



AIA Detroit

A Chapter of the American
Institute of Architects

AIA Detroit Christopher Kelley Leadership Development Program 2017-2018 Cohort

Session 2: Community Engagement

Date: November 3rd, 2017

Venue: The Jam Handy

Scholars: Kaleena Quinn & Tessa Sodini-Marshall

The second CKLDP Detroit session focused on Engaging Your Community and was led by Kalenna Quinn and Tessa Sodini-Marshall. This session was sponsored by Smithgroup JJR, University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Mohawk Group, W.E. Gingell Associates, INC. and Genesse Ceramic Tile. The location was perfect as it was hosted by the Jam Handy building, an event venue emphasizing community and art-related projects. The topic of the session was integrated throughout the session with two presentations, as well as a group activity that focused on the importance of engaging the community and including the importance of stakeholder involvement when it comes to design.

The first presentation was a panel discussion on Social Responsibility and Impact in Practice. The presenters were Steve Coy with Hygienic Dress League and LTU, Maria Galarza with the City of Detroit Planning Department, and Megan Heeres with the Work Department. The three presenters discussed their work both past and present, and the engagement of community in making their work what it is. Steve Coy began with talking about his background as well as his current efforts of creating a Masters of Fine Arts and Social Science at LTU. He then transitioned to focus on the Hygienic Dress League as art that takes on the form of corporation and how he engages the community their projects are located. Steve also focuses on enlisting help from students in the area teaching them about the impact of art. Meg Heeres talked about her efforts at the Work Department, and the goal to break down art and make it more accessible to the public. The Work Department builds the tools for organizations to help the community in breaking down complex information through marketing materials, art, etc. Maria Galarza presented on initiatives at the City of Detroit and how the planning department is working with the community in participatory design sessions. Kalenna and Tessa moderated discussion with questions ranging from how the panelists reach the community they are working in, how we can change clients opinions on community engagement as well as how to decide which neighborhoods or clients to take on.

The panel was opened up to the scholars to ask questions. Scholars were interested in learning more about the panelists thoughts on changing the culture and profession to include community engagement, how to balance the wants and feedback from stakeholders as well as how they deal and grow from negative feedback. These conversations were focused on how art, design and planning can be integrated into the community and what those interactions look like. The panelists talked about how in their own experiences community engagement is focused on being able to reach the community and getting to know people by gaining their trust. It is important to determine who your audience is and what type of format is appropriate for them. Being present and listening to the local residents is also important.



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After the first panel the scholars participated in a tour of the Jam Handy building. They learned more about the history of the building and its current multi-use purpose. After the tour scholars were split up into four groups and participated in a group activity called Spheres of Influence. This activity had scholars map out on the Detroit Metro area their commutes from home and from work in one mile and five mile radiuses. Scholars had the chance to see the differences between their peers commutes and how many of the spheres of influence were spread apart. Scholars were then challenged with coming up with a list of organizations and volunteer opportunities both past and ongoing. A greater challenge was issued of collecting data on all of the volunteer opportunities that scholars will complete over the course of the fellowship.



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The final presentation was with Emma Cuciurean-Zapan from Cannondesign in Chicago. The presentation was focused on Open Hand Studio which is a non-profit sector housed within Cannondesign. Open Hand Studio provides access to design services for organizations that might not be able to receive them. They have different programs including a Meet and Match which is like “speed dating for Pro-Bono work” as well as other design projects in which they treat exactly like any other project in their office. Emma talked about how the structure of the projects, timeline for the projects and gave an example of one project that the studio recently completed. The benefits of the studio and the value to the firm is plentiful but it also gives emerging staff project management opportunities that they might not have had before. This session brought together the ideas of engaging your community through art, design, planning as well as how architecture firms can provide design services pro-bono. Scholars are tasked with how to change the idea of equity and architecture.