

## **NCARB’s Position on the NAAB and Accreditation in Architectural Education**

*February 2024*

There is currently significant discussion and debate in the architecture community regarding the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) and the future of architectural accreditation. These discussions have included calls for adjustments to the NAAB’s governance, funding, and procedural models. The NAAB and its traditional supporting partners—NCARB, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), and the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)—are working to find alignment on the best path forward for the continued accreditation of architectural education. These deliberations have recently included correspondence from NAAB to the accredited schools about potential new funding models and ACSA leadership circulating a resolution indicating a vote of no confidence in the NAAB for its members’ consideration.

Given the increased dialogue on these issues, NCARB’s leadership believes it is necessary and appropriate to clarify NCARB’s position on the discussions surrounding the NAAB and accreditation. NCARB’s position is detailed below and is being shared for the benefit of both NCARB’s Member Boards and other involved parties.

### **The NAAB**

NCARB believes the NAAB plays an important role in assessing the content of architectural education. NAAB accreditation affirms that academic programs fulfill specific requirements that help graduates protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public, should they go on to become licensed architects. NCARB acknowledges that accreditation fulfills several needs but derives the most value from the core components of accreditation that focus on the protection of the public.

NCARB believes that NAAB has opportunities to update its accreditation methodology and is encouraging the NAAB to evaluate new approaches to program assessment to ensure this important organization is as effective and efficient with its staff, volunteers, and finances as possible in the years ahead.

### **NAAB Funding**

NCARB is a long-time funder of the NAAB and annually provides over \$400K to support NAAB operations. This same funding amount has also been provided by the AIA and the ACSA, with a smaller amount coming from the AIAS, per the terms of a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). In anticipation of the most recent MOU expiring on December 31, 2023, the NAAB requested a significant increase in funding from its three major collateral donors last year. NCARB and the other donor organizations declined that request, citing the need for more clarity in justifying proposed additional spending to support NAAB’s accreditation methodology. Significant dialogue has taken place between all of the affected organizations in an attempt to

gain a better understanding of the NAAB's request for additional funding, along with an ongoing request from its donors to explore opportunities to modernize the accreditation process. To fully realize its authority under its bylaws and to align more closely with common practice regarding accreditation funding, NCARB believes that the NAAB should no longer have its bylaws authority blocked by MOU language that prohibits collecting accreditation fees directly from accredited programs, should its other funding sources be insufficient to support appropriate funding of the NAAB accreditation mission. NCARB recognizes the NAAB has historically been prevented from invoicing programs directly, due to the terms of the funding MOU between NCARB, AIA, and the ACSA. The recent expiration of the MOU has released the NAAB from this limitation. NCARB has not decided upon its future funding of the NAAB, dependent upon a further review of NAAB's proposed future funding model. NCARB has an ongoing fiduciary responsibility to its 55 member jurisdictions regarding supporting accredited education as a path to licensure and hopes to arrive at a new funding arrangement with the NAAB in the coming months.

### **Accreditation Process**

NCARB believes the methodology NAAB undertakes in evaluating programs would benefit from new approaches to the utilization of volunteers, efficient application of new technologies, and other steps that will offer opportunities for efficiency savings. Procedural reform to NAAB's implementation of its accreditation program would benefit NAAB volunteers, NAAB administration, academic faculty, and students, ultimately benefitting the public that NCARB is organized to serve. NCARB continues to dialogue with NAAB leaders regarding reform to the accreditation process.

### **Accreditation Requirements**

The NAAB's *Conditions for Accreditation* are set periodically, with the most recent revision to NAAB Conditions occurring in 2019. NCARB would like to see some updates to the NAAB's *Conditions for Accreditation* that will better define important health, safety, and welfare (HSW) components and strengthen expectations for professional practice. NCARB would also like the NAAB to thoroughly re-evaluate the current 150 minimum credit hour requirement, which prevents academic institutions from bringing a focused four-year architectural undergraduate program into the accreditation landscape. NCARB believes this should be an option and offers one of the greatest opportunities for the next generation of architects. (see Reform in the Educational Sector below).

### **NCARB's Pathways to Practice Initiative**

NCARB's recent initiatives and announcements regarding the development of "multiple paths to licensure" have caused consternation in some quarters and have led to claims that NCARB is trying to undermine the value of accreditation. NCARB highly values accredited education. It is a viable and effective way to learn about the profession and the health, safety, and welfare responsibilities of licensed architects. It is a requirement in a majority of U.S. jurisdictions and is the most frequently used pathway to gaining a license today—and will likely remain so far into the future. Currently, 85% of new architects who achieve licensure have a degree from a NAAB-

accredited program. NCARB continues to commit significant funds to various aspects of accredited education on an annual basis, ranging from its NAAB contribution to supporting the development of digital curricula for professional practice instruction in partnership with the ACSA, offering annual Professional Practice Scholars professional development for instructors at accredited programs, convening faculty licensing advisors at face-to-face meetings and online, and conducting regular outreach visits to accredited programs throughout the U.S. Further, nearly three dozen accredited programs now participate in NCARB's Integrated Path to Architectural Licensure (IPAL) initiative.

NCARB's *Pathways to Practice* initiative aims to create new routes to licensure that enable individuals who don't have the means or opportunity to attend 5+ years of college, or whose approaches to learning and application of skills do not fit into a traditional accredited education path, to become architects. *Pathways to Practice* acknowledges the 18,000 licensed architects in this county who did not receive an accredited degree and directly supports NCARB's mission to facilitate licensure. NCARB asserts that for the profession to truly arrive at a diverse, inclusive, and equitable state, licensure options should be diversified, accessible, and obtainable. This initiative is about adding new opportunities, not diminishing established pathways.

### **Reform in the Educational Sector**

Over the past decade, NCARB has been working diligently to remove unnecessary impediments to licensure and mobility. It has pushed to reevaluate and adjust programs, in pursuit of fairness in licensure and to reflect the mantra "rigor for a reason."

Over the same decade, the cost of an accredited architectural education has increased significantly, which imposes real financial burdens on the next generation of practitioners. NCARB is committed to working with the NAAB and academia and has identified a number of opportunities that should be vetted and considered, including reform of the accreditation process, improved relationships with community colleges and the evaluation of a four-year accredited degree program.

### **Summary**

The current debate around accreditation is necessary and perhaps overdue. NCARB acknowledges there are both vested interests and competing points of view. Sustainable reform is never easy. But NCARB is committed to working with all of our stakeholders and adjacent organizations to broaden access, reduce costs, and elevate public protection.