

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

The following trends and assumptions have been identified through board discussions, scanning inputs from member boards and the broader regulatory and association communities, as well as environmental scanning research from reliable external sources. The 2026 update also incorporates signals identified through the 2026 CLARB Annual Meeting Environmental Scanning Workshop. Our environmental scan is organized by relevant trends in the following categories:

Business and
Economic

Technology,
Science and
Education

Social Values
and
Demographics

Legislative and
Regulatory

Business and Economic Scan

Workforce and Talent Trends:

- **Persistent Labor Shortages:** Firms and public agencies continue to experience difficulty attracting and retaining qualified professionals. Retirement of experienced practitioners is adding pressure to an already constrained talent pipeline.
- **Aging Licensed Workforce:** The retirement of senior professionals continues to outpace the rate at which new licensees are entering the profession in some areas, increasing succession, mentorship, and capacity concerns.
- **Changing Workforce Expectations:** Flexibility, work/life balance, mental health, purpose, mentorship, and workplace culture are increasingly important to recruitment and retention.
- **Generational Shifts in Work and Leadership:** Different expectations about career progression, communication, mentorship, and professional identity are reshaping workplaces and leadership development.
- **Rising Cost of Entry to the Profession:** Education costs, cost of living, entry-level compensation, examination expenses, and licensure fees can create financial barriers for students and emerging professionals.
- **Growing Interest in Alternative Pathways:** Workforce shortages and access concerns are increasing attention to competency-based and alternative pathways into regulated professions.
- **STEM Designation and Talent Pipeline:** Landscape architecture's STEM designation continues to support the profession's technical identity and can expand opportunities for student recruitment, international graduates, and workforce entry.

Business Models and Practice Trends:

- **Firm Consolidation, Mergers and Private Equity:** Merger and acquisition activity remains active across adjacent design professions. Consolidation and private-equity investment are changing ownership structures and may affect professional judgment, accountability, incentives, succession, and the influence of licensed professionals.
- **Changing Project Delivery Models:** Design-build and other integrated delivery structures are altering relationships among design professionals, contractors, clients, and regulators, with implications for responsibility and decision authority.

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

- **Digital-First and Technology-Enabled Practice:** Firms are integrating automation, AI, BIM, digital documentation, and data-driven tools into workflows, changing staffing models, productivity expectations, and professional roles.
- **Distributed and Outsourced Practice:** Remote collaboration, global teams, and outsourced production can expand capacity but may also change supervision, mentorship, experience-building, and responsible-control expectations.
- **Competition from Unlicensed or Underqualified Providers:** Technology, adjacent disciplines, and growing demand in resilience and green infrastructure can increase the availability of services from providers who may not meet the same competency or accountability standards as licensed professionals.
- **Client Expectations for Measurable Value:** Clients increasingly expect evidence-based outcomes, speed, collaboration, and demonstrable value from professional services.

Climate, Resilience and Economic Conditions:

- **Climate-Driven Market Demand:** Climate adaptation, resilience, water management, green infrastructure, and nature-based solutions continue to generate new project needs and practice opportunities.
- **Resource and Environmental Pressures:** Water scarcity, extreme heat, wildfire, extreme weather, and other environmental stresses are increasingly affecting project priorities, costs, and design decisions.
- **Economic Volatility:** Inflation, financing conditions, housing costs, trade policies, and changing public investment cycles continue to affect project scope, profitability, and timing.
- **Global and Supply Chain Uncertainty:** Geopolitical instability, tariffs, material availability, labor mobility, and global supply chains continue to influence project delivery and business planning.

Business and Economic Assumptions About the Future

Workforce

- Persistent labor shortages and workforce retirements will continue to strain capacity across firms, agencies, and regulatory systems.
- The profession will face growing pressure to expand access to licensure while preserving rigorous, defensible competency standards.
- Rising education and licensure costs will increase demand for clearer value, greater flexibility, and alternative ways to demonstrate competency.
- Employers will need to adapt to evolving expectations for flexibility, mentorship, mental health, purpose, and career development in order to attract and retain talent.
- Generational transition will place greater importance on succession planning, knowledge transfer, and intentional leadership development.

Business Models

- Private equity, consolidation, and integrated delivery models will continue to reshape professional practice structures.
- Professional responsibility and accountability will receive greater attention as ownership and project delivery become more complex.
- Technology-enabled practice will continue to change staffing models, entry-level work, productivity expectations, and the economics of professional services.

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

Climate and Economic Conditions

- Climate adaptation, water management, resilience, and environmental risk will remain significant drivers of demand for landscape architectural expertise.
- Economic volatility, trade policy, material costs, and financing conditions will continue to influence project feasibility and profitability.
- Clients and public agencies will increasingly expect measurable outcomes that demonstrate the value of qualified professional involvement.

Technology, Science and Education Scan

Technology:

- **Rapid Expansion of Artificial Intelligence:** AI is moving quickly into education, design, analysis, documentation, credentialing, business operations, and regulatory processes.
- **AI-Generated Work and Verification Challenges:** The growing ability to generate convincing plans, documents, images, and credentials increases concerns about authorship, accuracy, verification, accountability, and public protection.
- **Automation of Entry-Level and Repetitive Work:** Technology is changing the nature of early-career tasks and may alter how emerging professionals gain experience, develop judgment, and demonstrate competency.
- **Changing Definitions of Responsible Control:** Digital collaboration, automation, distributed teams, and AI-supported workflows are complicating traditional assumptions about who created, reviewed, and is responsible for professional work.
- **Data, BIM and Digital Documentation:** Interoperable digital tools, BIM, GIS, cloud workflows, and data exchange are becoming more central to practice and project delivery.
- **Cybersecurity and Digital Trust:** Protection of client information, professional data, digital credentials, and intellectual property remains an increasing concern.

Science and Environmental Knowledge:

- **Climate and Resilience Science:** Advances in heat mitigation, stormwater management, biodiversity, carbon, water systems, ecology, and nature-based solutions continue to influence professional practice.
- **Changing Materials and Construction Knowledge:** New materials, technologies, and construction methods require continual learning and adaptation.
- **Water as a Growing Design and Public-Protection Issue:** Water access, scarcity, quality, conservation, and stormwater management are becoming increasingly important across regions and project types.

Education and Competency:

- **Education Pipeline Volatility:** Landscape architecture enrollment remains uneven rather than uniformly declining. LAAB reported modest overall enrollment growth for 2024–2025, while program costs, graduate-level trends, and broader higher-education pressures continue to create uncertainty about the long-term pipeline.
- **Critical Thinking in a Technology-Rich Environment:** Educators and employers are increasingly focused on ensuring that technology use does not replace professional judgment, critical thinking, or foundational knowledge.

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

- **Workforce-Ready Expectations:** Employers expect graduates to enter practice with stronger technical, interpersonal, communication, and problem-solving skills.
- **Experiential and Alternative Learning:** Internships, co-ops, modular learning, micro-credentials, career changes, and other nontraditional learning models continue to expand.
- **Stronger Connections Between Education and Practice:** There is growing interest in aligning university education, professional experience, competency expectations, and regulatory requirements.
- **STEM Integration and International Talent:** STEM designation continues to support recruiting and post-graduation work opportunities for international students, while broader international enrollment and visa conditions remain volatile.

Technology, Science and Education Assumptions About the Future

Technology

- Artificial intelligence will reshape professional practice, education, examination, credentialing, and regulation more quickly than existing systems can fully adapt.
- Critical thinking, ethical judgment, verification, and professional accountability will become more important as AI and automation generate more of the work product.
- Regulators will increasingly encounter AI-generated plans, credentials, documentation, and decision-support tools, creating new verification and public-protection challenges.
- Digital practice will continue to blur traditional boundaries around authorship, responsible control, collaboration, and professional accountability.
- Cybersecurity, digital trust, and protection of professional information will remain important components of competent practice.

Science

- Climate, water, ecology, and resilience science will continue to expand the technical knowledge expected of landscape architects.
- Nature-based solutions, biodiversity, water systems, and climate adaptation will become more central to design standards, continuing learning, and public expectations.

Education

- Education systems will face growing pressure to prepare graduates for rapidly changing technology while preserving foundational knowledge and critical thinking.
- Enrollment volatility, rising education costs, and uncertainty in international student flows will keep the long-term education and talent pipeline under pressure.
- Alternative and modular learning pathways will continue to expand, increasing pressure to define competency independently from any single educational route.
- Closer alignment among education, professional experience, examination, and regulation will become increasingly important to workforce readiness.

Social Values and Demographics Scan

Social Values:

- **Changing Expectations of Work and Professional Life:** Younger and mid-career professionals are placing greater emphasis on flexibility, work/life balance, mental health, purpose, values, and meaningful career development.
- **Generational Differences in Professional Expectations:** Different approaches to communication, mentorship, workplace hierarchy, technology, leadership, and career progression are shaping professional culture.
- **Growing Attention to Mental Health:** Mental health awareness is influencing education, workplace policies, professional development, and expectations of supportive professional environments.
- **Need to Demonstrate Professional Value:** Professionals and regulators face increasing pressure to explain the value of licensure, professional expertise, and regulated practice in terms meaningful to the public.
- **Public Trust and Misinformation:** Public trust in expertise remains vulnerable to misinformation, polarization, and rapidly changing information environments.
- **Environmental and Sustainability Values:** Climate responsibility, water, resilience, public space, and environmental stewardship remain important values across many communities and among emerging professionals.
- **Continued Importance of Local Context:** Even as practice becomes more digital, standardized, and cross-jurisdictional, community, cultural, ecological, and site-specific conditions continue to shape appropriate design responses.
- **Changing Expectations for Public Space:** Communities continue to value parks, open space, and green infrastructure for resilience, health, social connection, recreation, and quality of life.

Demographics and Community Change:

- **Aging Profession:** Retirement of experienced practitioners is accelerating succession, mentorship, and leadership-transition concerns.
- **Aging Populations:** Population aging continues to increase expectations for accessible, safe, and age-responsive environments.
- **Global Education and Workforce Mobility:** International students and professionals remain an important part of the talent ecosystem, while recent enrollment shifts and changing immigration conditions create uncertainty for education and workforce pipelines.
- **More Diverse Career Pathways:** Career changers, nontraditional students, international candidates, and professionals with varied educational backgrounds are expanding the range of people who may seek entry to the profession.
- **Urban-Rural Differences:** Communities face different resource, infrastructure, regulatory, and workforce conditions, creating uneven access to expertise and public services.
- **Changing Client and Public Expectations:** Clients and communities are increasingly informed about environmental issues and expect responsive, transparent, and context-sensitive professional services.
- **Population and Resource Pressures:** Growth, migration, housing affordability, water availability, and changing regional demographics continue to reshape community needs.

Social Values and Demographics Assumptions About the Future

Social Values

- Workplace expectations will continue to evolve around flexibility, mental health, mentorship, purpose, and professional growth.
- Generational differences will increasingly influence leadership succession, organizational culture, communication, and the perceived value of licensure.
- Professionals and regulators will need to communicate the value of expertise and public protection more clearly in an environment of declining trust and abundant information.
- Environmental stewardship, climate responsibility, and resilience will remain important expectations among emerging professionals, clients, and communities.
- Professional organizations and employers will need to create more intentional opportunities for intergenerational learning and mentorship.

Demographics

- An aging licensed workforce will increase pressure on recruitment, retention, succession, and knowledge transfer.
- Aging populations will continue to increase demand for accessible and age-responsive public and private environments.
- International education and workforce mobility will remain important to the profession, but policy and enrollment volatility may affect the availability and movement of global talent.
- The profession will need to accommodate more varied educational, cultural, geographic, and career pathways.
- Urban-rural differences in workforce, expertise, resources, and infrastructure will continue to produce different regulatory and professional needs.
- Changing population patterns, housing costs, climate migration, and resource constraints will influence where and how landscape architects practice.

Legislative and Regulatory Scan

Legislative and Policy Trends:

- **Continuing Need for Role Clarity:** Policymakers and the public do not always clearly understand the distinct role, competencies, and public-protection responsibilities of landscape architects, keeping education and clear practice definitions important.
- **Continued Scrutiny of Occupational Regulation:** Licensure requirements continue to face questions about necessity, cost, mobility, and barriers to entry.
- **Pressure to Reduce Barriers to Licensure:** Legislators and policymakers continue to seek streamlined pathways, broader recognition, alternative qualifications, and faster movement across jurisdictions.
- **Changing Federal and State Authority:** Shifts in executive authority, agency structure, and the relationship between federal and state policy can affect board operations, regulatory authority, and professional requirements.
- **Government Modernization and Consolidation:** Licensing functions may be reorganized, consolidated, or modernized, affecting board independence, funding, technology, and operational clarity.

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

- **Policy Volatility:** Rapid changes in administration priorities, trade policy, environmental policy, workforce policy, and public investment contribute to uncertainty for regulators and practitioners.
- **Active Resilience and Water Policy:** States continue to consider legislation addressing disaster resilience, flooding, wildfire, heat, drought, water supply, conservation, water quality, and infrastructure, creating a changing policy environment for landscape-related work.
- **Mobility and Recognition:** Universal recognition, interstate practice, reciprocal licensing, and other approaches to professional mobility remain active policy issues.

Regulatory Trends:

- **Increasing Need to Demonstrate Public-Protection Value:** Regulators are expected to justify standards, requirements, and processes with clear evidence of how they protect health, safety, and welfare.
- **Regulatory Implications of AI and Digital Practice:** Boards increasingly need to consider AI, digital competency, credential verification, electronic documentation, and changing definitions of responsible control.
- **Alternative and Competency-Based Pathways:** Regulatory systems are under growing pressure to recognize varied routes to competency while maintaining consistent public-protection outcomes.
- **Licensure Cost and Accessibility:** The cumulative cost and complexity of education, experience, examination, application, and continuing requirements are receiving greater attention.
- **Global and Cross-Jurisdictional Practice:** Professional practice increasingly crosses borders, increasing interest in comparable standards, mobility, recognition, and consistent competency expectations.
- **Global Professional Recognition:** International efforts continue to define professional standards, compare competencies, and support recognition and mobility of landscape architects across countries and regions.
- **Movement Toward Common Licensure Standards:** Jurisdictions continue to explore greater consistency in education, experience, examination, reciprocity, and alternative pathways. CLARB's Uniform Licensure Standard is one example of this broader movement and had been implemented by ten member boards as of September 2026.
- **Regulation in a Changing Practice Environment:** Private-equity ownership, consolidation, integrated project delivery, and emerging technologies create new questions about responsibility, accountability, and enforcement.

Legislative and Regulatory Assumptions About the Future

Legislative

- Occupational licensure will continue to face scrutiny, with policymakers seeking clearer evidence that regulatory requirements are necessary and proportionate to public risk.
- Pressure to reduce barriers to entry and expand mobility will continue, increasing interest in recognition, reciprocity, alternative pathways, and common standards.
- Policymakers will continue to need clear information about the role of landscape architects and the relationship between licensure requirements and public risk.
- Resilience, water, and environmental policy will remain active and variable across jurisdictions, influencing professional practice and regulatory context.

CLARB Environmental Scan and Assumptions About the Future

Revised September 2026

- Changes in government structure, executive authority, and agency consolidation will continue to affect board independence, operations, and regulatory processes.
- Regulatory policy will remain politically dynamic, requiring boards and professional communities to adapt to rapid changes in priorities and authority.

Regulatory

- Public-protection evidence will become increasingly important to defend and improve licensure systems.
- Regulatory frameworks will continue to lag behind technology unless boards adopt more adaptive and anticipatory approaches.
- Artificial intelligence and digital practice will reshape competency expectations, credential verification, responsible control, and enforcement.
- Alternative pathways to licensure will expand, increasing the importance of clearly defined and consistently measured competency.
- Mobility and cross-jurisdictional practice will continue to increase pressure for greater consistency in standards and recognition.
- International efforts to define common professional competencies and recognition frameworks will continue to influence global mobility and regulatory dialogue.
- Interest in common licensure standards will continue as jurisdictions seek to balance mobility, accessibility, consistency, and public protection.
- Changing ownership and project-delivery models will require regulators to pay closer attention to professional responsibility and accountability.