Accessible Design: Private Practice Landscape Architects as Public Interest Designers

by

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ABSTRACT

ACCESSIBLE DESIGN: PRIVATE PRACTICE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS AS PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGNERS

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As a profession, Landscape Architects have a responsibility to design for the good of the public and are equipped with the skills to engage communities and translate ideas into physical reality. This research aims to increase the effectiveness of private practice Landscape Architects as contributors to public interest design through a better understanding of the organizational models and methods being used in practice. Through an analysis of the literature and data collected from interviews, this research articulates the challenges and opportunities of Landscape Architecture firms formalizing design initiatives and developing non-profits. The research identifies processes and resources that differ from traditional commercial practice, and presents the value that public interest design can add to the future of Landscape Architecture.

Key words: socially responsible design, community engagement, social entrepreneurship, ethical practice
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................................................... III
TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................... IV
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ VI
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. VI

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................ 1
  1.1 THE EVOLVING ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE ........................................... 1
  1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES ................................................................. 2
  1.3 THESIS OUTLINE ....................................................................................................... 2

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................... 4
  2.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................... 4
  2.2 PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION AS A PRECEDENT .......................... 4
  2.3 PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN
    2.3.1 The global climate ................................................................................................. 7
    2.3.2 Millennials ............................................................................................................ 8
    2.3.3 Changing the role of designers ........................................................................... 9
    2.3.4 Changing the role of design ................................................................................. 9
  2.4 CHALLENGES ............................................................................................................ 10
  2.5 MISCONCEPTIONS WITHIN DESIGN ....................................................................... 11
  2.6 STEPS FORWARD ..................................................................................................... 12
    2.6.1 Education ........................................................................................................... 12
    2.6.2 Supportive networks ......................................................................................... 13
    2.6.3 Finances ............................................................................................................. 14
  2.7 THE MODELS ............................................................................................................... 14
    2.7.1 Design initiatives within for-profit firms ............................................................. 15
    2.7.2 Independent non-profits ..................................................................................... 16
    2.7.3 Community design centres ............................................................................... 16
  2.8 ACADEMIC LITERATURE ........................................................................................ 17
    2.8.1 Reasons for the emergence of public interest design ........................................ 17
    2.8.2 The changing role of designers and design ....................................................... 18
    2.8.3 Challenges and steps forward .......................................................................... 19

CHAPTER 3 METHODS ....................................................................................................... 21
  3.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................... 21
  3.2 FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 22
  3.3 INTERVIEW THEME GENERATION ........................................................................... 22
  3.4 IDENTIFY FIRMS ...................................................................................................... 23
  3.5 KEY INFORMANT SELECTION CRITERIA .................................................................. 23
  3.6 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS ................................................................................ 23
  3.7 CONFERENCE OBSERVATIONS .............................................................................. 24
  3.8 RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS ........................................................................... 25
  4.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................... 25
  4.2 FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 25
    4.2.1 Firm values ......................................................................................................... 25
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Methods Flow Chart ................................................................................................................. 21
Figure 2: Components of Public Interest Design In Landscape Architecture Firms .................. 25
Figure 3: Design Process .......................................................................................................................... 39
Figure 4: Sample Design Process Provided by Inscape Publico .......................................................... 48

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Role of Key Informants in their Firms ......................................................................................... 33
Table 2: Size of Key Informant Firm ........................................................................................................ 33
Table 3: Firm Value of Public Interest Design ......................................................................................... 34
Table 4: Firm Business Model ................................................................................................................... 36
Table 5: Firm Criteria for Public Interest Design Clients ....................................................................... 37
Table 6: Skillsets for Public Interest Design ............................................................................................ 42
Table 7: Knowledge Sharing for Public Interest Design .......................................................................... 45
Table 8: Public Interest Design Business Models of Conference Presenters ....................................... 47
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Evolving Role of Private Practice Landscape Architecture

Socio-economic circumstances impact the health and welfare of the Canadian population. Those in the lowest incomes are faced with challenges related to adequate housing, detrimental health behaviours and lack of social supports, which affect their physical and mental health (Marshall and Boyd 2008). The built environment can have a significant impact on people's physical and mental health and “provides the setting for many of the social determinants of health” (Marshall and Boyd 2008, p.43). These determinants include income, employment, social networks and personal behaviours that are influenced by the built environment through factors such as “community design, adequate housing, access to safe water, good sanitation, safe neighbourhoods and adequate access to education, recreational services, public transit and childcare” (Marshall and Boyd 2008, p.43).

Incidences of obesity are growing, contributing to health issues in the Canadian population. Whether people will walk, thereby increasing physical activity, depends on “recreational pathways and sidewalks, safe levels of lighting, and compatible land uses that ensure pleasant safe spaces for both recreational and transit activities” (Marshall and Boyd 2008, p.44). What people eat is often dependent on access to grocery stores, something that is often limited in low-income neighbourhoods. Additionally, mental health is affected by interaction within one’s community and social engagement in the built environment (Marshall and Boyd 2008).

Landscape architecture is continuously evolving to meet the needs of the global population while managing impacts on the natural environment. The profession is being challenged by increased urbanization and the effects of climate change to create places that ensure the health, safety and well-being of the people with whom they work and the sustainability of the environment. As a profession, landscape architecture holds “influence and power over how our social world is ordered, by virtue of our monopoly over critical areas of knowledge” (Wilkins 2015, p.25). Inherent in being a professional is a responsibility to use the skills to the “best interest of society as a whole” and it is expected that all members of the profession are capable of engaging in a reciprocal relationship with the public, where they are granted the social authority by the public as long as they use them for the public good (Wilkins 2015, p.25). Wasserman et al. (2000) state that professions encompass: a specialized expertise exercised with judgment in unique situations; autonomy of a professional group; a guarantee of a basic level of competence from its members; and a commitment to public service and trust—a public duty. Professionals, therefore, are “uniquely positioned to balance private market interests with non-market obligations to the public good” (Luoni 2015, p.150).

Landscape architects make connections to understand how solutions to a problem will affect other parts of a system. They are trained with the technical skills to “create environments that are safe and secure, but also comfortable and enjoyable” (Taylor 2010, p.15). Landscape architects reach beyond the boundaries of a site to understand how the design will integrate into neighbourhood, regional and global
systems. Just as landscape architects may shift scales to ensure that corridors and patches of the natural environment are connected, there is a need to ensure that social and economic systems are connected such as connecting affordable housing is to transit systems, nutritional food and social services in the built environment.

The effects of mass urbanization and climate change are not distributed equally, with many people being forced into marginalized environments in order to keep their connection to place. The World Health Organization and UN-HABITAT (2016) estimates that global urban population will reach 6.3 billion people, or 65% of the world population by 2050. They emphasize the need to design healthier, more sustainable cities, through access to urban transportation, safe housing, and environments that enable healthy behaviour (WHO and UN-HABITAT 2016). As cities gentrify, low-income populations are often forced to the urban fringes without access to basic services. These sites have a tendency to be located in areas that are prone to natural hazards, such as flooding, and are developed too quickly to be planned safely. In North America, the 2008 recession led to increased numbers of people facing homelessness due to lack of affordable housing options and has left cities in disrepair as they budget to meet the needs of their citizens. The populations most affected by the changing economic, political and environmental climate are often those who cannot afford the services of landscape architects.

Good design by landscape architects can lead to more community engagement in public places and more sustainable communities. Landscape architects may specialize in designing for urban food production, public places for community development, water management systems to mitigate the effects of flooding and drought, and greenspaces for mental and physical health. As more research is compiled to show the impacts of good design on social and environmental systems, resources become available to strengthen these initiatives. This research argues that, similar to these specializations, there is a need for landscape architects to be trained in public interest design to empower communities and amplify the voice of the underserved.

1.2 Research Question and Objectives

As the design professions evolve to engage more in public interest design, this project asks “how can landscape architects contribute more effectively to public interest design?”

This question will be answered through the following three objectives:

1. Examine the development, implementation and value of public interest work
2. Analyze how landscape architects are currently practicing public interest design
3. Create recommendations for promoting public interest design amongst landscape architects

1.3 Thesis Outline

In the remaining chapters of this thesis I will address the objectives outlined above to answer the research question presented in Section 1.2. Chapter Two provides an in-depth literature review to provide context for the research. Chapter Three describes the methods used to gather and analyze data. Chapter
Four provides the results and analysis of the research methods. Chapter Five provides recommendations informed by the results and analysis of the research for landscape architecture firms as well as the broader profession of landscape architecture. The closing chapter, Chapter Six, reiterates how the question was answered through the research, identifies the limitations of the research and provides suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Public interest design is a movement that is challenging the design professions to engage with the public to address social, economic and environmental issues. This chapter will provide an overview of how public interest design is emerging. Specifically, it will review the ways this movement is affecting the role of design in the public realm; the organizational models that firms are utilizing to practice public interest design; and proposals for addressing challenges to move forward. Due to the limited amount of literature focused specifically on public interest design in landscape architecture practice, this review draws heavily on the profession of architecture and the broader field of design. Public interest design encompasses all fields of design, though this literature review references architecture when the practices described throughout the literature are specific to this profession. Landscape architecture is an essential element to most of the design solutions documented within the literature, though it is often the product of an architectural firm’s efforts.

An ever-growing number of architectural practitioners and academics have invested significant effort into compiling public interest design projects in order to create awareness within the public of the positive impacts that design can have in underserved communities. These projects showcase design-based solutions to communities’ social, economic, environmental and political challenges. Such work has been documented in the form of summit reports, books, conference proceedings, art exhibitions, journal articles, magazine articles, online blogs and annual reports. This review of the academic and grey literature connects the theories that contribute to public interest design to examples in practice and, in doing so, identifies common themes.

This review first explores the precedent of public interest work in the profession of law to demonstrate how a successful pro bono culture and a broader system of legal aid has been created. Public interest design is defined using the grey and academic literature. The academic and grey literatures are analyzed separately to identify themes within the academic realm and themes within the information gathered by practitioners. These are then synthesized to inform the research question and provide a basis for further exploration.

2.2 Public Interest in the Legal Profession as a Precedent

While public interest design work may be relatively new, there is a long history of community service in the professions such as law and medicine. Examining how the profession of law has adopted practices to instill a culture of pro bono work creates a platform for understanding how a culture of public interest design may be strengthened and supported in the profession of landscape architecture.

The profession of law emerged to “serve the needs of clients and society in a very direct way” (Taylor 2010, p.15). The public interest work being done by law and medicine professionals has been legitimized over time through research and service that has created a public understanding of the contributions that these practices can make to the social good (Luoni 2015). Pro bono work in North
America is often associated with the legal profession due to its strong culture of public interest work and the awareness of the public to their fundamental right to justice. While law has a long history of practicing *pro bono* work, developing a culture that is institutionally supported has had its challenges and setbacks (Miller and Hard 1994). In order to better understand how to build a culture of public interest design amongst Ontario’s landscape architects, it is important to review literature related to legal aid and *pro bono* work in Ontario and identify the key stages and strategies in the process.

*Pro bono* law began with a reliance on unofficially organized volunteers known as Poor Man’s Lawyers in the 1600s and has grown to programs in academic institutions and formalized centres offering legal aid and advice (Miller and Hard 1994). While the United States saw the emergence of legal aid societies decades before Canada, in Ontario the legal profession resisted a formalized system of legal aid that slowed the development of the movement (Reilly 1988). In 1922, the Law Society of Upper Canada was made aware of the “need for an organized system of legal aid in Ontario” to alleviate the stress that the recession had placed on impoverished people, though they concluded that “… it is not a matter within the scope of the Society’s objects, or with which the Society should deal…” (Reilly 1988, 84; Convocation Minutes in Reilly 1988). While arguments had been made in the 1920s to establish legal aid programs, it was not until the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s that it became evident that voluntary legal advice was not adequate, particularly in the urban centres (Reilly 1988). At the same time, the legal profession was being affected by the economic downturn and it became increasingly difficult for lawyers to maintain their income levels (Reilly 1988).

In 1934, Peter Wright, a prominent Toronto lawyer, identified a need for legal aid and the groups it should assist, and lobbied the official bodies representing the Bar to support the Toronto Legal Aid Bureau in order to enlist professionals and build awareness of the contributions that lawyers could have to society (Reilly 1988). Wright (1934) felt that “legal aid should be a permanent structure based on a private charitable system in which the interests and independence of the profession be maintained” (20-21) and that “junior members of the bar provide the necessary time and enthusiasm while the senior members give interest and financial support to the scheme (21)” (In Reilly 1988, p. 89). The Bureau was established in 1936, but became stagnant during World War II after the Law Society eliminated its support (Reilly 1988).

Later, the Ontario Law Society’s Special Committee released recommendations that called for a permanent, government-funded system to provide legal assistance to individuals in need and to promote the public image of the legal profession. These recommendations set in motion the initial steps toward an institutionalized system of legal aid in the province (Reilly 1988). In 1951, organized legal aid for criminal cases was implemented in Ontario (“Legal Aid Ontario”). In the 1970s, community clinics were established to “address the unique legal needs of low-income people who need help with the essentials of life, such as subsistence income and safe housing, and access to the most basic social services, such as education for children” (“Legal Aid Ontario”).
In 1996, *Pro Bono* Students Canada was created at the University of Toronto to serve the public interest and provide legal resources to communities in need through hands-on experiences (Aiken-Klar 2009). With programs in every Canadian law school, students contribute over 100,000 of *pro bono* hours annually and, while they cannot offer legal advice, they offer support through research, policy drafting and public legal education programming (Aiken-Klar 2009). Due to the engagement with public interest, students have demanded a response by their employers and their professional associations to engage with *pro bono* work (Aiken-Klar 2009). This interest has, in part, led to numerous high-profile provincial *pro bono* organizations in Canada and national law firms developing *pro bono* policies (Aiken-Klar 2009). Legal periodicals have increasingly featured articles on *pro bono* work, showing an interest by academics in law (Aiken-Klar 2009).

Legal aid in Canada emerged from the understanding that people are entitled to legal assistance - that it is a right of Canadian citizens (Canadian Bar Association 2012). It has been institutionalized and is publicly funded and therefore is dependent on the political and economic climate of the country. In the last 50 years, *pro bono* legal work has emerged based on the principles of charity and professionalism (Canadian Bar Association 2012). Legal aid relies on the *pro bono* services of lawyers but within the profession the two practices for public service are recognized by their different characteristics. Legal aid is defined by: the fact that it responds to public demand for certain kinds of services; its prioritization of the most critical legal matters; its consistent and detailed criteria; its dependence on registered lawyers that specialize in the area of service; and its need to meet the public interests identified by the funding it receives (Canadian Bar Association 2012). Alternatively, a *pro bono* organization is characterized by: its tendency to be supply driven and dependent on the availability of lawyers in the area; its decisions to decline some cases that may be taken by legal aid; having a more flexible criteria; linking clients with a student or a lawyer that has little experience in the area of service; and its focus for *pro bono* work being informed by input from the profession or those funding the organization (Canadian Bar Association 2012).

*Pro bono* organizations have grown to meet the needs of people that are unmet by legal aid services due to cuts in funding and strict financial criteria that leaves parts of the population unable to access legal services. Firms continue to develop *pro bono* initiatives and *pro bono* organizations are growing to provide legal services to more people. Organizations such as *Pro Bono* Law Ontario work to bridge the gap between volunteer lawyers and people in need based on the schedules and expertise of volunteers. Clients may need assistance with litigation cases, but this may also include projects focused on children’s rights and projects with charitable organizations (“Program Results”).

The precedent set by the profession of law can be used to respond to the challenges and resistance that public interest design may face in design professions and to set a standard for what this work can aspire to be. A responsibility to the public is inherent in all professions, and public interest work is not specific to design. The legal profession has followed two paths to promote *pro bono* and public interest work: (1) developing an organization to provide *pro bono* services to those in need and (2) promoting a culture of *pro bono* work in independent firms. There are precedents that can be followed
within other disciplines; medicine and law are cited throughout the literature as parallel professions that can offer insight and partnerships to further the public interest design movement.

2.3 Public Interest Design

Public interest design is a collective action towards making design accessible to communities that it traditionally has not reached. It takes a human-centred approach to create products and environments that are designed to meet the needs of the end users (Anderson 2014a; Abendroth and Bell 2015). Definitions of public interest design vary across the literature, but are centred consistently on the idea of designing for the public good by balancing the needs of the individual with those of the larger community to enhance social justice, increase awareness and raise aspirations (IDEO 2008; Feldman, Palleroni, Perkes and Bell 2011; Lasky 2012; Anderson 2014b). It integrates theories and practices in social sciences and community activism with methods from design disciplines, including architecture, landscape architecture and planning to create social impact (Anderson 2014b). Public interest design positions local, small-scale, and flexible interventions in to broader global issues (Awan, Schneider and Till 2011).

Communities that are underserved are often marginalized due to long-term societal problems, presenting designers with challenges that are outside their traditional realm of knowledge. Public interest design initiatives are commonly targeted at marginalized or underserved communities (Margolin and Margolin 2002; Lasky 2012) and follow the notion that “everyone regardless of income or social status, can and should benefit from the power of design to change how we live” (Beck 2014, p. 48). It broadens the realm of service to include those who have been historically underserved and, given the trends being seen in the environment and in cities, may become a prominent career track (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2009; Feldman et al. 2011).

Public interest design requires professionals to help articulate the needs of the public through their skills in collaboration, experience in observation and expertise in problem solving (Beck 2014; Manzini 2014). These skills allow the designer to create an environment that enables and empowers the local social actors to build sustainability, emphasizing the building of solid relationships within the community over the design product (Lasky 2012; Anderson 2014b; Manzini 2014).

A number of terms are used interchangeably with public interest design: social impact design, social design, socially responsive design, transformation design, asset-based community development, social innovation and humanitarian design. It is understood as a strategy, but it is also suggested that it may require a discipline unto its own to create better accountability through consistent practice models and evaluation methods (Fisher 2008).

Public interest design is not a new idea, though it has undergone a re-emergence in the last two decades (McGuigan 2012; Anderson 2014a; Anderson 2014b; Meron and Scharphie 2015). The literature points to a number of reasons for this re-emergence including the global social, economic, political and environmental climate, and the shifting in priorities of the millennial graduates of design.
2.3.1 The Global Climate

As the gap between the needs of people and the resources available to meet their needs has widened, the necessity for changes in our built environment has become apparent. Increasingly, issues related to climate and demographic changes are putting pressure on the infrastructure and built environment of cities (Fisher 2008; Meron and Scharphie 2015). Feldman et al. (2011) point out that we, as a global population, may not be able to depend on the same practices that have brought us to this point to continue to serve us into the 21st century. Architects have not intentionally excluded populations from the realm of design; it is that, as a profession, there have been limitations on design potential due to a disconnection to social issues (Bell 2008; Pitera 2015).

Designing for a car-dependent society has led many people to lead sedentary lifestyles, contributing to higher instances of diabetes and obesity within North America (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2009). Globally, though more pronounced in lesser-developed countries, mass migration to urban areas and increased instances of environmental refugees has led to overcrowding, lack of basic infrastructure and unsanitary conditions in underserved communities (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2009). As these issues become a more prominent part of the design discussion, there is a movement by designers to create a model to serve the underserved. It is argued that it is the responsibility of the profession to respond to these needs by making design services more readily available to the underserved public and to begin to consider how design is evolving to address these issues (Feldman et al. 2011; Pitera 2015).

2.3.2 Millennials

Throughout the literature there is a lot of attention given to the new generation of designers and their motivations for joining the design community (Czarnecki 2015; Meron and Scharphie 2015; Pitera 2015). While Millennials (birth years ranging from the early 1980s to around 2000) have been charged with having little loyalty to their employers, they are more likely to stay if they feel they are being supported to take on leadership roles (Deloitte 2016). The strong sense of purpose and the dedication to values of social justice drive the new generation of designers to use their design skills for the common good (Czarnecki 2015; Meron and Scharphie 2015). In the 2016 Millennial Survey done by Deloitte globally, 87 percent of respondents felt that the “success of a business should be measured in terms of more than just its financial performance” (8), with a significant number of Millennials mentioning attention to the environment and social responsibility as important values (10). The survey respondents emphasized that they preferred firms that connected with their personal values and morals (Deloitte 2016).

The Millennial workforce has grown up in a climate of economic change and has faced high unemployment rates upon graduation (Lasky 2012; McGuigan 2012). In addition, this generation of designers is increasingly connected through social media and the Internet, which has led to greater awareness about global issues. There is concern within every age demographic about the future of our global population but, arguably, Millennials are the most socially-conscious yet, as they educate
themselves in practices to create sustainable and resilient solutions to the anticipated effects of climate change and population growth (Meron and Scharphie 2015). The emerging design professionals are responding to the past celebration of the 'starchitect' by rejecting high-cost, resource intensive design and supporting low cost, social capital-intensive alternatives (Fisher 2009). They are identifying opportunities to create innovative and responsible design solutions to meet society’s needs through public interest design (Feldman et al. 2011; Meron and Scharphie 2015).

2.3.3 Changing the role of designers

The field of design is changing to meet the needs of both new designers and the underserved people who historically have had limited access to the services of design (Anderson 2014a). The shift in architectural practice is used as an example throughout the literature focusing on the profession’s increased involvement in affordable housing initiatives (Bell and Wakeford 2008; Awan et al. 2011). Fisher (2009) suggests that designers, like doctors, address the client’s specific needs, creating custom solutions for those who can afford the services and neglecting those who cannot. The role of architects is expanding to affect change through responding to the needs of all clients and by empowering communities (Awan et al. 2011; Feldman et al. 2011).

Public interest design shifts the emphasis of the architect’s role. Instead of being a mere problem-solver, public interest design values the architect’s ability to identify problems, a much more entrepreneurial skillset (Gilliland 2012). It positions the architect or designer as a social entrepreneur who can “offer market-based solutions to social issues” (Meron and Scharphie 2015, p. 18). As problem-identifiers, designers find opportunities to partner with communities to co-design solutions that have the potential to change people’s lives based on underlying values (Anderson 2012).

The challenge to the changing role of designers is to convince architects that public interest design offers innovative work opportunities and remind them of the central obligation inherent in being a profession (Garlock 2015). The challenge stems from designers having to rethink how they are delivering service and return to the role of civic champion (Peterson 2010). Designers are generalists who are capable of understanding the political, economic, environmental and social constraints that people face and who can identify holistic solutions to address these limitations—a role that requires engaging rule makers and mobilizing others (Anderson 2012; Gilliland 2012). As understanding of the benefits of design service increases and, with it, the appreciation of the public for design widens, there will be increased demand for public interest design practices. This demand will require that designers take on the role of facilitator, advocate and partner (Pealer 2008; Fisher 2009; Gilliland 2012).

2.3.4 Changing the role of design

With the expansion of the role of the designer comes a shift in the role of the design fields. Professions such as architecture and landscape architecture are considered to strike a balance between art and science, but often struggle between art and service (Peterson 2010). The built environment
influences most people’s daily life and impacts how people move “through it, to it or out of it” (Carter 2010, p. vi). For example, large populations lack access to well-designed, humane surroundings due to unequal distribution of money and talented designers (Carter 2010). Public interest design diminishes the gap between those with access to design and those without it, in efforts to engage communities to creatively create healthy environments that have greenspaces, clean air, clean water and increased food security (Carter 2010). It proactively mobilizes the social capital within a community to create options for social change (Fisher 2008; Gilliland 2012; Pitera 2015). It does not ask designers to abandon their expertise, but instead exercises it in a broader context to include social, global and ecological networks (Awan et al. 2011). Just as public health emerged to create solutions for entire populations by identifying and tackling issues that lay below the surface of built environments that created inequities, public interest design goes beyond design to create spatial solutions to challenging political, economic and social environments (Fisher 2009).

As the practice of public interest design evolves, business models will need to change to reduce the constraints that are felt by fee structures and thereby better serve societal needs (Fisher 2009; Feldman et al. 2011). Business models may consider the importance that Millennial designers place on measuring the value of one’s work on more than just financial gain. Part of the shift towards public interest design is attributed to the strong sense of purpose that is growing in the field of design (Lee 2015). Through public interest design there is an opportunity to work on projects with people that provides a sense of purpose (McGuigan 2012).

In order to develop a model for public interest design within the established design fields more completely, the positive impacts of design needs to be demonstrated. Doing so will help gain the “trust and commitment of clients who serve millions of people in need” (Peterson 2010, xv). Just as some design professionals had to be convinced of the value of environmental sustainability through initiatives such as Leaders in Energy Efficient Design (LEED), we are now seeing attempts to include evaluation of social impact within project frameworks through initiatives like the Social Economic Environmental Design evaluator (SEED) tool (Fisher 2008; Ress 2014; Abendroth and Bell 2015). As more projects emerge, the impacts will be demonstrated and understood. It is predicated that this, in turn, will attract philanthropies and government sectors that fund social services and community development, creating new financial structures and a shift in who design is responsible to (Peterson 2010). Providing metrics to demonstrate the value of design to the social realm will prompt clients and employees of design firms to expect projects to achieve certain social standards within their design (Lee 2015).

2.4 Challenges

As with any emergence of a new discipline, there are challenges to and misconceptions about how public interest design should be practiced. These are discussed at length throughout the literature, along with proposals for how these challenges can be addressed and public interest design can be strengthened.
One of the most common challenges for public interest design is a need for a definition that clarifies the goals of the field to enhance appreciation of the services being offered (Feldman et al. 2011; Lasky 2012). A definition would provide a unifying agenda with which designers can align, and would provide a foundation for educational frameworks for future practitioners (Lasky 2012). Public interest design attempts to reconnect political and social values to the design of the built environment. In architecture, the loss of an ideological agenda has led to the diminishing power of architects to affect the public realm through the design and production of place (Bell 2004; Gamez and Rogers 2008). Gamez and Rogers (2008) attribute this to the disappearance of the political element of design associated with the modernist era.

Second, the lack of accepted standards and metrics with which to evaluate projects and provide evidence of the effect of well-designed environments on social, economic and environmental well-being is a challenge to the acceptance of public interest design (Peterson 2010; Gilliland 2012; Lasky 2012). In creating a standard for evaluation, metrics could provide aspirational goals for designers. Funding opportunities based on the documented impact of design and a public understanding of how to access public interest design could become more readily available over time (Lasky 2012; Garlock 2015).

Finally, there is a challenge in facilitating knowledge-transfer about these new standards. In order to create robust public interest design standards that help prevent “redundant efforts and wasted resources” (Lasky 2012, p.22), there is a need for a platform to share knowledge. It may be challenging for practitioners to take the time to write about their successful and failed experiences, but this knowledge could inform other public interest designers’ work to avoid the same mistakes (Lasky 2012). Learning from other disciplines’ experience with public interest work would be valuable to the design professions, though there is little communication about interdisciplinary efforts (Lasky 2012).

As interest in public interest design grows, these three challenges need to be addressed. Doing so will provide a foundation of standards and a clear definition from which students and practitioners can learn and can more appropriately apply public interest design in practice (Meron 2012; Garlock 2015). Understanding the benefit of design to the common good will need to be measured qualitatively as well as quantifiably to emphasize the contributions of design. This change in valuation may address the misconceptions of public interest design by professionals and the communities in which it works.

2.5 Misconceptions within design

A variety of misconceptions about public interest design work, particularly related to pro bono work, are identified in the literature. Brigham (2009) identifies and responds to these misconceptions in her report about architecture and pro bono work; they are as follows:

1. Architects providing pro bono services are unfairly competing with fee paid work
2. Providing pro bono services is the same as any other work for free
3. Architects providing pro bono services are underselling the profession
4. Providing pro bono services reduces the income of (already impoverished) architects
5. There is no place for capital-A “Architecture” within community service work and so architects should not get involved.

In addition to the aforementioned misconceptions, Garlock (2015) adds that many designers feel that there is social value in all of their work; therefore, it is not necessary to create a separate set of standards. These concerns are addressed and discredited within the literature by advocates of the public interest design movement. Understanding the relationships between traditional architects and public interest designers can alter the perception of the threat of public interest design work and bring awareness to the potential opportunities that this work can provide.

2.6 Steps Forward

Designers are beginning to discuss ways to address the challenges and perception of public interest design in order to articulate motivations and communicate values (Feldman et al. 2011). They are finding new ways to engage with the political and economic forces that influence theories, practices, academies, policies and communities to diversify design professions and reach the broader population (Gamez and Rogers 2008; Watkins 2015). Some of the ways this is being approached are discussed in the following section.

2.6.1 Education

It is largely agreed in academic circles that design education must be approached differently both within university programs and professional continuing education programs. Much of the literature suggests the need for a fundamental theory that engages citizens and is based on action (Gamez and Rogers 2008; Feldman et al. 2011). Instead of focusing on a “shopping list of skills, methods and competencies” (Sandercock 1997, p.225) that defines professional design education, there should be an emphasis on technical and analytical literacies, but also on multi- or cross-cultural, ecological and design comprehension. The interest in public interest design is growing, which could eventually lead to a distinct field, following the precedents set by public defenders in law and public health in medicine, requiring a distinct educational model to support interest (Fisher 2008; Fisher 2009; Feldman et al. 2011; Lasky 2012).

Public interest design offers a good platform to ask students to identify and respond to problems in their local environment (Anderson 2012; Lasky, 2012). It balances the creative and pragmatic elements of a design project and teaches students what questions to ask to identify non-material values (Anderson 2012). Universities across North America are continuing to explore the potential of challenge-based curriculums to blur the disciplinary lines, identifying an issue and drawing on perspectives from multiple disciplines to synthesize solutions collaboratively (Lasky 2012). The Design and Social Impact report written by Lasky (2012) suggests there is a need for more social impact design programs in schools that allow students to major in one discipline and take courses in other disciplines to better approach social challenges in order to create a more comprehensive approach to design. Feldman et al. (2011)
recommend, based on their research into practice, that the Registration Boards “expand the framework of practice models and educational objectives aligned with public interest design in universities and intern training” (p. 103). Strengthening existing accreditation guidelines could create comprehensive standards across professional education curriculum to clarify the intentions of public interest design projects undertaken in studio settings.

Shaping the minds of future designers through university public interest design programs can be effective, but there is also an interest in engaging professionals in educational opportunities. Feldman et al. (2011) found that 72 percent of the 383 respondents attributed a lack of available on-the-job-training in public interest design as the key aspect inhibiting them from engaging in this kind of work. The profession needs to be educated on how to connect with non-profits and on the business models that can promote these partnerships (Fisher 2008; Feldman et al. 2011). Publicizing options such as web-based courses and fellowships or postgrad programs could create opportunities for professionals to develop their public interest design skills (Feldman et al. 2011; Lasky 2012). Offering opportunities for practitioners to become more aware of the processes that will help them to engage with underserved communities can promote a culture of public interest design, but also requires the support and resources of interdisciplinary networks.

2.6.2 Supportive networks

The challenge of knowledge sharing can be addressed through the building of a network of public interest designers to create best practices based on case studies. Learning from the successes and failures of fellow professionals can focus efforts and create an understanding of how to use resources effectively. A range of case studies would provide insight into what has worked and what has not, and would provide evidence of the fee sources and strategies that contribute to the professional practice of public interest design (Feldman et al. 2011; Lasky 2012). Further necessary is a framework based on the models, failures, strategies, and mechanisms that have led to public interest design project success (Meron and Scharphie 2015). This collaborative approach, wherein a network of professionals share learnings, creates an opportunity for story telling and lesson sharing as a way to provide evidence of impacts, and helps promote public interest design as a specific type of design practice (Awan et al. 2011; Feldman et al. 2011)

The demand to comprehensively understand how public interest design projects are being approached and the processes that are being used to build community-based practices is growing (Pitera and Wilkins 2015). Strong networks could lead to resources being developed specifically to help facilitate public interest design practices (Feldman et al. 2011). In the Design and Social Impact report, Lasky (2012) suggests short-term and long-term recommendations for developing this network of professionals through education, international networks of universities, calls for research, web-based knowledge hubs, a clear set of social impact design terminology and media campaigns.

Positioning this network within existing professional organizations, such as the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and/or the American Society of Landscape Architects, could be valuable as “it is
only through the collective output of the profession as a whole that meaning is apparent” (Sperry 2015, p. 48). It is recommended within the literature that professional organizations evaluate their code of ethics to include a defined commitment to public interest design (Brigham 2009; Feldman et al 2011).

Evaluating the impacts of design is one of the challenges that are being addressed through partnerships with parallel professions. It is difficult to identify traditional metrics for evaluating design that focus on social impact or public interest, as the impacts are often related to other disciplines. Fisher (2009) identifies the potential to merge with professionals outside of design, such as public health, to evaluate the impacts of design and also access funding sources that are not typically associated with design. Understanding and collaborating with other disciplines interested in the public good could lead to impacts in public policy and influence larger problems that protect the public realm and inform the design of the built environment (Fisher 2009; Sperry 2015).

2.6.3 Finances

Funding public interest design projects, particularly pro bono work, is a challenge that is identified by many. A single response to this challenge is limited, as access to funds is influenced by the context surrounding the project and dependent on the organizational model being used by the firm. Some suggestions for making engagement in public interest design projects more feasible for design firms are to:

1. Create a modest fund within professional organizations to provide financial resources to practitioners of public interest design. This could be used to advocate for increase public works projects funded by the government (Feldman et al. 2011).
2. Develop alternative funding strategies such as KIVA, a non-profit organization using the Internet to create a microfinance network to alleviate poverty (Lasky 2012).
3. Mimic the retail sector’s use of social initiatives to market services and raise awareness about important causes. The example used by Fathollahzadeh (2015) is of Tom’s shoes, a shoe company that donates one pair of shoes to someone in need for every pair bought, raising awareness and helping people simultaneously.

The challenges to public interest design require creative problem-solving and professional commitment to engage with communities to support the social good. Nonetheless, we can see substantial evidence that design professions are advancing the movement, and of a community of designers supporting the efforts.

2.7 The Models

At the firm level there are three predominant models being used to engage in public interest design projects. These are: (1) design initiatives within for-profit firms, (2) independent nonprofit
organizations and (3) community design centres. While the names given to these models vary across the literature, the basic foundation of each is identifiable.

2.7.1 Design initiatives within for-profit firms

This model uses the profits from higher-end projects to subsidize public interest design projects, which are often done at a lower rate or a loss (Feldman et al. 2011; Meron and Scharphie 2015). This model focuses on using available resources and professional services existing within an office to mobilize and engage designers (Cary 2010). This positions public interest design within the structure of the firm to ensure that the quality and standards are equal to full-fee work (Cary 2010). While public interest design work is not necessarily pro bono, design initiatives in for-profit firms are associated with a reduced fee when discussed in the literature. Pro bono work might be offered as design services, but also can include other activities that “engages public policy, such as service on volunteer boards and commissions, participation in community design charrettes and advising public-policy bodies, research and speculative work”, so long as the activity has benefit for the public (Peterson 2008 p.96; Feldman et al. 2011).

In many firms mentioned within the literature, there is a growing culture of public interest design, though few firms have a formal system in place to respond to requests to take on and evaluate pro bono work requests (Peterson 2008). An exception lies in multi-office firms such as SWA, HOK and Perkins+Will. These are identified as having institutionalized design arms to provide pro bono public interest work (Brigham 2009; Beck 2014; Watkins 2015). Perkins+Will is often being cited as a leader in public interest design based on their institutionalized Social Responsibility Initiative (Brigham 2009; Cary 2010; Beck 2014; Garlock 2015). When Public Architecture introduced the “1 percent program”, it challenged architecture firms to commit 1 percent of their billable hours towards public interest design, and is often credited with mobilizing the profession regarding the public interest design movement (Cary 2010; Beck 2014).

The commitment of firms to public interest design varies in services and size. While firms with a stated initiative may commit approximately 1 to 10 percent of their work to pro bono design, more integrated practices might commit 50 percent or less to conventional for-profit design work and designate the remainder to pro bono activities (Feldman et al. 2011). A pro bono arm of an existing company is the most scalable of the three models identified in the literature (Cary 2010).

Creating an initiative within an existing framework can be beneficial when compared to creating a nonprofit, as there is no need to create a board of directors to oversee the operations and money may be used more flexibly to meet the mission (Peterson 2008). The initiative relies on the time and effort of employees, often within billable hours, as opposed to volunteer-run organizations where people are held less accountable as their schedules and priorities change (Cary 2010).
2.7.2 Independent non-profits

Non-profit design firms develop to achieve a goal or address an issue, which informs their practice. They can offer a range of services generally focused on advocacy, research, and capacity building through community engagement and design-build services (Feldman et al. 2011; Meron and Scharphie 2015). Community engagement goes beyond consultation to ‘design with’ the population in need instead of ‘designing for.’

Non-profit design organizations have developed in two ways: as sister organizations to firms which can thus access different funding opportunities and bring awareness to social issues, or as independent organizations that are mission driven to advocate for a specific social issue. Firms may develop a non-profit to complement the for-profit work, engaging in projects that highlight social issues that could be addressed through either pro bono or for-profit work (Fathollahzadeh 2015). Operating as an independent non-profit provides a firm the independence to be innovative in their approaches to further their stated mission (Feldman et al. 2011).

Non-profit design firms have emerged from research, personal choices based on ethical intent and the lure of better access to funding, but at their core they are all addressing a gap in services to underserved populations. Two established non-profits provide examples of this transition from for-profit to non-profit models. For Brown at IDEO, the nonprofit was developed based on his design skills and the preference to avoid taking private commissions, which he felt confused private benefits with the public good (Brown and Katz 2009). Similarly, Public Architecture emerged in response to Peterson’s (2008; 2010) desire to put time - conventionally committed towards design competitions - towards underserved communities. Nonprofits tend to have flexibility to stay true to their goals and can use a variety of actions to empower communities predominantly through increased design research and the communication of social value (Watkins 2012).

Projects and operations are often funded through philanthropic donations, fee for service or successful grant applications (Cary 2010; Feldman et al. 2011; Meron and Scharphie 2015). In 2012, less than one percent of American design firms were listed as nonprofit (Hughes 2012). Peterson (2008) critiques the non-profit design firm in saying that it cannot be an answer to the lack of public service work and that unless it is absolutely necessary it offers little benefit. Instead he suggests that more projects by mainstream firms are the efficient way to practice public interest design (Peterson 2008). There are other ways to pursue grants and funding that do not require the non-profit status, such as third-party sponsors and attaining B-corps certification (Watkins 2015).

2.7.3 Community design centres

Community design centres emerged in the 1960s to support the civil rights movement and to design for social justice. Over the last 40 years, architects have used Community design centres to organize themselves (Cary 2010). Community design centres are often associated with universities or design schools to create a learning experience for students while offering low cost community-based
design to local neighbourhoods (Brigham 2009; Cary 2010; Lasky 2012; Meron and Scharphie 2015). The emphasis is on participatory design to provide a community with small design-build projects or feasibility studies that can be completed in a semester (Meron and Scharphie 2015). Funding is accessed through the affiliated university, which opens up opportunities to certain grants and is subsidized through the students' tuition and labour (Meron and Scharphie 2015).

Community design centres do not solely rely on the work of students, with many employing architects and landscape architects on a full-time basis. Often, they are a medium for teams of architects to work with and become connected to non-profit organizations, and are supported by the labour of students (Cary 2010; Lasky 2012). Firms might partner with the design centre, as they do with the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, to develop the initial design and then commit the firm to completing the project once the funds are attained (Vogel 2015). Community design centres have been critiqued due to the short time-period in which projects need to be accomplished and the prioritization of students’ education over the benefit of the community members (Blake 2015).

The models discussed in this section are the dominant models used by designers to practice public interest design work, discussed through the literature predominantly through the lens of architecture. Other models were mentioned within the literature, such as: non-profit design organizations within larger NGOs, incubator models, contextual models and parallel models (Lasky 2012). Firms and organizations will decide which model suits their needs and best aligns with their values (Scharphie 2014). Understanding the relationships among resources, value propositions, components and key processes can help firms build a strong organizational model that reflects their values (Scharphie 2014).

2.8 Academic Literature

Throughout the academic literature on public interest design there are three key themes that emerge: (1) reasons for the emergence of public interest design (2) the changing role of designers and design, and (3) the challenges to public interest design and the strategies to overcome them. These themes are aligned with what is being discussed in practice, revealing a growing body of knowledge that is beginning to reflect a strong culture of public interest design.

2.8.1 Reasons for the emergence of public interest design

According to the academic literature, public interest design has emerged for one of two reasons: in opposition to the status quo, or as a response to global change. First, to understand the emergence of public interest design as opposition, it is important to recognize that design, particularly architecture, is generally perceived as an artistic practice by the majority of the public. Scant research provides some evidence of the contributions that designers can make to human welfare (Margolin and Margolin 2002). This can be attributed to the "starchitect" qualities that emerged during the postmodern era of architecture when the social role was neglected in the name of aesthetics (Anderson 2014a). This market-driven design paradigm prompted an oppositional paradigm—that is, socially useful design - which responded to
social needs through forces of social change (Thorpe and Gamman 2011). In this way, public interest design emerged in architecture.

In a second distinct process, this movement is evolving out of global upheaval, as populations across the globe face challenges related to urbanization and climate change. Designers have come to recognize their role in reaching populations that are the most threatened by these phenomena. The “increasing scale differential between resources and population” is changing the urban dynamic and putting pressure on the built environment to sustain growing populations (Ogbu 2012, p.573). With an influx of population into cities come issues of affordable housing options, strains on services and infrastructure, and the potential for hostile environments due to conflicts over limited resources (Fisher 2008; Ogbu 2012). Architectural design of the modernist era had a role in creating the built environments that contribute to these issues today. Now, many designers are seeing it as their responsibility to reintroduce amenities and mixed-use living spaces to counter these issues. In order to design to alleviate issues such as poverty and homelessness, architectural practice is being challenged to re-evaluate their understanding of the built environment (Anderson 2014b). The evaluation of practice and education requires understanding the context and perspectives of stakeholders in order to provide multiple answers to complex and “wicked” design challenges (Thorpe and Gamman 2011).

2.8.2 The changing role of designers and design

In order to be able to rise to the global challenges and design challenges, the role of the designer is shifting and with it the practice of architecture and, more broadly, design. Public interest design shifts practice from a professional service done only for those who can afford it, to work that engages with its context and incorporates the values of the community (Anderson 2014b). This transition to a more participatory process often positions the designer as a facilitator in co-design teams (Papanek 1971, Manzini 2014). While designers identify with being problem-solvers, public interest design prompts designers to enhance their skills as problem identifiers and act as triggers for change as design activists (Manzini 2014). In order to meet local needs with the resources available, designers must be flexible and able to prioritize goals and needs of the community without pushing for design that is unnecessary (Papanek 1971; Perkes 2009; Thorpe and Gamman 2011). This requires a shift in language for communication with non-architects and challenges designers to listen to the knowledge of the people with whom they are working, through their own methods of communication (Anderson 2014b).

In order to better understand these needs, designers must be able to relate to the populations with whom they are designing, which may require a deeper understanding of social issues and knowledge of how other professions are addressing their issues (Margolin and Margolin 2002). Designers must immerse themselves to offer responsive design solutions to community end-users instead of being responsible to select stakeholders (Thorpe and Gamman 2011). This requires that designers engage with the community to identify contributing factors to a problem during the assessment stage, collaborate to develop intervention strategies, and co-design a solution for implementation based on social resources
Public interest design is dynamic, requiring that the designer be comfortable mediating complex and contradictory processes in order to build consensus to realize design solutions (Manzini 2014).

In working with non-traditional clients on projects that are outside the realm of traditional work, public interest design is changing the structure of practice and, with it, changing the value of the work from being a product to being the action of the process (Thorpe and Gamman 2011). While it is unrealistic to expect designers to always have the answer and the ability to resolve every issue that a community faces, shifts in the education of designers entering this realm of design could be beneficial to their effectiveness and their impact on the communities with whom they will work (Margolin and Margolin 2002; Fisher 2009; Thorpe and Gamman 2011). Educating students and professionals on the skillsets that will enable them to build relationships, communicate effectively and facilitate creative discussion can help to incorporate values that enhance equity and empowerment in future designs and respond to the needs of the public (Anderson 2014a; Anderson 2014b).

2.8.3 Challenges and steps forward

In the review of the academic literature, a number of challenges for the development of a comprehensive understanding of the public interest design movement are identified. Due to the broad nature of the term, there is not a clearly understood or universally accepted definition of the terms Social Impact Design or Public Interest Design (Ogbu 2012). There are a number of projects that have been collected in publications, presentations and the press to create awareness, though little has been done to develop a theory of practice or a model of design for social need (Margolin and Margolin 2002; Ogbu 2012). The lack of a framework for a deliberate process makes it challenging to compare successful strategies and to continue to learn as a profession, and does not provide insight into how projects are commissioned, supported and implemented (Margolin and Margolin 2002; Ogbu 2012). This has also limited the ability to create metrics to evaluate how projects are performing, though evaluation methods such as Social Economic Environmental Design indicators are being developed through non-profits such as DesignCorps (Ogbu 2012).

Specialized knowledge and an interest in profit can create a boundary between the designer and the community through a hierarchical partnership where the designer is seen as an expert and the community as passive recipients (Perkes 2009). In order to move towards a formalized understanding of public interest design, a broad research agenda must be addressed. Margolin and Margolin (2002) suggest that this agenda should focus on: the role that the designer can play in a collaborative process; what is being done and opportunities for future development; how the public perceives the role of designers and how this might change with a shifting role; how the design community and the underserved populations develop and value projects; and how the agencies that fund projects and research can be introduced to design as a socially responsible activity (p. 28). A focused agenda can help to develop a foundation for public interest design through an understanding of common practices informed by broad
collective knowledge, and would help to create a definition of public interest design (Ogbu 2012). A framework, it is argued, will change the orientation of design work towards change-creating action and “expand the capacity of the profession, the quality of the projects and the engagement and impact on the communities involved” (Ogbu 2012, p. 588; Anderson 2014b).

Ogbu (2012) extrapolates four common strategies used within three projects to create a foundation for public interest design: Process, Milieu, Boundaries and Practice. Within these strategies, she recognizes the changing role of the designer, the challenges that physical and cultural boundaries can create, the relevance of context, and the importance of co-design and a deep level of engagement (Ogbu 2012). Attempts to analyze practice and provide a starting point for how public interest design can be understood shows that the academic community is interested in taking steps towards a more formalized practice, though the approach is still fragmented.

As designers engage with projects that are aligned with public interest design, it is important to define the practice to coordinate the efforts of professionals. Understanding the global climate that design is positioned in will require that designers see all problems, environmental, social, economic and political, as design problems and create awareness of the positive contributions that good design can have. Teaching students how to identify and respond to larger issues that affect the environmental health of diverse communities in a university setting will inform their future professional goals and their sense of service to the public interest (Anderson 2014b). Developing a framework for public interest designers to engage with communities will make the contributions of design professions more effective and will change the perception of design to being responsive to public interest. Addressing the challenges that design professionals face in engaging with this work is necessary to build this framework and appears to have limited discussion in the academic literature.
Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Introduction

Designs for the environment need to mitigate the expected impacts of climate change and meet the needs of a growing population, while promoting sustainable economical, social and political systems. Public interest design is a field that is growing within design professions and landscape architects are well equipped to design for the changing environment. This led to the research question:

How can landscape architects contribute more effectively to public interest design?

The following research objectives were developed to answer this question:

1. To examine the development, implementation and value of public interest work
2. To analyze how landscape architects are currently practicing public interest design
3. To create recommendations for promoting public interest design amongst landscape architects

Figure 1: Methods Flow Chart
A methods framework was developed to guide the research as seen in Figure 1. The methods used to meet the research objectives are:

- Conduct a focused literature review to identify common points of discussion
- Develop a semi-structured interview guide based on themes within the literature.
- Identify firms involved in public interest design through their portfolios, magazine articles, blogs, websites and grey literature.
- Develop criteria to select firms for key informant interviews.
- Interview key informants to get a comprehensive understanding of projects, processes and initiatives.
- Categorize responses to identify correlations and trends.
- Attend Structures for Inclusion conference to gather information on activist architecture-firm models and engage in discussion of the future of public interest design education.
- Develop recommendations through an analysis and synthesis of findings.

3.2 Focused Literature Review

A focused literature review started with an exploration of definitions of public interest design in North America to identify themes related to how design professionals are engaging in public interest design work. This research relied heavily on literature related to architecture due to a lack of information specifically on landscape architecture. The literature review relied on analysis of secondary sources and was greatly informed by grey literature in the form of summit reports, white papers, annual reports and guides written by nonprofits. These findings provided formalized criteria to categorize landscape architecture firms practicing public interest design as well direction in the identification of firms that were not advertising their projects. Topics reviewed included public interest design history, social impact design, community design, civic generosity, activist architecture, pro bono and landscape architecture.

3.3 Interview Theme Generation

Published literature on the public interest design movement was analyzed to identify the differences between traditional design practice and public interest design such as clients, services, employee skillsets, financial structure, work process and outreach. The themes identified in the literature became the foundation for key informant interview discussion points.

These themes include:

- Value
- Business/Organizational model
- Client Criteria
- Comparison to traditional design process
- Skillsets/Education
- Knowledge sharing
3.4 Identify Firms

In order to find landscape architecture firms doing public interest design work, the researcher relied on a web search, in addition to firms that were mentioned within the literature. A web search resulted in a master list of landscape architecture firms that are promoting public interest design; this search provided information on the different approaches that firms are employing to practice public interest design.

In Ontario, the results of the web search were minimal, prompting the researcher to find firms through word of mouth. Firms were identified through snowball-sampling in conversations with landscape architects as well as discussions with community organizations.

3.5 Key Informant Firm Selection Criteria

Informed by the literature review, criteria were created to identify firms to approach for key informant interviews. These criteria are:

- The firm has a public interest design mandate that was firm-wide.
- The firm provided landscape architecture services.
- The firm had an example of a project that was done pro bono.
- The researcher was able to identify and contact a key informant involved in the projects.

3.6 Key Informant Interviews

Key informants were identified based on their direct involvement in public interest design projects in their firm, and through firm directories, the contact information on public interest design initiatives and personal networks. Key informant interviews were used as a data collection method because, according to Deming and Swaffield (2011), they can yield rich and relevant data.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with those who responded to interview request emails. Most of the email requests were responded to and resulted in interviews. A semi-structured interview technique was chosen to provide for both flexibility and organization. An adaptable approach was beneficial because it provided opportunity for respondents to interpret the questions and expand on their experiences and knowledge (Scharphie 2014). The interview guide helped direct the interview, ensuring that all themes were covered in the allotted time. The respondents were asked questions pertaining to their firm’s specific approach and projects.

Interviews were conducted via multiple means to allow for respondents to participate in a way that was most convenient and comfortable for them; this included in-person, telephone, Google Hangout video chat, Skype and email. Interviews ranged from 60-120 minutes in duration and were recorded as notes throughout the interview. Several of the key informants were contacted with follow-up questions. Tables were then created to categorize responses from the interviews within each theme to identify focus areas for recommendations.
Profiles of the firms interviewed were developed to capture the size, age and mission statement of the firm initiative. The firms were then categorized based on this information to attempt to identify correlations between firm profile and their engagement with public interest design.

3.7 Conference Observations

The researcher had the opportunity to attend the Structures for Inclusion Conference presented by DesignCorps, a public interest design nonprofit. The conference featured public interest design projects from around the world that were recognized for their focus on social, economic and environmental values of design. The purpose of the conference was to “bring together and share the best ideas and practices that are reaching those currently underserved by architecture” (SFI 16 brochure, p. 1).

Observations from the conference reinforced the themes identified throughout the literature and provided additional information on models being used in architecture practice as well as capturing insights from public interest design educators and their vision for the future.

3.8 Recommendations

Based on opportunities and gaps identified in the analysis of the interview responses, a set of recommendations for the profession of landscape architecture was produced. These recommendations are informed by the literature regarding public interest design and the trends that emerged from the interviews, and are guided by precedents in the legal profession in Canada and architectural practice in the United States.

This chapter outlined the research strategy by reiterating the research goal and objectives, providing details on the methods of data collection, and outlining the analysis. The next chapter describes the results and analysis of these methods.
Chapter 4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the results and analysis of the focused literature review, key informant interviews and conference observations. Major themes related to how landscape architects are currently practicing public interest design were identified.

4.2 Focused Literature Review

Findings from this focused literature review helped to identify firms engaged in public interest design projects and guided the questions that were asked in the key informant interviews. Books, journal articles, web log posts, annual reports and presentations were reviewed to find specific areas in which public interest design practice differed from traditional design practice. The major themes identified for further education and awareness building with the design professions can be seen in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Components of Public Interest Design in Landscape Architecture Firms](image)

4.2.1 Firm values

The way a firm understands the value of public interest design will determine the model that they use to engage in the work. A firm needs to find a strategy that will best suit their needs and will add value
to their community (Scharphie 2014). The literature presented a variety of values that were attributed to practicing public interest design work. Altruistic intentions may inspire some people to engage in public interest design, though the idea to give back to one’s community should not be relied upon to motivate firms when the priority is to manage a sustainable business (Peterson 2010).

Public interest design is a form of practice that contributes to long-lasting social and economic impacts on a community and allows designers to creatively use their skills to promote their core values (Carter 2010; Weissman 2011; Fathollahzadeh 2015). Engaging with communities to advocate for social equity and empowerment through design provides a platform for designers to reflect on how we understand the value of design (Hughes 2012). In addition to the valuable contributions that access to good design was adding to under-served communities, there were a number of benefits to the firm that were acknowledged within the literature.

**Public image**

Public interest design work differentiates firms from their competition, through exposure and enhancing the firm’s public image (Weissman 2011; Hughes 2012). Local leaders, as well as citizens, are made more aware of the potential that good design can have on community development and civic building (Carter 2010; McGuigan 2012; Gilliland in Beck 2014). This not only strengthens the profession, as awareness of the impact of good design is broadened, but it also builds the relationships between communities and design professionals (McGuigan 2012; Kiest in Beck 2014; Abendroth and Bell 2015; Watkins 2015). The relationships often lead to collaborations with a new client base to develop new project types, creating a more resilient and flexible firm and offering opportunities for innovation and creativity (Feldman et al. 2011; Weissman 2011; Anderson 2014; Watkins and Gilliland 2014). Exposure and awareness within the community has also led to lower marketing costs and stronger relationships with the community (Weissman 2011; Fathollahzadeh 2015).

As evaluation measures for social impact are developed, such as the Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED) evaluator (Abendroth and Bell 2015), and programs such as the “1 percent program” grow, there will be increased public awareness of the potential impacts of good design (Cary 2010). Public interest design produces spatial answers to social challenges, but also advocates for social justice, democracy, environmental stewardship, and opportunity (Anderson 2014b; Abendroth and Bell 2015). This will expand the expectations of the public for more diverse and socially engaged design and raise the aspirations of architects and designers to provide amenities for those in need (Gilliland in Beck 2014; Abendroth and Bell 2015; Czarnecki 2015).

**Talent retention and recruitment**

Talent retention and recruitment was cited in the literature as valuable to firms and a positive outcome of doing public interest design work (Weissman 2011; Ress 2014; Fathollahzadeh 2015). This is, in part, due to the increased opportunity for leadership experience for entry-level staff (Peterson 2010;
The sense of purpose that public interest design can add to an office increases morale, builds relationships and bonds within the office and creates a “more satisfied, engaged and dedicated professional staff” (McCail in Pealer 2008; Peterson 2010; McGuigan 2012; Gilliland 2014, p. 7; Ress 2014; Fathollahzadeh 2015).

4.2.2 Business model

As designers become more involved with public interest design, they are attempting to find effective ways to “integrate doing good and social-design imperatives within a sustainable business model” (Beck 2014 p.48). Throughout the past 20 years, various new models have emerged to respond to clients’ needs (Abendroth and Bell 2015; Pitera 2015). There are a number of examples throughout the literature of how this is being done within firms, either as a non-profit with a means of producing an income, or for profit with a mission-driven initiative (Abu-Saifan 2012; Fathollahzadeh 2015). Integrating public interest design practice within an existing firm may require restructuring in order to work more effectively with new clients (Anderson 2014b).

Meron and Scharphie (2015) suggest that three foundational factors help practices define themselves and how they will strategically develop their firm or organization. These are: the types of activities and work that the practice engages in, the organizational structure of the practice, and the sources of funding (Meron and Scharphie 2015, p. 19-20). Distinctions between the models are often blurred and flexible to allow practitioners to be “more innovative in their protocols, procedures, economic models and relationships to ensure the viability of their practices” (Feldman et al. 2011, p.4).

Multi-office for-profit firms

While the argument is made that larger design firms can be more flexible due to the availability of resources and ability to absorb costs, the literature provides examples of a variety of different-sized firms (Bell and Wakeford 2008; Cary and Public Architecture 2010; Awan et al. 2011; Beck 2014). Some of the multi-office firms that were mentioned were: Design Workshop, Perkins+Will and SWA (Pealer 2008; Brigham 2009; Abu-Saifan 2012; Beck 2014; Garlock 2015). Each of these firms developed an initiative that responds to their individual needs, as well as to those of the offices within them. Design Workshop created a nonprofit foundation in order to promote pro bono work matching the dollar amount of employee time and services donated to fund research and partnerships (Beck 2014; “DW Foundation”).

Perkins+Will are often referred to due to their unique internal communication systems and long-standing commitment to public interest work (Pealer 2008; Brigham 2009; Cary 2010; Beck 2014). Through their Social Responsibility Initiative, a leader within each office is positioned to promote projects and create quarterly reports to support the projects and initiatives (Jolicoeur in Pealer 2008; Brigham 2009; Beck 2014). The landscape architecture firm SWA is in the initial phases of their Social Impact Design Initiative and have developed their mission statement, a common set of principles and a common

Small for-profit firms

The literature tends to focus more heavily on the models used in larger firms over the less-transferable strategies used in smaller firms. While a variety of smaller firms models are mentioned within the literature their approaches and how they might be used in other firms are unclear. Many of them are using a model that subsidizes the public interest design work that they engage in with money charged for higher end projects, though the specifics are not often discussed (Beck 2014).

Independent non-profits

MASS Design, along with IDEO, is identified in the literature as an example of a nonprofit that has social entrepreneurship at its core (Abu-Saifan 2012; Hughes 2012). These independent firms specifically do public interest design projects, employing a full-time staff that is paid through funding grants, donations and commissions (Hughes 2012). While some for-profits might develop nonprofits in order to have access to more funding, these firms have developed in response to needs at the core of their mission (Anderson 2014b). Community design centres, such as the Auburn Rural Studio and the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, are also mentioned in the literature (Garlock 2015; Pitera 2015).

Precedent models

There is discussion within the literature of potential partnerships and models to follow in order to further public interest design. Fisher (1994) suggests that there are three models that could be used: the medical model, the legal model and the engineering model. Public Health is cited as an example within the literature as a potential precedent to follow (Fisher 2009). This field relied on the demonstration of the economic cost of not having it to provide evidence for its necessity, a model that could be used by design through the growing evidence of the impacts of nature on human health (Lasky 2012; Garlock 2015). Fisher (2009) points out the relationship that Frederick Law Olmsted built with public health to advocate for sanitary conditions as evidence for a design education track that is focused specifically on public interest design.

Practical business models to engage communities and diversify the market are necessary for the future of public interest design (Watkins 2015). Enhancing the social entrepreneurial qualities that designers exhibit will help to create business models that are adaptable to the phases and trajectory of public interest design projects (Watkins 2012; Anderson 2014; Gilliland 2014). In order to more fully develop a design-for-all philosophy, it will be necessary to reevaluate our business models to integrate funding strategies, engagement opportunities and a healthy balance within firm activities that will lead to sustainable practices of public interest design that is embedded in design culture (Fisher 2009).
4.2.3 Project/client criteria

Establishing criteria for clients to meet in order for a firm to engage in a project with them allows firms to be selective and credibly reject projects (Pealer 2008; Abendroth and Bell 2015). Firms mentioned in the literature felt it was important that they be able to add value to the organization that they were working with through services that they were comfortable performing (IDEO 2008; Pealer 2008; Perkins+Will 2014; Fathollahzadeh 2015). It is important that there be a clear purpose to the proposed project, open communication to share knowledge and experiences and disciplined decision-making to ensure that a project is successful (Peterson 2010; Awan et al. 2011; Gilliland 2012). A written contract establishing the scope of work and defining the financial value of the project can help to manage expectations (Pealer 2008; Peterson 2010).

Criteria examples

Perkins+Will (2014) have a specific set of characteristics that they require from their clients in order to participate in a public interest design project. These include having non-profit status with verified financial need; broad appeal of the project impacts and social benefits; compatibility with the core values of the firm and office; elements of sustainability; and service for the underserved (Perkins+Will 2014). Like many firms, Perkins+Will offices focus on the local communities that employees live and work in (McGuigan 2012; Perkins+Will 2014; Watkins 2015).

The San Francisco office of SWA documented in their 2014 Social Impact Design Initiative report some questions to ask before engaging in public interest design work based on lessons learned from a failed project. Some of the questions Hardy (2014) suggests to ask are: Who are you working for, and what is their interest in and capacity for the project?; Who are the decision makers for the project?; Who will use the project, and do they merit volunteer work? Asking questions like these can be used to avoid committing resources, time and talent to a project that will not succeed due to issues of land ownership or unidentified stakeholders.

The requirements that different firms have of potential clients may vary, but there are some important characteristics to look for to ensure project success. The literature identifies specific qualities that should be recognized before project initiation.

4.2.4 Design process

Public interest design projects tend to follow a different trajectory than a traditional project due to the multitude of stakeholders; the emphasis on engagement for needs identification; and the phased implementation timelines. A number of differences from the traditional design process are identified in the literature.
**Project initiation**

Public interest design projects are often initiated through collaboration between designer and client to develop a brief. Public interest design projects often emerge in two ways: as an issue that is identified by a designer or by a client who needs help articulating their needs. Firms define how they will engage with communities to identify transformational projects that meet the needs of the people who live there (IDEO 2008; Abendroth and Bell 2015). A design firm might frame their initiative to respond to issues to create a positive social, economic, political and environmental impact (IDEO 2008; Gilliland 2012; Abendroth and Bell 2015). This focus is important to conserve energy by narrowing the scope of the project to a specific area that will have a large impact on the community (IDEO 2008).

**Community engagement**

Engaging with the community is a crucial element of the public interest design process. It is through this process that constraints may be discovered and underlying issues are unearthed (Brown and Katz 2009). Community engagement has an important role in mobilizing people and creating ownership and empowerment throughout the design process (Gilliand 2012).

The process needs to be communicated clearly to nontraditional clients who may not have a strong understanding of the design process (IDEO 2008). This will help to manage expectations and give a clear understanding of what the impact will be (IDEO 2008). Reviewing the design process with the client allows the firm to identify areas they are upselling or where they can cut extra costs to optimize the impact and create a strategy of the timing for engaging with different stakeholders (IDEO 2008; Gilliland 2012).

While the design process for a public interest design project may be similar to a traditional project it is driven by the public, requiring an emphasis on engagement to ensure that all stakeholders are heard. It is necessary that steps are taken to ensure that all stakeholders are clear about the intent of the project and that expectations for impact are managed.

**Funding for implementation**

Public interest design projects differ from traditional practice in that they often require short, medium and long-term schedules in order to meet milestones set by funders. As the clients are often nonprofit organizations, there is an added step of securing funding (Abendroth and Bell 2015). Funding might be applied for on an annual basis and often contributes to an extended timeline (Anderson 2014a). Interest in the project needs to be maintained over the length of the project and is challenged by changing leadership within the organization and program fatigue (Lasky 2012; Anderson 2014a).

**4.2.5 Employee skillsets**

Architects and landscape architects are professional problem-solvers who identify spatial solutions to respond to the needs of the client. Scharphie (2014) describes architects as generalists who
are able to collaborate with others, coordinate resources and services, and translate needs into physical solutions. Designers are able to communicate their vision for the future with a broad audience through visual, oral and written mediums (Bell 2008; Fisher 2009). The variation in process requires that certain skillsets, which may be underutilized in traditional design, be practiced. Public interest design relies on the technical design skills that are used in all design projects, but also needs a genuine commitment and interest of the designer to develop a solution to a social issue.

Strong communication skills; an understanding of the political, economic and social context of the project; and awareness of the funding cycles that clients might rely on are important, but public interest design projects also depend on the ability to listen and empower others to affect change (Awan et al. 2011).

Community engagement

The emphasis on engagement in the design process mentioned above requires that designers be facilitators to articulate the needs of a broad population (Ogbu 2012; Manzini 2014). In order to understand these needs, designers need to be educated about the issues that might affect the populations with whom they work (Margolin and Margolin 2002). This may require that the designer go outside the realm of design to understand problems based on psychology, public policy, or sociology (Margolin and Margolin 2002). Public interest design challenges the designer to identify problems within space-based observations of the spatial dynamics, the culture and the context, and through engaged communication with the people who live there (Awan et al. 2011; Abendroth and Bell 2015). As a partner, the designer identifies opportunities to encourage community members to participate in the process (Awan et al. 2011).

Social entrepreneurship

Emphasis is put on the designer’s role as a problem identifier and social entrepreneur within the literature (Peterson 2010; Feldman et al. 2011; Gilliland 2012; Watkins 2012). The expectation within this work is that the designer, based on an identified social issue, will be proactive and not wait for the “law to establish what’s right or wrong for the built environment” (Sperry 2015 p.48). This positions the designer as a facilitator, advisor and partner with the community, rather than the expert or consultant, and requires that the designer listen for what is said and not said (Peterson 2010; Manzini 2014; Abendroth and Bell 2015; Watkins 2015).

Self-awareness

While the practical skillsets on which designers must rely to effectively participate in public interest design projects may be the same as those in traditional design, it is how they see their role in the process that differs. This requires that the designer be self-aware and empathetic to the needs of those
they are working with. It is a certain set of qualities rather than a specific skillset that strengthens the impact of a public interest designer (Sandercock 1997).

4.2.6 Knowledge sharing

The importance of sharing experiences throughout projects was emphasized throughout the literature to begin to develop a knowledge base to grow the field of public interest design. Knowledge sharing could create future opportunities for funding, educational opportunities based on a foundational theory of public interest design and broader awareness of the potential that design can have on social issues.

Definition and standards

Currently there is a growing catalogue of inspiring projects that highlight what public interest design projects can look like (Ogbu 2012). The real demand is to analyze these case studies to provide information on the deliberate processes, strategies, and methods that are being practiced in the field (Lasky 2012; Ogbu 2012; Pitera 2015; Sperry 2015). If public interest design can define the work that is being done more specifically, it will improve the quality of the projects being done and ultimately the impact on communities in need. From this definition, standards can be developed to create best practices so that expectations of public interest design projects are clear to the public and standards for professionals are uniform (Margolin and Margolin 2002; Lasky 2012; Beck 2014).

Interdisciplinary knowledge sharing

While there is movement forward in creating a more unified public interest design field, there is still a need to share more knowledge across disciplines (Awan et al. 2011; Lasky 2012). Steps are being taken to engage architects and landscape architects interested in public interest design at the University of Minnesota and Portland State University through certificate programs that require design students to take courses outside of the design school (Garlock 2015). Collaborating between disciplines and firms can help professionals understand how to move forward based on the successes and failures of past experiences (Lasky 2012; Beck 2014; Pitera 2015).

Networks

Organizations such as Design Corps, Public Architecture and the Association for Community Design are developing networks to bring people together and are publicizing the impact that public interest design work is having in communities through exhibitions, conferences, books and summits (Feldman et al. 2011). While practitioners may not have the time to report on their projects, publicizing experience creates awareness within the design professions of the potential that design can have on communities in need (Lasky 2012).
4.3 Interview Theme Generation

The focused literature review created the basis for themes to be used within the key informant interviews. The commonly discussed themes surrounding the relationship between public interest design and design fields, predominately architecture, became the basis for the discussion with firms offering landscape architecture services. Questions were developed to create opportunities for key informants to elaborate on their experiences. Discussion went beyond the themes to examine specific experiences to communicate ideas around these themes based on action and processes.

4.4 Identifying Firms

The literature provided a number of firms that were engaging in public interest design work and informed the criteria for identifying key informants. The characteristics of these firms were used to identify other landscape architecture firms for this research.

In order to identify firms, a web search was performed to find firms that included landscape architecture services. The researcher then looked for some indication that there was public interest design being undertaken through a marketed initiative, a project in their portfolio or blog posts that mentioned community outreach. Through this search, contact information for key people in public interest work was uncovered. The researcher limited the geographical boundaries to areas that she would be able to visit during the course of the research.

4.5 Key Informant Interviews

Eleven key informants were contacted and interviewed. Interviewees hold different roles within their firm, though the majority of them are either principals of firms or directors of non-profits, as seen in Table 1. The two key informants that are associates within their firms act in different roles: one is a landscape architect and urban designer while the other works as a marketing manager for strategic accounts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Informants</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal/Director</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key informants worked in offices across North America, with most coming from Ontario, California and Michigan. The size of firms that they represented varied, as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi office (100-2000 people)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single office (5-100 people)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single office (1-4 people)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview data was recorded, categorized and grouped in order to analyze and interpret how firms offering landscape architecture services are engaging in public interest design projects. The focus of the analysis was to learn how different firms are engaging in public interest design practices through an understanding of: the value they place on the work; the approaches to formalize initiatives; the criteria they use in selecting projects; the design process; the utilization of specific skillsets; and how knowledge and experiences are being shared. This section provides the responses generated in discussion of these themes through a series of tables and summaries.

4.5.1 Firm values

Inherent in the initiatives outlined by various firms is a belief in working for the public good. Employees in firms will often give their time and efforts for the satisfaction of knowing they are helping. Some firms also see value in doing public interest design work from a marketing lens, where some feel that this is not a genuine value for this work. Many of the interviewed firms were at different formative stages and the valuation of the work by principals and staff was shifting. These values are summarized in Table 3 and discussed below.

Table 3: Firm Value of Public Interest Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>value</th>
<th>KI 1</th>
<th>KI 2</th>
<th>KI 3</th>
<th>KI 4</th>
<th>KI 5</th>
<th>KI 6</th>
<th>KI 7</th>
<th>KI 8</th>
<th>KI 9</th>
<th>KI 10</th>
<th>KI 11</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talent retention</td>
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<td>☑️</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity/Innovation</td>
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<td>Informs private</td>
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</table>

*Relationships*

Relationships with the community are built and strengthened through public interest design work, a common value amongst the design firms. The interviewees stated that strengthening the relationships was considered one of the most valuable attributes of this work, and while some did not mention it directly, it was evident throughout the discussion. Commitments to the community, creating awareness of the potential opportunities for design, helping to overcome stagnation in projects, and emphasizing the process over the project to promote ownership were also mentioned in regards to the value of relationships with the community.
Talent retention

Recruitment and retention of talent is a value that public interest design work brings to the firm. Firms found that they are attracting bright new designers to their firm due to the public interest design work they engage in. Approximately half of the interviewees mentioned the interest that entry-level employees have in this type of work due to the ability to take a leadership role. The opportunity to take on leadership and work for the public good has been seen by some firms as being particularly attractive to Millennials. Also mentioned in regards to talent was the confidence that professionals built through this work and how public interest design might help focus professional goals.

Marketing

While some of the key informants were very clear that they did not participate in public interest design projects as a means to promote themselves and market their services, some firms celebrated the exposure that public interest design projects offer. Through exposing the work that is being done, they are creating awareness of the potential of design while increasing their credibility as public interest designers. Press related to their projects attracted more people in the community to the project, created advertising opportunities for suppliers donating supplies and time, and publicized the work of the firm.

Advocacy

Advocacy was not specifically mentioned by all key informants, but it is assumed this is because it is relatively inherent in the work being done. Firms that have goals aligned with specific agendas discussed this more openly in regards to their impact on policy change, food systems and affordable housing through advocacy and identifying design opportunities. The most commonly stated impact throughout the firms was that of placemaking and assisting in the development of a community within a neighbourhood.

Creativity/Innovation

The opportunity to be creative and innovative in community engagement and design was discussed within the interviews. Creativity and innovation were identified as valuable to the firms in two ways. The first was value in expanding staff expertise through: opportunities to learn from different contexts and clients, the need to resourceful in design development, and to experiment using different materials, equipment and innovative methods. The second was the value of being more entrepreneurial in order to find projects that addressed issues and identifying the stakeholders to engage in a project, leading to a new client base.

Expanding the profession

Some key informants mentioned the value that this work has to the growth and development of the profession of landscape architecture. They believe that in doing more public interest design work there
will be a better awareness of the potential impacts of design and, with that, higher expectations of the profession by the public. One key informant felt that this work was leading to a more interdisciplinary profession, and therefore to expanded opportunities to utilize design knowledge and skills.

*Informs fee-based projects*

Public interest design projects bring benefits to the community, but also provide a firm with research and information for future fee-based projects. The information gathered can lead to policy shifts that could lead to more work or might inform what materials are used in a future project. Practice in shifting scales of site and work was another value that was attributed to public interest design work. Finally, clients who are involved in a public interest design project may return for future endeavours or to complete a project when funding is secured, creating more fee-based projects.

### 4.5.2 Business model

The key informants are from different firms that used a variety of models to engage in public interest design work. Firms were categorized based on the models given in the literature. Key informants suggested reasons for why they had used particular models in their firms. Table 4 shows how the key informant firms were categorized.

#### Table 4: Firm Business Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>business model</th>
<th>KI 1</th>
<th>KI 2</th>
<th>KI 3</th>
<th>KI 4</th>
<th>KI 5</th>
<th>KI 6</th>
<th>KI 7</th>
<th>KI 8</th>
<th>KI 9</th>
<th>KI 10</th>
<th>KI 11</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design initiative</td>
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<td>Core</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Non-profits*

Non-profit firms grew out of an identified need in society, and developed to have access to funding not available to for-profit businesses, such as grants. This was the same for independent non-profits and non-profits that were associated with a for-profit firm. Key informants identified funding opportunities and access to communities as core to this decision.

*Design initiatives in for-profit firms*

Firms that had design initiatives were at different stages in their formalization of a public interest design strategy. The spectrum ranged from firms that had established a firm-wide commitment to public interest design projects, mostly through *pro bono* work, to firms that were starting their first project and
developing their mission statement and mandate. A few of these firms expressed interest in potentially creating a non-profit to engage in public interest design work, but acknowledged that they were either not at that stage, or they did not see how relevant that model would be to their overall firm structure.

*Integrated approach*

While most of the key informants suggested that designing for public interest was a part of all their work, one for-profit firm engages with non-profits and the public sector for the majority of their work and was therefore classified as having public interest design at the core of their business model.

4.5.3 Project/client criteria

Public interest design projects are often focused on populations that traditionally do not have access to design, including marginalized, low-income communities and nonprofits. Many firms have criteria that the client must meet in order to be considered for a project. The most commonly stated criteria are listed below in Table 5 and discussed in the following section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Firm Criteria for Public Interest Design Clients</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>criteria</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligned with firm goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within realm of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under-resourced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm Ability</td>
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<tr>
<td>KI 1</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Credibility*

For many firms this was high on the list for criteria. Spending resources, primarily employee billable hours, is costly to a firm and they need to be sure that they are using them the most effective way possible. Vetting organizations is a useful initial step to ensuring that the client organization is reliable and that the client has a good reputation among the community it is working in. The organization needs to have some evidence that they are prepared to undertake a project through having a long-term vision and good dynamics within the organization. This may be recognized by an organization having non-profit status, proving that they are not working for private interest benefits.
Align with firm goals

A number of key informants recognized the importance of clients having similar values and interests of their firm. Having goals that are aligned with the research and development of the firm plays a role in whether or not the firm will take the project on. While it is necessary for the project to fall within the realm of a firm’s professional services, they are often willing to take on projects that might push employees to be creative and expand their expertise. Firms stressed the importance of the client having a long-term plan.

Within realm of services

Almost half the key informants mentioned that it was important that the projects fall within the realm of services offered by the firm. Working outside this realm could create uncertainty in time and budget commitments and deliverables could not be guaranteed.

Expand services

Alternatively, a few key informants mentioned that projects are often a creative outlet for employees to gain new expertise. They offer opportunities to develop their portfolios and work with clients and communities with whom they might not have had experience. Therefore these projects have a reciprocal relationship to the firm; they add value to the firm and the firm adds value to the community in need.

Community involvement

Community involvement was another important criteria for public interest work. In order to get a sense of how to respond to the needs of end-users, they must be engaged in the conversation. Public interest design work commonly works with under-resourced organizations and communities, another criterion set by some of the firms.

Under-resourced

A few firms specifically mentioned the need for organizations to prove that they were under-resourced and had verified financial need. Having non-profit status was often used by firms as an indicator of an organization being under-resourced.

Local

Most of the firms with a design initiative felt it was important to be doing local work within their communities. Firms that required projects be close-by felt that they would make better relationships and create a better sense of community by staying local. Due to the longer timeframe of public interest design projects it is more effective to stay within the local context. They also said the expense of travelling internationally was not an efficient use of the resources they could offer to a client. Working locally also
allowed the firms to contribute to the surrounding urban fabric, a requirement held by almost half of the firms.

4.5.4 Design process

This category compares the traditional practice of a landscape architecture project to a public interest design project to create an understanding of how time and resources need to be budgeted differently. It has been broken down based on variables that are different than the traditional design practice.

![Figure 3: Design Process](image)

*Project initiation*

In traditional practice, clients often come to a firm with a design brief. Firms may respond to Requests for Proposals to get a client or compete in a design competition. To identify public interest design projects, the protocol is different. Most of the firms stated that their projects come from their employees. Someone with the firm may volunteer with an organization that is looking for some design advice. One of the independent non-profits said they would advertise request for proposals within the community to find projects. Another method of identifying public interest design projects was through entering design competitions.
Most of the key informants made mention of occasionally receiving cold calls to participate in projects, which they would refer to other firms if they were unable to fit the work into their schedules. One firm commented that it was more difficult than they had thought it would be to find projects.

**Developing the brief**

Briefs for public interest design projects tend to be created collaboratively by the organization and the designer. As this is often the first time a client is working with a design professional, the landscape architect needs to engage with stakeholders to create objectives and with community members to identify needs. Often this means that the expertise of the landscape architect will be in developing the brief to create opportunities that can be realized. The client may have an idea of what their community needs, but the designer has the expertise to offer suggestions that may not have occurred to the client. Key informants used the term pre-design consultation to define this stage of the process.

**Feasibility study**

A number of the key informants said that they budgeted a lot of time at the beginning of their projects to create a feasibility study based on all the components that a client wants. This is not limited strictly to the design of the physical space. Feasibility reports may identify criteria for phases in development, programming needs and operational costs, and the economics of investing in capital costs versus maintenance costs over time. It is important to make sure the client understands the reality of associated costs and time so that they do not commit to a project that will constrain their organization instead of benefit it.

**Schematics/Conceptual design**

Once the needs of the community or organization are articulated, a designer prepares conceptual and schematic designs. The key informants identified this as a very important stage in the public interest design process as its deliverable is often a graphic representation or feasibility report that can be presented to organizations to secure funds.

This process may require a number of iterations in order to present options to community members. One key informant, while talking about a specific design project, explained that they did this through a series of workshops over time to present their ideas. Most key informants said that they would prepare a full design for the site, though they would create components that could be implemented incrementally according to funds available. The conceptual design can be used to ensure that the long-term vision is maintained over the span of the project, regardless of management change or stalls in funding. Some firms indicated that they will help the organization with their funding proposal for free, with the intention that, should they receive funding, the grant will pay for their time.
**Funding**

In public interest design projects, it is not uncommon for the organization to be applying for grants and funding opportunities that have their own requirements and timelines. This is something that the firm has to understand and be cognizant of in their work with nonprofit organizations. There may be a significant lag between the time the conceptual diagrams and feasibility reports are submitted to the funding body and when the funds are received. Key informants had seen breaks in project progress ranging from a number of months to years. This can affect the momentum of the project and may require an additional stage to the process of keeping people excited and mobilized while they wait.

It is common for funders to release funds at specific points of the year. Ensuring that reports and documentation follow this schedule is important to successfully attaining funds on an annual basis, which may be needed over the course of a public interest design project. Public interest design projects may also face delays in funding based on the economic climate, and firms need to be prepared for longer timelines on projects and be able to brief their clients on associated costs.

A few of the key informants depended more on donations from suppliers and contractors to implement the projects as an alternative to funding organizations. They emphasized the importance of leading by example in donating their time and services and having personal contact with suppliers and trades people. One key informant explained that they had good experiences in getting donations, as the projects showcased new materials or equipment and provided advertising opportunities. When involving other professionals, there is a lot of coordination and preparation to ensure that there is an organized timeline so as to not waste people’s time and resources.

**Design development and construction**

Depending on securing funds, the project will move forward, though not always with the original design firm. At this point some key informants identified that there would be some sort of payment expected, as it would be included in the budget submitted for fundraising. This sometimes means that the organization will look for bids on the work, though key informants said that they commonly would continue with the community partner based on the relationship that had developed.

**Post project**

The partnership that is developed in a public interest design project means that there is a continuing relationship between the community and the firm. Most key informants explained that they continued to have contact with the people with whom they had worked on these projects and would continue to be involved in the community.

**Fee schedule**

The fee schedule for public interest design work is similar to traditional practice in that the client holds the money and pays the firm. The difference is that often the client is the middle person between
where the money is coming from - a funder - and where it is going - the firm. Therefore, the firm may need to respond to the funder’s needs as well as the client’s.

Within the context of this research, the focus is on pro bono public interest design work, meaning that there are reduced fees for work, or no fees at all. Traditional practice bases the costs for various parts of a project on the overall cost. This may be less clear at the outset of a public interest design project due to the variables in funding and timelines. The overall budget of the project should be estimated at the outset of a project, but associated fees need to be flexible if the work is not being done pro bono.

4.5.5 Employee Skillsets

As professionals, there are particular skills that landscape architects have, though there may be more emphasis on certain abilities in public interest design work. There are also skills that are specific to working with nonprofits and community organizations, such as understanding funder relationships and the grant process, social entrepreneurship and problem identifying, and understanding the language of the nonprofit sector. The range of skillsets mentioned in the interviews is discussed below and displayed in Table 6.

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<th>skillsets</th>
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Community engagement

In order to identify the needs of the community, the ability to engage with the community is essential. Throughout the interviews this was commonly stated with specific skills identified. The three most commonly-stated skills that were necessary for community engagement were taking the role of a partner instead of a consultant to create an environment for collaboration and using a common language not exclusive to design to ensure that ideas are being understood clearly.
Other areas of skill that were identified as important were identifying stakeholders, having empathy, visioning, managing time to ensure a commitment and being a decision maker when the situation needed one.

Grant process

Public interest design projects rely on the monetary contributions from funders, particularly if the client is a non-profit organization. The majority of the key informants suggested that designers involved in these projects should have an understanding of the grant process, to inform phasing of projects and manage expectations for receiving funds. While there was less emphasis on the need to be able to write successful grants, this was a skill that was identified in the interviews. In addition, understanding the language used by funders is useful knowledge, particularly when writing feasibility reports or creating conceptual drawings. Communicating in the language used by donors may increase the chance of getting funds, as they are familiar and more comfortable with the vocabulary of non-profits.

Communication

As with any design project, good communication skills are necessary for success. Articulating the vision of a community based on the needs they bring forward and communicating the possibilities of design to an audience that may not be familiar with design terminology were listed as the two most important skills related to communication. Both of these require having the patience to listen to everyone who is interested in sharing, as well as hearing what is not said. Listening was a skill that was emphasized in the interviews. Public interest design also requires effective public-speaking skills. A few key informants pointed to the importance of being able to communicate internally with management and other staff as well.

Creativity/Resourcefulness

Public interest design projects require creativity in approach and resourcefulness in implementation. Professionals engaged in public interest design projects may have to maximize the resources available to them, including social capital within the community. This may require that the designer work with the community to develop a timeline that allows for phasing.

Key informants who participated in grant-writing activities identified the skill of being able to create a design that meets the needs of funders and responds to their requests creatively. A project may meet the targets set by a funder, but it may take some creative language in the funding application to show how their goals are being integrated in to the design.

Some key informants referred to public interest design work as entrepreneurial, in that you have to be creative in seeing problems as design projects. It takes skills in creativity and observation to unveil the everyday issues that design may make less challenging for the people around us.
Understand the client type

Just as a designer would come to understand how developers or municipalities work, it is important that professionals working in public interest design understand the client type with whom they are engaging. Before becoming involved in a public interest design project, firms should do research into the type of organization with whom they are working. Knowing the likelihood of the continuity of the project should management change and the reality of implementation are important in setting reachable goals. A few key informants stated the importance of understanding the timelines of fundraising and the types of costs funds will cover initially (capital) and over time (operational), in order to inform their design for cost efficiency.

Collaboration

Most key informants emphasized the importance of partnerships. They understood that there are organizations and groups that have been engaging with communities to find solutions to issues for a long time, and that they are an excellent resource for initiating a project and gaining trust. In addition to the resources provided by organizations, key informants recognized the importance of collaborating with community residents with whom the projects are taking place to identify social capital and assets within the neighbourhood.

Time management

Time management skills are important for the success of every firm’s projects. In public interest design projects, it is easy for staff to be enthusiastic about the project and commit a lot of personal hours. Understanding how to manage your personal time on a project is an important skill in public interest design. While these projects are important and often fulfilling, their tendency to span a long period of time can lead to program fatigue and disinterest over time.

Budgeting hours within the firm was also an important skill that was identified in the interviews. Ultimately many of these firms work primarily in a fee-based project model in order to engage in public interest design projects. This means that time needs to be balanced in order to ensure sustainability. Creating this balance can be difficult and requires experience, skill and knowledge.

4.5.6 Knowledge Sharing

Sharing knowledge is a way of building a culture of public interest design in landscape architecture and makes the work accessible to the public. Many firms use blogs and websites to promote their work, as well as articles in online and physical magazines. Others will make themselves available for interviews and research to further the body of knowledge that adds to the profession. Firms have entered their public interest design projects into awards competitions and showcase these projects within their portfolios. Principals of firms will present at conferences and share their experiences with landscape
architects as well as professionals across other disciplines to create awareness around the work they are doing.

It is argued that practitioners often do not have time to write or document their public interest design work due to the financial constraints that require them to take on more work. Throughout the interviews it was clear that, to many of the firms, sharing their experiences and knowledge was an important element in the work they do, to better the profession and to market their firm. Regardless of the motivation, sharing experiences helps to create a discussion on what has worked in public interest design projects and what has not, and will ultimately lead to a more defined practice.

The results from the key informant interviews gave insight into the workings of public interest design in practice based on different experiences. Key informants identified areas that were weak and confirmed areas that are important to advancing a culture of public interest design as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Knowledge Sharing for Public Interest Design

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4.6 Conference Observations

The Structures for Inclusion Conference has run annually for 16 years to “bring together and share the best ideas and practices that are reaching those currently un-served by architecture” (SFI 2016). I attended the Structures for Inclusion Conference hosted by North Carolina State University and Design Corps in March 2016. This section will summarize the panel discussions that I was able to attend as well as the conversation that was had about the future of public interest design education.
4.6.1 SEED Awards

Public interest design projects from around the world received recognition for their commitment to social good through the awarding of SEED (Social Economic and Environmental Design) awards. The SEED network has developed a “common standard to guide, evaluate, and measure the social, economic, and environmental impact of design projects” (SFI 2016). Projects are judged based on how well they answer questions of:

- Participation: Have community members and stakeholders been involved in the design and planning processes?
- Effectiveness: How does the project address the community’s critical needs and challenges?
- Excellence: How does the project achieve the highest possible design quality, relate with its context, and dignify the experiences of those it touches?
- Inclusiveness: How does the project promote social equity as well as reflect a diversity of social identities and values?
- Impact: How are the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the project known and being measured?
- Systemic: How might the project or process be scaled up to have a broader impact? (SFI 2016)

The range of award winners emphasized that public interest design projects can span a wide variety of scales; can be instigated by one event or a series of events; and can be initiated by different populations. For example, when the MTree Architecture team initiated a project to help preserve ownership of the Maya Community land in Kilifi, Kenya, they had a budget to build a community centre. When funding disappeared, they kept their commitment and worked with the community on a volunteer basis to create a map that identified resources and ownership (Moon 2016). This is an example of being adaptable in the field, creative in promoting social good, and commitment to a community in need.

All of the projects presented had an innovative and creative way of approaching design - from designing a temp-to-perm strategy for immediate emergency housing in Texas (RAPIDO); to building a school in the jungle of the Democratic Republic of Congo to teach about conservation and sustainable practices (Ilima Primary School); and to the creation of a legitimate skate park in New Orleans led by a coalition of skateboarders (Parisite Park). The projects presented were not focused solely on the materials and elements of design; they told a story and positioned design within communities for a positive impact on the people who live there.

4.6.2 Panel Discussions

The second part of the conference consisted of panel discussions on a variety of topics related to public interest design practices. The discussions lasted 90 minutes and were dedicated to specific topics. Some of the topics included were: Activist architecture firms, disaster preparedness and response, public interest design partners, public interest design education, and intercultural competencies. Due to the
simultaneous presentations, I was unable to attend all discussions and instead focused on the activist architecture firms’ panels, where professionals from different-sized firms discussed the new models for public interest design that they are producing within their standard practice. The panelists talked about what public interest practice is and how they are doing the work. Table 8 describes the models that participants of the panel discussions I attended were using.

Table 8: Public Interest Design Business Model of Select Panel Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within for-profit firm</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-profit (connected to for profit firm)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer outside of firm</td>
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</table>

**Firm value**

The panelists discussed the value of their work as being important to building partnerships and momentum within communities to make impactful change. The value to the firm of doing public interest design work was recognized as: the feel-good nature of the work, the development of long-term relationships with the community, the marketing value, and the opportunity to be innovative and creative. Panelists felt that they were not only investing in the well-being of the communities they are working in but, through these projects, they are also investing in the leadership skills of their junior staff. The high cost of staff turnover was mentioned as an incentive to do public interest design, citing the interest of Millennials in firms that have social responsibility programs.

**Business model**

While most of the panelists did public interest design work within their for-profit firms, they tended to do part of, or the entire project, *pro bono*. They focused heavily on community engagement tools and practices and understood phased implementation. The non-profit firms were parallel organizations to a for-profit firm. They were developed to raise funds, to reduce fees, and to reach a broader audience through partnerships. Because people understood what the for-profit firm was doing, it was clearer what the intentions of the non-profit were, though the work was more accessible to the community. Another panelist worked for a traditional fee-based practice, but volunteered with his state chapter of the American Institute of Architects to generate momentum for public interest design. The for-profit firms did not have a formalized initiative to address public interest design work. They emphasized the need to balance public interest design, particularly *pro bono* work, with fee-based projects in order to ensure their sustainability as a business.
Project/client criteria

There was very little mention throughout the panel discussions regarding criteria, though it was clear through the discussions that there was consideration for this. One panelist suggested that the vetting process would help their firm to further their mission by ensuring that they were on the same page as the client. While one firm did all of the projects for free, other firms required a monetary commitment, though often reduced their usual fee by 75-80 per cent. They emphasized that the client group needs to do their part in confirming the funding. It was suggested by a few firms that they decide, in-office, which projects they will take based on the character of the organization and the alignment of the organization with the firm’s goals.

Design process

From start to finish, public interest design projects often span a longer time period and require additional steps in the design process. The pre-design and post-occupancy stages are emphasized within these projects to ensure that the needs to be met are clear at the beginning and outcomes are evaluated to record successes and failures. As with many design projects, the history of the place and precedents are good starting points to begin the project. Engaging with the community is an important part of this process to gain citizen knowledge and to identify and address needs of the end-users. Knowing who to invite to the discussion, and when, was discussed as an important element of the process.

It is important to have a defined timeline and clear understanding of deliverables throughout the public interest design process. Funders may require deliverables during their grant cycles. A clear program of what is needed at a certain point from the client organization and what can be expected from the designer can keep projects on track and reduce the chance of program fatigue. Establishing objectives that can be met throughout the process can keep momentum going and people committed. An example of the design process described by a non-profit public interest design firm is shown in Figure 4.

Employee skillsets

Most of the panelists considered themselves facilitators to the client organizations throughout the design process. As facilitators they help the client articulate their needs and provide collateral through conceptual design and feasibility reports to provide to funders. One firm discussed their inclusion methods for community engagement, using tools like blocks and sticker boards to break language barriers, and surveying people at the grocery store to ensure they were including everyone. The role of the designer
may be to identify where funds can be found, but the panelists agreed that most often it was the role of
the client to secure the funding.

Public interest design is a proactive practice. When panelists were asked about being activists,
many of them felt uncomfortable with the term. They were all able to agree that they have, with their firms,
actively made a choice to do public interest design work and are focusing efforts to not passively take
work.

Knowledge sharing

The panel discussions on the initial day of the conference did not go into much detail about the
firms’ practices of sharing knowledge and experiences. The fact that these panelists had taken the time to
travel to this conference to share their experiences was a testament to the value they put on sharing
information and learning from others.

4.6.3 Public Interest Design Education

The final day of the conference focused on public interest design education through an open
discussion followed by panel discussions. The panelists presented the customized programs that they
were developing to train the current generation of students. They identified learning outcomes and
opportunities to “collectively start to shape a comprehensive PID curriculum” (SFI 2016). The programs
mentioned in the panel that I attended showed a wide array of how public interest design is being
approached. Students were engaging in projects in Ghana through design studios or in their local
communities through community design centres. These projects paired students with communities in
need to find holes in the zoning or planning to propose design solutions and to meet the needs of different
user groups. In one example, the project that the students did led to a change in city ordinance to
integrate tiny homes in communities that lacked affordable housing.

Some of the attendees spoke about the initiatives they had taken throughout their education to
access courses that would better prepare them for engaging in public interest design work. The courses
focused on behaviour modeling, grant writing in public administration, and business courses to
understand the non-profit sector. Representatives from the University of Minnesota shared their
development of a Public Interest Design Certificate that focuses on the hard skills of design in studio, but
emphasizes the soft skills through participation in the social sciences. The certificate can be added to a
design degree and requires two core classes: Principles and Practice in Public Interest Design and
Design for Equity, along with the requirement to take a course outside the design college.

Online mentorship through initiatives such as SEED and Public Interest Design Institutes were
discussed as opportunities to reach professionals in practice. Certificate programs would also be
accessible to professionals and might follow a distance education format. The majority of the discussion
focused on education in universities and colleges.
Information gathered from the Structures for Inclusion Conference provided basic information on the practices being used in firms across the country. It showcased socially impactful projects and exemplified how SEED evaluation works. While architects presented most of the projects and discussions, the overlap into the realm of landscape architecture was obvious. It was not possible to get an exact number of landscape architects, but through conversation it became apparent that there was a good representation of the profession in attendance.

In this chapter, the results and analysis were presented to understand how landscape architects are engaging with public interest design projects. In the following chapter this information is used to discuss recommendations for landscape architects in Ontario who are interested in doing public interest design work, as well as suggestions on how larger professional organizations can contribute to a culture of public interest design.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The question guiding this research was “how can landscape architects contribute more effectively to public interest design?” To answer this question, the research achieved the objectives of: (1) examining the development, implementation, and value of public interest work; and (2) analyzing how landscape architects are currently practicing public interest design. This chapter provides recommendations for promoting public interest design within landscape architecture firms (Objective 3), as well as making suggestions for the broader profession of landscape architecture. The recommendations follow the precedent paths set by law to promote pro bono services to those in need by focusing on promoting a culture in independent firms and also through professional organizations as a whole. The recommendations are followed by reflections on the research process, identification of the limitations to the research and recommendations for future research.

5.2 Public Interest Design Recommendations for Firms

The results of the interviews reinforced many of the ideas that were suggested within the literature regarding opportunities and deficiencies in the development of a culture of public interest design. Based on the trends that emerged from interviews with key informant landscape architects, information in the literature regarding public interest design and precedents set by the law profession in Canada, the following recommendations for firms interested in public interest design work were developed.

5.2.1 Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

A mission statement defines the values that a firm intends to contribute to the public realm. It creates a common understanding, among the firm's employees and the public, of the purpose of the firm's public interest design work. Principles guide the focus of the projects and identify areas for impact. The creation of a mission statement and guiding principles shows a firm's commitment to public interest design work.

While the mission statement will be specific to the firm's values, the principles outlined by the Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED) network can provide a baseline to expand upon. These principles include:

1. Advocate with those who have a limited voice in public life
2. Build structures for inclusion that engage stakeholders and allow communities to make decisions
3. Promote equality through discourse that reflects a range of values and social identities
4. Generate ideas that grow from place and build local capacity
5. Design to help conserve resources and minimize waste (Abendroth and Bell 2015)
One of the key informants who had initiated a social impact design initiative with their firm stated that this was the approach they had taken and had added more based on input from their staff. This created a common language throughout the firm to discuss social impact, created an understanding of what constituted social impact design work and recognized that, in their case, social impact did not need to be equate to specifically reduced rate pro bono work.

Developing a mission statement and principles encourages discussion about what this work means to the firm and can ultimately help a firm define its value in terms of the impact they want to have on the public realm. Defining this makes it clear to the public what they can expect from engaging in public interest design projects with the firm.

5.2.2 Develop a Strategy

The Canadian Bar Association recommends that a pro bono policy identify potential recipients of pro bono services, set out the process for taking a pro bono case, describe how pro bono cases will be managed in the firm’s administrative systems, explain how the firm will measure a lawyer’s pro bono contribution, and define links to pro bono organizations and community organizations. This model could be used in landscape architecture offices to promote a culture of public interest design within an office.

There are a number of models being used by practitioners to do public interest design projects, mainly falling into the three models suggested in the literature. It became apparent through interviews and conference observations that, while it is important to have a formal strategy, approaches may be a hybrid of different models or transition from one model to another.

Non-profit or Design Initiatives

Firms need to decide for themselves which approach is most in line with the scope of public interest design work in which they want to engage. Advantages and disadvantages of each were discussed within the literature, in interviews and throughout the Structures for Inclusion conference.

- Non-profits

According to the key informants, parallel non-profits often developed alongside firms that had one or two people in their for-profit office. Key informants identified the value of initiating a non-profit as: having better access to funding and creating a more balanced relationship when engaging with communities. Advantages identified by an independent non-profit were being nimble, flexible, creative and having goals that are directly related to their values. The disadvantages of managing a non-profit related to a for-profit business were identified as: needing a board of directors and insurance implications
• **Design Initiatives**

Advantages of a design initiative were that: they are developed within an existing business and therefore have access to the same resources that are available to traditional practice; they can be implemented over time; and they fall under the same insurance and accounting systems. Disadvantages include the need to balance public interest design work at a reduced fee with full payment work; an unclear understanding of the initiative among employees; and a fear of the unknown by the principals.

The model that a firm decides to use needs to correspond with their aspirations and existing business model. It may be unnecessary to create a non-profit if the work that a firm hopes to do can fit into the existing business model. Alternatively, if a firm wants to engage with research or advocacy there might be more opportunities for funding or partnering should they have non-profit status. What became evident throughout the research was that the model being used to do public interest design work was not as important to getting the work done as a defined and formalized commitment to do the work, regardless of the form it took.

*Public interest design committees*

One strategy that can be used is the creation of a public interest design committee within the firm. At the initial stages this committee can help to develop the mission statement and principles to guide public interest design work. The roles of the committee may include: being point people for people in the office and the public to bring proposed projects to; screening and approving proposed projects; keeping track of public interest design resources; and offering training or workshops.

Having a number of staff on a committee can create opportunities for collaborating amongst experience levels, balancing idealism with pragmatism. Principals of landscape architecture firms and upper management may not be able to commit as much time to public interest design projects, but should be involved with screening and approving projects due to their experience and knowledge of the logistics in projects.

*Budgeting time*

One of the challenges of doing public interest design that was identified in this research was managing the number of hours allocated to projects. Most key informants said that, when projects were proposed, the firm decided whether they were capable of doing the work based on time and financial budgets. A strategy that one key informant’s firm used was budgeting hours at the outset of the fiscal year. Following Public Architecture’s One Percent model, the firm adds up one percent of each employee’s expected billable hours to total the amount of hours that they will commit to pro bono work at the beginning of the fiscal year. They try to fill these hours with pro bono work throughout the year.
A strategy that was discussed in relation to law firms was using billable hours credits. These credits can be used towards the billable hours quota they are expected to meet. In this context it was found that lawyers were more inclined to engage in pro bono work as it was guaranteed that their contribution would be recognized (Anand 2007). Law firms that use this tactic put a cap on the number of hours that can be used towards credit (Anand 2007). Another tactic identified in Anand’s (2007) research was using pro bono hours to meet billable hours quota should they not be met or as a basis for bonuses. Because landscape architects often work on a basis of billable hours, this is a strategy that could be used to manage hours spent doing public interest design work.

5.2.3 Create Criteria

Criteria set guidelines for what kind of organizations a firm is willing to engage with and what types of projects. This is closely aligned with the stated mission and follows the guiding principles, but sets limits to ensure that focus is kept. Criteria for project selection clarify, for employees, the types of projects the firm is willing to participate in and also provide a basis to credibly reject proposed projects. A set of clear requirements for organizations, and identified impacts of projects, ensures that firms do not expand their scope of service beyond what they are comfortable providing.

Throughout the interviews and literature there were common criteria mentioned. These included:

- Credible organization
- Long-term vision and commitment to the project
- Organization has a presence in the community and engages with people
- Project is local
- Organization and project are aligned with mission statement
- Organizations understand their role in design process
- Project is accessible by the public (i.e., not privately owned)

5.2.4 Outline a Process

There are certain elements of the public interest design process that are similar across firms and projects; these are extensive community engagement, steps to secure funding, and a continued relationship post implementation. Knowing these components ahead of time can help to outline how the process will work. A flexible template to help the client understand how the process works is useful in managing time and resources. It can also help a firm define its commitment to the project and create a timeline of deliverables from both parties to manage expectations.

Community engagement

Engaging with the community was referred to extensively throughout the literature, interviews and conference presentations. Of course, the only way to work for the public interest is to be fully informed of the needs and wants of the public. While community engagement needs to be context specific to be
inclusive and encourage the involvement of all community members, identifying tools, strategies and resources can help to streamline the process.

Emphasis, by many of the key informants and in the conference presentations, is on getting involved as early as possible. The landscape architect facilitates articulation of the vision and, from this, can help to select a site. Being involved early in the project development could result in selecting a site that will better suit the needs of the community and provide a good fit into the surroundings.

Partnering with local organizations can be an important part of community engagement as there may be information available to give context to community meetings and engagement activities. One key informant, while describing experience in a public interest design project, pointed out how important it was for the firm to know that the community had already participated in a similar engagement. The experience had been bad and had built mistrust in landscape architects within the community. This informed their decisions for strategies to engage the community. In an example given during a conference presentation, designers used sticker boards and blocks to interact with community members that did not speak the same language. The language barrier was an important element of the context of the site to be aware of ahead of time, as their usual process may have failed in this scenario. Ensuring inclusive engagement might mean meeting in unconventional places. One presenter at the Structures for Inclusion Conference said that one project led the design team to the library during children’s story-time in order to engage with the parents from whom they wanted feedback.

Methods for engaging with people will change depending on the community with whom a firm is working. Creatively expanding strategies to engage with people can be explored before public interest design projects are initiated and a toolbox of practices can be kept in order to inform future processes.

Steps to secure funding

For many public interest design projects, securing the funding to make visions a reality is an important part of the process. This stage can span a large amount of time and needs to be accounted for in cost estimates. One key informant acknowledged the importance of incorporating construction inflation rates into the budget; some projects will take years to build and will need to secure enough money to compensate for the time. It is also important to understand funding so that the design reflects the anticipated program and management budget after capital funds are used.

Most key informants interviewed said they are only indirectly involved in securing funding, though their feasibility studies and conceptual drawings are used as collateral in the process. Taking steps to streamline the funding process can be incorporated into a firm’s public interest design initiative through a grant application template for common funders; knowledge of grant cycles and opportunities; and precedents that can be used to exemplify impact.

One firm’s key informant stated that the firm did not depend on funders for the firm’s annual pro bono project. Instead, he collaborated with contractors and suppliers to get donations of time and supplies.
for public interest design projects. This requires a great amount of coordination and strong personal relationships, both of which involve a lot of time.

Understanding elements that might stall a public interest design project can be incorporated into the design process in order to avoid frustration and unforeseen issues.

*Post-project relationships*

The extensive community engagement with organizations, combined with the expanded role of the landscape architect to encompass advisor, partner and facilitator, leads to strong relationships that often extend past the project end date. Firms may be asked to perform post-occupancy evaluations or partner on projects into the future. Some key informants said that they were still very involved with the organizations as volunteers, which stemmed from their relationship that was built throughout the project.

5.2.5 Create Opportunities for Professional Development

As identified in the literature, key informant interviews and conference observations, there are a number of skills that are necessary to have in public interest design projects. While most of these skills will be gained and developed by engaging in pubic interest design projects, this research offers a few recommendations for firms to enhance these skills.

It may be useful to participate in courses outside of the profession. One key informant mentioned that she had taken a community engagement course, which she found very useful for conducting participatory meetings. She found the techniques and strategies to which she had been exposed helped her to connect with more people and helped her to ensure that workshops and meetings were inclusive. During conference discussions a number of people mentioned that they had taken short grant-writing courses to become more aware of the grant process and the commonly needed components for a funding application. Researching and advertising courses that are relevant to community engagement and grant writing, as well as other relevant context-specific topics, could be advertised in a public area of an office or through email to show opportunities.

Firms might consider offering resources such as books or workshops on these topics to create an understanding of community engagement techniques and grant writing amongst their staff. As the literature on public interest design work grows, a library could be developed to create inspiration and provide examples of projects that have been done in the past.

It is important to remember that not everyone will want to be involved in all aspects of a public interest design project. Commonly discussed throughout this research was the importance of identifying social capital and resources within the community. Strengths of different firm members should be identified within a firm to maximize the impact of the efforts.
5.2.6 Share Knowledge

In order to build a body of knowledge that will inform the expansion of public interest design work in offices, experiences and knowledge need to be shared. The literature points to a lack of deliberate process and transferability, which was echoed by key informants during interviews. The context-specific nature of this work makes it difficult to suggest that there is a single approach to public interest design, but projects can be framed by the successes and failures of previous approaches.

Publicize knowledge

Knowledge needs to be shared publicly by landscape architects who are doing public interest design work to help the movement grow and to bring awareness to the impact that the work can have. Social media creates an accessible platform to share information and discuss the experience - what worked and what did not. Some of the firms that key informants represented have articles on their website, sharing their experiences in public interest design projects. One firm has a category on their blog that looks specifically at social impact projects and discusses some of the important lessons that have been learned throughout the development of their initiatives. Websites dedicated to public interest design have daily posts on the opportunities and impacts of design work. Landscape architecture firms could contribute their projects and experiences as articles to these sites to inform the work of others in the field. News media was also identified as a way to share how landscape architects are contributing to public interest design work.

Submitting public interest design projects for awards can be a good way of advertising the impact that these projects can have. One key informant identified this as a method that their firm was using to promote public interest design work. Some cities are developing awards to specifically recognize public interest design work, such as Hamilton’s Civic Generosity Urban Design Award.

Internal knowledge sharing

It is also important to internally communicate experiences of public interest design projects for input on approaches and situation-based learning. One key informant identified this as a challenge in their multi-office firm, but they were working on developing a technological platform to compile office efforts and share information. Another key informant said they had an online platform that connected their offices, but all multi-office firms relied on leaders within each office to communicate updates monthly. Open discussion on public interest design projects and opportunities to engage in the community provides occasions for staff to ask questions and start to understand how they can be involved. This in itself will build interest and could help landscape architects in the office understand how to efficiently utilize their skills.
Cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing

Sharing knowledge across disciplines was identified as a necessary step to promoting a stronger culture of public interest design. Learning about the strategies being used by other disciplines to respond to social issues can help landscape architects understand the broader context of public interest design. No discipline or profession can address the needs of the public solely through their own work, making it necessary to reach outside the field in order to make a broader impact.

This section provided recommendations for landscape architecture firms to encourage a culture of public interest design based on the information gathered from the literature, key informant interviews and the 2016 Structures for Inclusion Conference discussions. While there are measures that can be taken within an office or firm to promote public interest design engagement, there are also steps that can be taken by the profession of landscape architecture to demonstrate commitment to intentionally working for the public good.

5.3 Public Interest Design Recommendations for the Profession

The research suggested that there is interest amongst professionals in landscape architecture to engage with public interest design. The challenges that were identified are not specific to landscape architecture and have been addressed in professions such as law and architecture. This section draws on the precedents set by law and architecture to engage professionals in pro bono work to provide recommendations for landscape architecture. The connection is made between pro bono and public interest design work due to the nature of often-reduced fee work that is discussed throughout the key informant interviews. The Canadian Bar Association is used as a precedent because it has geographical relevance and references pro bono on their website, while the American Institute of Architects is being used because of its position in design and its commitment to pro bono work.

1. It is recommended that professional associations representing landscape architects create a formal presence in the growing field of public interest design through an established commitment to engaging in projects and providing resources, courses and guidelines to members. It is recognized that there have been actions to publicize the public interest design and pro bono work being done by landscape architects, such as the American Society of Landscape Architects Year of Public Service, but a structured and ongoing commitment is recommended.

Professional mandate

The profession of law has a strong culture of pro bono work in North America and architects have started to develop a more formalized commitment to pro bono work in the past decade. These initiatives have developed from resolutions to promote pro bono work, in the case of Canadian Law, and changes to the Code of Ethics to address public service, as applies to national professional association of the
American Institute of Architects in the United States. Each profession has a stated mandate that encourages members of their profession to engage with pro bono work.

The Canadian Bar Association states:

Be it resolved that the Canadian Bar Association adopt the following policy on pro bono legal services:

• It is inherent in the professional responsibility of a legal practitioner to voluntarily contribute an identifiable part of time without charge or at substantially reduced rates:
• to establish or preserve the rights of disadvantaged individuals;
• to provide legal services to assist organizations who represent the interests of, or who work on behalf of, members of the community of limited means or other public interest organizations; or
• for the improvement of laws or the legal system
• each member of the legal profession should strive to contribute 50 hours or 3% of billings per year on a pro bono basis.
• take steps to encourage and promote this level of pro bono activity and to recognize pro bono efforts undertaken by members of the legal profession in Canada. (Resolution 98-01)

The American Institute of Architects states:

The American Institute of Architects encourages all of its members, their firms, and state and local components to engage in providing pro bono services as part of their contributions to the highest aspirations of the architecture profession and the Institute in service to society. Through participation in whatever format they may choose, every member of the AIA can support and further the values of the Institute in terms of its advocacy for sustainable design and practices, diversity, and elevation of the stature of the profession of architecture in the eyes of the public (Institute of Guidelines 2008).

Developing a guiding mandate that shows the commitment of the profession to public interest design, through fee-based or pro bono work, reflects expectations of members’ practice. A clear definition of what landscape architecture considers public interest design needs to be declared in order to create a common standard across the profession. The Canadian Bar Association goes as far as to set an aspirational goal of contributing 50 hours per year, which sets an attainable standard to work towards.

Provide Resources

Both the Canadian Bar Association and the American Institute of Architects provide resources on engaging with pro bono work to their members. Some of the resources that each provide are listed below.

The Canadian Bar Association has a Pro Bono Committee that organizes resources for members to promote pro bono service in Canada’s legal profession.

• Pro Bono Resources in Canada
• Pro Bono Working Group Report
• Pro Bono File Intake
• Report on Promoting a Pro Bono Culture in the Legal Profession
The American Institute of Architects has developed guidelines and contracts for pro bono design work that are available publicly on their website. Their continuing education includes courses on: Best Practices for Pro Bono Design; Designing for Good; Transformative Practice; Community Participation and Public Architecture. These courses discuss how to manage pro bono work within a company’s business model, benefits and challenges of working with community partners and non-profit organizations and insight from the viewpoint of partner organizations that have worked with pro bono architects. The American Institute of Architects has partnered with Public Architecture to promote pro bono work in architecture and publicly display the work they are engaging in.

Professional continuing education

As mentioned above, there are a number of courses dedicated to developing the skillsets needed by architects who want to engage in public interest design work offered by the American Institute of Architects. During this research, interest in developing strategies and skillsets for landscape architects to engage in public interest design was expressed through the interviews and in communication with professional associations such as the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects. There is interest in developing courses and resources specific to landscape architectural practice to be offered through webinars, workshops and landscape architecture websites.

2. It is recommended that landscape architecture education provide courses specifically targeted at public interest design through certificate programs. It is recognized that there is an expectation by the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board that there be service-learning activities within university programs that interact with the “larger institution, the local community, practitioners, and the public at large” (Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board 2016). This research suggests that there be more opportunities for landscape architecture students to develop skills related to public interest design through core courses that focus on the business models, processes and skillsets identified in this research.

Public interest design certificates

The technical skills offered through landscape architecture education are the base for public interest design, but should be complemented by knowledge in the social sciences in order to better understand social issues. There are a few design schools that are beginning to develop certificate programs in public interest design that can complement architecture and landscape architecture education. One certificate program at Portland State University offers the certificate program to both graduate level students and professionals in order to “prepare future leaders in architecture, urban planning, sustainability, community development and other fields to aid currently underserved populations through sustainable, human-centered design methods” (Portland State University 2016). The course requirements include:
• Required course: Contemporary Issues Seminar: Public Interest Design in Practice
• One social course
• One environmental course
• One economic course
• Fieldwork (Portland State University 2016)

The University of Minnesota is currently developing both an undergraduate interdisciplinary minor and a graduate certificate in public interest design. The programs are being developed to “give students the opportunity to explore ‘great design for the greater good’ through their work” (University of Minnesota 2016). There was discussion about this certificate at the Structures for Inclusion conference where two of the required courses were mentioned: Principles and Practice of Public Interest Design and Design for Equity.

Landscape Architecture is a broad field that attracts people with different interests. Creating opportunities for students to explore their professional goals through access to courses associated with public interest design can instill an ethic of public service and develop skills to engage more effectively with the communities in need.

Legal education as a precedent

The education system for the legal profession can stand as a precedent for the formal integration of public interest design into landscape architecture education. Some legal programs have an identified course stream for law students interested in pursuing different areas of the law profession. One of these streams focuses on public law. Landscape architecture programs may consider adopting a similar model to encourage students to focus their professional goals; a stream in public interest design could be incorporated. There are also student loan forgiveness initiatives in the profession of law for those who choose to focus on public law.

The organization Pro Bono Students Canada is a national law student program that “provides legal services without charge to organizations and people in need in Canada” (Pro Bono Students Canada). It is the first pro bono program to be developed in Canada and now has chapters in every Canadian law school. The program has three objectives:

1. To provide law students with volunteer opportunities to develop their legal skills
2. To have a positive impact on the legal profession by promoting the value of pro bono services to the next generation of lawyers
3. To increase access to justice across Canada

The program was developed at the University of Toronto in 1996 to combine education and public interest volunteer work (Aiken-Klar 2009). Program coordinators are hired to run the chapters and work to “develop projects, recruit volunteers, train and monitor students, hold events and hire and transition their successors” (Pro Bono Students Canada). Initiating a program such as this in landscape architecture
programs across North America could offer opportunities for students pursuing a professional focus in public interest design.

3. It is recommended that the profession of landscape architecture develop an organization to link professionals with underserved communities in need of design services. This organization should follow the precedent of Pro Bono Law Ontario, which connects lawyers who want to give back to their communities with volunteer programs to benefit low-income Ontarians, directly or through partnerships with charitable organizations. An organization such as this would formalize the efforts of the profession to engage with public interest design projects and could be an effective approach to serve more people than the ad hoc efforts in individual offices.

Pro Bono Law Ontario

Pro Bono Law Ontario is a charitable organization that emerged to “bridge the justice gap between lawyers who want to give back and the many Ontarians who cannot afford legal services and have a legal problem not covered by government funding” (Pro Bono Law Ontario). Annually it provides services to over 14,000 clients who without it would not have access to legal services. It serves the legal profession through addressing the “barriers to lawyers participation in pro bono activities and promotes a pro bono culture with the Ontario legal profession” (Pro Bono Law Ontario).

Pro Bono Law Ontario is active in providing programs for the public that are managed in-house or externally. These programs are focused on:

- People suing or being sued in the civil courts and who are unable to afford a lawyer
- Children who face barriers to their health, wellbeing, and educational progress and who might benefit form the assistance of a lawyer
- Charities and nonprofits that do no have the resources to address legal needs (Pro Bono Law Ontario).

The organization also provides consulting services as training and technical support to law firms and legal departments in:

- Developing pro bono policies
- Advising on program structure, best practices for pro bono service delivery, and strategic planning issues
- Identifying appropriate community partners and brokering those relationships
- Sharing templates for partnership agreements, intake and referrals
- Helping with Continuing Professional Development programs
- Recommending programs to LawPRO* for extended malpractice coverage
- Assistance with project launches
- Providing ongoing consulting services
- Guiding the evaluation process (Pro Bono Law Ontario).
The priorities of the organization are focused on: sustaining and expanding programs; embracing new technologies; increasing pro bono participation; and making it easier for lawyers (Pro Bono Law Ontario). Some of the efforts made to realize these priorities include working in house with the client organizations; creating an online platform to provide real-time information to remote communities; recruiting an increasing number of volunteers annually; and securing “extended malpractice coverage for pro bono lawyers, developing law firm pro bono policies that count pro bono time as billable time, advocated for the adoption of emeritus rules to support retired volunteer lawyers, and addressed conflict of interest rules in court-based pro bono projects” (Pro Bono Law Ontario).

Pro Bono Law Ontario relies on the support and generosity of private funders and corporate support to deliver services, and the donation of time and effort from volunteer lawyers. It support its volunteers through:

- Ensuring that clients are screened for eligibility
- Adhering to best practices that mitigate risk
- Providing free, accredited Continued Professional Development training
- Providing mentorship whenever possible (Pro Bono Law Ontario)

Following this precedent a Public Interest Design Ontario organization could be developed. One of the key informants for this research has been initiating an organization that intends to provide these services over the last few years with support from the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects and the Landscape Architecture Foundation of Canada. Strengthening this organization based on the formalization of pro bono law in Ontario could help to build a culture of public interest design. The success of the Pro Bono Law Ontario could be beneficial in expanding the services of the volunteer organization represented by one key informant to bridge the gap between landscape architects and underserved communities in Canada.

**Public Interest Landscape Architecture**

Based on this precedent, it is recommended that in order to strengthen the organization already engaged in connecting landscape architects with the public the following steps should be taken:

- Achieve non-profit status to allow firms to get tax deductions for donations
- Create an online platform to extend services to remote communities
- Research new project directions
- Collaborate with OALA to develop continuing professional education opportunities
- Secure extended contracts for public interest design and insurance coverage

Professional associations such as the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects could provide support for an organization such as this to bring awareness of opportunities for professionals to engage with public interest design work. Projects done through the organization should be celebrated and publicized in order to increase awareness within the public to the potential of collaborating with landscape architects to design and implement public interest community projects.
This chapter has provided recommendations for private practice landscape architects to formally engage with public interest design projects either directly through their individual firms or through initiatives and commitments by landscape architecture associations. These recommendations are the result of a review of the literature related to public interest design in architecture and pro bono efforts in the legal profession; analysis and synthesis of interview responses; and observations from the Structures for Inclusion Conference.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

Landscape architects are an active part of the public interest design movement. This research identified ways in which landscape architects can develop their firms and their profession to engage more fully in public interest design. It relied on precedents set by the legal profession and actions taken by architects to create an understanding of how public interest work can be integrated into existing practices or developed independently. These precedents, combined with the literature review, key informant interviews and conference observations, informed recommendations for the profession, for professional education, as well as for individual firms. These recommendations are meant to be a starting point for landscape architects to build upon in formalizing a commitment to public interest design.

This research is intended to add to the growing body of knowledge that will help to expand the reach of public interest design. It attempts to document the experiences of selected landscape architecture firms to highlight characteristics related to value, business model, client criteria, design process, employee skillsets and knowledge sharing. Through this documentation the research addresses the need to communicate how public interest design work is being done (Lasky 2012; Ogbu 2012; Pitera 2015; Meron and Scharphie 2015; Sperry 2015). It goes beyond cataloguing an assortment of public interest design projects to understand "how contemporary public interest design builds upon and breaks with traditional design practice, theory and social impact" (Anderson 2014a, p.2).

6.1 Limitations

This research sampled a limited number of firms that were engaged in landscape architecture practice and public interest design work. This was due in part to a limited amount of time and financial resources. There are a number of firms doing public interest design work, but the researcher had trouble identifying them due to a lack of knowledge sharing and a lack of public interest design projects being publicized in firm portfolios. In Ontario, the research relied on word of mouth, which meant that firms were sometimes suggested too late in the research process. The limited timeframe of the key informant interviews restricted the amount of projects that the key informant was able to discuss. Some firms did have non-profits that specifically worked on research associated with them, which were not discussed due to time constraints and a focus on design projects.

A decision was made not to interview any key informants from Community Design Centres as the focus of this research was based on professional firms’ public interest design strategies. While there was information used that focuses on Community Design Centres, there is an abundant amount of information that was not incorporated. The relationship that these centres have with universities influences the dynamic of engaging with public interest design work and was outside the scope of this research.

The literature focused only on architecture and law, due to the limitations on this subject within the landscape architecture literature. Architecture literature was explored due to the publicity that the public interest design movement has had in this field. Pro bono law literature was used as there is a strong culture of public interest work in the legal profession. The scope of the research did not explore the
planning literature, which could have had other outcomes due to the core values of planning for public interests.

Pro bono work was the focus of much of the literature used, which created more of an emphasis on pro bono work than initially anticipated. Public interest design and pro bono work have a lot of crossover in terms of their approaches, methods and frameworks, and many key informants mentioned reduced fees as a part of their public interest design model. For this reason, the researcher made connections between the two.

6.2 Future Research

This research has identified how public interest design is emerging in design professions and how landscape architects can strengthen their contribution to the public interest design movement. Law can be used as a precedent due to a long history of pro bono work and strong commitment to the public. Within the literature, Public Health is a model identified as offering insight into how public interest design could develop as a distinct field of design. Further research could compare the emergence of public health and how public interest design could follow a similar trajectory.

Another area that requires further research is how public interest design will be evaluated and the metrics to show impact. Post occupancy evaluation of public interest design projects could be evaluated using an evaluation tool such as the one developed by the Social Economic Environmental Design network to document the impact of these efforts. There may also be opportunities to partner with public health or social sciences to measure the impact of public interest landscape architecture design on the mental and physical health of communities.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

The global challenges we expect to see in the next fifty years cannot be solved through individual efforts; instead, we need collaboration across disciplines and participatory processes to engage the people who are affected directly by design decisions. Landscape architecture has an opportunity to develop a formalized commitment to using design to empower communities and amplify the collective voice demanding sustainable design solutions to a changing world. This research has identified ways in which individual firms can grow their public interest design practice and approaches that can be taken by the profession to promote a culture of public interest design within landscape architecture.
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70


