

## American Architectural Licensing

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There are three main steps which must be completed before applying for an architectural license in the United States.

1. Education
2. Experience - AXP (Architectural Experience Program)
3. Exams - ARE (Architect Registration Examination)

NCARB, which stands for National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, maintain a candidate's online record for the three stages. Candidates must upload school transcripts to verify their education, log hours of experience in the field, and track exam progress with their NCARB online record. Once all these steps are complete NCARB provides a certificate which goes to the state licensing board along with the candidates application for licensure.

Please note that while most states now have very similar processes, each state may have slightly different rules governing registration in their jurisdiction. Before beginning the path to licensure it is best to choose the state and consult their licensing board (webpage or phone) to see their specific requirements. (For a comparison of the different requirements by state see <https://www.ncarb.org/get-licensed/licensing-requirements-tool>)

### **1. Education**

Most states require a degree from a National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) accredited university.

**If you studied in the US** but are not sure if your school was accredited you can check with the accrediting board, here:

<http://www.naab.org/architecture-programs/school-search/>

**If you did not study in the US or studied at an unaccredited school** then the candidate must have their education evaluated by the Education Evaluation Services for Architects (EESA). An EESA evaluation is administered by NAAB (National Architectural Accrediting Board) and compares the candidates education to the NCARB Education Standard. A notarized copy of academic transcripts and descriptions of all coursed followed must be provided in english and therefore translated as required. <http://www.naab.org/eesa/>

### **2. Experience**

There are two ways to prove experience to NCARB. The first, and most common, is logging hours with the Architectural Experience Program, or AXP, which requires candidates to complete a **minimum of 3,740 hours of work under supervision** which will expose them to the types of tasks required for architectural practice. The second method recently introduced by NCARB, is an AXP portfolio, which compiles exhibits of finished work which "demonstrate competency in each of the 96 tasks

required by the AXP" and is submitted to a US licensed supervisor for approval. Candidates must choose either to submit AXP hours or an AXP portfolio and cannot use a mix of both methods.

The AXP hours framework as well as the portfolio seek to prove experience in six areas distributed over a range of tasks and stages that candidates need to be familiar with before they can be licensed.

They are:

Practice Management,  
Project Management,  
Programming & Analysis,  
Project Planning & Design,  
Project Development & Documentation, and  
Construction & Evaluation.

Note that some states require more than the NCARB minimum or require the hours to be completed over a set period of time. (For example some states may require that you have worked full time for 3 years and working many overtime hours in a shorter period of time than 3 years will not allow candidates to apply early.

#### **For those working outside of the US:**

**If you are working under the supervision of a US licensed architect** you may complete all 3,740 hours in this setting (called "experience setting A" by NCARB). In fact, there is a minimum of 1,860 hours which **MUST** be completed in an "experience A setting."

**If you are working under an architect who is not licensed in the US but in the country where you are working**, then there is a maximum of 1,860 hours which can be completed in what NCARB calls "experience setting O."

If candidates decide to use the supervised logging of **AXP hours** this is facilitated on the NCARB website where hours must periodically be entered under different categories of experience and submitted online to the supervisor to approve formally. Six months is the maximum amount of time that can be submitted at once to a supervisor. If hours are submitted to a supervisor more than 8 months after their completion there is a penalty on the time and 50% of the total hours is counted so it is in candidates best interest to do this on a regular basis.

The **AXP Portfolio** is a new addition for NCARB and was created for experienced but as yet unlicensed designers. Candidates must demonstrate two years of work experience that occurred more than five years prior to submission. A minimum of one of the two years must be in "setting A," i.e. supervised by an American licensed architect. The portfolio consists of exhibits which are uploaded to the NCARB record online and allocated to specific tasks. An exhibit can be used to show competency of more than one task. Once all 94 tasks have been assigned exhibits the portfolio is submitted to the candidate's supervisor, who must be licensed in the US, for final approval.

#### **4. Exams**

The Architect Registration Examination is a series of examinations establishing a minimum level of competence of architectural practice for each licensure candidate. The current exam standard is **ARE 5.0 which consists of six divisions**, each of which is between 3.5 to 5 hours long and made of up technical

as well as conception questions. Each division can be scheduled independently to suit the candidate but all divisions must be passed within 5 years and is subject to a rolling clock. .

The divisions are:

Practice Management,  
Project Management,  
Programming & Analysis,  
Project Planning & Design,  
Project Development & Documentation,  
Construction & Evaluation

The AREs are all computer based and proctored by official testing centres. **UK and EU candidates** will be happy to know that London has one of only three testing centres outside of the US. It is important to try out using the discretionary software before sitting the exam. Familiarizing oneself with the tests format can be done by taking the web-based practice exam accessible from each candidates' NCARB record site.

There are five **types of questions**: multiple choice, check all that apply, fill in the blank, hotspots, and drag and place. In addition some portion of each exam is as a case study which will ask a group of related questions about a specific example scenario. The case study section can be made up of a mix of any of the five question types. Each division of the AREs has multiple versions of the exam. If two people sit the same division ARE they may see completely different questions although the general topics covered by the test will be the same.

**Scoring** of the AREs is based on cut scores, meaning there is standard cut off score NCARB has established above which a pass and below is a fail. Therefore the AREs are not graded on a curve and the performance of other testers will not affect candidates pass rates. The number of correctly answered questions required for a pass is between 57-68 questions and depending on the division as well as the version of that division.

### **Conversion to a US License:**

For foreign architects looking to convert their license to a US architecture license the process is similar to that above. (Note that currently the US has mutual reciprocity with Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand so this section will not apply if the license is from one of these.)

#### ***1. Existing License / Education***

**If the foreign architect candidate holds a license from a country whose licensing body has a “formal record keeping mechanisms for disciplinary actions,”** then they may establish an NCARB record and submit a Credential Verification Form. This has two sections one for the candidate and one which must be completed by the credentialing authority. Candidates must also submit transcripts from their degrees online for verification of their education. Note that transcripts must be sent directly from the institution which conferred them to NCARB.

**If the foreign architect candidate does not hold a license from a country with formal record keeping,** then the candidate must have their education evaluated by the Education Evaluation Services

for Architects (EESA). An EESA evaluation is administered by NAAB (National Architectural accrediting Board) and compares the candidates education to the NCARB Education Standard. A notarized copy of academic transcripts and descriptions of all coursed followed must be provided in english and therefore translated as required.

<http://www.naab.org/eesa/>

### **3. Experience**

As above candidates must complete the Architectural Experience Program (AXP) hours or portfolio.

### **4. Exams**

As above candidates must complete the Architect Registration Examinations (AREs).

### **Useful links:**

<https://www.ncarb.org/>

NCARB certification overview

[https://www.ncarb.org/sites/default/files/Certification\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.ncarb.org/sites/default/files/Certification_Guidelines.pdf)

Education

<http://www.naab.org/architecture-programs/>

<https://www.ncarb.org/advance-your-career/ncarb-certificate/get-certified/education-alternative>

Experience - AXP

<https://www.ncarb.org/sites/default/files/AXP-Guidelines.pdf>

Exams - ARE

<https://www.ncarb.org/sites/default/files/ARE5-Guidelines.pdf>

<https://www.ncarb.org/sites/default/files/ARE5-Handbook.pdf>