

AIA Practice Management Digest – July 2017

 network.aia.org/practicemanagement/blogs/seth-anderson/2017/07/17/aia-practice-management-digest-july-2017

Pro bono work and public interest architecture

Letter from the editor

By Seth Anderson, AIA

The desire to make the world a better place seems to be a common quality among architects. I think that comes from the gratification most of us receive from seeing our conceptual creations make a physical mark on our communities -- whether it's beautifying a neglected area of the city, creating the healthy environment for children to learn, or developing that most basic human need, housing. Architects, by nature of our training, are accustomed to looking for elegant solutions to unique problems, and many architects are using those skills to make an impact on our communities through traditional architectural projects, but also volunteerism and pro-bono projects.

This quarter's PMKC Digest focuses on pro-bono services and public interest architecture. The first article, *Big Lessons from a Tiny Library*, outlines how Fanning Howey incorporates pro-bono work into their firm, tips for adjusting the approach to pro-bono projects, and why the firm feels it makes good business sense.

From the AIA Trust, the article *Managing Risks Related to Pro Bono Services* offers suggestions on how to reduce the risks associated with providing pro-bono services. The final article features the work that the buildingcommunityWORKSHOP does as an architect-run non-profit community design center. This unique approach to providing support for non-profits came from the for-profit sector and may serve as model for the next step in the evolution of architects working to better our communities.

We've also assembled many other great resources in the Additional Reading section of the Digest for individuals and firms looking to get involved with pro-bono and public interest design. Of particular note are the AIA's [Pro Bono Services Guidelines and Resources](#) page, and the [B106- 2010 Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect for Pro Bono Services](#), available to AIA members for only a penny (\$0.01).

Does your firm provide pro-bono services or make public interest architecture part of your operating model? If so, we'd love to hear about it on the [PMKC Discussion Group](#).



Features

[Big lessons from a tiny library](#)

By Rick Hahn, Assoc. AIA; Sean Costello; and Luke Bell

How do you select the pro bono work that is right for you? Three leaders at Fanning Howey share the lessons

learned from a recent tiny library project.

Managing risks related to pro bono services

By Kirsten R. Murray, FAIA; Article provided by The AIA Trust

Many architects are strongly motivated to provide volunteer or pro bono services to contribute to their communities and enrich their practice. What are the responsibilities and potential risks inherent in providing pro bono services? How can you avoid unintended liabilities for you and your team?

A non-profit community design center run by architects

By buildingcommunityWORKSHOP

Too frequently the people with the greatest needs are left out of conversations about the places where they live, work, and play. We work to shift this power dynamic in pursuit of design justice, amplifying the voices of those who will experience the direct effects of development initiatives.

Further reading and resources

[Disaster Assistance Handbook](#)

[Community resilience design resources](#)

[Wisdom from the field: Public interest architecture in practice](#)

[Center for Civic Leadership](#)

[Pro bono services and guidelines](#)

[The AIA Trust: Risk Management Library](#)

Contribute to the Digest

The next issue of the Practice Management Digest will investigate “Tips for training employees: Implement a continuing education program, create an effective AXP mentoring program and develop a robust firm procedure training program.” Join the conversation and let us know how your firm helps emerging professionals grow and improve their skills. Submission deadline is August 7th.

We are always looking for topics that you would like to see addressed in an edition of the *Digest*. If you have topics related to practice management that you’d like explored or articles you would like us to consider, please contact Seth Anderson, AIA, at sanderson@ascentarch.com.

Big lessons from a tiny library

 aia.org/articles/139491-big-lessons-from-a-tiny-library

By Rick Hahn, Assoc. AIA; Sean Costello; and Luke Bell , July 17, 2017

Three leaders at Fanning Howey share lessons learned from a recent pro bono project

Giving back should be a tenet of every design firm's philosophy, but firms can sometimes have trouble getting started. How do you select the right work for you? How do you get busy coworkers to participate? And how can you utilize pro bono work to further your firm's culture?

These are questions [Fanning Howey](#) faced before volunteering to design, build, and install two tiny libraries for Fletcher Place Community Center in our hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. It was a process of trial and error but through combined effort, patience, and perseverance, our team ended up with a wonderful experience and several valuable lessons about how to best approach pro bono projects.

Select pro bono work that furthers your firm's mission

If giving back is a part of your firm's mission, your pro bono work should be representative of how you'd like to change the world. Take a look at the work you do every day and ask yourself why you do it. At Fanning Howey, education is our calling; as architects, we feel compelled to design environments for learning. For us, designing tiny libraries was a unique way to spread a love of reading and learning to our local community, and to provide disadvantaged children and adults with a diverse selection of literature. Selecting pro bono work that your team is already passionate about will be met with positive energy, which will increase participation and result in a better project.

Adjust how you work

In our traditional work, we have formal contracts that delineate project deadlines, scope, and responsibilities. In pro bono work it can sometimes be difficult to coordinate availabilities, funding can dry up, and scope can turn on a dime. Be as flexible as possible with your time and process—a good designer knows being prepared for the evolution of design is a necessity for any successful project.

There are similarities between pro bono and traditional design work, too. In the case of our tiny libraries, our team held a design charrette with the children of the community center to meet, collaborate, and get their input, just as we would with traditional clients (only this time with more crayons). Since one of the libraries was to be installed in the playground area of Fletcher Place, our team sought out what the children loved about reading and books and determined how the design could relate and improve their daily experiences.

We had the idea of encouraging the children to design bookmarks for the library so that, during our charrettes, they not only contributed ideas but also created something tangible for library users. This influenced the installation of a small box on the side of each library where community members can take a handmade bookmark after visiting a library. Our team was also inspired to incorporate fun and colorful reused flooring, paint, and tile samples from our office to bring a bit of our environment into theirs.



The tiny libraries were created with reused wood from an architect's old cedar fence, and all the books were donated by Fanning Howey employees.

This was most likely the first design charrette for the children of Fletcher Place. But whether your clients are children or adults, it can be challenging to work with individuals who aren't familiar with the typical design and building process. For this, patience and communication are paramount. Understand that you may sometimes need to adjust your process, step out of your comfort zone, or in our case, occasionally dodge glitter. Our process involved open, transparent communication and collaboration with the directors, teachers, and children of Fletcher Place. We listened to their needs and considered how we could meet them in creative ways. This helped our libraries become true embodiments of the community center and representative of their mission.

Leverage pro bono work to enhance firm culture

Pro bono work provides an opportunity for your employees to work together toward a shared external goal, and to reinforce your firm's mission statement outside of the company website. Pro bono projects are often collaborative, and employees don't fill the same roles as in the office. Because of this, employees may work and interact with different people than they would in your typical workplace setting.

There is no better way to build new relationships and strengthen outstanding ones within your firm, all while reaffirming your values. Having a project that supports your mission statement in a tangible way helps to spark passion and create an even more authentic connection to a company's calling.

Be a good partner, both in design and in promotion

Good partners are empathetic—they don't stop at the "what" but rather identify the "why." This requires listening to properly understand your client's needs. Once these have been established, go above and beyond in delivery. Make

your partner feel heard, valued, and included by incorporating their input and letting them get involved; they're sure to want to help in any way they can.

Promotion can be a gray area when dealing with pro bono work. There is a school of thought that says we should do this work to help others and not to promote ourselves. While we agree, there are still widespread benefits to promoting your pro bono work, benefits that go beyond self-interest. For one, promoting these projects can encourage or inspire others to take on their own. Promoting your efforts can reinforce the role of "giving back" in your firm culture, and down the road could lead to more passionate and caring people joining your team.

Get started today

If you're interested in getting involved with pro bono work but don't think you have the means, ask for contributions and donations—you'll be surprised by how willing people are to help. A lot can be done with donations and extra materials; for example, the exteriors of the Fletcher Place tiny libraries were created with reused wood from an architect's old cedar fence, and all the books were donated by Fanning Howey employees.

The essence of pro bono work is that there typically isn't much money involved—creativity is currency, which allows more opportunity for personal contributions to influence the project. Even with limited budget or scope, you can always give back. No matter how tiny your library, passion and creativity can turn small contributions into a lasting impact.

Rick Hahn is a project manager at Fanning Howey, a national leader in the planning and design of learning environments. Sean Costello is an architectural graduate, and Luke Bell is a marketing communications specialist at Fanning Howey.

Managing risks related to pro bono services

 network.aia.org/practicemanagement/blogs/seth-anderson/2017/07/17/managing-risks-related-to-pro-bono-services

By Kirsten R. Murray, FAIA; Published by [the AIA Trust](#)

Many architects are strongly motivated to provide volunteer or pro bono services to contribute to their communities and enrich their practice. Whether you are an emerging start-up or a well-established firm, it is important to be aware of the responsibilities and potential risks inherent in providing pro bono services and to work with the client, your attorney, and your insurance provider to avoid unintended liabilities for you and your team.

Selecting Your Project

Consider your desired outcome for the project. Is it service? Visibility? Networking? Portfolio or staff development? Be clear about your motivations and align yourself with the opportunities that will best reward your interests.

Pro bono opportunities often evolve from social or professional networks, as the result of board membership, or local engagement with cultural, religious, educational or social service organizations. As with any other client group, the non-profit organization that becomes your client will have some sort of volunteer/staff leadership structure, as well as a charter and bylaws. It is important to understand how decision-making will occur, and to verify that you are working with those empowered to make decisions for the organization and within its legal parameters.

As you develop the working relationship, you should seek access to the client group to understand what their needs are, their budget and schedule, and to identify other considerations that will be critical to the success of the effort.

Consider any third-party responsibilities that might complicate the work, such as clients or business associates in board positions, and the potential for conflicts of interest between your volunteer and paid services.

In addition to the opportunities you might find on your own, there are a number of facilitation platforms that exist to pair teams with volunteer opportunities, both nationally and internationally. Check with your attorney, local chamber of commerce, building department, etc. to understand local jurisdictions' requirements regarding providing professional services, and any travel or other restrictions that will impact the work.

Identifying the Scope of Work

Pro bono services can vary from limited or full service design, management assistance, or even hands-on construction tasks. Take care to provide design and management services with which you are reasonably familiar and that you would feel comfortable offering to a paying client. If you are outside your area of expertise—for example, providing hands-on construction or maintenance tasks in a volunteer setting—verify that you or the owner have insurance to cover the participants.



Make sure you are clear with the client about the services and deliverables that you are providing, and that you are well positioned to provide them as requested. Identify your staffing plan and the amount of time you are willing to dedicate to the effort and make sure you have the resources to provide it. Establish boundaries and/or limit your services as seems appropriate to the project and to your availability to deliver them. Even if your services are free, your clients will be making decisions based on your guidance, and unfulfilled promises can create an atmosphere of frustration and distrust.

Use your best professional judgement to identify when other specialized licensed services (such as engineering, surveying, etc.) are required and make the owner aware of the need for these services.

Agreements

An architect will want to be careful to understand the scope of the needed work and to establish a form of agreement that reflects the roles and responsibilities of each party involved. As with paid work, this form of agreement might vary with the scale and type of the service. The AIA provides a contract specifically for pro bono services (B106-2010) which addresses the full scope of services that an architect might typically provide.

For more limited services, one might adopt a letter of agreement or other memo of understanding. In any case, it is advisable to include such clauses or provisions as limits of liability that will offer some protection against future claims. While these may or may not hold up in court depending on the nature and location of the service, this general acknowledgement will at least provide a basis for discussion in the unlikely event of a mediation, arbitration or litigation. Consider asking your client to limit your liability to the amount of your fee (which might be zero).

Other issues that should be addressed in an agreement are ownership of the documents, copyright, and future use of the instruments of service. If you are providing conceptual design in a limited phase, you may want to ask for a waiver of liability should the work be completed under a separate agreement without your participation.



Insurance

Regardless of the nature of the paid or volunteer effort and the existence of limits of liability or waivers, it is advised to carry a professional liability policy, as well as general liability, for protection against claims by your client, as well as by third parties.

It is also a good idea to require the owner to procure and maintain public liability insurance, as well as builder's risk and permanent property insurance.

If you or your employees are potentially at physical risk on a construction site or other off-site location, it would be wise for you to verify with your insurer that your insurance and workman's compensation policies will extend to these activities. Otherwise, seeking a waiver of liability for participants would be advised.

Conclusion

Offering volunteer or pro bono services can be a fulfilling way to connect with communities by helping those in need. Ensuring from the get-go that expectations and responsibilities are clear will benefit both the firm offering the

services, and the individual or institution receiving them.

Published by the

You may find [the original PDF](#) of this article in the AIA
Member's [Risk Management Library](#).

AIATrust

[\(Return to the cover of the 2017 PM Digest: Pro-bono work and public interest architecture\)](#)

A non-profit community design center run by architects

 network.aia.org/practicemanagement/blogs/seth-anderson/2017/07/17/a-non-profit-community-design-center-run-by-architects

What we do

Too frequently the people with the greatest needs are left out of conversations about how the places where they live, work, and play will grow and change. buildingcommunityWORKSHOP ([bc]) works to shift this power dynamic in pursuit of design justice, amplifying the voices of those who will experience the direct effects of development initiatives. Instead of imposing priorities upon neighborhoods, our inclusive design and planning process ensures that revitalization efforts responsively address the community's own desires and that residents have ownership of their own neighborhoods' development.

[bc] is a Texas based nonprofit community design center seeking to improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making. [bc] enriches the lives of citizens by bringing design thinking to areas of our cities where resources are most scarce. As an organization, [bc] works to improve access, choice, and quality in affordable housing, strengthen identity and build capacity among neighborhoods, and advance the practice of public interest design through a variety of programs and initiatives.

The operating model

[bc] strives to achieve an operating model of a 50% contributed and 50% earned financial model. Much of the fee-for-service work is undertaken to design affordable housing through partnerships with community development corporations (CDCs) and community housing development organizations (CHDOs). [bc] also provides technical assistance and services on a wide range of projects in the public interest. Our work with other non-profit and municipal agencies already working in communities is driven by a desire to actively seek opportunities where our unique viewpoint can support the empowerment of residents and the achievement of their goals.

We do not directly advertise our services; rather, our place-based outreach allows us to form partnerships that foster sustained work in a community and connect us to new projects. Where there are opportunities to do work in the public interest through a traditional fee-based model, we do so. However, as a non-profit community design center [bc] also fundraises for contributed income to support our initiatives to bring design and planning services to the challenges facing some of the most underserved communities.

In 2007, [bc]'s Founding Director Brent Brown's firm Brown Architects was commissioned to design a Community Center in the Jubilee neighborhood, including a six-month community engagement process completed under the buildingcommunityWORKSHOP name. Brent recognized that the neighborhood faced many more issues than could be solved through the traditional client-based architectural model. Through conversations with organizations and individuals working in the field of community design, he became aware that, as a non-profit, [bc] could fundraise for initiatives beyond the scope of market demand, such as the renovation of extant homes in a low-income neighborhood, to better serve communities.

The communities which have the greatest needs are typically the most lacking in resources, posing financial risks that for-profit entities are unwilling or unable to take. [bc] received 501(c)3 non-profit status in 2008 and has since grown to include four offices; Dallas, Houston, and Brownsville in Texas, and Washington, DC.

Community engagement

[bc] practices architecture and planning in a way that couples design with community engagement in order to confront inequity in our cities. Contrasting typical development practices, [bc]'s work begins and ends with conversations with the communities in which it will take place. The impact of the work is multiplied as community members become empowered to take an active role in the shaping of their neighborhoods.

Recent and ongoing projects include: The Cottages at Hickory Crossing, a permanent supportive housing complex for the 50 most chronically homelessness individuals in Dallas; Casitas Los Olmos, an 80-unit multifamily housing project in Raymondville, TX that incorporates Low Impact Development strategies to manage stormwater; sustainABLEhouse, an initiative to design affordable, efficient, contextually-appropriate, and resident-informed single-family housing through an inclusive design process; a state-wide disaster recovery initiative that reimagines an equitable disaster recovery mode; and many neighborhood-scale planning and creative placemaking initiatives. Consequently, the design process is a true collaboration between architect and client that empowers individuals who have never before been asked to participate in design conversations.

Trust, empowerment, and investment

The inherent risk in working in underserved communities is breaching trust. Marginalized communities are often just that—disconnected, disenfranchised, and distrusting due to decades of policies that have left them struggling. In beginning work with these communities, [bc] strives to build bridges of trust early on. [bc] often starts by partnering with organizations or individuals that have been already working in these communities and have established a trusted presence. Once work has begun, outcomes identified in the engagement process must clearly link to project outcomes in order for trust to be maintained and furthered into the future. This can often be difficult given project constraints but is critical to the success of the initiative.

When [bc] works with community members to identify their needs, empowering them with the knowledge and experience to actively participate in civic design and planning, residents become deeply invested in their role as stewards of their neighborhoods. Giving these individuals a voice in the form and function of their community instills a sense of pride and civic duty as community residents. As [bc]'s work attests, residents who are engaged as key stakeholders are inspired to invest time and energy into the betterment of their neighborhoods.

The buildingcommunityWORKSHOP is a Texas based nonprofit community design center seeking to improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making. We enrich the lives of citizens by bringing design thinking to areas of our cities where resources are most scarce. To do so, [bc] recognizes that it must first understand the social, economic, and environmental issues facing a community before beginning work.

[bc] has been fortunate to receive several awards from AIA Dallas & LRGV AIA, the 2010 National AIA/HUD Secretary's Award for Community-Informed Design and a 2011 National SEED Competition award. In 2013, [bc] was awarded the prestigious Rudy Bruner Award Silver Medal for the Congo Street Initiative. We were recently awarded the Texas Society of Architects Design Award for the La Hacienda Casitas. Little Free Libraries/Libros Libres was also awarded the 2014 SXSW Eco Place by Design award.

[bc] was established in Dallas in 2005 and opened offices in Brownsville in 2011, Houston in 2013, and Washington DC in 2016.

[\(Return to the cover of the 2017 PM Digest: Pro-bono work and public interest architecture\)](#)