

Dr. Jessica April Ward (Schleifer)

Founder IDEA Studio x Workshop LLC.

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PROFILE

Educator, published researcher, policy and program strategist with a PhD in Urban Planning & Environmental Policy. Over 20 years of experience designing and implementing federally funded housing, resilience, and community development initiatives. Over a decade of experience in architecture and construction science education, interdisciplinary research, and applied practice. Work focuses on regenerative regionalism, disaster recovery housing, infrastructure, and integrated environmental policy within the built environment. Principal Investigator on federally funded research and founder of IDEA Studio x Workshop LLC, a multidisciplinary design and consulting practice.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Urban Planning and Environmental Policy

Texas Southern University, Barbara Jordan Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs
Houston, Texas, May 12, 2023

Master of Architecture

Arizona State University, the Design School

Capstone Project: *Rwanda: Regenerative Regionalism: Healing Environments in the Great Lakes Region of Africa*. Tempe, Arizona, May 3, 2012

Bachelor of Arts in the Built Environment

Arizona State University, the Design School, Tempe, Arizona

(transfer credits from University of South Florida, School of Architecture and Community Design; + Ringling School of Art and Design, Sarasota, Florida)

Pine View School for the Gifted. Sarasota, Florida

CORE COMPETENCIES

- Educator, Design Policy Development & Implementation
- Program Design, Evaluation & Public Sector Strategy
- Housing, Climate Resilience & Environmental Justice Policy
- Federal Grant Management & Compliance (HUD, DOE, NASEM)
- Cross-Sector Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement
- Intergovernmental Coordination (Local, State, Federal)
- Data-Driven Decision Making and Evidence-Based Decision Making
- Public Communication, Technical Writing and Briefing Development
- Leadership, Mentorship, and Program Oversight

HIGHLIGHTS

- Principal Investigator on over \$1.3M in federally funded research and implementation programs
- Led housing and resilience initiatives at the intersection of environmental policy, community development, and disaster recovery
- Developed compliance and implementation frameworks used by developers, nonprofit organizations, public stakeholders, and the City of Houston
- Over 20 years of experience bridging policy, design, and construction in real-world applications

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor of Architecture & Construction Science

Prairie View A&M University | Prairie View | 2015–2025

- Led applied research, federally funded programs, and community-based initiatives focused on civic infrastructure, housing policy, climate resilience, and environmental justice
- Directed interdisciplinary instruction in environmental systems, sustainable development, and policy-integrated design
- Principal Investigator, U.S. Department of Education Title III Grant (\$600,000): Oversaw program design, construction, compliance, reporting, and cross-institutional implementation of Micro-Grid House 360 on campus
- Principal Investigator, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine – Gulf Research Program (\$750,000): Advanced research in climate resilience and environmental justice
- Managed grant-funded research teams, budgets, deliverables, and reporting processes across interdisciplinary stakeholders
- Developed curriculum translating environmental regulations and policy frameworks into applied development, design, and compliance strategies
- Mentored students and research assistants in environmental compliance, building performance, and community-based implementation

Research Infrastructure and Lab Development:

- Established and led design and construction of campus learning facility, sustainability and building performance lab supporting applied environmental monitoring and data collection
- Conducted air quality assessment, thermal imaging, and building performance analysis to inform resilience and environmental compliance strategies in the Gulf Coast region
- Operated a net-positive energy system enabling on-site solar generation, energy storage monitoring, and distribution to adjacent campus facilities
- Coordinated interdisciplinary teams and partnerships with public agencies and community stakeholders to implement research-driven housing and resilience initiatives
- Invited participant, JUMP into STEM program (U.S. Department of Energy / National Renewable Energy Laboratory), supporting applied research in building performance, energy systems, and resilient housing design.

Graduate Research & Teaching Assistant

Arizona State University – The Design School | Tempe, AZ | 2007-2009

- Supported applied research in housing, environmental planning, and community development, including work with the Salt River Pima–Maricopa Indian Community on land use and planning analysis, design visualizations and planning research
- Assisted with data collection, mapping, and development of planning strategies aligned with community and environmental considerations

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Founder & Principal | Designers. Planners. Consultants.

IDEA Studio × Workshop LLC | Houston, TX | 2020–Present

- Practice centers on integrated design for environmental architecture and development, aligning planning, permitting, and construction with long-term resilience and sustainability goals
- Lead policy-aligned planning and development strategy for residential and community projects, integrating environmental regulations, design guidelines, and long-term resilience objectives
- Coordinated permitting-related documentation, stakeholder reviews, and regulatory compliance strategies across developers, builders, and local authorities
- Produce policy-driven compliance reports and implementation frameworks addressing stormwater management, construction practices, and environmental risk mitigation
- Developed tracking systems and reporting frameworks to support permitting and regulatory review processes
- Provided technical guidance on sustainable development, environmental systems, and resilience-focused design strategies
- Supported integration of energy-efficient, high-performance building systems and renewable-ready strategies aligned with environmental standards and long-term resilience goals
- Designed and built hurricane-ready, fortified, high-performance and energy-efficient housing strategies
- Advise developers, nonprofit organizations, and public stakeholders on aligning project delivery with regulatory policy, funding requirements, and community impact goals
- Translate complex regulatory and environmental policy frameworks into actionable development strategies across permitting, construction, and implementation phases

Current Consulting:

Houston Habitat for Humanity | Houston, TX | 2023–Present

Robin's Landing Project Manager

- Support implementation of development and design guidelines for a mixed-income master-planned community, ensuring alignment with municipal regulations, environmental policy, and long-term resilience goals
- Conduct field-based compliance assessments and produce reporting frameworks used to guide development decisions and stakeholder coordination

- Coordinated with developers, contractors, and stakeholders to ensure adherence to environmental guidelines and permitting requirements, assisted in development and implementation of quality control, architectural design and environmental review standards
- Supported the redesign and implementation of climate-responsive infill single-family housing aligned with resilience, energy performance, and environmental performance standards
- Vetted qualified builder partners
- Solar policy and sustainability integration

Past Consulting:

Architectural Designer (Federal Program Management)

Houston-Galveston Area Council (HGAC) | 2015-2017

- Contributed to a federally funded Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) pilot program delivering disaster recovery housing prototypes in the Gulf Coast region advancing housing solutions focused on durability, resilience, and long-term environmental performance
- Designed and implemented 20 prototypes aligned with federal funding requirements, local codes, and environmental standards

Assistant Director

Building Community Workshop | Houston, TX | 2014-2015

- Led community engagement and implementation support for City of Houston disaster recovery housing programs
- Coordinated delivery of federally supported housing initiatives aligned with resilience and recovery objectives
- Facilitated collaboration between public agencies, community stakeholders, and technical teams

Project Manager / Junior Architect

Neighborhood Housing Services of Phoenix | Phoenix, AZ | 2012-2013

- Managed implementation of a \$1M federally funded Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)
- Oversaw contractor procurement, bid evaluation, and budget administration
- Coordinated construction inspections and draw approvals to ensure compliance with HUD funding requirements
- Ensured adherence to environmental review processes and federal, state, and local regulations
- Collaborated with contractors, inspectors, and public agencies to maintain program compliance and delivery timelines

Facility Planner

BPLW/ ASCG Architects & Engineers | Mesa, Arizona | 2006-2007

- Assisted with land use planning, site analysis, and preparation of development proposals
- Supported coordination of entitlement and permitting documentation for educational facilities
- Conducted research and mapping to inform planning strategies and regulatory compliance

Design Review Planner

City of Mesa – Planning Department | Mesa, AZ | 2005-2006

- Supported municipal planning staff in development review, zoning research, and land use analysis
- Assisted with preparation of planning documents and coordination of permitting-related materials
- Contributed to review processes aligned with local codes, ordinances, and comprehensive planning frameworks

Carl Abbott Architects | Sarasota, FL | 1998-2000

- Supported residential and coastal architectural projects in Sarasota County
- Gained early experience working within coastal development constraints and regional environmental considerations

ENVIRONMENTAL & REGULATORY EXPERIENCE

- Environmental compliance monitoring for residential and community development
- Interpretation and implementation of local, state, and federal regulatory frameworks
- Coordination of permitting documentation and development review processes
- Stormwater management and erosion control oversight
- Federally funded program administration (HUD, DOE, National Academies)
- Development of compliance tracking systems and reporting tools

TECHNICAL & FIELD SKILLS

- Data, Mapping & Analysis: GIS-based mapping and spatial analysis, site analysis, environmental data interpretation
- Project Tracking & Reporting: Excel-based project tracking, compliance dashboards, performance monitoring, technical report writing
- Field Assessment & Documentation: Drone-based site documentation, LiDAR scanning, thermal imaging, site verification
- Environmental Testing & Inspection: Air and water quality assessment, mold inspection, building performance evaluation
- Design & Visualization Tools: AutoCAD, Revit, 3D modeling and visualization, Adobe Creative Suite
- Software & Platforms: Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), Bluebeam, Procore

CERTIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- Architect Registration Examination (ARE) Candidate
- NSPIRE Certified Inspector (HUD National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate) (2026)

- Stanford Building Decarbonization Learning Accelerator, Stanford University (2023)
- Stanford Building Decarbonization Learning Accelerator, hosted at Morehouse University (2024)
- Evidence-Based Design Accreditation and Certification (EDAC), The Center for Health Design (2019)
- Green Classroom Professional (GCP), U.S. Green Building Council (2017)
- Quality Matters – Applying the Quality Matters Rubric (GRQM) (2020)
- Quality Matters – Introduction to Teaching Online (2020)

PUBLICATION

Invited presenter, keynote speaker, and panel organizer at national conferences and housing research forums, on environmental architecture, resilience, and implementation strategies for housing and community development. Including:

Conference presentations with the **Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA)** and the **American Institute of Architects (AIA)** (2020–Present)

Ward, J. A., & Johnson, G. S. *An oral history of African American seniors seeking hurricane recovery and climate justice in the Gulf Coast*. **Environmental Justice** (2025).

Ward, J. A., & Johnson, G. S. *An oral history of African American seniors seeking housing, health, and climate justice in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Harvey*. **Journal of Public Management & Social Policy**, 31(1) (2025).

Ward, J.A. (2024). Integrated Design for Environmental and Climate Justice Research, House 360. *7th Residential Building Design and Construction Annual Conference Proceedings*, **Penn State, College of Engineering**, March, p.127. [+LINK](#)

Ward, J.A. (2024). IDEA Climate Justice Research: House 360 Prototypes. *112th American Institute of Architects/ Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) Annual Meeting Proceedings, Disruptors on the Edge*. March, p.746. [+LINK](#)

Ward, J.A. (2020). Design Studio as Integrated Living Lab for Climate Justice: Houston. *108th American Institute of Architects/ Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) Annual Meeting Proceedings, Open*. March, p.888.

Ward, J. A. *Environmental Justice Heroes of Prairie View*. In Hoston, W.T. (Ed.), *Black Profiles in Greatness: A Legacy of Prairie View A&M University*. Texas Tech University Press. (*forthcoming book chapter*)

Dissertation: *Seniors Seeking Housing, Health, and Climate Justice: An Oral History of Hurricane Recovery in the Gulf Coast* (PhD, 2023)

HONORS, AWARDS & PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

- Selected Juror, American Institute of Architects (AIA) Committee on the Environment (COTE) Awards, 2025
- AIA Design for Aging Fellowship, 2019–2020
- Texas Society of Architects Studio Design Award, 2018
(Faculty Lead / Studio Instructor)
- AIA Houston + City of Houston Council – Special Distinction, 2018
(Faculty Lead / Studio Instructor)
- City of Houston ADU Design Guide - 2021
(Faculty Lead / Studio Instructor)

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES

Hebrew: Reading proficiency

Spanish: Reading, writing, and translation proficiency