

SEAOI – Illinois | 2020 Young Member Group of the Year Finalist

What events has your Young Member Group hosted (including education sessions, site tours, outreach, exam review, etc.) to foster professional development among your members? What event or activity did your membership find to be the most beneficial and why?

The SEAOI Young Engineer's Committee (YEC), our chapter's YMG, provides many professional development opportunities. In fall, we hosted a sold out site visit at the Old Chicago Post Office. Our attendees enjoyed learning about the difficulties of repurposing a historic industrial facility into modern office space.

In January, the Young Engineers Symposium gave young professionals the opportunity to share their experience on topics ranging from advances in computational design, to how structural steel design standards are developed. This event was an important opportunity for engineers and architects to connect and learn from each other, while also providing newer engineers the opportunity to present to a large audience.

While it ended up being postponed for safety reasons, the Young Professionals Workshop was our new non-technical professional development program. Now planned as a virtual event, this workshop aims to help participants work effectively with different personality types, develop their personal brand, and glean important ethical insights from case studies.

Last year our members also enjoyed participating in annual volunteering activities such as bulk food repacking at the Greater Chicago Food Depository, serving as judges for the Future City Competition, and organizing the SEAOI Holiday Toy Drive.

Lastly we sponsored a low-income household for critical repairs as part of the Rebuilding Together program. This project requires designated "House Captains" to plan, budget, and coordinate home repairs for a household in need. The YEC and SEAOI partnered with the American Institute of Steel Construction to allow us to sponsor a house with more extensive repair needs. However, due to COVID-19, the National Rebuilding Together Day event was cancelled and replaced with on-going remote events into the summer and fall. Regardless, these events and the planning process still provided tangible benefits to our members and the community.

What has your Young Member Group done to reach out to new young members over the last year and/or to increase participation/engagement of your members? Discuss how your actions have led to membership growth and/or increased participation. Please also indicate the size of the Young Member Group relative to the SEA membership.

Perhaps the best example of extending our outreach was the rollout of our first virtual site visit to the Nucor Yamato Plant in June of 2020. Normally our in-person site visits are limited to a smaller audience in the Chicagoland area and draw between 10 and 20 people. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown we innovated to make this traditional event feasible. The virtual offering proved to be wildly popular with over 70 attendees. Hosting this event near the traditional membership renewal window helped SEAOI overall retain paid memberships despite increasing economic pressures.

The YEC has also been actively engaging with students and new graduates in the Greater Chicago area and Illinois over the last year. Meet ups were scheduled with students during career fairs, and calls conducted at several universities including UIUC, IIT, and Notre Dame. While these sessions were intended to make future professionals aware of the YEC and SEAOI, the relationships that have come out of them have provided us with some ideas to implement in this upcoming year, including resume workshops for students who had internships rescinded due to COVID-19.

All these initiatives have led to membership growth and more active participation. Guest counts at events ranged from approximately 10 guests at intimate events like the Post SE Exam Social, to 70 guests at the Young Engineers Symposium. For reference, SEAOI has a membership of approximately 800 and has a typical dinner meeting attendance of 50-80. The goal of our efforts is to continually reach out to new members and develop an active new generation of SEAOI members. Through our topical events, and an unofficial goal for members to introduce themselves to a new person each event, we have seen a steady uptick of new faces at our events.

What has your Young Member Group done to foster networking with senior members of your MO, within the YMG, and with other disciplines (i.e. architects, contractors)? What lessons/educational opportunities have come from interacting with these groups?

Over the course of the past year, the SEAOI Young Engineers Committee (YEC) has organized and hosted several events to foster networking, even as we've transitioned to virtual events in the times of COVID-19. In the second half of 2019, happy hours were a great way for us to connect with senior members of SEAOI in a relaxed, non-technical setting. The YEC organized two happy hours for the entire MO: one last summer to kick-off the 2019-20 fiscal year for SEAOI and the other during the Christmas season as part of a holiday toy drive. SEAOI has recently been focusing on more collaboration between the YEC and other committees in general, and these happy hours have helped further develop the relationships between younger and senior members of the MO.

The SEAOI YEC has also organized educational events over the past year that have helped foster networking opportunities. The Young Engineers Symposium provides a forum for five young engineers to present a project that they've been working on at the office. This event not only facilitates technical discussions on these projects within the YEC but also involves a networking session before the presentations begin. As an invaluable opportunity for young engineers to connect with and learn from each other, the Young Engineers Symposium has consistently been the YEC's most well-attended event over the past few years.

As SEAOI transitioned to fully virtual events this March, the YMG adapted by organizing a virtual site visit to a Nucor steel mill in Blytheville, Arkansas. This session included a 360-degree virtual reality tour of the steel plant and provided an overview of the steel production process. By challenging ourselves to keep providing events for our members despite the ongoing virtual constraints, we've been able to remain engaged with the structural engineering community.