

Moving to an International Practice: Small, Medium, Large— Guidance for all Practices regardless of Size

READINESS TOOL

The following tool is a quick, preliminary way to assess your readiness to enter the international practice arena. No actual scoring is involved, but as you look at your candid responses a preponderance of “YES” responses could be an indicator that you are prepared for a more in-depth go-no go analysis. A good next step prior to embarking on a fact-finding mission abroad would be to review the in-depth International Practice Checklist referenced in the RESOURCES portion of this document.

YES	MAYBE	NO	WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL COMPETITIVE VALUE OF WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER WITH RESPECT TO YOUR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITORS?
			Within your U.S. domestic market, is your design expertise considered specialized or otherwise distinctive within your competitive group?
			As foreign public works projects generally require extensive credentials as part of the selection process, do you have at least five prominent examples of your services within the past ten years?
			Per above, do all of your proposed key project leaders have at least ten years of experience (often the minimum expectation)?
			Is your Web site ready for international “shoppers” from afar? Does your Internet presence focus on the competitive strengths you wish to promote?
			[other competitive criteria]
YES	MAYBE	NO	HAVE YOU FOCUSED ON A SPECIFIC GLOBAL REGION?
			If you are focused on a specific region or country, is the focus based on an objective business factor (i.e., economic market research or other means of confirming the market for services you offer exists in reasonable quantity)?
			Are you current on the political and economic environment of your targeted region?
			[other geographic criteria]

YES	MAYBE	NO	DO YOU HAVE ANY CURRENT CONNECTIONS?
			Do you (or any senior member of your practice) have any pre-existing relationships with potential clients in your targeted region?
			Do you have any pre-existing relationships with U.S. clients with projects in your targeted region?
			Do you have any pre-existing relationships with design professionals or non-design professional potential representatives in your targeted region?
			Do you know any U.S. design firms who might take you abroad as a specialty consultant or JV partner?
			Do you have any design-build relationships, and if so, could a current design-build relationship take you overseas?
			[other relationship criteria]
YES	MAYBE	NO	WHAT WOULD BE THE EXTENT OF YOUR LEARNING CURVE?
			Does your practice have experience working in metric units of measurement?
			Have you ever visited your targeted region?
			Whether through firsthand experience or otherwise, are you familiar with the customs and social-cultural characteristics of your targeted region?
			[other learning curve criteria]
YES	MAYBE	NO	ARE YOU PREPARED FOR LONG HAUL FLIGHTS IN ECONOMY CLASS?
			Unless your target international market happens to be relatively close by, are you or your senior staff prepared for the time commitment and physical stress needed to seek work and service clients due to the long distance travel involved?
			Are you prepared to extend your work day due to potentially major time zone differences between you and your client and/or local associate?
			If you are focusing on certain Islamic countries, are you prepared to shift your weekend at least to the extent of maintaining communications with your clients/local associates if their first work day of the week is a Saturday or a Sunday?
			Are you equipped with a smart phone and data plan that will work globally, and if so, is it a cost effective plan?
			Does your practice have access to high speed, sizable bandwidth for rapidly transmitting and receiving data files, along with robust, up to date anti-viral software at your Internet portal?

YES	MAYBE	NO	ARE YOU PREPARED TO INVEST?
			If you have not already done so—are you prepared to invest in a fact finding, relationship building trip to your targeted region?
			Public projects often require in-person interviews with the prequalified firms or teams of firms. Are you prepared to bear the expense of attending project interviews abroad?
			Commonly clients offer retainers but also require letters of credit or performance bonds. Are you prepared to allocate capital in some form of reserve account for the life of the project, or decline the retainer and risk services provided ahead of payment?
			Payments pegged to project phase submittals and approvals are much more common than monthly progress payments. Are you prepared to carry your costs for extended periods of time?
			Are you prepared to sustain slow payments and significant retainage of fees and, potentially, milestone payments based on approved completion of design phases without progress payments?
			Rarely in the international practice arena are architect selections based solely on qualifications. Are you prepared to submit financial proposals along with each “technical” or credentials proposal?
			Frequently some form of conceptual design is required as part of the technical proposal. Are you willing to enter what are essentially design competitions with variably weighted financial proposals?
			If you are paid for your services in local currency to a local bank account, are you willing to accept the risk of currency fluctuation given past history within your targeted region?
			[other financial criteria]
YES	MAYBE	NO	PRACTICE MATTERS
			If you typically serve as the full service, prime contracting entity on domestic design agreements, are you willing to serve as a limited service subcontractor to a local design entity?
			Have you alerted your professional liability insurance carrier that you are exploring international project opportunities and confirmed that such work would not be excluded from your coverage?
			Do you have legal counsel that understands international practice and can advise and help prepare and protect you in your dealings and negotiations?
			Are you and your senior staff familiar with the basic tenets of the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act?
			Are you prepared to consider model contract agreements from foreign governments based on foreign law?

YES	MAYBE	NO	PRACTICE MATTERS (CONTINUED)
			Are you comfortable carrying the risk of “all in” fee proposals, as in many parts of the world there is no concept of reimbursable expenses?
			Does your current health plan cover business related travel in your targeted region?
			Do you consider yourself a patient person willing to adapt to slower, less direct business practices?
			Would you consider hiring an expatriate professional from your targeted region as a domestic employee to serve as your communications and cultural liaison with your international partners and clients?
			Are you willing to display humility and respect, avoiding the impression of cultural arrogance?
			[other practice criteria]

Moving to an International Practice: Small, Medium, Large— Guidance for all Practices regardless of Size

RESOURCES

RESOURCE	LINK
International Practice Checklist	www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aias078437.pdf
AIA International Chapters	www.aiainternational.org/
AIA International Committee Website	www.aia.org/international
International Union of Architects (UIA) Professional Practice Commission via AIA Website	www.aia.org/ppc
Adjusting to Foreign Business Customs and Practices	www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aias078937.pdf
AIA Hong Kong “Useful Links”	www.aiahk.org/usefullinks/links.php?type=2
AIA Middle East “Useful Links”	www.aiamiddleeast.org/general-links/
AIA Continental Europe	www.aiaeurope.org/
AIA Japan	www.aiajapan.org/index.html
AIA United Kingdom	www.aiauk.org
UIA’s “Architectural Practice Around the World” database	www.uia-architectes.org/en/exercer/exercer-dans-le-monde/commission-uia#.UX6SKsqn6JV
UIA Accord of Recommended International Standards of Professionalism in Architectural Practice	www.uia-architectes.org

RESOURCE	LINK
U.S. Department of Commerce International Trade Administration	www.trade.gov
U.S. Department of Commerce trade promotion events	www.export.gov/tradeevents
U.S. Department of Commerce Architecture & Engineering Website page	www.export.gov/industry/architecture/index.asp
U.S. Department of Commerce Office of Service Industries	www.ita.doc.gov/td/sif/index.html
U.S. Department of Commerce Market Development Cooperator Program	www.ita.doc.gov/td/mdcp/
The Advocacy Center	www.export.gov/advocacy
World Bank	www.export.gov/worldbank/
Inter-American Development Bank	www.export.gov/idb/
European Bank for Development and Reconstruction	www.export.gov/ebrd/
African Development Bank	www.export.gov/afdb
Asian Development Bank	www.export.gov/adb
Overseas Private Investment Corporation	www.opic.gov
U.S. Trade and Development Agency	www.ustda.gov/
League of Green Embassies Program	www.leagueofgreenembassies.org/
U.S. State Department Overseas Buildings Operations	www.state.gov/obo/

RESOURCE	LINK
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	www.usace.army.mil/BusinessWithUs.aspx
Millennium Challenge Corporation	www.mcc.gov
U.S. Agency for International Development	www.usaid.gov
Export-Import Bank of the United States	www.exim.gov
U.S. Small Business Administration Office of International Trade	www.sba.gov/oit
Federal Government Business Opportunities	www.fbo.gov/
Getting Paid for International Work	http://info.aia.org/aiarchitect/thisweek09/0501/0501b_getpaid.cfm
Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council	www.upc.gov.ae
Emirates Green Building Council	www.emiratesgbc.org
Abu Dhabi Dept. of Municipal Affairs	www.dma.abudhabi.ae
Dubai Municipality	www.dm.gov.ae
Brazil Construction Opportunities Webinar	www.oceac.com/PW3511006.wmv
China Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development	www.mohurd.gov.cn www.uschina.org/public/china/govstructure/govstructure_part5/
China Ministry of Science and Technology	www.most.gov.cn/eng/
China Building Materials Industry Association	http://cbmia.cbminfo.com/english/eindex.htm
China Energy Conservation Program	www.cecp.org.cn/englishhtml/index.asp
Ministry of Environmental Protection of China	www.mep.gov.cn/
U.S. China Build (a program of Evergreen Products Assoc.)	www.uschinabuild.org