

Letter of Motivation: Praveen Nahar, NID Ahmedabad INDIA for Cumulus Executive Board 2022-25 Candidacy Application

Pressing Concerns for Design: A Contemporary Perspective

There are many emerging challenges in the twenty-first century that need to be addressed urgently. These include slowing down the ecological crisis, redefining the economy to make business sustainable and value-oriented, shaping future cities and better public service, negotiating the binaries of global and local, managing the ethical impact of technology on society, and creating a resilient equitable society.

Design has an important role to play in visualizing alternative future narratives that provoke, question, and seek collective action to realign socio-technical systems. Over time, designers have adapted to transitional practices to explore expanded notions of design and its fields of practice, giving designers newer opportunities and multiple roles to play. These have been aligned with various disciplines; design is not an isolated discipline. It works along with diverse domains of psychology, sociology, engineering sciences, computing technologies, material and manufacturing, digital and print media, and of course the arts. It is also a discipline that is constantly evolving its learning methodologies and applications from its surrounding disciplines. In these conditions, a network of diverse people from the arts and media form formidable teams to tackle issues most plaguing the world.

This shift in design to adapt and thereby remain relevant to the changing world from a discipline-centric mindset to a challenge-centric mindset; through acquiring transdisciplinary skill sets, by embracing diversity, equity and inclusion through an arts, design, and media network with diversity of people, locations, skill sets, and disciplines will add richness that design can bring to the exchange.

My Association with NID

I have dedicated significant years of my professional life to the National Institute of Design. I started there as a young faculty and now I am at the helm of things being in a leadership role. In these several years, I have come to value many unique aspects about NID. The institute is internationally acclaimed as one of the foremost multi-disciplinary institutions in the field of design education and research in the Asian subcontinent. Based on the recommendations made in *The India Report* in 1958, the first National Institute of Design (<https://www.nid.edu/>) was established at Ahmedabad in the State of Gujarat in September 1961 as part of the then Central Government's post-Independence nation-building initiatives.

The institute has a global perspective which it applies in the local context. Working with a bottom-up approach of learning from the field and drawing in learnings from global interactions, with the motto of 'Design Enabled India', NID has expanded into diverse fields and its graduates have achieved distinctive heights in emerging sectors.

NID has a unique institutional structure where all activities happen in a creative, non-hierarchical, and friendly 'working-learning-doing' environment. NID's design pedagogy is not only at par with the contemporary design schools' methods of learning and thinking by doing, but it has also immersed itself in a unique hands-on-minds-on methodology. A non-prescriptive, non-linear, exploratory, reflective pedagogical model is characteristic of NID as a creative school.

The design projects have themes set by the faculty and these are contextual in nature, focusing on an outcome which is of value to both business and the end consumer/user, all the while remaining firmly rooted in the realities of the Indian ethos, while incorporating global technologies. These projects follow a well informed and adaptable design process not losing on the creative leaps essential for innovation with liberties given to students to immerse themselves in creativity and imagination unlike the restrictive and prescriptive methods of traditional academia.

The overall structure of NID's educational programme is a combination of theory, skills, design projects and field experiences supported by cutting edge design studios, skill and innovation labs and the Knowledge Management Centre. Industry-sponsored design projects are brought into the classroom to provide professional experience. Interdisciplinary Design Studies in Science and Liberal Arts widen the students' horizons and increase general awareness of contemporary issues. Design Research practice by faculty through live projects with the governmental, industrial, and social sectors is an integral part of the faculty members' design practice and teaching here.

My journey as the Faculty and Director at NID

Currently, I am the Director of National Institute of Design (NID) Ahmedabad, India. It is Asia's largest and foremost design school with its extension campuses in Gandhinagar and Bengaluru. I am also serving as a Member Secretary for the India Design Council. I have also been a faculty member in the Product Design discipline at NID since 2002.

With a background in Industrial Design, I have a vast range of academic and professional interests that include Systems Oriented Design, Design Thinking, Sustainable Design/Green Design, Design in the Public Domain, Social Design, Appropriate Technology, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and Strategic Design to name a few. I have been involved in various research projects and consultancy projects at both the micro and strategic levels in various domains of the industrial and social sectors. Some of the significant ones include Diagnostic Studies and Institutional Frameworks for Crafts in Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat & Madhya Pradesh. I worked on many projects with the Amul Dairy Cooperative ranging from designing packaging of value-added milk products and milk distribution service. I made significant contributions towards designing Mumbai Suburban Trains and Mumbai Monorails apart from working on several other important projects for the Indian Railways which led to the setting up of the Railway Design Centre (RDC) at NID. One of my research projects titled 'Design thinking for Prison Industries' with UAL, UK received many accolades including British Council-CII India-UK excellence award for Collaborations in Higher Education.

I have been actively involved with academic projects with students concerning Systems Thinking and Design which involves projects with complex issues and problems ranging from healthcare to mobility, which have been presented at the annual 'Relating Systems thinking to Design (RSD)' symposia and published by the Systemic Design Association for the past 11 years. I chaired the RSD9 Symposium hosting it as a virtual conference at NID during the pandemic year 2020; it had a prescient theme "*Systemic Design for Well-being: From human to humane*", it attracted 450 participants from more than 40 countries and explored the connections between the well-being of our bodies, surroundings, and the planet. The symposium showcased a collection of design outcomes and programmes informed by research, real applications, and practices to address problems in the unbounded complexity of social and ecological systems.

I have traveled widely and presented views in various forums and conferences as the keynote and plenary speaker, I have been in panels, conducted design workshops and seminars in the areas of Systems Oriented Design, Sustainability, and Design Thinking overseas and in India. I have been the key contributor, have served as the jury member of national and international competitions, the Taiwan International Student Design Competition, Japan SDG Awards and IF Awards to name a few. I have also been part of scientific committees of conferences, academic, and advisory boards of institutions.

My Prospective Contributions for CumulusCommunity

I am delighted to put forward my application for being a Cumulus Board Member. I feel that at this stage of my career, it gives me the correct platform to integrate my interests and 26 years of experience in teaching and broad research interests in Design and Design Education leadership at a global platform. It will also provide me the challenge to expand the networks of design organizations in the region, while gaining a mandate to make design visible to governance in the region, in the long run, this will help design influence policy. Specifically, I will bring to the cumulus board, abilities unique to my journey as a design professional and academician as I explain in the following context:

- With its large population and enormous socio-cultural-economic-environmental diversity, India is like a microcosm of the world. Most of the challenges that the world faces are all present in India. As a design educator, I have been mentoring students to address many of these issues at a tactical and creative level from local to global contexts. As a design leader, I am now encouraging designers and design educators in India to explore vision-led design approaches which address diversity and complexity, a learning and ability I bring from my long engagement with systems thinking and design practice which prepares students to deal with a fair amount of ambiguity and complexity.
- Perspective from the Global South which will bring diversity to the cumulus organization. I have worked at the grassroots level in domains as different as public transportation to crafts, and this has allowed me to travel and understand the length and breadth of a vast and diverse country such as India. These concerns while being unique to India are shared across the Indian-subcontinent and many regions of Southeast Asia, through this I will add to the diversity within the Cumulus Organization. With India's rich diversity, perspectives from this part of the globe will add richness and value to any and every design community.
- To bring more visibility of Cumulus to the Asian subcontinent and an increased participation of India and the Indian subcontinent in design forums as well as a rapid increase in the numbers of design schools in this region. The Cumulus Network will greatly benefit from having a member from this region.
- I have been instrumental in initiating and sustaining NID's international programmes with more than 100 global institutions across all six continents; this brings my unique networking abilities and perspectives to Cumulus.
- NID being a national institute under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Government of India, in addition to teaching one is expected to contribute to projects of national importance, design promotion and other outreach activities along with institutional and administrative activities. Over the years, I have accomplished various research projects and consultancy projects at both the micro and strategic level across industrial and social sectors; this experience will be handy to initiate new activities at the Cumulus Network.
- During my tenure as Director, I have been working with colleagues on institutional reforms with Vision 2025 at NID which will bring academic, faculty, administrative, and infrastructural reforms. This experience will help me foster collaboration and knowledge

exchange at the Cumulus Network. I would also like to promote and further design education, practice, and research in complex and less known territories among Cumulus institutions.

With my interdisciplinary academic background, industrial experience, experience with teaching and coordination of education; consultancy projects; interacting with industry, governmental and non-governmental agencies; administrative experience; and vast international networking, I feel that I am well-equipped to contribute effectively to the Cumulus Association. As a board member, I would like to continue working on these as well as related programmes, to build and foster the meaningful interaction between institutions and other stakeholders. At this juncture of my career this would also be a challenge that I would be excited to take forward and demonstrate the viewpoints from leading an Indian design school rooted in issues unique to these times both locally and globally.
