

*THE WELLBEING
of ARCHITECTS
culture, identity
+ practice.*

in collaboration with Parlour

Value & Worth

A
Guide to
Wellbeing in
Architecture
Practice

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country and recognise their continuing connections to land, waters and community.

We recognise that their wisdom, culture, and stewardship have sustained the wellbeing of this place for millennia. We pay deep respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to the Indigenous people who are part of the architectural community.

Value & Worth: A Guide to Wellbeing in Architecture Practice

*The Wellbeing of Architects:
Culture, Identity + Practice*

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Support

If this guide raises issues for you, we encourage you to seek support:

Your GP, who may be able to refer you to other services

Lifeline: 13 14 14

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

[Mental Health Australia](http://MentalHealthAustralia)

Research findings

This guide is an outcome of *The Wellbeing of Architects* research project (2020–2024), a groundbreaking study into the wellbeing of Australian architectural practitioners and students.

Many practitioners participating in the research believe strongly in the value that good architectural design can bring, and are highly motivated and committed. But they did not believe that others shared this sense of architecture's worth. This was seen to be reflected in a low willingness to pay for architectural services, impacting both fees and remuneration.

While many people felt valued and supported by their peers and workplaces, the effort to complete the work was seen as not always commensurate with the reward.

Key publications

Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Maryam Gusheh, Byron Kinnaird, Naomi Stead, Kirsten Orr, Liz Battiston, Julie Wolfram Cox, *The Wellbeing of Architects: 2021 Practitioner Survey, Primary Report*, (Australia: Monash University, 2022).

Byron Kinnaird, Liz Battiston, Naomi Stead, Maryam Gusheh, Jonathan Robberts, Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Kirsten Orr, Julie Wolfram Cox, *The Wellbeing of Architects: Report on Focus Groups with Practitioners*, (Australia: Monash University, 2023).

Tracey Shea, Brian Cooper, Byron Kinnaird, Naomi Stead, Julie Wolfram Cox, Maryam Gusheh, Kirsten Orr, *The Wellbeing of Architects: 2023 Practitioner Survey* (Australia: Monash University, 2024).

Factors affecting wellbeing:

Value: The top six factors identified by practitioners to improve work-related wellbeing were: increased valuation of architectural services, greater advocacy, improved time management, increased fees, reduced overtime, and increased pay.

Contribution: Focus groups with practitioners showed that a sense of contributing to societal, community, and individual quality of life was an important positive factor in their wellbeing and the meaning and motivation for their work.

Identity: Practitioners' sense of connection to the profession formed a strong part of their identities, and they cared for and valued their profession. However, they were ambivalent about recommending architecture as a career for others.

Undervaluation: Many participants said they felt the architecture profession, and more particularly the design services it provides, are undervalued both by allied built environment professions, and by the general public in Australia.

Fees: Where fees were insufficient, many identified the flow-on effect of long hours, unpaid labour, financial losses, exploitation of younger workers, and stress and anxiety.

Remuneration: Lower levels of satisfaction with remuneration were associated with poor wellbeing. Our research revealed that satisfaction with remuneration increased by age, and those in more senior positions.

Undercutting: There is a perception of 'self-sabotage' among some Australian architectural practitioners, which has been connected to practices such as fee undercutting.

Sacrifice: Some practitioners felt that architectural workers were expected to sacrifice their personal time and remuneration for the good of their employer, their client, or the profession as a whole.

Value & Worth

1. What is the issue?
2. Why does it matter?
3. What can we do?

Overview

Perceptions of how architecture is valued, how architects value themselves, and the values that motivate practitioners and practices all impact wellbeing in complex, interconnected ways. The creative potential of the profession and a strong sense of the contribution it can make to healthy, inclusive communities motivates many practitioners. This has a positive, protective impact on wellbeing. Challenges arise when this commitment coincides with the perception that architecture and the work of architects is undervalued – both within and beyond the profession. The too-frequent comment “I love the work but I don’t feel valued,” encapsulates this tension.

This guide explores the interplay between values and value, worth and wellbeing. It offers advice about identifying and articulating the values that underpin the work of architects and embedding these in everyday professional activities and processes. It provides recommendations to help people, practices and professional bodies to better measure the value that architecture and architectural services can bring and better communicate their worth in diverse settings and to broad audiences. The guide argues that everyone has a role to play in articulating value and values and offers many ways to get started.

It's important to note that this guide is an overview only, with prompts for thought and ideas for consideration.

It is not a substitute for professional or legal advice. Individuals and practices should seek advice regarding particular situations from their legal, insurance, HR or other business adviser. Like the other guides in this series, this does not offer medical opinion, diagnosis or advice. Individuals should consult their health professional as appropriate.

1. What is the issue?

Many architects have a strong sense of the cultural, social, environmental and economic value of their work and the contribution it makes to public life. A firm commitment to the public good motivates many and extends well beyond delivering projects that meet the client brief. The concern with improving civic, community and environmental outcomes – to ‘making the world a better place’ – provides a strong sense of purpose, positioning architecture as a vocation as much as a professional service. A healthy sense of purpose has a positive impact on wellbeing.

Challenges to wellbeing arise when this vocational commitment is undermined by the sense that architecture and the work of architects is undervalued.

The experience of being undervalued plays out in many ways – from the impression that the clients and the public ‘do not understand’ the depth of knowledge and the value architects bring, to conditions and remuneration that do not align with the effort and responsibility required. High demands and stresses are common in procurement processes, unfair contracts and difficult delivery systems, including ‘value management’ processes. This sense of being both under-recognised and firmly committed leads to frustration, negatively impacting professional fulfilment and overall wellbeing.

Effort/reward imbalance

The relationship between effort and reward is an important factor in wellbeing. Mental wellbeing can be good in high demand projects or roles if the rewards are also commensurately high. But when effort and reward are not in balance, there is a risk of poor wellbeing.

Value and worth are intrinsic on both sides of this equation. The nature of ‘rewards’ can vary widely. They include the intrinsic interest and satisfaction of the work, esteem and concrete benefits, such as remuneration and job security. The rewards of architectural work may include a sense of contributing to society, being valued by peers and recognised by the larger community, but the efforts and personal costs can also be high – in long hours, other activities forgone, and poor remuneration.

Undervaluing architectural labour

The old opposition between art and business continues to structure and influence many aspects of architectural culture and many professional habits and processes. There is a persistent tension between architects’ beliefs in the cultural value of their work, and the reluctance (of some) to realise that business is a set of skills and an expertise that must also be learned. Too often this results in practice owners not financially valuing their work and the work of their employees.

Many experienced and successful architects and scholars have sought to untangle and shift this paradigm over many decades, yet the long tail of influence persists.

This means that parts of the profession are complicit in devaluing the work of architects. Problems are exacerbated every time a fee is cut, an unfair contract is accepted without negotiation, or an unrealistic deadline is agreed to. These pressures can be hard (even impossible) to resist day-by-day, but collectively such habits undermine the viability of practice and the integrity and respect for the profession within the construction industry.

Myths of the hero architect

Entrenched, out-dated mythologies about the architect-as-hero contribute to challenges within and beyond the profession. On one hand, such myths influence dominant public images of the architect, obscuring the diversity of the profession. On the other, these myths can result in over-inflated ideas of impact and may lead to egotistical behaviour that reinforces problematic stereotypes.

Narrow perceptions of 'good' architecture

The profession has established systems of recognition and reward – awards, publications, exhibitions etc. However, the work that is celebrated often occupies a very narrow band. There is a great deal of meaningful, valuable work that makes significant contributions but is barely noticed. The status of hero architect has been successfully critiqued, but there is a way to go in understanding the range and form of valuable architectural services.

A fast-changing world

The profession finds itself in a perfect storm – fees are reducing as costs escalate and contractual risk and liabilities increase. Regulatory systems and procurement processes are ever more demanding. The urgent issues of decarbonisation and decolonisation are ever-present.

Many practitioners are ill-equipped to weather this environment in terms of business skills, critiquing current practice models, and communicating the value of what they offer to diverse audiences.

Willingness to pay

'Willingness to pay' is a measure of value that comes from behavioural economics. The 'willingness to pay' for architectural services – on the part of both government and private clients – may bear little relationship to the actual cost of architectural services, or architects' perceptions of the value they produce.

Articulating value

Some practitioners find it hard to explain what they do and why it matters in ways that are meaningful to clients, stakeholders and the community. As a discipline, architecture has centuries-deep, sophisticated discourses exploring meaning and aesthetics, and an established vocabulary for discussing what architecture is and why it matters. This makes for rich disciplinary conversations, but skilful translation is required to convey these ideas to audiences beyond the profession.

Long-term value, short-term assessments

Value accumulates over years. It can be challenging to emphasise long-term value – economic, environmental and social – in contexts where short-term thinking is prioritised. This is also a problem when those making key decisions are motivated and rewarded by immediate considerations and 'value management' rather than lasting impacts such as maintenance, environmental performance, embodied carbon and social benefits.

Measuring and quantifying value

The profession has struggled to quantify the value it brings in empirical terms, and to define metrics for evaluation. Few researchers focus on this, and rigorous post-occupancy evaluations are infrequent.

There are important exceptions. In health, value is calculated in faster recovery times, reduced hospital stays and subjective measures of wellbeing. The ample research on the benefits of well-designed streets and cities includes the public health benefits of active transport, the impact of shading in reducing urban heat island effects, and much more. In education, there is empirical evidence on the benefits of well-designed learning spaces and schools.

There is much work to be done on the specific benefits in other areas, and in quantifying the value of architecture as a whole.

2. Why does it matter?

Understanding and articulating the value that architecture brings is critical for the future sustainability and viability of the profession. The quality of design outcomes, public perception, and the wellbeing of architects are all impacted.

When architectural services are valued in society, there is proactive investment in quality design and construction, leading to well-designed buildings and projects that support healthy communities.

When clients and government bodies recognise the value that good design can bring, briefs and procurement processes are structured to support outcomes that create value for all. This includes enabling professionals to do their best work in appropriate and healthy environments.

When architects value themselves and their services, positive effects flow throughout individual practices, the profession and the broader community.

“I do love it. I just find that it’s overwhelmingly exploitative.”

— Senior team member,
6–10 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Good design

Valuing architects and architecture helps create the environments, cultures and systems that deliver good design outcomes.

Well-designed projects deliver value for the client, diverse users and society at large. They support better environmental performance across the whole lifecycle. They elevate life and help create a sense of dignity and wellbeing for all occupants. They provide functional, efficient spaces that meet the needs and ambitions of those who live and work in them. Carefully designed places and spaces contribute positively to surrounding built and natural environments and facilitate social interaction and connection.

Understanding and documenting these benefits is fundamental to articulating the value architecture brings. This, in turn, is essential to ensuring that the profession is itself robust and healthy, and therefore able to contribute to the wellbeing of society.

Social impact

New work on the social value of architecture emphasises how good design can contribute to an equitable, inclusive and just society. This is especially important in the context of climate change and climate crisis, which is likely to exacerbate current inequalities and have its most negative effect on those groups who are already marginalised in various ways. The focus on the value of architecture as an enabler of a just society is ever more significant.

“Architects are very important thinkers for our changing times. The profession can either promote or stifle this. Design-based thinking is critical to the world and feeling valued greatly helps with student/practitioner wellbeing.”

— Associate in nonprofit,
over 30 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Building quality and safety

The quality and safety of the built environment can be impaired when the architect's role and skills are not adequately valued. Architects are highly trained and skilled in design, risk management, compliance with regulation, quality control, coordination of trades and consultants, communication and client engagement. They are advocates for design excellence, sustainability and social responsibility. The weakened influence of the architectural practitioner can damage the integrity of the design and compromise the quality and safety of the final construction.

Improved design literacy

Clearly communicating the value of architects and architecture helps improve design literacy within client organisations, stakeholders and the broader public.

This supports the development of good briefs, appropriate budgets, engaged client groups, better procurement processes and meaningful community engagement.

It also helps foster understanding and appreciation of the expertise, skills and contributions that architects bring, and increases the 'willingness to pay' for quality architectural services.

Better procurement processes

Knowledgeable clients who recognise the value of architectural services are fundamental to effective procurement processes. Good procurement supports high quality design and documentation, establishes effective relationships within which professionals thrive, and creates built outcomes that contribute positively to communities' wellbeing into the future.

Retention and a strong profession

Feeling valued, having good job satisfaction and access to meaningful work is core to people's ability to stay in the profession.

Financial sustainability

Emphasising and communicating the value of architectural services supports the goal of fair compensation and financially viable practices. When the value of expertise is acknowledged and articulated, it is easier to negotiate appropriate fees that reflect the time, effort and skill required for quality architectural work. This means that architects can sustain their practices, invest in employee wellbeing and provide the level of service that clients expect and deserve.

A valued architectural workforce brings numerous benefits. When people feel appreciated, they report higher job satisfaction. This in turn fosters increased loyalty and reduced turnover, resulting in a boost to overall productivity.

Professional identity and strength

Professional identity and confidence is strengthened when people are valued, and when they value themselves and the services they provide.

Self esteem and self worth play a significant role in improving mental wellbeing, including reducing the likelihood of burnout, stress and feelings of inadequacy.

Architects who feel valued are more likely to maintain a healthy life balance, prioritise self care and foster a positive and fulfilling relationship with the profession.

This enables professionals to better navigate challenges, make informed decisions and advocate for good design outcomes. All together, this helps create the agency to contribute meaningfully and to consistently deliver work to a high standard. This commitment to quality elevates the profession as a whole.

3. What can we do?

Practices, individuals and the profession all have significant roles in demonstrating and communicating the value of architectural services and projects. There are many ways that people working in architecture can develop, articulate and leverage their understanding of value.

It is essential that everyone plays their part, finds agency and activates it to demonstrate and advocate for the value of architecture and the work of architects.

There is substantial opportunity to better communicate the comprehensive nature of architectural services and the positive contributions it can make to healthy communities. This includes exploring practice models that enable meaningful engagement with clients and stakeholders from a wide demographic range. The many architecturally trained people working in government or client-side are also contributing to shifting perceptions within client groups.

Addressing these challenges requires collective action. It entails advocating for fair compensation, educating clients about the value of architectural expertise, and fostering a culture of collaboration and respect within and beyond the industry. By clearly articulating these contributions, the industry can establish a more sustainable working environment for architects, ultimately benefitting their wellbeing.

- Practices
- Individuals
- The Profession

Practices

Understanding values and value are fundamental to fostering healthy working environments and sustainable practices.

Understand the practice's values

Understanding the values at the core of the practice is fundamental to establishing, guiding and communicating what the practice does and why it matters. A clear understanding of values should underpin all decisions and is especially helpful in navigating complex situations.

- * Define and/or refine the values that drive the practice.
- * Examine how these values are manifest in the practice's culture and operations. Are there habits or processes that undermine these values? Are there policies and processes that can strengthen or consolidate these values?
- * Ensure everyone in the practice understands these values. Support practice leaders and employees to express these in everyday interactions within and beyond the office.
- * Examine how your values align with those of clients and collaborators. Are there opportunities to strengthen relationships?
- * Communicate the values of the practice everyday. Ensure that they are expressed in all activities, presentations and publications (including the practice website and social media).
- * Explore whether external accreditations could help refine and convey your values? BCorp is just one example that may be appropriate to some practices.

- * Consider how the practice communicates its values to employees and potential employees. People seek employers with aligned values and purpose, and often emphasise the importance of healthy and innovative practice cultures.

Articulate the practice's value

Define the value the practice brings – to clients, consultants, colleagues and the community. Explore how this can be measured and conveyed to different groups.

- * Define your practice's value proposition. Outline the benefits you bring to clients and the community. This could include specific expertise and problem-solving abilities, the role of 'trusted advisor' on sustainability and climate, and the positive impact on quality of life.
- * Identify ways to meaningfully demonstrate and communicate your value to clients, consultants, collaborators and the community.
- * Hone the value proposition so it can be easily and authentically conveyed in many settings – from the elevator to the boardroom to everyday social settings.
- * Support practice staff to develop strong communication skills so they can convey the value the practice brings with ease.
- * Explain the value of the work in nuanced ways – not just in terms of awards won or aesthetics. Emphasise the holistic value of the services provided. For example, discuss how it can improve user experiences, support the community, contribute to sustainable outcomes and create long-term economic benefit.

Measure and report on the value created

Where possible, invest in understanding and documenting the impact and reception of projects over time. This could be through formal post-occupancy evaluation or informal assessments.

Data-driven evidence can be an effective way to communicate tangible benefits. Testimonials from clients and occupants can be a powerful way to convey more qualitative benefits.

- * Track and measure the outcomes of projects, including the social, economic and environmental impacts.
- * Explore metrics to help define the intangible benefits of good design – for example, dignity and belonging.
- * Benchmark projects in terms of the money saved during construction, and reduction in long-term running costs.
- * Benchmark projects in terms of environmental benefits – for example, carbon saved, energy saved.
- * Explore how the information gathered can be used to inform and communicate with current and future clients.
- * Where viable, encourage clients to conduct rigorous post-occupancy evaluations by expert teams.
- * Seek feedback and success stories from previous clients. These can serve as strong endorsement of the practice's capabilities for the future.

Evaluate social value

Social value measures provide a comprehensive account of significance of an architectural project to the broader community, beyond economic and aesthetic contributions. This is especially relevant for practices who work on public, civic and commercial projects.

- * Consider using social value toolkits to quantitatively evaluate and communicate the benefits of design to clients.

- * Design for community and connection. Develop spaces that encourage community interaction, collaboration and participation. Demonstrate how the architecture supports social gathering, fostering a sense of belonging.
- * Prioritise and communicate the needs, wellbeing and experiences of individuals and communities in the design process.
- * Encourage user participation. Involve users and stakeholders in the design process, enabling them to contribute their insights and aspirations. Show how user input has helped shape the outcome, resulting in a work that reflects the needs and values of the occupants and community.

Value the work of the practice

Valuing the work of the practice is an ongoing process. Fees and contracts, negotiation and remuneration are tangible means to manifest this value, but culture, policy, habits and communication are also important.

- * Prioritise the quality of work the practice delivers. Good work is a core, lasting expression of the value of architecture. Develop an expanded view of what 'good work' involves and looks like.
- * Set appropriate fees that reflect hours required and the value they bring.
- * Do not engage in a race to the bottom on fees. Clients won through low fees are less likely to value expertise and services.
- * Do not work for free.
- * Do not over-service clients. This sets up unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved within an allocated fee.
- * Be careful about pro bono work. Undertake due diligence and avoid situations where the architect is the only consultant not being paid.

See also *Time & Money: A Guide to Wellbeing* and *Risk & Responsibility: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

Appreciate the practice's people

Employees' overall sense of self-worth and satisfaction is enhanced when they feel valued and appreciated for their work. This drives the motivation to excel.

Visibly appreciating the ongoing commitment to delivering meaningful, high-quality results is crucial for fostering a positive work environment and creating value and recognition.

- * Create a positive working environment – foster an inclusive culture that promotes open communication, teamwork, collaboration, respect and diversity.
- * Credit people for their work and contribution to projects. This includes in publications, award submissions, presentations, the practice website, social media and internal documents.

See also *Trust & Transparency: A Guide to Wellbeing* and *Psychosocial & Psychological Safety: A Guide to Wellbeing*.

Advocate for better processes

Practices can advocate for better procurement processes that enable the production of quality outcomes. This is an everyday activity.

- * Recognise the opportunity in everyday presentations to clients, authorities and planners to productively challenge and change processes and procedures.
- * Speak up and push back on unfair conditions, contracts or regulations.
- * Question unreasonable EOIs, competition conditions and requirements.
- * Negotiate contracts and reject unfair clauses.
- * Explain the impacts of poor procurement processes and contracts on the wellbeing of the team, the quality of the outcome and the value created through the project. Back this up with data if possible.
- * Be ready to propose alternatives that will support better outcomes for all.

Use the work of government architects to support quality processes and outcomes

Government architects across Australia have been advocating for the value of good design for some years.

Outcomes include policies supporting good design, publications that articulate the value of design in terms relevant to government and the community, and design guides. Design review processes are conducted by state and local governments across Australia. Together, these offer substantial resources for practitioners that can be used to advocate for quality outcomes on individual projects.

- * Familiarise the practice with key policies and documents, which outline the arguments for the value of design.
- * Refer to policies and guides when negotiating with public sector clients.
- * Engage in design review processes and use these as leverage to support good process and high quality outcomes.

Educate current and potential clients

Good work needs good clients. Effective everyday communication is a crucial part of ensuring clients recognise the value of architecture. This is a continual process.

- * Communicate the practice's values and vision clearly. This helps align project goals, enhances collaboration, and fosters respectful and creative working environments.
- * Work with clients who appreciate and value the practice's work. This is more enjoyable for all and helps increase the likelihood of repeat business and future collaborations, helping to generate a steady stream of new projects.
- * Consider the procurement models proposed. Some models – for example D&C contracts – can render the design process and the value of the architect's contribution less visible. Explore how this can be addressed.

- * Articulate the design process and work involved in all stages – not just the concept and the final outcome. Elaborate on the work required to undertake the project, and communicate the process.
- * Actively explain the value clients receive for the fees spent. This is crucial to ensure the longevity of the practice.
- * Explain the value of a design in terms of the whole-of-life costs, not just the initial capital costs. This includes ongoing maintenance costs, environmental footprint, the wellbeing of users, and the contributions to the public realm. Ensure you have team members with skills in assessing whole building lifecycle costs and long-term value.
- * Be clear about the time required to develop good design outcomes – and the long-term value created through this upfront investment. Ensure that clients and project managers understand the need to allow enough time in the allocated timeframes to create long-term quality outcomes.

“Educate clients to understand and value the complexity of design and the value of time spent in the research, conceptual and design development stages of a project.”

— Director in multi-disciplinary practice, over 30 yrs experience, WA, 2021

Foster internal conversations

Foster discussions about value as part of the everyday activities of the practice. This helps increase everyone’s capacity to communicate and advocate and ensures that the practice lives its values.

- * Discuss how projects and clients align with the practice values.
- * Discuss the value that projects and processes bring to different groups. What are the aims and ambitions for a project? How does it contribute – economically, socially, environmentally, culturally? How could this be measured?
- * Discuss how practice values and the value of the work can be communicated effectively to different constituencies. Explore how discipline-specific terms and ideas can be conveyed to people and groups beyond the profession.
- * Be aware that different people in the practice bring different knowledge and experience, and therefore different insight into discussions about value, why architecture matters and the contributions it can make. Canvassing diverse perspectives helps to enhance the knowledge and communication skills of everyone.

Connect with the community

Be active in the community. This helps establish trust and facilitates connections. It is part of an ongoing, subtle demonstration of the value of architecture.

- * Contribute to communities where feasible. This can occur at all scales, from a tiny connection to a substantial contribution, depending on capacity and opportunity. All can help build awareness and understanding.
- * Participate in community events. Attend local gatherings, meetings, and events to connect with community members and establish personal connections.

- * Collaborate with local organisations. Engage in joint initiatives that address community needs and, in doing so, highlight the value of architecture.

Communicate well every day

It is important to tailor and target communication to address the audience. This means using visual and verbal language that is appropriate to the context, and connects to the needs and aspirations of those you are talking with.

Remember, some discipline-specific language is mystifying to those unfamiliar with the profession. This can hinder communication, erode trust and reinforce stereotypes. In some cases it should be modified to enhance communication.

- * Use accessible, engaging language to communicate clearly, establish connections and gather information in a way that builds trust and conveys the value the practice can contribute.
- * Translate complex or specific architectural concepts and technical terminology into relevant and accessible language appropriate to the audience.
- * Use clear, concise visual presentations that align with and respond to the audience's goals and aspirations.
- * Think about the different ways to bring topics to life and engage audiences. For example, explore using storytelling and narratives to communicate purpose, inspiration and impact. Used effectively, these techniques can engage clients both emotionally and intellectually, helping them envision the value of the design or proposal. Think about data and diagrams.
- * Consider the breadth of experience and knowledge within the practice. Who is best placed to communicate to particular clients and audiences? Who can help build connections? How can they be supported to do this well?

Invest in training

Communication is a learnt skills, and there are experts that can help. A workforce skilled in communication will bring many benefits to the practice and the profession.

- * Invest in training for the practice as a whole, and individuals within it. Training may be provided in negotiation; communication to different people, groups and communities; intercultural competence and fluency training; and building consensus among disparate stakeholder groups.
- * Make opportunities for the people in your practice to hone their communication skills. Help them to build these up over time by offering staged opportunities. Don't throw people in the deep end unless you are confident they will cope.
- * Encourage people in the practice to teach and learn from each other.
- * Support people to develop authentic communication approaches that align with their skills and personality.

“I think architecture needs to be more open and inclusive to other skills and experiences that contribute directly to the process and to the profession.

That will help to increase empathy for other people's position and contribution and increase a sense of collective agency.”

— Project leader in private practice, 21–30 yrs experience, VIC, 2021

Individuals

Feeling valued and being able to articulate personal values has a profound impact on an individual's wellbeing. It can affect motivation, self-esteem and stress levels. It helps create a sense of belonging and enhances career prospects.

Everyone has a role to play in communicating the value of architecture in their everyday interactions – whether talking to a government minister or community representatives, negotiating with an engineer or chatting to a parent in the school playground.

“The visual and perceptual way you see the world as an architect encompasses a full spectrum of life. Architects can apply and connect to every discipline – from the microscopic one room to layouts of whole cities. Having this creativity outlet to apply to every opportunity that arises is certainly a positive for wellbeing in architecture.”

— Director in private practice,
over 30 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Understand your values

Understanding your values and the contribution you want to make is very helpful in navigating your career and making decisions about it. Effectively articulating your values to others can open doors to new opportunities and prospects.

Having a clear understanding of your values helps build self-confidence and creates clarity. This, in turn, helps position individuals to have a positive impact in their chosen sphere of interest.

- * Work out your core values and try to surround yourself with people who can support these. When your values are respected and are in alignment with those of the practice and others you work with, great outcomes can be achieved. Stand up for your values and be clear on your non-negotiables.
- * Be strategic and realistic. Not every project, team or workplace will offer a perfect alignment on values, but many will present opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways or to extend and enhance your knowledge.

Articulate the value you bring

People who articulate their value effectively are more likely to create opportunities for career growth, receive recognition and work on projects that matter – and thereby contribute back through their work.

- * Develop your workplace value proposition. Set targets, articulate your strengths, explore how to build on these, and document success stories.
- * Learn how to effectively communicate the value you bring during negotiations – with employers, consultants, clients. This is essential in matters such as negotiating salaries or seeking fair remuneration. It is also an important skill in delivering projects that create value.

- * Communicate with managers regularly. Clearly express the desire for constructive feedback and acknowledge and appreciate efforts when people offer opportunities for growth.
- * Find ways to convey your value to colleagues and collaborators. This is a delicate balance – you want to confidently demonstrate what you bring with integrity and humility, not appear arrogant or self-centred.
- * Take opportunities to contribute. Demonstrate a willingness to learn, and to assist others to develop skills. Establishing your identity as a valuable team member helps to foster collaboration, inclusivity and better architectural outcomes.

Establish boundaries

Articulating clear boundaries is part of valuing yourself and your work. When people value themselves, others are more likely to recognise and appreciate their expertise and contribution.

- * Remember that valuing yourself is not about arrogance or egotism. It's about recognising the effort and dedication you put into your work.
- * Establish boundaries as a core part of setting realistic expectations, negotiating fair compensation, and establishing mutually beneficial working arrangements with employers, clients, contractors and other stakeholders.

“Develop deep listening – a way to open the profession to learn from stories, data, practices; for it to develop empathy and self-determination and self-care.”

— Team member in government,
11–20 yrs experience, NSW, 2021

Learn from others

There is a growing body of work available that speaks to the value of a well-designed built environment. This provides important research and data and outlines language and ideas that can be adopted and adapted in a broad range of settings.

- * Familiarise yourself with publications by government architects about the importance of good design and the processes developed to support this. These guides, policies and frameworks are especially useful when working with public sector clients, but the ideas contained therein are relevant in many contexts.
- * Explore relevant research by scholars – there is particularly strong research and analysis about the impact of design in the fields of education and health.
- * Refer to material published by professional organisations – short opinion pieces, recorded discussions, guides and discussion papers.
- * Don't restrict yourself to architecture. There is excellent relevant work in landscape architecture, urban design, planning and sustainability, and so on.

Develop your communication skills

Strong communication skills are essential to articulating the value of your work and that of the profession.

- * Focus on building clear and persuasive communication skills. Consider how to effectively communicate in different contexts and to different audiences.
- * Learn from others. This can occur informally and through formal training. Watch and listen to see how others effectively convey ideas and contributions. Seek feedback from those you trust and respect. Take opportunities for more formal training if available.

- * Practise! Speaking clearly and confidently takes time and experience. It may also take time to develop a style that enables you to communicate with confidence and integrity.
- * Consider professional assistance, such as Toastmasters or communication workshops run by acting schools.
- * Find your own style, one that feels comfortable and authentic.
- * Consider the message sent by non-verbal cues such as gestures, body language and tone.
- * Make sure you respect the people you are communicating with. Be aware of their commitments, interests and investments. Find points of connection. Give some thought to what they need to know, the level of detail that is appropriate, the order and sequence of information, and the most effective way to convey information to them.
- * Learning to describe the value of your work can be done in a range of ways – consider highlighting environmental impacts and social value along with aesthetic and experiential benefits.

Connect with community

It's crucial to build relationships with people outside typical circles and engage in your community as both a citizen and an architect. This enables you to gain insight and make new and meaningful connections

Active community involvement also allows architects to advocate for the value of the profession in low-key, impactful ways. By demonstrating the positive impact of architecture on people's lives, you can strengthen the recognition and appreciation of the services you are trained to provide.

- * Participate in community activities. Attend local meetings and events to connect with community members and establish personal connections.
- * Volunteer on community projects or programs outside architecture.
- * Consider becoming involved in school councils and local councils, opening up opportunities to inform decisions that impact the built environment.

“Where is the limit between passion and unreasonable expectations regarding work? This is difficult to evaluate.”

— Project leader in university setting,
6–10 yrs experience, QLD

The profession

Architecture's professional bodies and institutions have fundamental roles in effectively promoting and communicating the value of architecture within and beyond the profession. Narrow definitions of 'good' architects and 'good' architecture need to be challenged and dispelled to bring about effective change.

Invest in research

Rigorous research is essential to understanding and communicating the value of architecture. Professional organisations have important roles to play in initiating and supporting research, and in communicating findings.

- * Invest in, conduct or support research investigating and documenting the value of architecture in social, cultural, environmental and economic terms.
- * Activate available research in advocating to government and client groups.
- * Communicate key research findings to the profession. Help practitioners identify ways to put the findings to work in their own professional contexts.

Advocate to government and clients

Professional bodies have important roles in advocating to government and client bodies about the contributions and value architecture can offer.

- * Emphasise the importance of long-term thinking about value to public and private sectors – economic, environmental, cultural and social value. Include the importance of maintenance, environmental performance, embodied carbon and social benefits.
- * Collaborate with other professional bodies to present unified, coherent and compelling cases for the value and contribution of architecture.
- * Participate in construction industry-wide groups, research, campaigns and advocacy programs. Embed knowledge and information about the value of design quality and the contribution of architects into wider programs. Ensure that the voices of articulate, informed architects are included.
- * Encourage the public sector to lead by example in architectural procurement, including fair fees and tendering practices that place value on the services architects provide. Emphasise the potential and importance of government as good clients – local, state and federal.
- * Engage in advocacy efforts to shape policies, regulations and planning frameworks that prioritise the value of architectural services.
- * Participate in public consultations, collaborate with policy makers, and deploy evidence-based research to demonstrate this value.

Tailor external communications

Communicating the value of architecture to wide audiences is essential for driving positive change. Professional organisations have significant influence and potential.

- * Effectively communicate the full range of roles and responsibilities that architects fulfil and the value that this brings.
- * Consider the imagery and words used in communications. Do they convey the breadth of contribution in a way that is meaningful and accessible to diverse audiences? Do they help dispel or challenge clichés and myths or do they serve to reinforce these?
- * Ensure that marketing strategies go beyond highlighting elite and high-cost projects. Instead, emphasise a broader range of architectural contributions and the value they bring.

Support community education

There are many opportunities to engage with the wider public, in both low-key and high-profile ways.

- * Develop programs aimed at promoting and communicating the value of architecture to the public and clients. Consider collaborating across multiple bodies for maximum impact.
- * Develop, endorse and support programs to promote design literacy within the wider community. These could include programs within schools.

Value diverse roles and contributions

Many decisions that impact the quality and potential of a project are made long before the architect is appointed, and often long before the brief is developed.

People with architectural training or knowledge working for clients/government or in allied fields can have many positive impacts at these early stages and bring particular insight, which complements that of architects in private practice.

It is important that these people feel seen and welcomed by conventional professional bodies.

- * Recognise the contribution made by people with architectural training active in the wider field.
- * Draw on and learn from the knowledge they bring to inform advocacy, research and professional education.

Share knowledge within the profession

Professional bodies have important roles to play in developing and sharing knowledge through ongoing professional education programs and publications.

- * Offer education on social impact, environmental and economic benefits and the long-term value of design.
- * Support practices to develop methods and metrics to measure impact.
- * Offer professional development opportunities for architects to enhance their communication skills and advocacy abilities.
- * Provide training, workshops and mentoring programs that help architects articulate their value, engage with communities, and effectively communicate the benefits of architectural design.

Foster collaboration and partnerships

Foster collaborations and partnerships with other professional organisations, government agencies, community groups and educational institutions. By working together, architectural bodies can amplify the message, reach a wider audience, and leverage resources and expertise.

Further resources

A growing number of resources support the understanding of the value of architecture.

[The Social Value Toolkit for Architecture](#) RIBA/University of Reading, 2020

This toolkit aims to make it simple to evaluate and demonstrate the social impact of design on people and communities. It was developed through a research project led by the University of Reading and included representatives from RIBA and research leaders in architectural practice.

[Research for Architects in Small Practice](#) ArchiTeam / University of Melbourne, 2020

This research provides people with the long-awaited answer to the question: Are architects worth it? The answer is a resounding yes, with the RASP research finding that architect-designed homes financially outperform the alternative.

[Better Placed](#) GA NSW, 2020

The Better Placed integrated design policy sets out seven objectives of good design. Part of the NSW policy framework, it integrates with [Greener Places and Connecting with Country](#) policies and is supported by a wide range of [design guides](#) – including the Design Guide for Health, Design Guide for Heritage, Design Guide for Schools, [advisory notes and resources for good design](#), and much more.

Although specific to New South Wales, these documents offer much insight that is relevant in many settings and contexts.

[Government as 'smart client'](#) Office of the Victorian Government Architect, 2021

This is the second edition of a substantial document. It outlines why good design matters and the value created, then discusses the importance of government as an informed client, what this means and how to achieve it. It explains the design process and procurement and outlines seven key steps for 'improving the procurement of design services that impact design quality'.

The primary audience is government bodies, but the document provides a useful summary of the value of design and insight into government processes. This can inform practices and practitioners as they articulate their value and negotiate with government clients.

Other ['good design' publications from the OVG](#) provide useful resources in relation to project types.

Further reading

[Why Architects Matter: Evidencing and communicating the value of architects](#) Flora Samuel, Routledge, 2018

This substantial book by Flora Samuel, a leader in developing frameworks to understand social impact, argues for the importance of research-led, ethical practice in promoting wellbeing, sustainability and innovation. It discusses the importance of understanding and effectively communicating the value the profession brings and offers considered ideas and recommendations about how this can be achieved.

[The Business of Design](#) Kerstin Thompson, ACA, October 2019

An articulate essay from Kerstin Thompson about value, delivering quality design and advocating every day for better systems and processes. This includes a description of the processes used within KTA to deliver design value.

[A. H. Hook Address](#) Kerstin Thompson, 2023

Kerstin Thompson's public lecture as the 2023 Australian Institute of Architects Gold Medallist includes an articulate and considered discussion of the challenges facing the profession, the role of practitioners in addressing these and the need to advocate for the value of architecture. An [abridged transcript](#) is available on ArchitectureAU.

[The Value of Architecture](#) Rachael Bernstone, ACA, September 2021

A short article connecting the wellbeing of architects with fee-setting and quantifying and communicating the value of architecture.

[Speaking Up](#) Saneaia Norton, Parlour, October 2020

Useful advice from Saneaia Norton about how individuals can hone their communication and public speaking skills. The article includes suggestions for external training and ten 'top tips' that are useful and meaningful for all.

[Speaking Up](#) Saneaia Norton and Rachael Bernstone, Parlour, September 2020

In this recording from Parlour's Light at the End of the Tunnel series Saneaia Norton and Rachael Bernstone discuss strategies for communicating with confidence and clarity – at an individual level and at the level of the profession. The session explores how to tell compelling stories about architectural work and how we can articulate the value of architecture to wider audiences.

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The Wellbeing of Architects: Culture, Identity + Practice

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You are welcome to contact the research team via the project website:

thewellbeingofarchitects.org.au

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