Engaging Community

Equitable and inclusive practices involve not only the workplace but also the communities and end users that the profession serves to produce a more flourishing built environment. As community needs become deeper and more urgent, encompassing broad concerns such as resiliency and social justice, architects will do well to adopt solutions created in partnership with those communities. By practicing greater equity, the profession increases its value to society as well as its visibility among potential partners and future practitioners.

This guide explains the fundamental principles and attributes of community engagement and proposes specific methods and guidance for involving community members in equitable, inclusive, and just design processes, decision-making, and outcomes.

AIA W

The University of Washington for the American Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee

What is community engagement?

The essence of community engagement is the inclusion of divergent voices—professionals, stakeholders, and end users—to arrive at consensus about project goals and characteristics, with a positive outcome for all.[1] A broad body of research in multiple fields, including higher education, social science research, and public health, can help inform architecture professionals about the outcomes and methods of constructive community engagement.[2]

The work of architects almost always has an impact on communities, especially when *community* is defined broadly—not only as neighborhoods but also as any group that occupies or experiences the end product, from a single family to an entire city. Client goals may sometimes align with those of the community and at other times they may conflict, for example, when the architect is representing a private client whose project objectives are at odds with those of the neighborhood or of other constituents. Since the majority of the work produced by architects affects communities of different kinds and scales, it becomes important to imagine the design with all stakeholders—client and community—in mind as each project progresses. Knowing how to engage with communities respectfully and with a disposition toward learning is essential to ensure successful end results.

Architects may be effective in several different roles: learner, facilitator, mediator, advocate, or implementer. In most cases, the architect is an outsider and, therefore, is responsible for building trust and understanding the community as part of a project's foundational work. In any case, the architect's primary contractual responsibility is toward the client; the extent to which community engagement is part of the project depends on the negotiated scope of the project and can be influenced by the architect.

Because of their significant impact on communities, architects need to be fluent in engagement. In addition to using skills such as creating and implementing effective processes and eliciting and communicating information about their work, architects engage more deeply and authentically when they understand the historic and systemic context in which the profession is viewed. For example, while designers generally intend to contribute to society in addition to serving clients, the impact on social systems, communities, or neighborhoods are not always perceived as positive by the very communities (end users) who experience the architect's designs. When a community's experience is negative, the work of architects can be seen as an example of what is described by researchers and advocates as "white savior complex." This term describes when a white person tries to help people of color in ways that are actually self-serving, or more broadly when dominant group experts dictate a solution that they believe is for the benefit of a less-powerful group.

Regardless of an architect's intent or identity, knowing how to discuss hot-button issues, such as affordability, resident displacement, and gentrification (discussed below), is key to connecting authentically in any engagement process. While it may feel risky, using principles of equitable practice outlined in this and previous guides will provide a foundation for aligning good intent with good outcomes and strengthening the architect's awareness of the community's vision and aspirations, which may differ from the original project brief.

CURRENT PRACTICES
This guide will address three forms of community engagement, ranging from individual to societal: how individual architects can engage in their communities as informed and involved citizens; how an architect can lead or facilitate engagement as a professional; and how architects can model engaged and equitable practices as they consider their impact on society.

ENGAGING AS CITIZENS

First, in addition to each person's own efforts to be a privately involved architect—a thoughtful and informed citizen—the work of a publicly involved architect is a form of civic engagement and public participation, creating situations in which people collaborate and communicate together toward a common goal.[3] For architects, who often describe themselves as solo actors, the role of publicly involved architect may be a stretch. Ways that individuals or groups of members can participate and contribute include:

· volunteering for nonprofit and public organizations in general (e.g., youth groups, public schools, social services, cultural institutions) and in community planning

· appearing in public and being identified as an architecture professional

· showing up at public events

· running for public office

· helping shape public policy

· becoming activists at the local community level on neighborhood-development issues, such as traffic control or historic preservation

These activities also benefit the profession as they enhance awareness of architecture as a career, build appreciation for what architects do, and involve architecture professionals more deeply as members of their own communities. For example, in the 2016 AIA Diversity in the Profession of Architecture Survey, 57% of architects of color believe that having little knowledge of architecture as a career option impedes diversity.[4] For people currently underrepresented in the field of architecture, meeting or seeing architects in public roles and learning about what architects do may help to diversify the profession in the long run.

This type of engagement can also include participation in outreach organizations that increase public awareness of and interest in architecture. For example, the Architecture Foundation of Oregon conducts programs to "connect communities to the power of design" and to work "with community partners to share design's role in shaping our future."[5] Programs such as Architecture in Schools expose youth and adolescents to architectural design. These programs seek to attract prospective architecture students and increase awareness of design's importance. Similarly, the ACE Mentor Program connects mentors from architecture, construction, and engineering with high school students and provides scholarships and grants to help students pursue careers in the building industry. NOMA's Project Pipeline is a well-regarded summer program that focuses on STEM and arts/architecture, teaching community-based participatory

research. The nonprofit organization Canstruction® sponsors competitions for designs and sculptures made of canned goods as a means of collecting food for food banks across the United States. More generally, AIA chapters create opportunities for members to volunteer for projects such as clean-up days and neighborhood markets.

Activism, or "activist-architecture," is another form of public involvement, through which architects participate in organizations that advocate for political and social change. AIA advocacy efforts during Grassroots connects architects with legislators and their staff members to address issues related to the built environment nationally, regionally, and in their districts. Activist architects might also participate in political or civic engagement campaigns and encourage their colleagues to conduct pro bono work or advocate for human rights, while also taking into consideration the potential financial and reputational consequences. Millennials, in particular, are seeking employers with a sense of social responsibility, and offering pro bono opportunities can be a recruitment tool.[6]

ENGAGING AS A PROFESSIONAL

Second, architects engage with communities in their professional capacity by facilitating community participation and voice. Many government entities—federal, state, or local—such as the General Services Administration, require community engagement during the design process for public projects or private projects that receive government funding or financing. (See the Compliance section of this guide.) Regardless of the project type and client orientation, architects can propose and help design the form of local-community involvement during the design stages—how to structure it and who should be involved—to ensure that the members and end users have input and that their knowledge, assets, values, history, culture, needs, and priorities are reflected in the final result.

One of the greatest positive impacts the architect can make is to ensure that a true cross section of those affected by the project is represented, not just those who are most vocal or have the most political influence or access. Inclusion often requires allocating more time for the engagement process, holding gatherings at a variety of locations and times of day, offering incentives, and creating different formats that recognize varying communication preferences and comfort levels among participants. The architect may be serving as a neutral facilitator or as an advocate with a standpoint and should make that difference clear from the outset. In addition to these roles and responsibilities, architects are well equipped to help participants design solutions to any governmental and regulatory constraints.

ENGAGING AS A FIRM

Finally, firms and institutions can model community engagement and equity and enhance the positive impact of architecture on society by offering services intended to advance equity.[7] These organizations include: for-profit firms that explicitly include community-engagement work in their business model, deliver pro bono projects, or create nonprofit arms; nonprofit design firms dedicated to community-related projects; and university-based design centers and studios that connect students and practitioners to local community networks and needs.[8] Many of the architects involved with these projects consider equity to include social justice and offer opportunities to amplify voices that have historically been excluded from decision processes affecting their environment.[9]

DESIGN METHODOLOGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Collaboratively developed processes, sometimes characterized as socially responsive design, emphasize community engagement, community needs, equity issues, and the relationship between the designer and the public.[10] For example, equity-centered design involves design through community cocreation, addressing power dynamics and making equity concerns central to the design process.[11] Other processes have evolved from design thinking, an approach intended to lead to design ideas that allow for the designer's creative expression and provide meaning and function for the user.[12] Human-centered design is a design-thinking practice in which users are cocreators, even if not necessarily experts in design.[13] In human-centered design, the user is at the heart of the design process, especially in the inspiration phase and in ideation and implementation. Human-centered designers call upon characteristics and qualities such as creative confidence, learning from failure, empathy, optimism, embracing ambiguity, and iteration as part and parcel of the design process and key to making the user's needs and values a focus of the design.[14]

The human-centered approach can be particularly powerful for users whose identities are underrepresented in architecture, guaranteeing that their unique and nuanced points of view influence the design. For example, people using wheelchairs and those using strollers may both benefit from accessible design features yet differ in what is most useful to them. Quality of life can be greatly enhanced for people with visible and invisible disabilities when designers take time to understand the challenges they face and try out solutions with them. Simply meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) misses opportunities for designs that could be more effective for everyone. Accessible design only addresses mandated accessibility while universal design considers the experience of a broad range of users.

In public interest design, designers use their skills to improve the quality of life of communities that generally cannot afford their services, in particular by addressing systemic problems that arise in the built environment.[15] Environmental and socially sustainable design adopts sustainability frameworks, such as LEED and the Living Building Challenge, and accords equal importance to principles of equity as to the other framework elements.[16] In general, these processes emphasize designing for communities through the creation of common spaces and friendly environments and by fostering human health and comfort and environmental regeneration. There are numerous efforts to integrate and elevate goals of environmental sustainability with goals of equity and justice.[17]

Fundamentally, whatever the process, community engagement is a cooperative approach that ideally provides the user or community with self-determination and promotes mutual care and concern between designers and the community as well as toward the project. A helpful rule for designers and project owners is to respect that community groups and individuals want "nothing about us without us," a slogan reflecting their experiences when well-intended efforts did not lead to positive outcomes.[18]

TOWARDS EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Architects have a pivotal role to play in the creation of thriving communities at all scales, and architects have the potential to begin addressing a host of historic, institutionalized practices and policies through empathy, trust-building, and intercultural competence and fluency. Such trust has been impeded by a history of inequitable practices in architecture, urban planning, and public policy that are widely known to have affected African American communities but also many other identity groups. These practices include, for example, redlining, housing discrimination, failed housing projects, and urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s, and have been largely due to historic, structural racism—the interaction of systems, ideologies, processes, and social and cultural influences that create and maintain inequities among racial and ethnic groups. Even today, one's zip code is the strongest predictor of health outcomes and social mobility, indicating that space and place matter.[19] Although architects and the profession are only one part of this complex system, it is essential for practitioners to acknowledge the role the profession has played in perpetuating inequity in the built environment and to commit to overcoming it by deeply incorporating equity into practice.

In the built environment, one of the most tangible and widespread examples of structural inequity is racism as expressed through redlining and subsequent resident displacement. The policy of redlining in housing is de facto segregation through the denial of mortgages and other services to, most often, African Americans. In the 1930s, Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), a federal agency intended to increase homeownership, created maps of major cities, color coded to designate

mortgage-lending risks. Areas considered high risk were colored in red and consisted of urban areas with large African American populations or other communities of color. In addition, some neighborhoods also drew up restrictive covenants that controlled who could own a home there and further excluded people of color and, often, Jews. When the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968, it became possible, in theory, for anyone to buy a home anywhere; however, the history of redlining and neighborhood covenants meant that the homes of many people of color had appreciated in value far more slowly, rendering the non-redlined homes beyond the reach of those whose equity had not increased as much.[20] In a different but related vein, urban historian Dolores Hayden has made the case that urban and suburban planning and architectural design have long contributed to the narrowing of women's sphere primarily to domestic life through suburbanization and the consequent isolation.[21] Both examples illustrate how exclusion from design and decision-making have contributed to a built environment that advantages some over others.

Redlining further resulted in the devaluation of the housing and physical assets (e.g., public parks, civic amenities) of underserved and low-income communities and thereby opened the door to gentrification, during which undervalued assets become attractive to outsiders who target the community for reinvestment.[22] Revaluing then results in the displacement of the original community, as rents and housing prices increase and wealthier and more powerful newcomers buy up older buildings and the land. The influx of money leads to improvements to housing and the urban environment— improvements that the prior residents may have wanted or fought for but lacked the political and financial power to attain.

Neighborhood and building improvements certainly have advantages, and residents who remain have been shown to benefit in some ways.[23] On the other hand, when community residents leave, a neighborhood's cultural and social history may be lost. While local governments may help fund those organizations (e.g., developers, businesses, property owners) that are investing capital in the neighborhood through tax breaks and other means, they generally do not provide significant assistance or public resources to help previous residents remain in their community or reestablish themselves elsewhere.[24]

Architects, who historically have mostly been white and whose dominant cultural paradigm has been that of the "designer as authority," have been in the position to make choices on behalf of lower-power or less visible groups, especially communities of color (particularly African Americans, indigenous people, and recent immigrants) and low-income communities.[25] Teams that reflect the identities found in the community may find it easier to connect, but regardless of team demographics, attending to implicit and explicit bias is essential to building the

trust required for authentic community engagement. (See the *Intercultural Competence* guide.) Limiting the impact of bias can also keep the focus on inclusion and avoid the perception of tokenism—a situation in which a single person from a target identity may perceive themselves or be perceived by others as included primarily to get the commission or deter criticism. Recruiting "cultural brokers" (individuals and groups familiar with the communities being served) can help achieve genuine communication when their roles are clear.

In addition, the culture of architecture, with its own visual and verbal language, is not always easy to understand, especially by those in communities that have had little exposure to architects; therefore, bridging with common language can be an asset. How designers connect, who they listen to, and how they gather information can all affect trust, communication, and success of the end product. Architects who understand how their own language and culture are perceived by others and who also have the skills to bridge intercultural differences are most likely to be effective, especially when individuals and groups in the community lack experience with architects or are suspicious of architects and the building industry due to historic and current policies, a history of being ignored, and/or economic pressure to leave their neighborhoods. (See the *Intercultural Competence* guide.) To engage local communities and users during projects, architects can foreground the local expertise of community members, leaders, and organizations by structuring design-thinking processes during which designers and the community share power in idea generation and decision-making to uncover context-specific solutions.

"It's important to reflect the demographics of your client, but it's not the reason you should have a diverse team. The way we look at it, it's really about the richness of the work. Internally, people are more comfortable talking about it this way too. It gets to the issue of genuineness."

President/CEO, White, 61 years old

Successful context-specific design comes from familiarity with local history and policy in relation to equity. For example, asking about demographic changes can yield increased awareness of gender and racial differences in how public space is experienced and can expand attention to the needs of people with disabilities or aging populations. Through this discovery process, architects increase both their sensitivity and their technical knowledge and skills. Reading about these issues and reaching out to organizations that represent different groups can help architects build empathy and understand the community or individuals not present or apparent in the lives of some architects. In this context any activity (a potluck, documentary, or school visit) that helps architects understand difference as well as appreciate similarities through the experiences of others can be useful. (See the *Intercultural Competence* guide for more on appreciating difference.)

Architecture professionals can engage communities and users more equitably with a framework that focuses on quality of life and that reduces racial, gender, and other disparities by processing and countering the forces that have sustained those disparities. For architects, working within an equitable development framework can include engaging local-community experts as partners during project design, encouraging developers and other outside investors to better understand community members and their values and concerns, recognizing histories and policies that have produced inequities, and—in an assertive advocacy role as distinct from a facilitative one—being involved in local policy making that allows for advancing economic opportunities for the community, promoting affordable housing, and implementing other anti-displacement measures.[26]

Regardless of the cultural characteristics, designers who have sustained interactions with the local community rather than superficial, brief interchanges are more likely to be successful.[27] Effectiveness depends on the values and perspectives of the specific community and how well one can meld the required outcomes of the project and the needs of the community. Keeping in mind that having a positive purpose does not necessarily translate to effectiveness or a good outcome, architects who have the capacity and flexibility to attend to both relationship building and project design and outcomes will have the greatest positive impact.

WHAT DOES AUTHENTICITY LOOK LIKE?
What does it mean to engage
authentically? How do we know we are
achieving authentic communication and
not just checking the box?

"Authentic engagement is built on an honest relationship with the community. As professionals, architects are often outsiders, but this is no limitation. Approaching the table as a citizen first and as a respectful guest gives the community the freedom to share their needs and experiences. In this space, the reality of the community experience and knowledge is more valuable than the architect's education or perceived status. Connecting with the community at this level allows an architect to lead from an informed position of trust and yields mutual benefit for all involved."

Associate AIA, African American, Female, 32

"We have to start to think anew. We have to approach community engagement as 'proactive social scientists' who, first and foremost, do not ignore the fact that we live in a country with increasing, ever-changing diversity and that some of the communities we serve are not monolithic but dynamic and hyperdiverse and continue to diversify. Researching and collecting data on the end users is the key to authentically connecting and proving our sincerity to serve instead of offering off-the-shelf, recycled solutions that may not necessarily fit or completely solve the task we are faced with."

Senior Architect/Project Manager, African American, Male, 49

"Being authentic in a community means to effectively share information that invites people's participation, welcomes their input, and inspires confidence in my ability to create design solutions that make space for them and that they can see themselves reflected in. My goal is to successfully curate a meaningful conversation about a relevant topic that demonstrates an understanding of their lived experiences and can help improve the quality of their lives."

Managing Partner/Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

"Authentic means staying engaged in the discussion until the issue is settled, testifying at public meetings to express your opinion, and being secure in the knowledge that you have truly been fully engaged in offering your opinion yet respectful of the final decision whether it is in your favor or not."

Vice President/Business Development, White/Hispanic, 69

"For me it means not just interacting once. Sometimes there's a desire to check the box 'I did that, and you'll never hear from us again.' But in my experience, not only did we go to meet with the community members, we asked questions in advance, asked questions while we were there. We wrote the responses in our reports, connected again. It wasn't just something we put on the record so we could say later: 'We met with this group.' We had meaningful conversations."

Architect/Designer, African American, Male, 50s

"It takes research and active engagement to authentically connect with a community. We often schedule outreach engagements during community gatherings, such as street fairs and community events, so we can reach out to a wider demographic. This environment also allows us to socialize, meet, and chat with our target audience in a more relaxing and engaging manner."

Architect/Public Sector, Asian American, Female, 49

"Authentically connecting to the community must include establishing a deeper professional and/or personal relationship with people in the community. This can be accomplished by the people on the team living, working, volunteering, or playing within the community. This has the potential to lead to deeper and more meaningful (i.e., authentic) relationships and therefore authentic connections. Maybe you go to a social or religious event in the community; maybe you shop, go to the park, and attend community sporting events—and through those activities it is evident that it is way more then checking the box."

Principal, White, Male, 60

EXTERNAL →→→→→ INTERNAL
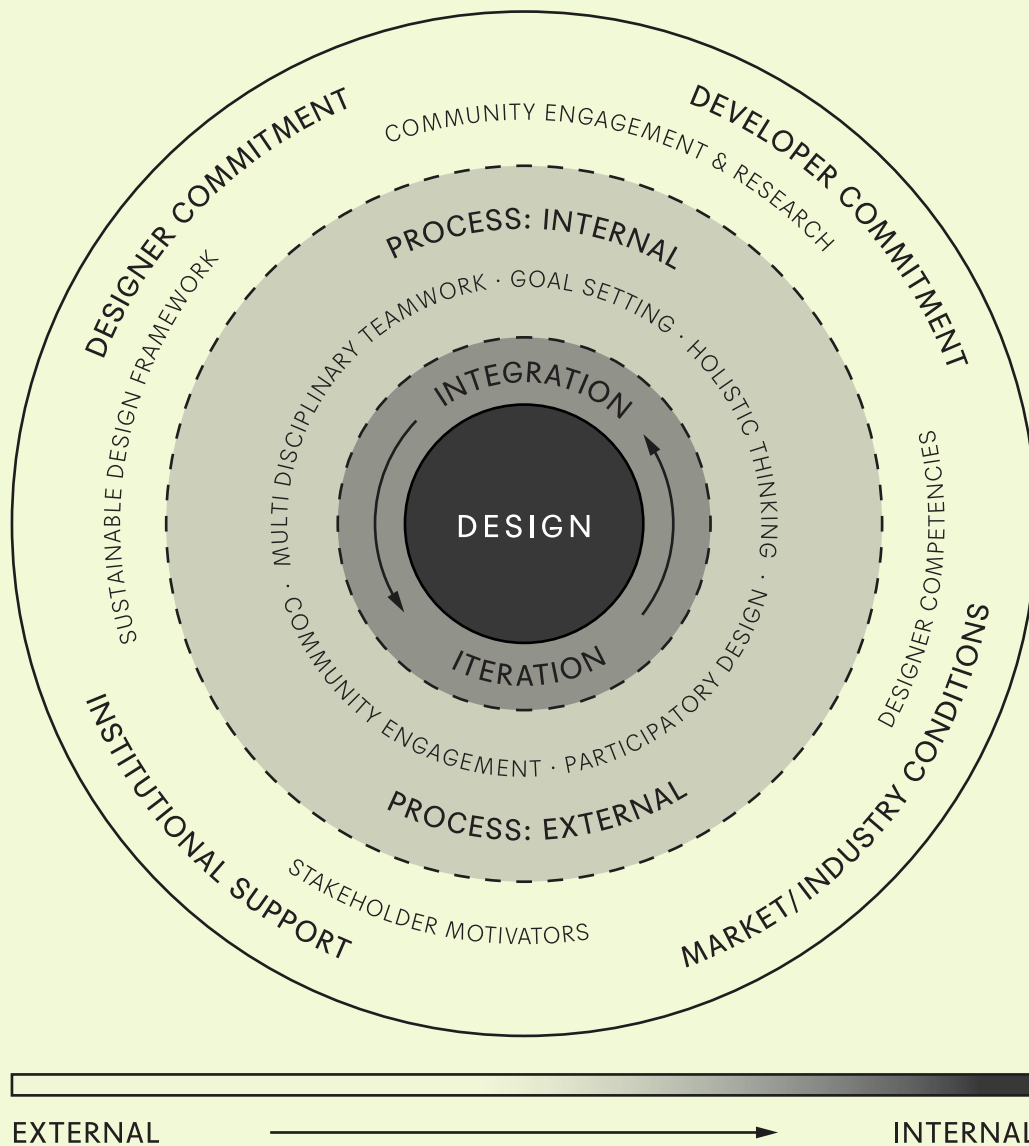
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE DESIGN

This framework is one way for practitioners who would commit to community engagement as part of their work to think about it within a broader, holistic design process. The framework advocates for not only environmental considerations but also "social equity" considerations (inclusion and access, participation, procedural fairness, and self-determination) to be inherent in any architectural project.

In the diagram, the outermost "layer of imperatives," or essential conditions for success, is the set of necessary preconditions that must be in place even before design and development begin (e.g., government incentives, professional competence, market demand, developer commitment and motivation). The second tier relates to how the design process itself is framed and initiated: how the design team is formed; which stakeholders are included from the start; what social engagement framework and efforts are part of it; and the team's management model.

The innermost tier, with its repeated cycles of integration and iteration, relates most directly to the details of the project itself: program needs, goals, time and budget constraints, site conditions, decision-making processes, etc., that must be synthesized into a coherent design. Some of the activities involved call for the design team to apply its more technical ("internal") capacities to integrate all these elements; others involve stakeholders and end-users—the community— to participate in generating and iterating design ideas and solutions ("external").

Together, the three tiers are intended to be interconnected and synergistic and to result in a design (the core of the diagram) that promotes social and environmental wellbeing.[28]

Why does equitable community engagement matter?

As underscored in the AIA Code of Ethics, architects have an ethical responsibility to people and the planet. In a survey about public interest design, a vast majority of architecture professionals believed that their profession has an ethical basis.[29] Seventy-five percent of respondents believed that architects should advocate for often-unheard members of the community, build inclusive designs that engage communities in idea generation and decision-making, promote social equality and equitable growth, help build local capacity, create environmentally sustainable design, and engage in environmental justice.[30] Yet Equity by Design (EQxD) survey respondents were far less likely to say their work benefits society or communities than they were to say that their work benefits their client or firm, and only 10% said that their work has a positive impact on underrepresented communities.[31]

At the same time that architects express the belief that architecture can have a positive impact, the building industry, market forces, and policy makers have contributed to creating a world with extreme income inequality, increasing urban populations, and limited or decreasing public funding for housing, all of which have led to a housing crisis in many urban centers.[32] Architects can use design to help meet this crisis equitably by designing buildings that are affordable as well as environmentally sustainable.[33] They can bring their expertise in design while acknowledging areas where they need other perspectives. Finding ways to thoughtfully engage with communities, municipalities,

policy makers, and developers ensures that different perspectives and ways of knowing and working inform the design. To do so means breaking the dominant cultural paradigm of the architect and architecture team as the authority on design, moving toward a model in which the team includes community groups and individuals.

Equitable and inclusive community engagement builds trust between designers and community members, sustains communities, and helps create functional, affordable, safe spaces.[34] When architects engage in the public sphere as community volunteers and activists, they can also influence public policies related to the built environment that promote the need of stable housing for all community members.[35] In addition, architects can use projects to benefit communities by hiring local consultants, contractors, and subcontractors.

There is also a relationship between equity, inclusiveness, and environmental performance—often defined as resilience. Metrics are beginning to emerge that measure performance in the areas of place, water, energy, materials, beauty, health and happiness, and equity. Equity can be assessed based on access to nature, community services, and neighborhood civic and communal spaces; developer investment; and involving organizations.[36]

When community engagement is intentional and strategic and when it focuses on values of equity and inclusiveness, the community and architects alike reap the benefits. Project outcomes improve as the design responds to the needs of all stakeholders, including those from the wider community affected by the project. When architects participate in outreach organizations or offer equity-centered services, the profession also becomes more visible, potentially attracting a new generation of architects and thereby enhancing diversity in the profession in the long term.

INDIVIDUALS

Empowerment · Community engagement bridges the gap between designers and communities.

Responsive design · When architects listen to communities, they can make more effective design decisions that lead to structures that are safe, healthy, sustainable, and more resilient and that enhance the quality of life for a greater number of people.

Relationships · Engaging in your own community as an architect helps build relationships with people outside of your usual circles and helps you understand the challenges and needs of those living in your own community and how your expertise can help meet these challenges.

Community health · Community engagement contributes to designs that are affordable and place appropriate, helping its members lead healthier, happier lives individually and together.[37]

FIRMS

Engagement · Those that feel that they make a positive impact on others through their work are more likely to be engaged in their work and more likely to plan to stay in their current job. (See the *Advancing Careers* guide for burnout.)

Reputation · Strong community engagement with clients or those living in the future area of a built project will help design more sustainable, responsive buildings and build a firm's reputation in design and in the community.

Trust · Engaging in your local communities will help build trust between your firm and the communities you work in, paving the path for increasing community participation in design and stronger relationships for future projects.

Networks · Community engagement increases your networks of users and local contractors and subcontractors.

Capacity · Firms with diverse employees who have high levels of intercultural competence will be more successful in community engagement and will have the capacity to meet future challenges with a still-broader range of clients.

Project outcomes · Community engagement ideally produces buildings that meet the needs of all stakeholders while reflecting and respecting community values. It can also lead to sustainable and innovative designs.[38]

PROFESSION

Visibility · Through community engagement, more people can become familiar with architecture.

Recruitment pipeline · Community engagement with groups that are underrepresented in architecture leads to many different communities seeing and understanding architects and learning about architecture as a profession. This exposure can lead to an increase in recruitment from a wider array of communities.

Relevance · Today's youth are engaged in their communities and politically passionate. When they witness architects engaging deeply with their local communities and placing equity at the forefront of their engagement work, architecture will be better positioned to attract a new generation into the field.[39]

Capacity for change · Instead of the traditional top-down model for solving social and environmental problems, such as affordable, safe, and healthy housing and efficient and sustainable buildings, community engagement helps formerly underrepresented people increase their agency by expanding their roles as decision-makers and designers of how their communities look and function. The profession can continue to work with developers, municipalities, and policy makers to promote substantial and equitable engagement.

"A lot of things I do pro bono actually have a lot of value not just within the community but also for the firm. I saw an article about media exposure that put a dollar amount on the value of social media. It made me wonder if we could quantify the value of what we do in the community too."

Rising Firm Leader, First-Generation Mexican American, Male, 30s

We are successful in community engagement when...

CONNECTION

the project process and result fully engage the intended users

there is mutual learning, growth, and respect between the architect and the community

architects listen to the visions of the community and use their expertise to give them shape

communities are fully invested in and take ownership of the process and project

TRUST

the architect and the community respect each other's knowledge

the architect is brought into the community for advice

there are project team members from the same culture as the community, and their cultural expertise is valued

architects act as listeners, as well as presenters and facilitators, during community events

ALIGNMENT

the resulting project accommodates and is accessible and safe for all in the community

the architect genuinely understands the users' needs and wants and reflects them in the ultimate design

the community appreciates and maintains the resulting facilities

equity is a key factor in decision-making, leading to the best-use, best-value, and a high-quality end product

POWER

design teams seek out and listen to many voices in the community, especially those with less power and privilege

architects work to effectively communicate their expertise to the community to make information meaningful and understandable

power, responsibility, and accountability are shared

architects are sensitive to and incorporate design elements and symbols offered by the community, not those solely based on their own interpretation, which may not be as fully informed

Compliance

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding conflict of interest and suggestions for maintaining standards of practice but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

Projects in which community engagement is a critical factor may raise unique challenges for architects and other design professionals. Challenging areas include potential or perceived conflict of interest, high expectations of professionals who may be working for a low or no fee, and understanding that requirements for engagement can vary depending on the location, project type and client, and the type of engagement.

For example, a number of jurisdictions now expressly or implicitly require community engagement in design reviews.[40] In these instances, a lack of awareness of and failure to comply with federal, state, or local requirements for community involvement may have serious legal consequences. This lapse could lead to:

· A court or administrative challenge, potentially putting a project in jeopardy.

· A violation of an AIA Code of Ethics disciplinary rule stating that members "shall not, in the conduct of their professional practice, knowingly violate the law."

· A violation of an AIA disciplinary rule stating that "members shall not counsel or assist a client in conduct that the architect knows, or should know, is fraudulent or illegal."

Potential liability for professional negligence may raise special concerns in this context. The standard of care requires the architect to do what a reasonably competent architect would do in the same community and in the same time frame, given the same or similar facts and circumstances. Failure to meet this standard may result in civil liability. It is important to note that the standard of care continues to apply even if the architect is providing services pro bono or at a reduced fee.

Many states have laws protecting architects from liability in emergency-response situations. In those states, immunity covers architects working as volunteers for a certain amount of time after a disaster.[41]

In non-emergency situations, when not acting as an architect but rather working as a volunteer doing non-architect related activities, it is less likely that an architect would be held to the architect's professional standard of care and more likely to the general "reasonable person" standard.

In community-based projects, architects sometimes take a relaxed view about memorializing the terms of their agreements in written contracts, a stance that almost invariably leads to problems. However, it is not uncommon for projects with highly engaged participants and/or public funding to evolve over extended time periods with the potential for scope changes due to budget, changed circumstances, or program needs. In even the most informal settings, it is prudent to have a written contract that sets forth the scope of work, financial terms (even if services are provided at reduced rates or for free), limitations on liability, and other key terms of engagement. A contract may also help to clarify that the architect is not offering guarantees of success or assurances of specific social results beyond what is required by the standard of care. As in all projects, the architect is well advised to confirm that the appropriate insurance is in place and covers the services and activities involved in a community-based project.

Especially with a community organization or other groups that do not have extensive experience in working with design professionals, an architect may have particular challenges in managing client expectations. An AIA member may even face discipline under the Code of Ethics for "intentionally or recklessly" misleading an existing or prospective client about the results that can be achieved through the use of the member's services. Moreover, even if done with the intent to respond to feedback from project stakeholders, a member may violate the Code of Ethics if found to have materially altered the scope of work without the client's consent. Where this type of issue arises, a written contract can again prove to be invaluable.

In some cases, an architect may also be a community advocate as well as a member of a community organization that requires or requests design services. In these cases, the AIA Code of Ethics applies to prevent potential conflicts of interest.

· Architects who advocate for a community organization in their private capacity and are also paid for services by the organization may face special challenges. The AIA Code of Ethics requires that members making public statements on architectural issues must disclose when they are being compensated for making such statements or when they have an economic interest in the issues.

· When architects play multiple roles in a relationship with an organization, they must be particularly attentive to potential and perceived conflicts of interest. Under the AIA Code of Ethics, a member may not render professional services if the member's professional judgment could be affected by responsibilities to another project or person—or by one's own interests—unless all those who rely on the member's judgment give their consent after full disclosure.

Assess

SKILL

Are you developing your competence to effectively engage the diverse communities you seek to serve? · Are you able to leverage and bridge cultural commonalities and differences that could help engage communities and achieve your desired outcomes? · Does your firm have employees who possess these skills?

What skills and behaviors do you need to successfully engage with a community? · Does your firm provide employees with the training and support needed to connect with a variety of people and communities, particularly those who are traditionally underserved? · If not, how could your firm better support improvements in employees' community-engagement skills?

QUALITY

Does your firm have a culture of—and a strategy for—community engagement? · Do your firm's leaders emphasize the importance of the community's involvement during design? · Do they encourage employees to volunteer outside of work?

When working with the community during design, how do you ensure that you are hearing from a diverse range of community members? · When and how often do you hold design-review meetings? How do you reach out and get feedback? · Who in the community participates in design decision-making? · Whose voices are missing and why?

Are you an advocate for affordable housing, environmental quality, and sustainability policies? · Have you or members of your firm attended public meetings on policies related to the built environment? · Do you seek to understand the points of view that traditionally underserved communities bring to the table?

POWER

When engaging with underserved communities, are you aware of the power dynamics between you and community members? · How do you establish stronger relationships with community members in light of these power dynamics? · How do you interact with your own team members in meetings with the public?

How effective are you at showing the value of engaging community to developers, policy makers, and municipalities? How do you communicate this value?

TRUST

How do you help build mutual trust? · What do trust, respect, listening, and engagement look like to the community you are working with? · Do you listen carefully to the ideas and concerns of community members? · If so, what are you learning? · How will you share what you have learned with the community? With your client?

Can you build trust within your firm to support a strategy for engagement? What about with your clients? What are the risks to the firm, or to the project, if the client does not wish to engage, the engagement does not go as planned, or something happens that you did not expect?

Act

INDIVIDUALS

Effective community engagement is systematic and strategic. The work of architecture professionals in their own communities, their participation in advocacy and public-interest-design organizations, and how they connect with the public and community groups all influence future relationships between communities, firms, and the profession as a whole. Therefore, it is essential for architects to work with communities and individuals as project collaborators, understand their needs and values, and prioritize equitable outcomes.

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS PARTNERS
Successful projects are built not only on an understanding of and solutions to the project requirements and constraints but also on personal relationships. Developing these relationships, even moreso with an outside community than in a diverse project team, requires thoughtful intention, sensitivity, and time.

→ **Understand the unique communication styles of communities and their members.** The communities and individuals you engage with may have predominant or preferred communication styles that differ from yours. In some communities, silence may indicate assent, while in others it may mean people need more information. Vary your methods and experiment to see what works. Facilitate large-group, small-group, paired, and individual input and idea generation; create verbal and non-verbal exercises. Be willing to be vulnerable, admit aloud when you're not sure what you're experiencing, and ask how to understand what you're observing.

→ **Avoid asking community members to take the time to educate you** on what you could learn on your own. Learn more about the communities you are working with through research, one-on-one conversations, and requests to organizations for resources on their community history and culture.

→ **Practice cultural or intercultural competence to understand and appreciate what communities need and value.** There may be many instances in which communities place greater importance on relationships rather than outcomes, and even if the

outcome is "good for the community," they may not see it in that light given the lack of trust, historically or currently.

→ **View community-group clients not as passive or as providers of input but as cocreators.** Listen to and take seriously their practical needs and their values when developing designs. Identify and listen to what is working well in their community, which institutions have been effective, and what has worked in the past. Share your knowledge and ask users and community members to share their expertise and experience in return.[42] This adjustment will lead to shared decision-making in design.[43]

→ **Make your expertise intelligible.** Architects' communication styles, ways of representing design, and vocabulary can often be inaccessible to the public. Help the community understand your expertise and make it meaningful to them through clear language and visuals, such as the use of physical models rather than section drawings.

"We have this one white guy on our team. He was really nervous, and when he gets nervous, he gets talkative. He was presenting to a group of sixty- to seventy-year-old Black elders. I'll be honest, I was scared for him. But he was honest, and he had good information. It was clear he was there for a purpose. And they trusted him."

Associate AIA, African American, Female, 32

→ **Admit mistakes and be humble.** Be vulnerable when you engage a community; learn from mistakes. Be willing to discuss difficult issues with community members.[44] Observe how apologies are made and adapt accordingly.

→ **Be comfortable with conflict.** Community engagement may involve conflict. Many marginalized communities have histories of being excluded and have reason to distrust outside experts. Listen and believe their history and experience while working on forging a mutual way forward. Stay attuned to the impact of what you say, no matter what your intent, and make amends when necessary.

→ **Build consensus.** As a design professional, you can help build consensus. Explain design options and share and elicit from the community the potential impacts of those design options.[45]

UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY IDEAS, ASSETS, NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND VALUES

Community engagement in any form requires listening, understanding, expressing empathy, and seeking out as many varied community voices as possible to build trusting, mutually beneficial relationships.[46]

→ **Have empathy.** See the world through the lenses of others.[47] Listen to what their needs and concerns are rather than what you think they would be based on your own personal experiences. Be the one to adjust your expectations and accommodate accordingly.

→ **Be a listener.** Whether you are engaging the community as a local volunteer, an activist, or a designer, listen more and talk less.

→ **Seek out and listen to diverse perspectives.**[48] Approach the process with an open mind. Sometimes, the loudest voices are the only ones heard. Think about who is the assumed or purported community representative and whose voices are silent: who gets to speak at meetings, who is choosing to speak, and who hasn't spoken. Notice people of color, women, and other underrepresented groups attending events who haven't spoken, and create ways to encourage them to express their thoughts.

→ **Do your research about the community.** Find alternate ways to learn about a community's needs and values and to gather their input for decision-making. Make phone calls, send postcards, or visit social media forums to inform community members about a project and your interest in their input. Meet them at local meetings and fairs. Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups with community members and leaders.[49] Try using community-based participatory research tools that enable collaborative knowledge creation and decision-making to better understand what the community believes is important. (See the Resources section of this guide for community engagement and planning tools.)

→ **Include perspectives that are frequently overlooked.** For example, ADA requirements only partially improve the quality of life for people with disabilities; inviting their day-to-day experience to inform the design can enhance their lives and enrich the community as well. Similarly, a building, street, or neighborhood that a dominant group may define as "safe" may have characteristics that make it feel unsafe to another group, such as people of color, women, older people, or people with disabilities.

PROMOTE AND PRIORITIZE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

Advocate for equity on your design projects. As much as possible, support community members and end users in building their own capacity for agency.

→ **Link your project to the community economy if possible.** Look for opportunities for your project to advance community economic goals, take advantage of incentive programs, and/or create long-term economic opportunities.

→ **Help communities build their own capabilities and agency.** Offer your project as an opportunity to help empower communities; help ensure that the same or greater level of agency, involvement, and leadership can be supported and generated on future projects.

→ **Engage in codesign practices** that put the relationship between the designer and the community or user front and center for the benefit of the project. These practices include human-centered design, public interest design, equity-centered design, and environmentally and socially sustainable design practices.

→ **Understand the history of the community.** In some communities, there is an inherent distrust of architecture and urban-planning professionals due to histories of disenfranchisement, such as redlining and resident displacement. Knowing the history of the community will help shape how you engage.

→ **Consider factors that may affect others' perceptions of you** (your identity and role) and the profession (local history, experiences with previous architects).

→ **Steer clear of cultural appropriation.** Cultural appropriation takes place when a member of a dominant cultural group adopts a custom, practice, or idea of another's culture inappropriately or without acknowledgment. If you wish to incorporate design elements from a community's culture or history, work with the community to ensure that you are using these design elements appropriately and meaningfully.

→ **Stay in touch post-occupancy.** Learn about the outcomes of your project. Has it met the community's needs? Where is there room for improvement in the process and the design of future projects?

BE AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY MEMBER OUTSIDE OF WORK
Community engagement does not end once you leave work. Many opportunities exist for architects to engage with local communities that not only help improve the visibility and reputation of the profession but also help improve their own architecture practice. Find ways to represent yourself as an architect in your community beyond your professional work, within the bounds of work-life harmony.

→ **Volunteer in the community.** Join neighborhood boards, local advocacy groups, or other outside organizations to become more familiar with your community's people, characteristics, and concerns. Doing so will help build respect and trust between you and your community and improve how your community views architects and the profession. Be aware of how your volunteer work can inform and improve your project work while also declaring and resolving any potential or perceived conflicts of interest. (See the Compliance section of this guide.)

→ **Volunteer for local architecture-related outreach organizations and activities,** such as mentoring K-12 students or joining a local competition that creates designs for the public.

→ **Provide your professional expertise to local community organizations.** When possible, provide pro bono services for local work.[50] Remember that no- or low-fee work is held to the same professional standard of care as full-fee work. (See the Compliance section of this guide.)

→ **Engage with civic leaders.** Seek an invitation to the table where civic decisions are made. You can become a trusted advisor on public issues, such as environmental sustainability and affordable housing, and demonstrate the value that architects can bring to their communities.[51] (See the Resources section for AIA guide on this topic)

→ **Practice self-care.** Architects tend to be generous with their time and expertise; however, it is possible to burn out from extra work, especially if you are part of a group for whom the performance bar is set high or on whom there are extra demands for mentoring and identity-group meeting and support. Take breaks to rest and recharge. Give yourself permission to have some space away from community outreach and activism. While it is important to say "yes" to opportunities to engage, learning to say "no" and "not now" supports your ability to remain active and engaged in the long run.

FIRMS

Firms have the power to improve relationships with civic and nonprofit organizations and community groups and can make community engagement a part of their workplace culture.

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY AS A PROJECT PARTNER
Architects are most effective when they partner with the community. While the final responsibility and authority for design decisions rest with them, more informed decisions will likely lead to more equitable outcomes. Solutions to community concerns that begin to be incorporated during the early design stages are less likely to be seen as easily removable later in the process. Engaging with the community as a project partner means developing clear roles and scopes of responsibility, building trusting relationships, and engaging the community throughout the project. The architect may have to make the final decision on aspects of the project design, but the process of getting there involves the valued input of the community.

→ **Bring the local community into the design process.**[52] Make sure to have community members front and center, including a broad cross section of individuals as well as community-based programs, institutions, and businesses. Use a variety of facilitation techniques to elicit input and ideas from all participants.

→ **Include people on the design team who genuinely understand a community's history and attitudes.** If it is possible to have one or more people on your team who are representative of the community you are serving, be sure to bring them in as active participants in the design process.

→ **Turn to the community to name who belongs and who should be consulted.** Rather than having the architect dictate who belongs in the process, ask a variety of community members who should be involved. Once identified, engage with them directly to help design the engagement process and to explore their ideas.

→ **Establish relationships before discussing project specifics.** When engaging with a community during design, it may be tempting to jump into specific design decisions before getting to know community members. The time investment at the beginning stages will bear fruit in later stages.

→ **Increase community member input on a project.** Work with community members to offer incentives for people to attend meetings or to engage in other ways. Improve meeting attendance by bringing food or providing trusted childcare at no cost. Try to find which people are not showing up to meetings, and ascertain the best way to engage with them.

Consider holding events at different times and days to include people who may have work, families, or other responsibilities.

→ **Build time into the project schedule.** As you convey to your client the value of community and user involvement in the end product, advocate for time in the schedule for connecting and reconnecting, even if it causes the project schedule to be compressed later on. The early investment of time will make the later stages smoother.

→ **Consider engaging a moderator or facilitator who is trusted** or can gain the trust of all parties (communities, users, developers, architects, etc.). This may be an outside facilitator, a mutually respected leader, a member of a stakeholder group, or a subject-matter expert. The key is to either develop a process with the time needed for a moderator or facilitator to gain the trust of all parties or enlist someone who is trusted by all parties and can help bridge differences.

→ **Make community engagement activities accessible** to people of diverse ages, abilities, and schedules.

→ **Establish shared ground rules together.** Develop clearly articulated and agreed-upon ground rules for communication and decision-making during meetings and community events. Pay attention to and help enhance mutual respect, empathy, and trust in keeping with the cultural norms of the community.

→ **Listen before designing.** Most codesign processes involve end users in hands-on design work early on. Learn from the community prior to developing and presenting a design. Ask community members how to make the project better.

→ **Conduct post-occupancy evaluations.** Community engagement does not end after a project is completed. Conduct post-occupancy evaluations to ensure building-user needs have been met and to evaluate the degree to which intentions for equitable design have been achieved.[53]

IMPROVE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS
Firms can improve community relationships through partnerships and other forms of engagement with community groups, public organizations, and nonprofits.

→ **Know the needs of the community or public organization.** Just as with individual architects, firms that understand the priorities of a local community or public organization with which they will be interacting regularly are well positioned for success.[54]

→ **Educate clients about the value of community engagement,** demonstrating that engagement will not necessarily slow down or compromise the project. Teach clients why community input can improve design and may result in an overall faster or more effective project path in the end. While community engagement takes time and energy, the input may influence the design and/or inform the stakeholders in ways that prevent costly changes, negative press, protests, or lawsuits as a result of an outcome that is not broadly supported. The participation of extant communities is particularly important in the context of gentrification. Valuing their perspectives and ideas in the process helps gain support among remaining members of the original community.

→ **Expose community members to what architects do.** Take part in or promote community events and outreach opportunities that make architects and architecture visible in the community.

→ **Engage with contractors, vendors, and local businesses led by target identity groups.** This will help to build trust in the community as well as support diversity in the building industry. If a supplier is not from a local community or is led by someone from an agent identity group working with a client from a target identity group, make sure that the supplier's workers demonstrate intercultural competence to build a positive relationship with the client; guide suppliers on how they can work well with the community.

→ **Learn the workings and organizational culture of a nonprofit or civic-partner organization.** Be flexible and seek to adapt if they have business models, practices, and norms that are different from what you are used to.[55]

"When I was an up-and-comer, I knew I was sent to interviews because I was a woman. Some clients said, 'We want to see your EEOC policies.' The partners were surprised. Now our clients are asking harder questions earlier, especially the nonprofits, academic, health, state-institution clients—the more public ones that get more scrutiny."

CEO and Owner, White, Female, 59

→ **Be philanthropic.** Providing gifts, such as funding for a specific community need, benefits not only your community but also your own sense of purpose and your employees' respect for the firm.[56] Your philanthropy can be tangible evidence of your values.

MAKE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT A PART OF YOUR WORKPLACE CULTURE AND STRATEGIC PLAN

For community engagement to be a priority in the workplace, it has to be central in your workplace culture. Taking up the cause of social responsibility will help affirm to your employees that their engagement and connection to the public and working on public concerns matters.

→ **Advocate for equity.** Pay attention to the social, economic, political, and environmental impacts of your projects.[57] Promote public-interest-design values through public events and communication tools, such as social media. Advance equitable design solutions to problems in the built and natural environments.

→ **Make time for community engagement, including some level of paid time if at all possible.** Be willing to invest in community-engagement activities and to incorporate community engagement into your design practices, including supporting employees through paid time for activities that benefit the community and that increase recognition of the value the firm places on community engagement.[58]

→ **Value community engagement at the leadership level.** Staff members need to see firm leaders making community engagement a priority in the workplace and on their projects. Have a public calendar in the office with a listing of community events and opportunities.

→ **Value and promote community engagement among staff.** Staff involved in their communities may wish to keep that engagement separate from the workplace—especially people of color and mothers, who may be concerned about bias in the perception of how their time is spent. Studies have shown that minority executives' social experiences outside the office are richer than those of their white counterparts: they are two to three times more likely to be involved with social outreach, community programs, or care responsibilities but are less likely to let employers know because they anticipate implicit bias.[59] When employees know that their community engagement is valued in the workplace and are willing to communicate their involvement to others, there is potential intellectual and social capital gain for the firm. If staff members have connections in a community within which the firm's project is located, their knowledge can be particularly valuable and may result in relevant project team assignments.

Encourage your staff to engage with the community, and make it clear that they are welcome to bring that part of their lives to the office if they want.

→ **Understand the role of geography.** Firms that seek opportunities for engagement in geographic areas where they do not have a home base can seek local partners or find ways to connect without face to face presence.

→ **Be aware of evolving equity metrics** in programs promoting a range of resilient design strategies.[60] Increasingly, metrics are directly and indirectly linking equity with sustainability. Architects play a role in helping drive these standards and promoting their underlying values to clients and communities.

→ **Do pro bono work.** If you have the means, conduct pro bono work in a community that has limited funding. Become a part of a network of engaged practitioners through organizations like the AIA and Public Architecture. (See the Resources section of this guide.)

→ **Seek funding for community projects.**[61] Finding the funds to enable pro bono projects can be challenging. However, funding may be found through federal- and state-government programs, community foundations, local nonprofit organizations, and private contributions.

"Community engagement is about going to the community, and with different faces. It's making sure that the communities understand what architects do and that they're accessible to them. And not just have a diverse group of people presenting in front of those communities, but do so way before gentrification happens, way before we're actively doing projects, so that there is a familiarity with our profession. That's really important."

Immigrant from Iran (Iranian American), 47

PROFESSION

Professional organizations can facilitate, foster, and expand dialogue around equity and community. Promoting authentic discussions means having discussions that may not always be comfortable but, when framed with clear intentions, will advance the profession's positive impact on society.

→ **Educate about public-interest work.** Teach architecture students effective methodologies for engagement. Celebrate the innovations that have made it possible for firms to do the work. Promote and support internships and fellowship opportunities for students that connect architects with nonprofit organizations. Publicly recognize practitioners and projects that prioritize community engagement and equity.[62]

→ **Host active discussions about civic policies that support local communities.** Professional organizations can nurture thoughtful discussions about policies that affect built environments and the community.

→ **Foster synergies.** Support dialogue exploring connections between established sustainable design goals and emerging goals of equity, resilience, and environmental justice.[63]

Consider

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

I consider the concept of authenticity as part of the art of communication. In architecture school, I remember listening to my professors pontificate in archi-speak— the arcane and obscure words that are used to wield power over "regular folks" by imposing monologue where public discourse requires dialogue—which reinforces our perceived status as "experts" at the expense of alienating the masses. I come from the masses of regular folks who take pride in plain talk and see truth as power. Early in my career, I would attend public meetings about important community issues and translate the archi-speak of the experts into plain talk for my neighbors. Often, after these meetings, regular folks would huddle around me to ask questions that they were too uncomfortable to ask publicly—either due to the language barrier erected by the experts and/or because they were inherently suspicious of the answers.

When I engage with a community as a design professional, I make a conscious attempt to use as little archi-speak as possible in favor of plain talk that promotes empowerment through comprehension and promotes dialogue over monologue. I am able to effectively communicate with many different people in the way they speak in their own homes and deploy language in service of expanding conversations. Maintaining a multi-cultural, multi-lingual staff is a core value of our firm. To further deepen understanding, I employ artists and engage in visual communication whenever possible—preferring diagramming, collage, and physical study models over more abstract architectural-representation techniques (e.g., plans, sections, elevations). In my experience, regular folks feel more comfortable and respond most enthusiastically when information is presented in this way.

I always begin my work from the premise that community stakeholders are the ultimate experts on their own lived experiences, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. It is my task as a design professional to formulate and ask specific questions that will ignite the conversations that lead toward a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities around which a successful design solution can be crafted.

— Managing Partner and Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

DISCUSS:

- How might the idea of community stakeholders as the experts challenge the traditional definition of the architect as the expert? What response does this idea evoke in you?

- What communication challenges have you encountered when participating in community-engagement activities? What visual-communication tools have you found to be successful?

- How do this person's communication skills benefit his practice? What types of communication skills would you like to improve to better engage users and other project stakeholders?

- What questions could you ask that would ignite these kinds of open conversations?

- How might architecture faculty better address the divide between archi-speak and plain talk?

Consider

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AGENCY

In my city, there are a lot of areas that are in bad shape—blighted areas. But what we've been able to do is actually help the community organize itself by giving them the information that we know about how to organize. Together, we came up with a guidebook that went to the organizations within the communities. They use it on their own to get funding for projects that they feel are important. We help identify opportunities. We're listening, and we're doing what we do anyway—getting people together to collaborate. After that, they can identify people they trust to come into the community, instead of us just imposing on them. The neighborhoods have a history of being taken advantage of; that's where the distrust comes from. So we're just being agents to help them be in control. It has had mixed results—sometimes there are too many organizations to move forward—but we've also had a lot of success.

— Associate AIA, African American, Female, 32

DISCUSS:

- What type of community engagement is this person describing? How might this form of engagement build stronger relationships with community members? How do you think this form of engagement empowers communities?

- In what ways may the building industry have been part of "taking advantage" of communities? What can an architecture firm do to counterbalance this history? How can you generate trust between yourself, your firm, and such communities?

- This person described her strategy as having had mixed results. Why would the involvement of too many organizations complicate the process for a firm? What would success look like?

- How comfortable do you think architects generally would be with the role of helping communities organize themselves, which falls outside of the traditional definition of practice? What might be done to help architects broaden their capacity for community agency?

Consider

DETERMINING THE NEEDS OF USERS

When doing a project with the general community, like a new community library, it's important to reach out to organizations or individuals that represent people with disabilities and ask them: What would you like to see? What are the barriers you face with your experience with libraries, and what are good things you've seen? What is on your wish list? You'll learn a lot of things from the users. You may find out what really matters to them is independence. Or you might find what they care about is efficiency. "I don't want to wander around everywhere for a type of book. Is there an accessible directory?" You'll find that most of the time people don't have extravagant wishes—you might find things that may not always be obvious to the general public but are obvious to people with disabilities. You might find that the disabilities you are looking to accommodate could include mobility, visibility, hearing loss, mental health. Often, laws focus on mobility, and (as someone who is mobility challenged) that's an important part of this community, but if you ask people, you learn a lot. Public engagement happens a lot with community buildings, but I don't always know if they engage with the disability community. The other thing you do is hire specialized consultants to engage with the disability community.

— Principal, Firm Owner, White, Female, Baby Boomer, Wheelchair User

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DISCUSS:

- What types of accommodations do you consider when working on a project's design?

- How often do you consult people with disabilities and their organizations on your projects? What have you learned? How has this knowledge changed your designs?

- Have you used the methods described? Have they revealed something to you that was obvious to a building user but not previously recognized by the designers?

- Are there times when you have hired a consultant to engage with a specific community or type of user? Was it effective? Did you learn enough to engage that type of user on your own in the future or would you continue to use a consultant?

Consider

OUT OF OFFICE ACTIVITIES

There is a woman in our Detroit office who coaches hockey in the wintertime and soccer in the summertime for inner-city kids. In the neighborhoods where she coaches, they absolutely trust her. And she doesn't think anything of it because she was an athlete. That's what she does. The goodwill engendered there—it's spectacular to watch. It's really, really cool. So while it's the lofty things that are important, I think everybody can do something. It doesn't have to be a big thing.

— Vice President/Business Development, White/Hispanic, 69

DISCUSS:

- What are some of the ways that you could help support your community? How would these activities improve relationships between architects and local community organizations and individuals?

- In your firm, how acceptable is it to know about an employee's out-of-office activities? Would you prefer to have your out-of-office activities be private? Why or why not?

- When is it acceptable to use an employee's relationships outside of work to enhance a firm's network, and when is it not?

Consider

LISTENING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The city had hired a firm and had to let them go, so the project went on hold as a result. They had already torn down the old building, so the community was upset. When we were brought on board, the community had some distrust with the city government. And since they didn't know us, we had to earn their trust. We were required to hold three or four community-engagement sessions. The community came with some suspicion. We had a listening session, and boy, they had a lot to say.

We came back after a few weeks with some initial designs, and I thought for sure there would be some healthy back-and-forth about the design. We presented, and the reaction was to complain about what the city had done previously. They were still focused on the fact that they didn't have a building for their community. We came back for a third meeting, with some advanced designs, and, again, the significant part of the conversation was about how the city had done the community wrong. It took me a while to realize that the community simply needed to vent, to get it out of their system. By the fourth meeting, they started to see that we were representing their interests. It was pointed out to me that we architects need to know what the community is looking for. We even added a fifth meeting, so they could interact with us. That was a critical moment, when you could feel the trust building between us and the community. As a result, the project turned out to be that much better because of the community's input.

— Architect/Designer, African American, Male, 50s

DISCUSS:

- How was this person able to build a relationship with the community? What time and resources were needed to build this trust? In this story, how did listening play a role in building trust in the community? How do you balance the time it takes to listen to venting and the need to get decisions made to move the design forward? Are there times where going slow to go fast works?

- What experiences have you or your firm had with working on public projects? How is community engagement during design different on public projects versus privately financed ones? Do differences between private and public projects influence how you approach community engagement during design, and if so, how?

- In this story, how did the history of the community with public planning and past architects skew the community's expectations about the building process? How much are architects responsible for solving problems created many years ago, and what can they do to solve these problems? How can designers be effective in situations in which past events have broken trust between a community and municipal agency?

- In this case, only four meetings were required but a fifth meeting was added. Have you been in situations where you went over and above the required number of meetings? What criteria do you use to balance the need to add meetings with the limited amount of time budgeted?
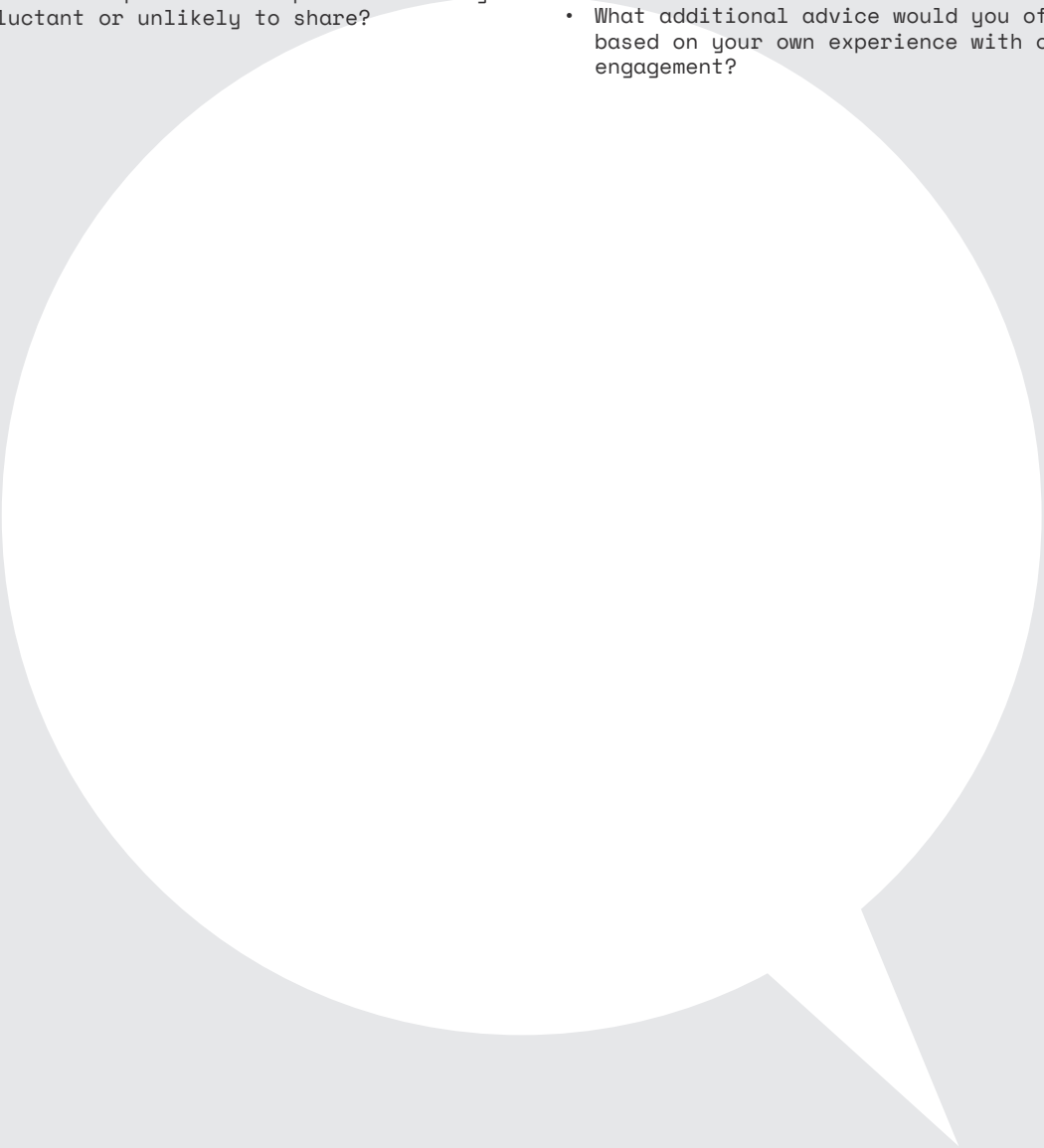
Consider

ENGAGEMENT LEADS TO NEW IDEAS

In my experience, community engagement, which in the 1960s was a radical idea, always makes a project better. Mostly because the community takes ownership in the process of planning and design. A lot of what I try to do for communities and clients is to share what an architect does, how we come to our decisions, our process, and all the things that we don't generally share. We tend to share the outcomes, the presentation drawings, but not the process. When we demystify what we do, it adds to our value as architects and brings understanding to our process. With a collaborative process, when someone has a suggestion or question, we can say, "we've taken a look at that." I still draw on buff and have stacks of trace paper that is a record of my steps—I keep it as evidence to show my work.

We did a community-care skilled-nursing facility. We got them to really think about their identity. They thought they knew what their shared identity was, but they had never written anything down, and it turned out they weren't all in agreement. We helped them and their stakeholders figure it out. The neighborhood around the site we wanted was reluctant to have any development as it was going to bring more traffic, and they were worried about parking. I was meeting with the client and stakeholders very regularly, and one person brought up an idea for intergenerational childcare to make the project a dual-use program. We got excited about it and proposed it to the neighborhood, and they really thought it met a need. Also, more people saw themselves in the project now: they had grandparents or wanted their kids to have a grandparent figure in their lives.

— Community Architect, African American, Baby Boomer

DISCUSS:

- How did this speaker foster community ownership for the decisions about site and program? Does it change the architect's role when the community/client comes up with a new program idea?

- What does "sharing the process" mean to you? What do you think of the idea of sharing the process? What are some steps you might take to do so? What parts of the process would you be reluctant or unlikely to share?

- How does the speaker document the process over time, and what is the value of this documentation? What ideas do you have for keeping track of ideas and goals that emerge from community engagement?

- What are some ways to help new ideas emerge that were not considered before, like intergenerational childcare?

- What additional advice would you offer based on your own experience with community engagement?

Consider

USING ENGAGEMENT TO REVEAL COMMUNITY NEEDS

We were engaged to renovate what was originally built as a temporary undergraduate dorm, to make it into a permanent dormitory for one of the graduate schools. We were asked to facelift the dorm and make the suites look like market-rate apartments rather than undergraduate dorms, to be more attractive to graduate students. We did an initial concept study, in line with the initial budget the school had imagined. Meanwhile, the school said, "We need a couple more seminar rooms, maybe a media lab. And we probably need a facelift in the student lounge." In schematic design we said, "We need to do a deep dive on program to be sure we're providing you with everything you want: this is the first addition to the school's campus in a hundred years, and we should be thinking about what your needs are in the next twenty-five to fifty years."

We interviewed alumni, students, faculty, administration, and staff of the school. Out of those interviews, we found the school needed many more teaching spaces than they thought, and that the type of space they needed had to change because class sizes had grown, and that they could no longer accommodate some classes in the school's original building. So we said, "Yes, the classrooms are necessary, but unless the school's center of gravity shifts to include this building in the life of the school, no one is going to want to go to these fantastic new classrooms because this building will always feel like an annex." And so we also started looking at the cultural integration of the new building. Even more programming came out, that had to do with the health and well-being of the students—mental, spiritual, physical needs—a place where they could let loose in a high-pressure academic environment. All of this led to an increase in scope and budget. The argument was that if we don't make this new building an integral part of the school, the millions of dollars spent on the dorm facelift will be thrown away.

Engaging all of the community members and really taking a deep dive into the experiences that were most important to them gave us insights we wouldn't have had otherwise. The fondest memory of many alumni was being able to walk to class in socks, because the original building included dorm rooms along with the academic spaces. If we hadn't done that exploration with them, we wouldn't have known those fundamental cultural and relationship elements, and we wouldn't have been able to create a balance in programming that would shift the center of gravity for the school. And because we did all of this with the leadership group of the school, they got it – and they came up with the byline for the project: "Two buildings, one school."

Communities aren't just physical neighborhoods, they also include the lived experience of those who come together in that place. In defining a community, it's not only a zip code or street boundaries or the university, it's the common experience among this group of users that relates them as a community. Our approach of really diving into the users' experiences in the built environment tells us the information we need to create places that help them do what they do, better.

That's why the definition of community is so important. We sometimes don't pay enough attention to what our words mean. If we break it down, it's a "common unity", it's some unifying force that brings them together in experience. That's the fuel that we as facilitators of the built environment can use to make environments that are more meaningful. It's not just that they function well and keep people safe, or that they're beautiful, but that they're meaningful to the users. That level of meaning that we help them infuse into their place then empowers them in their place because they know the story of its making. They know why there are thirty-person classrooms, or why the materials are stretched from floor to ceiling, or why there are patterns of birds and fish in the pavement because that's an interpretation of their aspirations in built form. So they relate to it. It's their story told in concrete, literally and figuratively.

— Community Member, Facilitator, Firm Principal, Teacher, Female, 50s

DISCUSS:

- How did the architects change the nature and scope of the program? How did culture become part of the program? Should cultural considerations be part of any project?

- How did the architects influence the client? How might you apply this experience in instances when the budget, schedule, or scope of work isn't flexible?

- What do you think was effective about questioning the original scope of the project? Were there risks involved in questioning it? Would there have been risks if the architect had not questioned it?

- How was *community* defined by the client? By the speaker? How do you define *community*?

Resources

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED DESIGN PRACTICES

Wisdom from the Field: Public Interest Architecture in Practice – Roberta M. Feldman, Sergio Palleroni, David Perkes, and Bryan Bell (2013)
https://designcorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/PUBLIC-INTEREST-PRACTICES-IN-ARCHITECTURE.pdf
> Overview of the state of public interest design in architecture, including benefits of public interest design, its interaction with communities, different ways firms are incorporating public interest design into their business practices, effective strategies, and suggestions to support and grow public interest design in architecture.

ARCHITECTURE AND OUTREACH

Housing as Intervention – Karen Kubey (2018)
> Series of articles and essays on how architects are meeting the global challenges of the housing crisis. The essays explain how housing projects and design can act as interventions to improve equity around the world.

Open-Architecture Collaborative
http://openarchcollab.org/
> U.S. nonprofit organization with multiple national and global chapters that develops educational programs for architects to become change makers and leaders "while simultaneously producing place-making programs with community developers and associations to inspire ownership and civic engagement in traditionally marginalized communities."

Public Architecture
https://www.publicarchitecture.org/#p2
> Public Architecture connects nonprofits with pro bono design services and advocates for socially meaningful design. The firm is a leader in the "pro bono design movement by asking design firms to formalize their commitment to give back professionally."

GUIDES AND TOOL KITS

21st Century Development (21CD) – AIA Minnesota/Center for Sustainable Building Research
https://www.21stcenturydevelopment.org/
> Framework for neighborhood development that uses building-performance areas related to sustainability and equity. This framework was designed for the purpose of creating resilient, regenerative communities that are healthy for people and the environment.

Create a Plan for Your Community – 11th Street Bridge Park
https://vimeo.com/346942267
> Video highlighting the seven-step process used on the 11th Street Bridge Park's Equitable Development Plan project. Also see *Our Community. Our Process. Our Plan* to hear more about the experiences of those who worked on the project (https://vimeo.com/334716089).

Community Engagement Toolkit – Futurewise, Interim CDA, OneAmerica, El Centro de la Raza (2014)
http://www.futurewise.org/assets/reports/CET.pdf
> Guidance and resources for engaging community in government planning. Includes tools to inform and consult with the community, promote community collaboration, and empower community members.

Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement – Community Places (2014)
https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf
> A guide for planning community engagement. Includes methods and techniques for engagement and assesses their strengths and weaknesses.

EngageforEquity.org
> This website provides a framework and tools for conducting community-based participatory research (CBPR). The CBPR Conceptual Model has four domains that guide engaged research: context, partnership processes, interventions and research, and range of outcomes. This model can be adapted to multiple different community-engagement contexts, including architecture.

Equitable Development as a Tool to Advance Racial Equity – Government Alliance on Race and Equity
https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/GARE-Equitable-Development.pdf
> Report detailing the framework for equitable development. Has examples of equitable-development projects in multiple locations in the United States.

The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design – IDEO (2015)
http://d1r3w4d5z5a88i.cloudfront.net/assets/guide/Field%20Guide%20to%20Human-Centered%20Design_IDEOorg_English-ee47a1ed4b91f3252115b83152828d7e.pdf
> Guide to a process for human-centered design to allow deep engagement with the community being designed for. Process is structured into three phases: inspiration, ideation, and implementation, with a variety of strategies and tools for each phase.

Getting Beyond Green: A Baseline of Equity Approaches in Sustainable Building Standards – NAACP Environmental & Climate Justice Program (2019)
> Overview and assessment of green building programs and their equity approaches. Provides recommendations on how to center equity issues in green building programs.

A Guide to Engaging with Civic Leaders – AIA
> Tool guide on how architects can engage with civic leaders to address local issues and develop better community partnerships with architecture professionals.

A Model for Getting Started: How Do We Begin Taking Action in the Community? – Community Tool Box, University of Kansas
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/get-started
> General model for getting involved in your community, with links to resources for every step: Assess, Plan, Act, Evaluate, and Sustain.

Notes

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7. Linda N. Groat and Sherry Ahrentzen, "Reconceptualizing Architectural Education for a More Diverse Future: Perceptions and Visions of Architectural Students," *Journal of Architectural Education* 46, no. 3 (1996): 166–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/10464883.1996.10734679.

8. Roberta M. Feldman et al., "Wisdom From the Field: Public Interest Architecture in Practice: A Guide to Public Interest Practices in Architecture," 2013, https://designcorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/PUBLIC-INTEREST-PRACTICES-IN-ARCHITECTURE.pdf; and Groat and Ahrentzen, "Reconceptualizing Architectural Education," 166–83.

9. Ibid.

10. Adam Thorpe and Lorraine Gamman, "Design *with* Society: Why Socially Responsive Design Is Good Enough," CoDesign 7, no. 3–4 (November 2011): 217–30, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15710882.2011.630477.

11. "What Is Equity-Centered Community Design," Creative Reaction Lab, accessed July 17, 2019, http://www.creativereactionlab.com/eccd.

12. Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt, "Design Thinking for Social Innovation," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2010), https://ssir.org/articles/entry/design_thinking_for_social_innovation.

13. Thorpe and Gamman, "Design *with* Society."

14. *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design* (Canada: Ideo.org, 2015), http://www.designkit.org//resources/1.

15. Feldman et al., "Wisdom from the Field."

16. Boaz Ahi Omri Kedar, "The Power of Synthesis: The Pursuit of Environmental Sustainability and Social Equity Through Design Practice" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2017), https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/20297.

17. 21CD, for example, provides a matrix for developers and other building industry stakeholders that incorporates the seven performance areas of the Living Community Challenge. These performance areas combine the support of equitable communities with environmental requirements relating to energy, water, and materials.

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26. To learn more about how to use an equitable development approach, see the videos *Create a Plan for Your Community* (https://vimeo.com/346942267) and *Our Community. Our Process. Our Plan.* (https://vimeo.com/334716089) detailing the practice and experiences of the designers and users of the 11th Street Bridge Park's Equitable Development Plan project.

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42. Pitera, "Leading from the Side;" and Feldman et al., "Wisdom From the Field."

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44. *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*; and Pitera, "Leading from the Side."

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