

# Beyond Repositioning: It's time for Reconstruction

Like many chapters of the American Institute of Architects, AIA San Francisco has eagerly awaited substantive change from the national office since the announcement of the repositioning efforts at Grassroots in March, 2013.

As a busy chapter with members active at all levels of the organization (local, state and national) we have enjoyed close working relationships with both staff and leaders at all levels of the organization. We have deep respect for these leaders and our recommendations below spring from a sense of desire for organizational change directed towards achieving a more relevant and efficient organization.

The Board of Directors of AIA SF are not professional association managers— but we are a diverse group who are passionate about the profession of architecture. We hope our peers across the country read this summary and discuss it. We have not worked out all the details of how this would work- but we do know that architects are wired to consider not just what exists today but what CAN exist. We hope to provoke you, the reader, and invite you to consider the possibilities.

Our fundamental belief is that it is time to consider a different organizational model for the design profession. We believe architects and those on the path to becoming architects deserve:

- the opportunity to pay lower dues by choosing in which level(s) of the organization they wish to participate
- the opportunity to lead an organization that is comprised not only of architects, but also other design professionals
- a professional organization that also manages the licensure process, in the same way that the BAR Association operates
- a professional organization that is completely transparent- offering members open access to information about budgets and priorities
- a minimum standard of service at all levels of the organization

## Recommendations:

1. Power to the members. Allow members the choice of joining local, state or national AIA chapters. Provide distinct services at each level to eliminate duplication and provide clear member value. For example, we could imagine that the national AIA might charge for the use of the AIA or FAIA designation or that National would require membership in the national AIA to submit for a national award. We might also expect that services like Architect magazine would be a premium of membership in the national AIA but not from a local chapter---but that a member could choose to receive the magazine by paying additional dues at the national level. Under this model, all levels of the organization would set their own dues and benefits levels.

2. Lead the profession. Change the name and the focus of the organization. Integrate other design professionals into the organization and rename it: The American Institute of Architecture and Design. Build a bigger tent by embracing the changing nature of practice.

The future of the AIA is multi-disciplinary and diverse. AIA members are no longer only white men. A majority of those with architectural licenses no longer work exclusively in architecture. Today's architects design furniture and cities, products and complex systems. "Architect" is a valued profession but its definition has changed dramatically;

open the doors to those leading this change and the organization will grow. Consider creating meaningful ways for other design professionals to embrace the mission and join the AIA– at all levels.

3. Get Real About the Next Generation of Architects. The current licensing path does not guarantee the objective of providing for the health, safety and welfare of the public. It is an expensive, bureaucratic process that needs immediate restructuring. The shocking decline of newly licensed architects nationwide is causing a dramatic shift in the architectural profession. As the voice of architects and architecture, the National AIA needs to be a loud and passionate advocate for immediate and substantive change in the licensure process– or face extinction. Develop a timeline for a merger with NCARB making it easier (and hopefully less bureaucratic and expensive) to create one-stop shopping for licensure, continuing education and service delivery.

4. Set standards. Not all nonprofits are created equal and there is currently an enormous diversity of groups who call themselves “chapters.” The National AIA should set high performance standards for nonprofits associated with the Institute. These standards should include legal requirements (filing required IRS forms); member service minimums (open hours and educational opportunities) and minimum professional standards. Should groups be unable to meet this minimum service level, it would be expected that members would pay for and receive additional support from adjacent local components or state or National AIA. We recognize that diversity is our strength as designers, so we welcome a conversation about “right sizing” of chapters.

5. Be the voice of the profession. Each level of the AIA should be required to demonstrate significant public and member value through public outreach. This outreach should be in the form of content– not purchased advertising. Chapters should be required to demonstrate significant public outreach to be named a “chapter.” Require full service “chapters” to have relationships with accredited architecture schools within their region.

6. Act global. For growing numbers of architects, practice is no longer local – it is working, connecting and collaborating with partners in other countries and continents. Recognize the pace of change is changing architecture- be the source for information about global practice and actively seek and nurture a global dialogue.

We look forward to working together to reconstruct an organization better positioned to lead the profession and educate the next generation of architects.