

To: AIA Executive Directors
From: Michael Armstrong
NCARB CEO
Date: June 5, 2020
Subject: Status Update: ARE Access and Candidate Challenges

Dear Colleagues,

As one of our partner organizations, we want to ensure you have the most up-to-date information regarding the status of the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®). We hope the update below will better enable you to serve your own members, the architecture profession, and the public.

NCARB administers the ARE on behalf of our 55 members, the architectural licensing boards in all 50 states and five U.S. territories. All of our members require passage of the ARE on the path to being issued a license to practice architecture. Our mission at NCARB is to assist our members in their public health and safety missions by ensuring licensure candidates are competent to practice. We also seek to facilitate licensure by assisting candidates as they develop that required competency.

As many of you know, due to the ongoing world health crisis, NCARB's exam delivery partner, Prometric, had to close test centers to protect the health and safety of their staff and test takers. This has caused frustrating delays for candidates pursuing their architecture license, and NCARB is doing everything we can to get candidates back in the test centers safely.

Early on we began waiving rescheduling fees and we have extended the five year "rolling clock" to complete the divisions of the ARE by nine months.

As test centers begin to reopen across North America this week, we continue to navigate the unprecedented nature of COVID-19 to plan out next steps. Over the last few days, we have heard from our Member Boards and candidates that ARE appointments were being unexpectedly canceled at the last minute and that scheduling appointments continued to be difficult.

We learned that the root of the problem was due to two errors on Prometric's part that, after direct conversations between me and Prometric's CEO, they have committed to remedy.

The first error was Prometric had designated the ARE as a “non-essential” test, significantly limiting seats available for our exam. **As of today, Prometric has added the ARE to its list of “essential” exams that will be offered in their test centers.** This will open up slots for ARE test takers, with the caveat that it will take Prometric a few days to update their systems to open all test center schedules to our candidates. ARE candidates will be able to access previously unavailable sites beginning next Tuesday, June 9, 2020.

The second error occurred over the weekend when Prometric accidentally canceled approximately 120 June appointments across the country without communicating with NCARB. Prometric has acknowledged this error and is beginning to work with each impacted candidate to reschedule these appointments as soon as possible. **We have also reached out directly to these candidates and NCARB is providing a refund of their original exam fee along with rescheduling their testing appointments at no cost.**

The information below includes additional clarification on testing access that you can use to help message the latest updates to your members, volunteer leaders, and architectural community.

Please do not hesitate to contact Josh Batkin or Marta Zaniewski if you have questions about how we can provide support to your components regarding testing resources, and we welcome suggestions and feedback regarding ongoing efforts during the current environment.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Armstrong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Armstrong" clearly legible.

Michael J. Armstrong
NCARB Chief Executive Officer

Clarification on Examination Delivery

NCARB contracts with one of the largest providers of test centers in the country, Prometric, for the secure delivery of its exam. Prometric administers the ARE along with many other occupational and professional examinations. Prometric and their network of test centers are a separate organization. NCARB's system extends as far as the purchase of a seat credit, which enables candidates to access Prometric's scheduling system. Prometric is then solely responsible for providing first-come, first-served access to scheduling, as well as setting the policies that ensure a safe environment for candidates and managing the operation of their test centers.

Below are in-depth responses to our most popular questions related to the ARE, Prometric's test centers, and the pandemic.

Exam Scheduling and Cancellations**Are architectural candidates considered "Essential"?**

Yes. NCARB's advocacy efforts were successful this week for the inclusion of ARE candidates as essential test takers in Prometric's test center network based on the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) guidelines. Previously, Prometric had identified ARE candidates as non-essential which was limiting test center availability in many jurisdictions. After completion of system updates by Prometric, ARE candidates will be able to schedule in Prometric test centers listed as "All Programs" and "Essential Only" beginning Tuesday, June 9, 2020.

Are my local test centers reopening?

As of June 1, Prometric has been able to resume testing at locations across the country where local or state mandates allow test centers to be open. You can view Prometric's current [site openings](#) on their website. ARE candidates can schedule and test in all test centers identified as "All Programs" or "Essential Only" as listed in the Program Availability column. Prometric will update this list daily as government limitations continue to evolve.

Why are some appointments still being canceled?

Unfortunately, currently scheduled exam appointments may be subject to cancellation if the local test center is not able to reopen as planned, if local mandates change, or additional social distancing measures need to be put in place to ensure candidate safety. Prometric evaluates test center capacity on a rolling basis for all appointments scheduled within the next two weeks. Prometric determines the need to adjust appointments as needed to comply with local requirements and safety guidelines. If appointments are determined to be canceled, Prometric notifies the candidate. If a candidate's appointment is canceled by Prometric, NCARB will update their exam

eligibility and provide the candidate a new seat credit so they can reschedule their appointment at a later date at no additional cost once the test center becomes available.

Can candidates that have had appointments cancelled receive a refund?

NCARB has implemented a temporary refund policy that allows candidates that have had the same division appointment displaced by Prometric two or more times request to not test at this time and receive a refund of the original seat credit. Many candidates will want to reschedule and test as soon possible. This temporary policy provides candidates greater flexibility during these times.

Candidates can request the refund using NCARB's [contact us](#) and identify the ARE division they would like cancelled. Upon verification of the refund request, candidates should expect the refund within seven days.

How far out can candidates schedule an exam appointment?

Candidates can schedule exam appointments as far out as Prometric provides open appointment availability. Prometric typically extends North American appointment availability six months out, and three months out for international locations.

Can NCARB make Prometric open appointment availability?

No. NCARB does not have control over Prometric's management of their test center network, including determining the hours of operation at each test location. At present, Prometric provides the largest network of professional test centers in North America. NCARB is actively lobbying Prometric to extend hours and days of operation to allow for more testing without compromising social-distancing efforts.

Will NCARB adjust or remove the current 60-day rescheduling timeline for those who have failed a division?

No. The minimum 60-day wait to retest on a failed division, as well as the limit to retest only three times per twelve-month period on the same division, is in place to control the exposure rate of the questions on the ARE. Ensuring candidates see different questions is a critical factor in maintaining the validity of the pass/fail decision of every ARE division. NCARB cannot jeopardize the confidence state licensing boards have in the ARE by changing this policy.

COVID-19 Mitigation at the Test Center

How will Prometric ensure that candidates will not be exposed to the coronavirus while at the test center?

Prometric is not able to ensure that no candidate will be exposed to the Coronavirus while at a test center during these times. If candidates are not comfortable testing

because of health concerns, they should reschedule their testing appointment for a later date when they may feel more comfortable to test. NCARB has waived all rescheduling fees to provide candidates greater flexibility during these times.

What precautions is Prometric implementing to mitigate the spread of coronavirus while at the test center?

Where testing is taking place, Prometric has implemented safety practices throughout the testing process to support social distancing. To read Prometric's most up-to-date social distancing policies, see below. Some regions have specific policies in place based on local guidelines, so please make sure to review the policies for the region you will be testing in.

- For Prometric's standard global policies, please click [here](#).
- For Prometric's North America specific social distancing policies, please click [here](#).
- For Prometric's China specific social distancing policies, please click [here](#).

Along with the local policies noted above, **all candidates must bring and wear a face covering to the test center**. The face covering does NOT need to be a medical mask. Cloth face coverings are acceptable.

Safety practices including observing social distancing at six feet per governmental regulations. This also includes limiting the number of people allowed in the waiting room at any time to ensure social distancing is maintained. Additionally, all Prometric staff will always wear a mask

Prometric staff will be cleaning each workstation between candidate appointments, as well as physically operating lockers on the candidates' behalves to avoid candidates having to be in contact with locker keys or lockers.

To account for the likelihood that check-out and check-in procedures on break may take longer, NCARB has extended the length of the flexible break available during each administration to 25 minutes and updated our [ARE 5.0 Guidelines](#) to reflect this change.

Candidates will not be permitted to test if they:

- Have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days,
- Have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days,
- Are experiencing flu or cold-like symptoms, OR
- Have returned from travel to a highly infected area in the last 14 days.

Can candidates bring their own gloves or additional personal protective equipment to the test center?

Yes. Candidates will be allowed to test using their own personal protective equipment. Prometric staff will visually inspect all personal protective equipment to ensure exam security.

Will fingertip scanning still be required at the test center going forward?

Prometric staff will implement cleaning procedures and safe distancing practices at all test centers. If the test center is not able to ensure cleaning and safe distancing procedures throughout the check-in and check-out process, certain biometric security procedures may be waived for that appointment. If Prometric chooses to waive a procedure to ensure safe distancing guidelines, it will not impact a candidate's ability to test.

Test Center Limitations

Why don't all Prometric test centers offer the ARE?

Prometric supports multiple levels of test centers with varying technologies and security features. The ARE is only administered in Prometric's highest level test centers where they can ensure consistent access to large screen monitors and high-speed internet, as well as required security measures.

Has NCARB considered expanding testing into every Prometric test center?

No. Prometric's lower level test centers do not guarantee the necessary technology in place to support the ARE, nor do they support the required security.

Has NCARB considered expanding testing into non-Prometric testing centers?

Yes. NCARB is currently in the process of evaluating multiple test administration providers that can support both a physical test center network, as well as remote proctoring delivery.

Remote Proctoring

Is NCARB investigating the option of delivering the ARE through remote proctoring, allowing candidates to test at home, their place of employment, or an AIA chapter?

Yes, NCARB is actively working to restructure the delivery of the six divisions of ARE and working to select a remote proctoring vendor to allow the next iteration of the exam to be securely delivered at test centers and via remote proctoring.

Specifics around what conditions must be in place to allow a remote proctored exam are in development as NCARB evaluates various technology platforms that could ensure secure delivery in private areas of an office or home environment.

What Is remote proctoring?

An exam delivered with remote proctoring enables a candidate to take the exam in an appropriate location of their choice, but at a fixed time and with a fixed duration. The exam is overseen by a “remote proctor” who observes the candidate using video and audio surveillance throughout their test to ensure compliance with testing conditions.

What is the timeline for making a remote proctored exam available?

NCARB plans to determine necessary changes to exam structure and testing vendors by July 2020. Once those decisions are made, the restructured exam will be developed, and the new version will be launched.

To ensure the exam is still accepted by all 55 U.S. jurisdictions as a fair and valid measure of a candidate’s ability to competently practice architecture, establishing the next version of the exam will require a focus on rigor through research and testing. Currently, we hope to be able to offer remote proctoring in early-2021.

Why is remote proctoring going to take so long to deliver?

In its current format, ARE 5.0 is not designed to be delivered via remote proctoring. Its software navigation, flexibility, and large test time requirements make it difficult to securely deliver the exam using remote proctoring.

To make remote proctoring possible, NCARB is actively working with our volunteers and psychometrician consultants to adjust the delivery of ARE 5.0’s six divisions into a new version deliverable via traditional test centers as well as remotely.

Will this be an exam transition, like the transition from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0?

The new version in development would **not** require an exam transition like the transition from ARE 4.0 to ARE 5.0. The new version would use the same six divisions currently used in ARE 5.0, and divisions passed in the current version of ARE 5.0 would count toward completion of the ARE the same way they do now.

What testing conditions will be needed for remote proctoring?

NCARB is responsible for assuring our member licensing boards that the security and integrity of the exam is not compromised. To maintain appropriate security, future remote proctoring of the ARE will involve a check-in procedure that includes a video inspection of the testing area, live proctors monitoring and recording the candidate’s audio and video during the entire testing event, and the live proctor maintaining overall exam control throughout the test administration.

To take the exam via remote proctoring, interested candidates will need to provide a private testing area with a continuous high-speed internet connection, as well as a live audio and video feed from their computer.

Once implemented, remote proctoring will allow the flexibility to take the exam in any location where one can provide a private environment and meet the necessary computer requirements.

Will remote proctoring be the only testing Option?

The updated version is being developed for both test center and remote proctored delivery. Once remote proctoring is available, all candidates taking the ARE would have the same test format—whether testing at a physical testing location or taking the exam via remote proctoring. All policies around exam timing, breaks, access to resources, etc., will be consistent regardless of the delivery mode.

How will AIA components be able to support remote delivery?

While we do not currently have a full picture of what remote delivery will look like, NCARB expects that AIA components could provide support to candidates taking the ARE remotely by setting up local secure testing areas that meet the required testing conditions. This provides a service to candidates who may not be able or want to test remotely at their home or office.