Preliminary Review of the Canadian Alternative

Independent Consultant's Report on Findings by

Daniel Zanth

Prepared for

ARIDO

Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario

August 29, 2023

Author's Profile and Acknowledgement of Potential Biases

Author's Profile

Daniel Zanth, an independent consultant with over two decades of experience in adult learning, accreditation, and competency assessment, is the author of this report. He has worked with numerous organizations to design, develop, and implement competency assessments within professional credentialing programs.

Daniel has maintained a long-standing association with ARIDO, including co-chairing the Alternative Pathways Task Force in 2014. He authored a report recommending a shift to competency-based assessment, along with the adoption of fair access principles. Daniel led the development of both the Intern Competencies Review System (ICRS)™ and the Interior Design Experience Requirement (IDER)™. Currently, he is leading the development of ARIDO's Canadian Alternative, which will serve as a new option to satisfy the final qualifications requirement to be completed in the registration path.

Acknowledgement of Potential Biases

With over two decades in the professional credentialing field, Daniel is well-versed in designing, developing, and implementing competency assessments within professional credentialing programs. He acknowledges the potential for biases, such as confirmation bias, ownership bias, authority bias, and status quo bias, which may stem from his longstanding involvement in the field. To mitigate these biases and ensure objectivity, Daniel:

- Seeks diverse feedback and consults multiple sources of information to counter confirmation bias.
- Regularly evaluates his assumptions and decisions to minimize ownership bias and attachment to pre-existing ideas.
- Remains open to new ideas, approaches, and perspectives, and actively challenges his preconceptions.
- Transparently documents his decision-making process and rationale.

Daniel continuously engages in professional development to stay informed of the latest trends and best practices in the field. He is committed to fairness, rigor, and transparency, ensuring his reviews and recommendations are evidence-based and unbiased. As the lead consultant for the IDER and co-author of its white paper, Daniel strives to uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism.

Recommendations for Report Dissemination

Daniel is committed to presenting an unbiased and balanced analysis. He will submit this report directly to the ARIDO Board of Management, and recommends that the report be made fully accessible to the public.

Contents

Letter to the President and Executive Director of ARIDO

Dear President Sabrina Carinci and Executive Director Sharon Portelli of ARIDO,

I am pleased to submit the preliminary review of the Canadian Alternative, initiated in January 2023 to create a new option for ARIDO's final registration requirement. Additionally, other ARIDO-developed assessment systems have been reviewed to ensure they align with intended objectives.

Given that the ICRS, IDER, and the Canadian Alternative are each at different stages of development, separate review reports will be submitted for each.

Please find enclosed the preliminary review for the Canadian Alternative. This initiative is designed to provide applicants with a fair and equitable opportunity to demonstrate the competencies required to practice interior design while also protecting the public interest.

I extend my gratitude to the ARIDO Board of Management and the broader Canadian interior design community. Feedback received during this review from an anonymous survey of 505 respondents has significantly shaped the direction of the Canadian Alternative.

The focus of this review is to summarize stakeholder feedback concerning ARIDO's examination requirements. It aims to bring to light the firsthand experiences and qualification barriers faced by interior designers, without critiquing ARIDO or any other involved parties.

As the lead consultant, I assure you that the initial recommendations, grounded in a thorough analysis of stakeholder feedback, will be thoughtfully incorporated into the development of the Canadian Alternative to ensure fair and equitable access to the interior design profession in Ontario.

Best regards,

Daniel Zanth

August 29, 2023

Executive Summary

Introduction

Under the ARIDO/OAA Direct Regulation Model, ARIDO will be responsible for assessing whether individuals meet the requirements needed to qualify as an Interior Designer. This holds ARIDO accountable to the provincial government, the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA), and the Ontario Fairness Commissioner, ensuring that individuals have met the necessary criteria for registration into the Interior Design profession.

A core responsibility of ARIDO will be to oversee the validity, reliability, and fairness of the assessments used to satisfy the registration requirements. Additionally, ARIDO must possess the authority to alter these requirements in the interest of fair access.

In collaboration with the OAA, ARIDO has recognized the need for a Canadian option to the current exams. As a result, ARIDO has initiated a project to develop the Canadian Alternative, a new assessment option to fulfill its final registration requirement.

This report offers a preliminary review of the Canadian Alternative's step to gather feedback during its initial development. It's an essential initiative that seeks to provide a fair and equitable path to qualification. It ensures that all individuals applying to become Registered Interior Designers in Ontario have an equal opportunity to demonstrate essential competencies.

Objective

This report aims to provide an update on the Canadian Alternative's early development, share feedback from ARIDO members and the interior design community, and offer initial recommendations based on this feedback. The goal is to guide the development of the Canadian Alternative to meet the profession's needs while ensuring fair access.

Methodology

An anonymous online feedback survey was conducted in both English and French across Canada, targeting key areas such as professional background, barriers to qualification, resources, and development suggestions for the Canadian Alternative initiative. The survey reached Canada's interior design community via email lists, professional networks, social media, and provincial interior design bodies. It encouraged sharing within the community to reach non-members.

Findings

This report summarizes qualitative feedback from various stakeholder groups, including students, interns, educators, registered members, unaffiliated interior design practitioners, and members of other provincial interior design bodies.

Executive Summary

Initial Recommendations

This section summarizes the feedback survey findings and identifies five initial recommendations:

- Recommendation 1: Make it Affordable
- Recommendation 2: Ensure Relevance and Accessibility
- Recommendation 3: Provide Robust Support and Resources
- Recommendation 4: Raise Awareness around ICRS and IDER
- Recommendation 5: Humanize the Assessment Experience

Next Steps

The next steps in developing the system are also briefly described, building on the direction provided by the feedback input and demonstrating ARIDO's commitment to being transparent and engaging stakeholders in the development of a practitioner-led solution.

The Canadian Alternative assessment is a milestone for ARIDO, aimed at protecting the public interest and tailored to the Canadian context. Initial development steps and consistent feedback across stakeholder groups have shaped the approach. The five recommendations are grounded in the realities of those who have experience with the qualifications process firsthand and offer a clear direction for ARIDO. This, in turn, will contribute to the development of a qualifications system that is both effective and accessible for all.

Concluding Remarks

The Canadian Alternative is an early-stage, promising initiative aimed at enhancing the pathway to registration for Ontario's interior designers. This project, still in its formative stages, underscores ARIDO's commitment to stakeholder engagement and transparency, and demonstrates ARIDO's dedication to ensuring fair access.

Introduction

This preliminary review focuses on the initial development steps taken for the Canadian Alternative, an initiative aimed at providing a new option for meeting the final qualifications step to become a Registered Interior Designer in Ontario. The initiative emphasizes stakeholder engagement and transparency of ARIDO's self-assessment process in the design, development, review, and ongoing monitoring of its qualifications assessment systems. ARIDO uses a robust assessment development process that includes pilot testing and field testing under close monitoring. Two concurrent review reports to the ARIDO Board of Management further support these efforts. Those reports focus on the existing assessments ARIDO has developed for the education and experience requirements.

Background

Reviewing and confirming the purpose of the examination requirement is a priority that was recommended during the development of the Direct Regulation Model by the ARIDO/OAA Joint Task Force.

The examination requirement is the final qualifications step on the path to registration and ARIDO has no oversight nor involvement in the deployment or maintenance of the current exams which are used to satisfy its examination requirement.

ARIDO has not mapped what competencies are required nor determined how these competencies are best assessed in order to decide if an applicant for registration has met the final qualifications requirement.

In collaboration with the OAA, ARIDO has recognized the need for a Canadian option. In addition, among the various provincial regulatory bodies for interior design in Canada, ARIDO has committed to taking the lead on the design and development of an alternative to the current exams with the intention of making it available should other provinces choose to adopt it.

Stakeholder Engagement

For the Canadian Alternative under development, stakeholder feedback was sought through an anonymous online survey that sought to ask respondents about whether they faced barriers or obstacles in the path to qualification and how we can build a solution that ensures fair access to the interior design profession in Ontario through a Canadian option. Survey feedback from stakeholders across Canada guided the development direction and approach.

Introduction

Objectives of the Review

This preliminary review occurs during the initial development of a new assessment and serves as an early-stage evaluative process, primarily focused on gathering and analyzing user survey feedback. This step is crucial for identifying barriers, unmet needs, and opportunities for improvement within the qualifications assessment framework. The review synthesizes survey data to distill key insights, providing an evidence-based foundation to inform the design and development of the Canadian Alternative. This ensures that the new assessment option not only aligns with registration requirements and professional standards but is also crafted with stakeholder input, thereby offering a more fair and equitable route to registration.

This review aims to achieve two primary objectives:

- **Identify Barriers**
  - The intent is to identify qualification barriers by emphasizing feedback related to ARIDO's current examination requirement.
- **Guide Development Through Feedback**
  - The review aims to use stakeholder feedback to inform the design and development of the Canadian Alternative, an option intended to reduce barriers and establish a fair assessment to satisfy the final qualifications step for registration in Ontario.

Scope

This review focuses on assessing the early development phase of the Canadian Alternative.

Included
- ARIDO's examination requirement feedback survey results.
- Initial development phase of the Canadian Alternative initiative.

Not Included
- Evaluation of related ARIDO support programs that may be under development.
- Reviewing the criteria or assessments for other interior design credentials or certifying bodies.
- Examination of pan-Canadian implementation efforts and initiatives.
- Assessment of the French language translation and system implementation.
- Formal compliance review in relation to fair access legislation.

The defined scope enhances transparency in the Canadian Alternative's development by ARIDO, fostering responsiveness to feedback concerning the current examination requirement. The subsequent sections of this report will explore the survey findings and offer insights that guides our way forward as the Canadian Alternative development work continues.

- **EDI Consultant for the Canadian Alternative**
  - ARIDO engaged Dr. Fatima Samji, an Education policy researcher and consultant who advises on EDI, to study the development of the Canadian Alternative. Dr. Samji's key involvement includes:
    - Consultation during survey development and working session planning.
    - Delivering an EDI Crash Course that focuses on accreditation barriers and biases.
    - Performing a "live audit" from an EDI perspective during the development group meetings.
    - Authoring a post-project equity and inclusion report of study findings.

- **Feedback Survey in English and French**
  - A bilingual online survey was conducted nationwide to assess the current examination requirement.
  - Data was analyzed using thematic and sentiment methods, and initial findings shared with both the ARIDO Board of Management and Development Group to addressed identified barriers.

- **Conduct Reviews of ARIDO-developed Assessments**
  - Reviewed existing assessment systems to ensure they are functioning as intended and used the competencies identified as key input for developing the Canadian Alternative.
  - Completed a Final Review of the ICRS Field Testing and submitted a Findings Report.
  - Completed a Progress Review of the IDER Field Testing and submitted a Findings Report.

- **Development Group - Initial Planning Meeting, Identification of Competencies**
  - A five-member group convened for two working sessions: the first to review survey feedback and initial planning, the second to review competencies. Each session featured a brief EDI course by Dr. Fatima Samji, accompanied by "live audit" of the discussion. The group aims to reduce barriers and improve the assessment process for the Canadian Alternative.

- **Review Group - Initial Recruitment**
  - Multiple recruitment channels have been opened, and targeted outreach has been initiated for participant recruitment. Provincial-level discussions have been conducted online to clarify the review process and invite participation. A participant profile survey has been administered to capture details about the professional backgrounds of potential participants.

- **Pilot Testers - Initial Recruitment**
  - A call for pilot testers has been issued through various communication and social media platforms. Engagements with provincial interior design bodies have been initiated to elaborate on the role of pilot testers and to assist in recruitment. An online information session has been hosted to outline project specifics and eligibility criteria. The target date for finalizing the list of participants is set for June 30, 2024. Subsequently, the pilot testing phase is scheduled to take place from October to December 2024.

ARIDO's Structure, Capacity & Future Needs

Current Structure

ARIDO has a lean structure that is ready to address evolving needs. While the Canadian Alternative system is still in development and is scheduled to be finalized in 2024, staff are still engaged. Even though they do not have dedicated assignments to this system, team members have been observing key stages of its development. This participation ensures that they gain a deeper understanding of how the qualification assessments are developed, how they interconnect, and the overarching intent behind the new system and its supportive processes.

Capacity Analysis

Currently, ARIDO uses exams from a third party to satisfy the examination requirement and therefore have not built an internal capacity to handle the needs of developing and maintaining their own assessment for the final qualifications requirement. Once the Canadian Alternative has been defined in terms of assessment type and administrative model, ARIDO will need to create a staffing and resource plan in place to handle the anticipated volume of applications to complete this assessment. In the event that other provinces agree to have ARIDO handle assessments on their behalf, they will need to put an agreement in place that specifies the terms and conditions of this arrangement. This could include the number of assessments that ARIDO will be responsible for, the fees that will be charged, and the quality assurance measures that will be in place.

Future Needs

As the Canadian Alternative progresses and an assessment type and administrative model are finalized, ARIDO will need to expand the staffing available to deliver on key tasks. The pilot testing phase and field testing will allow time for ARIDO to put the appropriate staffing and support resources in place and gather feedback prior to finalizing a full roll-out of the new assessment. ARIDO is acting proactively and remains steadfast in its commitment: when the system's needs are fully defined, they will ensure optimal tool integration and equip staff with the knowledge and resources necessary to maintain and support the system sustainably.

Survey Description

Objective

The primary objective of this voluntary survey was to invite feedback from the interior design community about the current examination requirement for interior designers. The focus was to identify perceived barriers and challenges in the qualification process for Registered Interior Designers in Ontario and across Canada in order to guide the design and development of a Canadian Alternative for the examination requirement.

Respondent Demographics

- **Geographical Area**: Ontario and other provinces in Canada, including British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and New Brunswick.
- **Professional Roles**: students, interns, registered members, educators, as well as others who are actively practicing interior design but are not members of their respective provincial regulatory bodies
- **Experience Level**: Varied, from less than 2 years to over 20 years in the industry

Survey Components

- The importance of an examination requirement
- Protecting the best interests of the public
- The practice of interior design in your province
- Barriers to qualification
- Resources and support for applicants using the Canadian Alternative
- Feedback and suggestions

Methodology

- **Distribution Channels**: Email lists, professional networks, social media, and provincial bodies, encouraging sharing within the community to reach non-members.
- **Survey Type**: Online, anonymous, bilingual (English and French)
- **Data Analysis**: Quantitative and qualitative, including content, thematic, sentiment, and frequency analysis

Timeframe

The survey was administered between April 13, 2023, and May 31, 2023.

Number of Respondents

A total of 505 participants engaged in the survey, with 467 respondents based in Ontario and 38 from other provinces.

Findings —
The Importance of an Examination Requirement

What are your thoughts on the importance of completing an examination requirement for becoming a Registered Interior Designer in Ontario?

There is widespread agreement on the importance of an examination requirement and respondents recognize the requirement as crucial for ensuring competency, upholding professional standards, and maintaining industry credibility. As far as survey respondents opposed to a mandatory examination requirement, two French participants stated this should only be a requirement if a professional order is created within their province. In the English responses, three individuals made five comments against mandatory exams, with one individual responsible for three of those comments.

Amid the support for high professional standards, there is a tension for more flexibility and accessibility in the qualifications process. There was a call for a thoughtful review of the examination requirement and qualification process, ultimately balancing high standards with accessibility, inclusivity, and local relevance.

There is a demand to ensure the requirement's relevance, content, practicality and accessibility. Particular focus was placed on the format and difficulty of the requirement and costs of completing the process as being potential barriers to entry, necessitating suggestions for alternative pathways to registration, improved preparation resources, and changes in the qualifications needed to take the examination requirement.

The need for flexibility and accessibility also emerged as a consistent theme, suggesting a tension between maintaining high standards and providing equitable opportunities. To address this, several avenues for improvement were highlighted, including:

- Enhanced preparation support and resources for the requirement
- Consideration of alternative assessment methods
- Addressing stress and financial barriers

There is a clear call for more inclusive and flexible professional recognition methods that consider a broader range of experiences and competencies. and the need for a comprehensive qualifications evaluation process balancing theoretical knowledge and practical skills is needed to accommodate a diverse range of individuals. The feedback suggests a need for ensuring the requirement is made to be more accessible, relevant, and fair for a diverse range of individuals, as well as being practical and reflective of the realities of interior design practice in Ontario and Canada.

Findings —
Protecting the Best Interests of the Public

Which aspects of design practice do you think have the greatest impact on protecting the best interests of the public and should be given priority in the examination requirement?

Consistent across all stakeholder groups, several aspects of design practice are thought to have a significant impact on protecting the best interests of the public. Below is a summary of aspects of design practice that respondents thought should be given priority in the final qualifications requirement. The aspects are listed from most to least frequently mentioned by respondents.

- Building Code Knowledge and Compliance
- Health and Safety
- Accessibility and Inclusivity
- Professional Ethics and Responsibility
- Sustainability and Environmental Considerations
- Material Knowledge and Selection
- Construction Knowledge and Coordination
- Space Planning and Functionality
- Understanding of the Entire Design Process
- Collaboration and Professional Communication
- Design Principles and Practices
- Commercial and Specific Setting Design
- Experience
- Legal and Industry Standards
- Ergonomics and Human Factors
- Wayfinding and Occupancy Planning
- Use of Design Software
- Fire Safety

Findings —
The Practice of Interior Design in Ontario

How does the practice of interior design in Ontario compare to other regions, and which specific areas of design practice do you think are important to include in the examination requirement for Registered Interior Designers in Ontario?

The survey yielded insights into what respondents think should be incorporated into the final qualifications requirement for Registered Interior Designers in Ontario. A minority of respondents felt that education should be the primary focus, while some believe that the current examination requirements are either too strict or are sufficient as they are. Overall, the findings offer a comprehensive view of the multifaceted skill set required for competency in the interior design profession in Ontario.

- **Regulatory Compliance**
  - Understanding of building codes, regulations, and industry standards specific to Ontario.

- **Professional Practices**
  - Knowledge of ethics, insurance, liability, risk management, and mentorship.

- **Design Fundamentals**
  - Inclusion and accessibility in design, and universal design principles.
  - A comprehensive design process, from concept to construction.

- **Technical Skills**
  - Technical understanding of materials, climate conditions, and sustainability.

- **Specialized Design Areas**
  - Competency in commercial and residential design, including specialized fields such as renovation, heritage, and healthcare design.

- **Industry Recognition**
  - Understanding the role and recognition of the profession and interprofessional dynamics.

- **Sustainability**
  - Environmental considerations, including green design and high-density living spaces.

- **User-Centric Design**
  - Emphasis on ergonomic studies and user-based thinking.

Findings —
Barriers to Qualification

Have you experienced any barriers or obstacles that made it more difficult for you to qualify as a Registered Interior Designer in Ontario?

This section discusses the challenges and obstacles faced by aspiring Registered Interior Designers, both in Ontario and across Canada, as identified by survey respondents.

General Overview

46% of respondents in Ontario and 55% from other provinces reported experiencing barriers.

Specific Barriers

- **Eligibility and Experience Recognition**
  Challenges such as a lack of supervised work experience, unrecognized degrees, and limited access to approved supervision.
- **Financial Constraints**
  High costs of assessment and lack of employer support for ARIDO membership.
- **Workplace Challenges**
  The lack of firm support for ARIDO membership further intensifies financial constraints. Additional challenges include instances of workplace bullying, unprofessional behavior within professional associations, and discrimination in hiring practices.
- **Time Constraints**
  Balancing work, study, and personal life is challenging, especially for those transitioning careers or owning businesses.
- **Geographic Barriers**
  Inconvenient testing center locations and limited work opportunities in urban areas.
- **System Issues**
  Unclear current application guidelines, ambiguity in the grading system, current exam requirements, process of logging work hours, and user-unfriendliness of systems like the ICRS website.
- **Support and Flexibility**
  Lack of mentors, support groups, and accommodations for unique needs or disabilities.
- **Limited Alternative Pathways**
  Need for more recognized alternative pathways to qualification and a greater emphasis on mentorship, with certain types of work experience not recognized as qualifying for the required interior design hours.
- **Pandemic Impact**
  COVID-19 has led to layoffs and hiring freezes, complicating work experience requirements.
- **Language Barriers**
  Non-native English speakers face transition challenges.
- **Limited Clarity and Transparency**
  There is a general lack of clear information on the requirements for registration.

Findings —
Suggestions to Minimize Barriers

What suggestions do you have to help minimize barriers and promote a fair and equitable path for individuals seeking qualification as a Registered Interior Designer in Ontario?

This section outlines the suggestions made by survey respondents for minimizing barriers to qualification for Registered Interior Designers in Ontario.

- **Financial Accessibility**
  - **Enhance Association Support**
    Address concerns about perceived self-interest within the association and increase support benefits for aspiring designers.
  - **Promote Affordable and Accessible Assessments**
    Make assessments available in Canadian dollars and explore online options. Also, include practical aspects in the assessments.
  - **Improve Financial Support**
    Offer financial assistance or discounts to alleviate high application and exam costs, especially for new graduates.

- **Assessment and Recognition**
  - **Diversify Assessments**
    Create multiple versions of assessments instead of a 'one size fits all' approach, and reduce examination requirements where possible.
  - **Recognize Work Experience**
    Count unsupervised work and internationally gained experience toward qualification requirements.
  - **Boost Professional Recognition**
    Strengthen ties with the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) to improve professional recognition.

- **Education and Training**
  - **Early Industry Education**
    Start educating prospective designers about industry requirements at an early stage.
  - **Improve Study Materials and Training**
    Make sure study materials are not only affordable but also relevant to the Canadian context. Offer free access to industry standards and provide ongoing workshops and seminars.

- **Flexibility and Inclusion**
  - **Ensure Assessment Flexibility**
    Increase the availability of assessments and offer accommodations for test-takers with special needs. Refocus assessments on understanding core concepts rather than mere memorization.
  - **Diversify Accreditation Methods**
    Recognize alternative design education and more schools offering bachelor degrees, provide alternative routes for those with significant industry experience, and create more ways to gain accreditation.
  - **Foster Equality and Diversity**
    Implement hiring practices based on qualifications rather than race and welcome a diverse range of design professionals into the organization.

- **Transparency and Support**
  - **Enhance Clearness of Information**
    Improve information clarity on the ARIDO website, make qualifications and examination details transparent, and clarify common misconceptions about the profession.
  - **Promote Mentorship**
    Increase community support, improve availability of diverse work experience options, and accommodate the current exams as a continuing option.

- **Outreach and Ongoing Education**
  - **Outreach and Recognition**
    Implement employer incentives, social media recognition for successful completion of requirements, and continuous career education, and communicate with school boards to promote interior design as a career.

Findings —
Resources and Support for Applicants

What resources or support do you think ARIDO should offer to applicants who plan to use the Canadian Alternative to meet the examination requirement?

General Overview

Survey feedback reveals the need for specialized study materials, mentorship, affordability, and Canadian-specific content for those using the Canadian Alternative. Twelve respondents questioned its necessity, while four emphasized that it should maintain the rigor of the existing examination requirements.

Specific Resources and Support

Preparatory Resources

- **Study Materials and Guides** (174 mentions)
  Respondents often cited the need for comprehensive materials, including textbooks and online resources.
- **Courses/Classes and Workshops** (69 mentions)
  The need for preparatory courses and workshops, both online and in-person, was frequently suggested.
- **Practice Exams** (48 mentions)
  Access to practice exams was highlighted as crucial for effective preparation.

Mentorship and Professional Guidance

- **Mentorship and Guidance** (62 mentions)
  The value of mentorship by experienced professionals was often highlighted. Suggestions included more stringent requirements for supervision and the involvement of diverse designers to guide applicants.
- **Work Experience/Recognition of Experience/Work Experience Credits** (8 mentions)
  Work experience under a registered designer or the possibility of counting work experience as assessment credits were suggested.

Canadian Context

- **Canadian Specific Content** (43 mentions)
  There was a notable emphasis on the need for content in the examination specific to Canada, including knowledge of Canadian building codes and local regulations.
- **Building Codes Knowledge** (10 mentions)
  Knowledge about local bylaws and building codes were emphasized.
- **Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge/Cultural Knowledge** (2 mentions)
  Indigenous and cultural knowledge should be part of the education & examination requirement.

Communication and Transparency

- **Clear Information about Exam/Clear Communication/Guidelines** (24 mentions)
  Clear communication regarding the examination process, including the need for transparency about what will be tested and how to prepare.
- **Information and Transparency** (16 mentions)
  Respondents expressed the need for clear and transparent information about the examination and its requirements.

Accessibility and Affordability

- **Affordability and Accessibility** (38 mentions)
  Includes calls for affordable and accessible resources, including free resources, classes, and seminars.
- **Financial Support** (8 mentions)
  Some respondents suggested financial alternatives or bursaries for those in financial need.
- **Testing Supports for Learning Disabilities** (1 mention)
  The need for testing accommodation supports for those with learning disabilities was mentioned.

Online and Remote Resources

- **Online Learning and Resources** (12 mentions)
  Many respondents highlighted the importance of online learning options and resources.
- **Webinars** (2 mentions)
  Webinars were suggested as a helpful resource for exam preparation.

Collaboration and Networking

- **Group Study/Collaboration/Networking** (41 mentions)
  Group study, collaboration, and networking opportunities were often suggested as valuable resources for exam preparation.

Special Considerations

- **Language Support** (4 mentions)

  Support for candidates who are non-native English speakers was suggested.

- **Inclusion of Internationally Trained Professionals/Evaluation of Foreign Credentials** (4 mentions) A few responses suggested that regulatory authorities should assist interior designers who have immigrated to Canada.

Additional Recommendations

- **Access to Assessments and Boot Camps** (2 mentions):

  Some respondents suggested free access to assessments and boot camps.

- **Community Support** (1 mention)

  The need for blogs and a community to support young designers was suggested.

- **Professional Practice Guidelines** (1 mention)

  One response suggested the need for professional practice guidelines.

- **Institutional Partnerships** (1 mention)

  A suggested was made for partnerships with educational institutions.

Findings —
Feedback and Suggestions

The feedback around improving the qualifications process for aspiring Registered Interior Designers in Ontario can be broadly categorized into three areas: assessment development, assessment delivery, and support and resources. The emphasis is on creating a comprehensive, accessible, and transparent qualifications process.

Assessment Development

- **Diverse, Canadian-Centric Assessment**
  - Develop a diverse, Canadian-centric assessment that includes various question types, practical components, and real-world scenarios.
  - Reference local building codes and regional standards in the assessment content.
  - Collaborate with experienced designers, other Ontario professionals, and other provinces in the assessment development process.
- **Flexible Format**
  - Implement a flexible exam format, incorporating multiple-choice, case study-based questions, and possibly practical assessments.
  - Consider dual streams and an experience-based option, recognizing the value of real-world experience, including self-employment, in the certification process.
- **Accommodate Learning Differences**
  - Accommodate neurodivergent candidates by providing extra time and segmented assessment.
- **Assessment Delivery**
  - Improve assessment accessibility by creating more regional centers, remote proctoring, and online testing options.

Support and Resources

- **Study Aids**
  - Provide robust support resources, including affordable study materials, online resources, workshops, seminars, practice exams, and focused study groups.
- **Transparency**
  - Ensure transparency about the assessment format, requirements, and the details of the new Canadian Alternative.
- **Career Advocacy**
  - Advocate for better salaries, a globally inclusive examination process, and maintain control over the credentialing process.

Summary of Findings

The survey findings present a comprehensive view on the complexities involved in becoming a Registered Interior Designer in Ontario and Canada at large. There's widespread agreement on the necessity of an examination requirement to ensuring competency, uphold professional standards and industry credibility. However, there's a tension between maintaining high standards and ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. Calls for a more flexible qualifications process and alternative assessment methods were prevalent, highlighting the barriers posed by costs, limited preparation resources, and strict qualification requirements. However, there seems to be a lack of awareness among respondents about ARIDO's initiatives like ICRS and IDER that aim to improve fair access through competency-based assessments and evidence-based requirements.

Barriers to qualification are multi-dimensional, with 46% and 55% of respondents from Ontario and the rest of Canada, respectively, indicating challenges. These range from practical issues like financial constraints and work experience to systemic issues like unclear guidelines and insufficient support. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges by affecting work opportunities.

To minimize barriers, respondents suggest a gamut of strategies, including financial accessibility, diversification of assessments, improved education materials, mentorship programs, and increased transparency. Resource and support-related feedback emphasize the need for Canadian-specific content, affordability, and accessibility in study materials and exam resources. In line with the call for localized and relevant content, there is a suggestion for the inclusion of Indigenous and cultural knowledge in education and assessments.

Initial Recommendations

Based on comprehensive stakeholder feedback, the following initial recommendations are presented to set a foundational direction for the ongoing development of the Canadian Alternative. More targeted recommendations will be formulated once the assessment type and administrative model are determined.

- **Recommendation 1: Make it Affordable**
  - To address financial barriers, consider implementing cost-effective and sustainable assessment and delivery models. Review the financial implications of different types of assessments and keep to a cost-recovery model to set fair assessment fees.

- **Recommendation 2: Ensure Relevance and Accessibility**
  - Respond to calls for greater flexibility in the qualification process by examining diverse assessment formats and methods beyond traditional examinations.
  - Prioritize assessment content that meets Ontario's specific needs within the Canadian interior design landscape. Identify where adjustments may be needed in other provincial jurisdictions.
  - Increase the frequency and geographical accessibility of assessments.

- **Recommendation 3: Provide Robust Support and Resources**
  - To address the identified gaps in preparation resources and guidelines, develop an accessible, comprehensive Applicant Guide that outlines all qualification steps.
  - Train staff and designate a dedicated administrative support representative for assessment-related queries.
  - Create clear, informative support materials that detail what is being assessed and how.
  - Consider creating a centralized, free, and accessible Canadian resource hub for study materials, guides, and FAQs.

- **Recommendation 4: Raise Awareness around ICRS and IDER**
  - Due to the low visibility of ARIDO's ICRS and IDER programs, increase informational sessions and launch a targeted communication campaign that aligns with ARIDO's ongoing outreach efforts and is highlighted at industry events.

Initial Recommendations

- **Recommendation 5: Humanize the Assessment Experience**
  - Make assessment policies accessible and easy to understand.
  - Ensure key policies for appeals and accommodations are in place.
  - Produce a video introduction to the Canadian Alternative for potential applicants.
  - Schedule regular online information sessions, featuring testimonials from previous applicants.
  - Boost access to support resources for identifying potential mentors (integrate with other ARIDO initiatives; i.e., mentoring).

Each of these initial recommendations aims to reconcile the tension between upholding professional standards and ensuring fair and accessible pathways to qualification. These should be considered foundational guidelines for further development and stakeholder consultation as the assessment program evolves.

Next Steps

Next Steps in the Development of the Canadian Alternative - September to December 2023

- **Development Group (September - October 2023)**
  - Confirm competencies for inclusion in the Canadian Alternative.
  - Establish criteria to verify competency achievement.
  - Determine assessment types and administrative model.
  - Submit Proposed Assessment Model to Review Group for one or two rounds of feedback.
- **Review Group (October - December 2023)**
  - Review and provide feedback on the Proposed Assessment Model to the Development Group.
- **Public Comment Period (December 2023 - January 2024)**
  - Finalize the Proposed Assessment Model.
  - Open a period for public comment to gather stakeholder feedback.

Concluding Remarks

The Canadian Alternative is an early-stage, promising initiative aimed at enhancing the pathway to registration for Ontario's interior designers. This project, still in its formative stages, underscores ARIDO's commitment to stakeholder engagement and transparency, and demonstrates ARIDO's dedication to ensuring fair access.

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