

Small Firm Roundtable Questionnaire –  
Responses from Burton L. Roslyn. FAIA

1. Seventy-nine percent of member-owned firms are small firms (under 10 employees). Large firms tend to have integral leadership training. What new steps will you take to increase access to leadership development training for members working in small firms?

After spending much of my career as a principal of small and medium sized firms, I have lectured and advised practitioners on the skills needed to successfully manage firms and provide the value that makes architects invaluable to our clients.

I have helped to identify and mentor emerging professionals and fostered their vision to become leaders in both their firms and the institute.

As an educator, I have impressed upon my students the importance of both pursuing licensure and membership in the institute. We, as an organization, need to provide greater outreach and mentoring to our students. They need to hear from us as practitioners why we are an important component of our societal development.

This effort will help to create successful leaders in both practice and the profession at large.

To accomplish this, we must work with our local and state chapters to create leadership development programs & training sessions, developing both firm and institute leaders.

Identify those traits that foster the development of leaders by helping to:

- Learn to take initiative
- Learn to take risks
- Learn to be a comfortable speaker
- Develop a public posture that instills confidence
- Develop a Toolkit for Leadership Skill development drawing upon experience of current leaders
- Encourage local components to promote small firm practitioners, exhibits, separate award categories
- Provide ongoing one on one mentoring & support to developing leaders

2. What would you say to a small firm practitioner who does not see the value of membership, would you do anything differently to increase or promote the value AIA provides?

I would propose the creation of a matrix and toolkit with the practitioner, identifying the critical issues for their practice. Using that matrix, we could identify and indicate areas of member value added by membership in the institute.

As examples:

- Continuing Education & the skill development AIA provides to members vs non-members
- Networking
- Peer group issue resolution - how are others dealing with an issue
- Practice guides & workshops to provide support in educating the public on the value of licensed architects and to them the value of AIA
- Advocacy for specific local issues & broader impact issues of import to every practitioner
- Team exposure for larger projects
- The difficulty in breaking into public-sector work as a part of the Institute's conversations with public agencies at all levels

3. What do you believe are the prime issues facing small firms?

While there are many crossover issues impacting all firms and practitioners at every level, the challenges for the small practitioner are very specific and include the following:

- Fee pressure from unlicensed or moonlighting competitors
- Lack of public understanding of the value provided by licensed professionals
- Financial pressures, cash flow & financing, access to credit
- The difficulty in breaking into public-sector work; this must be part of the Institute's conversations with public agencies at all levels.
- Firm transition

4. How do you think the AIA public awareness campaign should acknowledge the work of small firms across a broad range of project types?

This response requires a focused program with specific targets geared to the project types and range of the small practitioner. At a minimum, included should be the following:

- Showcase their work, they are creative & efficient
- Local exhibits for the work of small practitioners
- Walking tours to showcase work of small practitioners
- Separate design awards for both small projects & small practitioners
- Encourage local municipalities to seek out small local practitioners for municipal work - libraries, firehouses, schools, etc.
- Create an ad campaign to refer to them as “boutique” firms, putting them in a different context for the general public