



# Five steps to thrive

Architects have always had an intrinsic value in improving the quality of our lives. Economic trouble won't diminish this fact, but it does signal the time for architects to demonstrate their relative value to clients and potential clients as they review their future budgets and plans.



**The American  
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of Architects**



## Step 1: Get your talking points ready

Start with the AIA Message Book, supported by research and developed with members, which offers you proof points, statistics, and anecdotes to customize for client conversations. There are several narratives that resonate with public audiences, which the message book covers, and in these extraordinary times, here are some ways they may be adapted:

- Architects are uniquely positioned to align human health, climate health, and design thinking to improve lives.
- Architects have a vital role to play in the economic recovery of cities, states, and nations. They also have a vital role to play in forging a new era of public health awareness and risk mitigation.
- This is a time for architects to thrive in a challenging economic climate, but it is no time to ignore the dangerous ecological crisis. By taking action on every project to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate inefficiencies in energy usage, you and your client can make a big difference.



## Step 2: See things like a client sees things, then help them see things as you see things

Client satisfaction is the heart of any creative brief, and there's a qualitative narrative about perception and optics that is just as important as price per square foot or return on investment. Here are some key ways of framing your approach:

- Design is key to creating better health in buildings and communities.
- Design results in quicker recovery times in hospitals.
- Design results in better learning outcomes in schools.
- Design results in lower incidence of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.



### Step 3: Make the call

Referrals and steady clients form the backbone of successful practices, so get your Rolodex out (or sign in to your favorite video platform) and start dialing.

- Their anxieties about reopening are your anxieties. Be their partner and their calm, confident advisor.
- Have some key observations ready about how other clients of the same size, industry, and location might be thinking about those anxieties and about their plans to reopen.
- Offer information about local ordinances related to construction activity or options related to available financing.
- Share what you know from architects in other cities and states where businesses have begun to answer the “what’s next” question and reopen to workers, customers, and their own clients.



### Step 4: Make some recommendations

Your clients will have, at a minimum, new guidelines to follow or rules to implement, not to mention tenants, workers, or children to accommodate. Understand that pressure and see your involvement as a short-term and long-term partner.

- Think about the next two months as the time to offer a series of short-term tactics for your clients to normalize, institute new health standards, and welcome back students, residents, or workers.
- Then, think about the next 12 months as the time to offer clients a long-term strategy to regain control of their financial situations, turn a profit (however modest), and institute permanent changes in spaces, configurations, or even entire physical plants.
- Materiality, hardware, and the “software” of furnishings promise to be important areas for innovation. As an architect, you might see this as an opportunity to expand your industrial design and furniture design capabilities, too. If not, you will certainly find these to be vital areas for research on antimicrobial properties, durability, and flexibility.



## Step 5: Be ready for “construction ready”

Continuing design work now to have construction-ready projects as we all emerge from this uncertain time will benefit your clients, even if their budgets have been slashed and their business cycles have been disrupted.

- Be flexible in the materials or equipment you source by specifying multiple options, allowing proposed substitutions, and welcoming “the unexpected” as an opportunity.
  - Keep in contact with suppliers for updates on those products and materials, and find creative ways to compromise.
  - Double down on locally manufactured products and materials. It’s a shorter physical distance to you and your site, it’s a vital show of support for your community, and it’s better for the environment.
  - Familiarize yourself with state-, county-, and even city-issued guidelines on health and safety.
- Prepare yourself and your client for possible backlogs with code officials.
  - Prepare your own firm’s safety protocols to protect you and your staff on site visits, and make sure your clients have received those protocols, too.