

## AIA College of Fellows:

### 12 Common Mistakes Made When Completing the Application

1. **Preparing the application in a hurry.** It takes a good five months. Expect to spend a busy summer gathering and organizing information and images. In fact, make believe the deadline is end-September; you'll never regret having the luxury of a couple of weeks "more" to complete the work.
2. **Expecting your standard marketing language to suffice.** This is not about getting a job. The tone and purpose are entirely different. It's all about you, individually, not your office. Ask your marketing people to sit this one out if they can't adapt.
3. **Failing to explain how you have advanced the profession, technology, design, whatever.** This document is all about consequence. What you have done is surely interesting, but why is it important? What has changed in, say, design, practice, or the business of design? If you hadn't been an architect, what would never have happened that's truly relevant? Because the jury looks for the enduring significance of each individual candidate's work and focus, "therefore" is the most important word you can use as you prepare your application.
4. **Picking a sponsor or letter writers who have prestige but don't know you well.** Oh, how that shows up really fast! Instead, pick people who know you across the years – preferably from a geographic range and preferably already Fellows. Doesn't hurt one bit if they write warmly and anecdotally.
5. **Thinking you can do the application all alone** – and still have a life and happy clients [or equivalent]. Designate and involve staff and/or a consultant from the start. Include someone to do the graphics, others to find and input the information, proofread [ideally, someone *not* involved], and tactfully track the progress of your letter writers. You have enough to do to gather, sort, and prioritize the information. And, by the way, context is important.
6. **Not asking questions of Robin Lee [[rlee@aia.org](mailto:rlee@aia.org)] or your component executive.** No one knows better than they do. [Your friends who have become Fellows already are less reliable sources.]
7. **Mumbling.** Word-smithing is important. This is not the place for archibabble – nor for bragging or false modesty. Write a clear, cogent explanation of who you are, why you are worthy, what you have accomplished, and what the planet has gained from your talent. This is important language. [See also Mistake No. 2.]
8. **Not setting up your own checklist.** . The AIA's is good but brief. There are hundreds of details in an application. The master list that we use for applicants is nine pages long. [*See "Quick questions" on the reverse side.*]
9. **Claiming a "first" but failing to substantiate the innovation.** Make sure you really moved the needle on the dial, then give the jury sufficient information to overcome any skepticism.

10. **Ignoring the business issues.** Your application will take considerable time. You will need to allocate money for support people, the submission fee, and the cost of photography [if nothing suitable exists]. Don't forget the expense of FedExing or messengering background information to your letter writers as well as the pages that your photographers, Section 3's exhibit validators, and the chapter president are required to sign.
11. **Not preparing your letter writers to make the points needed.** Choosing these boosters well – to show off your talent and professionalism in all eras and facets of your career – is an art. Discuss your theme and their particular message with them, and give them back-up to help them remember.
12. **Not holding to your Chapter review schedule.** Even if you think you don't need that late-summer review, do it. It can't hurt – and you'll be very grateful that you had to hustle to make that early deadline.

Quick questions:

- Are you current in your AIA dues?
- Do you know the date you became an AIA member?
- Do you know your AIA membership number?
- Is your sponsor an AIA member in good standing?
  - Does he or she know his/her membership number?
- Are you current in your CES credits?
- Have you lined up your letter writers?
  - Are they AIA members in good standing?
- Is it clear that the interns who work in your firm are *paid* as a matter of policy?
- Has your sponsor notified your Chapter that you will be submitting?
- Is there anyone else in your firm submitting this year?
  - Will your submissions be substantially different?
- Have you printed out all the pages [intern declaration, signature page, exhibit signature page] that need to be signed and ultimately scanned into a pdf?
- Are you aware of your Chapter's review schedule?
- Will your sponsor be willing *and* available to help you?
- Have you met with your entire production team?
  - Are they clear on the focus and intent of the submission?
  - Have you shown them prior successful submissions so they understand the full scope of the document [*available through AIA*]?
- Have you lined up the people who will sign the Declaration of Responsibility for the Exhibit 3 projects?
- Do you have a great black and white photograph of yourself?