



# **Improving Younger Member Attendance at Section/Branch Meetings**

**February 2011**

# **Section 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **WHAT IS THE NO WRISTWATCH IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE?**

The No Wristwatch Implementation Committee (NWIC) was formed to implement recommendations from the No Wristwatch Task Committee (NWWTC). The NWWTC concluded in October 2009 and prepared recommendations for Society to increase young engineer (30 years old and under) involvement with the Society.

The NWWTC produced five recommendations for the Society for implementation consideration. One of the five recommendations was to improve attendance at Section/Branch meetings. The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations to increase Younger Member involvement at Section and Branch meetings. The intended audiences for this document are Section / Branch leadership and Society leadership.

### **WHY ARE YOUR YOUNGER MEMBERS NOT ATTENDING?**

There are many reasons Younger Members do not attend Section/Branch meetings. Based on the findings of the NWWTC survey, the NWIC compiled a list of reasons provided by Younger Members.

- Some view the lunch/dinner meetings as boring or intimidating, as they might not know anyone at the event;
- Younger Members may not need PDHs and are not interested in spending \$30-\$50 to attend the meetings;
- Younger Members do not feel comfortable or know how to request reimbursement from their employer; and  
Younger Members are unaware of events occurring in their area.

The ideas compiled by the NWIC are valuable not only to increase attendance among Younger Members, but also to increase Section/Branch membership and participation. As engineers, we often thrive on repetition because it makes planning easier and does not force us to think outside the box. However, we forget people enjoy change and new events. The following guidelines are intended to jump start making a change for Section and Branch leaders.

## **Section 2**

# **HOW TO UPDATE YOUR CURRENT MEETING**

### **GENERAL**

The Committee recognizes many of the ideas discussed in this report are already implemented by Sections and Branches. However, Sections and Branches should look at ways to make current successful events more successful. This section will provide ideas and recommendations Sections and Branches can use to increase membership and active participation in Section and Branch activities.

### **MISSION, VISION AND GOALS – WHAT’S OUR PURPOSE?**

Programs, activities, meetings and events shall be designed to support a theme and objectives. Sections and Branches should regularly communicate the Society’s mission and goals and how each event, meeting or activity meets these goals. Technical topics are likely too specific to target multi-disciplinary attendance at Section and Branch meetings, so it is recommended that Sections and Branches focus on political, social, and policy related topics as well as multi-discipline projects or panel discussions that will promote discussion and debate while capturing interest from the majority of the membership.

### **WELCOME PACKAGE - THE FIRST IMPRESSION IS EVERYTHING**

The first time a new or renewed member interacts with Sections and Branches is the most important connection. The first communication will set the stage and standard for future communications and it is important to get it right. Sections and Branches should develop a virtual welcome package with a welcome letter from a Section/Branch leader along with other member resources including Section and Branch contacts, meeting activities / times and other member related activities.

### **LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

Many Sections and Branches tend to have their meetings in the same location each month. For members who are living and working on the outskirts of a region, this may cause some difficulties. Some Sections/Branches have seen success in varying the location of meetings.

Another way to encourage new attendance is to ask the Younger Member Group to host a meeting at a location of their choice or ask the Student Chapter at the local university to host a meeting on campus.

Some Younger Members work for public agencies and have difficulty leaving work long enough to travel to and from a lunch meeting. If possible, plan a lunch meeting at a local state or municipality office.

## **MEETING TIMES**

Does your Section/Branch host a dinner meeting once a month? Why not try a breakfast or lunch meeting? Members have different schedules, priorities and goals, both personally and professionally. Providing some variety in a few of your meeting times may accommodate the schedule better for engineers who are not currently attending.

## **FORMAT CHANGES**

Shortening the length of meetings can help encourage extra attendance for a meeting any time of day; one possible solution is to integrate the presentation with the meal. Use the extra time to add a networking hour before your presentation to allow members a chance to interact.

Another way to change your format is to encourage your presenters to avoid using PowerPoint. Many college professors use the same format and for today's young engineers, Power Point is associated with long, boring lectures. Take advantage of multimedia such as video.

Consider inviting a local mayor or a member of Congress to speak at a meeting. Young engineers are often interested in government relations and advocacy. A chance to have their ideas heard by a local official may pique their interest.

Invite a financial counselor or non-industry motivational speaker. Many Younger Members are also looking for life experience - not just professional experience.

A monthly meeting might be difficult for everyone to attend; consider using Skype or other video conference meeting-to open the Section/Branch Board meeting to members who can listen in. While nothing can replace face-to-face interaction, a video conference or teleconference might encourage a new member to become an active member.

## **MEETING FEES**

Encourage Younger Member attendance by looking at fee reductions. Ideas include:

- Encourage employers to bring their younger employees by offering 2-for-1 admission if one member is under 30.
- Offer Younger Members an "every third meeting free" program where for every two meetings attend they get one free.
- Educate the Younger Members in your Section/Branch on the benefits of attendance and how to approach their employer about reimbursement.
- Educate the more seasoned/experienced members on the benefits of their employees attending and persuade them to encourage the Younger Members at their firms to attend.
- Re-evaluate program budgets and consider lower cost meetings.
- Provide online payment options. Consider providing discounts for payments online or advanced payments to encourage early registration and make it easy for members to attend a meeting.
- Investigate alternative locations such as public agency meeting rooms or other venue

that can reduce cost of attendance.

- Consider different rate structures for members and non-members.
- Consider promotional activities such as a discount for bringing a new member or offer a free or reduced rate for a member birthday.

## **ADVERTISING**

Recent graduates may need a little encouragement to attend a local Section/Branch meeting, especially if they are new to the area. You can reach out to them by having your membership chair or another officer send personal emails to newly registered members inviting them to upcoming meetings and events.

Sections or Branches could consider developing an introduction video from the President and posting it to social media or including a link to it in a welcome email to members. A video is more personal and can be run from smart phones or tablets.

Another way to encourage attendance is to contact the local university and ask to attend an event during the spring (ASCE Student Chapter meeting, or a meeting geared toward graduating seniors from the Civil Engineering department). Talk to the students about the benefits of staying active and encourage them to become involved after graduation. A PowerPoint presentation template is provided at [http://www.asce.org/uploadedFiles/Young\\_Member\\_Groups\\_-\\_New\\_Template\\_YM\\_Membership\\_2010\(1\).ppt](http://www.asce.org/uploadedFiles/Young_Member_Groups_-_New_Template_YM_Membership_2010(1).ppt).

While advertising is important, following up with targeted communications programs can help refine member interests and help Sections and Branches retain members. There are several programs, including Eloqua and ConstantContact, which are low cost email tracking solutions. for Section and Branches use.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media is becoming an increasingly effective and widely used medium. Social media has become the new search engine and could replace a website as it provides subscription based services and is also an online networking tool for Sections and Branches. Social media provides tailored, user-targeted information for its members. Several tools are available, including Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. Sections and Branches can use these tools to promote events, activities and the Section/Branch, while encouraging word-of-mouth recruiting.

# **Section 3** **Ideas for a New Type of Meeting**

## **SOCIAL AND NETWORKING EVENTS**

Not every ASCE meeting needs a presenter, a meal and a PDH certificate in order to attract members. Once or twice a year, try offering a social or networking event as a chance to do

something new. There are a variety of events that can be easily planned and hosted by any group. A few ideas are listed below:

- Attend a local sporting event
- Arrange a site tour of a high-profile bridge, stadium or other local construction project
- Plan a regional event (i.e. crabfest, clambake)
- Have a picnic
- Organize a friendly kickball or softball game with a BBQ afterwards
- Plan a Student Awards dinner
- Join in a dinner hosted by the University
- Schedule a joint activity with another Section or Branch

### **OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Another way to bring members together is through educational outreach or community service. This can even be done in addition to your regular events. Many Younger Members express a strong interest in reaching out to students and helping their community. Organizing an event may bring out members who have never attended a presentation and encourage them to get more involved. There are many types of events that can be organized, such as:

- Participating in a local Rebuilding Together or Habitat for Humanity project
- Cooking dinner at a Ronald McDonald House
- Organizing or supporting a “Mathcounts” program for local schools
- Starting a toothpick bridge competition for your area
- Helping local students participate in the West Point Bridge Design contest
- Working with local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts (or other similar programs)
- Collaborating with Engineers Without Borders (EWB)
- Hosting competitions
- Participating in the Future City Competition
- Participating (judge) in science fairs at local schools
- Volunteering at local museum or science center

Do not feel you have to reinvent the wheel. Many ideas have been done before by ASCE Sections/Branches/Younger Member Groups. ASCE has Society committees dedicated to helping members with student outreach and community service. The Committee on Pre-College Outreach developed ASCEville to encourage student outreach on their website, <http://www.asce.org/LandingPage.aspx?id=65>. Visit it for more information and ideas.

The Committee on Volunteer Community Service has helped facilitate community service at Society-level events, while encouraging activities on the local level. If you would like to organize a program for your Section/Branch they can provide ideas and guidance. Contact Becky Waldrup at [rwaldrup@asce.org](mailto:rwaldrup@asce.org) for more information.

## **Section 4**

### **Conclusion**

Each Section/Branch is made up of different members with different demographics and interests. The ideas and suggestions provided in this document may be exactly what your group needs. Or, they may not be quite what your group needs to increase Younger Member and overall attendance. Hopefully, they will be enough to get you on your way.

It is very likely that most activities or ideas have already been done by another Section or Branch. However, it is important to leverage the best practices from other Sections and Branches to save the valuable time of your volunteers. A copy of the Section and Branch Best Practices Guide is available from the Committee on Geographic Units or online at <http://www.asce.org/Content.aspx?id=30273>.

Additionally, ASCE has several resources for Section and Branch leaders from Geographic Services. There are several resources at [www.asce.org](http://www.asce.org) - click on "Regions, Sections and Branches" under "Membership and Community."

Lastly, the best way to find out what your Section/Branch is lacking is to ask your members. Consider creating a survey to distribute at your next meeting, with your newsletter and/or through email. Ask members what would interest them and help them get more involved. A sample survey from a Section is included in Attachment A of this report. Remember, please keep the survey short and be sure to provide member participants with the results.

## Appendix A – Sample Membership Survey questions

**1. Rate the overall effectiveness of the <Insert your Branch/Section Here> in meeting your PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT needs.**

Highly Effective

Effective

Somewhat Effective

Not Effective

N/A

**2. Rate the overall effectiveness of the <Insert your Branch/Section Here> in meeting your TECHNICAL TRAINING and PDH needs.**

Highly Effective

Effective

Somewhat Effective

Not Effective

N/A

**3. Rate the effectiveness of the <Insert your Branch/Section Here> public relations and community affairs outreach (outreach to the general public, students and communities).**

Highly Effective

Effective

Somewhat Effective

Not Effective

N/A

**4. Rate the effectiveness of the <Insert your Branch/Section Here> government relations outreach (outreach to political figures and government agencies).**

Highly Effective

Effective

Somewhat Effective

Not Effective

N/A

**5. How satisfied are you with the ASCE <Insert your Branch/Section Here> e-newsletter?**

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral

Somewhat dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

**6. How satisfied are you with the new ASCE <Insert your Branch/Section Here> website?**

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral

Somewhat dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

**7. How often do you attend monthly meetings?**

Every month

Most months (9 or more per year)

Some months (3-8 per year)

Rarely (1 or 2 per year)

Never

**8. If you rarely or never attend meetings, what is the reason for your lack of attendance?**

Meeting location

Time constraints

Travel / out of town

Conflict with other commitments / meetings

Uninterested in topics

Other reasons

N/A

**9. What is your primary reason for attending monthly luncheons?**

Networking

Meeting topic / Speaker

Professional Development Hours (PDH's)

To stay current in the industry

Other reasons

**10. How satisfied are you with the OVERALL format of the monthly luncheons - registration, name tags, announcements, food, service, speakers, technical institutes?**

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral

Somewhat dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

N/A

**11. What type of speaker do you prefer for the monthly luncheons?**

Political speakers (mayors, legislators)

Government agencies (public works directors, project managers from cities/counties, transit agencies, airports)

Technical presentations related to specific projects

Combination of all of the above

Other types of speakers

**12. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the Technical Institutes' continuing education seminars?**

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Neutral

Somewhat dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

N/A

**13. How satisfied are you with the online reservation system?**

Very satisfied  
Somewhat satisfied  
Neutral  
Somewhat dissatisfied  
Dissatisfied  
N/A

**14. How satisfied are you with the online payment system using Paypal?**

Very satisfied  
Somewhat satisfied  
Neutral  
Somewhat dissatisfied  
Dissatisfied  
N/A

**15. Do you believe that dues-paying members of ASCE should pay less for monthly luncheons than non-members?**

Yes  
No  
Don't know / Doesn't matter