PILLARS

LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

2026-2027 REVIEW

AIA Kansas City

2026 PILLARS CLASS

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ABOUT PILLARS

The Pillars Leadership Training Program of the American Institute of Architects Kansas City prepares a representative cross section of the chapter's emerging leaders and individuals from the building community for their role in shaping the future of both the architectural profession and the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The training program includes active participation in programs and exposure to community leaders and issues. Each class spends their time exploring core issues that affect our profession and the region within which we practice. Through discussions with leaders and colleagues, dialogue among themselves, tours and research the group will be able to understand and present to the AIA as a whole how we can make a positive change within our community. The AIA Kansas City Pillars program is a nationally recognized program for its originality and depth and has inspired similar AIA leadership studies in other US cities. The program continues to raise the bar of what young professionals want out of their profession and how we as professionals can make an impact on our built environment.



The Pillars with the snag that took down the Arabia Steamboat, with Joshua Norwood who provided the introduction and gave the tour



The Pillars at Rock Island Bridge listening to Dan Zeller, Brad Toellner, and Mike Zeller (left to right), describe how the project came to life

OCTOBER: TRANSIT

The cohort kicked off with an October session exploring the role transportation has played in shaping Kansas City's growth and development. From early commerce along the Missouri River to the expansion and eventual contraction of the region's railroad network, the session examined how transportation infrastructure has influenced the city over time and continues to shape its future.

Looking to the past, the day began at the Arabia Steamboat Museum with a presentation and discussion led by David Hawley, who discovered the Arabia and established the museum. Following the presentation, Joshua Norwood guided the group through the museum, providing additional insight into the history of river transportation and its role in establishing Kansas City as a center for commerce and trade.

From there, the Pillars traveled to the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) at their new downtown offices in the Garment District. The group met with Martin Rivarola, AICP, and Lukas Yanni to discuss regional transportation planning, including the Connected KC 2050 plan, updates to SmartMoves KC, and upcoming initiatives. The conversation also explored how public transit is funded in Kansas City and the opportunities and challenges associated with planning for future growth. The discussion provided a look at how regional collaboration and long-term planning influence the way people move throughout the metropolitan area.

The final stop brought the group back to the river for a rainy afternoon at Rock Island Bridge. Owner Mike Zeller shared the history of the project and the effort required to bring a new vision for the historic bridge to life. Dan Zeller of Multistudio and Brad Toellner of Thornton Tomasetti joined the discussion, offering insight into the unique design and construction challenges of transforming an existing railroad bridge into a public gathering space and restaurant. The conversation highlighted the creativity and collaboration required to give historic infrastructure a new purpose.

Following the discussion, the Pillars remained on the bridge for a happy hour overlooking the river, providing a fitting bookend to the day.



The Pillars at MARC learning about the Connected KC 2050 plan and how the city plans for future growth, provided by Martin Rivarola