2026 Handbook

National Associates Committee

AIA Member group

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Overview

The National Associates Committee (NAC) is a unique committee representing a particular membership category of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). While it is our sincere hope that the future of membership evolves and changes, we remain steadfast to our intention of serving and representing Associate Members.

The NAC operates on a Session Year defined as the calendar year from January 1 to December 31st. The first Session Year began in 2000, identified as the First (1st) Session. Every Session Year thereafter will be identified by subtracting 2000 and adding 1. The current Session Year is 2026, identified as the Twenty-Seventh (27th) Session.

NAC Purpose
The purpose of this Committee is to serve as a source of communication and representation on issues pertaining to Associate Members through the lens of Career Advancement. To best serve and represent Associate Members, the Committee focuses on Strategic Initiatives.

NAC Strategic Initiatives
Strategic Initiatives are determined each year by the NAC Advisory Committee*. The NAC will achieve identified Strategic Initiatives through the combination of Work Group based Committee Work and an integrated approach with the AIA Knowledge and Practice department staff. While the NAC has a strategic focus rather than programmatic, we will have the opportunity to collaborate with AIA staff initiatives on an as needed basis. Opportunities to collaborate will vary Session to Session.

*Topics of importance to Associates may fluctuate year to year; it is the role of the NAC Chair and NAC Advisory Committee to vet the year's Work Group Topics, keeping in mind the realms of change, overarching goals, and mission and vision of the NAC. Awareness of Institute-wide initiatives, strategic planning, and Emerging Professional projects is an essential component of the work accomplished each year by the NAC.

NAC Work Groups
The NAC is Work Group based, which allows for a more focused approach to issues facing Associate Members. Work Groups are led by At-Large Directors and consist of members from the NAC Full Committee.

NAC Committee Work
NAC Committee Work is rooted in Thought Leadership. Our committee assesses the needs for policies, programs, and resources for Associate Members and promotes the continued development of a national network of Associate Leaders. As a Committee of Associate Member Volunteers, we are uniquely positioned to articulate issues facing Associate Members because we are experiencing those issues in real time. Our collective Leadership representing these issues is incredibly valuable for creating a better future for those seeking careers in Architecture.

NAC Collaborations
Creating a better future for the Architecture Industry will require collaboration with the AIA and other allied professional groups, beyond the NAC itself. This is a fundamental reason the NAC has re-envisioned itself, its operations, its rules, and its members' roles and responsibilities. The NAC will seek appropriate opportunities for partnerships to broaden the reach of Associates. An important opportunity for collaboration is with the Associate leadership across the country and Institute, the Young Architects Forum (YAF), College of Fellows (COF), Strategic Council (SC), Board of Directors (BOD), Council of Architectural Component Executives (CACE), and many of the AIA Knowledge Communities.

Mission Statement

Our Mission is to inspire the profession by promoting innovation, inclusiveness, and professional development while amplifying the voice of the Associate community within the Institute.

Vision Statement

The National Associates Committee serves, supports and advances the interests of all Associate members of the American Institute of Architects, both traditional and non-traditional. The NAC aspires to be a catalyst for progress within the Institute and the profession.

- We **ENGAGE** by becoming agents of change
- We **INNOVATE** by challenging the status quo
- We **CONNECT** by representing our diverse membership
- We **LEAD** by example, promoting mentorship, fellowship, licensure, advocacy, service and design excellence

The NAC believes its work serves to make AIA membership meaningful to Associates through services that effectively anticipate, meet, and exceed their needs.

Commitment to Progress: 4 x 4 x 4

Through its work, the NAC aspires to affect positive Cultural Change in Architecture. Cultural Change is change that occurs over time to a shared way of life of a group. The types of Cultural Change the NAC aspires to positively affect in Architecture are Community Engagement, Innovation, Inclusion, and Professionalism. We can accomplish Cultural Change through collaboration that directly relates to specific realms of the profession of Architecture. The Professional Realms are Education, Training, Practice, and Policy.

Four Types of Cultural Change

Community Engagement – We must be active players at every level of society, including the creation of policies and practice methodologies that yield more diverse, vibrant, and sustainable communities.

Innovation – We must be willing to consistently challenge the status quo to quantify the impact of design and proactively share the successes/failures of each endeavor to build and enhance the collective body of professional knowledge.

Inclusion – We must do everything possible to design for an increasingly diverse and stratified society in manners that increase the relevance of built work while providing greater access to design for all residents throughout the socioeconomic spectrum.

Professionalism – We must proactively earn the trust bestowed upon us by holding ourselves accountable to the highest standards of licensure and provide dignified service to all clients, whether in conventional or non-traditional practice.

Four Realms Where Cultural Change Can Occur

Education – School may be the first opportunity to learn what an architect does, the design process involved, and the skill sets required in the architectural profession.

Training – While it may occur at different times, this is when real world learning reveals the ins and outs of working in the profession.

Practice – Successful completion of architectural license opens up the door or professional practice and can define a significant career stage.

Policy – Local, state, and federal policies, along with organizational procedures, define how architects practice and greatly influence the built environment by providing for the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

Four Opportunities to Make an Impact

Encourage individual, community and professional development and leadership among Associates through interaction and collaboration within the AIA and allied groups.

Build a network that serves as the collective voice of Associates that works to address relevant issues throughout the AIA and allied groups.

Make AIA membership valuable for Associates to develop the future leadership of the profession.

Advocate on behalf of Associates, both mainstream, and alternative, at all levels of the AIA

Committee Work Groups

The NAC is Work Group based, which allows for a more focused approach to issues facing Associate Members. The Advisory Committee reviews Work Group topics on a yearly basis, typically during the Fall Transition Meeting. The five At-Large Directors each lead a Work Group. STARs participate in at least one Work Group each year. At-Large Directors manage Work Groups split equally to include the 53 state and territory representatives. The AdCom works with the At-Large Directors and the STARs to assign approximately 10 volunteers to each Work Group during the Q1 timeframe, aligning preferences and needs where possible.

The NAC has a strategic focus rather than a programmatic focus. Committee Work Groups function to value STAR volunteers for their intellectual capital and ideation. As such, Work is defined by Thought Leadership and Thought Partnerships. Strategic Thought Partnerships help to broaden the reach of Associates through: connection with other leaders across the Institute, partnership rooted in shared goals and achievement of shared goals. While infusing the Associate perspective in all AIA operations, the NAC serves the Board and Strategic Council more nimbly on issues affecting Associate members.

The NAC assesses the needs for policies, programs, and resources for Associate Members, while promoting the continued development of a national network of Associate leaders. Throughout their two-year tenure, workgroups focus on high-level strategic thinking for their workgroup topic in an effort to: identify, evaluate, ask questions, and make recommendations. Steps often include: identifying a need for progress or change, setting goals, developing a premise and mission statement, researching the baseline and ways to achieve ideal objectives, developing a supporting plan or study, and then making recommendation(s) to the Institute. Upon the completion of the two-year Work Group term, The Institute may then begin to strategize on how it might be possible to consider broader implementation, whether it be through Institute-developed: tools, products, events, or the like.

Individual tasks of each Work Group are determined jointly by the At-Large Director and the STARs, with input from the Advisory Committee. Each task will continue until either the task is complete or the task is no longer relevant. Some tasks may only exist for a couple of months; others may extend over multiple years.

Work Group Topics

The proposed Work Group topic focus will be explored by At-Large Directors during Fall Transition Meeting:

We encourage review of the AIA Strategic Plan 2026-2030 to see how these topics pertain to the AIA as a whole.

2026-2027 Climate Action Work Group
This work group studies knowledge gaps on the topics of Climate Action, Sustainability, & Resilience and explore ways to deliver sustainable career advancement for Associates and EPs through utilization of existing tools and programs available through AIA.

2026-2027 VALUE/EDI Work Group
This work group seeks to empower the Associate voice through the justice, equity, diversity, & inclusion foundation that the Institute has laid. The collective voice of architects and associates is essential for designing a better future for our country and planet. We are that voice.

2025-2026 Knowledge Work Group
This work group advocates for the community of current and future Associates by defining, collecting, and disseminating available resources to aid in personal and professional development.

2025-2026 Advocacy Work Group
This work group serves its membership through the public promotion of the Associate experience in order to validate the presence of the unlicensed within the architectural industry, ultimately leading it to professionally evolve.

2025-2026 Strategic Partnerships Work Group
This work group connects more broadly with the Institute, by engaging with more Knowledge Communities, Strategic Council Sprints, and with opportunities available with AIA Staff. We aim to elevate more Associate voices across the Institute and forge strategic alignments to share common goals.

Committee Structure

Governing Documents

AIA's articles of incorporation, AIA bylaws, and rules of the board take precedence (in that order) over all AIA committee-generated rules. Since the articles document is essentially a contract with the state where AIA is incorporated, most often the bylaws and then the rules of the board govern (in that order) any committee rules that are inconsistent with them. Institute-wide policies and procedures exist between these governing documents and committee-generated documents. In 2025, AIA staff were tasked with documenting and aligning policies and procedures for the clarity of current and future committee leadership.

NAC Members shall uphold the standards of professionalism and responsibilities expected of a professional member and contribute to the advancement of the AIA and the profession of architecture. NAC members do not act on behalf of the AIA and are not legal representatives of the AIA. Actions of members of the NAC shall not be contrary to official AIA policies and procedures. NAC members do not have authority over any AIA staff member, operational policy, or procedure.

Advisory Committee (AdCom)

Each summer, the Advisory Committee places a call for candidates to fill open positions for the following year, to be determined by a Selection Committee. Positions are open to all AIA Associate members in good standing. Members may serve for up to four years on the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee meets monthly in 1 hour conference calls and for an extended time for a virtual Fall Transition meeting. All Advisory Committee members have important roles at the Annual Meeting in Q1. The Advisory Committee members

consist of the Chair, Vice Chair, (5) At-Large Directors, an Associate Representative on the AIA Strategic Council, an Associate Representative on the AIA Board of Directors, a CACE liaison and a COF liaison.

State / Territory Associate Representative (STAR) Network

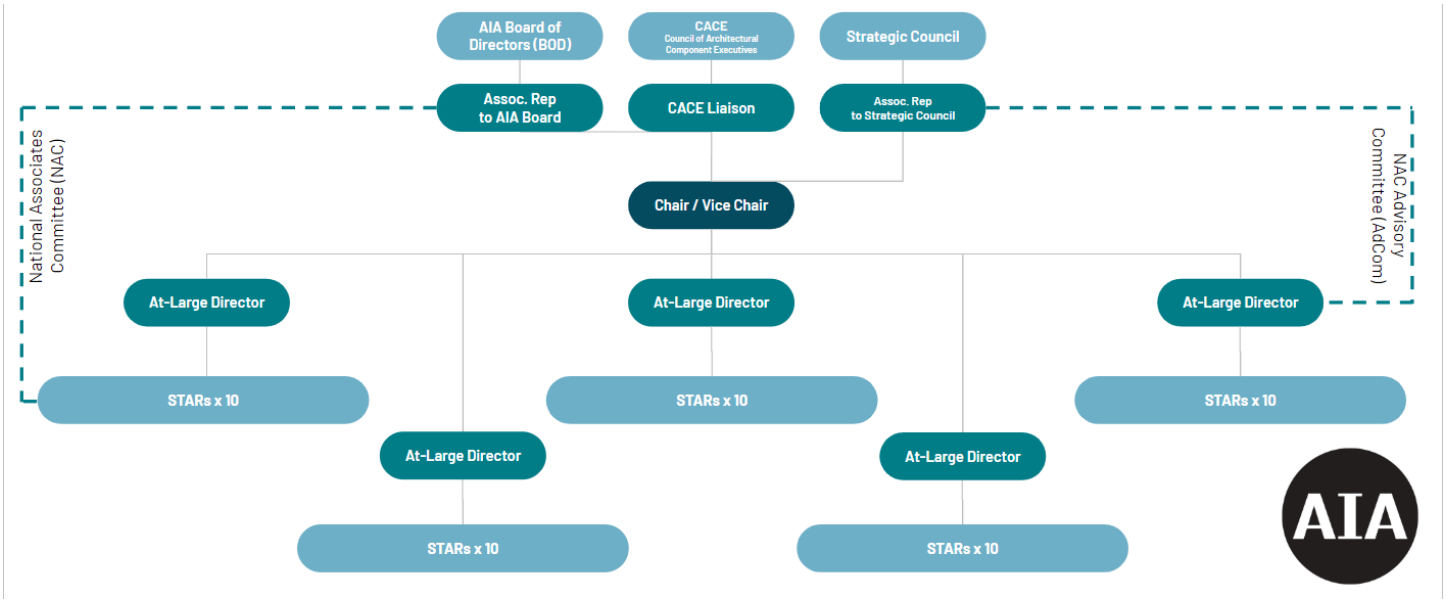
STARs work with their counterparts, the YARs, AIAS Quad Directors, Architect Licensing Advisors, and AIA Strategic Councilors in their States. STARs are responsible for gathering information about issues facing Associates within their States and disseminating information about national activities and resources for use at the local level. Of equal importance, STARs serve as a vital link between Associates (in their state/territory) and the national organization. While STARs roles and responsibilities vary State to State widely, NAC-related roles and responsibilities are expanded below in this Handbook. STARs are the key to vertical communication, connecting Associate leaders at all levels of the Institute. STARs are also encouraged to work on various issues important to them and their states through the NAC work groups. STARs may serve for up to four years, two terms.

Committee Liaisons

The NAC has the opportunity to invite liaisons from the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) and the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) to participate in committee meetings, as needed. In the past, the AIAS liaison is selected by the AIAS leadership and is typically the AIAS National Vice President. In the past, NCARB national staff selected the NCARB liaison, usually filled by the Director of Experience + Education. Securing Liaisons from both AIAS and NCARB is dependent upon the relevancy of a NAC Session's Strategic Initiatives and the bandwidth of the volunteers fulfilling Liaison roles.

The NAC does not currently have a liaison from AIAS nor NCARB during the Twenty-seventh Session (2026).

NAC Organizational Structure



Funding

The AIA annual planning cycle begins in June the previous year and concludes with a final approved budget at the December Board meeting before the year begins. Once the year has begun, AIA staff forecast actual budget numbers each quarter. All this planning is to ensure an appropriate use of funds and to be responsive to a changing economic environment. Listed below is the approved and expected funding for 2026. Updates on 2026 and 2027 funding are discussed with the NAC AdCom at their monthly AdCom conference calls. As of April 2026, the funding we expect to be annualized is:

- Chair is funded to attend AIA Leadership Summit
- Chair, Vice-Chair, and up to five At Large Directors receive complimentary registration to the AIA Conference on Architecture and Design per the AIA Rules of the Board.
- All AdCom members and all 53 STARs are funded to attend the NAC Annual Meeting, though specifics of the funding are published in Q4 the year prior.

The AIA hosts major events, both in person and virtually. NAC AdCom and STARs are welcome to attend any AIA event, including but not limited to: AIA Leadership Summit, AIA Conference on Architecture and Design, the Architects in Action Conference, and Women's Leadership Summit. As a part of your service, you will receive notice of opportunities to participate in these events. Generally, AIA funds volunteer attendance at one event per person per year. For NAC leaders, that is the NAC Annual Meeting. This funding is not transferable to other events, other people, nor other years. And communications about grant funding for other AIA events is intended for NAC leaders to share with their network. If you have any questions on funding, please reach out directly to your staff liaison anytime.

Roles and Duties of NAC Advisory Committee Members

Chair

The Chair is the leader of the National Associate Committee. Their responsibility is to coordinate the activities of the Committee.

- Leads the Advisory Committee meetings and calls
- Hosts and plans agenda for Annual Meeting
- Hosts and plans agenda for quarterly full committee calls
- Serves as point of contact for committee with the larger AIA
- Organizes the desires of the full committee into achievable tasks and goals
- Provides a Chair report, including items from the Vice-Chair, in advance of Advisory Committee and Full Committee conference calls and meetings
- Reviews and updates NAC Handbook with NAC Vice-Chair and AIA staff, as needed

Vice Chair

The Vice Chair assists the Chair of the National Associate Committee while learning the responsibilities of the chair.

- Hosts and plans agenda for Fall Transition Meeting before chair term begins
- Hosts and plans agenda for full quarterly committee calls with the Chair
- Provides items to the Chair for inclusion in the Chair report in advance of Advisory Committee and Full Committee conference calls and meetings
- Coordinates Advisory Committee and STAR Reports in advance of Advisory Committee and Full Committee conference calls and meetings
- Issues meeting and conference call minutes for Advisory Committee and Full Committee conference calls and meetings
- Reviews and updates NAC Handbook with NAC Chair and AIA staff, as needed.

At-Large Directors

The five At-Large Directors serve staggered two-year terms. The At-Large Directors lead the work groups that address various initiatives such as advocacy, knowledge, et cetera.

- Serves on the Advisory Committee of the NAC
- Attends Annual Meeting and Fall Transition Meeting.
- Participates in full quarterly committee conference calls
- Participates in monthly advisory committee conference calls
- Provides At-Large Director reports in advance of Advisory Committee and Full Committee conference calls and meetings
- Manage and oversee a Work Group based on a particular task or goal of the committee
- Hosts conference calls for Work Group as needed

Associate Representative on the Strategic Council

The AIA Strategic Council Associate Representative serves on the AIA Strategic Council to represent issues and topics related to the Associate Membership of the Institute. This person provides insight on Associate issues, helping to focus the NAC's efforts in the same direction.

- Serves on the Advisory Committee of the NAC
- Attends Annual Meeting and Fall Transition Meeting
- Participates in full quarterly committee conference calls
- Participates in monthly advisory committee conference calls
- Provides an Associate Director report in advance of Advisory Committee conference calls
- One-year term
- Manages Strategic Council work group related tasks, as committed

Associate Representative on the AIA Board

The Associate Director serves on the AIA Board to represent issues and topics related to the Associate Membership of the Institute. This person provides insight on Board issues relevant to Associates and helps inform the committee's direction.

- Serves on the Advisory Committee of the NAC
- Attends Annual Meeting and Fall Transition Meeting
- Participates in full quarterly committee conference calls
- Participates in monthly advisory committee conference calls
- Provides an Associate Director report in advance of Advisory Committee conference calls
- One-year term
- Manages AIA Board-level committee related work, as committed

CACE Liaison

The role of the CACE (Council of Architectural Component Executives) Liaison is to provide guidance, support, and mentorship to the chair, vice-chair, and other members of the advisory committee. This person is requested by the NAC and assigned at the discretion of CACE.

- Serves on the NAC Advisory Committee
- Attends Annual Meeting and Fall Transition Meeting
- Participates in quarterly full committee conference calls
- Participates in monthly Advisory Committee calls
- Provides a monthly report of relevant CACE news in advance of monthly Advisory Committee calls

COF Liaison

The role of the COF (College of Fellows) Liaison is to provide guidance, support, and mentorship to the chair, vice-chair, and other members of the advisory committee. This person is requested by the NAC and assigned at the discretion of COF.

- Serves on the NAC Advisory Committee
- Attends Annual Meeting and Fall Transition Meeting
- Participates in quarterly full committee conference calls
- Participates in monthly Advisory Committee calls
- Provides a monthly report of relevant COF news in advance of monthly Advisory Committee calls

Roles and Duties of NAC State / Territory Associate Representatives (STARs)

State / Territory Associate Representatives (STARs)

The State / Territory Associate Representatives are responsible for gathering information about issues facing Associates within their states and disseminating information about national/state/local activities and resources for use at the local level.

- Serves on the NAC Full Committee
- Funded to attend the NAC Annual Meeting
- Participates in full quarterly committee conference calls
- Participates in Work Group initiatives & calls
- Serves as point of contact for state to the NAC
- Serves as a conduit of information to their state from the NAC
- Maintains regular contact with all state leaders

Rotation of STARs

In any effort to maintain institutional memory, the NAC seeks to stagger the terms of the STAR and the YAR. To review current YAF terms, see the rainbow chart. To review current NAC terms, review the NAC roster.

Not all STAR positions are filled as of 2026. Efforts to fill seats and engage new STARs will always lean towards their service in a two-year term. For this reason, we do not have scheduled term years as originally planned during the region-to-state transition. However, a cycle may be reintroduced in the future.

The Advisory Committee shall provide the NAC seven (7) days' notice of any change. No change may affect the duration of a sitting STARs term, without their consent.

Operating Guidelines

Committee Members

All NAC members must be AIA members in good standing. Position descriptions, selection procedures, and term limits are outlined above.

Advisory Committee Members:

- Chair/Vice Chair – voting member, two-year term
- 5 At-Large Directors – voting members, staggered two-year terms
- Associate Representative on the AIA Strategic Council – voting member, one year term
- Associate Director on the AIA Board of Directors – voting member, one year term
- CACE Liaison – non-voting member, two-year term, appointed by CACE
- COF Liaison – non-voting member, two-year term, appointed by COF
- AIA Staff Liaison – non-voting member, no term limit, appointed by AIA

Committee Members:

- 53 STARs – voting members, staggered two year terms, appointed by state

- AIAS Liaison – non-voting member, appointed by AIAS
- NCARB Liaison – non-voting member, appointed by NCARB

Selection Committee

A Selection Committee will review applications and select candidates for all open Advisory Committee positions.

The Selection Committee will also recommend an Associate AIA member for a 1-year term on the AIA Strategic Council to be directly followed by a 1-year term on the AIA Board of Directors. No member of the Selection Committee may submit an application for a committee position nor recommend any person that is applying for a committee position.

The Selection Committee will be composed of the following:

- Incoming NAC Chair, as chair
- Current NAC Chair
- Current Associate Representative to the Strategic Council
- A NAC At Large Director
- A second year NAC STAR
- CACE Liaison to the NAC
- COF Liaison to the NAC

Vacancy

In the event of a vacancy on the Advisory Committee, the Selection Committee may appoint a committee member to complete the term of the vacated position. In the event of a vacancy on the committee the position will remain vacant until the next call for interest. All appointed positions may be filled by the appointing organization at any time.

Meeting Attendance

Attendance will be taken at all in-person meetings and conference calls. All committee members are expected to attend all in-person meetings and conference calls. If a committee member misses three consecutive meetings or calls, the Advisory Committee will first reach out to the committee member to discuss the reason for absence. Appointment termination is at the discretion of the voting members of the Advisory Committee. The NAC and AIA National will work with the state to solicit applications for all vacant positions.