Architecture Licensing Exam to Launch Online

In mid-November, architecture graduates and other qualified candidates will have the flexibility to take the national licensing exam online or at test centers.

Washington, DC—For many aspiring architects, passing the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®) is the final step to earning a license. But nearly 30,000 architecture graduates have had to delay their licensing goals, as testing sites across the country closed or postponed appointments amid the coronavirus outbreak. It is anticipated that by mid-November, candidates will have the flexibility to take the six-part ARE online, at Prometric centers as they do today, or a combination of both options.

Developed and administered by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the ARE assesses a candidate's knowledge and skills related to architectural practice. The exam, which is required by all state and jurisdictional licensing boards, addresses services that affect the public's safety and wellbeing—such as evaluating the integrity, soundness, and health impact of a building.

NCARB’s staff, architect volunteers, and testing consultants have been exploring the viability of an online exam for several years. Throughout the development process, ensuring that state licensing boards can continue to trust the security of the exam has been a top priority. The organization is also addressing concerns that have troubled other disciplines regarding security, technical glitches, accessibility, and privacy.

“While the pandemic has moved up NCARB’s timeline to launch an online exam, we have not come to this decision swiftly or lightly,” said 2020-2021 NCARB President and New Mexico architect Robert Calvani, FAIA, NCARB. “We understand that any updates to the ARE can be stressful for test takers. Our primary goal is to ensure candidates have a consistent experience whether testing online or in a testing facility, while maintaining the security and legal validity of the national licensing exam.”

Balancing accessibility and exam integrity

Online proctoring will enable candidates to take the ARE in a private location that meets specific technical and environmental requirements. While the ARE’s content and division structure will not change, the exam’s format and experience will be updated for both online and in-person tests. All of these updates will ensure all candidates—regardless of where they test—will have a consistent and secure experience.
• **Online appointments will be available 24/7.** While the ARE is currently available six days a week at Prometric centers, online proctoring will enable candidates to schedule appointments 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, anywhere in the world.

• **Exams will be closely monitored by an online proctor.** To ensure compliance with testing conditions, exams will be overseen by a live proctor who will facilitate the check-in process, conduct a 360º room check, and monitor the entire appointment.

• **Technical support will be readily available.** If candidates need technical support at any time during their exam, their online proctor can assist with troubleshooting. If their internet connection drops or their computer crashes, candidates will be able to re-launch the exam.

• **Candidate privacy will be maintained.** Similar to the ARE’s content, personal information, recorded sessions, and other sensitive data are stored securely on Prometric’s advanced network.

• **Questions per division will be reduced.** Each ARE division will feature 15-20 fewer questions compared to the current exam—primarily “pre-test” questions that do not count toward a candidate’s score.

• **Optional break times will be expanded.** The current break time of 25 minutes will be expanded to 30 or 45 minutes, depending on the division. Candidates will also have the option to use this time for multiple short breaks or one long break.

• **Previously viewed questions will be locked after breaks.** Candidates will be given the option to review all previously viewed items before breaks. Upon returning, candidates will be unable to review questions seen prior to a break for security measures. Those questions will be locked for the duration of the test appointment.

• **Digital whiteboard will replace physical scratch paper.** Currently, candidates are provided scratch paper and pencils, which must be returned at the end of each appointment. Now, candidates will take notes, outline potential solutions, and perform other functions using an online whiteboard.

• **Most accommodations will be available via online proctored exams.** NCARB provides testing accommodations for candidates with documented disabilities or temporary medical conditions; such as additional testing time or breaks. Due to the nature of online proctoring, some accommodations—such as readers or Sign Language interpreters—will only be available at in-person test centers.

### Preparing candidates for the future

As NCARB looks to the future, the organization will continue to balance the needs of candidates, state licensing boards, and the public they protect. Despite architecture’s rapidly shifting landscape, one goal remains constant: delivering a fair and accessible, yet rigorous licensing exam.

“NCARB and our licensing boards have a duty to ensure architectural licensure keeps pace with the world around us,” said NCARB CEO Michael Armstrong. “As with other licensed professions, we are grappling with how to fairly regulate architecture amid a pandemic—and there is no easy solution. But by asking difficult questions and embracing emerging technologies now, we can better position ourselves, and candidates, for the future.”

In the coming weeks, NCARB will share additional tools and resources with candidates, including updated study materials, sample questions in the *ARE 5.0 Handbook*, step-by-step instructions in the *ARE 5.0 Guidelines*, and a demonstration exam where candidates can practice using the new whiteboard. Anyone interested in learning more about the launch of online proctoring can subscribe to NCARB’s [ARE Update newsletter](https://www.ncarb.org/ ARE) or visit [www.ncarb.org/ARE](http://www.ncarb.org/ARE).
About NCARB

The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards' membership is made up of the architectural licensing boards of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NCARB, in collaboration with these boards, facilitates the licensure and credentialing of architects to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

To achieve these goals, NCARB works with its Member Boards and volunteers to develop and facilitate standards for licensure, including the national examination and experience program. NCARB also recommends regulatory guidelines for licensing boards and helps architects expand their professional reach through the NCARB Certificate.

Connect with NCARB on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.