



AIA NY kicks off second year of Civic Leadership Program

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New York, NY On June 9th, the AIA NY Civic Leadership Program (CLP) kicked off its second year at the Center for Architecture. Ten selected leaders came together for a full day of programming that began with an introduction to the origin, mission, and objectives of the CLP, framed within a larger social and political context. The kick-off focused on the need for architects to take action by finding opportunities for civic involvement. Throughout the day, the 2018 CLP class discussed themes including transparency, effective communication, courage, connection, and trust.

After learning more about CLP, the ten participants convened for a group activity where they shared their individual stories, exchanged ideas, and discussed themes related to civic leadership. From this exercise, there emerged a foundation of trust and collaboration.

Following this activity, Richard Swett, an architect and former congressman and ambassador to Denmark, returned for a second year as the kick off's keynote speaker. Swett urged the group to serve as leaders by design and by example, to employ their unique abilities to solve problems and bring communities together. He spoke of the architecture profession's awareness of the complexities of society and our value as civic leaders. Swett noted that "by expanding design from its aesthetic sense to incorporate people, society, and quality of life issues, we shift the paradigm of architecture from the design of buildings to influencing the design process for solving problems in society."

During the afternoon, the group gathered with their newly assigned partners for a panel composed of architects and designers who serve as civic leaders. Ifeoma Ebo, senior design strategist at the mayor's office for criminal justice, discussed how the design of public infrastructure can address equity and social justice issues in cities. From her work with marginalized communities in South Africa to her current role on the mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, Ebo's work experiences demonstrate a critical and unique application of design in the public realm.

Claudia Herasme, Chief Urban Designer at the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP), shared how she came to work at the intersection of design and policy. At DCP she works to improve New York City's public spaces at multiple scales, from waterfront redevelopment to streetscape regulations. Herasme spoke to the power of an inclusive design approach to address aspects of everyday life and highlighted the value of citizens in creating change.

William Merritt Singer, Chief Plan Examiner at the Brooklyn Department of Buildings, shed light on how New York City government operates. Drawing from his experience as a civil servant, Singer focused on leadership skills and tools, urging the class to immerse themselves in their communities.

Finally, 2018 AIANY President Guy Geier, FAIA, IIDA, led a discussion about the multiple strategies architects can use to engage in the civic realm. The speakers advised the young leaders to build relationships with their community and city government, and to continually bring who they are to their efforts as civic leaders.

The day concluded with a sense of possibility for what the program can offer as the CLP class works together.

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