

## **BWA&D: Lifting As We Design: How To Start a Successful Firm**

Black Women in Architecture & Design

Lifting As W Design: How to Start a Successful Design Practice

Saturday, July 18, 2020, Black Women in Architecture & Design hosted a panel discussion with Black women architecture firm owners. The discussion was the impetus of a desire by Black women to get advice on starting an architecture firm. The lively discussion was attended by nearly 60 attendees of diverse backgrounds. The panel answered scheduled questions and also took audience questions.

: <http://bwa-network.com/2020/08/05/bwad-lawd-startafirm/>

### **CHAT TRANSCRIPT**

12:53:52 From Kathy Dixon : Hello everyone.

12:54:27 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Hello!

12:56:07 From vicky : Hi this is Vicky from Orlando, Florida! Thank you for hosting!

12:56:53 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Hello Vicky, thank you for joining!

12:57:03 From vicky : I'm a senior associate at Baker Barrios, but interested in potentially breaking out on my own.

12:58:07 From Kisha Patterson : Kisha in Pittsburgh Pa, good afternoon everyone!

12:59:06 From Joyce Selina Love : Joyce Selina in Memphis, TN. Hello All!

13:02:31 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Hello Everyone - thank you for joining!

13:03:32 From Ingrid Green : Hey everyone! Ingrid Green here in Detroit. I studied architecture @ Howard U and UWaterloo. Nice to be here.

13:05:37 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Sorry this isn't loading

13:06:49 From Ingrid Green : H. U. !!!!

13:06:50 From Mimi Okunlola : looking forward to the conversation!! thanks for organizing this

13:08:29 From BreSheena K : Afternoon ladies! BreSheena Kinney from Orlando Florida. Studied architecture at the University of Michigan. Thank you for organizing this conversation!

13:09:29 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Please share your questions here for the Q&A towards the end of this session.

13:10:10 From Ingrid Green : Q1a: Have any of you heard of or participated in #sharethemicnow?

13:10:59 From Ingrid Green : Q1b: If you were to do a #sharethemicnow with a White woman architect, who would you want?

13:11:09 From Mashawnta Armstrong : You guys are not having any issues hearing correct?

13:11:19 From Ingrid Green : Correct.

13:11:21 From Breta Bishop : No problem

13:12:53 From vicky : How did you all go about getting your first clients?

13:13:45 From Ingrid Green : FORESIGHT

13:14:20 From Ingrid Green : Business partnership EXIT STRATEGIES.

13:14:20 From S. Black : What do you recommend as the 1st steps to starting your own firm A. Getting clients or B. Legalizing the firm?

13:16:06 From Ingrid Green : Didn't see a need...

13:16:29 From Daimian Hines : hi everyone, I guess I will represent the men lol. I am looking forward to hearing this knowledge

13:17:41 From Ingrid Green : Welcome @Daimian.

13:17:50 From R. Denise Everson : a license gives credibility, right?

13:18:12 From Webster Allen : nice to meet everyone my name is Webster Allen I recently graduated JMU and I really like the knowledge being shared

13:18:40 From Ingrid Green : James Madison U, is that right @Webster?

13:18:58 From Webster Allen : yes :)

13:19:00 From R. Denise Everson : I wondered the same thing!

13:19:28 From vicky : I can totally relate!!!

13:19:36 From Ingrid Green : I know someone who played varsity soccer @ JMU and became a nat'l soccer player. Welcome @Webster.

13:19:55 From Ingrid Green : Changing technology

13:20:01 From Ingrid Green : Sustainability

13:20:14 From Ingrid Green : Insert self = confidence?

13:21:20 From R. Denise Everson : black colleges do a great job teaching networking skills. it does not have to be awkward

13:21:20 From Mimi Okunlola : how do you build your clientele? or how do you get new clients

13:21:41 From Ingrid Green : Genuine connections are rarely awkward.

13:21:55 From Tom Lenar - Clark Construction Group : As a design-builder, it's important to Clark Construction to grow the pool of architects and designers who we can partner with. Most of these projects are very large or complex projects which present challenges to working with new and small design firms. We're exploring some ways to get past this and want to ensure that our efforts address the needs of minority businesses. As we're working on this issue, what do we need to consider to create equity?

13:22:32 From Ingrid Green : @Tom don't say you're funny. Make me laugh.

13:22:36 From Kyrah W. : Hi everyone! ☺☺ Quick question: were you all licensed before you took that leap to start your firms? If so, how did you navigate licensure and balancing/creating a firm?

13:23:03 From Ingrid Green : @Tom I know that question wasn't for me but...

13:23:26 From Ingrid Green : Business partner quality — good sounding board.

13:24:10 From Ingrid Green : Business partner quality — pep talks when bidding against former firms

13:24:39 From Ingrid Green : business oartner

13:24:45 From Chandra Moore : It is very important! I will talk about that journey on License next while working at a large firm.

13:24:52 From R. Denise Everson : my firm has a social purpose...it was important to my partner and me that we do good and live well!

13:25:08 From Ingrid Green : Business partner quality — complimentary skills (yin & yang)

13:25:46 From Ingrid Green : liability fears

13:25:57 From Ingrid Green : Stable income fear  
13:26:45 From Jen Marrero : Nice  
13:26:47 From Ingrid Green : Income from TEACHING  
13:27:14 From R. Denise Everson : Kathy Dixon really helped me be ok with starting a firm...I saw her do it...I felt I could  
13:28:04 From R. Denise Everson : word of mouth has been really helpful for us. one good project leads to several others  
13:29:13 From Ingrid Green : Personal inheritance = runway to begin a firm  
13:29:49 From Ingrid Green : Meeting other firm owner for entrepreneurship advice  
13:29:53 From R. Denise Everson : board service is critical...it definitely worked for me  
13:30:19 From Ingrid Green : \$3,000 from Mom #Chandra  
13:30:35 From Ingrid Green : Seriously folks, y'all just gotta GERONIMO.  
13:31:34 From Ingrid Green : Great clients from working with large firms FOLLOW you. Keep / foster those relationships.  
13:31:46 From Felicia : This is so inspiring!!!  
13:32:26 From Ingrid Green : LEFT A SIX-FIGURE JOB #Chandra  
13:33:49 From Ingrid Green : We blasted social media when we started our firm #Saundra  
13:34:02 From Mashawnta Armstrong : I would like to give a HUGE shout out to JUNE GRANT who joined us who is ALSO an amazing architect who practices in San Francisco.  
13:34:11 From Ingrid Green : a.k.a. DON'T BE SHY  
13:34:59 From Ingrid Green : Team up with old firm (humility)  
13:35:24 From Webster Allen : Thats amazing Ingrid and I like these statements :)  
13:35:34 From Ingrid Green : BIG UP TO WOMEN OWNED businesses BASED IN DETROIT  
13:35:47 From Ingrid Green : Drones 4 Girls  
13:36:21 From Ingrid Green : Thanks @Webster  
13:36:24 From Breta Bishop : sound issues  
13:37:26 From Ingrid Green : Nice!!! #KathyD  
13:39:53 From Ingrid Green : My partner IS MY FRIEND.  
13:40:14 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Thank you for the chat notes Ingrid - you're awesome  
13:40:21 From Ingrid Green : I've known my business partner since college. We worked well in studio. #Saundra  
13:40:35 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Please send us your specific questions about starting your own firm.  
13:40:38 From R. Denise Everson : I am friends with my partner as well!! it works  
13:41:40 From Karen Burton : Great partnership b/w Saundra and Damon. Made for outstanding office culture.  
13:42:01 From Ingrid Green : My business partner is a FORMER MENTOR #Nakita

13:42:54 From Ingrid Green : We didn't have a clear EXIT STRATEGY #Nakita  
13:43:35 From Ingrid Green : I needed to speak up. The power dynamic was shifting. #Nakita  
13:44:47 From Ingrid Green : I realized that I couldn't do a lot of it by myself. #Chandra  
13:45:34 From Ingrid Green : I build on mentors. They helped me get to where I am today. #Chandra  
13:45:43 From Ingrid Green : Dr. Craig Wilkins  
13:46:10 From Ingrid Green : There are so many things you don't know. #Chandra  
13:46:30 From Ingrid Green : merged  
13:47:15 From Ingrid Green : Talk about the EXIT STRATEGY when things are good. #Nakita  
13:47:56 From Ingrid Green : Stalked her a little bit..  
13:48:03 From Ingrid Green : NOMA connections help.  
13:48:17 From Ingrid Green : Make decisions that MAKE BUSINESS SENSE  
13:48:36 From Ingrid Green : Act like a business OWNER  
13:48:54 From Ingrid Green : shareholder + associate  
13:49:10 From Ingrid Green : Understand the value of negotiation  
13:49:57 From Ingrid Green : Goldman Sachs 10,000 small businesses #Saundra  
13:50:01 From Mashawnta Armstrong : 10,000 SMALL BUSINESSES  
[https://10ksbapply.com/regional-small-businesses-opportunities?fbclid=IwAR2eCmTtzG8j0uP\\_QgG1DYUiV6pZdJjrQecpjmduy2sgt\\_hehp5r6uOG2JM](https://10ksbapply.com/regional-small-businesses-opportunities?fbclid=IwAR2eCmTtzG8j0uP_QgG1DYUiV6pZdJjrQecpjmduy2sgt_hehp5r6uOG2JM)

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[https://interise.org/sbaemergingleaders/?fbclid=IwAR3QOSZJawGHk-q3\\_G8LEwiw9W\\_so-Wp6Y0pFOOkMhTf5qZXvpNBsQbOp-Q](https://interise.org/sbaemergingleaders/?fbclid=IwAR3QOSZJawGHk-q3_G8LEwiw9W_so-Wp6Y0pFOOkMhTf5qZXvpNBsQbOp-Q)

13:50:17 From Ingrid Green : What is your EXIT STRATEGY???

13:50:39 From Ingrid Green : I have NO IDEA! (humility)

13:51:06 From Ingrid Green : Self awareness is so critical. Don't fool yo'self

13:51:33 From Ingrid Green : Succession planning is CRITICAL

13:52:41 From Ingrid Green : Nobody gives the REAL REAL like Black people.

13:53:09 From Ingrid Green : Y'all are the REAL MVP's. Please do more Office Hours. PLEASE.

13:53:19 From Atianna Cordova : Loving this discussion! I have a practice in New Orleans called WATER BLOCK-- would love to hear yall's experience with project negotiating/any tips!

13:53:41 From Jen Marrero : I Like That 🙌

13:53:51 From Ingrid Green : Don't ignore the emotional list

13:54:20 From Ingrid Green : Yaaaay!

13:54:32 From Jen Marrero : Yesss!

13:54:38 From Ingrid Green : Congrats @Saundra

13:54:39 From Jen Marrero : Congrats!

13:54:53 From Karen Burton : Emotional for the Detroit Black architect community as well, but we tried to see big picture and opportunities

13:57:04 From Ingrid Green : We often don't get the business education in architecture school... #kathy SAY IT AGAIN FOR THE COUSINS IN DA BACK!

13:57:25 From Ingrid Green : Yaaaasssss #KathyD

13:57:39 From Karen Burton : Yesss, Kathy!

13:57:51 From Ingrid Green : Use prime projects to get more projects

13:58:15 From Jen Marrero : Great Question

13:58:30 From Ingrid Green : Get a loan. SBA is a source for acquisition.

13:58:49 From Ingrid Green : GET A GOOD LAWYER. #Kathy

13:58:52 From Karen Burton : That's a whole other workshop: how to acquire a firm

13:59:29 From Ingrid Green : Agreed #KarenBurton

13:59:30 From Jen Marrero : I can only imagine Karen but we definitely need to hear it

13:59:52 From Ingrid Green : You gotta be in it for the long haul #Kathy

14:00:13 From Ingrid Green : There are brokers for other architecture firms #nakita

14:00:48 From Ingrid Green : We went thru a 6-8 month process #acquisition

14:01:29 From Ingrid Green : There are a lot of resources coming up for acquiring a minority-run firm. #Saundra

14:02:02 From Ingrid Green : Saundra IS DA QUEEN.

14:02:20 From Karen Burton : she sure is!

14:02:49 From Ingrid Green : I KNOW you KNOW, @KarenBurton

14:03:28 From Jeffrey : any thoughts on an architecture practice as a non-profit?

14:03:55 From Kisha Patterson : (or b-corp?)

14:04:01 From Ingrid Green : "How are you gonna sell something I (God) gave you?"

14:04:09 From Karen Burton : Chandra has always had a multi-city vision and reach! Always things big.

14:04:54 From Ingrid Green : You just don't know how it's gonna end. Go with that flow. Just start. #Chandra

14:05:08 From Ingrid Green : You're welcome

14:05:26 From Ingrid Green : These queens are dropping gems

14:05:32 From Ingrid Green : HAD TO CAPTURE THEM

14:05:45 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Ingrid is grabbing all of the GEMs that are being dropped. Thank you!

14:06:13 From Yazmine Parker : Is this still the pre-presentation questions?

14:06:33 From Ingrid Green : You have to have your license to seek work, as well as a business license in your city #Kathy

14:06:52 From Mashawnta Armstrong : @Yazmine, we are into audience questions now - please send them our way and we'll add to the list.

14:07:29 From Ingrid Green : Having license is a point of credibility

14:07:38 From Ingrid Green : Get dat STREET CRED y'all

14:07:59 From Ingrid Green : Get all your city certifications lined up.

14:08:14 From Ingrid Green : MEET AT THE LIBRARY if you don't have an office.

14:08:30 From Ingrid Green : Be ready when opportunity comes along

14:08:42 From Tynesia Hand : Lots of great nuggets of information! Thank you!

14:08:56 From Joyce Selina Love : Kathy said, "She would have done something different with the lawyer when acquiring the new firm." In hindsight what would that have been?

14:09:15 From Ingrid Green : Someone is gonna call you on it. Make sure you have all the certifications in place.

14:09:24 From Ingrid Green : SOMEONE IS GONNA CALL U ON IT.

14:09:34 From Ian.Vaughan : Can you all provide the list of certifications ?

14:09:50 From Ingrid Green : Is this an idea or a hobby?

14:09:57 From Ingrid Green : Big up to MOMS!!!

14:10:05 From Ingrid Green : Seriously, edlers

14:10:17 From Ingrid Green : Seriously, ELDERS have knowledge

14:10:33 From Ingrid Green : I was scared everyday. #Chandra

14:11:10 From Ingrid Green : God will send people...

14:11:22 From Ingrid Green : Do it scared.

14:11:25 From Jeffrey : #DoingItScared

14:11:26 From Marcell Snodgrass : Would you recommend getting professional liability and other insurance protection as you start your firm?

14:11:45 From Ingrid Green : Think of it like driving from DC to New York #Nakita

14:12:24 From Chandra Moore : @Marcell - YES you must have all of those insurances and protection to even work or cash a check from Contractors, etc.

14:12:34 From Kristin Roy : Were any of you all thinking about entrepreneurship, right after graduating? What we're the very preliminary steps to preparing to have your own practice? Ex. LLCs & PLLCs?

14:12:42 From Kristin Roy : were\*

14:13:06 From Ingrid Green : Starting a architecture business IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

14:13:17 From Marcell Snodgrass : @Chandra - Thanks!

14:14:27 From Ingrid Green : This ☺☺ has ☺☺ been ☺☺ amazing ☺☺

14:14:55 From Kristin Roy : Also, may you touch on the dynamics of earning personal contracts while simultaneously working at a firm?

14:15:03 From Jeffrey : Thanks @Sandra for answering the question on non-profit practice

14:15:18 From Ingrid Green : We were an an S corp but I'd recommend starting with an LLC. #Nakita

14:15:54 From Ingrid Green : DO you have professional liability insurance? #Saundra

14:16:27 From Gabriela Rodriguez : how to make sure is a good investment to buy into an already established partnership?

14:16:29 From Mashawnta Armstrong : EDUCATION: from a NAAB accredited school or foreign equivalent. <https://www.ncarb.org/become-architect/study-architecture/accredited-programs>

EXPERIENCE: Administered by NCARB - <https://www.ncarb.org>

LICENSE: Pass the ARE - Architecture Registration Exams - Administered by NCARB  
- <https://www.ncarb.org>

Your State / City Issue these Certifications:

Minority Owned Business - at least 50% of owner should be a minority

Woman Owned Business - at least 50% of owner should be a woman

Professional Liability Insurance

14:17:10 From Ingrid Green : Have good credit!!!

14:17:15 From Ingrid Green : Get the EIN #

14:17:42 From Ingrid Green : Have a bank acct. Put in the minimal amt.

14:17:44 From mAy Design : I have my own firm . I have been working under my supervisor since 2017. I want to improve my personal experience on large commercial projects too. what's the best way I can catch this opportunity? thank u

14:18:02 From Ingrid Green : FELICIA !!

14:18:19 From Karen Burton : Will the replay be available? I'd love to share.

Real business education here.

14:18:47 From Saundra Little : Goldman Sachs Project

<https://10ksbapply.com/regional-small-businesses-opportunities>

14:19:03 From R. Denise Everson : my bank helped me with the EIN on the same day I opened the business account

14:20:02 From Ingrid Green : I was in three virtual conferences this week and this is the ONLY CALL I plan to re-watch. Absolutely amazing info. The grit is REAL. Queens. Y'all have assembled QUEENS.

14:20:32 From Ingrid Green : Clients underestimate what architectural services cost. #Nakita

14:21:02 From Ingrid Green : If you change the cost, CHANGE THE SCOPE.

14:21:04 From Mashawnta Armstrong : RESOURCES:

14:21:06 From Mashawnta Armstrong : RESOURCES TO DROP IN THE CHAT:

SMART SHEET FOR ARCHITECTS

[https://www.smartsheet4architects.com/resources?fbclid=IwAR2Ny9cl-Q5dVy9aPGCDJR\\_jKYuAjstsX77NhJANknB-Pe0hHZl3ie3-zG8](https://www.smartsheet4architects.com/resources?fbclid=IwAR2Ny9cl-Q5dVy9aPGCDJR_jKYuAjstsX77NhJANknB-Pe0hHZl3ie3-zG8)

ENTRE ARCHITECT

[https://entearchitect.com/2017/01/24/business-books-for-entrepreneur-architects/?fbclid=IwAR01B2I2y4Pb7Ao\\_sr6PApcnh-Jn3NXliwFSObYNQxEBkjUmGPdvnUPxqcM](https://entearchitect.com/2017/01/24/business-books-for-entrepreneur-architects/?fbclid=IwAR01B2I2y4Pb7Ao_sr6PApcnh-Jn3NXliwFSObYNQxEBkjUmGPdvnUPxqcM)

10,000 SMALL BUSINESSES

[https://10ksbapply.com/regional-small-businesses-opportunities?fbclid=IwAR2eCmTtzG8j0uP\\_QgG1DYUiV6pZdJjrqEcpjmd-y2sgt\\_hehp5r6uOG2JM](https://10ksbapply.com/regional-small-businesses-opportunities?fbclid=IwAR2eCmTtzG8j0uP_QgG1DYUiV6pZdJjrqEcpjmd-y2sgt_hehp5r6uOG2JM)

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[https://interise.org/sbaemergingleaders/?fbclid=IwAR3QOSZJawGHk-q3\\_G8LEwiw9W\\_so-Wp6Y0pFOOkMhTf5qZXvpNBsQbOp-Q](https://interise.org/sbaemergingleaders/?fbclid=IwAR3QOSZJawGHk-q3_G8LEwiw9W_so-Wp6Y0pFOOkMhTf5qZXvpNBsQbOp-Q)

14:21:14 From Saundra Little : Book Recommendation - Mori Taheripour  
"Bring Yourself"

14:21:23 From mAy Design : thank you for great tips for negotiations.

14:21:25 From R. Denise Everson : a mentor of mine taught me .."never be the  
cheapest, always be the best"

14:21:45 From Jen Marrero : definitely change the scope

14:21:52 From Jeffrey : everyone: you can copy and past the group chat text  
prior to leaving the meeting, FYI

14:22:12 From Kath3rin3 W : click the three little dots to save the chat

14:22:21 From Karen Burton : Mori T. is an amazing negotiations  
teacher/coach.

14:22:50 From Ingrid Green : I'm learning how to say NO. Money is GONNA  
COME.

14:23:03 From Ingrid Green : Are you enjoying what you're doing?

14:23:28 From Ingrid Green : The clients will come. You have to be willing to  
start & keep going. #Chandra

14:24:51 From Ingrid Green : Learn how to let other people talk. When the  
room gets silent— just wait. #Saundra

14:25:14 From Ingrid Green : Get in front of a mirror and say "My fee is  
\$9Million." #Saundra

14:25:31 From Ingrid Green : Everybody has to come!! #Saundra

14:25:58 From Ingrid Green : The worries of payroll are REAL. #Saundra

14:28:02 From Ingrid Green : I love everyone who took time to be in here.  
Please feel free to connect with me thru LinkedIn.  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ingridgreen/>

14:28:38 From Mashawnta Armstrong : Kathy Dixon published this book - you  
can find it on Amazon.

14:28:46 From Mashawnta Armstrong : [https://www.amazon.com/Business-  
Architecture-Kathy-Denise-Dixon/dp/1138190349](https://www.amazon.com/Business-Architecture-Kathy-Denise-Dixon/dp/1138190349)

14:29:07 From Kathy Dixon : Thanks Mashawnta.

14:29:19 From Mashawnta Armstrong : The Business of Architecture

14:29:29 From Ian.Vaughan : its a great book!

14:29:39 From Ingrid Green : ☹☹

14:30:23 From Jen Marrero : While partnering with larger firms to get  
established how do you keep your own identity within that project and stand out?

14:30:27 From Saundra Little : Yes Get Kathy Dixon Book!

14:30:30 From mAy Design : I saw the book yesterday. absolutely I need one.

14:30:32 From Ingrid Green : Go off of established relationships #Nakita

14:30:39 From Kisha Patterson : I know this is a discussion on making a  
profitable firm ... But do you still get to do the "fun" or design part of architecture?

14:31:10 From Chandra Moore : @Kisha - YES! For sure!!

14:31:25 From Jen Marrero : I'm on the app I can't save

14:32:06 From Kath3rin3 W : Jen. we plan to save and post.

14:32:32 From Jen Marrero : Thank you☺

14:33:47 From Ingrid Green : How are you gonna be different? #Chandra



14:34:41 From Tiana Taylor-Huntsman Architectural Group : Thank to all the Speakers and the Moderator! This was very encouraging!!! You are all such Beautiful Women. I'm glad that I was able to attend! I need to get that License! Thank you again!

14:34:51 From Ingrid Green : Show yourself as an expert. #Saundra

14:34:58 From Jen Marrero : I Love That☑

14:35:05 From Ingrid Green : Thank you to all the speakers.

14:35:12 From Kath3rin3 W : Yes Tiana. License! Get that!

14:35:44 From Kathy Dixon : Thank you all for joining on a Sat afternoon!

14:35:47 From Jen Marrero : Yes Thank you to all of the speakers and participants this was a very valuable conversation

14:36:09 From Ingrid Green : Study for A.R.E. first.

14:36:29 From Ingrid Green : There is a NOMA facebook group.

14:36:51 From Jen Marrero : Lol that was cute

14:36:52 From April McGee-Flournoy : Thank You Ladies for sharing, wisdom and encouragement!

14:37:03 From mAy Design : thank you so much

14:37:05 From Breta Bishop : Thank you so much!!

14:37:05 From Jolleen : Thank you all

14:37:16 From Ingrid Green : Thank you Mashawnta

14:37:19 From Gabriela Rodriguez : thank you so much

14:37:21 From Jeffrey : this was great, thank you so much

14:37:22 From Stephanie Paul : thank you!

14:37:22 From Jen Marrero : Good Afternoon