faces of advocacy

2017 REPORT
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participants

IIDA Members

Stacey Crumbaker, IIDA
Associate, Mahlum
Northern Pacific Chapter

Kelly Ennis, IIDA
Managing Partner,
The Verve Partnership
Mid-Atlantic Chapter

Clara Mechelle Karnei, IIDA
Senior Designer, IA Architects
Texas/Oklahoma Chapter

Susanne Molina, FIIDA, CID, LEED AP
Principal, ONE Design Collective
Southern California Chapter

Roberta Pennington, IIDA
Senior Associate Interior Designer,
Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects
Oregon Chapter

Carmen Preston, IIDA, RID
Account Manager, Shaw Contract
Alabama Chapter

Jessie Santini, IIDA, LEED AP BD+C
Senior Interior Designer, RLPS Interiors
PA/NJ/DE Chapter

Annie Chu, IIDA, FAIA
Principal, CHU+GOODING Architects
Southern California Chapter

Speakers

Collin Burry, FIIDA
President, Council for Interior Design
Accreditation (CIDA)
Northern California Chapter

Michael Cassidy
Senior Vice President,
State Government Relations,
McGuireWoods Consulting

Amy Coombs
Public Member, CIDQ Board of Directors
President, Prestige Government Relations

IIDA Staff

Cheryl Durst, Hon. FIIDA, LEED AP
Executive Vice President
and CEO

Emily Kluczynski
Director of Advocacy &
Legislative Affairs

Abigail Rathbun
Public Policy & Grassroots
Advocacy Manager

Louisa Fitzgerald
Director of Content
In July 2017, the International Interior Design Association (IIDA) gathered eight member-experts who are actively advocating for the Interior Design industry. Each member was asked to come to the table ready to provide insight and commentary on what is next for commercial interior design advocacy.

advocacy is everything we do

For IIDA, this conversation was a continuation of its commitment to interior design advocacy. “Advocacy is everything we do,” said Cheryl Durst, Hon. FiIDA, LEED AP. “Education is advocacy. Membership is advocacy. And every single member of IIDA—whether you are practicing in a firm or working for a manufacturer or teaching—is an advocate for the profession.”

Advocacy—what we mean by the term and how it plays out within the industry, among our peer professions, and politically, as well as what we do to promote interior design to the public—is a constantly moving target. As the association for commercial interior designers, it is critical for IIDA to not only stay current, but also to be predictive and nimble in how it allocates resources, approaches the political landscape, and positions the profession.

Bringing together our members for an advocacy ‘think tank’ is one way for IIDA to stay ahead of the curve—so is participating in the conversations that are happening locally among our members. But we also must look outside of our organization. “We must be sensitive to and cognizant of the conversations that are happening within other interior design associations and governing bodies. We must be aware of how the perception of interior design has changed over the last three decades and how we can continue to refine it,” said Durst.

“Education is advocacy. Membership is advocacy. And every single member of IIDA—whether you are practicing in a firm or working for a manufacturer or teaching—is an advocate for the profession.”

Cheryl S. Durst
Hon. FiIDA, LEED AP, Executive Vice President and CEO, IIDA
part 1

the issues facing interior design advocacy
Over the course of the Faces of Advocacy conversation, participants outlined the issues that complicate interior design advocacy and how they can be overcome. What roadblocks exist? How does education and testing strengthen the case for the legal recognition of interior design? How do we define a common language? And how do we continue to build a body of knowledge for a profession that is a mere 40 years old? In order to take interior design advocacy to the next level, we must be able to answer these questions.

**education and accreditation**

For advocacy efforts to gain traction, we must understand the landscape of interior design education and accredit post-secondary programs—in other words, defining and creating a body of academic knowledge for the profession then ensuring that students are equipped to practice upon graduation will only strengthen interior design advocacy efforts.

The Council for Interior Design Accreditation, or CIDA, is an independent, non-profit accrediting organization for interior design education programs at colleges and universities in the U.S., and internationally. The organization identifies, develops, and promotes quality standards for the education of entry-level interior designers and accredits programs that meet those standards.

Collin Burry, FIIDA, president of CIDA, joined advocates at IIDA Headquarters to provide an overview of the organization and why its existence and continued commitment to excellence in interior design education is paramount to advocacy efforts.

“CIDA is sort of the United Nations of the Interior Design profession. We have representatives from IIDA, ASID, IDEC, and NCIDQ. This is one of the places where we can all come together with the common purpose of strengthening interior design education,” said Burry.

**PREPARING STUDENTS, EDUCATING PARENTS, AND STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS**

Unlike a degree in medicine, law, or even architecture, interior design education is not inherently understood... yet. But we’ve made some important strides. CIDA provides credibility to interior design programs, which in turn can mean peace of mind for parents who are planning to invest in their child’s college education. But it’s also building the standards for this young profession, making it more likely that as these programs continue to gain recognition, students and parents will understand that interior design education is worthwhile and prepares new grads for entry-level employment in a meaningful career.

And accreditation means something to employers: “At the end of the day, I look at the school when I’m hiring entry-level designers. It’s about the curriculum and some schools really prepare students for a career in the industry; others don’t,” said Susanne Molina, FIIDA, CID, LEED AP, principal, ONE Design Collective.
“Accredited educational programs speak to the legitimacy of the Interior Design profession. When talking with legislators, it is important for lobbyists and advocates to show that this is an established profession. These standards are a great way to have that conversation. It gives us something to talk about that takes away from the emotion of politics and grounds the discussion in facts.”

Amy Coombs, President, Prestige Government Relations
A TOOL FOR ADVOCATES

For advocates, accreditation gives us something to talk about. With four decades of information to build on, it’s important that CIDA is actively defining and redefining standards of interior design education. “We are advocates for education. We also really help in terms of quality assurance for the industry,” said Burry.

In addition, accreditation is meaningful to the local representatives who can introduce and pass legislation that benefits our profession. As Amy Coombs, president, Prestige Government Relations, put it, “Accredited educational programs speak to the legitimacy of the Interior Design profession. When talking with legislators, it is important for lobbyists and advocates to show that this is an established profession. These standards are a great way to have that conversation. It gives us something to talk about that takes away from the emotion of politics and grounds the discussion in facts.”

a common vocabulary

Finding a common language around the profession of interior design has long been a goal of advocacy efforts. During the Faces of Advocacy discussion, Jessie Santini, IIDA, LEED AP BD+C, senior interior designer, RLPS Interiors, shared her graduate research, Perceptions of Interior Architecture, which examined this term in relation to interior design and architecture. Her research included findings from a survey sent to 476 architects and interior designers to gauge understanding and implications of the term.

CALLING INTERIOR DESIGN ‘INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE’ CAN BE PROBLEMATIC

Approximately 10% of schools with programs accredited by CIDA are called interior architecture, which Santini found can be misleading or confusing to students, parents, and the public. For starters, students going into “interior architecture” programs may be surprised to learn that they cannot practice architecture. Their coursework will prepare them to take the NCIDQ exam, but not the Architecture Registration Examination (ARE). Another concern? The term architecture is a protected in all 50 states as a defined profession and regulated industry; interior architecture is not.

“Some believe that using ‘interior architecture’ devalues the term ‘interior design.’ Some believe that it implies that interior design is a subset of architecture rather than its own profession,” said Santini. “However, there are absolutely people who use the term because they firmly believe that what they are practicing is indeed in this gray area of interior architecture.”

According to Santini’s survey, the adoption of the term interior architecture is primarily due to interior design’s confusion with interior decorating. She also found that interior architecture programs have a higher perceived value than interior design programs—which may explain why some designers feel that interior architecture better defines the depth and breadth of what they do.

But the lack of consensus about terminology surrounding the profession is pervasive, extending far beyond the interior architecture vs. interior design debate. “Architecture has three degrees—you get your B.Arch., you get your M.Arch., and your doctorate—whereas interior design has 8,000 different degree titles, so how do our employers and legislators compare it? I think more consistency is what we need to be more legitimate,” said Santini.

“As a young profession, interior design has the potential for growth and development. We need to continue to strengthen the brand of interior design to increase consistency within the field of design, improve public awareness of our profession, and achieve legislation for title and practice. By remaining a unique and distinct practice from related disciplines, we retain our autonomy,” said Santini.

~10%

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Jessie Santini, IIDA, LEED AP BD+C, Senior Interior Designer, RLPS Interiors
part 2

advocacy for a new age
There's no question that advocating for interior design has changed since efforts to define the industry began in the 1980s. “Advocacy has changed from a conversation that would almost become a conflict to a respectful dialogue about interior design, how we practice, and what recognition we deserve for contributing to the building and architecture community,” said Stacey Crumbaker, IIDA, associate, Mahlum.

Most Faces of Advocacy participants agreed that there is a much broader understanding and acceptance of what commercial interior designers do, that interior design is important and necessary, and that designers bring a different and critical set of skills to a commercial project. “We’ve gained more respect from our associates. My peers in architecture understand what interior design is and feel emboldened to speak to their peers about what we do and why interior design needs a legal definition,” said Roberta Pennington, IIDA, senior associate interior designer, Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects.

But there’s still more work to be done. Here’s a look at how we can elevate the advocacy efforts of the Interior Design profession.

**Honing our messages**

A key aspect of the discussion was how to refine interior design messaging for a range of advocacy purposes—for local representatives and legislatures, peer professions, and the general public. This is critical. According to Molina, “Interior designers are not always able to communicate effectively about what we do. Advocacy is ultimately about having a common vocabulary we can use to educate the public about what interior design is.”

Without that common vocabulary, it’s difficult to set commercial interior design apart. While we—and associated professions—may understand what interior designers do, if we can’t talk about it to other audiences, it will be difficult to achieve more success.

**OWNING ‘COMMERCIAL’**

The first step for many participants: Clearly defining the difference between designing for commercial and residential environments.

“For legislators, when we add ‘commercial’ in front of ‘interior design,’ it’s an aha moment,” said Durst. “We have to become a bit more specific in speaking about commercial interior design because that is who we are. It is also the segment of design with a capital D that is most clear and easy to talk about in the context of its impact on human beings.”

**INCORPORATING HUMANITY**

Defining design to lay audiences also means making it clear how it differs from architecture and other allied professions—but the message needs to change from what interior design is not to what interior design is. “Interior design is about empathy. We are trying to put ourselves in the user’s shoes, what’s the why, who are the people that are using our spaces?” said Burry.

Or as Durst put it, “Space doesn’t just happen. There’s a rationale—or at least there should be—behind every space that exists. Every space should be created with people in mind. This is what interior designers do. They maintain the humanity of every project.”

This message resonates and differentiates what interior designers do in relation to peer professions. For advocates who are familiar with the industry, it’s a message that almost feels overly simplistic and obvious, but to those outside of the profession, it’s not.

90%
The amount of time Americans spend in their interior environment.
“Advocacy has changed from a conversation that would almost become a conflict to a respectful dialogue about interior design, how we practice, and what recognition we deserve for contributing to the building and architecture community.”

Stacey Crumbaker, IIDA, Associate, Mahlum
DEFINING IMPACT
It’s an oft-cited statistic, but bears repeating: Americans spend 90% of their time in the interior environment, which means interior designers have the ability to make a profound positive impact on day-to-day safety, health, well-being, productivity, and more.

“Our value is our impact. It is the impact we have on the lives of every single person every single day in the interior environment,” said Durst. “We impact how people heal, how they learn, how they work—all the conversations around performance and productivity and attraction and retention.”

building new relationships
A veritable alphabet soup of associations and governing bodies represent the Interior Design industry and often have different, sometimes competing, goals and purposes—IIDA, CIDA, IDEC, CIDQ—not to mention the organizations that represent architecture and other allied professions. In order to be successful, we must work together.

ENGAGING EDUCATORS
For starters, how do advocates reach across the boundaries that divide practitioners and educators? According to Burry, “It’s almost like the educators are over here and the professionals are over there. Yes, there are organizations like CIDA and CIDQ, but educators are doing all this amazing research that professionals don’t know about.” That research could assist advocacy efforts.

IIDA is working to bridge the divide. Over the past few years, IIDA has made a concerted effort to engage both educators and students—by sponsoring the IDEC conference, hosting student and educator roundtable events, and creating award programs that honor educators.

☑️ ACTION ITEM: Nominate educators in your area for IIDA awards.

“We are starting to see some shifts and changes. Younger educators in particular are members of IIDA,” said Durst. “But we have to do more to engage them.”

Working through IIDA Chapters and Campus Centers to begin to facilitate the understanding of interior design and related professions at the student-level is another way to change the conversation and create new allies. “Ignorance propels discrimination. Even within schools where the architecture and design departments are housed in the same entity, the discrimination is still there among faculty and certainly passed on to students. So each generation passes the same discrimination and biases to the next generation,” said Annie Chu, IIDA, FAIA, principal, CHU+GOODING Architects.

☑️ ACTION ITEM: Host a joint design competition for area architecture and interior design students.

REACHING BEYOND THE PROFESSION
When we talk about relationship building, IIDA advocates must look beyond the groups that represent other interior designers to those outside of our profession that have overlapping goals or interests. If we want our interior design advocacy messages to reach new audiences and make a bigger impact, it’s time to start thinking differently about who our allies and supporters might be.

“It’s finding those people that aren’t necessarily in the design industry that you may be able to partner with. We’re not talking about IIDA, ASID, and CIDQ working together. That’s an internal group working together to see if goals align. We are talking about building relationships with other groups,” said Emily Kluczynski, director of advocacy and legislative affairs at IIDA.
Where to start? Think about groups that have similar, if tangential, interests. For example, interior design is a profession that is largely made up of women. The economic impact of women-owned design firms will resonate with local women's business groups. Similarly, local organizations dedicated to economic development, building and zoning, and ADA compliance are groups that have interests that align with interior design. These opportunities—to look outside our professional associations—are largely untapped.

**ACTION ITEM:** Attend meetings and get involved with your local economic development or building and zoning committees, or seek out other groups that have overlapping interests.

**modern lobbying**

While capitol days are important, lobbying has evolved. The most effective way to advocate for the Interior Design profession is by building relationships with your local representatives. Hiring a professional lobbyist can help you build those relationships with legislators and navigate the new world of lobbying. Not sure how to get started? IIDA Headquarters can help your chapter engage a lobbyist.

“Modern lobbying and modern advocacy are flexible. You can take information from all sorts of genres and disciplines to make your case. I think it provides much more opportunity to connect with the individual that you are speaking with,” said Coombs.
DON’T JUST TELL—SHOW

Sitting down with a legislator to talk interior design for 10 minutes can be effective, but showing them firsthand what we do can make a bigger impact. “Bringing a legislator to our events and our workplaces goes a very, very long way,” said Michael Cassidy, senior vice president, state government relations, McGuireWoods Consulting.

Site visits, typically facilitated by lobbyists, allow designers to demonstrate how firms operate day-to-day or showcase a newly designed space. They also can be powerful reminders that interior design is not just for densely populated urban areas—interior designers make important economic contributions in cities and towns of all sizes. But you can think outside the workday too, and invite a legislator or government representative to a large industry event or design awards reception that highlights the best interior design work being done locally.

These efforts often leave a lasting impression on people who are typically not connected to the industry. “I brought Illinois’ director of commerce to NeoCon. His job is to basically talk about the economic role of different industries in the state. He didn’t realize that NeoCon was the largest commercial interiors convention. He had no idea,” said Cassidy.

**ACTION ITEM:** Work with a lobbyist to invite a legislator to attend an interior design awards event, spend a few hours at a firm, or tour a recently completed commercial interiors project.

FRAME THE CONVERSATION

Legislators typically respond to facts over emotion. “Emotion is great for storytelling, but it needs to be backed up by fact,” said Coombs. “We can’t just talk about our title and our practice. We can’t just say this is what we want. We have to say, ‘This is our impact.’”

Frame your conversations with representatives by sharing numbers that demonstrate interior design’s impact. One piece to start with: The Economic Impact Report from IIDA, which illustrates how interior design contributes to each state’s economy.

**ACTION ITEM:** Download your state’s economic impact report at advocacy.iida.org.

RECOGNIZE YOUR CHAMPIONS

Even if there isn’t a current interior design bill in your state, it’s important to continue building relationships with legislators who have historically championed our industry. Creating an award that can be presented to a representative is a fantastic way to continue to engage them, make them feel special and recognized, and interact with them away from the capitol. For example, IIDA has recognized Ohio State Representative Timothy Schaffer (R-77) and Utah State Senate Assistant Minority Whip Luz Escamilla (D-Salt Lake City), with its Legislator of the Year award. Make sure your legislator’s award is promoted through your IIDA Chapter’s communication channels and the local media.

**ACTION ITEM:** Create an award that recognizes a local representative who has championed interior design advocacy.
part 3

resources
deregulation and why it matters

As we continue to advance the profession, assessing the political climate is critical if we are to understand how it will impact existing interior design legislation and the ability to pass new legislation. Deregulation of interior design legislation has been an issue for more than a decade. Why? Those who seek to deregulate the profession feel there are too many barriers to entering interior design, which reduces economic opportunities for potential workers.

Interior design isn’t the only profession at risk of deregulation. Organizations such as the Institute for Justice and Americans for Prosperity promote deregulation and encourage legislators to introduce bills that would deregulate a variety of professions. Moreover, deregulation efforts don’t always fall along party lines—it’s a bipartisan issue, as demonstrated with the Barack Obama White House, which issued a study on occupational licensing in the U.S.

WHAT Deregulation MEANS FOR ADVOCATES

The potential of deregulation should remind interior design advocates that it’s always important to be engaged in the political process. IIDA Headquarters closely watches deregulation legislation and is actively working to educate government officials at every level about what interior design legislation is and how registration does not limit anyone from entering the profession or calling themselves an interior designer.

defining roles in advocacy efforts

IIDA Headquarters supports the efforts of interior design advocates across the country. However, to be effective, advocacy must happen at the local level, which means chapters must take the lead in their states. To help chapters better determine their role in the advocacy process, IIDA conducted an audit of interior design legislative efforts and funding mechanisms for the past two years and created the following chart to outline the complementary advocacy roles of IIDA Chapters and Headquarters.

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<th>CHAPTER ADVOCACY ROLE</th>
<th>IIDA HEADQUARTERS ADVOCACY ROLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Garner chapter support for advocacy initiatives.</td>
<td>• Create materials to educate members about advocacy and legislation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Share advocacy updates and information from HQ with members.</td>
<td>• Create materials to help chapters engage members and plan events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Educate members on legislation, the importance of registration, and how to be a grassroots advocate.</td>
<td>• Host an annual advocacy training (the Advocacy Symposium).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Create and execute plans to educate members, host a capitol day, and engage non-IIDA designers.</td>
<td>• Help hire and manage lobbyists.</td>
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<td>• Build relationships with state legislators, state boards, and state and local government officials.</td>
<td>• Provide strategy planning in person or via video or phone conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Be aware of the chapter’s advocacy goals through surveys or other means on a yearly basis.</td>
<td>• Monitor proposed bills in state houses and in Congress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Adequately fund advocacy initiatives; 10% of the chapter’s budget is recommended.</td>
<td>• Guide the overall IIDA advocacy strategy and policies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide financial assistance through the advocacy grant program for chapters to engage with lobbyists or for advocacy projects.</td>
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IIDA advocacy resources

IIDA has developed talking points, guides, and other resources that members can use to strengthen their advocacy efforts. All resources are available at advocacy.iida.org.

Be An Advocate Brochure
How to be an interior design advocate

Capitol Day: A How-to Guide
How chapters and coalitions can plan a capitol day

Coalition Guide
Learn to build successful interior design coalitions

Communications Handbook
Successful communications strategies and tactics to boost advocacy efforts

CQ StateTrack
A Tool to Track Your State’s Active Legislation

Guide to Fundraising for Advocacy Events
Sample events and planning tips from IIDA Chapters

Why Registration Matters Brochure
Talking points for interior designers advocating for registration

Your Legislative Guide to Interior Design
Overview of the profession for legislators

Phone2Action Grassroots Platform
IIDA HQ and ASID National have partnered on a platform that allows for quick mobility and engagement with legislators when necessary. Text “IIDA” to 52886 to start receiving alerts for your state.

how to get involved

If you’re trying to figure out how to get involved with interior design advocacy in your area, the IIDA Members who attended the Faces of Advocacy event have plenty of advice to share. All participants are active advocates for the profession—many are currently serving or have served as their chapter’s vice president of advocacy. Here’s what they had to say:

Carmen Preston, IIDA, Alabama Chapter:
I like to get out there and talk to students about the importance of advocacy. I go to the universities in my area to inspire students to become commercial interior designers, take the NCIDQ, and advocate for the profession. Starting at the student level has given grassroots advocacy new energy.

Roberta Pennington, IIDA, Oregon Chapter:
Get involved with local politics. I stay involved with IIDA because the organization respects the grassroots advocacy efforts and understands that this is a local political issue—every jurisdiction in America has different interpretations of how building codes should be read.

Clara Mechelle Karnai, IIDA, Texas/Oklahoma Chapter:
Get familiar with the legislators in your district. Visit them at their offices and let them know that licensed interior design is important to you and why it should be important to them and their constituents.

Jessie Santini, IIDA, PA/NJ/DE Chapter:
Be able to tell your story as a professional interior designer. Have that elevator pitch ready to go when you get in front of your local representative, or even your father, your mother, and friends. Educate everyone around you about the importance of what we do to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the public.