

CLEARWORKS FIELD REPORT / Q3 2026

State of AI in AEC

What firms are doing now, where useful work is emerging, and why promising pilots stall.

DESIGNED REPORT + LEADERSHIP DECISION WORKSHEET



CLEARWORKS.AI / AEC OPERATING SYSTEMS, WORKFLOW DESIGN & RESPONSIBLE AI



AEC is between experimentation and operating capability.

Chat, research, images, and drafting are common. Connected workflows over firm data—with owners, review gates, writeback, and measurement—remain the exception.

13 / 16

CLEARWORKS PULSE: EXPERIMENTING
OR DEPLOYED

27%

SMALL FIRMS REPORTING DAY-TO-DAY AI

50%

POTENTIALLY AUTOMATABLE
NONPHYSICAL A+E WORK

- 01 AI use is common, but definitions hide the maturity gap.** Surveys count different things: any tool use, regular job use, and firmwide implementation.
- 02 Firms are using AI most where it is easiest, not necessarily where work hurts most.** Chat, writing, research, and images lead.
- 03 Operational visibility is becoming a gateway use case.** Firms want current views across pipeline, workload, projects, finance, and delivery.
- 04 The real constraint is implementation.** Ownership, permissions, workflow design, professional review, administration, training, and adoption determine whether a demo becomes capability.
- 05 The frontier is moving from isolated tools to connected domains.** Stronger systems retrieve evidence, draft or compare work, route review, record the decision, and update the system of record.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

This is a field report, not a claim to represent every AEC firm. Survey populations and definitions differ; potential automation is not the same as adoption or realized value.

Four sources of signal

Public research is combined with anonymized field observation. Private evidence describes recurring patterns without identifying clients.

AEC AI Office Hours

Three practitioner sessions, attendance patterns, registration questions, live discussion, and follow-up requests across solo through large firms.

Anonymized client audits

Workflow maps, systems inventories, interviews, surveys, pain-point analysis, solution portfolios, and implementation specifications.

Discovery conversations

Private discussions with leaders asking what AI can do across design, delivery, finance, knowledge, growth, and management—not simply which tool to buy.

Industry + product evidence

McKinsey, AIA, buildingSMART, Autodesk, current product documentation, open workflow libraries, and case studies labeled by evidence quality.

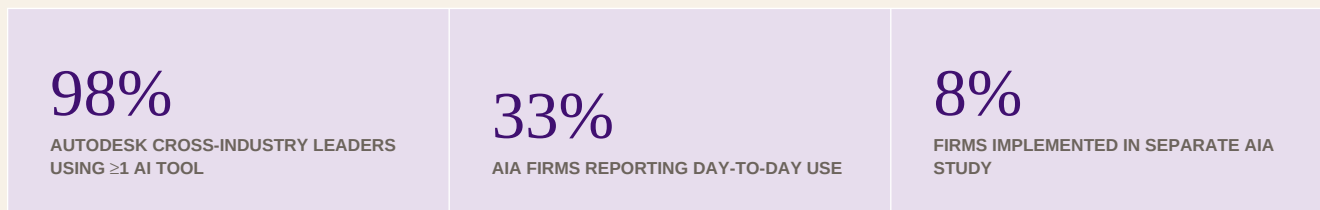
Two field signals are kept distinct. A practitioner pulse captured 16 responses about firm size, adoption stage, blockers, and risk concerns. Separately, 56 distinct people participated across three AEC AI Office Hours sessions; 14 returned. The survey describes only its 16 respondents; the Office Hours count describes participation—not firmwide adoption.

PRIVACY STANDARD

Private firm evidence is anonymized and cited as Clearworks field research. Vendor case metrics are identified as vendor-reported.

Broad use is not the same as dependable capability

There is no single honest AI-adoption rate because studies measure different behaviors and populations.



Autodesk's 2026 cross-industry survey says 98% of leaders use at least one AI tool. AIA's architecture-specific research is more layered: one-third of firms reported AI in day-to-day work in the 2024 Firm Survey, while a different AIA study found 6% of professionals regularly used AI for their job, 8% of firms had implemented it, and another 20% were implementing it.

These figures are not interchangeable. They reflect different instruments, populations, and definitions. They are best read as evidence that individual experimentation is ahead of standardized, governed, cross-team implementation.

INTERPRETATION

The adoption gap is operational: accounts, data, ownership, workflow design, review, writeback, support, and measurement—not access to a model alone.

Easy-entry use leads; connected work follows

Chat, writing + research

Draft, summarize, compare, structure, and explore. These are common because they require little systems integration.

Images + visualization

Explore material, light, atmosphere, entourage, and presentation direction while controlling what may change.

Production assistance

Prepare views, sheets, tags, schedules, exports, checklists, and structured model-data work for team review.

Review + retrieval

Flag missing or inconsistent information and make project records queryable with source links.

Operational visibility

Combine pipeline, workload, project, financial, and delivery signals into current, role-specific views.

Connected domains

Retrieve evidence, prepare work, route it to a human, record the decision, and write the accepted result back.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARY

Safe verbs are draft, extract, compare, classify, flag, assemble, populate, query, and recommend. Architects and other qualified professionals author, verify, approve, and seal.

Why promising pilots stall

The 16-response practitioner pulse surfaced overlapping constraints; counts describe mentions, not mutually exclusive groups.



- 01 **The workflow is not defined.** Source, transformation, reviewer, accepted destination, and owner remain unclear.
- 02 **The data is fragmented or untrusted.** Project, finance, pursuit, meeting, and model information live in separate systems and people's memory.
- 03 **The human is still the integration.** People re-key, reconcile, copy, and chase state across tools.
- 04 **The experiment has no operating owner.** No one owns access, connectors, support, measurement, or retirement.
- 05 **Trust is treated as a feeling.** Teams need explicit review gates, citations, change logs, approved examples, and correction paths.
- 06 **Client and project constraints arrive late.** Confidentiality, consent, IP, jurisdiction, and professional-duty questions must shape the workflow from the start.
- 07 **The firm adds another interface.** Useful systems reduce context switching and write reviewed state back to trusted records.

RISK SIGNAL

Fifteen of 16 pulse respondents named a liability-related concern. Ten said institutional knowledge lacked a clear owner. These results describe respondents, not every AEC firm.

Size changes the implementation path—not the need

Solo / very small

Protect the founder's attention. Begin with recurring administrative and pursuit work, a secure supported assistant, and simple capture into an owned record.

Small / growing

Reduce key-person risk. Connect handoffs, project status, proposals, finance, knowledge, and role-based training before habits fragment.

Mid-size / large

Govern and scale. Standardize approved environments, domain ownership, data rights, evaluation, reusable workflows, and portfolio measurement.

Small-firm advantage

Fewer systems, shorter decision paths, and direct access to the work can support fast learning. A small firm should not copy an enterprise lab.

About three quarters of US architecture firms have fewer than ten people. AIA's data also shows a size gap: large firms report more AI use and implementation than small firms. Clearworks Office Hours showed small firms as the strongest recurring known-size segment while large-firm attendance increased across the first three sessions.

Help information move; keep the accepted record visible

Where information lives

Models · drawings · email · meetings · project management · finance · CRM

What connects it

Right information · what changed · AI help · review · saved result · measurement

Where people use it

Pursuits · production · delivery · construction · operations · growth

What stays human

Accountable decisions, sensitive communication, professional judgment, approval, and irreversible actions

This does not require one giant replacement platform. It requires enough connection and ownership that proposal work, project reporting, drawing review, dashboards, and knowledge search are not five separate experiments using five different versions of the truth.

OPERATING DEFINITION

The work is not done because AI produced an answer. It is done when the right person accepts it and the team's record shows what happened.

Seven moves to turn evidence into work

- 01 Show people concrete examples.** Let the team see possibilities across design, delivery, construction, finance, growth, and knowledge.
- 02 Start small enough to own.** One proposal, report, drawing review, or billing process can matter without replacing how the whole firm works.
- 03 Measure the work as it is now.** Count time, rework, aging items, missing information, supervision, and trust.
- 04 Name the person who checks it.** Define what AI may find, draft, compare, flag, or change—and who approves the result.
- 05 Save the approved result.** Make the firm's project or operating knowledge easier to use next time.
- 06 Plan for the people work.** Accounts, privacy, permissions, training, office hours, corrections, and usage review belong in the plan.
- 07 Let the second workflow reuse the first.** Shared information, rules, review, and records turn experiments into a connected capability.

Read the evidence in context

Evidence labels distinguish public surveys, product documentation, vendor reports, technical previews, and anonymized Clearworks field research.

- 01** McKinsey, "How AI is reshaping the future of the AEC industry," July 15, 2026. Automation and value figures are projections; McKinsey analyzed more than 150 workflows across 25 AEC-related domains.
- 02** McKinsey, "Delivering on construction productivity is no longer optional," August 9, 2024.
- 03** AIA, 2024 Firm Survey Report. More than 1,200 firms; firm-size and day-to-day AI figures.
- 04** AIA, "Architect's Journey to Specification," published 2025. This study uses a different instrument and population from the AIA Firm Survey.
- 05** AIA Architecture Billings Index, May 2026 special question. 88% reported no staffing effect from AI in the prior year.
- 06** Autodesk, 2026 State of Design & Make: AI Pulse. Vendor-sponsored survey across AECO, manufacturing, and media; not AEC-only.
- 07** AIA AI Firm Toolkit, 2026. Current workflow and human-review guidance.
- 08** Chaos, AI architectural visualization workflow with Enscape and Veras, June 2026. Product documentation; capabilities are not industry adoption evidence.
- 09** Autodesk Revit 2027 Assistant technical preview. Preview status is material.
- 10** buildingSMART, Industry Foundation Classes. Open, machine-interpretable data standards for cross-system workflows.
- 11** Clearworks field research F1: anonymized AEC AI Office Hours attendance, registration, questions, and session records, July 20–August 17, 2026.
- 12** Clearworks field research F2: anonymized architecture, design-build, and construction workflow audits, interviews, systems inventories, and solution portfolios, Q3 2026.
- 13** Clearworks field research F3: anonymized AEC principal discovery conversations, Q3 2026.
- 14** Clearworks field research F4: anonymized AEC practitioner pulse survey, Q3 2026 (n=16). Results describe the respondents and are not presented as a representative industry estimate.

Canonical web edition: <https://clearworks.ai/resources/state-of-ai-in-aec-q3-2026>

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