

Starting and Running a Successful Local AIA Technology Committee

Contributed by AIA Technology in Architectural Practice

January 2003

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SUMMARY

Good planning is fundamental to the development of a successful technology committee. Here are some tips to help you organize a successful local technology committee.

THE BASICS: ORGANIZATION AND CULTURE

Starting and running a successful local AIA information technology (IT) group over the long term depends a great deal on the way it is organized in the beginning. Here are a few tips.

- **Focus on education.** The more members can learn by attending meetings, the more successful the group will be.
- **Keep it simple.** Avoid setting up an elaborate governance and organizational structure, with chairs, vice chairs, elections, nominations, dues, budgets, and so on. Ask the chapter president to name a group of two or three enthusiastic members to serve as the IT group educational coordinators.
- **Foster a culture of knowledge sharing.** Call the group something other than a "committee," which suggests a governance group, not an educational group. The Boston Society of Architects, for example, calls its knowledge-sharing groups "Wizards," such as "IT Wizards" and "HR Wizards."

GETTING STARTED

Dedicate the first meeting to an open forum in which the IT group coordinators solicit topics of interest to members. Even with a small group, it should not be difficult to prepare a list of topics that would stretch a year into the future.

Share the workload widely. Once the list of desired topics is ready, coordinators should ask members or member firms to host a meeting and organize the program. If the culture of sharing takes root, individual members or firms will find that they need to volunteer their time or space for a meeting only

once every two years or so, and in return have access to a wealth of knowledge.

PROVIDE MEETING HOST GUIDELINES

Prepare a one-page information sheet or checklist for the host firm. It should include logistical information such as how many attendees to expect, equipment needed for presentations, and arrangements for refreshments and food, if appropriate.

DEVELOP A SAMPLE CURRICULUM

The information and knowledge needs of AIA members on the subject of information technology vary widely. Design a typical curriculum for a meeting that anticipates the wide spectrum of knowledge needed.

Here are some tips:

- Limit each meeting to no more than 90 minutes.
- Provide the host firm with the list of desired topics, but encourage the firm to suggest others in which it has particular experience or expertise.
- Organize the program into three *brief* presentations (typically 15–20 minutes each) on beginner, intermediate, and advanced level topics. Allow 10–15 minutes for Q&A after each presentation.
- Focus presentations on information and knowledge that can be put to immediate, practical use.
- Have a different speaker address each topic. This keeps the workload of any one person down to a reasonable level. The host firm can draw speakers from its own staff for all three topics, or it can invite others to address a topic.
- It's almost impossible to learn about technology without talking about products. Invite technology companies to make presentations, but keep them focused on knowledge sharing (and not sales); don't let them dominate the program.

- Offer AIA/CES credit for every meeting!

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 22.05.01 Membership Recruitment Strategies
- 13.01.07 Technology for a Sole Practitioner
- 06.04.11 How to Create a Component International Committee

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Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components