

AIA Minnesota - Council of Firms Knowledge Community

Monday, March 26, 2018

TOPIC: What does it mean to be a Council of Firms Knowledge Community?

At our March Council of Firms meeting, we discussed what it means to be a Council of Firms Knowledge Community. We will be creating our charter over the next few months, and this discussion will help in drafting that document. The focus of our discussion was on Content, Context and Commitments.

Content

The Council of Firms currently meets 1.5 hours per month. Firm leaders openly share the opportunities and challenges they are facing in their primary areas of practice. The goal of this Knowledge Community is to provide positive, constructive discussions that are practice-based, and that move the profession of architecture forward.

The Council of Firms is not “exclusionary”, but the focus of topics is most relevant to firms dealing with the following practice issues:

1. Marketing/Business Development
2. Organizational Structure
 - a. Strategy/Vision and Mission
 - b. Organizational Strategic Planning
3. Project Delivery
 - a. What new technology/software allows us to deliver faster, better?
4. Information Technology
 - a. Remote access/security/access safety
 - b. Vetting new software – mapping out your digital ecosystem
5. Human Resources
 - a. Diversity in the Profession
 - b. Equity and Social Justice
 - c. Compliance
 - d. Recruitment/Retention/Training
6. Financial Management/Firm Acquisitions
 - a. Benchmarking/Metrics
 - b. Integrating acquisitions – culture and scale
7. Leadership Development
8. Ownership Transition/Governance
9. Firm Culture/Multiple Offices
 - a. Cultural continuity between offices

Additional topics were discussed, including:

- Building Capacity for Firm Leadership
- Consider publishing an annual calendar of categories (example: April will always cover Firm Culture; HR topics may happen over two separate months)
- Consider an annual networking event like happy hour with spouses/significant others, summer party, etc.
- Consider an annual community service project as a Council of Firms (some larger firms already have lots of opportunities for volunteering)
- Look at the AIA Large Firm Roundtable for suggested topics on occasion
- Consider taking one meeting to discuss real-world architectural-based solutions to social and economic issues like healthcare and gun control
- Management books like: *Traction* by Gino Wickman
- Accountability

- Job Description of the CEO – barriers, channeling greatest strengths, leadership development (leaders need to develop too), journey of a firm through seasons (Glenn Fischler, infoedge LLC)
- Business Development – invite marketing principals; tools and ideas; mentoring and training
- Internal Firm Communications

Context

Starting at our May or June meeting, we will look to individual firms to host a lunch meeting (3rd Monday of the month) at their location. This will ensure that different firms will have opportunities for greater firmwide engagement. This will require us to have actual RSVPs for the meetings – a culture shift from recent years.

If you would like to host the meeting in an upcoming month, please contact Mike or Mary to get onto the revolving schedule. For months when we do not have a host firm, we will plan to meet at IMS.

Hosting responsibilities:

- Provide lunch for the meeting
- Provide directions and parking guidance

Formats for meetings were discussed:

- Structured conversations, based on books or articles
- Panel discussion
- Small group breakouts
- “SHARE FAIR” – series of topics

Commitment

The magic of the Council of Firms is the willingness of our members to share openly, and the meeting should always provide an environment of trust. We would like for firms to commit one leader (with a back-up) for one year to attend every Council of Firms meeting. That leader and their back-up should have good knowledge of the firm and our industry. They should be empowered and willing to share information about their firm and to take what they have learned here back. What is said here, stays here, but what is learned here gets shared.

We discussed having each firm leader bringing along an emerging leader to subsequent meetings. Some attendees felt this would be a great way to engage one person, while others felt there was benefit in bringing a different young leader to each meeting. That topic needs some additional discussion.

We would like to update our Council of Firms email list to include back-up attendees.

Next Meeting

Our April meeting will discuss Firm Culture, Social Events and Community Service.

Co-Chair Interest?

Please contact Mike or Mary if you are interested in becoming a co-chair elect of this Knowledge Community.

AIA Minnesota Council of Firms

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