

A Process for Improving Government Planning, Design, and Construction Practices

Contributed by Paul W. Welch Jr., Hon. AIA, AIA California Council. Excerpted and adapted from a 2005 Component Award-winning entry. January 2005

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SUMMARY

AIA California Council (AIACC) followed the initiative set by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to assess how California's government business is conducted. The AIACC formed focus groups to identify the key issues that face AIA California's members in the way the state carries out its planning, design, and construction effort. The end result was a report AIACC took to the state that categorized three primary issues: leadership, planning and financing, and investment.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INPUT

In spring 2004 newly elected governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger initiated the California Performance Review (CPR), a comprehensive examination and assessment of the business of California government and how it is conducted. The intent was to formulate practical recommendations that would allow California government agencies and programs to eliminate overlap and duplication, reduce costs, increase productivity, improve services, and make government more responsive and accountable to the public. As part of the CPR process, the American Institute of Architects California Council (AIACC) assembled several focus groups with the goal of making "a major difference in the quality and cost-effectiveness of planning, design, and construction services for state funded and supported projects. AIACC's ideas were well received by the state's subcommittee considering infrastructure and were incorporated into a report that became part of the overall CPR report produced by the state.

A MODEL FOR ADDRESSING ISSUES OF CONCERN IN GOVERNMENT PLANNING, DESIGN, AND CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES

Undertaking such an in-depth review of state government practices required a significant effort on the part of the AIA California Council. Component leaders and staff planned the effort as a two-part process: brainstorming a response and presenting the results in a report and in testimony at the state level. To accomplish this, AIACC engaged a number

of its members as well as others involved in design and construction of state projects.

First, a focus group of about 13 AIA members representing various project types met for one full day to outline the problems they identified in how the state government plans, designs, and builds its construction projects. The group brainstormed and narrowed their discussion to specifics that could be included in a report. The participants also identified industry partners, including contractors and clients, from whom they would like to solicit input to craft the AIACC response to the state's call for review of its practices.

The second focus group comprised a subgroup of AIA members who met previously and a number of other stakeholders in the government construction process. These stakeholders, many of whom were suggested by the original architect task group, were selected based on their primary project type. At this one-day meeting, the participants refined the issues and recommendations discussed at the first meeting

AIACC staff members compiled the results of these two meetings into a report, which was organized into three sections:

- **Principal issues of concern.** This section identifies the focus groups' primary concerns about the way the state carries out its planning, design, and construction efforts. The text consists of a brief description—just one short paragraph—of each issue. For the California Performance Review, AIACC identified three principal issues: *leadership, planning, and financing and investment.*
- **Major issues of concern.** In this section, the report elaborates on the principal issues of concern. The information given for each issue begins with a short paragraph stating the focus group's primary concern regarding that issue.
- **Specific recommendations.** AIACC developed recommendations that would address their concerns about the state's planning, design, and construction practices. These were

organized into three issue categories: leadership (four recommendations), planning practices (four recommendations), and financing and investment practices (13 recommendations). Most of the suggestions AIACC made are specific actions the state could take to change its practices.

A small group that included both architects and several other stakeholders met with the state subcommittee considering infrastructure to present the AIACC report.

To supplement its efforts, AIACC prepared a report titled “The Role of Design and Construction in California’s Economy” as a resource to inform discussion and debate during the California Performance Review process. Component representatives also testified before the CPR Commission, presenting a few specific recommendations in more detail.

The efforts of the AIACC in responding to the call for input into state practices has been well received at the state level to date. As the California Performance Review is an ongoing initiative AIACC plans to remain involved.

APPLYING THIS MODEL ELSEWHERE

If an AIA component’s state decides to follow California’s lead and review its state government practices with an eye to improving them, the experience of the AIACC could serve as a guide for response. However, the process AIACC used to participate in the CPR effort could also be used in a more targeted way to address any state planning, design, or construction practice that could be made more effective and efficient.

Once a component has developed and produced a report reviewing state practices and making recommendations for improvement, it is important to find the best way to distribute it. If a state has requested input into a mandated review of how state business is conducted, an AIA component can submit its report to the relevant state office. If the AIA component has determined to undertake a voluntary study, however, it is important to come up with a way to introduce ideas in a nonconfrontational manner. If the AIA component is presented as an advocate for architects, its construction industry partners, and the public may help communicate the component’s findings in a positive way. Determine which offices in the state government are most likely to seriously consider the report, and decide whether it should be shared with members of the state legislative branch.

RESOURCES

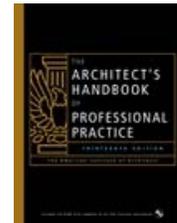
More Best Practices

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

- 21.03.04 Building Relationships with Elected Officials
- 22.03.01 Reforming Denver’s Development Review Process
- 17.05.01 City of Carrollton, Texas, Development Process

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Public Service and Community Involvement” by William M. Polk, FAIA, in *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 7, page 172. *The Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending an e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



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Key Terms

- Practice
- Performance review
- AIA components