

Steven Lewis, FAIA

Responses to AIA Candidate Questionnaire

May 20, 2024

How can AIA most effectively balance environmental and social responsibility at the national level?

There are many ways that the two are linked. If we replace the word “responsibility” with the word “justice,” then the correlation becomes even clearer. We must engage in collaborative partnerships with allied groups who share the AIA’s values that place these challenges at the center of our mission. From a practical standpoint, I’d like to leverage the savvy of our younger members to use all available media to broadcast our values/platform and share examples of members and/or components making a difference. Utilize existing AIA resources, which are often not easily found unless one takes the time and effort to dig through the national website, to make a compelling case for the role we can play in advancing these values. But most importantly, national should expand opportunities for local components to give voice to these issues, get directly involved, and then amplify our visibility in public-facing media.

What role can each level of the AIA play in providing resources to help architects be better prepared to help clients and communities across the country?

Clients and communities are anchored in specific places, each with respective values, qualities, and characteristics. The ability of each level of the AIA to reach out and make our role and benefits more visible and understood to and by clients and communities is essential to our being hired to help them achieve their goals. I believe that it is the local chapters that have the greatest impact on telling their stories. Precedents and stories are by their nature, accessible and can be the most compelling form of advocacy, where architects can see themselves reflected in certain situations that are being portrayed. When we, ourselves, are inspired, then we have a better chance of getting our clients and communities excited about the power of architecture to improve their situations.

How can national support local chapters to ensure a coordinated approach?

First, by insuring greater transparency with respect to policy development and approval by the Board. This is necessary in order to rebuild and/or strengthen ties between chapters and their members and national leadership. Beyond that, national can take the rich resources it has and make them more easily accessible to members. National can share success stories of chapters that have instituted programs that members and the public are prioritizing. National should have a repository for anecdotes contributed by members and chapters that can be formatted with the AIA brand and made available for dissemination, both internally and externally.

Value of Design: What can AIA do to help members communicate the value of design to clients, communities, and the public at large?

National can take the lead in promoting the power of architecture in creating the legacy of our time so that future generations can refer to what we will leave behind in the built and natural environments as evidence of our societal values. Again, national can leverage the rich resources it has developed, frankly to assist members, and make them more easily accessible. National can share success stories of chapters that have instituted programs that members and the public are prioritizing. National should have a repository for anecdotes contributed by

Steven Lewis, FAIA

Responses to AIA Candidate Questionnaire

May 20, 2024

members and chapters that can be formatted with the AIA brand and made available for dissemination. Again, we should leverage the passion of our emerging professionals to help communicate the value of design. Images and stories are accessible to all and should be leveraged.

The Economy: What role(s), programs, and activities should national initiate to support components and individual members?

With the loss of Contract Documents as a source of local revenue, National can articulate and amplify the value of the services we provide, while expanding our problem-solving skills to offer clients enhanced, “out of the box” service. National should use partnerships with allied organizations to make architects more visible and essential to a broader audience. Events and initiatives that engage the public interactively could be an effective way to increase perceptions of who we are and what we do. It is critical that any national initiatives be adopted, adapted, and executed at local component levels.

Encouraging Engagement: The Members’ Voice

“If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound?” We each have interesting and compelling stories of how our gifts have translated to benefits for clients, organizations, and the public at large. Too often such contributions are overshadowed by the daily demands of practice, particularly for members who lack the infrastructure and resources to mount public relations campaigns. Putting in place (or revealing existing) structures that allow for individual members to daylight their accomplishments for public consumption is one way to elevate voices. Also, valuing the stories and experiences of our diverse membership - stories of resilience and triumph - is inspirational.

Practice: How can AIA improve coordination across the organization to better prepare, package, curate resources to support architectural practice at all scales

Related to the previous prompt, but moreover, make visible and accessible the many resources that National already has in place, such as the website, Knowledge Communities, and the Young Architects Forum. I believe that the Knowledge Communities should be socialized more among chapters and their members to encourage participation. Tapping into KC’s like Practice Management Knowledge Community (PMKC) and Project Delivery Knowledge Community (PD) will promote best practices and successful strategies that can be shared and adopted where appropriate. Additionally, make advertisements for continuing education seminars and events more compelling, such as using video messaging from well-known and/or famous people who would likely attract a larger audience.