

Media Training for Elected AIA Component Leaders

Contributed by Sherri Hughes Smith, Director of Communications, AIA Colorado

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SUMMARY

AIA Colorado's Communications Advisory Board created a Media Training Program for local component presidents. The program's participants receive thorough public relations training and together define key messages for future media addresses.

ONE GOOD THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

The 2001 AIA National Convention in Denver put AIA Colorado's local components on the "media map" for the first time. (The term "local component" in Colorado is something of a misnomer; with the exception of AIA Denver, the other components cover geographical regions larger than many states.) Media from across the state began expressing interest in the AIA—what the organization is doing, how we align ourselves with allied organizations, and how our components and members meet the major challenges facing our state, such as an economic downturn, a serious drought, and rampant growth.

SHIFT GEARS TO MEET DEMAND

AIA Colorado maintains a Communications Advisory Board (CAB), composed of the presidents-elect of each local component. In response to the increased demand for media relations, the CAB shifted its focus from being a "working board" that carried out communications tasks, to being a "strategic board" that defines overall communications strategies and initiatives, not only for the state component but also for each component. Each local component president assumed responsibility as the public spokesperson for his or her component.

LEVERAGE EXISTING SKILLS TO DEVELOP NEW ONES

While most architects have considerable experience in public speaking, being an effective spokesperson requires a different set of skills which many component presidents may not possess. To address this need, the CAB decided to create and implement a Media Training Program (MTP) for incoming

component presidents. The MTP has two principal goals: to train the presidents to be effective spokespersons and coordinate the consistency of the messages to be communicated to the media.

RECOGNIZE YOUR POWER IN THE MARKETPLACE

While a training program of this type might typically cost \$10,000, AIA Colorado was able to take advantage of its network of consultants and PR firms to negotiate a fee of only \$1,000.

KEY STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Incoming state and local presidents-elect and the chairs of key committees such as Government Affairs receive training every year. The president-elect of the local Society of Design Administration (SDA) chapter and the executive director of the Denver Architectural Foundation are also invited to participate in the training as guests of AIA Colorado.
2. The participants complete a survey to document their particular areas of professional expertise in media relations.
3. A public relations firm is selected to conduct a four-hour training session.
4. The training includes a brainstorming session to identify key messages and an overall public relations theme for AIA Colorado and each local component in the coming year.
5. The training includes a mock videotaped interview with each participant, to provide experience answering questions in an actual media setting and to provide participants with immediate feedback.
6. Following the training, a media luncheon is held to introduce the presidents-elect to the media as a group and to provide the media with their first opportunity to discuss issues facing the professional services industry in Colorado.

MEASURE RESULTS

Measures of success for the Colorado Media Training Program are best expressed by the participants.

"I think the training was effective in bringing a clear and consistent message to the media. It was also important that we as architects can control the topics and subject matter we want to convey."

—Chris Green, AIA, president, AIA Colorado West

"The media training was eye-opening to the participants; how to take a potentially distasteful situation and learn the techniques necessary to make it a positive encounter."

—D. A. Bertram, Esq., AIA, AIA Colorado Government Affairs Committee

These are some other measures of success:

- The component presidents all agreed to fund future annual training sessions through their local budgets.
- The first media luncheon generated dynamic and useful dialogue between the architects and media representatives.
- Since the first training session, two successful interviews have been conducted, with favorable content conveyed about the profession.

For More Information

Contact Sherri Hughes-Smith, director of communications at AIA Colorado, 303-446-2266 or sherri@aiacolorado.org.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 21.06.03 Training Architects to Publicize Themselves, Their Firms, Their Projects
- 21.01.05 Communication Plan of AIA Louisiana
- 22.07.07 Involving Member Firms in Component Advertising

Key Terms

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

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