

# Repositioning Update

May 2012



LaPlaca Cohen

Pentagram

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# Project Process



# Project Process

AIA has enlisted LaPlaca Cohen, a communications and brand strategy firm and Pentagram, a design firm, to work in partnership in leading its repositioning initiative. Our collaborative process is designed to identify and assess the challenges and goals that face both AIA and the architecture profession as a whole. These issues will be addressed through a new communications strategy and a re-consideration of AIA's visual identity.

# Timing

## **Situation Analysis, Research, and Strategy** *March–June*

The primary focus of the first phase has been to get to the heart of the issues that currently face AIA through an extensive research process that will be detailed in the “Key Themes from Situation Analysis and Research” section of the presentation.

# Timing

## **Positioning Platform Development** *June–September*

Drawing on the research findings from the first phase, we will develop and refine a positioning platform—essentially a set of concepts and messages that will enable AIA to effectively communicate who it is and why it is important.

# Timing

**Position Impact Exploration**  
*August–October*

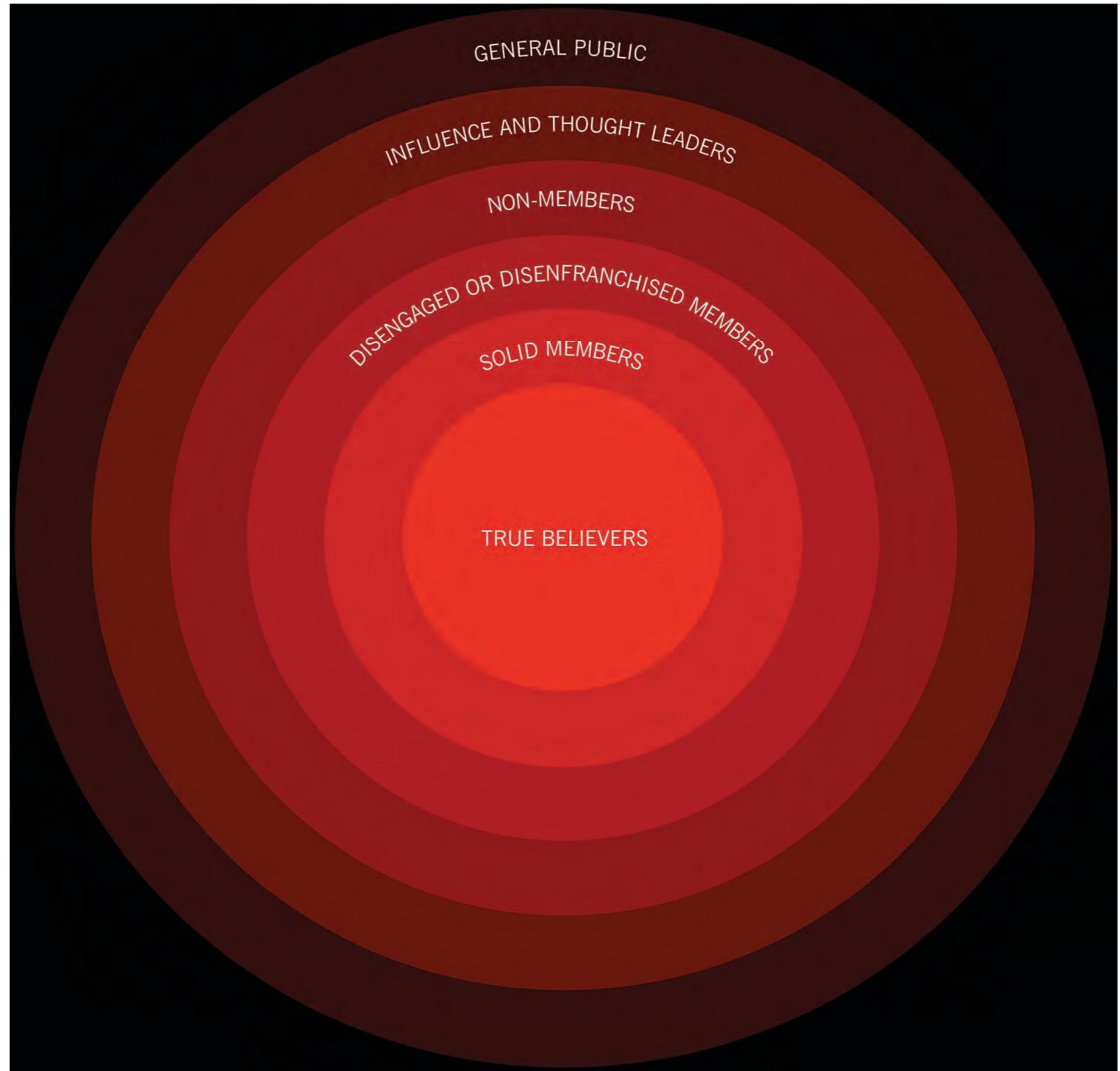
**Position Communication Planning**  
*October–December*

**Communications Platform Alignment**  
*December–February 2013*

Over the course of the remaining three phases, Pentagram will take the lead in developing a design strategy that will activate our positioning recommendations and bring AIA's visual identity into alignment with how the organization truly sees itself and who it aspires to be.

# Project Process

Our approach has been to start inside and work outward—getting the perspectives of those within the AIA community first before working our way towards the general public.



# Key Themes from Situation Analysis and Research



# Our Premise

In speaking with AIA about why this initiative is crucial, particularly at this moment in time, we arrived at the premise that underlies our inquiry:

The nature and practice of architecture is evolving and AIA must evolve with it in order to secure its leadership position.

# The Big Question

How can AIA evolve with the changing needs of the architecture profession while maintaining its core values, beliefs, and offerings?

## Who have we talked to?

A selection of senior national leadership, elected leaders, and board members

Attendees of the Grassroots 2012 Leadership and Legislation Conference

Various AIA members and stakeholders around the country

Thousands of members via an online survey

Members of the general public via an online survey

# Sources

We also reviewed AIA's extensive pre-existing research and communications materials including:

- Market studies
- Member surveys
- Advertising campaigns
- Strategic plans
- Environmental scans
- Identity building initiatives

These resources serve as the foundation for our research and recommendations.

# Member Survey Methodology

From April 19 to April 24, an online member survey was fielded.

We received over 10,000 responses and the results have been gathered and analyzed.

The following pages present highlights from the survey findings.

# Member Factors

55% agree the profession is less satisfying than they'd like it to be, though only 8% are strongly considering pursuing another profession.

According to members, the public considers architects “nice to have,” but are non-essential, expensive professionals that work on large projects.

Members consider educating the public, making the business case for the value of architecture, and legislation advocacy to be AIA's most important roles and activities.

# Public Survey Methodology

The following data was gathered from our current national online survey designed to gauge public perceptions of architects and the value of architecture.

Our findings are based on the responses from the first wave of 1,000 respondents.

Two forthcoming waves will increase the pool to 3,000 respondents total.

# Public Perceptions

Thus far, public perceptions regarding architects, what they work on, and how they work, are primarily neutral, lacking a clear opinion positively or negatively.

This is potentially good news since it appears that there is no need to change negative perceptions, but there is a need to define and build positive perceptions (an easier challenge, but still a challenge).

# Public Perceptions

In a few areas, however, early findings show stronger perceptions, though they are still mixed:

While only 21% of Americans have worked directly with an architect, 74% of them are very satisfied with their experience, and 58% of them would recommend hiring an architect in the future.

33% feel decidedly that architects listen to clients and help them achieve their needs.

# Public Perceptions

A quarter of Americans believe that architects work mostly on large-scale building projects, as opposed to small commercial or residential projects.

Of those considering a building or renovation project, only 35% of them are likely to hire an architect.

# Key Themes

A number of themes emerged throughout our research with solid consistency. In the following slides, we've framed them as responses to "The Big Question": How can AIA evolve with the changing needs of the industry while maintaining its core values, beliefs, and offerings?

# Key Themes

Each theme is illustrated with direct quotes from our interviews. Though only one or two quotes for each theme are included, they are representative of sentiments frequently voiced by interviewees.

# Key Themes

## Lead with emotion

Currently, AIA's identity lacks emotional “punch”—while personal passion and idealism drive many architects' decision to join the profession, these ideals are not yet reflected in the range of programs and resources AIA is best known for.

# Key Themes

## Lead with emotion

*“Being a home for passion is important for the AIA. It can’t all be about practice.”*

*“At one point the AIA separated architects and architecture. This bifurcation has created issues. Architects are inspired by the subject matter, this is what fuels their fire.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Key Themes

## **Shift the conversation from process to impact and benefits**

Shift the focus from the architect and his or her process to the value that *architecture* has to clients and to society at large. The value can generally be expressed in terms of problem-solving and/or “good design.”

# Key Themes

## **Shift the conversation from process to impact and benefits**

*“There is an absence of data on evidence-based design and the value of design in helping buildings and society perform better. We don't have a lot of messages about what's in the public's best interest.”*

*–Grassroots 2012 Interviews*

# Key Themes

## **Lead with conviction and clear positions and members will follow**

AIA cannot be all things to all people but it can be a valued resource for many. Defining who those audiences are and how AIA can best serve them through focused, clearly understood initiatives is the first step towards organizational success.

# Key Themes

**Lead with conviction and clear positions and members will follow**

*“AIA is now a flurry of constant activity that leads to confusion because there is no shared sense of purpose, direction, or message.”*

*“We need to judge by relevance, not just by the desire for inclusion.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Key Themes

## Focus on core offerings

AIA is perceived as playing “catch up” within the shifting field of architecture, resulting in a proliferation of initiatives and programs that make it difficult to discern where and how it is most relevant—to its members, to the industry, as well as to the public.

# Key Themes

## Focus on core offerings

*“Many decisions fall to the lowest common denominator. You end up advocating for everything. You should have a clear, compelling message, but you end up with a camel with four humps.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Key Themes

## **Demonstrate your value**

AIA should be viewed as the go-to resource for architects at every stage of their career, no matter their area of practice. However, AIA's focus on particular professional resources does not fully align with the needs of the industry today.

# Key Themes

## Demonstrate your value

*“People come in to support the profession and stay in because of CES. But there’s a lack of compelling satisfaction at all levels of the organization.”*

*“How do we celebrate the talent of our youth better and maximize the ability for them to grow and become licensed, even if they’re outside of traditional practice? That should be our number one priority.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Key Themes

## **Make it easier for constituents to listen**

Members suffer from communications overload and have begun tuning AIA out, making it difficult for AIA to assume a leadership role and convey clear and consistent messaging about its positive impact and wealth of resources.

# Key Themes

## **Make it easier for constituents to listen**

*“One problem is that we send out a ton of stuff and no one reads it.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Key Themes

## **Guide the conversation**

Given that the public does not regularly interact with architects, AIA has an opportunity to shape how the profession is viewed by enhancing its activities onsite and online and by providing members with the right tools to tell their story.

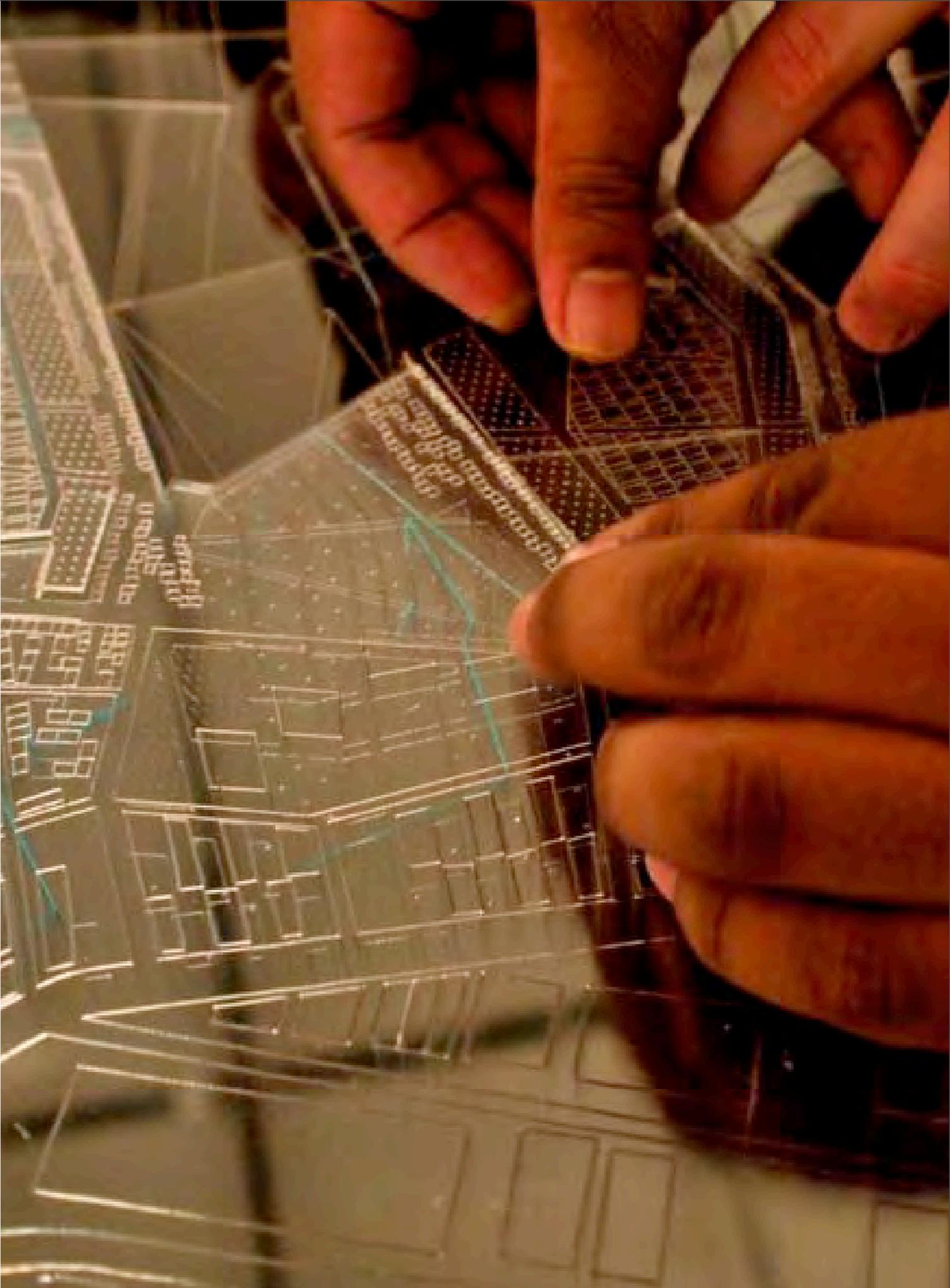
# Key Themes

## Guide the conversation

*“We don’t have the same recognition in the marketplace for architectural services even though what we do affects everyone’s lives every day, so I’m really looking for ways we can tell our stories more effectively.”*

*–Internal Stakeholder Interviews*

# Emerging Hypothesis



# Emerging Hypothesis

## What unifies the AIA's diverse stories and members?

*Desire to make an impact*

Regardless of their background and area of practice, every architect started with a desire to create positive change.

The strength of this desire keeps architects committed to the profession throughout all stages of their career.

Yet keeping sight of this motivation while facing the realities of practice is a challenge.

# Emerging Hypothesis

## Connectivity is at the core of the AIA offer

*Beyond supporting practice, AIA is an opportunity to connect*

Connecting like-minded practitioners encourages members to tap in to the passion that drives the profession.

Though the recession has engendered apprehension, collaboration is key to survival.

By focusing its core resources, AIA will foster connections and collaboration and create a stronger sense of affinity.

# Emerging Hypothesis

The following attributes begin to articulate an ideal position for AIA, drawing on both who the organization currently is and what it aspires to be.

## AIA should be...

**Progressive**, not reactionary

**A vital resource**, not a superficial designation

**Universally beneficial**, not limited and elitist

**Adding value**, not additional financial burden

**At the cutting edge**, not a follower

**Public facing**, not behind closed doors

**An architecture resource for all**, not just for industry insiders

**Results and benefits-focused**, not process-driven

or self-referential

# Emerging Hypothesis

## **Fusing passion with practice is AIA's winning formula**

Providing professional support for the practice of architecture is a valued hallmark of the AIA identity, but it hasn't been enough to make the organization truly remarkable or distinctive.

Adding passion—the ideological and emotional motivators that make the profession so appealing—will help transform members from complacent supporters into ardent advocates.

# Emerging Hypothesis

## **Demonstrating the impact that AIA members have on society builds your relevance**

Speak in terms that focus less on the architectural process and more on how good design benefits the public's everyday lives.

Communicate the value that *only* architects can provide through creative solutions for projects of every scale.

# Next Steps



# Thinking Ahead

We've used the following questions to help guide our process and anticipate how change will take shape. We encourage you to think about these questions as well:

How committed to change is AIA?

What can you do to help AIA align itself with these conclusions?

What hard choices about programs, structure, etc., should we begin to investigate?

## Next Steps

Now that we know what AIA's internal stakeholders have to say, we are turning our attention to external stakeholders.

- Completion of national survey
- Discussion with external stakeholders
- Interviews with peer institutions

Then, we will begin developing and refining the positioning platform.

# Timing

Throughout the remainder of the process, members of the repositioning team will be visiting components and attending key events to present the results of our ongoing efforts.

In the meantime, please visit [www.aia.org/discussrepositioning](http://www.aia.org/discussrepositioning) to learn more about the initiative and share your thoughts in the Discussion Forum.

# Timing

Situation Analysis, Research, and Strategy  
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Positioning Platform Development  
*June–September*

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# Thank you

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