



# Strategic Direction 2016

**AIA Minnesota** | AIA Minneapolis | AIA Northern Minnesota | AIA St. Paul

WHAT IS OUR REASON FOR BEING?

HOW CAN WE BE A STRONGER

ARCHITECTURE COMMUNITY?

WHAT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE DO

ARCHITECTS NEED TO SUCCEED?

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD

WE PARTNER WITH TO HELP ACHIEVE OUR GOALS?

WHAT CAN BE

DONE TO ENHANCE THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF ARCHITECTS?

WHAT

WILL DISTINGUISH OUR WORK?

WHAT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED AND

LIFTED UP WITHIN THE PROFESSION?

WHERE WILL WE FOCUS OUR

RESOURCES?

WHAT DO WE WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR?

HOW CAN

WE INSPIRE AND ENGAGE THE NEXT GENERATION OF ARCHITECTS?

## OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### MISSION

Our reason for being

Advancing a vital profession,  
vibrant communities,  
and architecture that endures.

### CORE VALUES

What will distinguish our work

#### Integrity

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- Soundness.
- Wholeness and unity.
- The quality of being honest and fair.

#### Inclusion

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- Ensuring openness.
- Creating environments in which anyone can feel welcomed, respected, and valued.

#### Passion

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- Boundless enthusiasm.
- Determination.
- Intense, driving conviction.

#### Empathy

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- Understanding another's situation.
- Being aware of and sensitive to others' feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Where we'll focus our resources

### STATE CHAPTER

- **Build & Mentor the Profession of Architecture**—From the first inspiration and introduction to the profession, through every stage of career growth, development, and achievement.
- **Make Architecture Accessible, Understandable & Highly Valued**—Engagement to grow awareness of and appreciation for the process, outcomes, and importance of the profession among the general public and key influencers.

### STATE & LOCAL CHAPTERS, TOGETHER

- **Collaborate to Inspire K-12 Students**—State and local AIA chapters working together and with K-12 teachers, school administrators, afterschool programs, and youth-focused nonprofits throughout Minnesota to inspire interest in architecture and the profession.

### LOCAL CHAPTERS

- **Create Connections with Local Leaders**—Proactively engage with leaders of local and regional governments, business groups, and community organizations.
- **Hold Local Events of Broad Interest**—Create local chapter events in regional centers focused on topics of interest to the profession, industry partners, key influencers, and the general public.

## WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

### 2017

- Gathering ideas for specific strategies and tactics to further our strategic priorities—from members, staff, and current and potential partners.
- Evaluation of what we do and how we do it—the impact of our programs, services, and partnerships, and allocation of dollars, staff time, and volunteer time.
- Creation of a workplan for the next several years.
- Realignment of resources to further our strategic priorities, core values, and the workplan.

### 2018-2020

- Achievement and continued evolution of the workplan.
- Progress reports to the membership.
- Periodic environmental scans and engagement with members and key partners to gain input on what's going well and what could be better.

## WHY THIS STRATEGIC DIRECTION?

**AIA Minnesota conducted extensive primary and secondary research to inform this strategic direction.** The values and strategic priorities established by the AIA Minnesota Board of Directors are driven by this research, recognizing that alignment with member and industry partner priorities and perspectives is critical to the success of the association and the profession. It is important to note that this strategic direction is in direct alignment with the AIA National 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, and that the strategic priorities identified as the focus of local chapters’ work have been unanimously approved by each local chapter’s board of directors.

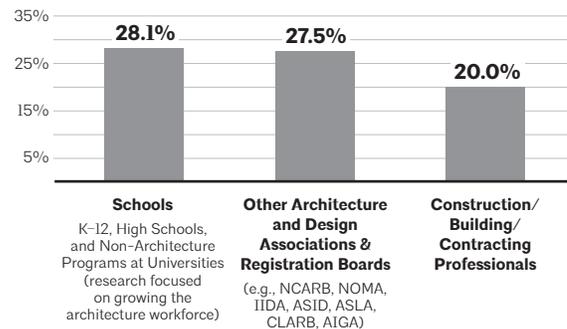
## FINDINGS FROM MEMBER SURVEY

**Member Survey:** 521 AIA Minnesota members participated in a member survey conducted in spring of 2016—a response rate of 25% that allows for statistically significant extrapolation of survey results as being representative of the views of the AIA Minnesota membership. The survey was administered by the University of Minnesota’s Office of Measurement Services.

**Members overwhelmingly identified “Enhancing the perceived value of architects” as the top issue for AIA Minnesota to focus on, followed by “Fostering the engagement of architects in the broader community” and “Achieving greater diversity, inclusion, and equity in the profession.”**

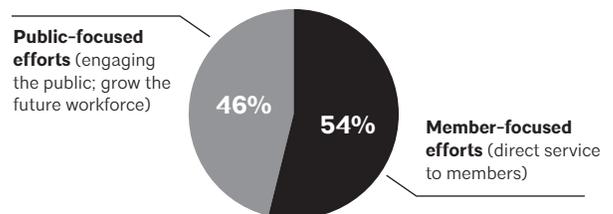
- More than half of survey respondents (53%) identified the issue “Enhancing the perceived value of architects” as their top issue when asked to rank order (1–7) where AIA Minnesota state and local chapters should ideally focus our efforts. An additional 25% of respondents ranked it as their second- or third-placed issue resulting in more than 3 in 4 respondents identifying it as top 3 priority for the organization.
- “Fostering the engagement of architects in the broader community” followed in a secure second place with more than half (52%) of survey respondents listing it as one of their top 3 priorities for the organization.
- Receiving both the third highest first place ranks (11%) and the third highest top 3 ranks (41%), “Achieving greater diversity, inclusion, and equity in the profession” is also an issue highly valued by respondents to the survey.
- Also of note, just under half (49%) of respondents age 18–34 identified “Promoting sustainable/resilient design” as a top 3 issue for the organization.

Respondents identified the following as organizations to approach in exploring **potential partnerships & joint efforts**:



**Members would like to see more AIA Minnesota resources go toward engaging the general public.**

Survey responses show a desire for significant resources to be put toward public-focused efforts, when asked this question: Approximately what percentage of **AIA Minnesota state and local chapters’ efforts** would ideally be dedicated to the following:



- Regarding *Architecture MN* magazine, a substantial majority of survey respondents—70%—when asked to choose an audience focus of either AIA Minnesota members or the general public, chose the general public.

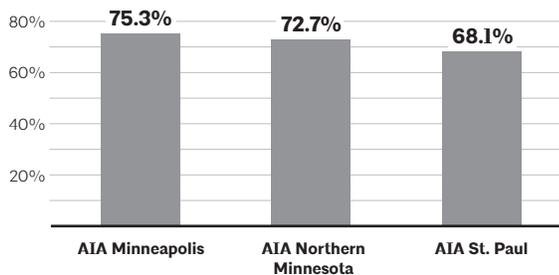
## FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

**Focus Groups:** 22 member focus groups (consisting of approximately 180 individuals), three student focus groups (consisting of 12 architecture students and three high school students), and six industry partner focus groups (consisting of approximately 35 individuals) were held throughout June, July and August of 2016.

AIA Minnesota Executive Vice President Mary-Margaret Zindren facilitated the focus groups with members, architecture students, and interior designers. Ariella Tilsen of Vital Edge Consulting facilitated the focus groups with other industry partners (e.g., Allied Members, engineers, general contractors, developers) and high school students participating in the Weisman Art Museum architecture camp.

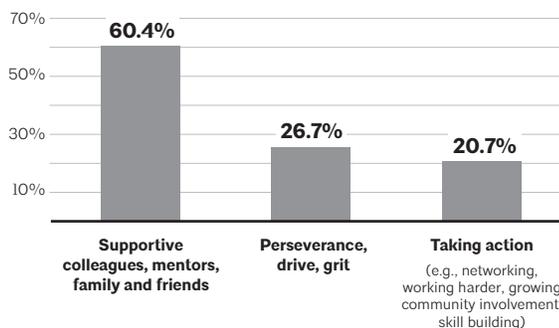
### Members want to see more local chapter resources go toward fostering connections with local governments.

Significantly more resources (staff/volunteer time, dollars) should be allocated toward **the local chapter being a liaison** to city and regional governments.



### Members have relied on mentors and their own resilience to get through tough times in the profession.

In response to the open-ended question “When you have experience challenges in your pursuit of a career in architecture, **what has most helped you overcome those challenges?**”, members said:



### What do you want to be known for? (as an architect / aspiring architect)

1. Problem solving
2. Client focus
3. Collaboration
4. Broad knowledge and skills
5. Spaces people enjoy
6. Attention to context
7. Quality
8. Listening
9. Pragmatism

### What can be done to enhance the perceived value of architects?

1. Grow client understanding of the design process
2. Actively counter cultural influences (e.g., DIY/HGTV myths, commoditization of design, short-term mindsets)
3. Increase appreciation for the breadth and depth of what architects can do
4. Reinforce that architectural services are an investment, and that architects understand the importance of budgets
5. Foster opportunities for architects to work with local government officials as partners in community building
6. Grow public awareness of the profession and engage media throughout Minnesota
7. Dispel the myth of the lone architect and highlight architects as collaborators

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## WHY THIS STRATEGIC DIRECTION?

### FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS (CONTINUED)

#### Why did you pursue architecture as your career path? What first motivated and inspired you?

1. Family influence (i.e., had someone in the family/close family friend who was an architect, engineer or in construction; family experience building a house or structure—on a farm or in a city)
2. Architecture as a calling (i.e., always knew I wanted to be an architect; always building, drawing plans since a small child)
3. Being good at art and math/science, and told this combination equates to success in an architectural career
4. Architecture-related classes or experiences in school (e.g., drafting, Revit, 3DModeling, SketchUp class; extracurricular club or school-organized opportunity; high school career fair)
5. Given design/construction toys and drawing inspiration (e.g., Legos, K'nex, Lincoln Logs, Erector Sets, house plan books)
6. Encouragement from teachers, guidance counselors, and/or aptitude tests to pursue architecture
7. Exposure to inspiring architecture (e.g., houses along Minneapolis lakes, Chicago buildings, Barcelona)

#### How can this be a stronger architecture community?

1. Make it easier to engage electronically (e.g., On-Demand CE, an AIA Minnesota App, video-streaming of meetings, online forums, podcasts)
2. Foster more knowledge sharing and collaboration among firms (i.e., connect firms of different sizes and regions of Minnesota, share best practices through the magazine or electronic forums)
3. Grow and maintain camaraderie and collegiality, while recognizing the competition that exists for work
4. Create opportunities to volunteer together and contribute to the greater good in our local communities
5. Make it easier to understand what AIA Minnesota committees and efforts are really about and how someone can engage
6. Set up a section or group for architects in each region
7. Encourage personal asks/Incentivize members to bring less-engaged members, clients, and representatives of partner organizations to AIA Minnesota meetings and events
8. Grow collaborations with others outside architecture

#### What should be recognized, lifted up, and awarded by AIA Minnesota and the local chapters?

1. Collaboration and Teams—both through separate awards, and in criteria and application requirements
2. Revise juries and selection panels to include non-architects to bring broader perspective/create awards with nominations submitted by non-architects
3. Recognize more firms and their process in *Architecture MN* magazine
4. Recognize strong client service with a recognition/designation program
5. Grow recognition of volunteer service, community leadership, and education of the public

#### What skills/knowledge do you wish you had/wish were stronger for you and for those who work for you?

1. Business, management, contract negotiation, and business development skills
2. Communications, presentation, collaboration and public engagement skills
3. Technical knowledge on how to put a building together
4. Client engagement skills (especially institutional clients)
5. Code changes
6. Knowledge of the construction process and skills in dealing with industry partners in construction
7. Rigor needed for the design process and learning quickly in an office environment

#### Findings specific to Greater Minnesota

- Attracting and retaining talent is more challenging for Greater Minnesota firms than for the Metro area. It's easier when individuals have personal ties to the region; harder in the context of spouses also needing to secure and retain work in the region.
- Architects are viewed more often as a "necessary evil" by people who are forced to stop mid-project to engage an architect.
- Architects outside the immediate vicinities of Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth consistently feel disregarded and that their membership in AIA Minnesota and the local chapters is not valued.

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### Findings specific to women in architecture

- Double standards and outdated assumptions related to women in the workplace are prevalent today, in ways similar to decades ago.
- Preparing for and returning from maternity leave is a particularly acute time of frustration for women in architecture.
- Mentors matter significantly to retention in the profession. More connection to and mentorship by senior women architects is highly desired. Connection among women has helped many stay in architecture firms when others have left. Persistence in the face of adversity is also key to long-term success.

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### Findings specific to current and prospective members of color

- When times have gotten tough in pursuing architecture as a profession, architects of color have leaned upon the strength of their career dreams, their personal drive and fortitude, and on mentors—both older and of the same age, often also people of color.
- Current and aspiring architects of color are driven by many of the same inspirations as others in the profession, but seem to have been told by others more often that their blend of interests pointed to architecture (as opposed to knowing an architect in their family or being exposed to careers in architecture in their early years).
- Students of color believe that expanding who is seen as qualified to serve in a leadership role will go a long way toward addressing diversity and inclusion in the profession; they see how diverse their student body is compared to the generations that currently hold leadership roles in firms and in the AIA.
- Past pipeline programs should be learned from or revived, as they were successful in sparking interest among architects of color (e.g., the Architectural Youth Program and specific college programs for high school students).

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### Findings specific to current and prospective members in their 20s and 30s

- Mentors matter a great deal to success and retention, and are very much desired. When formal mentoring relationships set up by educational institutions or firms don't work out, the profession would be wise to fill the gaps.
- More regular, comfortable, in-person interactions with established architects are desired. When GenX and Boomer members are invited to events organized by Millennials but don't show up, it sends a negative message about the strength of Minnesota's architecture community.

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### Findings specific to high school students who aspire to become architects

When asked what would help feed students' passion for and interest in architecture and design, students said:

- More direct exposure to architects who are like me (e.g., women, architects of color) and to architecture schools.
- More hands-on experience and opportunities to work on design projects.
- Learning more about what architects do and how they work.
- More support from teachers; less negativity around the math skills required and less dissuasion from pursuit of architecture as a potential career path.

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### Additional findings from industry partner focus groups

- The key ingredients for healthy relationships among architects/architecture firms and allied industry partners:
  - Early and ongoing communication. Positive, open, ongoing communication was universally identified as the most important ingredient for creating, sustaining, and growing the kind of relationships people want to be part of.
  - Providing and receiving genuine understanding, appreciation, and respect for the expertise that each person and each field brings to each project; acknowledging partners' specific contribution to a project and the team nature of the work architects are involved in.
  - Contracts that are relationally focused and structured, ideally allowing for normal human variances, retaining opportunities to leverage relationships in service of a project and to solve problems creatively.
- The hallmarks of a strong community of allied partners:
  - Genuine collaboration and mutual respect.
  - A clear vision of the project, and a solid plan that includes all allied partners.
  - A realistic approach to fee structures and risk management.
  - Trust and safety.
- The value that architects, architecture firms, and AIA Minnesota provide:
  - Leadership and project management.
  - Design excellence.
  - Deeper understanding of the considerations taken into account in the work of architects.
- Opportunities for the future:
  - Strengthen the design/building industry field as a whole.
  - Address the changing demographics of the design/building industry workforce and client base.
  - Grow the value of architects and industry partners by recognizing the broader team.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### AIA Minnesota Strategic Resource Team

To assist in the 2016 strategic planning effort of AIA Minnesota, a Strategic Resource Team was established—a cross-section of more than 40 AIA Minnesota members. This team contributed to the compilation and analysis of dozens of industry reports and served as a sounding board for AIA Minnesota staff in crafting research questions and interpreting results.

Bryan Anderson, AIA	Gabriel Keller, Assoc. AIA
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