1. The Institute has accomplished much through repositioning, and our effort to make AIA better positively continues. There is a need to address an innovative and new membership fee structure. By doing so, we will open avenues for an even larger and more diverse membership. This would help satisfy a long standing goal to attract an even wider range of collaborative, interested as well as interesting people to join our membership ranks.

Membership costs for the emerging professional as well as those who are dedicated to educating the next generation of architects, those who work in non-traditional practices such as government (including the military service) and corporate architects need to be evaluated. Every potential member licensed or not that seeks to join and help us in our journey to educate the public on the value AIA architects provide should be encouraged to do so.

The repayment of student loans normally starts within the first year after graduation. This is a critical time for this next generation, a time where they are starting their careers, and may also be starting their own families. Together, we must be committed to helping emerging professionals towards reducing their student debt.

We must help emerging professionals, who select to take a licensure track, with IDP support and ARE preparation. Reducing the costs involved and providing the time off from the office without any penalty needs to be strongly suggested, supported by the Institute and made available to these future architects.

Lastly career support for all AIA architects and vehicles to help meet critical continuing education during one’s entire career can be made available through creative component programming. This will benefit not only members who participate, but the components themselves. With this culture in place, the results will be self evident and realized in large dividends to the whole of the membership in the succeeding years and not too distant future.

2. It is a positive force to illustrate the importance of the value of good architecture. Therefore, every effort the Institute can, to continue to educate the public on the value architects provide, should be made. Our members should be proud of this first advertising campaign in nearly a decade. It is being viewed and/or listened to by millions of people all across the country and the benefits are incalculable.

The iLook Up campaign is not about us and our individual practices. More or most importantly it is about the profession in general and the goal to see AIA architects as a vital contributors to influencing community’s quality of life. Providing the strong foundation to help the public understand the value AIA Architects bring in creating places that are healthy. In their final form this will improve the prosperity of the entire population in our communities.
Responses to Questions from AIA California Council from
Jerome Leslie Eben, AIA, Candidate for Director at Large to the AIA National Board

From the homes they live in, to places where they are schooled, work, worship, play and beyond, the story of what architects bring to projects, places and communities is being told in words, pictures and music.

Members and our collaborators should refer to this current campaign at every opportunity. I know that it has already resonated with the public, by engaging it in numerous discussions with them since the advertisement first appeared just weeks ago. I have referenced it in the proceedings during a Planning Board presentation and recently added it to a Career Day lesson plan. Here the value can really resonate. Children from Kindergarten through the 12th grade are attentive to not only looking up............but all round their neighborhood and beyond.

My statements during the Candidate’s discussion at Grassroots were that not every child who listens will become an architect, but that the education provided will help them understand their environment and prepare them to become better and future clients for the next generation of AIA architects!

I am convinced and extremely proud of the iLook Up campaign, know and believe that it will help us move forward the profession, and our members should be also.

3. Over a decade ago the Institute’s Diversity Committee and the AIA Boston Society of Architects published Perspectives on Diversity and Design. The publication’s main title was 20 On 20/20 Vision. The important papers included, began with the unedited reprint of the speech made to the AIA at its Convention in Portland OR, nearly fifty years ago by Whitney M. Young Jr. AIA leaders at that time were extremely courageous to invite him. Most certainly, many minorities were not represented at this gathering. In his speech, Mr. Young assailed the membership noting that they had a long way to go to integrate the profession and the Institute.

While at the time, less than 1% of the practicing architects in the country were African American, in an earlier period as evidenced by the Institute’s own history, other minorities were if not banned, most certainly were not welcomed to join the profession or the Institute.

During my own education, there were few people of color and absolutely no women in my graduating class. I was recently invited by Frank Mruk, FAIA, Associate Dean at New York Institute of Technology School of Architecture to attend his class on professional practice. There I was extremely pleased to see that the students were from all walks of life, representing many colors, ethnicity and political views and both genders. In many visits locally at the New Jersey Institute of Technology School of Architecture and Design a virtual “rainbow” of students from all over the world.
Responses to Questions from AIA California Council from
Jerome Leslie Eben, AIA, Candidate for Director at Large to the AIA National Board

While these visits are proof that this is a positive sign of increased diversity, at probably all of our schools of architecture, we cannot relax in our work to become more inclusive and to continue the discussion.

One of the hall marks of the Diversity Committee is educating the membership. Their publication should be mandatory reading for the entire membership.

Individually each of our members has a responsibility to address the awareness of diversity. To help us do this, the Institute is in the process of gathering information on ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, and age from schools of architecture and various other sources. This will hopefully capture an accounting of important data that can help us continue to act in a positive way in developing new and better programs and initiatives. We need to continue to work towards the goal of maximum inclusiveness.

4. We can empower our next generation of architects by mentoring them and including them collaboratively in everything we do in our practice of the profession and within our component activities.

Our education evolves continuously and is a powerful force to meet the challenges people are facing around the globe. In this most current environment, every person makes a contribution, bringing value to that particular practice, its projects, clients and above all the public at large. We have and it is incumbent that we continue to value emerging professionals, including those in the first decade after their formal education, licensed or not.

While my point of view remains to advise graduates to continue their education with “on the job training,” our now improving economy allows them to do so in a broader range of practices, within the specific niche of their choice. This will provide these emerging professionals with multiple benefits from the knowledge and culture that various sizes and types of firms offer.

Supporting AIA initiatives that demonstrate the value that trained architect problem solvers bring to public interest design is one of many that can be transmitted to this next generation of practitioners. An example would be awareness and support for non-profit type architecture in taking the time to serve one’s community on a local regulatory board or on a design assistance team (RUDAT/SDAT). These proven programs help a community to “come back from the brink!” This has been proven over and over again. In addition they are the best ways for us to advocate for the profession.
5. Our effort starts with educating the public enlightening them as to the meaning of architecture and what it can do for them. Our initiatives demonstrate the value that trained architects have a special ability in solving problems and that “design matters.” I believe that we have a strong foundation on which to stand and continue to build upon when it comes to the value we bring to public realm. If anything, it is this ability to help people by imagining for them how their project will not only look, but perform over the long term of its existence. We are the knowledgeable voice and our efforts on their behalf in making better, more sustainable buildings are our business. We are there to help provide them a way to make good choices for the project that we are designing for them and that design is a positive investment.

The Institute business and firm support must be second to none for the profession. Side by side case studies of architect and non-architect projects should be developed by professional economists to demonstrate what we already know. Bringing value to the general public can best relate to housing design, we could start with housing case studies that have clear conclusions. These studies can be used to demonstrate how architects, through design, improve efficiency of construction, lower initial construction costs, lower long term costs and provide increased long term value directly to clients and building users. Showing hard evidence of a solid “business case” for the value of design is a priority of the Institute.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions and I welcome members input and will listen. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (973) 902-4900 or via E-mail jlebenaia@gmail.com