



# Design Freedom for Federal Architecture

## The Challenge

Mandating classical and traditional architecture as the official preferred style for federal buildings stifles innovation and harms local communities. By preventing individuals from shaping their built environment in ways that reflect their unique history, character, and aspirations, all style mandates undermine the American ideals of independence and self-determination.

## The Ask

Support the Democracy in Design Act and oppose any efforts to remove local control, hinder design freedom, or add bureaucratic hurdles for approval of federal building designs.

## More Information

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## BACKGROUND

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) is aware of the recent Memorandum for the Administrator of General Services (GSA) regarding The White House's request to review the GSA's Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture. AIA is extremely concerned about any revisions that remove control from local communities; mandate official federal design preferences, or otherwise hinder design freedom; and add bureaucratic hurdles for federal buildings.

Since 1962, GSA's Guiding Principles have three policies: provide requisite and adequate facilities in an architectural style and form which is distinguished, and which will reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American National Government; development of an official style must be avoided; and choice and development of the building site should be considered the first step of the design process.

In 2020, President Trump issued an Executive Order which established classical buildings as the preferred style. In 2021, President Biden rescinded that order. Now, President Trump's memo seeks recommendations to revise the Guiding Principles again.

## WHAT IS DESIGN FREEDOM?

AIA supports the GSA's Guiding Principles, and we support freedom in design. AIA's members believe the design of federal buildings must first be responsive to the people and communities who will use those buildings. Our federal buildings across the country must reflect America's wealth of culture, rich traditions, and unique geographic regions. AIA has strong concerns that mandating architecture styles stifles innovation and harms local communities. The current Design Excellence Program at GSA, which is based on the Guiding Principles of Federal Architecture, achieves these goals and should be protected, not revised.

Classical buildings require complex design techniques, demand expensive construction materials, and take longer to build. They are more expensive to maintain and may have higher operational costs. This is a burden for the government and ultimately the taxpayers.

**AIA supports freedom in design and is extremely concerned about any revisions that remove control from local communities or mandate official federal design preferences that hinder design freedom.**

## CONGRESSIONAL ASK

AIA supports legislative efforts to codify the Guiding Principles through the Democracy in Design Act, which received bipartisan support in the 118th Congress and was refiled in the 119th Congress.

AIA is strongly opposed to legislation that seeks to remove control from local communities; mandate official federal design preferences, or otherwise hinder design freedom; and add bureaucratic hurdles for approval of federal building designs.