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AIA New York’s 2030 Fund Awards \$14,000 in Student Loan Forgiveness to Six BIPOC Professionals

The 2030 Fund was created to support NOMA’s 2030 Challenge, which aims to double the number of licensed Black architects by the end of the decade.

May 21, 2026, New York, NY – AIA New York is excited to announce that the chapter has awarded a total of \$14,000 to help six aspiring BIPOC architects pay down their student loans through the **2030 Fund**, which seeks to help build a more diverse and representative profession.

The 2030 Fund was created by AIANY 2021 President **Kenneth A. Lewis, AIA**, in collaboration with the **New York Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects (nycoba|NOMA)** in recognition of the profession’s diversity problem and the unique challenges faced by young BIPOC professionals pursuing licensure. According



to [NCARB by the Numbers 2025](#), people of color remain critically underrepresented in the field, with BIPOC accounting for just 20 percent of architects nationwide. The fund also seeks to support NOMA's 2030 Challenge, which aims to double the number of licensed Black architects by the end of the decade.

The 2030 Fund's six awardees were selected from applicants across the United States. Beyond student loan support, the recipients will also receive free access to [ARE prep courses](#) organized by AIANY and an opportunity to meet quarterly with an architect mentor who will provide early career and licensure guidance.

2026 RECIPIENTS

Ashrita Shetty

Ashrita Shetty is a Bangalore-born, Brooklyn-based strategist, designer, and researcher. Her work is dedicated to helping communities and organizations imagine and enact vibrant, inclusive, and climate-friendly futures. She has held senior strategy and design roles at global firms including Gehl, CBRE, and MKThink where she led projects blending human-centered design and research, systems thinking, and multi-stakeholder collaboration in complex organizational contexts. Shetty's experience spans corporate, public sector, non-profit, and institutional clients including Google, Blue Zones, and Oakland Unified School District.

Outside of work, she has served on Open Architecture Collaborative's board of directors and as a guest lecturer and critic at local universities. Shetty is a licensed architect in India, WEDG-certified, and dabbles in digital experience design. She earned a Bachelor of Architecture from R.V. College of Architecture in Bangalore, India and a Master of Urban Design from Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Shetty identifies as a first-generation Indian American immigrant woman.

Brent Kokonya Wafula

Brent Kokonya Wafula is an artist and registered architect in Kenya who hails from Nairobi and is based in New York City. He also has over three years of experience having worked on projects based in Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, and the United States. He has more specialized experience predominantly in healthcare having worked on facilities offering imaging, phlebotomy, surgical, orthopedic and hematology/oncology services for healthcare systems such as New York's Mount Sinai and Hospital for



Special Surgery, Penn Medicine in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and Hartford Healthcare in Connecticut. He currently works at Perkins&Will as a Designer II.

Expressing his architectural research and design through culturally grounded illustrations, his work has been showcased in exhibitions and magazines in the United Kingdom and Portugal, shortlisted for and winning awards like the Drawing of the Year, the Lexus Design Award and the Diana Award. He was recently invited to participate in the third edition of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial in the United Arab Emirates. He is interested in infrastructure, healthcare and placemaking, developing practice that brings history, heritage and contextual narratives to the fore of design discourse in an equitable and empathetic way.

Kokonya holds a post-professional master's degree in architecture from Yale University. As an Ulli Scharnberg scholar, he graduated from Yale in 2024 with the David M. Schwarz Traveling Fellowship Award for his study of paratransit landscapes in Kenya and Paraguay. He pursued his bachelor's in architecture at Jomo Kenyatta University in Kenya, with a brief stint at TU Delft.

Kokonya identifies as an African man.

Emma Sumrow

Emma Sumrow (she/her), a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, is a transdisciplinary architectural designer, researcher, artist, and academic whose work explores the intersections of indigeneity, climate, psychology, boundaries, technology, and policy. Based in New York and originally from Texas, she currently holds teaching roles as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation as well as Adjunct Instructor at the Hillier College of Architecture and Design at NJIT.

In addition to other distinctions, Sumrow is a recipient of the Charles McKim Prize and the Saul Kaplan Traveling Fellowship. Her work, which reflects a critical and synthesizing approach to design, has been featured in *ELLE Décor* and will appear in the forthcoming first edition of the International Conference on Adaptive Reuse publication. Drawing on her recent experience as an Architectural Designer at Bernard Tschumi Architects, Sumrow founded studioSMRW ("studio sumrow") in 2025—a practice which aims to interrogate diverse intervention typologies as a framework for scalar experimentation. Sumrow holds a Master of Architecture from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Environmental Design from Texas A&M University.



Sumrow is a Native American female (Indigenous woman) who identifies as both Chickasaw and Cherokee; however, her tribal citizenship is solely through Chickasaw Nation due to the notoriously problematic blood quantum regulations and dual tribal citizenship policies among certain tribal nations.

Gary McGaha, Jr.

Gary McGaha, Jr. (he/him) is a New York City-based Architectural Designer with a passion for public works that build and serve community. He has worked at all phases from schematic design to construction administration for projects at various scales.

McGaha began his architectural career in Atlanta, GA and later worked in Morristown, NJ and New York City. Throughout all experiences, he has worked closely with clients and collaborators to make design endeavors a reality. He generally enjoys working with others and achieving team objectives together. McGaha believes in the power of thoughtful design to create spatial experiences that enhance the user's quality of life.

McGaha identifies as African American.

Lauren Jian, Assoc. AIA

Lauren Jian is an Asian-American designer. Jian holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Southern California and a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University. At [dencityworks](#), she works on mixed-use and multi-family projects located in NYC that enable affordable housing and spaces for the public. Jian co-founded Architecture + Advocacy, a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Within A+A, she engages with students to explore design equity, and collaborates with local community partners on design builds in New York City and Los Angeles. Jian's work has been part of exhibitions at the Lisbon Architecture Triennale, 2024 Venice Biennale, e-flux, Columbia GSAPP and USC XPO. In her spare time, Lauren plays tennis, wheel throws, and creates ceramic sculptures.

Jian is a Chinese American architectural designer, born in Shenzhen, China, and raised in Monterey Park, California.

Wengelyn Muñoz, Assoc. AIA

Wengelyn Muñoz is a Latina architectural designer and graduate of Pratt Institute, where she earned her degree in architecture with a minor in film. Her interdisciplinary background informs a design approach that values narrative, representation, and the social impact of the built environment. Deeply committed to equity-driven design, Muñoz



is particularly focused on public and community-based projects that prioritize dignity, access, and long-term quality.

Currently, her work and interests center on public-sector projects, including the renovation of NYCHA public housing, where design can directly improve living conditions while resisting displacement. Having grown up in low-income housing herself, Muñoz brings firsthand understanding to issues of housing insecurity, community preservation, and the importance of tenant-centered solutions. This lived experience continues to shape her advocacy for architecture that responds to real human needs rather than abstract ideals.

Muñoz is passionate about sustainable design and public infrastructure that serves communities meaningfully and responsibly. She aspires to work internationally, expanding her global perspective through travel and collaboration while contributing to socially impactful projects abroad. Through her practice and seeking licensure, she seeks to strengthen communities, amplify underrepresented voices, and contribute to an architectural discourse rooted in care, accountability, and social responsibility. Muñoz identifies as a Dominican American, Afro-Latina, and a first-generation professional.

Congratulations to all our 2030 Fund recipients and thanks to our 2026 Selection Committee!

2030 Fund Selection Committee:

Harpreet Dhaliwal, AIA
Keristen Edwards, Assoc. AIA
Mark Gardner, AIA
Benjamin Gilmartin, AIA
Priyanka Jain
Jesse Lazar, Assoc. AIA
Kenneth Lewis, AIA

About AIA New York

Established in 1857, AIA New York is the oldest and largest chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), serving as the collective voice of nearly 5,000 licensed architects, allied professionals, students, and design enthusiasts in New York City.



Inaugurated in 2003 as one of the AIA's first cultural institutions, the Center for Architecture engages local and international audiences with the value, impact, and wonder of architecture. Together, we advance the value and practice of architecture to promote just and sustainable communities.

Both AIA New York and the Center for Architecture advocate for the importance of design in enhancing urban life, offering programming that fosters engagement among architects, professionals, and the public. We prioritize values such as civic engagement, equity, environmental sustainability, resiliency, technological innovation, and inspiring design.