



---

AIGA is a nonprofit professional membership organization founded in 1914, incorporated in the state of New York and headquartered in New York City. It is a volunteer membership organization—the organization exists to enable its members to develop programs and to advocate positions, most of which occur only through the energy and effort of volunteer members.

### *Mission statement*

The mission of AIGA is to advance designing as a professional craft, strategic tool and vital cultural force.

### *Purpose statement*

AIGA, the professional association for design, is the oldest and largest membership association for professionals engaged in the discipline, practice and culture of designing.

The organization was founded as the American Institute of Graphic Arts in 1914. Since then, it has become the preeminent professional association for communication designers, broadly defined. In the past decade, designers have increasingly been involved in creating value for clients (whether public or business) through applying design thinking to complex problems, even when the outcomes may be more strategic, multidimensional and conceptual than what most would consider traditional communication design. AIGA now represents more than 20,000 designers of all disciplines through national activities and local programs developed by more than 55 chapters and 200 student groups.

AIGA supports the interests of professionals, educators and students who are engaged in the process of designing. The association is committed to stimulating thinking about design, demonstrating the value of design, and empowering success for designers throughout the arc of their careers.

Through conferences, competitions, exhibitions, publications and websites, AIGA inspires, educates and informs designers, helping them to realize their talents and to advocate the value of design among the media, the business community, governments and the public.

### *Members*

The most important stakeholder in AIGA is the member; the organization and its leaders are accountable to the members. All members are members of the national organization. In many parts of the country, members have organized into local chapters to encourage local events.

AIGA is a national professional organization. In joining, a member makes a commitment to become part of a national community of professionals dedicated to the principles of excellence in design.

### **Reasons for joining**

Most members cite four needs or interests they expect this relationship to address:

- 
- Opportunities for fellowship and networking within a community of designers
  - Access to information about design and professional practices, which may also involve networking with other professionals with similar problems
  - Finding ways to improve understanding of the profession among the public and potential clients
  - Finding ways to increase respect for the profession and its impact

### **The importance of volunteers**

AIGA will always depend on its members' volunteer commitment. A responsive professional organization exists to help a profession organize and channel members' efforts to address issues that are important to them. "Professional organization" reflects the concept of a profession coming together to discuss issues and concerns and proposing ways to address them. To facilitate the response, the community of professionals decides to hire staff, who are then used:

- For repetitive administrative tasks required to sustain the organization (maintaining a membership database, invoicing, accounting)
- To undertake some activities that are broadly supported by the membership (competitions, conferences)
- To help in facilitating the volunteer members who want to develop discussion of an issue

National fees are set to meet the costs of these core activities. The fees are not set to fund a staff that is large enough to address all of the profession's interests. Nor would it be appropriate in any case for the staff to be deciding what is critical to members. Despite the existence of a national staff, no member should be surprised that substantive professional initiatives continue to require member involvement.

### **AIGA is its members**

AIGA is not a small staff in a building in New York. Nor is it a national board. "AIGA" is the collective identity of the membership. If a member says "AIGA should do XYZ," it needs to be recognized that this is a call for the membership to take on an issue. The call will be satisfied when a member (or members) steps forward to develop a response to the issue and build a consensus. The national staff can assist in the process of this work, particularly in seeing that there is an opportunity for national discussion and a coordinated response.

### *Board of directors*

AIGA is governed by a 16-member board of directors, consisting of 15 elected members and the executive director. The elected members serve for staggered three-year terms, with five members rotating off each year. The board consists of professionals from design and related

---

fields and reflects a broad cross section of the profession in terms of design disciplines, geographic locale, ethnicity and gender.

The board appoints the president of the board, who serves for two years. The national board plays a broad policy role, with three fundamental responsibilities that interact with management: determining AIGA's strategic direction, approving the annual budget and evaluating the executive director. In addition, board members, as stewards of the trust, have fiduciary responsibilities and fundraising objectives. Typically, national board members are assigned specific ad hoc responsibilities for projects during the year.

## *Chapters*

Every chapter is a separately incorporated, nonprofit corporation with its own board of directors and bylaws. Its tax-exempt status is maintained through a group exemption. Each chapter is self-governing and self-financed, although the chapter executes an affiliation agreement with the national organization that defines respective roles and responsibilities. A portion of national dues is provided to the chapter to assist in providing programming and services at the local level.

Although a limited number of chapters have part-time administrative help, most depend entirely on the volunteer help of members.

### **The role of chapters**

Over the past two decades, AIGA has encouraged the development of local chapters in areas where there are enough members to sustain a regular program of activities. Local chapters are essential to a national organization since they allow designers to initiate activities and work with their colleagues locally to address issues of importance to them. It is virtually impossible for a national organization to be responsive to its members without being local as well as national. As is true at the national level, chapters are volunteer organizations.

Chapters are able to be more responsive to local professionals' needs, particularly in terms of fellowship and information sharing. They are also a critical means for promoting AIGA to professionals, encouraging membership, promoting messages that are important to the profession and implementing programs that the membership develops nationally. For most members, the bond is strongest at the local level.

### **Role of chapter leadership**

The AIGA national board is accountable to the membership as a whole. Each chapter president is accountable to the members in his or her geographic area. These are distinct views, although they are both intended to be reflective of the views of our members. As with all professional associations, the energy of the organization comes from the bottom up, from the members, not from the top down, from the boards or chapter presidents. And the overall institution belongs to the members, not the leaders.

---

*Chapter presidents council*

The governance structure follows a federation model. The chapter presidents meet several times a year as a council. This council provides an opportunity for information sharing and communication among chapters. It is similar to the role the governors play in the national political arena. They are each elected by a portion of the constituency for the national government and represent an important source of information and counsel for the national leadership. It is not, however, a legislative body to which the national staff and board are accountable.

The chair of the presidents' council is also the presidents council representative on the AIGA national board. The presidents council representative is able to cast a vote on any action item on the AIGA board agenda and to comment on the perceived impact on chapters for the record.

**Selection of the chair of the presidents council**

The next incoming chair is selected by the incumbent chair, the incoming chair and representatives of the national staff, based on demonstrated initiative, leadership potential, accessibility and commitment. The selection process typically occurs in the month before the annual leadership retreat; the pool of candidates consists of those presidents who have just finished the first year of their term.

The new incoming chair then serves one year in that position, and assumes chair responsibilities as his or her term as chapter president expires. It is anticipated that this will give the person more time to devote to the position without the concurrent responsibilities of chapter leadership.

*Issues originated by members*

The national board and staff welcome recommendations on initiatives from the membership. There are several approaches that work best for the communication of ideas that may require the commitment of resources from AIGA:

- Through direct contact with the executive director or any staff member, who are always open to membership comments and suggestions
- Through direct contact with a national board member
- Through the chapter's leadership and the chapter presidents' council

The last approach, through the chapter presidents' council, is the preferred approach, for it allows a vetting of ideas and consideration of ideas and initiatives in the broader context of the experience of other chapters.

Issues that a member would like to have the national board consider can be raised with the local chapter president. He or she can then raise the issue at the next chapter presidents' council meeting. If the issue is approved at the meeting by a consensus of the presidents,

---

then the presidents council representative on the AIGA board will propose it be added to the national agenda.

While the national organization is open to listening carefully to the ideas and comments of every member, unless the national leadership senses a broad interest in the issue, the ideas of a single member may not be implemented. This does not mean they were not considered carefully, weighing the advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, even a strongly held view of a single chapter president or a small group of presidents may require an explicit expression of broader support before it will be considered.

#### *Process for national actions*

Under normal circumstances, the AIGA board will not act on any major issue that the chapter presidents have not had at least six weeks to consider individually and to discuss as a group, if it is an issue that requires chapter board action. If the chapter president can decide alone, the response window will be a minimum of two weeks. There will be some urgent and timely decisions that the board must act on that will require earlier consideration by the chapter presidents, but those will be kept to a minimum.

In addition, a vote of the national board on any substantive issue will not take place until at least two weeks have passed since a discussion at a chapter presidents' meeting, in order to allow the chapter presidents to gain full closure on their recommendations.

For this governance sequence to be effective, chapter presidents must carefully consider material when requested and obtain their own membership or board guidance. This communication is a shared responsibility. If an opportunity occurs for chapter presidents to consider an issue—they will be informed by mail, email or conference call—and a chapter president does not make use of this opportunity within two weeks, the process will continue anyway and consider the opportunity for feedback to have occurred. This approach respects the fact that all chapter presidents have the scheduling imperatives of other professional commitments, yet AIGA also must be able to move ahead on action agendas.

#### *National headquarters*

The national headquarters is located in AIGA's own building at 164 Fifth Avenue in New York. This building offers the profession an opportunity to convey its messages about the process of design, the role of the designer and the value of design to others in the profession, to the media and to the general public through seminars, lectures and exhibitions.

The national staff consists of 18 full-time paid professionals. The role of the national staff is to support the volunteer professional membership in its programming by promoting membership, maintaining central membership records, developing national programs that can travel, developing member benefits and implementing a broad advocacy effort to increase understanding of and respect for design of high standards.

Staff members are recruited with specific organizational or programmatic experience. Their responsibilities include:

- 
- Overseeing the production of AIGA publications
  - Organizing competitions and juries
  - Sending out calls for entry and processing entries
  - Mounting exhibitions
  - Maintaining a library and gallery space
  - Organizing national conferences
  - Organizing board meetings, meetings of chapter presidents and community leaders, and retreats
  - Sending out membership invoices and processing applications, renewals and changes of address
  - Producing membership brochures, directories and newsletters
  - Preparing monthly membership reports and reimbursements for chapters
  - Developing corporate sponsorship of the conference and advertising in the publications
  - Building and maintaining a strong web presence as a source of information and community