

ARCHITECTING AGENCY

Start Here

What you downloaded, what every file does, and your first fifteen minutes - assuming nothing.

READ THIS FIRST · VERSION 1.7.2

Ten minutes, then build.

micahrobertson.com/architectingagency



Start Here

IN PLAIN TERMS

If this is your first AI build, begin here. Ten minutes is enough to understand the package and choose a starting path. If the setup already looks familiar, skim the first two tables and move on.

1. What you downloaded

The download is one zip. Unzip it once. The folder inside uses stable names, so instructions do not change whenever the version does.

Path	Open it when...	What it gives you
START_HERE.pdf	You are deciding where to begin	This guide
FIELD_GUIDE.pdf	You want the reasoning	The complete illustrated book
COPY_PASTE/	You are working in a chat window	Three complete prompts, named by job
WORKSPACE_TEMPLATE/	The AI can work in a real project folder	A ready-to-copy workspace with rules and handoff files
OPTIONAL/	A real need appears later	An auditor, research-capture skill, and a workspace check
FIELD_GUIDE.md	You need search or AI-readable reference text	The book in plain Markdown
DAY_1_WORKSHEET.md	You are naming the first five decisions	A reusable blank worksheet
MANIFEST.json and SHA256SUMS.txt	You need to check a download	The release inventory and file hashes

The version lives in the folder name and manifest. Files you copy into a project keep the same names from one release to the next.

2. Pick a lane

Your situation	Start here
You want to understand the method	Read the Field Guide's Reader Guide and "Zero to your first success"
You have an idea and only a browser chat	COPY_PASTE/01_BUILD_NEW.md
You are on a company machine or handling company or client data	COPY_PASTE/02_BUILD_ENTERPRISE.md
Something already exists and you want it inspected	COPY_PASTE/03_AUDIT_EXISTING.md
Your AI tool can read and edit a project folder	Copy WORKSPACE_TEMPLATE/, rename it, and open it in that tool

3. The first fifteen minutes

Lane A - use a chat window

This lane needs no installation. The assistant cannot touch your files, so use it to design, question, and plan.

1. Open a fresh chat.
2. Open the matching file in COPY_PASTE/ and copy the whole thing.
3. Paste it into the chat and send it. The prompt is long because it has to carry its own rules.
4. Answer one question at a time. "I don't know; help me check" is a valid answer.
5. Keep DAY_1_WORKSHEET.md beside you and fill it in as decisions settle.

After the first hour, look for three things: a tier written down, an architecture taking shape, and one irreversible action that still belongs to a person.

Lane B - use the workspace

Choose this lane when the AI needs to read files, run code, or work on the project itself.

1. Copy WORKSPACE_TEMPLATE/ to the place where you keep projects and rename the copied folder.
2. Open that folder in an AI-enabled editor or coding agent.
3. Open prompts/ and paste the short starter that fits: START_BUILD.md, START_ENTERPRISE.md, or START_AUDIT.md.
4. The AI reads GOVERNANCE.md, checks STATUS.md, fills in the worksheet with you, and waits for approval before it builds.

The template includes pointers for tools that read AGENTS.md, CLAUDE.md, GEMINI.md, GitHub Copilot instructions, or Cursor rules. Each pointer sends the tool to the same rulebook; there is no second copy of the rules to drift.

4. What lives in the workspace template

File	Job
GOVERNANCE.md	The canonical rulebook
STATUS.md	Current phase, next action, and blockers
DAY_1_WORKSHEET.md	The problem, tier, action ratings, and trust-boundary count
DECISIONS.md	An append-only record of consequential choices and their reasons
LESSONS_LEARNED.md	Incidents and the rules created from them
AGENTS.md, CLAUDE.md, GEMINI.md, .github/, .cursor/	Tool pointers to the rulebook and status
prompts/	Three short starts for build, enterprise, and audit work

On a later session, the AI reads the project state instead of making you reconstruct an old chat.

5. When something goes sideways

If the AI changes files too early, say: "Stop. Read GOVERNANCE.md again. Recommend first and wait for my approval." If it ignores the project, ask it to read the five state files and report the tier and next action. If it says the work passes, ask for the test output. No code experience? Start in Lane A. Lost? Read "Zero to your first success" in the Field Guide, then return here.

6. The optional shelf

Leave OPTIONAL/ alone on day one. The Agency Auditor reviews an existing project against the Field Guide. Research Capture turns a checked source into a small note. Workspace Check looks for missing files, unfinished setup, and obvious secret-file risks without changing the project.

7. Updates and support

The suite is free at micahrobertson.com/architectingagency, with no account, email gate, or checkout. The download page shows the current edition; compare it with MANIFEST.json and replace the whole package if yours is older. For a broken file or unclear instruction, use the contact form at micahrobertson.com. The regulatory material is a starting point, not legal advice.