



K-12 Volunteer guide

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Volunteering with schools

By volunteering in local schools, architects can increase career awareness, empower students to engage in their communities, and increase student understanding of how to take action and improve their built environment. Schools provide an opportunity to educate, empower, and excite all students about the field of architecture.

Why it matters

The average growth rate for the field of architecture is 5%, and thousands more professionals are needed in the next decade. Extra attention to members of groups currently underrepresented in the field can increase the diversity of future architects.

Equitable and Inclusive

Volunteering in schools is equitable and inclusive when:

1. Volunteers engage with a variety of schools and student populations.
2. Volunteers are intentional about their projects and consider how the project is meeting the needs of the teacher, student, and future field of architecture.
3. Volunteers engage with students, providing information but, even more importantly, a listening ear that purposefully and intentionally values each student's personal experiences.
4. Volunteers understand that not only do students benefit from the experience, but the volunteers themselves benefit by fulfilling the need for outreach, growing their mentoring skills, and oftentimes reminding themselves of the wonder of their chosen profession.

Initiating an engagement with a school

Initial conversations	<p>School: Direct your conversation to a teacher, principal, or school counselor. Connections may be made through your own children, friends, colleagues, groups you are a part of, or via a search for public schools.</p> <p>Workforce development: Contact your local workforce development organization. Often, apprenticeship programs and funds exist that directly support students wishing to learn more about architecture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the initial conversation, you can introduce yourself and inquire about any current or future projects or programs in the school or organization where architecture is a natural fit (e.g., Career Day, STEAM Fair, design courses, etc.)• If you have a particular project in mind, ensure at least two to four months lead time from initial conversation to implementation.
Be prepared to:	<p>Be patient! The first year of implementation is often the most challenging; by year 3, many programs will have become a tradition to be counted on.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide information for safety screenings (e.g., background check).• Undergo official volunteer training (if required).
Consider:	<p>Leaning on the resources and expertise of those who have engaged in previous K-12 work, including presentations, videos, and resources all found on AIA's K-12 Resource Page.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating a project committee that organizes and runs an annual program during a specific time period.• Documenting specifics so the program can continue regardless of the coordinator.
Share:	<p>Share your experience with others (especially AIA).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report how many students you engaged and any successes or challenges on our AIA's webpage.• Ask the school if you have permission to share photos. Students may need an additional permission slip to be signed if the school has not already received media permission for outside groups. Sample media permission legal language is here; you would need to clear yours through your legal team as each state is different.

Training tips for classroom engagement

Teacher questions	<p>Speak with the teacher before your engagement to gain clarity on expectations. Consider asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the teacher's hopes and expectations for our time together?• How many students will be in the room?• What have the students been told beforehand about what to expect?• Will the teacher remain in the room? (This should be a yes.)• Are there any classroom rules I should be aware of?• What is the best way to get the group's attention? (Many teachers use a call-and-response or other method specific to their classroom.)• Where should I park?• How should I sign into the school on the day of the engagement?• How early should I arrive? (Make sure you are at the classroom on time—schools run on a minute-by-minute schedule.)
Activity questions	<p>If you have a hands-on activity planned (hopefully you do), consider asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which of the necessary materials do the students already have available?• Will the teacher make any necessary paper copies of handouts and have them ready ahead of time?• How much time do I have and is there any flexibility? (Sometimes activities can run longer than anticipated.)• Will the teacher help break the students into groups beforehand?• What technology is available (if needed)?
General tips	<p>First and foremost, be yourself. Kids love having visitors in the classroom and will be eager to meet you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If doing a hands-on classroom activity, one adult per every group of 3-5 students is ideal (in other words, bring colleagues along if you can).• Leading the students in an activity will feel more chaotic than giving a presentation, but it will also be more engaging for the students. Consider the attention span of your student age group when planning your engagement (and lean on the teacher's expertise).• Keep it simple. You can build on instructions if you have multiple sessions together.• Give space and time for student questions and know that it is OK to defer questions to teachers or steer the conversation back to the topic at hand.• Keep your commitment. Teachers will build their day or week around your visit. A last-minute cancellation is detrimental to relationship-building.
Be prepared to:	<p>Have fun!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be patient.• Provide information for safety screenings (e.g., background check).• Love your time with the students!

Working with volunteers

If you are creating or running a K-12 activation and will be in charge of training volunteers, consider the following suggestions.

Before the event

1. Share a description of the engagement plan, including date/time/location/goals.
2. Provide a brief explanation of the volunteer's role.
3. Create a way for volunteers to sign up (e.g. email, form, or system like SignUp Genius).
4. Host a volunteer orientation, online or in person, to review expectations. Review the volunteer guidelines (see examples on the next page).
5. Ask volunteers to complete a background check (e.g. [VERIFY!](#)) if the student engagement is occurring at your place of business.

During the event

1. Greet the volunteers as they arrive and answer any lingering questions.
2. Monitor volunteer behavior and ensure they have access to organization leaders to share questions or concerns.

After the event

1. Ask volunteers to share any photos they took at the event with you so you can showcase your efforts.
2. Ask for feedback on the volunteers' experience.
3. Thank the volunteers for their help.

Volunteer guidelines examples

Language examples are from a variety of organizations that work with students, including AIA components, the YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club. AIA components might consider creating a volunteer guideline sheet that is applicable to and appropriate for their engagement based on the following examples.

As a volunteer, I WILL:

- Model positive behaviors by using respectful, encouraging, and appropriate language when speaking with adults and students.
- Insure there is always another adult besides myself in the vicinity of each child.
- Always work in an open environment and encourage open communication
- Maintain confidentiality. Do not share with program leaders any concerns related to student welfare and/or safety.
- Treat all minors equally and with patience, respect, courtesy, and dignity.
- Always put the welfare of the minor first.
- Remain calm and respectful at all times, providing positive and constructive feedback.
- Ask for assistance from a staff member when there are any questions or needs.

As a volunteer, I WILL NOT:

- Use profanity, abusive language, tell inappropriate jokes, or share intimate details of personal life.
- Work with students in a private or unobserved situation.
- Disclose, use, or disseminate student photographs or personal information about students, self, or others.
- Touch a minor in an overly affectionate or inappropriate way. Where any form of manual/physical support is required, it should be provided openly and with the consent of the minor.
- Tolerate inappropriate or bullying behavior.
- Use or possess tobacco products. Use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at any time. Be under the influence of prescribed drugs that impair judgment.

Additional notes:

- Parents/guardians are responsible for transporting their minor to and from activities. In the event a minor must be transported from one location to another by a volunteer, parent/guardian consent must be obtained and the minor should never be transported with fewer than two adults.
- If minors are being dropped off for an activity at your place of business, obtain written parent/guardian consent to act in loco parentis for the administration of emergency first aid or other medical treatment, should the need arise. Keep a written record of any injury that occurs, along with details of any first aid given.