Kevin J. Flynn, FAIA Responses – Candidate for 2014 First Vice President/2015 President Elect

1. Positioning the Profession for the Future

The impact and duration of the economic downturn has impacted the design and construction industry in ways we are just starting to realize. While by all accounts the tide has turned, the architectural profession has yet to fully recover. Firms that have “survived” the recession are now looking ahead toward a very different future, one where they will potentially have to change their business practices, and refocus their energies to be successful in a new economy. At all levels, how can the AIA support members to network and pursue opportunities in a recovering market?

For all of our members and firms, we need to advocate and stimulate public interest in the value of architecture in our communities and the role of the architect in creating healthy and sustainable communities for future generations.

At the national level, the AIA can help its members by continuing to advocate for legislation that supports small business opportunities in the federal procurement process. On the global level, AIA needs to continue its work for members who want to expand their practices internationally by providing resources and contacts via trade missions and related events. Finally, AIA should help member firms develop leadership skills within their teams so that they can lead the highly collaborative teams of the future.

At the state level, the AIA needs to continue to advocate for laws that support qualifications-based selection processes. Putting the focus on the value that architects bring to the process and how the community benefits both the membership and their communities.

At the local level, we must help our members become more active in our communities to make the connections with potential clients and to educate the local business community about the value that an AIA member brings to their projects. Every local AIA chapter should have a working relationship with their mayor, elected officials and Chamber of Commerce.

With 80,000 empowered AIA architects working in our communities, we will truly be able to start a Design Revolution.

2. Repositioning the AIA for the Future

The success of the Repositioning requires our collective energy to shift our perspective about what the AIA can do to serve members, advance the profession, and provides a tremendous opportunity for change. If you could make only one change to the AIA as
part of the Repositioning Initiative, what would that be? Please be specific in the details and explanation of why.

It is time to do some good old-fashioned “spring cleaning.” I would put in place a process that would review our current portfolio of programs and initiatives to align them with the AIA Statement of Purpose in the Repositioning Report.

That statement reads, “The AIA is a visionary member organization providing advocacy, leadership, and resources for architects to design a better world.” As the consultants noted, there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 +/- programs at the AIA. We do not have adequate resources to successfully sustain this high number of programs long term.

Making this one change would create a more focused organization, would serve our members more effectively and would reduce costs, which in turn has the potential to reduce membership cost. In addition, knowing our priorities and where they will be delivered will allow us to make more informed decisions regarding such things as size of the board, lack of tier coordination and allocation of resources.

Creating this sharp focus within the organization will allow us to create a clearer message to our members and the public. The outcome of such an effort would create a more focused organization, one which members could believe in, especially our emerging professionals. When they see the value, they will join and we will have the opportunity to increase our membership with new, passionate and engaged members.

3. Member Resources
While the economic climate has been challenging for all in the design and construction industry, it has been especially difficult for “seasoned” professionals who are often times unable to compete in today’s technology-based delivery environment. How is the AIA positioned to support these experienced members?

We need to identify new opportunities within the profession for our “seasoned” professionals. In his book The Big Shift, Marc Friedman “issues a call for converting America’s looming midlife crisis into an opportunity to forge a new map of life, one that includes a new stage between the end of the middle years and the beginning of anything resembling retirement and old age.”

We have the opportunity in our local chapters to provide training for those “seasoned” professionals by providing resources for self-directed learning and structured courses. Working with industry partners these resources could be enhanced even more. There are numerous examples of how local components during the “great recession” helped their unemployed members. Local chapters created opportunities for their members to continue to develop or learn new skills by providing free access to technology and by providing networking events. That was an AIA that cared for its members and those
members in turn saw the value in the AIA.

Second, we need to encourage a culture of life long learning in the AIA and in our firms. We need a culture where the cross training of both the emerging professionals and the “seasoned professionals” is the norm in our practices and not the exception. The seasoned professional learns new technology and the emerging professional learns the soft skills needed to operate a sustainable business.

What does this mean for AIA? Perhaps a new membership category that keeps our seasoned professionals engaged in the AIA long beyond normal retirement age. Imagine an AIA Encore Membership category that allows them to be active and contributing members till they are 85+ but at a reduced membership rate.

4. Organizational Structure
While all can agree that a revitalized, relevant, and robust AIA to lead and support the profession is critical, there is still uncertainty whether the AIA has the will to make the significant and substantive changes necessary. In view of the findings of the Repositioning Study, what recommendations would you make about the AIA’s current service and delivery model to the membership?

There needs to be a clear focus for each level of the organization – national, state, and local. The value obtained at each level must be crystal clear to our members.

The rapid evolution of technology will dramatically change our delivery model at all levels of the organization. In order to survive in this new reality, duplication of services must be eliminated.

The cost model for these services needs to be simplified and the value proposition back to the member needs to be clearly understood at each level. We need financial models that are transparent, easily supported and fair to all. Simple eloquent systems that provide exceptional value will foster an emotional connection between the member and the AIA.

Technology already has transformed how we connect with our members; this transformation will continue with ever increasing speed. Each new generation of members will demand more and more from us in terms of technology. We must review our current capabilities and understand what is state of the art. We need to put a strategic technology plan in place and allocate sufficient resources to deliver a one of a kind user experience.

5. Emerging Professionals
Across all levels of the organization members lament the lack of engagement of emerging professionals both in practice and within the AIA. The decline of a culture of mentoring within firms and the profession is blamed for the correspondingly low
numbers of new licensees. What can the AIA do to affect a cultural shift to among experienced professionals and encourage all involved in the delivery of architectural services to stay connected with the organization?

Grace Kim, AIA in her book *The Survival Guide to Architectural Internship and Career Development* proposed a philosophy she termed LADDERSHIP. “Laddered mentoring is the idea of serving as a mentor to someone while receiving mentorship from another. There is so much diversity in professional practice and changes within project types and technologies that there is always something to learn and knowledge to share. In a field dominated by lifelong learning, and an architect should always be engaged as both a mentor and a mentee.” Grace Kim, AIA

Jason Del Pierce, AIA joined with other members in the San Francisco Chapter to start just such a mentoring program. This year Jason started a similar program in the St. Louis Chapter. The AIA and our member firms should be encouraging such programs across the country. Having our members work across the generation gap to understand each other’s strengths will lead to a stronger profession with more active members.

We need to craft the stories for those just coming into the profession about the value of being engaged in your profession. We must be open to the fact that this involvement may look different than in the past. It may be less about the association itself and more about the values we hold as a group and the power that group has in making change in the communities where we live.

We need to craft the stories of why design matters and why licensure matters. These stories need to be heard much earlier than graduation. We need to share these stories in our architectural schools from day one. Those in the academy must be our partners in sharing this story with the future members who will follow a traditional path in architecture and to those who may choose alternative paths.

A Design Revolution will need many supporters, unified behind one cause...“building a better world.” The AIA must be the home where all those who share the values of betterment are welcome. This AIA will be place where emerging professionals want to be engaged. It will connect them to the profession in new ways and will drive their commitment to the places where they work. Through these connections, they will see the value in being recognized for their achievements. Licensure will take on a new meaning and value. It will be looked at as a valuable credential about the value we bring to building or designing a better world.