

# A Report from Kansas Architect Zachary Stoltenberg

## Member of NCARB 2016 Think Tank



(Picture from July 2017 Licensure Ceremony)

Over the extended weekend of June 21-24 I was privileged to attend the annual NCARB business meeting Think Tank. This diverse group of 12 people from around the world were chosen to serve based on their unique experiences and paths to licensure and their willingness to improve that process for others. Three of us made the trip to Boston to present our final charges and share the end result of our yearlong service to the member board leadership in attendance. Our focus on charges was twofold, the first question we asked was “what is the value of licensure?,” and second was “How can we improve the Supervisor role to evolve into a partnership between a Licensure Candidate and their Mentor?”

When considering Value it’s easy to look at the financial side, more difficult to tabulate the emotional. To begin, we presented average investment analysis for newly graduated architects to quantify both the time and financial commitment it takes to complete the licensure process. NCARB’s “By the numbers” shows us that last year alone there were over 41,000 people currently pursuing licensure and on average it took just over 4 years for most of them to complete the AXP experience component. Most candidates take just over 2 years additionally to complete all divisions of the ARE, meaning that including education and practice, on average it takes 12 and a half years for most people to become an architect. Additionally, with the cost of education, exams, study materials, etc. the average licensure candidate will spend more than \$100,000 towards completing licensure as well. So where is the value? How can NCARB better reach and engage the next generation of architects and encourage them to pursue licensure? Again, we explored both quantifiable figures as well as some intangibles that measure up as well. On average, licensed architects make \$4,000-\$8,000 more than their non-licensed counterparts. Licensure enables sole practice which accounts for roughly 20% of all practicing architects today and enables flexibility in a rapidly changing job market. Today’s recent grads value mobility and flexibility in a job and licensure allows that. In short, it’s a personal decision for each candidate but the value is clearly there and is greater the sooner a candidate becomes licensed, and they are. Newly licensed architects in 2016 completed the process on average 10 months sooner than in 2015, and we are seeing a more diverse group of people in the profession than ever before.

In examining the existing dynamic of the Supervisor / Candidate roles we found a stark difference in perceptions of the responsibilities and their execution in practice. When surveyed, 84% of current supervisors feel as if they are helping their candidates gain the necessary experience across all areas of practice. This is a great thing, except that only 46% of the licensure candidates they are serving feel the same way. This gap, we felt, was evidence of the opportunity to improve this relationship for both the Supervisor and the candidate and one we felt centered upon mentorship. Not all mentors will be supervisors, but ALL supervisors should be mentors. Both the NCARB rules of Conduct as well as the AIA code of ethics require a commitment towards developing professionals through investment. So how do we strengthen this relationship? We focused on tools to train supervisors, improve communication, build knowledge base of the licensure process, and educate both supervisors and candidates on the expectations of the path towards licensure. We quantified the benefits that can be found in a healthy mentor / candidate relationship including opportunities for the supervisor to share their experience, gain an understanding of the day to day work in their office from the perspective of their non-licensed staff, the opportunity to improve their own leadership and teaching skills, and the satisfaction found in knowing they are investing in the future of the profession. We looked at the direct benefits to a firm including increased retention, better staff morale, a higher level of respect between employees, a pride in the firm...

and the profession as a whole, and the continued culture of mentorship that developing professionals will in turn take with them as they transition into mentoring those who will eventually come behind them.

This focus culminated in identifying some immediate options as well as some possible future development that could improve the Mentor/Candidate role and make more apparent the value of licensure to those considering it. We worked to develop the framework of a future monograph training series that will be available to all NCARB members focused on Mentorship and training supervisors to be better mentors. We brainstormed additional incentives for mentor/supervisors to encourage more people to get involved and want to serve their candidates to the best of their ability. We looked at the possibilities of utilizing the existing technology and engagement candidates have through My NCARB and personalizing it through a “my Path” track that would break down the overall process into smaller, manageable goals that each candidate can pursue at their own pace. We presented additional ways to celebrate the smaller milestones along the path to licensure and explored opportunities to network individuals sharing the experience in order to allow them to encourage one another and share resources with each other. We encouraged the member board leadership from each state and territory to follow the example of states like Kansas in holding ceremonies for newly licensed architects, and explored additional recognition opportunities for firms and individuals to celebrate this achievement. In order to ensure that licensure remains relevant in an ever deregulated political environment, we believed that we could and should invigorate the process. We proposed that both licensure candidates and supervisors would benefit from a better mentorship relationship and that through an increased interaction with NCARB support and services we could help make that happen. We believe that good architects make good supervisors, and stronger relationships between licensure candidates and supervisors build better professionals. Better professionals are more equipped to serve and protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public, so invest in your developing professionals, the future of the profession is dependent on it!

**ZACHARY B. STOLTENBERG Design Architect**  
NCARB | AIA