

AIA Minnesota Youth Outreach and Pipeline Development Program Review: Update to the Board of Directors

Since our initial report to this body in March 2022, the staff and member team leading the efforts of this program review have solicited input from members who have participated in the Architecture in the Schools Committee or its outreach efforts in the past as a way to gain understanding about the following:

- What motivates you to be involved with this work?
- What made it difficult for you to be involved in this work?
- What was most enjoyable about your involvement in this work?

We invited these members to provide input in written form and/or via conversation during a virtual meeting.

Five members submitted written feedback, two of whom also participated in the virtual meeting. One additional member participated in the virtual meeting who did not submit written feedback.

From this written and verbal feedback, we learned that involvement in the Architecture in the Schools committee has been challenging due to the large volume of work and deep commitment asked of members. The tasks traditionally taken on by the committee—creating lesson plans, maintaining relationships with educators and institutions, and participating in events and engagements—were sometimes too much. This contributed to burnout among members and difficulty sustaining a presence on the committee when workload at their firm increased.

The kinds of engagements in which the committee participated has historically been heavily influenced by committee leadership, so it often shifted focus when new leadership came on board. For example, one previous leader had several relationships with educators who preferred multi-week, multi-session engagements with students over the course of a semester. Another leader had relationships with institutions like libraries and historical societies, so focus was more on creating “make and take” activities and crafting lesson plans for day-long camps.

Committee members agreed that shifting the responsibility for maintaining relationships with educators and organizations/institutions from volunteers to staff would ensure more consistency and relieve committee members of some heavy responsibilities.

In general, members who shared feedback favor more consistency in our relationships with partners in education, which would contribute to having a more consistent presence for the youth who are affiliated with those partners.

Another issue we face is how to deploy our member volunteers most effectively and efficiently. While in the recent past membership indicated that youth outreach should be a very high priority for the organization, we continue to experience great difficulty finding members willing or able to volunteer time to participate in engagements with youth. As we consider what our future work will look like, we need to be asking the question: what are the instances where an architect representative is critical to successful engagement?

Finally, feedback from members touched on the difficulty of measuring success when it comes to youth engagement efforts. Because it is nearly impossible to know whether the students we engage with will ultimately choose architecture as a profession, it is unrealistic to use that criterion as a metric. We want to consider other, more traceable criteria to measure the success and impact of our efforts.

Our team continues to wrestle with these questions and looks forward to an opportunity to discuss them with the board in the upcoming months.