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Component Relations

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Cultivate Future Leaders

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By: *Lauren Wolfe*

Component relations professionals do a pretty good job targeting students and growing student chapters but often overlook the young professional members. Your components are a great place to cultivate the future of associations through young professional development.

Is growing your membership a strategic imperative? Of course. But it's not just about attracting members, it's about engaging them. Empower your young professional (YP) members. Create future leaders. Plant the seeds within your association, chapters, and affiliates, and watch them grow.

What is a YP?

A YP is a professional under the age of 35 or new to the profession (less than four years of experience). A YP member is *not* a student member.

Suzanne Carawan, vice president of marketing and strategy for Higher Logic, brings up a good point: "Most associations do not distinguish between students and YPs—and this is something they need to do. They seem to have ideas for students but have zero clues what a YP would need to start, establish, and grow their career."

"We had been so focused on migrating students into professionals, we were totally dropping the ball in terms of retention and growth strategies for freshly minted professionals," notes Jason Della Rocca, former executive director of the International Game Developers Association (IGDA). "Once we realized that YPs have unique needs, we were able to drive programs down to the chapter level to better serve them."

What do YPs Want?

According to [The Decision to Join](#) and [The Decision to Volunteer](#), two studies undertaken by ASAE & The Center, 63 percent of members with entry-level positions rate professional benefits as important. YP members want opportunities to become involved and grow into their careers, but they also want to give back as well. Empower your YPs, and they will be much more than your resident Facebook experts.

YPs are already using technology to make connections with colleagues and friends in their city and around the globe. Capitalize on this knowledge base and leverage their skills to create word-of-mouth power for your association. Provide the platform—YPs will become your evangelists if you give them what they want.

A YP member wants to do the following:

- Be respected.
- Become active and engaged within their membership, and not just online.
- Earn a role in the association community.
- Gain experience and learn from others in the field.

- Collaborate and share ideas with other members.
- Expand his or her network of peers.
- Meet mentors and establish positive working relationships.
- Access the association and its members 24/7.
- Have real member benefits, especially if your membership dues are coming from his or her paycheck.

Surprising? Let's hope not. You can help YP members meet many of these needs at the component level.

Realistically, you need to speak to the YP audience differently. Change your marketing message and create pieces that attract YPs. The message can't be the same for all members. Target between levels within your membership; expand on this tactic for your YP members. Speak their language. Help them understand how they can meet their needs via active engagement in your organization.

As a YP myself, I discuss this topic often. In college, these issues never crossed my mind. I assumed associations all had programs for YPs, but I was wrong. Most associations don't understand what a YP is, what a YP wants from an association, or how YPs can plug into an association's network of components.

Graduates assume associations are up to speed. YPs are active within and rely on online communities like Facebook, Amazon.com, and Twitter for quick and easy access to friends, info, and data—anytime, anyplace, from anywhere. YPs expect your website to provide features like individual and customizable user profiles, access to reviews and ratings, search options to find information instantly, the ability to message other members, and videos and downloads—in short, social media, and then some.

Where do you Find YPs?

Online! YPs grew up with the internet and the ability to access and spread information quickly. Naturally, they are looking for information about your association and components online.

A simple association website is not enough. Your organization should be an online community for members—a member benefit. Use your website as a portal to an online environment where your members can communicate, interact, and gain access to resources. Incorporate elements of social media into the mix and develop an actual strategy. Think about this online community in terms of member engagement. That's really what this is all about. YPs are just as familiar with the technology as they are with what they want from your membership. And they want both.

Are Associations Doing This?

Yes! Many associations are exploring and implementing strategies to build YP membership via their components.

Consider this example at the IGDA: There had always been chapter-level programs targeted toward students (e.g., career day with local game studios), but nothing specific to work YPs into the community more directly.

As such, there was a concerted effort by several IGDA chapters to leverage the enthusiasm of YPs and put them to work as volunteers for onsite support at chapter meetings. Also, YPs were engaged by leveraging their tech savvy to help set up the AV for presentations, record videos for posting to YouTube, blog summaries of chapter sessions, and even work the welcome desk to greet members as they arrive at meetings. IGDA's YPs served as a ready pool of willing and able talent to help run the chapters more smoothly. More importantly, doing so brought them closer to local leadership and offered a chance to be groomed and mentored into leadership roles over time.

In terms of content, IGDA's Montreal chapter hosted an annual "demo night" where young designers and developers were encouraged to demonstrate their works in progress. These events were always packed with a diverse audience eager to be inspired by the efforts of the up-and-coming game creators.

Cultivate Your Membership

This is my third year serving on ASAE & The Center's Young Professional Committee and we spend a lot of our time discussing how to provide YP opportunities within all ASAE education, programs, events, and media. But I often challenge the committee to go further with this discussion.

Yes, implementing elements of social media within your components' websites and marketing efforts is critical, but ask yourself the more important question: Now that you have the interactive social media tools, what do you do with them? Operating under the motto, "If you build it, they will come," is simply not enough.

"What I don't see associations doing that they should is putting YPs into community manager roles and directly reaching out specifically to this group to ask them to be leaders and engage," says Carawan.

She's exactly right. Providing a discounted membership rate or discounted program rate is a great start, but it simply is not enough. Give YPs a role in your association and components, a position on a committee, or a place on the panel presentation at your next meeting. In addition to leadership roles, get your entire membership—including all of your chapters, affiliates, councils, and committees—involved. Across the board, support YP initiatives and watch your association grow. It will be a beneficial learning experience for everyone.

Invest in your YPs, and they will invest in you. They are the future of your association. Are you motivating future leaders or collecting checks?

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