

AIA and the Future of the Profession

The question is an interesting one that assumes the profession has a singular, preferred future. During my forty-year career, I have lived across the country working in both small and large firms. Having associated with many different architects, I have come to realize that while we all are architects, we pride ourselves on our individualism. Consequently, we have many different “preferred futures.” We are not a “one size fits all” profession. Fortunately, the AIA recognizes this and works very hard to respond to the needs of many different types of practices.

Never the less, the one thing that members of the profession all have in common is the desire to increase our relevance to society and the built environment. Current programs related to Sustainability, Integrated Practice, Communities by Design, Government Advocacy and Emerging Professionals go a long way in that regard.

However, if we are really talking about the future, ten to thirty years from now, the AIA must do more to identify what the future is likely to hold. Specifically, I believe that a “think tank” like “Futures Council” needs to be established. The Council should meet on an annual or semi-annual basis and retain the services of one or more recognized futurists, who will facilitate discussion and help identify tasks relevant to the long-term future of the profession.

I wish I could take credit for this methodology, but it has been utilized with great success by major corporations who have wanted to maintain their relevance in an ever-changing market place. I believe the “preferred future” of the Architectural Profession and the AIA would greatly benefit from this approach.

The Economy

Since early 2008, the Architectural Billings Index (ABI) has indicated a decline in the nonresidential sector. According to a recent forecast of the AIA Consensus Nonresidential Construction Forecast Panel, nonresidential construction will decline 11 percent in 2009 and 5 percent in 2010 with all nonresidential sectors being affected.

The actions taken by National AIA are critical to its future success and the future of the profession. Unless you’re old enough to remember the Great Depression, the today’s recession is worse than any other we have experienced. While things will get better, the experts tell us that this will take some time. The AIA should take advantage of this difficult period to become a much stronger organization than it is today.

Your question asks, “What role(s), programs, and activities should national AIA initiate in order to support AIA Components and the individual member?” The key word here is “member”, in that we pride ourselves on the fact that we are a member-based organization. We exist because of our members. We can’t let the recession put us in danger of losing many of them.

Even during normal times, our surveys show that dues are an impediment to participation. Imagine how the lack of income is affecting many professionals’ ability to maintain membership. We must take steps in order not lose these members. At Grassroots, I suggested that we allow members pay dues in installments. It would appear National has taken steps to do just that. However, it is not enough. The dues of unemployed architects should be forgiven. For those with no income, cost should not be a barrier to participation.

Statistics show that the dues for a large part of our membership are paid for by their firms. Many of these firms are also operating under economic hardship. We need to find ways to mitigate this expense so that these firms continue to support our membership.

Our Components are also experiencing economic hardship. They're struggling with major cash flow problems. National AIA needs to find ways to insure their financial health and help them, through these difficult times.

Since all of the above could create significant reductions in revenue, we need to implement budgetary constraints by transforming the way our current programs are organized, funded, and implemented.

While the AIA has done much to advance the Profession, good times have allowed us to become somewhat insular from the economies of a changing world. Consequently, we plan and budget for programs incrementally, oftentimes, without evaluating cost or member benefits. We must consolidate redundant and competing programs, and require that our Committee Structure be efficient and accountable. Revisiting the member value equation compels us to use this opportunity to retool ourselves, and the services we provide our communities and membership.

The Treasurer serves as the Chairperson of the Board's Finance and Audit Committee. The Rules of the Board state that the role of this committee is to "Evaluate the existing fiscal program's effect on long term financial strategic planning and, if necessary, make recommendations to the Board for changes that will assure the fiscal well-being of the AIA." As Treasurer, I promise to take a proactive role to insure that this charge is met.

Collaboration- Membership – Inclusiveness

While for many years the AIA has strived for a more diversified membership, in 2008 President Marshall Purnell, FAIA made it a major strategic issue for the AIA. This led to the creation of the Diversity and Inclusiveness Discussion Group, Chaired by Vice President George Miller, FAIA. The charge of this group was to "...expand the diversity of the design professions to mirror the society that we serve; to promote awareness of the contributions of architects from underrepresented racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability groups; to encourage alternatives to traditional practice models; and to provide opportunities for an ever-greater variety of individuals to become architects, take advantage of leadership opportunities and influence our practices and our professional lives."

The work of this Group led to the development and adoption of the [AIA Diversity Action Plan, 2009-2013](#). This powerful plan set a course of action and established goals that the AIA is on its way to meeting. The Board Diversity Council, chaired by Vice President Clark Manus, FAIA is currently responsible for insuring the success of this initiative. The renewed high-level emphasis on this important issue is already showing signs of success.

How we as an organization address inclusiveness goes beyond moral and ethical considerations. It could very well be the major factor in the AIA's future success as the leading professional organization in the Design and Construction Industry. Our profession is always changing. However, due to technological advances in the past ten years the change has been dramatic. We have moved from an era when architects were generalist to an era that emphasis specialization. Our clients demand it.

Government statistics indicate that the number of employees involved in architecture has risen dramatically since 1960. However, the pace of architectural registration has declined even

though the number of architectural graduates has not. This could very well have something to do with the demand for specialization and the failure of registration exams to reflect this.

Many years ago, the architect did it all. However, today our projects are full of consultants who are specialists in their respective fields. In addition to MEP and structural engineers, the list includes code consultants, waterproofing consultants, roofing consultants, lighting consultants, cost estimators, acoustical engineers, fountain consultants, hardware consultants, specifications consultants, etc. We even see specialization within the architect's office, where there are designers, project managers, project architects, technical staff, specification writers, etc., each one, not only having a different proficiency, but also specializing in a particular building type.

The AIA has recognized this phenomenon. It is seriously studying options that would allow for an inclusive membership, which would include specialists as well as others involved in the Design and Construction Industry. Regardless of the outcome, I support the AIA's efforts to address its future role, and the future of the architectural profession, in a rapidly changing environment.

Associate Members – Young Professionals

I think the best answer I can give to this question is the same one that I gave to questions presented by the NAC. Their question was:

A number of members have expressed a concern that fewer trained architects are pursuing licensure, and that our profession is beginning to shrink. There are many points of view as to why this might be: diverse skills learned in school, opportunities presented to graduates before they have the opportunity to test, and a lack of incentive/pay once an individual is licensed, to name a few. What is your take on this, and what do you feel are the best actions to take?

And my answer was:

Unfortunately, references to the decreasing number of trained architects pursuing licensure today are anecdotal. There is no way of knowing that fewer licensure candidates also mean fewer graduate architects entering the profession.

Maybe the ARE doesn't reflect the way architecture is practiced today. Thirty years ago, the architect would hire a MEP and structural engineer, and that was it. The Architect would prepare cost estimates; prepare code reviews; design the lighting, roofing and curtain wall; write the specifications; and manage the construction process.

About the same time, the Architect was cautioned to mitigate the liability associated with all of these services. In response, today's design team includes a plethora of consultants who provide the services once provided by the Architect. Construction Management began also about thirty years ago, and significantly reduced the Architect's role during the Construction Phase.

Specialization penetrated the way work is done in the Architect's Office. We now have designers, project managers, project architects, etc., each one not only having a different proficiency, but also specializing in a particular building type.

Maybe, the ARE has not kept up with the practice of Architecture and young professionals realize it. Firms give lip service to the need to obtain an Architectural License. They provide no incentive in compensation, position, or title for obtaining a license. Little is made of the achievement.

NCARB being the national licensing authority, should undertake a major study of Architectural practice today in order to determine the appropriate form licensure should take in today's environment.

Governing the AIA

The analysis and study of alternative Board Governance models did not occur until after I left the Board in December of 2007. Therefore, I cannot be sure as to why they embarked on this exercise. However, as a candidate for Treasurer I have been afforded an opportunity to attend this year's Board Meetings and have heard the discussion associated with this topic. The points both pro and con seem to be:

Pros

1. Other national organizations similar to the AIA report success with much smaller Boards of 10-18 members.
2. A smaller Board can act decisively, quickly and strategically.
3. A smaller Board would be less expensive to administer.
4. Various constituencies could be more fully represented. An example of this is the lack of Knowledge Communities representation today.
5. With a smaller, decisive Board, the Executive Committee does not need to include four Vice Presidents.

Cons

1. Given our regional organization, it is difficult to reduce the number of Directors and still have all AIA Members equally represented.
2. How are Directors from alternative constituencies selected to insure grassroots representation?
3. In order to represent eighteen regions and a significant number of alternative constituencies, can the Board be made significantly smaller?
4. What has the current governance model failed to achieve?

Based on what I've heard from Board members, it is unclear that there is a consensus on a preferred direction. Such a significant issue as governance will require considerable debate and discussion on many levels before a conclusion is met.