies, and evaluation criteria with the *Competency Standard*, and future updates shall be informed by ongoing analyses of professional practice.

NCARB shall implement quality assurance processes designed to promote consistency and reliability across all assessment types. Quality assurance measures shall include standardized evaluation criteria, assessor training, calibration procedures, periodic audits, and continuous monitoring of assessment outcomes to ensure consistent application of competency standards.

NCARB shall ensure all individuals have a fair opportunity to demonstrate competency. Assessment programs will be designed to minimize bias, provide reasonable accommodation when required by law, maintain transparency regarding assessment requirements and performance expectations, and offer appropriate mechanisms for review and appeal. Regardless of the assessment pathway utilized, NCARB will ensure all individuals are evaluated against the same competency expectations and minimum performance standards required for safe and independent architectural practice.

Through continuous validation, data analysis, stakeholder input, and periodic review, NCARB shall maintain an assessment system that gives jurisdictions, individuals, and the public confidence that competency determinations are accurate, consistent, and aligned with the profession's responsibility to protect public health, safety, and welfare.

7.3 Appeal and Review Processes

NCARB shall maintain fair, transparent, and consistent processes that allow individuals to appeal administrative decisions and receive meaningful feedback regarding their performance. These processes will promote confidence in the licensure system while ensuring that assessment results and competency determinations are administered in accordance with established policies, procedures, and professional standards.

Individuals shall have access to procedures for submitting appeals related to eligibility determinations, assessment administration irregularities, scoring concerns, accommodation decisions, disciplinary actions, and other licensure matters identified by NCARB policy. NCARB shall maintain clear requirements governing the grounds for appeal, submission timelines, documentation requirements, review procedures, and final disposition of appeals. Appeals shall be reviewed by qualified individuals who were not directly involved in the original decision whenever practicable.

NCARB shall administer all appeal and review processes in a timely, impartial, and consistent manner to ensure fairness, accountability, and confidence in the competency-based licensure system.

7.4 Annual Reporting and Public Transparency

NCARB will maintain a commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement by publishing annual reports and other publicly available information on the operation and effectiveness of its licensure programs. At a minimum, NCARB shall periodically report aggregate information on candidate participation, competency assessment outcomes, pass rates, trends, program enhancements, and other performance indicators relevant to administering the licensure system.

Reports shall be presented in a manner that protects candidate privacy and confidential assessment information while providing jurisdictional licensing boards, policymakers, individuals, and the public with meaningful insight into the effectiveness and integrity of NCARB's competency-based licensure programs.

NCARB will also make available information regarding competency standards, assessment methodologies, governance processes, program changes, and quality assurance activities to promote understanding and confidence in the licensure process.

Through regular reporting and public disclosure of program outcomes, NCARB shall support informed oversight by jurisdictional licensing boards, facilitate ongoing evaluation of licensure programs, and demonstrate continued accountability for maintaining standards that protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

7.5 Data Governance, Privacy, and Security Requirements

NCARB will establish and maintain systems and processes to collect, store, transmit, and protect sensitive candidate and licensure information. NCARB will establish and maintain a formal data classification framework and apply controls commensurate with the sensitivity of the information maintained. In working with third-party providers, NCARB will require providers to establish and maintain controls of equal or greater magnitude. These functions will support the efficient administration of licensure programs while promoting consistency and mobility across jurisdictions.

As an assessment and credentialing provider, NCARB maintains comprehensive data governance, privacy, and cybersecurity controls, including the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Cybersecurity Framework, NIST 800-53, ISO 27001, and SOC 2 principles. NCARB will require all assessment providers to maintain appropriate information security, privacy, operational resilience, and business continuity controls, and will subject them to periodic review.

Such controls include safeguards for data confidentiality, integrity, availability, access management, records retention, auditability, and incident response. NCARB employs appropriate technical, administrative, and operational measures to protect candidate information and assessment records from unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or loss.

8. Licensure Decision Process

Nothing within NCARB's competency-based licensure programs shall be construed as assuming the authority to grant, deny, renew, suspend, revoke, or otherwise regulate a license to practice architecture. The jurisdictional licensing board, acting under the laws and regulations of its jurisdiction, retains exclusive authority to make licensure decisions.

NCARB's role, in consultation with jurisdictional licensing boards, is to develop, administer, and maintain competency standards, assessment programs, credentialing services, and related licensure support functions that help jurisdictions evaluate applicant qualifications. Successful completion of NCARB's competency-based licensure program assessments, achievement of competency credits, or satisfaction of NCARB program requirements shall not, by themselves, entitle an individual to licensure. Final determination of an applicant's readiness for licensure, including compliance with all jurisdiction-specific requirements, shall remain the responsibility of the jurisdictional licensing board.

This structure preserves each jurisdiction's full authority over licensing while enabling nationally consistent competency standards and assessment processes. By maintaining jurisdictional authority over licensure decisions, the system ensures that accountability for public protection remains with the governmental entity charged by law with regulating the practice of architecture.

8.1 Transparent Criteria for Granting Licenses

NCARB shall support jurisdictional licensing boards by maintaining clear, objective, and publicly available standards for all NCARB's competency-based licensure programs, assessments, competency requirements, and credentialing processes.

NCARB shall maintain transparent criteria for the award of competency credits, assessment outcomes, program completions, and other qualifications included within an individual's NCARB Record. NCARB shall make information regarding licensure pathways, competency expectations, assessment requirements, policies, procedures, and program changes readily accessible to individuals, licensing boards, and other stakeholders.

NCARB shall also communicate any substantive changes to competency standards, assessment programs, or qualification requirements that may affect licensure decisions.

8.2 Verification of Competency Achievement

The NCARB Record will serve as the repository of an individual's verified qualifications, competency achievements, assessment results, and other licensure-related credentials maintained by NCARB. NCARB will document competency credits awarded through NCARB-approved assessments within the candidate's NCARB Record and maintain it as the authoritative record of the candidate's qualifications for licensure.

NCARB shall provide jurisdictional licensing boards with secure access to, or transmittal of, candidate record information necessary to evaluate applications for licensure. Information contained within the

NCARB Record shall constitute verified documentation that the candidate has successfully satisfied the applicable competency requirements and other qualification standards validated by NCARB.

Maintaining and transmitting competency information through the NCARB Record is intended to promote consistency, accuracy, efficiency, and portability within the licensure process. Jurisdictional licensing boards can rely on this information to determine whether an applicant has met the licensure qualifications established by the jurisdiction.

8.3 Transitioning to NCARB's Competency-Based Licensure Programs

NCARB recognizes that implementation of these changes will require thoughtful consideration of each jurisdiction's unique statutory, regulatory, and administrative framework. While the overarching objectives are national in scope, the specific actions needed to adopt and administer the changes may vary by state based on jurisdictional requirements and legislative or regulatory processes.

Drawing on its successful management of previous national licensure program transitions, including the evolution of the Intern Development Program (IDP) to the Architectural Experience Program (AXP) and the transition of its examination offerings from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0, NCARB will implement future competency-based licensure programs through a deliberate and candidate-responsive process. In each of these prior transitions, NCARB preserved candidate progress through clearly defined transition policies, extensive stakeholder engagement, comprehensive guidance resources, and sustained support for licensing boards, candidates, educators, and practitioners, while providing sufficient time for the transition.

Building on this proven approach, NCARB will develop a detailed credit model that maintains a consistent national standard allowing licensure candidates to receive appropriate competency credit based on their current progress toward licensure. NCARB will dedicate the necessary staff, technical expertise, and outreach resources to support boards, candidates, and policymakers throughout the transition, including communication materials, policy guidance, candidate transition plans, and ongoing consultation. The Council's objective is to ensure that existing candidates receive appropriate recognition for progress already achieved, that jurisdictions have the flexibility to address local requirements, and that the transition occurs thoughtfully, efficiently, and effectively to maintain public protection while ensuring candidate progress toward licensure.