Emerging Leaders Academy Class VI  
Ongoing Support & Facilitation of Student Chapters  
Student Outreach Network (SON) Project Team Committee

Section Summary

The Emerging Leaders Academy Class VI (ELAVI) recognizes that student chapters will require ongoing support and maintenance, and that additional programs will be required to continue to generate interest in American Public Works Association (APWA) at the student level. APWA already has the structure and resources in place to foster such a relationship with their standing committees, technical committees, and project teams. This group was tasked with identifying the appropriate avenue to sustain student development and growth within APWA.

The APWA mission statement defines that it “exists to develop and support the people, agencies, and organizations that plan, build, maintain, and improve our communities. Working together, APWA and its membership contribute to a higher and sustainable quality of life.” To that end, ELAVI has developed the following Statement of Purpose with respect to student engagement required after the class disbands:

The American Public Works Association is committed to facilitating students’ engagement in their communities and the public works profession as they prepare to begin their careers. An active student membership will help the future of public works by exposing the next generation to the field earlier in life, and thus developing an understanding of how a sustainable, balanced local government functions. Advanced student interaction will provide guidance and support for a uniform student chapter program across the United States and Canada.

An established national program is fundamental to the successful development of a uniform student program. However, local interaction is essential to the sustainability of such a program. After careful review of the APWA committee structures and requirements, this group has identified a Project Team Committee – both at the national and local chapter levels – to be the most effective avenue to kindle a lasting student program. The following outlines a list of responsibilities for each of these committees:

National Project Team Committee Responsibility:
1. Guide the local chapter project team committees in their involvement with the student organizations
2. Create and maintain a student portion on the APWA website
3. Provide mentoring opportunities for both the local chapters and student chapters
4. Maintain and revise a standard student chapter handbook/tool kit and BMP’s as needed
5. Facilitate the growth of the APWA with the introduction of the next generation of young professionals
6. Ensure that student members are not excluded from APWA events due to cost
7. Provide a national forum for information
Local Project Team Committee Responsibility:
1. Create or participate in college career fairs
2. Assist student chapters with finding speakers for monthly meetings
3. Provide a local internship program
4. Invite students to local conferences and provide free registration
5. Designate a local member to be the main contact for student chapters
6. Provide quarterly or bi-annual joint meetings with the student chapter
7. Mentor/Advise the chapter and help manage finances and records
8. Encourage interaction between other student chapters within the same region
9. Report student memberships to national committee

Committee Structure Selection

APWA’s committees are very deliberate and rigid with regard to their structure. As a result, they are few and they are effective. Adopting the appropriate structure for a national committee to guide and oversee student chapters is important to the sustainability and efficacy of the group. It is vitally important that this national structure be rigid enough to be sustainable, but flexible enough to have open dialogue with local student and professional chapters. APWA maintains three types of committees, standing committees, technical committees and project team committees.

**Standing Committees** are formed to assist in the governance and internal affairs of the association. The chairs of these committees are appointed by the APWA National President, and members must apply for appointment to such committees.

**Technical Committees** focus on specific areas of public works, such as Emergency Management, Engineering & Technology, or Water Resources Management, to name a few. These committees are comprised of volunteers and generally meet only a few times per year.

**Project Team Committees** are less formal committees that form to execute specific objectives. There are no position appointments with this committee, it is voluntary basis. These groups are specialized and task focused to achieve a common goal.

This group has proposed to implement a project team format based on the Young Professionals network. The reasoning behind this proposal is because

a. APWA’s YP Network is currently established with passionate individuals from across the country;
b. Young professionals can generally relate to students better;
c. Young professionals may currently have relationships with university students or faculty that could easily facilitate the implementation of student chapters at universities.

After new student chapters have been established, the project team should review the progress and efficiency of the committee. This review should be three to five years after initiation and will evaluate whether a transition to a standing committee or technical committee would be beneficial to the overall goal. The project team, SON, will complete a new proposal or report of
responsibility to be considered by National APWA. The main focus of the committee should be to act as a resource for local chapters, assist in their involvement with student chapters, and update the Best Management Practices (BMPs) and toolkit for starting a new student chapter.

The transition to a Standing Committee should only occur after sufficient progress has been made in creating new student chapters at universities throughout the US and Canada. Until that time, the SON Project Team Committee should focus on a set of specific responsibilities to foster such student and local chapter development.

**National Project Team Committee**

An active, involved national project team will be vital to the success of student chapter development. As student chapters become more accessible and sustainable, this group will be required to be fluid and transition with the development of student programming. The responsibilities of this group will be lofty, but manageable.

1. **Guide the local chapter project team committees in their involvement with the student organizations**

   While the national committee may disseminate information and foster BMPs for student interaction, it will be up to the local chapters to add value and purpose to the student chapters. The national chapter will need to give the local chapters direction and share successes of other chapters. A close relationship will be necessary for success and proper communication. The national committee will be responsible for providing the local chapters step by step guidance, if needed, to general interest and develop a sustainable student chapter.

2. **Create and maintain a student portion on the APWA website**

   Work with APWA staff to enhance the student portion of APWA’s website. Highlight specific student chapters and events, develop materials to boost student chapter meetings, such as a topics section, or relevant articles, or project highlight.

3. **Provide direction and mentoring opportunities for both the local chapters and student chapters**

   At the professional chapter level, this can be a one-on-one coaching session, or webinars/conference calls devoted to engaging students, or even panels at Congress or local meetings/conferences. Similarly, such avenues can be taken to coach and council new student chapters. However, local interaction with students should be stressed wherever practical.

4. **Maintain and revise the student chapter handbook/tool kit and BMP’s as needed**

   As part of this project, ELAVI is creating and updating materials to facilitate the creation of a student chapter, and the subsequent materials for local chapters to be involved. The national committee should maintain and update this material and ensure its relevance going forward. A
standard handbook/toolkit should be available for each local chapter’s use but should provide flexibility for each chapter to personalize based on the culture and what is appropriate for their area or region.

5. *Facilitate the growth of the APWA with the introduction of the next generation of young professionals*

Provide articles and meeting topics to share with the local chapters. Use such information as a tool to enhance both the local and students chapters, but also to encourage their involvement and interaction with one another.

6. *Ensure that student members are not excluded from APWA events due to cost*

Fulltime students are typically not gainfully employed and steps should be taken to ensure that attendance at professional development events is not cost prohibitive for them. This may be developing BMPs for sponsorship events, establishing professional development scholarships, working with APWA or local chapters to provide reduced/no cost access to events in exchange for volunteer time at such events, or other such means to allow students the opportunity to attend.

7. *Provide a national forum for information*

The national committee should establish student specific information dissemination through email and the APWA website. Such communication could include internship opportunities, student chapter BMPs, news or academic articles of interest, or general public works promotional information.

**Local Project Team Committee**

Local Project Teams are vital to the success of a sustainable student chapter. This can be the executive board or an entirely separate committee of a local chapter. It needs to be a group of people who cares about the sustained success of the local student chapters. The local project teams will provide a greater accessibility to the students by providing local mentoring and one-on-one support.

1. *Create or participate in college career fairs*

Creation of a student chapter is mutually advantageous to students as well as professionals as their relationship could blossom into that of employee/employer. Participating in a career fair is a great way to develop these relationships and reach out to a broad audience. Career fairs held by a local professional chapter should include participation from the general public, all local universities and technical schools.

2. *Assist student chapters with finding speakers for monthly/quarterly meetings*
Keeping students interested is going to be a key challenge to sustaining student chapters at various universities. Value and legitimacy will be added when dynamic speakers are available to address the group of students. This may also help to draw in more students who are considering the public works field as their profession.

3. **Provide a local internship program**

Local APWA chapters are the perfect clearinghouse for internship opportunities. The pairing of local students with local agencies is a natural progression. Further, for those students who attend college/university out of the region, their local APWA chapter will be a valuable resource for finding work during breaks from school. A student who is active at school is more likely to make his/her local chapter their first resource for finding internships when returning home for breaks.

4. **Invite students to local conferences and provide free/reduced rate registration**

Local conferences are likely going to be the students’ first real opportunity to get to know the field as well as mix and interact with area professionals. A student focused chapter will recognize the value of young interest in their field and offer reduced rate or even free registration to students who would like to participate in their events. This could be in exchange for volunteer time, such as conference registration, or simply as a perk of being involved in a student chapter of APWA.

5. **Designate a local member to be the main contact for student chapters**

It is important to have a single point of contact between local and student chapters. From a communication standpoint, a single liaison will convey a clear message. From a personal perspective, a single contact will be able to develop relationships and connect with the students on a more intimate level. This person can mentor the student group along and help to steer their development. Any faculty at the local organizations that are current members of the local chapter would be the ideal contact for that student chapter.

6. **Provide quarterly or bi-annual joint meetings with the student chapter**

Giving students access to regular meetings will be a great benefit to the students, but may also bolster involvement in the local chapter post-graduation. This advances the effort to develop the students, but also adds new perspective to meetings and meeting topics that may otherwise be overlooked. Students or their academic advisors may be likely candidates to present at meetings based on course content and research done in the classroom.

7. **Mentor/Advise the chapter and help manage finances and records**

Starting a new chapter from scratch will not be an easy feat. Local chapters should use their experience in meeting planning, accounting, and record keeping to help develop the students as they take on new roles. Reaching out to other local chapters that have successfully started a student branch will increase the success of setting up a sustainable system.
8. Encourage interaction between other student chapters within the same region

Universities outnumber local APWA chapters throughout the US and Canada. The local chapters should logically and logistically be central ground for students from various universities in the same region. They could host student specific events to encourage intercollegiate interaction, or help to establish regional initiatives to add value to the student experience. For example, students from different colleges or universities could collaborate on a single philanthropy that is established or organized by their local chapter.

9. Report student memberships to national committee

While the students will have interaction with the national committee, the local chapters are going to have the outside perspective to provide information to the national committee, and to develop and funnel ideas and information to the students.

Conclusions & Recommendations

To successfully develop a sustainable student chapter there has to be an inherent value to the organization in the students’ eyes. The best way to uniformly achieve that is to have a clear vision at a national level, but also to be able to convey and execute that vision at the local level.

At the national level, a project team committee, SON, should be formed. The YP network should be a guide and resource since the group currently has a team who is organized and motivated enough to be a proper catalysts for the student movement. After a period of time, not less than three to five years, the project team committee structure should be re-evaluated with consideration to make a standing committee. This will give students the opportunity to hold a nationally appointed position and to set their own agendas and guide their own progress moving forward.

Throughout the Association, local chapters should recognize their duty to “develop and support the people, agencies, and organizations that plan, build, maintain, and improve our communities” tomorrow, by investing in student development today. They are the local presence that is going to add value to student organizations and entice new students to make the field of public works their careers.