

# Setting Professional Liability Goals and Objectives

Contributed by James B. Atkins, FAIA

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## CONSULT YOUR ATTORNEY

The information herein should not be regarded as a substitute for legal advice. Readers are strongly advised to consult an attorney for advice regarding any matter related to professional liability.

## SUMMARY

James B. Atkins, FAIA, provides guidelines to help firms develop an effective risk-management program.

## SET CRITERIA THAT FIT YOUR PRACTICE

We wish that we could cut through the thicket of risk management information that perpetually comes before us and practice architecture without getting bogged down with worries about legal issues. An effective way to start developing your risk-management program is to focus your energies on actions and resources that will benefit your overall project-delivery process. The goals and objectives listed here will provide a suggested framework for helping you establish the risk-management criteria that are right for your practice:

- Choose your clients and projects wisely
- Know when to walk away
- Promise only what you can deliver
- Balance the risk with the reward
- Make your services match your contract
- Be available for your client
- Foster client education
- Produce documents that tell the story
- Mentor with experienced employees
- Always include contract administration with record services
- Document, document, document
- Resolve project issues quickly
- Work toward mutual team benefits during construction

- Respect the time/cost/quality equation
- Don't fly solo; use available support resources
- Follow through on closeout
- Review mistakes openly within your firm
- Use your insurance agent's available resources
- Use a quick-response plan for claims and disputes
- Know and use your legal counsel

It will help to post your goals and objectives in a prominent location in your office and discuss them openly with your team. Discuss what each one means and what you can do to integrate them into your services. Foster participation and involvement by assigning tasks for developing internal procedures and guidelines. Celebrate individual contributions and overall program achievements through rewards and recognition.

The objective is to develop a mindset of daily priorities that guides your decisions and actions throughout the day. From informed project selection and safe contract negotiation to quality documents and client devotion, implementing these suggestions will improve your chances of mastering the area of your practice we call risk management.

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

James B. Atkins, FAIA, is a principal with the Dallas-based architecture/engineering firm HKS Inc., where he concentrates on construction-phase services, contract negotiation, and loss prevention. He serves on the national AIA Documents Committee and Risk Management Committee and frequently presents seminars on AIA documents and project management. This article was originally printed in *AIArchitect*, it was adapted with permission.

## RESOURCES

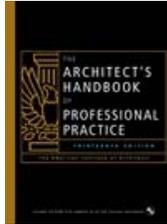
### More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic

- 09.01.03 Warning Signs of Potential Claims
- 09.01.04 Gratuitous Advice: All Risk, No Pay
- 09.01.05 Controlling Exposure to Risk

### For More Information on This Topic

See also “Risk Management Strategies,” by Richard B. Garber, ASLA, and Charles R. Heuer, FAIA, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 12, pages 319.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



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### Key Terms

- Practice
- Project administration
- Liability insurance
- Professional liability insurance