



## **Council of Firms Knowledge Community**

### **June 11 Meeting Notes**

#### **Topic: Firm Culture (Part 2) – Social Events + Community Service**

What do we do for our staff and for our communities? Lots of stuff, it turns out! In our June 11 meeting, hosted by ESG Architecture and Design, we had a lively discussion about how we celebrate staff through social events and give back to our communities through volunteer efforts.

The things that we celebrate socially range in topic from our project milestones, most successful projects, newly licensed individuals, new employees, promotions, and retirements, to our work relationships. The way that we socialize and celebrate comes in the form of informal happy hours, summer outings and team parties to more formal events like annual shareholders' meetings and winter formals. The informal events, like summer picnics, include families and friends, while the annual meetings tend to focus on employees.

Firms with multiple offices talked about trying to get everyone together - in one place - as long as they could; once they reach(ed) a certain size, they need(ed) to adjust to localized events. Some national practices bring shareholders/partners together annually, but the teams back in their offices are not as connected – those firms are feeling challenged to keep everyone engaged.

Here are some of the social events that our firms are doing:

- “State of the Firm”, “Shareholder Palooza” and other annual meetings
- Employee Appreciation month
- Annual Party with Clients and Staff
- Office Open Houses
- Street dance or big bash with a live band
- Game Show with prizes
- Hayride
- State Fair Day
- Weekly Brew Tour of craft breweries
- Summer Picnic
- Holiday Party (or Post-Holiday Party), Holiday Happy Hour
- Sports – softball, skiing, volleyball, running clubs
- Potlucks and Food Competitions (chili, salsa/dip)
- Flip Flops and Ice Cream Party
- Boat ride
- Twins Game, Saints Game or other sporting event
- Spontaneous outings, like a visit to Sea Salt with Frisbees
- Monthly Happy Hours to celebrate new employees (and celebrate people who leave the firm)
- Bus trip – resort weekend – for everyone with a plus one

When it comes to Community Service, we are an active industry and committed to giving back. Every office, large or small, does something to improve our cities, neighborhoods or environment. Some firms have pro bono studios, some have committees or task forces that organize the events,

and some have annual traditions of participation in United Way, Habitat for Humanity, Hearts and Hammers and other non-profits. There is diversity in the way firms handle volunteer and pro bono time – some firms pay for sanctioned volunteer events, some give ½ of the volunteer time and the employee gives the other ½, and some firms give people freedom to participate with the expectation that time is entirely on your own.

Here are a number of ideas we discussed for giving back to our communities:

- Multiple volunteer events sanctioned – everyone is expected to do something, whether it is running for office, serving on a board or commission, singing in a choir, participating in a non-profit event, etc.
- “Day of Service” – expected to be done by each employee
- Charrettes or design efforts for non-profits who need design services
- Humanitarian response teams – in the US or outside the US
- Pro bono studio
- “Giving Committee” to plan community events
- Earth Day pick-ups
- Rotary Club volunteer events
- Food Shelf or Backpack Drive
- Hearts & Hammers
- Habitat for Humanity
- United Way Fundraiser
- CANSTRUCTION
- Little Free Libraries

A healthy team and a healthy culture do not just happen – we need to work at building relationships and building community within our firms. When our teams feel appreciated, engaged and energized, that is a great win for our people, our firms and our communities.

---

#### AIA Minnesota Council of Firms

##### Co-Chairs

Mary Shaffer, AIA  
[mtshaffer@leodaly.com](mailto:mtshaffer@leodaly.com)

Mike Fischer, AIA  
[Mike.fischer@lhbcorp.com](mailto:Mike.fischer@lhbcorp.com)

##### Immediate Past-Chair

Pete Smith, FAIA  
[psmith@bwbr.com](mailto:psmith@bwbr.com)

AIA Minnesota Staff Liaison  
[Deanna Christiansen](mailto:Deanna.Christiansen), Hon. AIA MN  
275 Market Street, Suite 54  
Minneapolis, MN 55405  
d: 612-767-1746

