RESOURCING THE PROFESSION for prosperity

For many years, the architectural profession was unchallenged as all parts of the construction industry experienced significant growth. Over the past thirty years, the dominance once experienced by the profession has deteriorated with the maturation of the industry. We now face challenges from a wide range of factors both within and outside of design and construction. As a profession, and as an organization, we need to build upon our recent efforts to be more nimble, and more proactive, to not just maintain our presence, but expand our influence.

With recent changes to the national governance model of the AIA, we have started to address some pressing needs. The question is, where do we go from here? With a desire to refocus our profession, we need to follow the newly defined strategic initiatives of the AIA Strategic Plan. By maintaining a focused course of action, we can continue to elevate the way we address member needs. This effort should consider the following:

- The AIA needs to allow the Strategic Council to continue to develop as AIA’s forward thinking contemplative body that goes well beyond representation, and becomes the entity that addresses global trends and emerging issues from both within and outside of the industry. By better understanding issues, we are better able to provide resources that support members and our mission.

- As an organization, we need to ensure that members approach new technology and trending issues from a position of knowledge. With available resources, we have the ability to educate members about the issues affecting the profession and the way we do business. From delivery methods to trending business models, the AIA can approach these emerging discussions from a position of strength through knowledge and understanding.

- AIA member needs are as varied and diverse as is the makeup of our firms. From the sole proprietors wearing many hats to focused positions within global corporations, we each have unique needs and experiences. Our educational efforts must reflect these needs. Through well-defined educational tracks, the AIA can provide advanced programming to elevate knowledge. Beyond a focus on design and health, safety and welfare, we can provide members with information that will expand their skillsets and provide true value to their firm’s operations. From educational tracks providing advanced information on concentrated topics such as finance and business development, to offerings that include a wider focused blend of management information geared toward sole proprietors and small firms, the AIA can be the knowledge leader in firm prosperity as well as design.

- Regulations and oversight are very much part of what defines our profession. While many seek the reduction of these regulations, it is through innovative programs and education that the AIA can help members be best prepared to meet these requirements head-on. The AIA Central Valley’s PASS - Prequalified Architectural Submittal System, is an example of how we can collaborate with others to address our specific needs and interests.

We have the ability to focus our efforts and attention on member needs. Through coordination, a firm commitment to our strategic initiatives and the implementation of programming that supports members, the AIA has the ability and resources to not only help members adapt, but to also lead change within the entire industry.
INFLUENCING our clients and communities

We have all heard the description of the AIA as an organization that is a mile wide and an inch deep. We may have even experienced overlapping efforts that seem to be looking at or reviewing the same issues or concerns as other groups within the AIA. Along with this very far-reaching attempt to be all things to all people, the valuable efforts of various parts of the AIA are sometimes lost. I believe that this is true with AIA’s efforts in advancing our advocacy agenda.

While the focus of the AIA’s advocacy effort is divided at the federal and state level, there are resources already in place that can benefit all components. Through the State Government Network, (SGN), we have dedicated members from across the country who focus their efforts on affecting state government issues. SGN is advanced through AIA’s national staff on Policy and Communications, and specifically, State & Local Relations. Utilizing these resources, state components have the ability to share workloads, understand successes, and discuss threats or misguided attempts to implement regulations that may negatively affect members.

While the issues we address on advocacy do not evoke the same degree of excitement as many other parts of our mission, we do have the resources in place to assist components and members. Through State & Local Relations we can:

- Help components formulate positions on a variety of subject matter including alternate project delivery methods that properly provide support for the design professionals.

- Utilize the SGN to understand the shortfalls of legislative action taken in other parts of the country and to explore ways to improve the implementation process as it is proposed in other areas. The capability of State & Local Relations coupled with SGN can and should have a significant impact on how legislation is written and enacted.

While working to develop new regulations, or to protect our current position, AIA resources are available to help components develop a regulatory framework that incorporates the most current information. We also know however, that advocacy does not work in a vacuum and that connections with regulatory agencies, legislators and boards or committees have a significant impact on our successes. The AIA has already moved forward with programming that will help us develop our skills to better advocate for the profession. Through this year’s inaugural SpeakUp Conference, the AIA is helping members become involved in the process as advocates for the profession. Through education, we, as members of the AIA, can better position ourselves to the benefit of the entire design community. Through these collaborative and proactive efforts, our members will be better equipped to lead not only the AIA, but also our communities.

OUTREACH to our communities

I believe the effort of the AIA’s outreach program has been very successful and in many ways benefitted our membership. As members of an organization, we are proud of what we do and the effort to promote the profession in a way that demonstrates the very diverse nature of the profession has been well received. In a similar way, the effort has initiated a connection of the AIA brand with the capabilities and creativity of members of the architectural profession. The question that needs answered next is of course, where do we go from here?

With our promotional efforts, we have created a very wide reaching program that defines both architecture and the AIA. This basic connection is critical to viewers who know little about what an architect does or about what the acronym “AIA” means. But as we all know, without continued reinforcement of any communication, many will soon forget the message. It is important for us to
continue our media campaign as both a national and local effort. I believe it is important for the AIA to provide resources to our components to include locally recognized designs and architectural landmarks within ad pieces that help personalize the message. We talk about how little the public connects our work with the buildings and environments which they experience each day. This would be a great way to develop that connection. The local advertising would, in a more personal way, allow us to build the brand and the profession.

I also however believe that it is important for us to take this marketing effort one step further. While building the brand and expanding the understanding of the profession is helpful, we need to relate this effort to key initiatives of our national strategic plan. What value does building knowledge of the profession and the brand bring, if we cannot somehow relate that to both our mission and to firm prosperity? Imagine if we could leverage our marketing effort all the way to the firms, where, through developed pieces, images and inserts, AIA could provide material that would help firms compete by connecting what they do with the purpose of the AIA. This effort, at the firm level, would allow us to elevate the firm, the brand and the profession. What better way to promote the real meaning of architect, than through a concentrated effort that involves members and the Institute working together to advance a common goal.

We have experienced a successful campaign through the work already done. This effort needs to be leveraged on all levels to provide the AIA and our members the highest value on our investment. Through a continuing program that connects all of us to our basic mission, we can achieve a greater level of success while elevating the AIA, our firms and the profession.

Enhancing MEMBER VALUE

From contract documents to Knowledge Communities, the AIA has worked to provide services that meet our needs to become more effective and more prosperous in our practice. As an organization that represents a very widely focused membership however, the engagement of our members varies as significantly as does the size and makeup of our local components. While AIA components are extremely capable of developing programming and events, the harder part is actually generating active member engagement.

We all know that there is no one answer. While recent studies show that ongoing engagement results in the most satisfied members, the means of providing those opportunities vary by location and component size. While the level of service may vary, the AIA is working hard to provide better opportunities for member involvement. With the development of Digital Transformation, I believe that members will have the opportunity to better focus on their specific needs and interests regardless of where they live or practice. Combined with existing resources that can be enhanced through Digital Transformation, such as the Knowledge Communities, access to information should provide members with benefits that deliver an economic advantage. Access to knowledge is critical in our support of firm prosperity, and firm prosperity is one of the factors that is directly related to member value.

While the AIA has focused in the past on a more chapter-centric organization, I believe that recent changes can enhance member engagement. By providing concentrated educational experiences through AIAU, the AIA can provide valuable programming to any member, regardless of location or schedule. In a similar way, we need to look at how we as an organization, continue to look at our national programs to make them more accessible to a larger percentage of members. While events and programs, such as our national convention, are excellent events to attend, we need to find a better way to increase member participation. Our ability to expand access to this event is critical in our effort to better connect members with the Institute.
As noted, there is no one single way to better engage members, but our ability to reach out to members on a personal level often makes a significant difference. Through direct engagement and a concentrated effort that utilizes engaging yet simplified messaging, the AIA can work with components to ensure that members are fully informed. Whether a local event or national programming, regular and timely communications addressing Institute-wide efforts can be the most effective means of engaging members.