AIA GRASSROOTS 2001 ISSUES FORUM
INCLUSIVENESS – AIM Objective #6
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In a recent Boston Globe article regarding President-elect Bush's cabinet member selections, columnist Ellen Goodman points out that, "The test of this diverse cabinet is whether the new members regard their work as the <u>fulfillment</u>, or the <u>beginning</u>, of a promise." The AIA's Strategic Long Range Plan, Aligning the Institute for the Millennium, mandates that we, as an organization and its members, make a promise toward cultural and professional diversity to fulfill our promise to become inclusive.

Background: Objective 6 of the AIM Plan focuses on the issue of inclusiveness, urging us to "aggressively broaden the membership base to be more inclusive, and focus services to anticipate and creatively respond to members' needs." Task Force members describe this directive best in their overview of Objective 6:

> *"The definition of the profession is expanding. Students being graduated with degrees in architecture are applying their training in new ways. Both facts of modern practice constitute an opportunity for the profession to have a greater impact on society and the built environment. However, many of these architects do not feel an affiliation with their profession nor do they see a home or forum for their interests in the AIA. The challenge for the AIA is to adopt an inclusive and welcoming attitude if this organization is truly to live up to its claim to be 'the voice of the profession'."*

This objective implies that for AIA, inclusiveness has to be much broader than a conversation limited to race and gender. If we are to remain a relevant and vibrant organization, we must encourage a culture of openness that welcomes those who have elected to apply their architectural education and training' in alternative career paths. Only by embracing these individuals and serving their needs will we become representative of the new profession of architecture and reflective of the society we serve.

Issues: Here, we are dealing with the origins of "protectionism" vs. the reality of "expansionism." When the AIA was chartered in 1857, the strategy was to <u>define</u> a profession, and the consequence was naturally restrictive. This posture was both fitting and necessary to distinguish us from "the others." Is it still? The AIM Task Force concluded that in the 21st century, our profession is being <u>redefined</u> and the protectionist attitude is less and less appropriate. AIA needs to represent the profession in all its technical and demographic variety. In 2001 and beyond, the challenge is for the AIA to be the voice of the profession in all its octaves, not just the voice of licensed architects.

AIA demographics support the theory of expanded practice settings and diversified career choices by our members. The number of Associate Members - those non-registered individuals who have degrees in architecture but who are in alternative practice, or who are on the pathway to licensure - has increased at a rate four times that of architect members over the last five years. Associate members currently comprise 18% of total AIA membership, and the National Associates Committee reports that at this rate of growth, Associate Membership will exceed Architect Membership by the year 2015.

Alternatives: Consider first AIA's historic behavior, where virtually all of our resources and efforts have been directed toward those registered architects who practice in traditional firm settings. In this model, architects who have ventured beyond mainstream practice find themselves increasingly alienated from the profession at-large and from 'their' professional organization.

Against this background, the AIM Task Force developed a different vision of the AIA, one characterized by a welcoming attitude, a commitment to enabling, and a gathering of all 'under the tent.' The Task Force envisioned a model for AIA that might resemble the modern large firm, in which everyone responsible for creating the project is under that tent, but not everyone is a registered architect. Diverse? Yes! Inclusive? Yes!! Successful? Yes!!!

Thus, if AIA is to thrive, we must become more relevant to this sector of the profession: the increasing number of architectural graduates who enter related fields, and the many professionals with whom we associate. The composition of contemporary firms supports this theory, as noted above. The rate of growth of AIA's Associate Member category confirms the demographics. Our "Redefinition of the Profession" goes hand-in-hand with this approach. And, the AIM Plan itself dictates our actions. If the profession is evolving, should the AIA not evolve with it? It must!

Implications: Implied above are two schools of thought, with a 'compromise' alternative in the middle. The alternatives and implications are thus:
1. **Maintaining the 'status quo'** leaves us in a defensive stance, does not address the issue of diversity and inclusiveness in a meaningful way, and may mean that AIA become s a shrinking subset of an expanding profession.
2. **Modifying the current model** by expanding existing membership categories, etc. is risky because strategies and tactics may not guide us as effectively as would a straight-forward articulation of a larger vision for the organization.
3. **Committing to a culture of inclusiveness** results in an organization whose posture toward the design and construction industry is that of a primary organ supporting the whole 'body' and legitimizes AIA as the true voice of the profession.

Desired Actions: The AIA should develop a policy on inclusiveness, one that can – and should – affect everything we do as staff and volunteers. The following are strategies for collectively realizing the goal of inclusiveness:

1. **Promote entry into architecture schools and the profession to all members of society.** Support ACSA's 1990 "Code of Conduct" for architectural education, which advocates promoting social justice, improving the climate of architectural education for all, recruiting the best talent from the widest possible pool, increasing sensitivity to the full range of future clients, teaching students to work in a global marketplace, and fostering diversity within the profession. Endeavor to shape public policies affecting access to higher education.

2. **Encourage a culture of openness, welcoming alienated members and alternative practitioners.**

3. The AIA can no longer pay lip service to the issue, but must be assertive in its quest for inclusiveness. An attitudinal shift must take place not just within the Institute, but in the components, and in the minds of individual members. This means that all must actively work for inclusiveness, mentoring emerging professionals, enhancing relationships with partners in the design and construction industry, nurturing local, state and national leadership, and most importantly, expanding their own definition of who an architect is and what our industry stature should be.

4. **Allow graduates from accredited degree programs to be called 'architects.'**

5. This recommendation by the Collateral Internship Task Force embodies a sea change that has profound implications, one that cannot happen overnight. In the words of the CITF Report, 'architect' here is "used to describe professional degree graduates of an accredited program as they pursue one of the diverse career paths for which their architectural education has provided them the appropriate skill sets. Through the celebration and inclusion of these architects within the larger context of society, these individuals have the potential to expand the influence of the highest values and aspirations of the architectural profession and the quality of the built environment in service to that society." Who comprises the profession? Registered architects alone, or should 'we' not be everyone who has been awarded a professional degree?

6. **Conduct a comprehensive redefinition and restructuring of membership categories.**

7. If all professional degree holders are allowed to call themselves architects, then they should be considered AIA members, with all accompanying rights and privileges of membership. This brings everyone – those who are educated as architects and other industry partners – to the table, but AIA still sits at the head. This approach celebrates the diversity of the profession, and recognizes those individuals who have taken their problem solving abilities and knowledge of the design process beyond the creation of buildings. These architects address issues of form, function, and space, yes, but they also control matters that influence governance, communities, and quality of life.

8. **Evaluate and reconfigure non-member access to member benefits and services.**

9. Commensurate with the inclusion of all architects as members is an implied value to membership - and a corresponding loss to those who are non-members. Access to numerous member benefits and other services should be limited, so that non-members see and members realize the benefits of belonging to the organization. Rather than the value of the AIA 'brand' being diluted and compromised as is feared, this transformation would likely enhance the stature of the profession, as AIA member architects are scattered to the far reaches of the business and professional world.

10. **Collaborate with components to deliver products and services that meet expanding needs.**

11. Expanding the member base brings with it a promise for an extra measure of work for already burdened national, state, and local component staffs. But if our current structure of service realigns to eliminate redundant efforts and more effectively serves the members, all of the jobs would be easier. The membership relationship and service delivery vehicles could rest chiefly with the components. National would provide a reservoir of resources - research, knowledge, and support – to assist the components in their efforts.

12. **Enhance existing and create new allied and affiliate programs at all levels of the AIA.**

13. Bringing more players from the design and construction industry, including related professionals, building product manufacturers, service providers, and owners, 'to the table' of

the AIA will stimulate enhanced dialogue, promote greater understanding, and foster stronger relationships among industry partners. Creating such links will also equip members to more directly shape the environment in which they practice.

Dr. Boyer, in his preparation of the acclaimed *Building Community* special report, recognized the profession's shortcoming in the area of inclusiveness and noted that, "The need for diversity … goes to the heart of the vitality of the discipline and profession of architecture." He used the term "diversity with dignity" to describe our intended path.

Diversity with dignity. This implies that celebrating diversity is just the first step for us. Our more difficult challenge will be promoting equity to achieve a true culture of inclusiveness.