

International Practice Checklist

Contributed by the AIA International Committee

August 2003

The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.

SUMMARY

International practice adds a new dimension to the professional development needs of U.S. architects in the areas of culture, business practices, technical knowledge, and professional standards. This checklist is intended to guide U.S. architects in broadening their professional horizons by helping them to identify and assemble the basic information needed to provide services abroad successfully.

The list includes mundane but easily overlooked travel considerations (such as climate, weather, time differences, and currency) as well as strategic business considerations (such as the nature and stability of government, the regulatory climate, available infrastructure and communications, and professional practice requirements).

THE GLOBAL MARKET EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES

National boundaries no longer constitute impenetrable barriers to international economic activity. The character of an “international” architecture practice differs considerably from its counterpart of 10 to 20 years ago.

Today, U.S. architects provide services to foreign clients constructing buildings in the United States. Foreign banks or investors finance “domestic” projects. More and more architects, in firms large or small, export their expertise and undertake projects abroad, either independently or in partnership with foreign firms.

The global market gives U.S. architects opportunities to diversify, seek new outlets for their knowledge and talent, and collaborate with a diverse array of professionals around the world.

CONTENTS

1.0 Strategic Considerations

- 1.1 Political/Social
- 1.2 Geography
- 1.3 Infrastructure
- 1.4 Economics

2.0 Cultural Considerations

- 2.1 Underlying Cultural Attitudes
- 2.2 Social and Business Customs
- 2.3 Business Relationships
- 2.4 Business and Legal Culture

3.0 General Business Considerations

- 3.1 Legal System
- 3.2 Business Regulations
- 3.3 Taxes

4.0 Architecture Practice Considerations

- 4.1 Professional Practice
- 4.2 Standard of Care
- 4.3 Copyright
- 4.4 Project Procedures
- 4.5 Scope of Architectural Services
- 4.6 Contracts and Agreements
- 4.7 Permit Processes

5.0 Construction Industry Considerations

- 5.1 Business Practices
- 5.2 Construction Methods
- 5.2 Code Enforcement

What is the typical relationship between the owner and contractor?
 What is the typical relationship between the architect and contractor?

5.2 CONSTRUCTION METHODS

- Determine the availability and quality of construction methods
- Assess domestic construction capabilities
- Assess the feasibility of using international contractors on a project
- Determine the availability and quality of domestic building materials
- Assess the technical feasibility of importing building materials and whether import restrictions exist
- Would any premium be attached to U.S. products or quality, and can U.S. products function in connection with local systems?
- Identify the typical construction contracting method (e.g., lump sum, cost plus)
- Determine the typical costs for labor, materials, and systems

5.2 CODE ENFORCEMENT

- Are written laws and codes followed, or are other informal practices accepted?
- What national and/or local laws regulate the building construction process? If necessary, obtain reliable English translations.
- Identify the government agencies that control the construction process, including
 - a) Building departments
 - b) Planning departments
 - c) Environmental protection agencies
 - d) Worker protection agencies (OSHA equivalents)
 - e) Regional authorities

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The International Union of Architects (UIA) is a non-governmental organization that represents more than 1 million architects throughout the world through the national architecture associations that form the UIA Member Sections. For information, see www.uia-architectes.org/texte/england/Menu-1/0-pourquoi.html.

In keeping with the UIA Accord on Recommended International Standards of Professionalism in Architectural Practice, the UIA provides a country-by-country compilation of requirements and contact information on different aspects of global practice through the UIA Spanish Section by the Col legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya (Architects' Association of Catalonia).

To access this resource, visit the following Web site: http://www.coac.net/internacional/praprof_w.htm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication was assembled by the volunteer efforts of AIA International Committee members under the leadership and direction of Kenneth H. Natkin, Esq., FAIA, a past chair of the AIA International Committee.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 10.05.04 Managing International Teams
- 10.05.09 International Videoconferencing
- 10.05.06 Adjusting to Foreign Business Customs and Practices

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Practicing in a Global Market" by Roger B. Williams, FAIA, and C. Richard Meyer, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 6, page 100.

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.

Feedback

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

Key Terms

- Practice
- Project management
- International practice

