

SEAONC – California | 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?

SEAONC YMF hosts a variety of professional and social events every year. Our goal is for members to develop into successful engineers and grow their professional network. In March, we transitioned entirely to virtual platforms to host these events.

Professionally, we host semi-annual PE info sessions, site tours, and “YMF Presents” presentations. PE info sessions set members’ expectations for the national and state licensing exams and registration process. Presentations provide a chance to learn about exciting structural engineering topics in a less formal environment than the general SEAONC meetings and a chance to practice presentation skills. For example, one of our members gave a presentation in January on her work as the structural engineer for “Stone 27” at Burning Man.

Our social events allow our members to socialize outside of their firms. Every year we organize a spring and winter social and a group outing to an SF Giant’s game. We also collaborate with other local professional young member groups to host an Oktoberfest social with industry sponsors. Members particularly enjoy this event because they meet young professionals from across the AEC industry and chat with industry representatives about their products. In addition to our larger events, we also host monthly happy hours at rotating locations around the Bay Area.

The transition to online events involved some trial and error, but we have found success in monthly trivia happy hours. Attendance has actually increased because the event is easily accessible to everyone from their own home. In addition to monthly trivia, we also hosted a virtual PE info session and are planning a virtual YMF Presents and a virtual Oktoberfest with a slate of professional and social activities. Our members are especially thankful for the opportunity to stay connected to other young engineers despite the absence of in-person events.

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.

SEAONC has hundreds of members and 74 of those members are officially registered as part of the YMF committee through the SEAONC website. However, this does not account for all of the young engineers who attend our events. We always welcome attendance from engineers who are new to the Bay Area, recent graduates, and visiting engineers to promote our committee and a sense of community within structural engineering. We also actively reach out to current students through our university outreach events which are now virtual. This year we have placed an increased emphasis on effective communication to increase engagement with current members and recruit new members.

We communicate with our members and potential members a few different ways and are always exploring new methods. Traditionally, we have relied on an online, bi-monthly newsletter and word of mouth. The newsletter announces upcoming events hosted by YMF and other professional organizations to over 350 subscribers. It also has links to the SEAONC Committee pages to encourage participation in our parent organization. To keep the newsletter fun and engaging we add pictures and pop culture references. We also started an Instagram account this year. We use the account to market upcoming events and share photos from past events. Our recruitment effort is mainly in person, whether it is university outreach events or conversations with co-workers and fellow SEAONC members at monthly meetings.

Our digital communication has become increasingly important after our programming transitioned to virtual in March. With no in person events, YMF members are encouraged to actively invite coworkers and friends to our virtual events. To further promote attendance, our trivia night is a competition between pairs and small teams. We are also continuing to grow our Instagram account as virtual programming continues through June 2021.

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?

We actively encourage members to interact with senior members of SEAONC and with other disciplines by planning and promoting events with SEAONC and other professional organizations. We hope they use these events to strengthen and grow their professional network.

Within SEAONC we have promoted other committee’s events and activities - ranging from simple inclusion in our newsletter to assisting with planning of the events. We have collaborated with committees such as the Structural Engineering Engagement and Equity (SE3) committee and Public Outreach Committee. In October 2019, we co-hosted a workshop with SE3 discussing “Building an Inclusive Workplace for All in the 21st Century.” The event included a keynote speaker who led a discussion on the current state of equity, diversity, and inclusion within the structural engineering industry. Participants discussed how we can further understand and accept differences in the workplace and initiate action within our firms. It was a valuable experience for the YMF members to work with the senior SEAONC members to help shape the future of the structural engineering community in Northern California.

Outside of SEAONC, YMF co-hosts seasonal socials with the local American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) chapter. We have hosted after-work and weekend socials with both their Young Members Forum and Structural Engineering Institute (SEI). In the past, we have also invited Bay Area Young Architects (BAYA) to join our socials. Through these events, we have maintained contact with the leaders of these committees with the hope of continuing to foster a strong interdisciplinary network through these yearly events.

Through these events, our members learn the importance of connecting with colleagues outside of project work. A new opportunity could present itself at any moment and having a strong and diverse network allows our members to fully capitalize on that moment.