



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.

VOLUNTEERING IN SCHOOLS IS EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE WHEN ...

- Volunteers engage with a variety of schools and student populations.
- Volunteers are intentional about their projects and consider how the project is meeting the needs of the teacher, student, and future field of architecture.
- Volunteers engage with students, providing information but even more importantly a listening ear that purposefully and intentionally values each student's personal experiences.
- 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

- **Start with a conversation:**
 - **School:** Direct your conversation to a teacher, principal, or school counselor.
 - Connections may be made through your own children, friends, colleagues, groups you are part of, or via a [search for public schools](#).
 - **Workforce development:** Reach out to your local workforce development organization. Many times there are apprenticeship programs and funds that directly support students wishing to learn more about the field of architecture.
 - 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:**
 - 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.
 - Provide information for safety screenings (e.g., background check).
 - Undergo official volunteer training (if required).
- **Consider:**
 - Leaning on the resources and expertise of those who have engaged in previous K-12 work, including:
 - Presentations about the field of architecture AIA Kansas City: [K-6](#), [7-12](#)
 - [At-home activities](#) by AD EX
 - [Center for Architecture activities](#)
 - Comprehensive map of K-12 resources available at [AIA K-12](#)
 - Creating a specific project committee that organizes and runs an annual program during a specific time period.
 - Documenting specifics so the program can continue regardless of coordinator.
- **Metrics reporting:**
 - Track how many students you engaged and share any successes or challenges via k12@aia.org.



Training tips for classroom engagement

- Speak with the teacher before your engagement to gain clarity on expectations. Consider asking:
 - 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 call-and-response or other methods specific to their classroom.)
 - Where should I park, how should I sign into the school on the day of the engagement, and how early should I arrive? (Make sure you are at the classroom on time—schools run on a minute-by-minute schedule.)
- If you have a hands-on activity planned, consider asking:
 - 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:
 - Be yourself! Kids love having visitors in the classroom and will be eager to meet you.
 - If doing a hands-on classroom activity, one adult per every group of 3-5 students is ideal (in other words, bring colleagues along).
 - 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:
 - Have fun.
 - Be patient.
 - Provide information for safety screenings (e.g., background check).
 - Love your time with the students!