1. **Impact of the economy on the organization**

   The economic downturn, coupled with the changing demographics within the profession, has had significant impacts 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?

   We must experiment with new membership and pricing approaches. One size cannot and need not fit all—why not test customized, choice-based schemes? Why not let members select among various benefits, and among various levels or forms of involvement? There is a direct correlation between value and price; we should act accordingly. Many businesses—and many professional organizations—have learned to adjust operations and pricing to suit a more demanding, discerning and cost-conscious society. Programs and organizations must operate in proportion to available resources, of course. Value to members is the essential, underlying ingredient; the AIA must focus on how its component structure delivers worth most effectively—not only to members, but also to the public and our industry partners.

2. **Competition in global markets**

   During the Grassroots Leadership and Advocacy Conference, the profession was challenged to look outside US 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?

   As AIA members and architects shaped in the US, we stand out in global markets—not by being more like our competitors, but by being more like ourselves, by focusing on our core strengths. We set high standards for knowhow, competence, value and ethical conduct. We own experience with the legal and administrative aspects of building; our time-tested contract documents are a vital form of “best practices.” We embrace professional learning and development. We have natural, distinguishing advantages. On the AIA Board, I have driven the formation of two new offshore Chapters, in the Middle East and China, as well as the new International Region. These steps build connections between practitioners based in the US and thousands of members positioned abroad in key markets. Fortunately, young Americans entering practice—or trying to enter—are attuned to global markets. They are well equipped to work in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural environments. They are also open to such challenges. This is essential, because so much of the world’s development now occurs outside of the US. We have to support people who can compete globally—and want that opportunity—by offering stronger connections and more chances to engage through AIA networks and programs. This is not just for large firms—our offshore chapters are creating new business opportunities for many smaller 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?

At least one California component, collaborating with technology vendors, is working to give veteran practitioners low-cost training in computer-based design, production and management systems. This move to provide experienced architects with new skills and capabilities may lend itself to national emulation. Architects are not just technicians, however; there is great value in professional judgment earned through sustained experience. We probably face a prolonged period with relatively low levels of new construction, so architects will need to apply that judgment and experience in new ways—by helping clients to manage property portfolios, to make new acquisitions, to sharpen maintenance regimens, to rework existing buildings, and to make incremental capital improvements. An entire body of knowledge is available here, from the facility and property management fields. The Institute must help its members to become skilled advisors, as well as designers.

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 affect a cultural shift among the profession and encourage those educated and involved in the delivery of architectural services to stay connected with the organization?

Educational institutions are crucial. Some AIA components have established leadership positions for educators and students, actively soliciting people to fill those positions effectively. This will help to improve a situation in which relatively few educators are licensed, and fewer still are involved with the AIA. We need also to push for responsible reforms in the long, expensive path to licensing, by ensuring that all of the steps along the way serve the intended purpose—to protect public health, safety and welfare. Support from employers is important. It deserves not just encouragement, but real recognition. We need to recruit more Associate members, help them along the path to licensing, and offer them early opportunities to lead the AIA at all levels.

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?

Yes, our present membership is aging and we need to renew the organization’s base. The AIA must reflect the depth and breadth of the profession’s interests and its inherent diversity. We have to help our members to become more successful, and fashion a membership structure that fits member needs, interests and abilities.

Emeritus Architect members want and deserve sustained involvement with the profession—and they have much to offer as the Institute seeks to attract and support younger members. Let us use that.

Recruitment and retention are vital—top priorities in the 2011 CACE survey. The AIA will ensure its value by addressing issues faced by practitioners. We cannot ignore the thousands of foreign nationals who have graduated from US architecture programs. They have now returned to their native countries, with an affinity for US methods of practice and for US
architects. These are valuable potential professional allies and even clients. They in turn will value association with the AIA—so let us make it easier for them to belong.

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?

Let us concentrate on helping members get back to work and achieving success, while ensuring the Institute’s health. I see three basic priorities:

First, expand our markets. We can devote more “advocacy” efforts to securing new sources of work for members, and gaining larger shares of existing markets. The executive branches of government—at national, state and municipal levels—are where agencies and departments actually carry out building programs, control budgets and establish policies. The legislative branches are important, but the agencies that spend appropriations are closest to the action—and we have to be there, too. Many private corporations also have high stakes in achieving excellence, and the US has huge needs—transport infrastructure, affordable housing, resource management, heritage conservation, community development, disaster mitigation, and health care. We must continue to press on these issues, urging business leaders and elected officials to give them needed priority and funding.

Second, enhance the strength of member firms. The AIA must do more to help practices prosper, by focusing on the critical issues of profitability, fee-setting, and contract management. We must help members to enhance technical capacities and find new markets. Successful practices hinge on these factors. As economic conditions improve and the country returns to investing in the built environment, we must be in a position to perform and thrive—the AIA must aim resources at improving our methods of practice and market development.

Third, reinforce the Institute. The AIA is at its best when it harnesses the power of groups working on common goals and challenges. Participation in the AIA must appeal to professionals in a wide range of roles: architects in government, educators, corporate managers, volunteers in public service, community advocates, and elected officials. If the AIA is to be more appealing, we must offer programs and places for activism that cater to the desires, needs and talents of the people we hope to attract. This aspect of our diversity—our ability to accommodate a wide range of roles and interests—is a central challenge.

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 word “design” needs to recover the richness and breadth of its true meaning—as a professional discipline. AIA member firms must be at the forefront of meeting human needs through excellent design and skilled use of appropriate technology. But staying at the leading edge of practice requires staying at the vanguard of research—and, for this, the AIA must reestablish a preeminent, national built environment research unit, focusing on innovations, enhanced performance and technical excellence. The AIA also needs to link
with academic centers of excellence, engaging members in state-of-the art research, in genuine knowledge-based design.

The “Knowledge Communities” can be much more effective in gathering and disseminating research and practice tools—and recognizing member work of distinction. Communications are also vital. We can learn fast about what architects are doing virtually everywhere on the planet—good work spreads quickly, thanks in large measure to networking and communications tools. Let us use these media and networks to greater advantage, not so much to achieve recognition, but to promote AIA member work and practices.

Our digital resources require great improvement, however, if the AIA is to become a widely used Internet information resource and a go-to showcase for member work.

We must also be more forceful in stressing the issues that truly matter. Younger architects are pushing the profession—and our entire industry—to build affordably, to use resources conscientiously, and to address humanitarian needs. Even if too much building still occurs without the benefit of professional design, most cities—and the public—now realize the value of responsible urban design, livable streets, sound growth planning and cultural stewardship. Architects have long embraced and implemented these values—let us herald them.

With many young men and women serving people struck by poverty and disaster, we now have a corps of architects experienced with post-incident operations; they are expert at mitigating disaster and dedicated to working in communities facing serious difficulties.

These architects are willing to endure hardship and they know how to create value, even in the most impoverished, difficult conditions. Such deep convictions—that design truly matters, and that all people should have access to the best design we can make available to them—offer a way forward in a world that greatly needs sound solutions and capable leaders.