

A Model for Building Associate Membership

Contributed by AIA Houston

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SUMMARY

AIA Houston has developed an effective, sustainable program model that fosters intern career development while simultaneously helping the component build its associate membership base. The program engages member firms and promotes their involvement in helping interns advance their careers. The program also demonstrates to interns the value of membership in an AIA component. Other AIA components can easily use this model to build internship programs and increase membership.

CREATING AN INTERN RESOURCE CENTER

AIA Houston's intern resource center helps Architect Registration Exam (ARE) candidates who need guidance and mentoring. It is equipped with study materials and a computer loaded with ARE practice software. Interns may also use the center to get information on acquiring other review books and materials. The Houston Architecture Foundation provided funding for the computer.

FACILITATING EXAM REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

The component also developed several ARE review programs as an added benefit to associate members:

- A weekend seminar and mock exam
- A summer weekend series of seminars on structures taught by a former structures instructor at the University of Houston College of Architecture
- A seminar on contract issues

ESTABLISHING AN INTERN EVENTS CALENDAR

A special-events program can help recent architecture graduates recognize the value of AIA membership and involvement. To promote this idea, the component hosts a seminar series for associates and interns. AIA members who are experts in a particular field or outside specialists present the seminars, which have included the following topics:

- AIA contract documents
- Lighting basics
- HVAC basics
- Public speaking
- Project financing
- Time management
- Specification writing
- "How We Passed the ARE"—a panel discussion of recently licensed architects

INITIATING AN INTERN ADVOCATE GROUP

The component's Intern Advocate Group (IAG) is charged with supporting local interns by focusing on their relationships with mentors and supervisors. The IAG considers itself "a network of architectural stakeholders who can call upon each other for information and inspiration."

The IAG compiled a large amount of information about the relationships between interns and mentors and supervisors and condensed it into a user-friendly document called the "Navigator." Mentoring programs and other ideas that have been successful in member firms are shared through this document.

The IAG also hosts three meetings a year to keep its members abreast of current registration issues from the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners. A guest speaker usually delivers the registration information. The group also tours offices to see successful programs in action.

DELIVERING THE NEWS ELECTRONICALLY

AIA Houston developed *INTERNette*, a monthly electronic newsletter containing current information pertinent to interns' career development. This member service provides an opportunity to reach a membership group that often feels disconnected from the larger membership of the AIA. Newsletter topics have included the following:

- Topical essays written by interns and licensed professionals
- Updates on Intern Development Program (IDP) issues from NCARB
- Updates on licensing issues from the Texas Board of Architects
- AIA chapter events
- Opportunities for involvement and contribution
- Guidelines on how to contribute

CONNECTING ASSOCIATES TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

AIA Houston has a partnership with the Private Sector Initiative (PSI), a citywide program to renovate homes for low-income and elderly citizens. Through PSI's Homesavers program, interns not only have the chance to participate in hands-on renovation and construction, but they also receive IDP credit in the Professional and Community Service category.

Interns and licensed architects work side by side on these projects to give back to their community with their time and labor. A message that civic responsibility is a key component of one's development as a professional is clear to all who are touched by this program.

PROGRAM YIELDS VALUABLE RESULTS

As a result of AIA Houston's associate membership development program, firms have initiated or improved their own in-house programs. Likewise, interns have responded to the idea of architecture as a career rather than as a job and are taking and passing the ARE in increasing numbers.

The component board unanimously approved the creation of an intern/associate director position. The component board supports the work of this program wholeheartedly and also approved the expenditure of funds to set up the resource center and bring in national experts for the seminar program.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 22.05.02 Preparation for the Architect Record Examination
- 22.02.02 ARE Success Teams
- 21.01.05 Communication Plan of AIA Louisiana

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact: bestpractices@aia.org.

Key Terms

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architectural associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA Components