



AIA Brazos

P.O. Box 115
College Station, TX 77841

Alexis McKinney, AIA
Chair, Honor Awards Committee
Texas Society of Architects
500 Chicon Street
Austin, Texas 78702

May 10, 2024

Dear Chair McKinney and Honor Awards Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically nominate Ms. Leslie Tijerina for the prestigious 2024 Texas Society of Architects Associate Member of the Year Award on behalf of the American Institute of Architects, Brazos Chapter Executive Committee. As the current President of AIA Brazos, I have had the distinct privilege of witnessing Leslie's exceptional contributions to the field of architecture, her firm, and our professional community at multiple levels.

Leslie's dedication to excellence within her firm, BRW Architects, is nothing short of commendable. Her unwavering commitment to design as a public service has manifested in her remarkable work on First Responder Facilities and Fire Station Design. Leslie's innovative approach to public facility design has not only improved the lives of the communities she serves but also elevated the reputation of her firm. Furthermore, her significant role in mentoring practice teams and onboarding new talent at BRW Architects has been instrumental in nurturing the next generation of architects.

Beyond her firm, Leslie has consistently demonstrated her passion for the architectural profession and her willingness to give back to our profession. Her active involvement with the American Institute of Architects, particularly as a member of the National Associate Committee, showcases her dedication to advancing the goals and values of our organization on a national scale. Locally, as the Architecture in Schools Coordinator for AIA Brazos, Leslie has played a pivotal role in expanding an appreciation for architecture among students, especially by her efforts spearheading the expansion of the program. Her tireless efforts as a committee member for the AIA Brazos Gingerbread Build-Off and her leadership as the Emerging Professionals Director and Executive Committee member have had a lasting impact on our chapter.

Leslie's commitment to education extends beyond her professional life. She has been a contributing asset to Texas A&M University, where she has served as a Studio Guest Lecturer, Studio Review Juror, and AIAS Speaker and Panelist. Her contributions to shaping the architectural education of future professionals cannot be overstated. Additionally, Leslie's active participation as State Associate Representative (STAR) in the Texas Society of Architects is a testament to her leadership and influence within the broader architectural community.

Leslie Tijerina's passion for mentorship, education, diversity, and advocacy within the field of architecture is truly inspiring. Her dedication to public service, firm development, and community involvement exemplifies the core values of the American Institute of Architects. She is an outstanding candidate for the 2024 Texas Society of Architects Associate Member of the Year Award, and I wholeheartedly endorse her nomination. Thank you for considering Leslie Tijerina as a candidate for this prestigious award. I am confident that her continued contributions will not only elevate the profession but also inspire future architects to follow in her footsteps. Please feel free to contact me if you require any additional information or references in support of her nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Briana K. Brandt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Briana K. Brandt, AIA, RID, NCARB
President
M: (512) 964-8869 E: president@aiabrazos.org

Biography + Resume

The of Core of My Being

Born in Laredo, Texas, a border town between the US and Mexico, I was privileged to live the tale of two cities. The mixture of cultures and being able to belong to both created a sensibility to “place” that is inherently a part of who I am. My parents saw this early on in my childhood and knew I was destined to be an architect. In my teen years, I found an old childhood notebook filled with sketches and drawings. One memorable sketch was a treehouse I had designed with an extravagant swing set, slides, and climbing paths to access the treehouse. Surrounded by the dry and arid climate of south Texas, our home did not have trees that would ever be treehouse worthy, however, it made me realize that I was destined to pursue a design path.

As a young adult, I decided to apply to a STEM program in high school. The program was geared towards engineering, but I learned tools that would enable my creativity like CAD, robotics, and drafting. My parents were my greatest supporters to pursue higher education, however, I knew I would need to heavily pursue scholarships as my family would not be able to financially support me going to a university. With much grit, I received a four-year scholarship to Texas A&M University. Being able to attend college felt like a win for my family and all of my family heritage.

Upon undergraduate graduation, I decided to get more in-depth experience and apply what I had learned into practice. My passion is to design for people first and use my training within design and the arts to create spaces that best speak to them and inherently speak for them. I pursued a full-time designer position at Patrick Berrios Design in conjunction with Breed Architecture in Houston, Texas. After a year, I decided to enroll in the fall for Texas A&M's Master of Architecture program. With having real work experience, I went back to school with a new perspective and wanted to further my knowledge in public and community buildings. During my last year of graduate school, I worked part time for BRW Architects which rolled into a full-time position. At BRW, I have been able to foster my love for purposeful and meaningful design while having the support of pursuing passions outside of the office. While Texas A&M University laid the foundation of my passion for design, being involved in professional organizations and the culture my current firm has towards citizen architecture is what has fueled my passion for the profession.

Relevant Education

Texas A&M University | Master of Architecture | August 2016 – May 2018
- 2018 Tau Sigma Delta Architecture and Allied Arts Honor Society
- 2018 Edward J. Romieniec Graduate Award Recipient

Texas A&M University | Bachelor of Environmental Design, Minor in Art and Architectural History | August 2011 – May 2015
- 2013 Golden Key International Honour Society
- 2011 Regent's Scholar Recipient

Relevant Work Experience

BRW Architects | Associate, Project Manager
May 2017 – Current

- Experience in civic projects and first responder facilities
- Developed onboarding process and oversee within the office
- Part of the Mentor Practice Team, develop opportunities for mentorship, ARE guidance, and team building

Foundation of Continuing Undergraduate Success | Graduate Assistant
August 2016 – January 2017

- Oversaw University Mentors
- Provided office hours for student check-ins
- Oversaw weekly academic and resource workshops

Patrick Berrios Designs / Breed Architecture | Building Designer
May 2015 – August 2016

- Experience in custom residential design and small commercial design
- Worked under two joint firms for diverse expertise

Foundation of Continuing Undergraduate Success | University Mentor
May 2012 – May 2015

- Facilitated weekly academic and resource workshops
- Mentored first generation students as individuals and in group settings

Professional Organizations

American Institute of Architects | National Associate Committee
January 2023 – Current

Texas Society of Architects | State Associate Representative
January 2023 – Current

AIA Brazos | Architecture in Schools Coordinator
September 2020 – Current

AIA Brazos | Gingerbread Build-Off Committee
December 2019 - Current

AIA Brazos | Executive Committee
January 2021 – December 2022

AIA Brazos | Emerging Professionals Director
January 2021 – December 2022

Speaking Engagements

Texas Society of Architects | October 2022 - Current

- November 2023: Conference Session Facilitator for the following sessions:

Texas Speed Mentoring: A Statewide Mentorship Exchange

The Evolving Architect: Transforming Your Career at Every Stage

Finding Your Path in Architecture

- February 2023: Advocacy, Meeting with Representatives for Architects Day at the Capitol

- October 2022: *Emerging Leaders Grassroots Conference Panelist*

Texas A&M University | Fall 2020 – Current

- Studio Guest Lecturer and Review Juror | ARCH 205, 405 and 605
- AIAS Speaker and Panelist

Statement of Contributions

I've always had a passion for the passing of knowledge and helping others succeed with sharing our success and challenges. As a hispanic first-generation college graduate, I strove to be the person I needed as a student and continued that as a young professional. When I became involved within my local AIA chapter and within my firm's mentoring initiatives, I developed relationships and found great leaders, supporters, and mentors that further inspired me to do the same for others. Since then, my passion for the architectural profession has led me to be heavily involved within AIA at the local, state and national level.

Being involved at all levels of the organization and being rooted in my local community has led me to see where there is room for growth. With everything I set out to do I ask myself three questions, does this help someone find their calling, does this help someone grow, and can my contribution make it better? My goals within the profession are to elevate many like me, underrepresented small town folks who have a passion for design and are invested in growing their future within the architectural community. While that is a broad goal, I fine tune it with all my involvement within the AIA organization and within practice. I see how my contributions for bettering our resources, creating effective communication tools, and elevating the architecture profession have an impact on those around me and will continue to strive to advocate for young professionals.

I believe my contributions to the profession capture those beliefs. Before my nomination to become the State Associate Representative for the Texas Society of Architects, I was AIA Brazos's Emerging Professionals Director for two years. I developed several initiatives that would help our growing pool of emerging professionals and helped →

offset the cost incurred within the chapter. In my spare time, I continue to serve on my chapter's Gingerbread Build-Off Committee and as the Dual Language Architecture in Schools Coordinator. These two programs are close to my heart as they are our chapter's education and community outreach programs. While the Gingerbread Build-Off helps fundraise for AIAS leadership scholarships, EP conference scholarships, and other education programs, the Architecture in Schools program provides awareness of architecture within our younger generations and their surrounding communities.

As the Texas State Associate Representative, I am part of a small group who helps put on our state conference. This ranges from finding speakers, panelists, applying for grants, and facilitating conference sessions. Additionally, my role is to communicate to and from the National Associates Committee. Being a part of my state component and a national committee has taught me the value of my role. In the exchange of knowledge, we prove working as a cohesive unit helps elevate the profession as a whole.

My professional experience is focused on civic projects and first responder facilities. With a specialty in fire station design, I consider my work within each community as a public service, whether designing for the health of our first responders, providing essential functions and spatial efficiency for quicker incident response times, or simply creating a beacon for their neighborhood. This work contributes to the wellbeing of communities all over Texas. Within my firm, I am also a part of the Mentor Practice Team and champion training, team building, onboarding, and ARE guidance.

While I may be one person within a small volunteer chapter, my sphere of influence does not stop there. Each role I take on and each initiative I pursue is for the purpose of enriching our designers, the profession, and large and small communities across the region. The following exhibits further elaborate on my contributions to our organization and how they have helped advanced the profession. While no one accomplishes anything on their own, I acknowledge that the contributions I have made to the profession have a positive and lasting impact.

The ripple effect of my involvement within the profession is a difficult thing to explain. I'd like to imagine myself similar to a low tide turning into majestic waves is a fair analogy. You never will quite understand the impact or magnitude your actions have on someone until you actually try to make a contribution in their lives. Everything I set out to do is to give individuals the tools they will need to succeed whether directly or indirectly. Since my involvement within AIA, I have seen my time, skills, and dedication to the profession produce a lasting impact, and it is the greatest honor for me to be able to represent associates, emerging professionals, and minority designers across the multiple tiers of our incredible organization.

Program Funding within AIA Volunteer Chapter

Program funding within volunteer chapters is an important topic because small chapters typically do not have the financial and staffing resources to develop initiatives the chapter may be interested in pursuing. Prior to 2019, AIA Brazos had an event called Bark and Build (B&B) where Design+Build doghouses would be donated and auctioned as a fundraising event. Participation, excitement, and profitability had declined in the recent years, and the chapter decided it was time to retire B&B and start a new initiative.

I was invited to participate in a committee that would determine a new event that would help fundraise and expand our local programs. We did a search to see if there were any existing resources or precedents we could use and came across AIA Houston's Gingerbread Build-Off competition. AIA Houston was a great resource and provided valuable information on how to create our own competition. While the information shared with us laid the foundation on where to start, our chapter still needed to figure out the logistics, sponsorships, registration, and event guidelines for a scale that was appropriate for our chapter and our community.

With much dedication and after a year of planning, we held our inaugural Gingerbread Build-Off in 2019. It has become our most anticipated event of the year for participant teams and the community. The one-day, holiday event allows local design →



Inaugural AIA Brazos Gingerbread Build-Off Competition
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos



professionals to show off their building skills while promoting community engagement and raising funds in support of education programs. The public is invited to watch the progress, take their kids by the Kids Build Area to decorate their own sugary creations, engage with team members to learn more about the designs, and vote for their favorite structure.

Because the event profited better than anticipated, the Gingerbread Build-Off would be able to donate to not one, but three education programs: AIA Brazos Architecture in Schools, AIAS Leadership Scholarship, and AIA Brazos Emerging Professionals Scholarship. By funding these programs, Architecture in Schools was able to grow into areas it previously did not have the capacity to do, AIAS students were able to attend the AIAS Grassroots Leadership Conference to gain valuable leadership skills, and AIA Brazos was able to provide EP scholarships to help offset costs to attend the Texas Society of Architects Design Expo and Conference.

Initially, my role within the Gingerbread Build-Off Committee was creating graphics for marketing like logos, banners, t-shirts, trophies, and event promotion on social media. Additionally, my day-of task was to lead the Kids Build Area. Over the years, my role has grown to seek sponsorship opportunities and promote registration. Being a part of the Gingerbread Build-Off is one of my favorite contributions to the profession. This event truly creates public outreach of what design professionals do and helps programs dedicated to up-and-coming generations and their growth within the profession.

AIA Brazos Founding Gingerbread Build-Off Committee
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos

Within the AIA Brazos chapter, the Architecture in Schools program has been steadily providing a free architecture program within the Brazos Valley for over a decade. The program consists of students playing "architect" for a 10 - 12 week course where students use their creative skills to develop a neighborhood filled with housing and community buildings. While it consistently provided one program each semester, the program had been predominantly in private or public schools based on connections with teachers.

I joined the program in the midst of the Pandemic back in 2020. Much like the entire world, we navigated what it meant to communicate, learn, and teach without physical interaction. It was difficult, but it was extremely rewarding to see students get excited each week to learn and play "architect". The 9-year-old in me thought, "I wish I had a program like this when I was growing up". Coming from a predominately low income Latin and Hispanic community, I immediately thought of all students that could not share this experience. I thought of the Leslie's of the world who had a passion and the foundation to be an architect, but would not be ignited until later in life or for some, something that was never fulfilled.

I felt the butterflies, the ones you get when you know you are on to something. With the support of my chapter and previous program coordinators, I launched the first Architecture in Schools program with →

Architecture Awareness in Younger Generations



Final Dual Language Program Presentations at College Hills Elementary
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos



Spanish supports at Neal Elementary in Bryan, Texas in the Spring of 2022. This means the program was taught in English, but had Spanish language supports for students with English as their second language. Not only was the program introduced to a new school, it was also serving predominately low income and Hispanic demographics. It was incredible to see these students be so in awe of what it actually meant to be an architect and see the gears turning in their minds. In the fall, I took the program a step further and introduced the first Architecture in Schools Dual Language Program at College Hills Elementary. The program was structured similar to previous programs, however, the lessons plans taught each week alternated between English and Spanish.

The program I started at Neal and College Hills Elementary are very close to my heart. They feel important to the efforts of equal representation in architecture. These programs have not only opened the eyes of the students, but their parents too who may encourage their children to pursue architecture in the future.

Over the course of my time within the Architecture in Schools program, I have had the privilege of teaching multiple cohorts. Being an Architecture in Schools Coordinator is something I am extremely proud of, and I look forward to growing the program in conjunction with other educational programs across the region. Programs like these enrich our communities and increase the pipeline for a more diverse profession. They also promote architecture as a actual and attainable career for those who catch the spark of design.

Architecture in Schools Class Session at College Hills Elementary
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos

Growth of Emerging Professional Resources within AIA Volunteer Chapter

Being part of AIA Brazos has really been the foundation of my growth within the profession. It has taught me the value of volunteers and that collectively we can have a great impact. The challenge with being part of a small unstaffed chapter is we are truly dependent on volunteers to keep the chapter running. This also means we have to be resourceful. Our small town of College Station, Texas has seen new mixed-use developments across town and have created hubs for things to eat, do and shop. Additionally, Texas A&M 's student population has been exponentially increasing within the last decade. As a result, our chapter quickly saw an increase in young professionals wanting to stay in town after graduation. With this in mind, the two goals for my two-year term as EP Director were to provide new and current study materials to our growing emerging professionals group and provide networking opportunities to better integrate new members.

Our chapter could not afford to do either of these initiatives, but the need and request from chapter members was evident. Along with the Chapter's EP Co-Chair, we started Rep Sponsored Happy Hours where the chapter would charge a product representative a flat fee of \$1,000 to host a networking event and could display their products. In the fee, we included services of selecting a venue, coordination of event, e-mail invites to the chapter members, social media shout outs, and the food and beverage tab for the event. We →



AIA Brazos Rep Sponsored Happy Hour
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos



would budget for the event and the profit leftover from the event would be put towards offsetting new study materials for the chapter. The happy hours have become a recurring social event within the chapter for networking and mentoring. Their success has made this a staple event and are still provided as a quarterly chapter amenity.

After building enough funds to purchase study materials, we opted for doing a three month Chapter ARE subscription with Black Spectacles. Most of our previous study materials were print material and were rarely checked out for use. At the time, most EPs in our chapter were not given many study materials within their firms and were enthused to hear the chapter could provide an additional study resource that had great success rate and was NCARB approved. By the time we made the chapter subscription available to our members, we had filled the slots we had purchased, and two members became licensed within the same year and largely attributed their success to the chapter subscription. Due to its popularity, we went on to provide an additional three month subscription in the fall. We provided a spring and fall subscription the following year.

The great outcome was that we were able to provide more amenities for our EPs without incurring an expense to the chapter. Additionally, we helped EPs see the value of their AIA membership.

Social Media Post of New ARE Resource
Photo Credit: AIA Brazos

In 2022, I had been nominated and board approved to become the 2023 – 2024 State/Territory Associate Representative (STAR) for Texas and serve on the Texas Society of Architects (TxA) Board of Directors. Additionally, accepting this role would lead me to be involved within the AIA National Associates Committee (NAC). Being a STAR has been one of the most eye-opening experiences I have encountered in my professional career thus far. Prior to becoming the Texas STAR, my involvement within the AIA organization had been limited to my local chapter. Being involved at the state and national tier of conversations is a responsibility I do not take lightly and has been the highest honor the organization has bestowed upon me thus far.

Being new to the state component and the national committee has led me to see that something we strive to do as an organization is to communicate effectively and pass on the wealth of knowledge each of us brings to the table. But when there are so many tiers, subcommittees, specialized taskforces, and many other components doing important research and work, it is a constant challenge to let members know what is happening within the organization.

Taking on the STAR role has enabled me to speak on behalf of associates throughout the state at TxA Board meetings and within the NAC. Coming from a small volunteer chapter, I know the importance of being informed. We typically rely on resources →

Knowledge Exchange from State Component to Local Chapters

2023 Slate of Officers | Texas Society of Architects



Announcement of Approved 2023 Slate of Officers
Photo Credit: Texas Society of Architects



developed by others to help us reach our internal goals. This is why being involved within TxA and the NAC matters. I truly understand the importance of the exchange of knowledge, and I believe TxA is a great hub to facilitate conversations, learning opportunities and the exchange of valuable information from national efforts to local staffed and unstaffed chapters.

As the Texas STAR, I collaborate with the Texas Young Architect Representative and the Associate Director on all EP initiatives. Last year, we applied for the AIA College of Fellows Emerging Professionals Grant. We were awarded the grant and were thrilled to be able to use the funds to serve EPs throughout the state. The grant helped offset cost to bringing a guest speaker to an EP TxA Conference Session and helped provide seven scholarships for EPs to attend TxA Conference. Being new to the role, I saw that there was an opportunity for better communication and we initiated the TxA EP Newsletter last year. This bi-monthly newsletter is sent to all Texas EPs within AIA and shares EP content with state and national news and initiatives. The newsletter also advertises scholarships, conferences, and other networking opportunities. Another task as a Texas STAR is to plan and coordinate EP TxA Conference Sessions. Along with the YAR, AD, and TxA Staff, we provided three EP geared sessions within the conference and are currently planning this year's conference as well. It is important to continue to share the knowledge wealth across the state, and being a part of EP initiatives at the state level has made me feel I have a positive impact on the profession and with EP individuals within their own chapters.

Discussion Presentation at TxA Board Meeting
Photo Credit: Ricardo Maga Rojas, NOMA, Assoc. AIA

Design with purpose can be found in the most ordinary places. I see serving communities across the state as a public service and believe architecture can truly enrich communities through design. From large and structured municipalities to small rural districts, civic facilities are integral to the regions they serve.

For the past 7 years, I have dedicated my professional career to civic projects and first responder facilities across Texas. I specialize in somewhat of a niche building type, fire stations. As Jeanne Gang, FAIA with Studio Gang once said about their New York City Fire Department Rescue Company 2, the concept of fire station design is “design that not only keeps its firefighters safe, but also serves as a touchstone for local residents.”

When we think about healthy and mindful buildings, our minds tend to gravitate towards spaces that enable people to live a more mindful and healthy wellbeing. While a fire station's main purpose is to be a hub for first responders, there are many layers to a successful fire station design. Other than its core function, health within first responder facilities is sometimes overlooked as a critical aspect of design.

Studies have shown that cancer lead by prolonged and intense carcinogen exposure is the leading cause of death for fire fighters. While it is inevitable that fire fighters are exposed to carcinogens when responding to →

Health within First Responder Facilities



Example of Health-Conscious Fire Station Design
Photo Credit: BRW Architects



incidents or during training, mindful fire station design can reduce carcinogen exposure, cross contamination, and even provide methods of removing toxins in the body.

While I did not invent the philosophy behind a healthy conscious fire station, I implement these principles everyday and every project I serve. I am truly passionate about the well being of our first responders. It is odd to think that a building could make you physically sick, but it is the harsh reality for fire fighters. One of many strategies to reduce carcinogen exposure is the identifying the three tiers of hazards and creating transitional spaces between high and low hazard spaces. Another strategy is to provide a decontamination room to avoid cross contamination. Studies have shown that sweating out the contaminants are a great way to reduce health issues in the future. Implementing sweat lodges and fitness rooms allow the fire fighters to sweat any carcinogens picked up during an incident. Returning from an incident call can be a traumatic experience. Providing individual sleeping rooms or lounge spaces where shifts can congregate provide a variety of social intensity spaces to help the first responders decompress from a call as they see fit.

While fire stations are built for function, they have a sensibility to wellness that is crucial to the health of the fire fighters. I find the work I do within BRW is extremely important to those who put their lives on the line of duty. It has been a privilege to work with communities of all sizes across Texas, and I believe advocating for safe public buildings is through example.

Fire Chief at Fire Station Grand Opening
Photo Credit: BRW Architects