AIA

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

AIA research: the intersection of climate action, global pandemics, and racial justice

Request for proposal—helping architects create a zero carbon, healthy, resilient and equitable built environment while addressing COVID-19 and social injustice.

August 31, 2020

Project overview

As AIA implements a new strategic plan and aligns itself with key societal issues—most notably, climate action and racial and social justice—it is imperative we understand the intersection of this work and how to navigate it. This work is important as we move forward in our work to highlight and share the value of architects—while also providing the tools, resources, knowledge, education, and networking to help them realize this value. We are currently operating in a time of intersecting crises driving economic uncertainty and social disruption. All these crises (COVID-19 pandemic's health crisis, climate crisis, social unrest, and economic recession) are inextricably linked—and disproportionately harming BIPOC communities. As AIA moves forward, we need to understand the intersecting—and competing—issues that face society, and the ways that architects can intervene to make a difference.

AIA has embraced the triple bottom line, often portrayed as people, profit, and planet. But its parts have been amplified, and it is no longer sufficient to look at them separately without understanding the intersections—and also the tensions—between them.
AIA's newly released 2020 Policy Statements are tied to the triple bottom line concept, with three pillars of focus: a strong future economy, climate action, and healthy and equitable communities. The policies supported by the AIA under these pillars are focused on tangible, specific policy interventions to improve American lives.

While AIA implements its Climate Action Plan, institutes a Framework to Address Systemic Racial Injustice, and supports policy actions outlined in its 2020 Policy Platform, we must understand the ways these issues are intersecting—and where they are not. The answer to these questions are not simple or easy—nor will one research study or initiative answer all our questions, but we hope this concept outlines a first step along that path. This first study is focused outward—on the work and role of the architect.

This work has a three-pronged approach, with additional phases of work possible.

I. Visualization

In 2020, AIA has produced a number of documents to move the profession toward the issues of climate action, equity and social justice, healthy and equitable communities, and economic strength. The five documents that are being used to help AIA organize its initiatives and communicate effectively include the AIA's 2020 Policy Platform, 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, Climate Action Plan, Framework for Design Excellence, and Framework to Address Systemic Racial Injustice (draft). A prior report, AIA's 2019 Research Agenda provides additional content related to this work. While these documents are strong, they stand, for the most part, in isolation. With the architectural profession so visual, and the intersections so profound, AIA needs a visual interpretation of this work with an architectural lens.

Deliverables:
- Outline of intersecting themes from the aforementioned AIA documents
- Visual overlay of key themes from the documents, highlighting intersections—as well as outliers.

II. Landscape assessment—intersecting trends and the role of the architect

Architects can help provide equity, contribute to the reversal of climate change, and reduce the frequency and impacts of pandemics by designing for biodiverse urban environments that instead support physical activity, healthy socialization, and sustained food systems. Architects can design settings that truly support sheltering in place, protecting Americans from harsh climate conditions and providing access to nature and natural conditioning (for continued operations in the face of infrastructure disruption). Architects can design settings for easy maintenance, enhanced indoor air quality, and touch-less occupancy to control against infectious viruses and bacteria. However, it is crucial that while they do this work, they are mindful of the intersecting outcomes, potential conflicts in design approaches, and unintended consequence of design decisions. To do this, we need to understand the forces and trends—and the intersection of architects' work with those trends.

This phase of work includes an overview and assessment of the trends affecting our communities and built environment in the face of climate change impacts and natural disasters, communities at risk, homelessness and shortages in affordable housing, the health pandemic, and resource conservation—within the context of racial injustice, equity broadly, and the economic realities. It then includes how each of these trends affect different building types as well as an overlay of the architect's work and role(s) in light of those changing trends. The following documents will be provided to the researcher/consultant and should provide a strong starting point for the work:
- Recent (August 2020) AIA survey of architects on how they think architects can influence issues facing society today. Those findings will be provided as context for this part of the project.

- AIA's Reopening America reports by building type that outline strategies for reopening America safely (https://www.aia.org/resources/6299247-reopening-america-strategies-for-safer-bui). Building types addressed: offices, schools, retail stores, senior living communities, and multifamily housing.

Deliverable:
Word document report that includes the following information, looking at issues intersectionally, aligning with the graphic created in part I of this project. The report should include:
- Brief description of each issue and trends around that issue (i.e., is it short-term or a long-term trend, level of disruption on society, local versus global, etc.)
  - Issues likely include homelessness and population trends, housing affordably, building adaptive reuse, climate adaptation and mitigation, resilience, existing building investment, environmental justice/at-risk communities, school and education pedagogy trends, aging, community infrastructure, equity, and economic factors.
  - Note: This is not intended to be a deep look at each issue but provide context in the future facing architects.
- Impact/relation of the issue to the built environment
- Identifying barriers in addressing these issues within the built environment.
- Impact of individual or intersecting trends in different building types (data source: AIA building type reports on Reopening America)
- Practical role of the architect in addressing the issue, including the impact the architect can have on this (data source: AIA issues survey)

III. Design interventions & conflicts

As architects take on roles to lead and/or contribute to the future direction of our built environment and communities, there are design solutions that can be selected to help address these issues. There may also be unintended consequences that result from a design decision that may solve one issue while causing another. For architects to make better decisions—and AIA to prioritize its calls for action, resource development, and research investments, we would like an assessment that reveals specific interventions, conflicts and potential consequences architect may face in the midst of multiple influences.

Deliverable: Word document report (3,000 word max) that identifies architectural process and design solutions that address intersections of mitigating transmission of disease (most notably, COVID-19), climate action, social justice, and the economic recession. This builds on the roles identified as those architects can most affect (part II above)
- Identify design solutions and architectural processes for those issues architects can most affect.
- Organize design solutions around our desired outcome of a Zero Carbon, Resilient, Equitable and healthy built environment
- Describe conflicting design solutions that may successfully address one desired outcome but negatively affect another

Audience

The audience for this work is two-fold:

- AIA leadership and staff: To help AIA to make more informed decisions around program prioritization and improve communication around the architect's role and potential benefits to practice diversification, new practice models.
- AIA members, architects, components and building product manufacturers: To help architects, designers, researchers, and others in the design professions to understand the context their work can have on driving sustainability and equity outcomes—and the challenges they face.

Contract timeline

The consultant/researcher and team are expected to complete this work in by the end of the year, with the following timelines. Deliverables for each part are expected to be delivered within the allotted time for each part. The work does not need to happen consecutively, and we would expect that some parts of the work could occur concurrently.

Part 1: 2-3 weeks, including a draft visual and a final based on feedback. The timeline assumes the following:

- 3-5 days week for document review
- 1 week for draft graphic creation and delivery
- 2-3 day feedback from AIA*
- 2 days for finalization of graphic

Part 2: 5-6 weeks, including a working draft by week 3 for feedback. The timeline assumes the following:

- 3-5 day for document review
- 2 weeks research for draft issue identification at the end of which is an outline sent for feedback
- 1 week feedback from AIA*
- 2 weeks to finalize report

Part 3: 5-7 weeks, including a working draft by week 3 for feedback

- 2 weeks: Review AIA's Sustainability Leadership group document on the intersection of Climate Action and COVID-19, and research design strategies that address equity, disease transmission (specifically, COVID-19), and climate action—at the same time
- 1 week: develop a report outline and deliver to AIA
- 1 week feedback from AIA*
- 2 weeks to finalize report

* If the AIA does not provide feedback in this time frame, the overall timeline will be adjusted. A member advisory group will be comprised to help support this project and provide prompt feedback. The researcher/consultant is expected to attend calls as required to receive feedback,

not to exceed 4. The researcher/consultant is expected to provide biweekly progress reports to the AIA identifying any problems with the work or timeline.

Budget

This is a fixed rate project. The project is expected to be $20,000–$30,000 overall. Please price this project as you expect is necessary to do this job. While we believe one entity is best suited to do this work, we could break the project up into parts, with guidelines around costs for each part:

- Part I: no more than $3,000
- Part II: $8,000–$12,000
- Part III: $8,000–$12,000

Proposal submission

Please include the following in your response:

- General approach to the project (i.e., restating the work as you understand it)
- Summary of qualifications—past work, biography, who will do the work, resource access, etc.
- Budget, which should include the following:
  - Estimated projected costs for each project part, with explanation
  - Hourly rate(s)
  - Total anticipated costs
- Timeline (using the outline above as a guide)
- Status as a minority or woman-owned/focused organization