AIA California Council Questions

Susan Chin, FAIA, Responses – Candidate for 2013-2014 Vice President
(two will be elected)

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?

   AIA National must be the first to step up to encourage increased collaboration and communication at all levels of the Institute. The AIA should also foster collaboration across state and local components, to share programs and best practices. We depend on each other more than ever in these challenging times--pulling together, not apart is critical. However similar to others industries and what our members face individually on a daily basis, the AIA needs to adjust to fiscal realities. Many components have reduced their budgets or held the bottom line steady. By re-examining our core mission and areas of competency and expertise, we need to draw the distinction between the goals of National, region, state and local to avoid overlap and redundancy where possible and to sharpen our focus.

   At the same time, the AIA needs to incentivize membership recruitment and retention throughout the Institute to increase participation and resources. The AIA Membership Committee is the process of developing a membership-marketing plan for the next two years. The “I AM AIA” campaign targeted at students launched Fall 2011 will run through 2013 to increase younger membership.

2. **Competition in a Global Market**
   During the Grassroots Leadership and Advocacy Conference the profession was challenged to look outside U.S. borders 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?

   From my conversations with leaders across the country, primarily larger firms and mid-sized firms with a broader reach have opened doors to the global marketplace, either on their own or by partnering with firms here or abroad. Smaller firms have been able to enter this market with the aid of competitions, personal entrepreneurship and effective use of technology.

   At Grassroots Leadership and Advocacy Conference, we heard from the Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, who suggested we connect to the US State Department and the Small Business Administration to reach the global marketplace. The AIA should facilitate connecting our members with those agencies, both in terms of qualifications and procurement requirements as well as job opportunities. The AIA could offer an introductory workshop or webinar with contracting officers from those agencies for our members. The AIA International Committee is best suited to advise on programs that connect members who
are interested in this market with those who already have international practices to draw upon lessons learned.

The AIA recognizes the importance of our presence in the international marketplace for the Institute and our members both here and abroad. The AIA has a strong network through its chapters—AIA Continental Europe, AIA Middle East, AIA Hong Kong, AIA Japan, AIA United Kingdom—and members who already have established international practices. Tethering those relationships to those stateside has been a successful model for connections and effective communications. AIA Pacific Northwest Region has had a successful relationship with AIA Japan and AIA Hong Kong. AIA New York has had an extremely collegial relationship with AIA Continental Europe and AIA UK. At Convention, we will be considering a Bylaws amendment to establish an International Region and how to adequately support those members.

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?

‘Seasoned’ professionals add many types of value to any team; among these are their well-honed creative and problem solving skills, and their deep technical understanding of building construction and performance. All professions that provide a service in a market economy must continually look for ways to add value to their service, not simply by using technology.

The AIA is well positioned to support professionals who lack knowledge of computerized design methods. Some components have been working with academic institutions to offer training in REVIT and BIM and other applications to those professionals during summer months, both benefiting the academy in the off season as well as providing a valuable service to the architects. The AIA might broker deals with the software industry based on volume to offer discounts on various applications as a member benefit.

We recognize that firm consolidation and aggregation has created a pool of underutilized talent. The AIA network of practitioners at every stage of practice and construction industry affiliates can do more to provide opportunities to build new working relationships that advance the profession and for both ‘seasoned’ and emerging professionals to collaborate.

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?

There are number of reasons for the decline in the number of new licensees--emerging professionals don’t see the relevance of becoming licensed as necessary for their future goals; the number of opportunities for young professionals to secure positions where they would gain experience toward licensure has decreased; and firm owners may not proactively
encourage licensure due to financial constraints. The AIA needs an advocacy campaign spearheaded by the Large Firm and Small Firm Roundtables to encourage a culture of mentoring and to promote licensure within those firms and to develop a program to reward them for doing so. It could be a celebration on a monthly basis of those firms who achieve 100% licensure similar to Design Awards; discounted dues for a year; or small stipends to firms to assist interns in the licensure process.

We should also encourage a culture of intergenerational mentoring where emerging professionals work closely with seasoned professionals to gain mutually beneficial skills, technical or managerial, to increase the understanding of the relevance of licensure. The AIA also needs to work closely with NCARB to review the IDP process to reduce fees, broaden categories of training and experience, allow an extended time frame for emerging professionals to fulfill their requirements and/or allow emerging professionals to take the ARE sooner.

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?

While the architectural profession is “aging”, we as a society are also living and working longer. Keeping our “brain trust” members engaged and active in the Institute in substantial ways is critical to the advancement of the profession. We need their informed thinking about professional practice, problems of the day, and opportunities for the future. Intergenerational mentoring is essential to the health of our members and the profession.

The AIA also needs to concentrate its focus on emerging professionals, in particular those who have graduated recently, in order to provide services that will assist them in their development. Until they have joined a firm or other job opportunities, the AIA can provide an armature of support, low cost courses that will assist in licensure and an armature of support. The AIA must work closely with NCARB on licensing and certification requirements to assist in this effort.

In “Repositioning the Architect”, we will survey those inside and outside the AIA to determine what they seek and what’s of most value to them about their professional organization. We need to broaden working relationships across professional boundaries. We can increase recruitment of allied professionals who are engaged in the design and construction industry to join the AIA, offer programs that benefit them, and provide opportunities to connect them with architects. This is the type of working relationship that will enable us to advance the industry.

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?
The AIA’s 2011-2012 Strategic Plan identified three focus areas, *Serve as the Credible Voice, Be the Authoritative Source and Increase Member Value* and 10 priorities. These priorities are highly relevant to the future of the profession and value of our association. In my candidacy, I have focused on leadership, knowledge sharing and communication, which advance these AIA strategic plan priorities—Renew focus on and support emerging professionals; Enhance member sharing of knowledge; Provide a responsive and enjoyable convention; Ensure ease of access to continuing education tracking and high quality programs; Promote the contributions of the architecture profession.

Having our members serve as leaders in society in a wide variety of roles lifts up the profession and contributes to a stronger community. By sharing knowledge with our members, we are able to strengthen their practice and assist them in dealing with the challenges of the time. With increased communication within and outside the AIA, we bring value to our members and promote the value of the profession to the public.

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?*

The AIA currently recognizes our members for practice, education, public service and service to the Institute through awards ranging from Fellowship to Firm Awards at all levels of the Institute. The AIA highly values the importance of practice, which is required to carry out successful design, many of its programs focus on teaching the techniques of successful practice.

When I was AIANY Chapter President The Practice Management and Project Delivery Knowledge Communities came to New York and conducted conferences for architects and public sector officials to bring attention to practice and project delivery. They had identified problems and best practices on the business of architecture. The AIA and its KCs can be vigilant in advocating for changes in practice and regulations with government agencies, insurance and construction industry and trade associations.

As a former government official, I am aware of the tremendous effort required to delivers architecture that solved the problems and dealt with all aspects of practice in our complex environment. Firms that were well equipped and capable in dealing with process often were engaged for more than one project, i.e., repeat business because of their core competencies. Perhaps that is the best reward of all.