1. **Impact of the Economy on the Organization**

   The economic downturn coupled with the changing demographics within the profession has had a significant impact on the AIA at all levels. Fewer resources are available and membership recruitment, retention, and member services and delivery are suffering. This is further evidenced in increasing competition between local, state, and national components over non-dues revenues, and has inhibited collaboration within the organization. How can the AIA respond to these challenges?

   I agree membership recruitment and retention are critical with an aging member population and a persistent economic malaise. Members are the AIA. However, I believe first restoring the collaboration between local, state, and national components is central to attracting and maintaining a strong AIA. In fact, as a member-driven organization, that collaboration should be the very definition of our institute. When any level of the AIA suffers, the organization is considerably weakened.

   More so than an economic or demographic issue, I fear there is lack of general coordination and communication, in good times or bad, that can infect a large organization when members and staff are not vigilant. Simple operational issues, like duplication of services, competing CEU programs, inconsistent advertising, and the glut of communication tools, waste time, energy, and enthusiasm. We have begun some new programs that have promise. The CACE and AIA Board Executive Committees have begun to meet regularly at Grassroots, Convention, and in the summer, the new 4C’s AIA+CACE group coordinates common issues, and the annual CACE and Knowledge Community assemblies are being held in tandem. I believe communication is far better in just the past two years.

   Most members and component execs have long recognized the high level of passion members have for their local chapter, which thins out at the national level. None-the-less, there are certain things most efficiently done by National, and our surveys have shown members do appreciate the distinction. At the most basic level, it would make sense to reapportion more of the dues revenue to the components, while National is better equipped to look for other sources. However, in the long run, shared and coordinated non-dues income for every level would help all members.

2. **Competition in a Global Market**

   During the Grassroots Leadership and Advocacy Conference the profession was challenged to look outside U.S. boarders for new opportunities to export architectural services. Is the AIA structured to adequately support members wanting to engage in international practice, and perhaps more importantly, the challenges of design and delivery in foreign marketplaces? How can the AIA best support its members who want to practice abroad?

   After the ’91 recession, my firm took away several lessons that we hoped would help us weather future economic turmoil. Many of the recommendations at the time came from the core services of the AIA – Convention workshops, the AIA journal, and local committees such as the BSA’s International Practice committee. We did make the strategic decision to work more both in our local area, but to also extend to other countries in specific areas of our expertise.
Since then, over the past 20 years, as my firm’s has fluctuated in size from 45 to 75 and back, we have managed to maintain a strong percentage of our work overseas, and there are several areas where the AIA can (or has been) of considerable help. As with all services, there is a national and a local aspect, but more so now, with two kinds of local – here and there. Nationally the AIA has been connecting with the government, promoting Architects as service exporters. There are a host of Federal services available AIA can broker.

The recent National move to create new International Chapters has been most fortunate, and we have been able to take advantage of the newest chapter, AIA Middle East, as soon as it took off. I was fortunate to attend their CityScape conference in Riyadh last year, and this year one of my partners will be presenting on how to work in the Middle East. In parallel, our BSA International Practice committee has been holding workshops at BuildBoston, our TAG group (BSA’s local version of the LFRT) has been bringing in financial advisors regarding overseas work, and those firms with offices in other countries have been sharing contract advice (we are a BSA Kuwait resource). Many components have similar programs, and National could tap that knowledge for components with limited access to experienced firms.

3. **Member Resources**

*Conventional wisdom suggests that at the conclusion of the recession, the architectural profession will be forever changed. 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 members?*

The range of speculation regarding the “new normal” for the Architecture profession as we come out of this recession has been unusually broad, from the supremacy of the super-sized A/E firm, to the demise of the mid-size firm, to the increased chasm between the smallest and the largest. At the same time, industry promotion of BIM and IPD have exacerbated the psychic pressure on “seasoned professionals.” I do believe the AIA has tools in place, and more importantly, our own thought leaders in these areas, who are themselves seasoned in practice. In particular, the Practice Management Knowledge Community and the Project Delivery Knowledge Community are rich in information on the changing practice, and as they embrace the AIA’s KnowledgeNet online their wisdom will be easier to share. AIA needs to help the KC’s move from research to curriculum for our knowledge base.

For direct support to those “seasoned professionals,” I have great hope for the AIA Center for Integrated Practice, which started back in 2006 under Kate Schwennsen, FAIA, as President, as a great resource. At the same time, the new firm structures that come out of this recession will hopefully be more flexible, less hierarchical, and more open to different skillsets in the workplace. Ideally that seasoned professional will be sharing his or her knowledge of the craft, with an emerging professional equally passionate about the technology-based systems.

4. **Mentoring**

*Across all levels of the organization members lament the decline in the number of new licensees. Some suggest the lack of a culture of mentoring within firms and the profession is to blame. What can the AIA do to effect a cultural shift among the profession and encourage those educated and involved in the delivery of architectural services to stay connected with the organization?*

I am of the camp that feels well-intentioned aspects of the ARE testing, IDP scope and timing, and academic isolation from the practice side of the profession, have put unintended and unfortunate obstacles in the road to licensure. The demise of mentoring is just one of
those obstacles. It is unfortunate that while NCARB’s “supervisor” is a central part of the IDP program, the IDP “mentor” is an optional extra. In this case, AIA should be taking a stronger role in promoting the supervisor and the mentor. It would further help if the AIA could identify, honor, and celebrate those who do act as supervisors, and promote that role in the firms. NCARB needs to regulate, while we at AIA should nurture.

I applaud the mentoring program developed between YAF and the College of Fellows, and believe it can be strengthened with AIA support. However, I am very aware that some components face a shortage of Fellows, while others do not seem to be able to muster enough emerging professionals. Area colleges have also set up mentor programs, as have local chapters trying speed-mentoring, and even the AGC has a joint mentoring program with the BSA. In reality, if you listen to the YAF series of podcasts on Fellows and their mentors, you realize a good mentoring experience includes a continuum of key people over time, for different reasons, often not even in the firm. I wrote a recent article for YAF online, called: “Mentors – Where are They When You Need Them?” at http://peterkuttnerfaia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Kuttner-Mentoring-YAF-Article.pdf

Also, one of my editorial sketches for the AIA Board attempts to illustrate the continuum of support we need to provide: http://peterkuttnerfaia.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/AIA-Footnotes-06-Mentors.jpg In my office we have formal supervisors and informal mentors, and many teach as well, so there is another level of mentoring possible, The AIA does need to promote the return to mentoring as part of the entire approach to continuing education, as many of us may be mentors to one or more of our staff, and still be being mentored ourselves, by a partner or someone our senior.

5. **Changing Demographics**

*Evidence shows the architectural profession is “aging,” and this will have a significant financial impact on the AIA in the very near future. How can the AIA position the organization to mitigate this impact while continuing to provide value to existing members?*

This is an interesting argument, relevant for the life of our communities as much as for the profession. In truth, simple statistics show the entire American public is aging, for no other reason than the baby boom generation has moved into its 60’s and pulled the averages along with it. We are no different. Besides the average age of our members increasing, most firms have a much higher average age as well, due to the relatively recent trend of firms living generations beyond the life of the founder.

I believe what makes the aging of the AIA membership issue unique is that it is also a result of delayed licensure. Where once an intern spent 3-4 years, and could become a full member in one’s mid-to-late 20’s, now they spend 6-8 years as interns. Our youngest members are now much older, and it “ages” the overall group.

In fact, in recent years before the recession, our
Associate membership was growing at twice the rate of the regular membership. The younger members are there, but without licenses they don’t count in the average the same way.

The biggest single AIA focus in this area needs to be in recruitment, even more than retention. The diagram shown here illustrates in round numbers the stakeholders in our profession. We actually have a majority of the 106,000 architects out there as members, which is a penetration every other professional organization envies. In fact, recruitment efforts to the remaining registered non-members would not reduce the aging.

However, if you look at the number of students enrolled currently (gray), the number of Associates (green) and the number of licensed members identified as young (blue – less than 10 years), then you suddenly see the cohort of emerging professionals is actually larger than our entire membership. The good news is they are there … but the recruitment campaign we need at AIA for students, Associates, and the young Architects must be designed and directed much differently than for the typical registered non-members.

6. Governance

Despite the focus in recent years on strategic planning, some argue that the AIA still lacks focus, which reduces its effectiveness on any one priority. Recognizing there is a myriad of issues and priorities facing the organization, what are the priority issues that AIA should focus on?

Through that focus in recent years on strategic planning, and numerous workshops with members and stakeholders, two common goals have emerged - we now need to reach out to Members, in this perilous time of economic turmoil, and at the same time, we must work together at all levels to educate the Public about the value an Architect brings to the built environment. Both of these goals share the common requirements of better communication and collaboration by the AIA. The bottom line is that members benefit when the public appreciates and understands them.

To meet these goals, AIA has been gradually creating tools, which now need to be used in a coordinated and purposeful way. During Paul Welch’s tenure in DC at AIA Headquarters he “realigned” the staff organization, creating a new level of senior management more closely paralleling the Board. AIA at the National level has organized around the four strategic areas of the Strategic Plan, with teams in Knowledge, Advocacy, Collaboration, and Communication now able to link volunteer and staff efforts – and all arranged around the practice of architecture. With the hiring this week of Kathy Compton, the new VP of Communications and Marketing, Paul’s AIA Realignment is finally complete. With Robert Ivy now as CEO, he brings a level of expertise in communicating to both Architects and the Public for the past 15 years that is unsurpassed. As we complete our Repositioning the Profession exercise, we should move aggressively ahead.

7. Value of Design

There is increasing concern among AIA members that the value of architecture and design is being differentiated by a focus on “design” in the absence of the context of “practice.” What can the AIA do to bring attention to the problems of practice and project delivery in an environment of growing complexity? And, in what ways can we better recognize the majority of professionals, who are seldom published and little recognized for their efforts?

This past year the conversation about moving past the “Design Matters” mantra into an emphasis on Practice seemed to come to a head at both the CACE Annual Meeting and at the Knowledge Leadership Assembly. Many attending expressed an appreciation for the fact that
the term “design” had slipped from our conversation for many years, but that too much emphasis on that one aspect of our work confused the public’s appreciation of the full range of an architect’s service.

I find the richest wellspring of wisdom in the AIA comes from our Committee structure at the local level and from the Knowledge Communities at the National level. We do not need to look outside our organization for thought leaders—they are working away in KC’s and Committees. Most chapters recognize that the Committees are the front door into the AIA for their members, and that our strength comes from the multitude of entry points into our organization. We are many things to many people. Some members spend their careers in one area, while others move around.

The AIA needs to tell the stories of these architects, and their special vocations. When we share these stories with the community at large we meet both of our goals—we serve those members and we inspire the public. Further, if the range of these stories is sufficiently wide, we extend the public’s appreciation of the Practice.

Some of this is happening, but it’s still insider ball. Every month in Architect magazine, the first page of the AIA section is AIA Voices, and those stories come straight from the KC’s and the components. Every member profiled stretches the definition of Architect and the Practice. A similar strategy is at work on the web site, with the header on the home page revolving through four members, with links to their stories of their Practice. However, the task at hand is to get these stories to a wider public, and specifically to that part of the public who make the decisions about the built environment.

For additional information please visit my web site at www.peterkuttnerfaia.com