



Bonnie Staiger not only leads the North Dakota State Board of Architecture, but she also is executive director of AIA North Dakota. By concurrently guiding two complimentary though distinct organizations, Staiger has developed a rich perspective about regulating and advocating for the profession of architecture.

North Dakota MBE Bonnie Staiger Redefines Leadership—and Flourishes

Blame it on serendipity. Within a couple of days of assuming the role as the first ever executive director of AIA North Dakota, Bonnie Staiger was asked to consider taking on the same position for the North Dakota State Board of Architecture. While the offer represented a unique opportunity for Staiger, it also created a potential conundrum.

In some states, Staiger would have been unable to head both the advocacy organization and the regulatory organization for the same profession. North Dakota professional licensing boards, however, are privatized entities that receive no general fund appropriations and hire their own staffs. With these key

factors in place—and with an extra effort to clear the possibility of any conflict of interest—Staiger was leading both groups by June 1998.

Since those fateful days more than eight years ago, Staiger has effectively guided North Dakota's Member Board and AIA component to such a degree that her work has been recognized by the leadership bodies of NCARB and the AIA. As current president of the AIA's Council of Architectural Component Executives (CACE), Staiger was installed on the Institute's national board of directors in December 2006. She has chaired NCARB's Member Board Executives (MBE) Committee

in 2002-2003 and has served as the MBE liaison to several of the Council's most integral committees.

As an AIA component executive who also leads a state licensing board, Staiger has "gained more than a superficial understanding of the regulatory side of things and what impact protecting the public has on the practice of architecture." Likewise, as an NCARB Member Board Executive who also leads an AIA component, Staiger has learned about "advocating for and being the voice of the profession." She adds, "The common ground is [that] both NCARB and the AIA have a larger goal to serve society." **DC**

Designing a Sustainable Relationship

Given her unique leadership roles within NCARB and the AIA, Bonnie Staiger possesses a valuable perspective about the organizations' efforts to strengthen their ever-evolving relationship. Staiger shares her thoughts below.

On the national level, both NCARB and the AIA have done an excellent job strengthening the relationship. While each organization's approach is different, both have stated objectives in their respective strategic plans that highlight our commonalities. Some obvious examples of the shared aims are IDP (the Intern Development Program), diversity, leadership development, continuing education, and simplified reciprocity.

The relationships vary considerably on the state and local level. Many jurisdictions and their AIA chapter/component have worked well together. They work at respecting one another while maintaining a healthy arms-length relationship. Others have had some difficulties. Unfortunately, there are a few situations where the mindset of "us versus them" is firmly entrenched.

In the spirit of designing sustainable relationships, I would offer three suggestions for NCARB and its jurisdictions. The first is to demystify the role of the Member Board Executive (MBE). It is not clear to the AIA—and

perhaps other collaterals—that nearly all MBE's are civil servants who have the responsibility to administer state laws and the added pressure of serving a volunteer board. Further, it is not clear to the AIA that in most jurisdictions these state agencies and their board members represent multiple professions.

After some rocky experiences in the past, the MBE's and CACE have had several successful years of appointed liaisons to each other's group. During their year, the former and current chairs of the MBE Committee, Doreen Frost (administrator of the Minnesota Board) and Mark Courtney (administrator of the Virginia Board), respectively, were NCARB liaisons to CACE events. Both were warmly welcomed. Based on her experience, Doreen commented that she "has become an AIA cheerleader." Given the opportunity to interact, a new respect has emerged. Here is another example: At the last NCARB Annual Meeting, the MBE's invited Pat Dougherty, executive director of AIA Cincinnati, to attend the MBE Forum. Pat was thrilled to be invited, and she is still talking about what she learned and her new found respect for licensing issues.

My second suggestion is that NCARB Member Board Members (MBM) be aware of opportunities to demystify their respective profes-

sional societies. Nearly every MBM has been—and still is—a card-carrying member of the AIA, ACEC (American Council of Engineering Companies), ASLA (American Society of Landscape Architects), etc., and could easily assist in building alliances and encouraging communication.

Lastly, neither organization should hold a committee or group meeting in a city without inviting a local representative of the other organization to sit in on their meeting. Perhaps they invite a board member or the executive director—or both if they are in that city. This should be a standing responsibility of every committee chair of each organization to make that phone call.

It has been my experience and it is my operating platform that *great alliances start with good hospitality*. I'll quote Mark Gerson who said, "To get to common ground, you have to move to higher ground." And sometimes the higher ground can be found in a coffee shop. We can be a valuable resource for one another by accepting—not just tolerating; by offering to help; and by listening without filters. **DC**