



A Message to AIC Members From the AIC Membership Committee

May 7, 2014

In addition to our traditional role of assessing Professional Associate (PA) and Fellow applications, we have, as a committee, been discussing how AIC can strengthen its professional designations in order to better promote conservation professionals and their expertise to allied professionals and the public. Our goal is to develop a proposal for consideration by the AIC Board of Directors.

As part of this process, we are providing you with a brief rationale for developing this proposal and the broad outlines of our ideas to gauge your reactions and gather your suggestions. The first forum will be at the upcoming AIC Member Business meeting, followed by moderated discussions on the member-wide online forum to be introduced over the summer. As your input is being received a sub-group of the Membership Committee with broad membership representation will be created to assess member comments and help moderate the discussions. After further consideration and discussion, a detailed plan be created and submitted to the AIC Board of Directors.

As you are aware, AIC's Professional Associate and Fellow membership categories continue to take on a high level of importance in the conservation field. In the absence of a certification program, the PA and Fellow designations are one of the few ways that end users of conservation, both arts and humanities organizations and members of the public, can identify those highly trained, qualified conservators who abide by the AIC Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Many federal and state agencies are already using PA status as a requirement for contracts.

The current PA and Fellow review process is well regulated. However, standards for the PA process have changed over the years as AIC grew and the views of members of the Membership Committee changed. At the same time, the lack of a continuing education requirement or a process for future reviews leaves no way to ensure that those given PA or Fellow status keep current in the field and maintain standards. Once PA status has been earned, there is no process or requirement to follow up with established PAs or Fellows.

The Membership Committee believes that, in order for the PA and Fellow designations to truly be considered professional designations, a continuing education requirement needs to be established. Everyone recognizes that the conservation field has changed greatly in the last 30 years, and while it is clear that the vast majority of our PAs and Fellows have changed with it, we have no mechanism to help us demonstrate this fact to the public.

Establishing a continuing education/review requirement will provide AIC with the following:

- Uniformity in standards among Professional Associates
- Stronger commitment to the designations among AIC members
- Credentials that can be marketed to allied professionals and the public
- A credentialing program that is more amenable to the members than certification
- A program that can be managed with current AIC resources

As an integral part of this transition, the membership Committee is considering a new name for those Professional Associates who choose to participate in the continuing education program. This name would reflect the new status of AIC membership categories. The registered mark being proposed in the AIC Bylaws revisions would be associated with this new name for use as a professional credential and for marketing purposes. Those PAs who decide not to participate in the program would continue to use this designation and retain their voting right status. However, over time, the committee suggests that PA applications would be discontinued and only the new designation, adherents to the continuing education program, and Fellows would undergo the peer-review process.

Current thinking of the Membership Committee is that the requirements for Fellow remain as they are. The application process for Fellow is challenging enough that anyone who becomes a Fellow has demonstrated a commitment to keeping current in the field. For example, applicants for Fellow are expected to have either published or taught in the field. Also, because each Fellow applicant needs the sponsorship of 5 current fellows to even be considered for Fellow, AIC is ensured that all Fellows are active in the field. By not requiring a formal continuing education process for Fellows, AIC can offer greater flexibility in the program. Those members, who don't care to track their continuing education, can apply for Fellow status. By increasing the number of Fellows, AIC will also strengthen its leadership pool, since only Fellows can be President or Vice President. If there is not enough distinction between the two categories, AIC could see the number of Fellows decrease, which could over time shrink the leadership pool.

While the Committee recognizes the enormity of these ideas, it is important for AIC members to think about how AIC can better support its members and keep its leadership strong. We believe that it is time to bring these ideas to you and to hear your thoughts.

Questions to consider:

- Do you believe that a continuing education program would be of benefit to AIC members?
- Do you support a name change for PAs as a way to demonstrate new requirements?
- Should Fellows be exempt from such a program, given their demonstrated commitment to the field?
- If so, could this potentially lead to more Fellow applications, strengthening AIC's leadership pool?

Thank you for your consideration of the challenges we face and potential ways we can work together to promote our practice and expertise.

The Membership Committee

Sarah Fisher, Chair

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