# The Information Architecture Institute

## Findings from the IAI 2009 Survey of Local Groups

*This report details the results of a brief survey of leaders in the fields of information architecture (IA) and user experience design (UX). The survey, which was conducted by the Information Architecture Institute (IAI), measures respondents' perceptions of local and regional IA/UX community needs. The study is intended to engage IA leaders at the local level and to identify unmet needs in their professional communities.[*]*

*The sample was comprised of 468 individuals whom the IAI operations manager and members of the boards of directors and advisors identified as leaders in the IA community. For the purposes of the study, an individual qualified as a leader if he or she is engaged in and connected with local, regional and/or international IA communities. Both IAI members and non-members were included in the sample. Each received a link to the online survey via email from the Secretary of IAI on March 10, 2009. The survey was made available on the Survey Monkey website for 37 days, until April 16. A total of 105 individuals responded to the survey, with an overall response rate of 22%.*

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Survey respondents come from all over the world, although they are mostly concentrated in the United States and Europe. A solid majority live close to at least a few fellow IA/UX practitioners, and about half say they live near many people in their field. Most report that organized group activities are available for practitioners in their area, although about one-in-three describe their professional community as disconnected, dissipating, or only beginning to form. On average, respondents hold organized IA/UX activities about once a month, and they believe these events primarily offer the potential for socializing and networking.
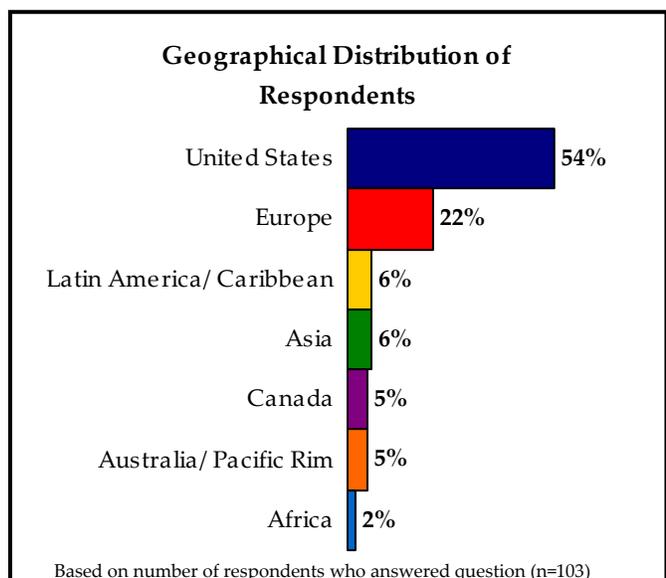
Overall, respondents report that the IAI has been most helpful in its awarding of grants for organizing events and conferences. In looking to the future, they are particularly interested in the potential for forming greater relationships with local and regional organizations, for leadership support, and for support with managing events. About half are interested in playing a greater role in the IAI's new Local Groups/Chapters program.

## Profile of Local and Regional IA/UX Communities

*Geography*

A narrow majority of respondents (54%) are from the continental United States. The bulk of these respondents live in the Northeast and DC (18%), while a considerable proportion comes from the West (16%), the South (11%), and the Midwest (10%). None of the survey respondents live in Alaska or Hawaii.
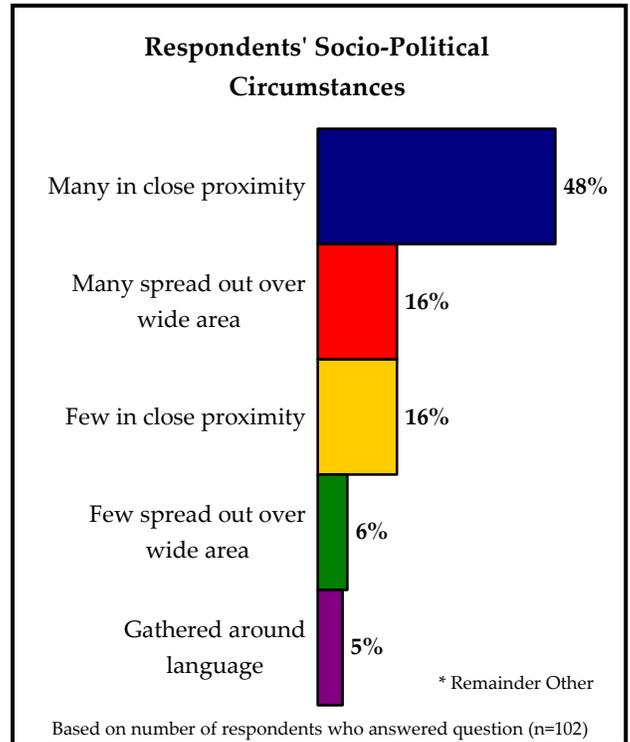
The remainder come from elsewhere in the world. More than one-in-five (22%) are from Europe – including 9% who specifically say they live in the United Kingdom. Other respondents hail from Latin America or the Caribbean (6%), Asia (6%), Australia and the Pacific Rim (5%), Canada (5%), and Africa (2%).
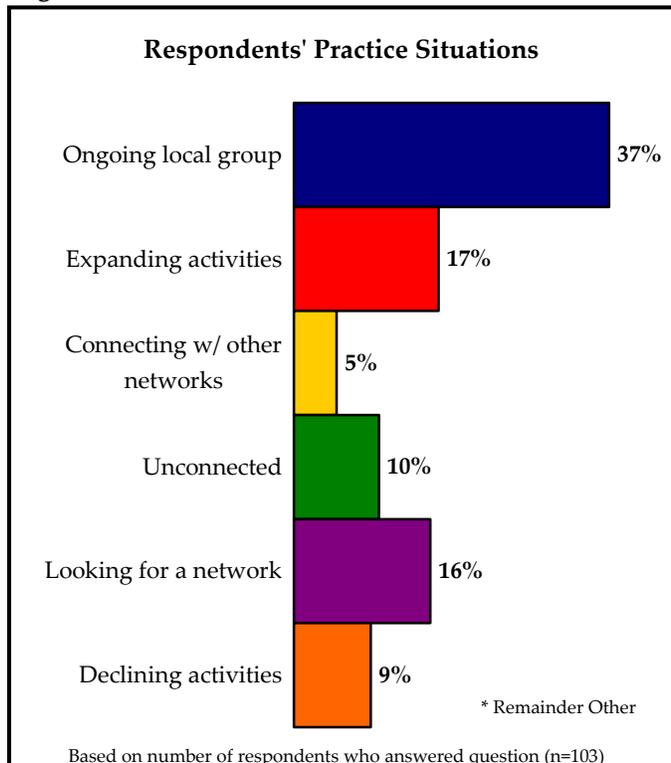


**Geographical Distribution of Respondents**

| Region | Percentage |
|---|---|
| United States | 54% |
| Europe | 22% |
| Latin America/ Caribbean | 6% |
| Asia | 6% |
| Canada | 5% |
| Australia/ Pacific Rim | 5% |
| Africa | 2% |

Based on number of respondents who answered question (n=103)

*Proximity to Other Practitioners*

A solid majority of respondents (64%) say there are at least a few IA/UX practitioners in close proximity to them. This includes nearly half (48%) who say there are "many" people practicing in the IA/UX fields nearby. Another one-in-four respondents (28%) say there are at least a few practitioners spread out over a wide geographic area, while 3% say that practitioners in their region are "gathered around language rather than geography."

- Most respondents residing in the United States (52%) report having "many practitioners in close proximity" to them. There is some variation among specific regions within the United States, however, with relatively few respondents in the South (18%) indicating that many of their colleagues live nearby.

- Looking at other parts of the world, respondents in Canada (60%), Asia (50%), and Africa (100%) are particularly apt to report having "many practitioners in close proximity" to them. Only about one-in-three respondents in Europe (35%)

**Respondents' Socio-Political Circumstances**

| | |
|---|---|
| Many in close proximity | 48% |
| Many spread out over wide area | 16% |
| Few in close proximity | 16% |
| Few spread out over wide area | 6% |
| Gathered around language | 5% |

\* Remainder Other

Based on number of respondents who answered question (n=102)

and Latin America and the Caribbean (33%) say there are many others working in the IA/UX fields close by, while just one-in-five respondents from Australia and the Pacific Rim (20%) indicate they live near many other IA/UX practitioners.

*Organized Activities*

**Respondents' Practice Situations**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ongoing local group | 37% |
| Expanding activities | 17% |
| Connecting w/ other networks | 5% |
| Unconnected | 10% |
| Looking for a network | 16% |
| Declining activities | 9% |

\* Remainder Other

Based on number of respondents who answered question (n=103)

Most respondents indicate that there currently are at least some organized activities in their area for IA/UX practitioners. In fact, nearly two-in-five (37%) describe themselves as part of an ongoing local group in which "activities have been taking place for some length of time." Another one-in-six (17%) are interested in establishing their existing group more firmly or in expanding its scope, while 5% would like their group to reach out to other networks.

Still, a substantial minority feels that IA/UX professionals in their area tend to be disconnected from one other. This includes one-in-six (16%) who are actively looking for a network or currently are working at launching local activities, as well as one-in-ten (10%) who say that people working in IA/UX in their community tend to be "unconnected" or unaware of the larger discipline. Additionally, one-in-nine respondents (9%) say that while there once had been interest and participation in activities in their area, this has significantly dissipated over time.

- Not surprisingly, respondents who live in close proximity to many other practitioners are generally more apt to say their community has an ongoing IA/UX group, or a group that is looking to expand activities or connect with other networks. Over half of all respondents who live near many other practitioners say this is the case (54%).

- Overall, respondents in Australia and the Pacific Rim (67%), Canada (60%), and United States (54%) – particularly the West (80%) and the South (67%), where interestingly, there are relatively few practitioners nearby – report having the most connected IA/UX communities.

# Community-Building Activities

*Meetings*
Respondents report at least some organized activity among IA/UX practitioners in most communities, and in many areas, meetings are held at least once a month. One-in-four respondents (25%) say between one and five IA/UX meetings are held in their area each year. One-in-seven (14%) indicate there are six to ten meetings annually, while another one-in-four say between 11 and 15 meetings are held each year (24%). One-in-four (27%) say practitioners meet more often than 15 times a year. Still, one-in-ten (10%) respondents indicate that practitioners in their area do not meet at all.

**Average Number of Meetings Per Year**

| | |
|---|---|
| Total | 12 |
| Canada | 19 |
| United States | 15 |
| Australia/ Pacific Rim | 15 |
| Europe | 8 |
| Asia | 6 |
| Latin America/ Caribbean | 3 |

Overall, on average, respondents say IA/UX practitioners in their area meet about once a month, or 12 times a year.
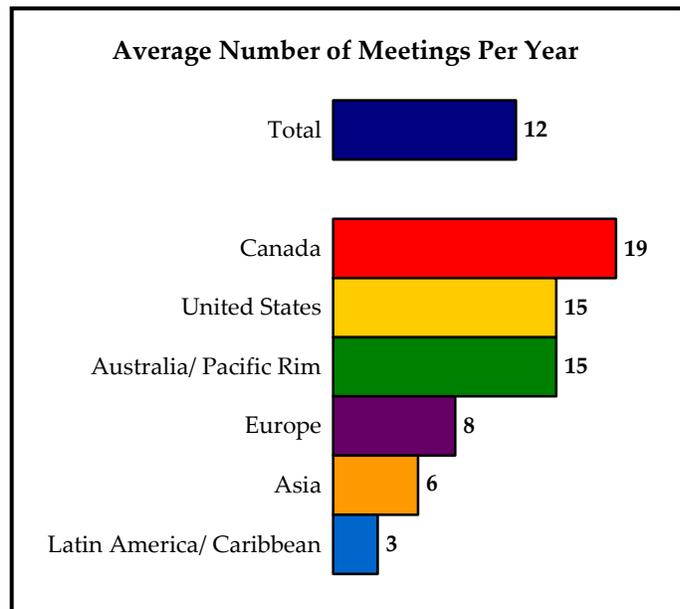
- Respondents in Canada (average 19 times per year), United States (15), and Australia and the Pacific Rim (15) tend to meet the most frequently; on average, they meet more often than once a month. Those living elsewhere generally meet with fellow local practitioners less frequently; respondents in Europe (8), Asia (6), and Latin America and the Caribbean (3) meet less often than once a month on average. Respondents in Africa only meet about once a year (1).

- Within the United States, respondents in the West (average 18 times per year), Northeast (17), and Midwest (13) have an average of more than 12 meetings per year. Respondents in the South, however, tend to meet less frequently (10).

- As might be expected, those who report that there are many practitioners within close proximity to themselves tend to meet more often than respondents as a whole. These respondents meet about 17 times a year on average.

Local meetings among IA/UX practitioners vary in size, but they tend to be fairly large. When asked the size of a typical meeting, respondents' answers run the gamut: from as few as just five people in attendance to as high as 200. The average meeting is attended by 29 people.

Interestingly, the average size of attendance is generally no different among local groups that meet on a frequent basis than it is among those that meet less often. Both groups that meet fewer than six times a year and those that hold more than 20 meetings annually average approximately 30 attendees at a typical meeting.

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*Technology Tools*
Respondents generally find online business networking tools and their IA/UX group's local website to be the most helpful in their community building efforts. Over half (55%) of those who responded to a question about technology tools indicate that Xing, Ning, Linkedin, Meetup, or a similar "business" networking tool have been useful in their efforts to strengthen the local IA/UX community. Likewise, 52% say their local group website has been helpful for these purposes.

About one-in-six (18%) say Basecamp or a similar project management tool has been helpful to them, and fewer than one-in-ten (8%) describe Skype and similar telecommunications tools as useful in local community building activities.

A number of respondents specifically volunteer that email or mailing lists (13%), Yahoo or Google groups (11%), and Facebook (8%) have been helpful in their efforts to strengthen the local IA/UX community.

# Local and Regional IA/UX Needs

*Perceived Benefits of Membership in Local Groups*
Respondents believe that the two greatest factors influencing participation in local groups are the opportunities to socialize and network. Virtually all respondents who answered a question on this topic believe that local IA/UX practitioners are looking for a chance to "discuss and learn with others" in their field; fully 92% hold this view. Additionally, about nine-in-ten respondents also think practitioners turn to local groups for networking purposes (85%).

Other oft-cited perceived reasons for joining a local group include the opportunity to participate in projects or events (52%), self-service resources and job information (50%), the chance to gain prominence in the community and grow as a leader (49%), and the opportunity to reach out to new communities, disciplines or markets (36%). Only one-in-eight (12%) feel that practitioners are looking for "web infrastructure so [they] can build tools/content for [their] local group."

*Interaction with IAI*
Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the "most important,"[‡] survey respondents were asked to assess the usefulness of 10 different types of support currently being provided by IAI. Overall, respondents believe the organization has been most useful in its awarding of grants for organizing conferences or events. They give this an average rating of 4.12, with the maximum possible score being 5. In fact, about half of all respondents (48%) believe this deserves the top rating of 5.

Other types of support that respondents rank in the top tier include promotion of the group via IAI channels (average rating of 3.93), access to the job board (3.87), the ability to locate other IAs in a geographic region (3.77), and access to mentors (3.76).

Respondents clearly value the remaining five types of IAI support tested as well, as no type of support

| Types of Support | Average Rating | Percentage Rating "5"[†] |
|---|---|---|
| Grants for organizing conferences or events | 4.12 | 48% |
| Promotion of your group via IAI channels | 3.93 | 37 |
| Access to job board | 3.87 | 34 |
| The ability to locate other IAs in a geographic region | 3.77 | 30 |
| Access to mentors | 3.76 | 29 |
| A section for your local group on the iainstitute.org website | 3.59 | 29 |
| Grants for other purposes | 3.57 | 26 |
| Access to collaboration tools | 3.40 | 25 |
| Tips and guidance on starting and managing local groups | 3.37 | 21 |
| Opportunities to manage, participate, or collaborate in global-facing IAI projects | 3.35 | 20 |

| Possible IAI Services | Average Rating | Percentage Rating "5"+ |
|---|---|---|
| Relationships with local/ regional organizations | 3.98 | 37% |
| Support to leaders (launching local groups, managing groups, planning events) | 3.85 | 33 |
| Event management support (registration, financial management) | 3.77 | 36 |
| Regional/language-focused resources (library, tools, regional salary surveys) | 3.54 | 24 |
| Formal status as an IAI Chapter | 3.41 | 24 |
| Membership management support (dues collection, membership database) | 3.39 | 24 |
| Awards and other recognition to members and local leaders/Robust social networking tools with dedicated areas for your group | 3.33 | 15 |
| Formal representation of group leadership in IAI decision-making bodies | 3.31 | 17 |

receives an average rating below 3.3. These lower ranking types of support include a local group section on the IAI website (3.59), grants for purposes other than events (3.57), access to collaboration tools (3.40), tips and guidance on starting and managing local groups (3.37), and opportunities to manage, participate, or collaborate in global-facing IAI projects (3.35).

Using the same scale, respondents also were asked to rate eight potential IAI resources that they think would be most beneficial to them over the coming years. The possible types of help ranged from formal status as an IAI chapter to event management support to regional or language-focused resources.

Overall, respondents do not perceive any one potential resource as substantially outweighing the others, as less than three-fifths of a point separates the number-one resource from the eighth-ranked resource on the list. Respondents clearly believe all of the resources that the IAI might offer in the future would be at least somewhat helpful to them.

However, three resources do receive slightly higher ratings than the others on the list. The first is relationships with local and regional organizations such as universities, industries or other UX associations; respondents give this an average score of 3.98 out of a possible 5.

The second top-rated potential resource is support to leaders when they launch local groups, manage groups or plan events. This receives an average rating of 3.85.

The resource with the third highest rating is event management support such as registration and financial management. On average, this resource receives a score of 3.77.

The other resources on the list include regional or language-focused resources (average rating of 3.54), formal status as an IAI chapter (3.41), membership management support such as dues collection and a database (3.39), awards and other recognition and robust social networking tools (3.33), and formal representation of group leadership in IAI decision-making bodies (3.31).

## Profile of Local Leaders Interested in Playing a Greater Role in IAI

About half (49%) of the respondents who completed the survey indicate they would "be interested in taking a role in developing the IAI's Local Groups/Chapters program."

Respondents who are interested in playing a role in the new program are noticeably more apt than the survey population as a whole to believe practitioners in their area feel disconnected from the professional community; three-in-five (60%) perceive the local IA/UX groups as either unconnected, declining or not yet fully established. In contrast, only 40% of respondents who are *not* interested in becoming more involved feel this way about their local community of practitioners.

Similarly, respondents who are interested in having a greater role generally report having fewer IA/UX meetings in their locale than respondents overall. Whereas the average respondent says there are 12 meetings a year, respondents who are interested in becoming involved with the new program report only meeting 10 times annually. The meetings that are held in their community, however, generally draw the same size audience (average of 28 people) as those for the entire survey population. Likewise, respondents who would like to be involved in the IAI Local Groups/Chapters program are generally just as apt to live in close proximity to many other IA/UX practitioners as respondents overall.

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\* The survey was designed and administered by Stacy Surla, Secretary of the IAI. Survey results were analyzed and the report written by Georgi Vogel Rosen, independent survey research consultant.

† Based on the number of people who answered the question (n=93)

‡ The survey instrument itself labeled 1 as the "most important." This has been reversed and recoded for the purpose of analysis.