



AIA Best Practices:

22 realistic and achievable professional liability goals

Contributed by James B. Atkins, FAIA. Excerpted and adapted from AIArchitect.

Summary

Liabilities from professional services can arise from many sources, and architects desire to manage these risks effectively and within the boundaries of their day-to-day practice. James B. Atkins, FAIA, lays out 22 goals for firms to use as a guide to developing an effective risk management program.

Consult your attorney

The information herein should not be regarded as a substitute for legal advice. Readers are strongly advised to consult an attorney for advice regarding any matter related to professional liability.

Set criteria that fit your practice

Effective risk management for your firm can be achieved through good project management when your goals and objectives are integrated into your services and project delivery process. An effective way to start developing your risk management program is to focus your energies on actions and resources that can become a part of your day-to-day activities. The goals and objectives listed here will provide a suggested framework for helping you establish the risk management criteria that are right for your practice:

- Choose your clients and projects wisely.
- Know when to walk away from a new project.
- Promise only what you can deliver.
- Balance the risk with the reward.
- Make your services match your contract.
- Be available for your client.
- Foster client education.
- Produce documents that tell the story.
- Give voice to all team members; experiences improve practice.
- Promote team mentoring.

- Always include construction contract administration with record services.
- Document and maintain accessible records.
- Resolve project issues quickly.
- Work toward mutual team benefits during construction.
- Respect the time/cost/quality equation.
- Don't fly solo; use available support resources.
- Properly document project completion.
- Constantly review and improve your process.
- Review mistakes openly within your firm without blame.
- Use your insurance agent's available resources.
- Develop a quick-response plan for claims and disputes.
- Know and use legal counsel.

Circulate your goals and objectives, and discuss them openly with your team. Discuss what each one means and what you can do to integrate them into your services. All team ideas are important. Foster participation and involvement by assigning tasks for developing internal procedures and guidelines. Celebrate individual contributions and overall program achievements through rewards and recognition.

The objective is to develop a mindset of daily priorities that guides your decisions and actions throughout the day. From informed project selection and safe contract negotiation to quality documents and client devotion, implementing these suggestions in ways that are transparent to your project delivery can enable you to manage risk and your projects more effectively.

About the contributor

James B. Atkins, FAIA, is a Standard of Care litigation consultant and expert witness who has worked in the design and construction industry for the past 50 years. His experiences as a contractor and his many years as a senior principal with a top-10 design firm enabled him to participate and contribute to the AIA Documents Committee, AIA Risk Management Committee, the AIA Trust, and the AIA International Committee. His published work includes *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, *The Emerging Professional's Companion*, two professional books, and multiple professional articles. This article was originally published in *AIArchitect*, it was adapted with permission and has been updated by the author for Best Practices.

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About AIA Best Practices

AIA Best Practices is a collection of relevant, experience-based knowledge and expert advice on firm management, project delivery, contracts and more, aligned with the *Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition*. See the full AIA Best Practices collection at aia.org/aia-best-practices.

This article corresponds to:

Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 15th edition Unit 1 - The Profession
Chapter 16 – Risk Management
Section 01 – Risk Management Strategies