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?

All practitioners need to demonstrate value and acquire new clients. We all strive to learn, to do careful research and to achieve excellence. All of us want fair compensation. At every step, at every level, the AIA can help us: Stress the value of design and stimulate demand for design by AIA members. We know this about the future for design services:

- We’ll work more than ever on existing buildings and established communities.
- We’ll be better off if our work can achieve more of our clients’ aims.
- Our clients will be more diverse and we’ll have to match them.
- Work will go to the nimble, technically adept and communications-oriented.
- Excellent design will show its value—and will maintain it.
- Facts will count more than opinions; evidence-based approaches will prevail.

The AIA can help us learn more and do more about all of these issues. We must focus on critical needs—infrastructure, housing, resource management, conservation, disaster mitigation, health care, growth, adapting existing facilities, and others. We must influence, joining with our allies to lead public discourse and shape public policies. We must also innovate: Society faces huge needs that architects can help meet—we lead by showcasing new and innovative solutions, produced by AIA members.

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.

We have to test limits—including those imposed by this question. If we were setting out to design our professional institutions from scratch, we would probably not:

- Create five separate, essentially independent organizations: One for licensed architects and associates, one for educators and schools of architecture, one to accredit degree-granting architecture programs, one to regulate the practice of architecture, and one for students of architecture.

- Accept the fact that less than half of those who teach architecture hold a license, with less than a half of those who do hold licenses belonging to the AIA.

- Cede the promotion of architecture and design to other organizations and institutions.
• Create a national professional society with hundreds of chapters, sections, regions and state organizations—each with different bylaws, governance structures, financing mechanisms and staffing schemes—letting some parts get far ahead while others lag.

• Allow government agencies and major clients to accept the lowest bidders, ignore lifecycle costs and environmental impacts, or cast aside “design” as frivolous or too expensive.

• Accept “optional” membership in our nation’s only national professional society—one that promulgates ethical canons, promotes standards of professional practice and requires continuing professional development.

• Make it lengthy and expensive for capable, dedicated people to enter our profession.

What the AIA must be: An organization to which every architect wants to belong. A place members immediately feel is their own. A place to meet someone—or to see something—interesting and useful. A showplace of innovations and great work. A beacon of ethics and high standards. Of direct value to members, professionally and personally. An organization where direction and performance are open to regular member review. The dominant influence in educating and regulating the profession. Influential in all aspects of public policy related to design. Engaged at all levels with government agencies and client groups. Representative of all segments of society. Cohesive, connected to members and active in communities. An organization that listens to its members and gives them voice.

More than one thing needs to be changed. Overall, we must use approaches that produce the best results—doing the greatest good for the greatest number. That means giving support to programs designed and implemented at the component level.

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?

Forward-leaning AIA Chapters are offering low-cost courses in CADD, BIM and other digital technologies—designed for people who want to build skills and supported by software vendors. The Institute can implement such initiatives at a national scale. The “knowledge communities” structure already reflects diverse professional needs and interests—it can readily accommodate new directions. The AIA’s “job boards” and discussion sites can also focus on the needs of experienced professionals. We have to offer programs that are both affordable and valuable. The AIA is best when it harnesses the power of groups working toward common goals and shared challenges. Focusing on new markets and expanded services is critical; the more we do to help clients meet their goals, in more places, the better off we’ll be as professionals.

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?
AIA members do want significant, substantive change—management and staff share this aim. We must break with established procedures and experiment with realigned roles and responsibilities. Our challenges are to:

-- Forge strong ties to the contracting and building product industries.
-- Engage critical client groups and user groups in all of our programs.
-- Unite with allied professionals to bolster our power and influence.
-- Attract young talent with early opportunities to lead meaningfully.
-- Address matters of social equity and need by taking concrete action.
-- Connect with political leaders and the public on key community issues.

For the membership, AIA must deliver two basic things at reasonable cost: Unsurpassed programs and expert member service. The national body must provide resources efficiently and fitted precisely to needs. One size does not fit all.

We need to rethink how we deploy our human, financial and technical assets. The key is to ensure that all resources—which come from the members, and belong to them—perform at peak for the greatest good. Experimentation and new approaches must be part of our future. This means wider latitude and greater resources for components.

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?

Some firms pay employees to prepare for the Architect Registration Examination (ARE) and provide paid leave to take it. Some firms offer bonuses, salary raises and new positions to employees who become licensed. Some firms advise unlicensed employees that continued employment is conditional upon becoming licensed within a reasonable period—and then they furnish needed tools and incentives. Some firms pay Associate AIA dues while their employees work toward licensing.

The AIA can reward firms that make such commitments, and help them to reduce costs. This includes discounts for participation in key AIA programs, reductions in Associate AIA dues for a certain number of unlicensed employees, and other incentives.

We must work with NCARB to streamline licensing and reform needlessly burdensome aspects of the process. The AIA must also encourage schools of architecture to treat licensing as a fundamental element of professionalism, along with continuing commitment to our only practice institution—the AIA.

The AIA already does much to support people who want to become architects and seek involvement. We must do more to ensure that the other institutions of our profession—the academicians and the regulators—join our efforts. For more information, please see my web site: www.vonierforaia.com.