




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

Experience Report: Executive Summary

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National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA)



Baseline on Belonging: Experience Report

Report Structure

NCARB and NOMA are releasing the full *Baseline on Belonging* report in seven phases. This is the second phase, featuring data related to the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®). The following reports will be released individually over the coming months, ending with the full report, which will compile the previous sections.

In This Summary

This executive summary report features an overview of the key findings and next steps from the *Baseline on Belonging: Experience Report*. To explore survey findings related to the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®) in depth—including charts showing filtered responses to each AXP-related survey question—please visit ncarb.org/belong.


For more information about the study, read the *Baseline on Belonging: Experience Report*, which includes highlights from the full survey, a breakdown of the survey structure, and an explanation of respondent demographics.

Survey Audience

The *Baseline on Belonging* survey was distributed from February 19 - March 4, 2020. The survey received over 5,000 responses from licensure candidates, recently licensed architects, and individuals who stopped pursuing a license. Of the respondents, 1,852 identified as white, 692 as Black or African American, 1,320 as Hispanic or Latino, and 861 as Asian. Additionally, 279 individuals identified as another race/ethnicity group. Other demographic information such as gender, age, firm size, and position were also captured.

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Baseline on Belonging: Experience Report

Executive Summary

Earning professional experience by completing NCARB's Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®) is one of three key steps required to become a licensed architect in most U.S. jurisdictions. To gain the required experience on a variety of projects, candidates rely on the support of their firm and architect supervisor. The *Baseline on Belonging* survey included a number of questions exploring respondents' experiences while navigating the AXP, with a goal of better understanding if and where firms, supervisors, and the program itself may create unintended impediments along the path to licensure.


When viewed as a whole, survey participants had positive responses to questions about the experience component of licensure. Viewing responses without separating candidates by demographic filters shows that most candidates reported it was easy to find a firm that would support them through the AXP. In addition, the majority of all respondents had a supervisor who supported their licensure goals.

However, viewing the survey responses by factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, and age reveals several key disparities related to earning professional experience. Some of these disparities are slight, while others are more significant. The *Baseline on Belonging* study is intended to raise awareness of disparities faced by underrepresented professionals and highlight areas where they may be more likely to face barriers on the path to licensure. Understanding the underlying causes for these barriers and how to address them fully is the focus of ongoing research and development for NCARB and NOMA.

The impact of race/ethnicity alone often appears relatively small in the survey findings. By contrast, layering filters—i.e., sorting responses by race/ethnicity and gender—highlights compounding disparities faced by individuals who are a part of multiple underrepresented groups. For instance, the combined impact of race and gender is strongest for Black or African American women, who consistently trend toward the least positive response to a given survey prompt.

This intersectionality is underscored by the survey's gender findings. On the surface level, the study revealed little impact when data is viewed by gender alone. However, digging deeper into the data by race/ethnicity reveals that there is often a significant gap between white women and women of color. For example, although white women often respond more positively than their male peers of all races/ethnicities, women of color frequently report the least positive responses when asked about the AXP. Because of this, viewing the data by gender alone can be misleading, and the following report includes no views of data from the *Baseline on Belonging* study filtered solely by gender.

While the *Baseline on Belonging* study is primarily focused on the impacts of race/ethnicity and gender, the survey revealed another major factor on the path to licensure: age. In all areas related to experience, age had the biggest impact on a candidate's progress. This factor is consistent across all questions, showing that candidates aged 30-39 and 40+ typically perceive an increasing level of challenge, and are less satisfied with their supervisor and firm support than their peers aged 18-29.



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NCARB's own programmatic data shows that there is little difference in the time it takes to complete the AXP when it comes to race/ethnicity, with white candidates taking slightly longer to complete the program than candidates of color. However, white candidates typically start and complete the program at a younger age.

In addition, the survey revealed several other factors that can influence candidates' progress through the experience program, including firm size and career position.

On average, survey respondents employed at small firms reported lower rates of firm and supervisor support than those employed at mid-size or large firms, with firm size having a larger impact on candidates of color—especially those who are African American or Asian. African Americans employed by small firms are less likely to: document experience, agree that their AXP supervisor treats them with respect, or feel comfortable voicing contrary opinions compared to their peers of other races/ethnicities or African Americans employed by large firms.

Career position also showed an interesting pattern, with white and Asian candidates in entry-level positions reporting the most satisfaction with support in the experience program, whereas African American and Latino candidates reported better satisfaction when in mid-level positions.

For many of this report's key findings, additional study is needed to better understand the core causes of disparities related to professional experience. For more information about NCARB and NOMA's planned follow-up surveys and additional research, see page 12. For more details on key findings related to experience, see page 5.

Baseline on Belonging: Experience Report

Key Findings

Overall Experience Response Is Positive

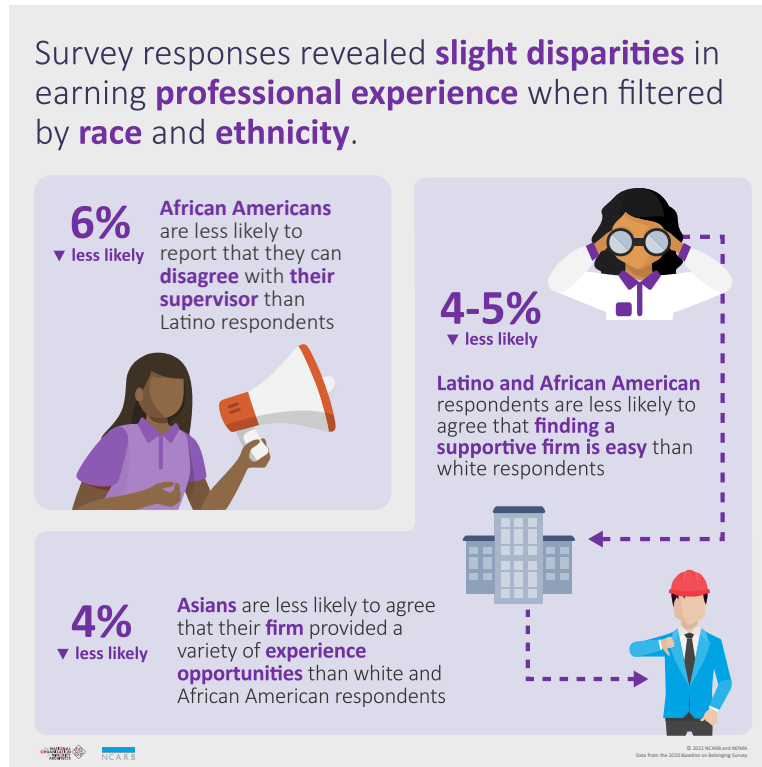


- In general, respondents rated experience-related statements favorably, with 50 percent or more agreeing for all segments.
- Respondents generally feel well-respected and supported by their supervisors.
- Twenty-five percent of all respondents indicated that they faced challenges that made it difficult to earn AXP credit.

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Key Findings

Only Slight Disparities Are Seen in the Experience Program for Race/Ethnicity



- When filtered by race/ethnicity alone, respondents report only slight differences when navigating the experience component of licensure, especially in regard to their ability to gain experience across the AXP areas and their supervisor’s overall support of their licensure progress.
- Some areas where there are more apparent disparities when viewed solely by race/ethnicity include:
 - When searching for employment in a firm, African American and Latino respondents typically find it slightly more difficult to find a supportive firm.
 - African Americans are slightly less likely to respond positively about specific questions related to their supervisor relationship, including their supervisor’s awareness of their path to licensure and their supervisor’s respectful treatment of them.

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Key Findings

Disparities Grow When Race/Ethnicity Is Combined With Gender

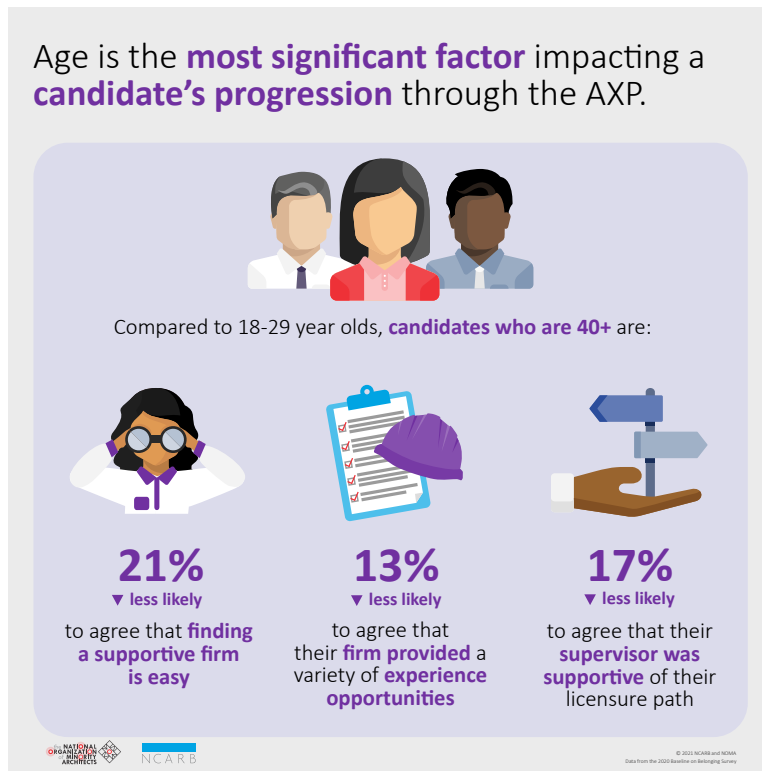


- Filtering the data by race/ethnicity and gender reveals that women of color are more impacted by the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and gender, compared to the impact of gender alone.
 - White women often report a more positive experience than white men, a pattern that is typically reversed for people of color, where women tend to report more challenges than their male peers.
 - African American, Asian, and Latina women are slightly less likely than their male peers to agree that they received access to the variety of experience opportunities needed to complete the AXP.

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Key Findings

Age Is Most Significant Factor in Relation to Experience

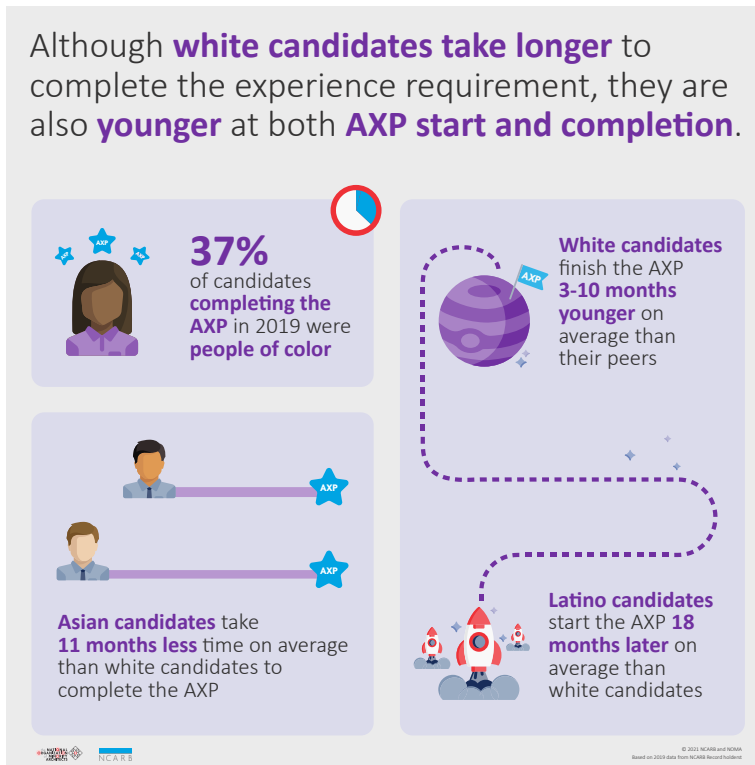


- Age is the most significant factor captured in this report when it comes to a candidate's progression through the AXP, with younger candidates reporting less challenges than their older peers.
- Filtering the survey results by age and race/ethnicity reveals that young, white candidates are most likely to report having a firm or supervisor that provides opportunities to gain a variety of experience than any other demographic.
- Access to supervisor support and experience opportunities decreases more dramatically among older white and Asian candidates, whereas African American and Latino candidates typically see less change between age range and career positions.

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Key Findings

White Candidates Start and Complete the Experience Program Younger



- NCARB's supporting data from customers' NCARB Records reveals that time to complete the program varies only slightly by race/ethnicity, with Asian candidates completing the program fastest and white candidates taking the longest.
- However, while white candidates take the longest amount of time to complete the program, they typically start at a younger age and are therefore slightly younger than candidates of other races/ethnicities when they finish.

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Key Findings

Firm Size Is Significant Factor in Gaining Experience



- Firm size can have an impact on the support respondents received for the AXP, with some benefits and drawbacks seen for each firm size.¹
 - There is little distinction between “firm support” and “supervisor support” in small and mid-size firms, whereas candidates employed at large firms may be more likely to receive support from their firm that extends beyond the supervisor relationship.
 - African American candidates typically report less obstacles when working in a large firm compared to African Americans working in small and mid-sized firms.
 - African Americans are 15 percentage points less likely to report experience if they are working in a small firm, compared to African Americans employed by large firms.

<?> Firm size is determined by response to the question “How many people are currently employed at your firm?” with “small firm” indicating respondents who selected 1-19 employees, “mid-size” indicating respondents who selected 20-99 employees, and “large firm” indicating respondents who selected 100 or more employees.


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Key Findings

African American Women Less Likely to Report Having Engaged or Respectful Supervisors



- When filtered by race/ethnicity and gender, respondents were nearly as likely to agree that their AXP supervisor was supportive of their path to licensure. However, responses to deeper questions about the supervisor relationship—such as supervisor engagement, respect, and the ability to contradict their supervisor—revealed that race/ethnicity and gender may have a larger impact below the surface.
 - African Americans (both men and women) and Asian women are least likely to feel they can voice contradictory opinions in the workplace.
 - African American women are least likely to report having a supervisor who treats them with respect and was fully engaged and aware of their licensure progress.




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Next Steps

Responses to the preliminary study did not point to any obvious bias issue within the experience program's structure. However, some key insights from the report raise important questions—including that a candidate's age has the biggest impact on their progress through the experience program, and that candidates of color typically start, and therefore complete, the experience program at an older age than their white peers:

- Why do minority candidates typically start the AXP later than their white peers?
 - Is this due to lack of access to early career experiences such as summer internships?
 - Is this due to greater challenges in finding employment in an architecture firm?
 - Are there other work/life considerations that delay certain individuals from beginning the AXP once employed by a firm?
 - Is this due to the interpersonal relationships needed in firms to complete the experience requirement?
- Why do older candidates face additional challenges?
 - Are firms culturally conditioned to focus support on younger individuals pursuing licensure?
 - Do older candidates become waylaid by role specialization and other work responsibilities?
 - Or is an older age profile a symptom of the delay caused by the challenges a candidate faced in their particular career path?
- What additional support are large firms providing that give African American candidates a higher level of support than their peers in small and mid-sized firms, and are there actions that small and mid-sized firms could do to emulate that support?
- Are there specific practice areas where women, and particularly women of color, have difficulty gaining experience, and if so, which ones?

In Phase #2, NOMA and NCARB will look to further explore these questions by conducting a follow-up study and focus groups.



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