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Structural Engineers Association of Georgia

2023 NCSEA Young Member Summit Scholarship Essay

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*Prompt: You are given the responsibility to recruit students and recent graduates to participate with the Structural Engineers Association, how do you do it? Describe how you got involved with your YMG, state's SEA, and/or NCSEA and what strategies you would employ to encourage others to get involved.*

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The task of trying to recruit students and recent graduates to participate in our Structural Engineers Association (SEA) is one that I'm familiar with, because in my experience I have been both the recruit and the recruiter. We've employed a wide range of strategies and, while each approach has its benefits, based on my experience I believe that the best results are produced when recruiting efforts are focused in two places: general education and personal invitation.

General education should be focused on understanding where the gaps are in the recruitment process and what opportunities are available in the window between undergraduate studies and being a licensed engineer to let perspective members know what an SEA is and the value it offers. I know from my experience that the first time I heard about the Structural Engineers Association of Georgia was two years after graduating, when I started my second job. Truthfully, this is a common story – not only in our SEA, but in many others.

One step we have taken is to increase our visibility to the engineering students in our state and we have already seen some positive results. While I was chair of our Young Member Group (YMG), we began to reach out to three of the largest universities in our state that educate structural engineers. At the time, our SEA was still conducting meetings virtually, so we saw this as an easily accessible opportunity to reach out to current students. We did this by leveraging relationships with university faculty to email invites to their classes, educating them on what a Structural Engineers Association was, what we offer, inviting them to sign up for free student memberships, and join our meetings. We also invited them to join our YMG and let them know about some of our upcoming activities. In the future, I hope to push our association to continue increasing visibility at the university level by sponsoring tailgates, hosting case studies at club meetings, or even exploring starting an SEA student chapter.

After university, it is still critical to engage young engineers who are new to the profession, and who potentially have the most to gain with SEA involvement through educational opportunities and professional networking. However, I believe that this is one of the harder areas to try and recruit. There is no centralized list you can access to send out emails to potential members, but that doesn't mean there aren't any tools available. Our SEA is fortunate enough to have a fantastic Publicity Committee that has been very active these last years and has been leveraging social media – like LinkedIn – to increase our online presence and educate local engineers about our association. Social media is one of the few tools that allows us to effectively target and recruit engineers in our field who may not understand what an SEA is. I would recommend any SEA without a group exclusively dedicated to publicity consider starting one. This committee offers a fantastic leadership opportunity to members, and it's an incredibly valuable service to the SEA and the profession as a whole.

While I believe that general education is the best method for growing the association as a whole and developing a strong pipeline of new recruits into the organization, in my experience, nothing beats the power of a personal invitation when it comes to developing the future leaders of an organization. I would not be in the

position I am in, and the engineer I am today, if it wasn't for other engineers that invited me to the table and encouraged me to join and grow in the organization.

When I started my job at Uzun+Case, I was unaware of the Structural Engineers Association of Georgia, but I became aware quite quickly because our firm has a history of support and volunteering with the association. Even so, even after seeing the email invitations being sent out, I was hesitant to get involved because it was natural for me, like it is for a lot of people, to be hesitant to walk into an unknown situation. It wasn't until one of my co-workers, the then-chair of our Young Member Group, had a conversation with me and personally invited me to come to a YMG event that I finally attended, and after that I continued to attend. The Young Member Group was my entry point into our SEA, and I think it is for a lot of engineers. Making the Young Member Group a fun, educational, and welcoming group to young engineers can then be leveraged to grow the SEA. This can be done by hosting events, like a happy hour, before or after the main SEA meeting. Doing this still provides a fun draw, with a group of known colleagues and friends, and invites them to take the next step in their development by engaging with the primary Structural Engineers Association.

While the power of a personal invitation should not be underestimated when encouraging people to join the SEA or YMG, I think it's best exercised when trying to grow a young engineer into a future leader. At every step of my journey into the leadership of our SEA, I had a current leader encouraging me to take that next step and inviting me to join them at the table. Truly, the act of inviting someone to take that next step can be empowering for them and show them that you have the confidence in them to grow into that next position. Additionally, having systems in place that offer support and continuity to incoming leaders also helps encourage them and makes the position more accessible to a wider group of potential leaders.

After joining our Young Member Group and attending a lot of our events, our chair invited me to join the YMG board and help plan and manage our activities for the year. After being involved on the board for a couple of years, our current chair then invited me to take over and serve as the next chair. Our YMG chairs usually stay on the board for another year, serving as past-chair, and I think that support for the incoming chair lessens the perceived burden and encourages more members to take that next step. Our SEA also invites the chair of the YMG to join the SEAOG board meetings and see how leadership within the primary association functions. Getting a glimpse into those inner workings and having the opportunity to educate the board about the YMG activities, and what our priorities were for the organization, was a fantastic opportunity. It was because I got to sit in on those meetings that, when the time for our next leadership election came, I was encouraged to run for Treasurer on the SEAOG board and was elected.

One of the biggest factors in growing general membership for local SEAs is making sure potential new members know about the organization and what we have to offer. Taking the time to identify and understand the gaps in education and trying to target them specifically should produce the best results in recruitment. Despite the value of trying to target those larger groups, nothing will beat the efficacy of reaching out to an engineer personally, and inviting them to join you at a meeting. It may not seem like a big deal to bring in just one more person, but if, as an organization, we can make a concerted effort to reach out to our colleagues, especially the younger engineers who represent the future of our profession, then we can make a big impact. The next step is not to forget that we're always recruiting, even from within our own organization, for our future leaders. Setting up systems that help grow and empower your future leaders, and inviting them to take that next step, may encourage them to grow into a position they never thought they could.