



Candidate Guide

Finding an Employer That Will Support Your
Licensure Goals

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Introduction

Employers play a huge role in shaping licensure candidates' experiences on the path to licensure and beyond. When you're considering potential employers, keep in mind that the firm you choose may impact your professional development, your support along the path, and your post-licensure benefits.

This guide addresses information you need to know when working for a firm providing professional services. Generally, we are referring to an *architecture firm*, but there is also guidance if you are working for another licensed professional.

While you're completing the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®), you'll rely on your firm to meet several of the program's requirements. For *Setting A* experience (working for an architect), this includes:

- **Lawful practice**—the firm must be lawfully practicing architecture per the jurisdiction's requirements
- **Licensed supervisor**—an architect licensed in the U.S. or Canada must supervise at least half your AXP experience
- **Variety of work opportunities**—you must gain experience and build competency in tasks across all the AXP's six experience areas

Ideally, your employer should work with you to ensure that you are gaining experience that meets these requirements and builds your professional knowledge and skills. While NCARB's data shows that over 85% of employers provide some degree of licensure support, you may eventually grow beyond the experience your firm can provide. If that happens, don't be afraid to seek out new opportunities to help you meet your career goals.

Keep in mind, NCARB recommends that firms go beyond the bare minimum of ensuring that you have access to qualified AXP experience opportunities. Firm support for licensure candidates should address the full path to licensure—including:

- Providing support and resources while you take the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®)
- Ensuring equitable career growth regardless of your demographic or background
- And offering mentorship to guide you through your early career stages.
- Covering some or all of the costs for your licensure and NCARB certification

Whether you're searching for a new employer midway through your licensure path or are just getting started, **this guide provides tips and tools you can use to ensure that your employer will support your goal of becoming an architect.**

Guide to Firms

Your firm's size and specialty/type can impact the opportunities and support you have access to throughout your career. NCARB and NOMA's *Baseline on Belonging* study has shown that each type of firm comes with its own challenges and benefits. Understanding these experiences can help you make an informed decision when choosing an employer.

FIRM SIZE

Small, medium, and large firms can offer different types of licensure support at various stages. Keep in mind that the pros and cons listed below are typical based on the findings of NCARB and NOMA's *Baseline on Belonging* study, but not universal. Your experiences may vary, and it's best to discuss these aspects of licensure support with your firm to better understand their unique capabilities and circumstances.

Small (1-19 employees)

- Common Pros:
 - Supervisor has high awareness of your licensure progress
 - Supervisor has authority to provide firm support
 - Supervisor provides access to wide variety of experience opportunities
- Common Cons:
 - Firm may not be able to provide financial support for licensure
 - Firm may not provide free study resources
 - Firm may not provide material benefits post-licensure (promotion, raise, etc.)

Medium (20-99 employees)

- Common Pros:
 - Candidates of color report more equitable levels of firm support
 - Firm likely to provide financial support for licensure
 - Supervisor likely to support your licensure goals
- Common Cons:
 - Firm may lack diversity in leadership
 - Supervisor may not have authority to provide firm support

Large (100+ employees)

- Common Pros:
 - Firm likely to encourage licensure
 - Firm likely to provide financial support for licensure
 - Firm may provide material benefits post-licensure (promotion, raise, etc.)
- Common Cons:
 - You may be assigned to a "specialty" area, preventing access to a variety of experience opportunities
 - Supervisor may lack awareness of your licensure progress

FIRM SPECIALTY/TYPE

Similarly, your firm's specialty/type can impact the types of projects, roles, and experience areas you have access to.

Architecture-only

At architecture-only firms, you may have more access to a licensed architect who can serve as your AXP supervisor, as well as access to a variety of tasks needed to complete the AXP. Keep in mind, some architecture-only firms choose to offload the construction administration portions of projects to a third party.

Multi-disciplinary

At an architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) firm, you'll likely have access to a variety of types of projects and project phases. You may need to work with individuals licensed in other professions (engineers, landscape architects) to sign off on your AXP hours under AXP Setting O. Keep in mind that half of your experience hours must be approved by a licensed U.S. or Canadian architect in Setting A.

Other

If you're working at a firm that's performing engineering, landscape architecture, design, or construction-related work, you can typically earn AXP credit under setting O. Be prepared to explain the basics of the AXP to your supervisor if they're not a licensed architect.

Guide to Interviewing

When you're interviewing for a job at an architecture firm, asking about licensure support up front can help you set expectations and ensure you're choosing an employer who will support your growth. Below are some topics to consider during your job search:

LICENSURE CULTURE

Some firms (especially large firms) encourage licensure for all employees, while others may be less invested in candidates' licensure goals. When interviewing, you can learn more about your prospective employer's licensure culture by asking questions like:

- Does the firm encourage candidates to become licensed?
- If so, what kind of licensure support does the firm offer?
- How many other licensure candidates work at the firm?
- What kind of post-licensure benefits does the firm offer?
- Does the firm have an [Architect Licensing Advisor](#)? (Note: this is a specific person who participates in NCARB training to support licensure candidates)
- Does the firm pay for licensure or certification fees?

You may also want to ask if any employees at the firm have recently become licensed, and if so, ask if you can talk to them about their experiences as part of the interviewing process.

ACCESS TO AXP EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES

Not all firms perform work in all areas or tasks identified in the AXP. Consider asking some of the following questions to better understand how your potential employer will empower you to complete the AXP:

- Does the firm perform work across all project phases?
- Will I be assigned to a particular project phase or type of task? Will I have the opportunity to develop my skills in all tasks/experience areas covered by the AXP?
- Can I shadow other employees working in different areas if needed?

If you have already started the AXP and are looking for experience in a specific area or task, ask the firm if they will be able to provide you with opportunities to gain experience in that area. Keep in mind, you may need to explain the basics of the AXP to your interviewer, especially if they aren't an architect.

WORKING WITH YOUR AXP SUPERVISOR

It's a good idea to discuss who your AXP supervisor will be as part of the interview process—and, if possible, ask them about their expectations when it comes to supervising your experience.

- Who will be my AXP supervisor for this role?
- Have they served as an AXP supervisor previously?
- How familiar is my potential supervisor with the AXP's requirements?
- Does my supervisor have any preferences or expectations when it comes to submitting and reviewing experience reports?

If you are exploring roles outside of architecture—such as landscape architecture or engineering—you may need to explain how non-architects can serve as your AXP supervisor for certain experience opportunities.

SECURING EXAM SUPPORT

Taking the ARE can be both expensive and challenging. According to the *Baseline on Belonging* study, two-thirds of all firms provide some financial support for the cost of the exam, and over half provide free study materials for the exam. When interviewing, ask about the support your firm is able to offer:

- Do you provide financial assistance with the cost of the licensing exam?
 - If so, do you pay for exam divisions up front or after the fact?
 - Do you cover the cost of any failed divisions, or only passed exams?
- Does your firm have a library of study materials employees can access?
- Does your firm pay for subscriptions to exam prep materials?
- Is there a study group or support group for candidates prepping for the exam?

You may also want to ask if the firm provides paid time off for exam appointments or exam prep.

LICENSURE APPLICATION AND CERTIFICATION SUPPORT

Many firms also help their employees cover the costs of applying for licensure and earning credentials that build their professional credibility—including the NCARB Certificate. When interviewing, ask your firm what credentialing fees they'll cover.

Guide to Working With Your Employer to Establish Licensure Support

If you're not able to get answers to all your licensure support questions when interviewing, or if you've already started working at a firm, don't worry! You can still work with your supervisor to understand how your employer can support your licensure goals.

SEEKING LICENSURE SUPPORT

While your licensure goals may be top of mind for you, you might need to be proactive about asking your supervisor for access to new experience opportunities and sharing any AXP areas where you still need to build your competency.

If you have an exam appointment coming up, make sure your supervisor is aware of your test date and discuss the impact that your exam prep and testing time might have on any upcoming projects or assignments. Your goal in doing this is to avoid any last-minute conflicts that would cause you to cancel your exam.

Plus, share NCARB's [Firm Guide: Best Practices in Licensure Support](#) with your supervisor or firm leadership so they can better understand common best practices and expectations for architecture firms.

TOOLS AND TIPS FOR BUILDING YOUR SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP

Throughout your early career, your supervisors and mentors will play an important role in helping you complete the path to licensure, so it's vital that they have a basic understanding of the experience program, its goals, and the responsibilities involved. If they aren't already familiar, be sure to share NCARB's [AXP Guidelines](#) with your supervisor, as well as our [suite of free supervisor resources](#).

Your supervisor should encourage your professional development by providing work assignments that will help you develop the ability to competently perform the tasks identified by the AXP. Whether you've been working with your supervisor for years or you're just starting out, establishing shared expectations is key to building a healthy supervisor relationship. Schedule a check-in with your supervisor to discuss:

- How often you will meet
- Expectations regarding your ongoing work experience
- A strategy to ensure you are assigned work opportunities that allow you to gain competency in all areas of the AXP
- Timing for submitting and reviewing experience reports

Use the following resources to keep your meetings organized:

- [Candidate & Supervisor Expectations Guide](#) | Use this resource to set up shared expectations and build a positive working relationship with your AXP supervisor.
- [Licensure Progress Worksheet](#) | Guide your check-ins with your supervisor using our Licensure Progress Worksheet, which will make sure you're on the same page regarding next steps for your career.

NCARB offers free continuing education courses worth learning units in Health, Safety, and Welfare that can help your supervisor better understand how to help you develop competency and navigate the program effectively:

- [AXP Supervisor Training](#)
- [AXP Portfolio Supervisor Training](#)
- [Supervising With Impact](#)

NCARB Resources

The following NCARB resources may be helpful throughout your licensure process:

- [Destination Architect](#): For individuals just beginning their licensure journey, this video-based resource provides a basic overview of the licensure process
- [AXP Guidelines](#): This document details the requirements for completing NCARB's experience program
- [AXP and ARE Updates](#): These regular newsletters outline any programmatic updates, share tips and resources, and offer insights into completing the AXP and ARE strategically
- [ARE Guidelines](#): This document details the requirements for taking the ARE, outlines official policies, and explores exam content
- [Free ARE Practice Exams](#): NCARB's free practice exams are available to all candidates with an NCARB Record (and a PDF version is available to all, regardless of Record status) and are created to mimic the real exam
- [Licensing Requirements Tool](#): This interactive map can guide you through the licensing requirements in your jurisdiction and allow you to compare between jurisdictions
- [NCARB Certificate](#): Whether you're newly licensed or have been practicing for years, the NCARB Certificate can help expand your professional reach. Along with the flexibility to pursue work in multiple jurisdictions, Certificate holders have access to free continuing education, exciting leadership opportunities, and more.
- [Education Alternative to Certification](#): U.S. architects without a degree from a program accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) can pursue an [NCARB Certificate](#) through one of two "Education Alternative" options. Both of these paths enable architects to satisfy the education requirement for NCARB certification. Your eligibility will depend on your educational background, as evaluated by NCARB. Candidates can only apply after three years of initial licensure.