

for associations to consider. Sophisticated technology, too, has made for a different membership environment.

Interior designers are seeking greater responsiveness from the associations and their leaders. They are more carefully considering the return on investment that they get for their volunteer involvement, attendance at conferences, and purchase of forms, documents, and resources.

Each association has a governing body usually called a board of directors. These boards meet at state, regional, national, and international levels. They set policies, define the association's vision, determine the measurements of success, and make decisions regarding fiduciary obligations. Most of all, however, the boards of these interior design associations are the champions of their organizations and of the future of the design professions. Board members serve terms ranging from two to five years. During their term, board members debate key issues of the day and deal with questions such as "Should this body be inclusive or exclusive?" "What should our priorities be this year?" "How can we be better managed, better led, and more relevant to our constituencies"? In recent years, the boards of the design associations have been hotbeds of political action and have brought forward broad changes affecting the future of the design professions.

Each association has its own culture and style. And while some of the associations continue to lead in certain areas, others choose to lead in other areas. It is useful to examine characteristics of these associations to ascertain where they "fit" with your own expectations. Keep in mind the following:

1. Are the meetings well attended?
2. Are there frequent communications?
3. Are there regular professional development programs offered for members at all levels?
4. Is the board of directors prepared for their duties? Are they leaders?
5. Do the leaders participate in the meetings?
6. Does the organization encourage a plurality of ideas in their discussions or are issues railroaded through the meetings of members?
7. Are the meetings of the association controlled by a few outspoken members?
8. Are issues resolved or do they carry over from meeting to meeting?

9. Do the leaders take action?
10. Are issues brought to closure?
11. Are the meetings good social experiences—is there camaraderie and meaningful social purpose?

TRUSTING YOUR ASSOCIATION?

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While twenty-first-century organizations are formed because of common purposes and goals, not all associations function effectively despite their lofty ambitions. The most critical factor that makes some of these organizations more effective is “trust.” Much has been written about trust. It is recommended that a trust assessment be conducted before investing time and money in an association. This is prudent behavior. Look for shared purpose, shared culture, and for confidence in the leadership. Here are some questions to ask of associations before you become involved:

1. How involved are volunteers in the organization? What is the turnover rate? What percentages are involved locally and nationally?
2. How much of my membership dollar goes into administrative overhead? Exactly how is my dollar divided? What are the priorities of the budget for these changing times?
3. Who are the leaders and what are their qualifications? Are these the leaders that peers respect the most?
4. What barriers are associated with involvement in the leadership activities?
5. Does the association board have a strategic plan? Is it available to see? How does the board measure success? How does it communicate that to the membership?
6. What mechanisms does the association have to understand the membership’s changing needs? Does it have a way to get timely and meaningful feedback on the services it offers?