



Mid-Career Professionals Task Force Report

October 18, 2024

Executive Summary

The Mid-Career Professionals Task Force is excited to provide these program recommendations to the AIA Virginia Board of Directors for its review and approval.

Mid-Career spans roughly half our working life – from age 31 to 56, typically starting after 10 years workforce experience – and it presents unique challenges as architects balance increased personal and professional demands while transitioning from production roles to management positions. Many architects enter this phase with limited experience in business and management, despite the robust professional support available for younger architects, and university programs that focus on design rather than business skills. The Mid-Career Professionals Program seeks to address these gaps by providing targeted business management training and fostering a supportive peer community to help architects gain the skills they need to navigate this critical career phase.

To develop this program, the Taskforce conducted extensive research from April to August 2024, including surveys, interviews, and an environmental scan of similar programs. Feedback indicated a strong interest in a program focused on managing people, time, finances, and firms, delivered in a cohort model over several months. The proposed program offers a comprehensive overview of essential business practices through presentations, workshops, and case studies, while building a community of support including peers and industry experts.

If the following recommendations are approved, AIA Virginia staff plans to develop the program from October to December 2024, open applications in early 2025, and launch the program in April 2025.

The Mid-Career Professionals Task Force thanks AIA Virginia for the opportunity to positively impact the profession by creating much-needed programming for Mid-Career Professionals.

BACKGROUND

The Mid-Career Professionals Taskforce, created in April 2024 by the AIA Virginia Board of Directors, was established to help develop a new business management program for Mid-Career Professionals (MCPs). Composed of architects from varied backgrounds, firm types, and career stages, the Task Force was charged with making recommendations that define the program audience, content and delivery format, schedule and financial commitment including opportunities for partnership with sponsors, presenters, and content experts.

The 2021 Mid-Career Professionals Task Force made five recommendations that we used to guide our work:

Our focus	Create a customizable Business Management Program with a flexible delivery model to provide essential business and management skills
Next step	Create an Executive Leadership Program to cultivate and advance leadership skills
Goals for our work	Summarize and promote existing best practices and model policies to serve & AIA Virginia as an essential resource
	Cultivate a peer community. Help designers identify and navigate their ideal career path.
	Find ways to recognize and celebrate leadership and managerial excellence

Task Force Members

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Program Overview

TARGET AUDIENCE

This program is designed to support AIA members who manage projects and people in their day-to-day work. They are the current or future leaders of their firm or organization or are thinking about starting their own business. With around 10 years of experience and demonstrated success in the field, they have the maturity and focus needed to contribute to a dynamic cohort of industry leaders – elevating the conversation, workshops, and esprit de corps.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Mid-Career Professionals Program will provide a comprehensive overview of business management topics while building a community of peer support. This program will present a broad understanding of best practices for managing time, finances, people, and firms, while offering practical skills to take back to the office.

Program participants will meet once a month over 8 to 9 months, and learn from a variety of content experts, both within and outside the architecture profession, through in-person classes, workshops, and case-studies. To foster networking opportunities and build a culture of peer support, classes should be held in person with a consistent cohort of individuals. A-la-carte sessions may be created in the future from recorded sessions.

To support continued learning and connection, AIA VA could host virtual meetings between sessions such as a moderated mid-month check-in to discuss questions, skills implementation, upcoming topics, etc. – with AIA VA staff, workshop presenters, or eventually program Alumni facilitating the conversation.

RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM

This 9-day course covers key topics members need to better manage people, finances, time, and their firms. Starting with the most important resource, people, attendees will explore their personal career path, use personality and strengths finder tests to understand personal and group dynamics, and develop tools that build strong teams. Next, the course covers managing Finances and Time, with an emphasis on developing skills in time management, task prioritization, and Project Management principles for organizing projects and teams. Finally, we synthesize what's been learned in a discussion of Firm Management, with a focus on firm culture and identity, managing relationships and risk, winning work, and using strategic planning for firm management.

A list of key topics and recommended program format follow. For full curriculum outline, see the full Mid-Career Professionals Taskforce report dated August 9, 2024.

KEY TOPICS

Financial Management

- Business accounting
- Revenue and expenses
- Cash flow, budgeting, and forecasting
- Taxes

Time Management

- Project team management strategies
- Task management strategies
- Project Management best practices
- Professional sustainability & work-life balance

People Management

- Individual talent development
- Team assessments and dynamics
- Experience development strategies
- Psychology and decision making:
 - individual and group
- Recruiting employees and partners
- Conflict resolution and negotiation

Firm Management

- Launching / growing / shrinking your firm
- Advancement and Succession Planning
- Firm Ownership and Leadership models
- Branding and Messaging
- Business Development (sales, winning work)
- Presentation and Public Speaking Skills
- Contracts, Liability, Risk Management

RECOMMENDED PROGRAM FORMAT

Based on our environmental scan and personal experience with a variety of professional development programs, we recommend a cohort class size of 15 to 22. To maximize time for learning while promoting group cohesion, we recommend a consistent session format:

- 9:00-9:30 Arrival and coffee
- 9:30-10:00 Welcome, introductions, housekeeping and a personal check-in to build connection:
 - “How are you doing in your work & life?”
 - What problem are you hoping to solve today?”
- 10:00-11:30 Session 1: Content-rich lecture / presentation by subject-matter expert; Q&A
- 11:30-12:30 Lunch break (no agenda). Social connection, check in on work.
- 12:30-2:30 Session 2: Structured workshop / case study / whole group or small group activity
- 2:30-3:00 Break (no agenda). Social connection, check in on work.
- 3:00-4:00 Session 3: Lighter lecture / presentation (PechaKucha, panel discussion, etc.)
- 4:00-4:30 Wrap up, housekeeping, personal check-in to focus on useful take-aways:
 - “What’s one thing you learned today that you’ll take back to your office to use?”

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Task Force recommends that the MCP program application process be similar to other established leadership development programs. Application requirements will ensure that members of the MCP cohort are committed to participating in the program, invested in their personal and career growth, and that they are mid-career professionals who will benefit from, and positively impact, the cohort-based learning environment.

Applicants will submit a letter of interest, one to three letters of recommendation, and their personal resume. The Task Force also notes the benefit of including a short answer prompt

requiring a 500–600-word response as part of the program application. An agreement form may also be included, to confirm and reinforce their commitment to the program attendance. An application fee is not recommended, as it may deter participation.

The applicant's letter of interest must describe their reasons for applying to the MCP program and include how they believe their participation will help them improve their practice and help them grow in their career. Letters should include some personal background to help the selection jury understand them as an individual and give insight into their career path so far. The letters of recommendation should reinforce the applicant's letter of interest and highlight their growth potential. Recommendations are preferred but not required to be from within the industry. Personal resumes must include the applicant's employment history, education, volunteer experience, and licensure status.

The Task Force recommends that applications be evaluated by a selection jury such as the AIA Virginia Executive Committee or Education Advisory Council and follow a similarly rigorous process as the ELA program and honors and awards jury. Ultimately, the Task Force hopes to have more applicants than available seats for the first MCP cohort, but if that is not the case in the first year, the application review process should be more flexible.

ESTIMATED PROGRAM COST

The anticipated costs to run a mid-career architect professionals' educational program in its first year may be higher than the return years, just to work to develop the content. Overall costs to be considered for the following categories:

- Program development including instructional materials
- Facilities and equipment expenses (e.g rental of classrooms and any specialized software)
- Catering and event costs (e.g. coffee, lunch, happy hour)
- Marketing and recruitment costs including promotional materials and outreach activities
- Guest lecturer stipends or honoraria
- Travel and accommodation expenses for guest lecturers or staff travel if locations vary
- Administrative costs

There are many opportunities to keep costs to a minimum such as partnering with local firms or allied partners to provide space or equipment at a lower cost or for free. Engage industry professionals who might be willing to volunteer their time in exchange for networking and development opportunities. Sponsorships from partners such as architectural firms or organization partners can also enhance the program's credibility and attract more participants.

The anticipated cost for the program is estimated at \$35,000 to \$40,000 annually.

ESTIMATED REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES

There are several opportunities for revenue in this program:

- Tuition for 15-22+ participants: \$2,000 per participant.
- Sponsorship opportunities include presenters / facilitators, firm sponsors, industry partners, etc.
 - Estimated sponsorship revenue would be approximately \$5,000-\$8,000.
- Additional learning opportunities.
 - Individual courses could be packaged for delivery by AIA VA to deliver this content to members who want the content but can't commit to a multi-month cohort program. The opportunity to serve these members exists, and AIA VA and our members could benefit from meeting them.
 - AIA Virginia could record and resell this content on AIAU

The anticipated revenue for the program is estimated at \$48,000 annually.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The following proposed timeline allows for a thorough development process to create a high-quality program that meets the needs of mid-career professionals.

Phase 1 - Initial Planning and Setup (October to December 2024)

- Receive board approval by mid-October.
- Develop a detailed project plan, including milestones, deadline, and assign responsibilities.
- Draft the preliminary budget.
- Identify and recruit potential lecturers/instructors.
- Start developing the curriculum outline and course materials.

Phase 2 - Curriculum Development (January to March 2025)

- Finalize curriculum and course content.
- Finalize all lecturers or presenters
- Secure locations/facilities and any special equipment needs.
- Test and refine course content with input from Task Force or Advisory group.
- Begin marketing outreach to attract applicants. Allow for a two-month application process.

Phase 3 - Launch Pilot Program, Year 1 (April to November 2025)

- Officially launch the program.

- Manage 10 sessions in 8 months – one session a month, except for first and last months.
- Provide ongoing support to participants and instructors.
- Make any necessary adjustments between sessions, if possible.
- Collect feedback from participants, instructors, and staff after completing the program.

Phase 4 – Ongoing Program, Years 2+ (December 2025)

- Begin planning for the next iteration of the program based on the feedback.