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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) was formed in 1857, and the New Orleans chapter was founded in 1909 as its thirteenth chapter overall and only the second chapter in the South. AIA New Orleans has a storied history with many significant accomplishments related to promoting the field, providing professional development opportunities for local architects, supporting economic development by attracting businesses to the city, promoting historic preservation, and influencing local policies and practices related to land use and development.

As of 2015, AIA New Orleans has grown to include over 600 members representing 193 firms or organizations. AIA New Orleans continues to offer high quality professional development for members, peer engagement opportunities that build a strong network and professional community of architects, and public awareness and advocacy activities related to quality design in the built environment. Working in collaboration with the New Orleans Architecture Foundation (NOAF), AIA New Orleans successfully completed a capital campaign that enabled the purchase and renovation of the Center for Design, the space on Lee Circle in downtown New Orleans that houses its offices and hosts many AIA-related events. (See the website, www.aianeworleans.org, for more information about AIA’s history and current activities.)

In light of the growth of the organization, the opportunities presented by the Center for Design space, and the challenges of managing and sustaining a professional association in the current economic climate, the Board decided that it was an appropriate time to develop a strategic plan. They retained independent consultant Alan Brickman of Brickman Nonprofit Solutions to design and facilitate the planning process, and to draft the strategic plan document.

Mr. Brickman met with a seven-member Strategic Planning Task Force from February through June 2015, during which time there was also an all-day retreat of the full Executive Board. To inform the planning discussions, an online survey was distributed to the membership and completed by 97 members. In addition, Mr. Brickman conducted in-depth interviews with seven local partners and funders, and gathered information from six other AIA chapters identified by the Task Force.

This strategic plan captures all the decisions and directions developed through the planning process. It is intended as a roadmap for going forward over the coming three to five years, and as a resource and reference as AIA New Orleans continues to plan and implement activities that make meaningful contributions to both its members and the New Orleans community.
MISSION AND VISION

AIA New Orleans is a professional association of architects that is registered with the IRS as a 501(c)6 tax-exempt organization. The New Orleans Architecture Foundation (NOAF) is an affiliated 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization that was initially formed to coordinate the capital campaign that enabled the purchase and renovation of the Center for Design in Lee Circle where both organizations have their offices. These organizations work as strong partners whose missions are as follows:

AIA NEW ORLEANS

AIA New Orleans is a member-driven professional association that advances the practice of architecture in New Orleans through a comprehensive program of professional development, professional peer engagement, advocacy, and public awareness activities.

NEW ORLEANS ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION MISSION

The New Orleans Architecture Foundation supports and collaborates with AIA New Orleans on education and advocacy activities that enhance public appreciation of architecture and design as vital community assets that enrich the quality of life in New Orleans.

A vision of the future that informs and drives AIA’s planning and decision-making, both programatically and organizationally, includes the following components:

- AIA New Orleans envisions a **diverse, active, and robust professional community of architects** working together and supporting each other to improve the quality of the built environment in the city, and to enhance the reputation and stature of the field of architecture.

- AIA New Orleans envisions **active partnerships** with government, community-based organizations and neighborhood associations, academia, and others through which architects play a significant role in planning, designing, and creating a resilient, sustainable, and economically vibrant New Orleans.

- AIA New Orleans envisions a **highly visible, well-regarded, and entrepreneurial professional association** with the resources and capacity to deliver high quality services and effective advocacy, and thereby serve as a significant resource to both AIA members and the community.
KEY OVERARCHING THEMES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

- **Strategically targeted and value-added member services**: On the basis of an analysis of AIA’s past programming and the expressed needs of both new and longtime members, the program activities described in the strategic plan have been strategically selected to maximize the value added to members.

- **Expanded member engagement**: AIA will significantly expand member engagement in both its programmatic and organizational activities. AIA will be strategic and intentional about peer networking opportunities in ways that maximize the value of the professional association to members, and will allocate resources for and actively encourage member-initiated projects and activities. All AIA members will have access to leadership positions within the organization, including full voting membership on the Executive Board.

- **Engagement with the broader community**: AIA will actively reach out to local government, community-based organizations and neighborhood associations, academia, and others to identify and implement activities that provide significant and valued benefits to the community. In addition, AIA will develop opportunities for interaction and collaboration between AIA’s membership and individuals and organizations in the community.

- **Diversifying revenue to support program expansion**: AIA will diversify its revenue base through the entrepreneurial and creative use of the Center for Design location, as well as a variety of approaches and strategies that target AIA’s traditional constituencies in the design, construction, and planning fields as well as other prospective individual and institutional donors in the community.

- **Increased organizational capacity**: AIA will systematically and strategically build its Board, staff, and committees, and will actively engage members, partners, and sponsors in ways that create the organizational capacity to meaningfully deliver on both the member services and community services aspects of the mission.

- **A robust partnership between AIA and NOAF**: All AIA’s public awareness and advocacy activities will be implemented in partnership with the New Orleans Architecture Foundation. NOAF can effectively attract resources and community support for these activities, thereby significantly enhancing their reach and impact.
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Each category of program activity presented below includes a list of the specific programs and services, a value proposition that articulates AIA’s aspiration for how these programs add value to members, and a preliminary list of key partners that will be engaged in the implementation of the program activities.

LICENSURE SUPPORT, CONTINUING EDUCATION, AND PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

a. ARE seminars and study groups;
b. Opportunities for CEUs including: building tours, “business of architecture” workshops, and lectures and seminars by AIA’s local sponsors and partners as well as AIA network members;
c. Document and contract templates;
d. Library/clearinghouse of best practice and current trends information and materials;
e. Career services and job banks.

VALUE PROPOSITION

These member-driven and state-of-the-art professional development services respond directly to the needs of architects at all levels of their career paths (i.e., emerging, mid-career, and veteran practitioners), and address issues related to both the practice and the business of architecture. The resources made uniquely available to members reflect national best practices and current trends in the field, and draw on both the best academic thinking and real world practice of experienced local and national architects. Because these services are member-driven and often member-led, AIA’s professional development programming provides opportunities to highlight member firms both within and outside AIA.

KEY PARTNERS

- AIA National, AIA Louisiana, and the AIA network;
- Local sponsors, vendors, and other partners;
- Related industry associations;
- AIA members (individuals and firms).

NETWORKING, MENTORING, AND BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Note: This includes both opportunities for networking among members, and between members and AIA’s sponsors and partners in related fields.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

a. Activities for architecture students and AIAS such as “firm crawls;”
b. Robust calendar of social events;
c. Design awards, with expanded recognition of project team members;
d. Structured networking activities, such as “speed” networking;
e. Activities involving AIA fellows and YAF;
f. Sponsored charettes, competitions, and other opportunities for member collaboration.
VALUE PROPOSITION

AIA creates networking opportunities and events with great intentionality to maximize the added value to members. In addition to creating collegiality and comradeship, these AIA networking activities will also provide opportunities to develop partnerships and generate new business, share knowledge about the state of the field, trouble-shoot and problem solve, and develop contacts with colleagues that support career development and advancement. In addition, AIA facilitates networking between member architects and a wide range of relevant sectors of the community (i.e., professionals in the design, construction, and planning fields; government officials and policy makers; academic institutions; and community-based organizations) in ways that support the visibility and success of AIA members, both individuals and firms.

KEY PARTNERS

- Tulane School of Architecture;
- Young Architects Forum (YAF);
- AIA Fellows;
- AIA Associates;
- Women in Architecture (WIA);
- National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA);
- Sponsors and partners;
- Related industry associations;
- AIA members (individuals and firms).

ADVOCACY AND THE COLLECTIVE VOICE OF ARCHITECTS

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

a. Monitoring relevant local policy and legislative developments, with regular reports to members and, as appropriate, calls to action;

b. Building relationships with relevant local government officials through regular meetings and other communication;

c. Active advocacy on selected issues (i.e., policy white papers, press releases, mobilizing members and partners, etc.).

VALUE PROPOSITION

AIA is the most effective vehicle for bringing the collective voice of architects to policy makers and public officials on issues important to our field that are related to land use and the built environment in New Orleans. Member engagement, input, and leadership is central to AIA’s advocacy work, and there are meaningful opportunities for members to access information on policy and regulatory issues, and to shape the advocacy positions of the association. AIA’s advocacy has the dual impact of improving the business success of architects and architecture firms, as well as enhancing the stature, recognition, and positioning of architects in the community as highly regarded and sought-after professionals.

KEY PARTNERS

- AIA National and AIA Louisiana;
- New Orleans Architecture Foundation (NOAF);
- Mayor, City Council, and other local public officials;
• Related industry associations;
• AIA members (individuals and firms).

PUBLIC AWARENESS

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES
a. Website blog (member and/or guest written);
b. Regular social media posts (FB, Twitter, etc.);
c. Public events and workshops hosted at the Center for Design;
d. Architecture tours.

VALUE PROPOSITION
AIA’s public awareness activities create greater understanding and awareness among current and potential clients, leading to increased business success for architects. The use of both traditional and new media to promote public understanding of architecture has a reach beyond New Orleans to the regional or state level. In addition, public awareness activities about the field have the long-term impact of attracting young people to the profession in ways that benefit local firms and, importantly, diversify the professional community of architects.

KEY PARTNERS
• New Orleans Architecture Foundation (NOAF);
• Press/media;
• Neighborhood associations;
• City government;
• Educational organizations (HS, universities);
• New Orleans Arts Council;
• Community organizations (preservation, affordable housing, etc.);
• AIA members (individuals and firms).
MEMBER OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

CURRENT STATUS
AIA New Orleans’ total 2015 membership of over 600 includes the following:

- 390 licensed architects;
- 225 associates (not-yet-licensed architects);
- 19 Fellows (veteran practitioners who have received formal recognition from AIA National);
- 30 affiliates (firms in related fields).

These members represent 193 local firms and organizations, and approximately 80% of the local professional community of licensed architects. (Note: This is consistent with AIA member recruitment results nationally.)

The benefits of membership can be grouped into three categories:

a. Access to AIA information, materials, programs, and networking opportunities (and when programs are fee-based, at a reduced cost or free);

b. Access to insurance and other discounts resulting from AIA-negotiated agreements traditionally associated with professional associations;

c. Perceived status as a professional. (Note: There is some confusion among non-architects about the distinction between AIA membership and licensure. Regardless, being able to put “AIA” after an architect’s name is still considered a benefit to members that enhances their professional status.)

STRATEGIES FOR EXPANDING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT
AIA New Orleans’ strategic imperative in the short-term is less about the active recruitment of new members (although that remains an ongoing activity), but rather expanding and communicating the “added value” of membership in ways that increase member engagement in AIA programs and organizational activities. Specific strategies for increasing member engagement are:

a. **Highlighting firms and firm owners**: AIA will develop events and materials (print, electronic, traditional and new media) that highlight local architecture firms and firm owners/principals to a community audience.

b. **Highlighting associates**: AIA will develop activities and events that are opportunities for AIA associate members (i.e., emerging professionals, not-yet-licensed) to present and highlight their projects and themselves to an audience of colleagues in ways that build their reputations and enhance their careers.

c. **Affinity groups**: AIA will support the development of a robust and active network of “affinity groups” within the AIA, including existing groups (WIA, NOMA, YAF), as well as new groups potentially organized around professional status (associates, newly licensed, firm owners), areas of expertise (green infrastructure architects, residential architects), or other aspects of affinity. The development of new groups will be driven by member interest and initiative, and AIA will develop a specific menu of supports available to its affinity groups. Further, the affinity groups will be given a great deal of autonomy and control over their activities and their use of any funds they receive through AIA.
d. **Grants to Members:** AIA will budget funds with which to make modest grants to members, consortia of members, or established affinity groups for activities that are aligned with AIA’s mission and the directions in the strategic plan. Such a grant program may have an annual or semi-annual deadline for applications, or, alternatively, a “rolling” process that accepts applications throughout the year. The structure and features of the member grant program will be better defined, and will include specifics related to: the maximum size of grants, the formal set of criteria by which grant applications are considered, and a specific plan for recognizing and publicizing the funded projects both with the membership and with the public.

e. **Firm Visits:** AIA will develop a “road show” presentation about its value-added programs and all the current and new opportunities for member activity and involvement, and then take this presentation to local architecture firms in order to catalyze, through face-to-face contact, more member activity and engagement.

f. **Content-Rich Media Strategy:** AIA will develop a robust media strategy that highlights both members and AIA as a professional association. Further, AIA will create a significant body of content about local architecture and trends in the field for dissemination through traditional media (Times-Picayune, City Business, TV, radio), social media (Facebook, Twitter, video, blogs), and member communication (newsletters, website, meeting presentations).

g. **Member Service Recognition:** AIA will develop activities and events for the formal recognition of members for service to the chapter and/or the community. This type of recognition may either be piggybacked onto the Design Awards gala, or develop as its own independent event/gala.
STRATEGIES FOR EXPANDING REVENUE

AIA’s current operating budget is approximately $275,000. The Strategic Planning Task Force set as a preliminary target to double AIA’s revenues within 3 to 5 years to support the expanded staffing and program activity detailed in the strategic plan. Specific plans for expanding revenues are presented below.

USE OF THE DESIGN CENTER

AIA’s vision for the Design Center in Lee Circle is that it is a bustling, always-active space that creates opportunities for both visibility and revenue for the organization. While always reserving some space for AIA-related committees and other meetings, and minimizing “permanent” uses, the specific revenue generating activities for the Design Center are as follows:

a. Rental for non-AIA uses such as exhibits, receptions, and the like, with a target of 6 per year. These can include one-time events such as wedding receptions, or longer-term exhibits or programs (up to 2 weeks). These activities can be scheduled during daytime or evenings hours.

b. AIA-sponsored tours, as well as tours sponsored by other organizations or businesses, that can start and finish at the Center. (For the non-AIA tours, a fee arrangement can be negotiated.)

c. A gift shop and/or bookstore that generates revenue and supports AIA public awareness objectives as well;

d. While the Design Center does not have the capacity for a fully-developed food service operation, AIA will explore opportunities for periodic food trucks or other food vendors setting up at regularly scheduled times (one fixed time per week, for example) and/or in coordination with other Design Center events and activities via arrangements that generate revenue for AIA and add to the draw of the space.

e. A “suggested donation” box similar to those employed by museums and other cultural institutions.

FUNDRAISING EVENTS

AIA currently has a robust annual calendar of events that generate revenue, provide networking opportunities for members, and create visibility for the organization. Plans for expanding event-related revenues include:

a. Continue to improve and expand the existing events (including the design awards gala, golf tournament, crawfish boil, bowling night, and winter holiday party) by adjusting sponsor levels and expanding sponsor recruitment through Board member contacts.

b. Develop and implement a fall gala in collaboration with NOAF that targets a different and more broadly community-based audience than the design awards. The focus of this gala might be recognition of members and other who have made a significant contribution to the New Orleans built environment and/or the AIA chapter. This event might also include an appropriate high-profile celebrity keynote speaker who will be a major draw in the community.

c. Develop a patron party/VIP party related to each event (when appropriate) that provides an opportunity for individuals and businesses to give at a higher level. These patron parties should have some specific incentives for the attendees to motivate their higher-level giving, such as networking time with the celebrity keynote or special highly-visible recognition of their higher level support for AIA.
MEMBER DUES
There will be a modest increase in member dues for 2016 that will position AIA New Orleans to be more in line with other similarly sized AIA chapters. On an annual basis, the Executive Board will review the dues structure and may make additional adjustments based on the needs of AIA New Orleans and the trends in chapter finances and dues across AIA’s national network.

GRANTS
There are a number of potential sources of grant revenue that can support AIA’s community programming, e.g., activities in schools, tours or lecture series targeting the public, etc. Grant applications can be submitted through NOAF’s 501c3, or in collaboration with other local nonprofit organizations involved in the built environment of New Orleans. Categories of potential sources include:

a. AIA National;
b. Local, regional, and national foundations and corporate contributions programs;
c. Local and state-level government agencies.

INDIVIDUAL AND BUSINESS DONORS
The core messages in AIA’s funding requests to foundations and corporate giving programs to support its community programming can also be used to attract individual and business donors through a “Friends of AIA”-type structure, with a range of related benefits and incentives that will be conceptualized and marketed.

WEBSITE ADVERTISING
The anticipated expanded level of programming, member engagement, and public awareness activities will be reflected in an upgraded website that will function as a vehicle for the active engagement of both AIA members and the broader community. As a result, there will be new opportunities to attract advertisers to the website, including firms and professionals in the design, construction, and planning fields as well as other partner organizations and institutions for whom AIA’s key constituencies are important target audiences. AIA will strategize the structure and pricing of these opportunities to attract advertisers, and over time will develop significant revenues related to this activity.

MESSAGES TO POTENTIAL DONORS OUTSIDE THE FIELD
AIA New Orleans’ plans to expand revenue include reaching out beyond the organization’s traditional donor constituencies (i.e., member architects as well as individuals and organizations in the design, construction, and planning fields). Specifically, AIA seeks to target foundations and corporate giving programs, local residents and businesses, and others whose philanthropy is driven by a desire to support organizations that benefit the community and/or address important community needs. In this context, it is important that AIA articulate the case for supporting the organization in terms that will appeal to these new constituencies. Below are several of the core messages that will comprise that appeal.

- Architecture is a cultural asset: Just as New Orleans celebrates its music and cuisine, so too should we celebrate architecture as an important cultural asset. New Orleans’ unique architectural history enhances the quality of life for residents and attracts tourism dollars and other investment. AIA plays a central role in creating public awareness and appreciation of this essential aspect of the city’s cultural heritage.

- Architecture is fundamental to resiliency: In post-Katrina New Orleans, concerns about the city’s resilience in the face of another catastrophic event are high priorities
for residents, businesses, and policy makers. Through AIA, architects are essential strategic partners and resources (to government, to builders and contractors, to local residents, etc.) when it comes to those aspects of the built environment and the related land use policies and practices that will position and prepare New Orleans for any eventuality.

- **Architecture and a sustainable environment:** New Orleans experiences the negative impacts of water pollution, coastal erosion, street flooding, subsidence, sea level rise, and climate change as much, if not more than, many other American cities. Through AIA, architects are essential strategic partners and resources with regard to issues of environmental protection and sustainability.

- **Architecture is good business in the 21st Century:** New Orleans is experiencing an economic renaissance that is being driven by a strong small business community and various resources that support entrepreneurship and innovation. Fundamental to the city’s ability to attract and retain these entrepreneurs is a robust community of architects who help create the physical spaces that best support the kinds of businesses that will drive the region’s economy in the 21st century.
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The discussions of AIA New Orleans’ organizational structure focused on assembling and structuring the “person−power” necessary to implement the activities in the strategic plan related to programming, member engagement, and fundraising. To that end, the actions outlined below address Board recruitment, the committee structure of the organization, and future staff expansion.

BOARD RECRUITMENT

The central goal for the recruitment of new members of the Board is to identify individuals who bring the passion, skills, and commitment to embody AIA’s renewed focus on being an entrepreneurial, creative, and, importantly, member−driven organization. As part of a targeted and strategic approach to Board recruitment, the needs for specific types of individuals will be communicated to the membership, and members will be actively involved in identifying appropriate and qualified Board members. A preliminary list of skills and experiences that would be assets to the organization, especially in the context of implementing the strategic plan, is as follows:

a. Fundraising experience, especially event fundraising;
b. Press, media, and public relations experience;
c. Policy advocacy experience;
d. Business development and entrepreneurship experience;

Below are several additional notes about Board recruitment:

• Board recruitment will be driven in part by the goal of diversifying the leadership of the organization, and ensuring that all professional and demographic sub−constituencies within the membership are represented in the leadership. (Note: This includes expanding the number and types of local firms represented on the Board.)

• To the extent that AIA will be reaching out beyond its traditional constituencies of architects and professionals in the design, construction, and planning fields, the NOAF Board and the AIA committees (described below) will function as avenues for the involvement of non−architects.

• The Board will upgrade its approach to orienting new Board members by refining the Board packet and orientation session currently in place, and implementing a buddy/mentor system in which new Board members are paired with veteran Board members who will serve as an additional source of information and support.

• Organizations such as AIA that have relatively small paid staffs often develop roles for Board members that might be considered “staff” responsibilities, sometimes resulting in confusion about authority and accountability. The Board will develop language that clearly differentiates the Board “governance” function from the staff’s “operational management” function, and will include this information in Board orientation materials.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

AIA has had a complex committee structure in which numerous member committees take on programmatic, organizational, and fundraising tasks. The committee structure will be reconfigured to create greater focus and clarity; greater capacity for strategic, goal−oriented, and accountable work; and effective communication and coordination with the staff and Board. To that end, the new list of standing
committees of the organization (as distinct from Task Forces which exist for a discreet and time-limited purpose) is presented below. (Note: The implementation of this new committee structure may require a change in the current by-laws of the organization.)

a. **Executive Committee:** composed of the officers of the Board and perhaps others, and responsible for coordinating and facilitating the meetings and activities of the Board;

b. **Finance Committee:** a small committee responsible for reviewing the organization’s finances, monitoring performance relative to the budget, and regularly reporting to the Board on all financial matters. The Finance Committee is also responsible for coordinating the process of the annual audit, including selecting the auditor.

c. **Membership Committee:** responsible for planning and overseeing all member engagement activities. All AIA member affinity groups (e.g., Women in Architecture, and others described earlier in the strategic plan) will be subcommittees of the Membership Committee.

d. **Event Committee:** responsible for planning and coordinating the annual calendar of AIA fundraising and other member and community events. There will be Task Forces convened under the auspices of the Event Committee for the planning and implementation of specific events.

e. **Development Committee:** responsible to work with the staff on planning and implementing all other fundraising and revenue-related activities specified in the strategic plan other than events.

f. **Advocacy Committee:** responsible for planning and implementing of AIA’s policy advocacy and public awareness activities, in collaboration with NOAF.

A note about the New Orleans Architecture Foundation: While officially a separate organization, NOAF functions in several important ways like an AIA committee. It is stipulated in the by-laws that a majority of NOAF Board members must also be AIA Board members, so as to ensure good communication, coordination, and alignment. The Foundation will be an active partner in the implementation of all AIA public awareness and advocacy activities, and will be a vehicle for the involvement of AIA members as well as other individuals and organizations in the community in those activities.

Below are several additional notes about the committees:

- Every committee will include at least one Board member, and one of the Board representatives will function as chair. This is to ensure effective communication and coordination between and among the committees and the Board.

- Committee chairs will think creatively and strategically about the recruitment of non-Board members and in particular non-architects onto the committees if they bring skills and contacts that would be assets to the work of the committee.

- If an affinity group functioning within the Membership Committee has funds that they raised or that have been allocated by the Board to their activities, then a member of that affinity group will also sit on the Finance Committee.

**STAFF EXPANSION**

AIA’s current staffing includes: a part-time Executive Director, a full-time a Member Services Coordinator, and a full-time Association Manager. As with many organizations with active programs and limited staff, while these positions have a clear division of responsibilities, there is also a great deal of overlap and collaboration on activities and events. The activities outlined in the strategic plan will require additional staff; however, any staff expansion is dependent on the success of the organization with respect to
fundraising and new revenue. In this context, the recommendations regarding staffing over the coming years are presented below, with the specific timetable to be driven by both the organizational development of AIA and the available funding.

a. As soon as is financially feasible, the organization will transition the Executive Director position to full-time so that the Executive Director can be an even more active and visible advocate and champion for the organization and its mission, and can effectively manage the various new and expanded directions outlined in the strategic plan.

b. NOAF will have a staff person that can help coordinate the programmatic, organizational, and fundraising activities of the Foundation.

c. Within 5 years (i.e., the same time horizon that the Board is projecting to double the revenues), AIA will have a staff that includes the Executive Director plus four or five additional staff members whose job descriptions and division of responsibilities will be driven by the AIA’s program expansion and the infrastructure needs of the organization.

d. AIA will continue to explore and implement, pending funding, an appropriate and competitive compensation package for all employees.