

# **The First Decade: Lessons Learned from SSSI's National YP Network**

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## **SUMMARY**

Australia's Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI) National Young Professionals Committee (YPs) began a little over a decade ago with the aim of empowering young professionals and students in SSSI's governance. The founding National Young Spatial Professionals Committee developed a space to encourage innovation. With the establishment of regional committees in each state and territory, as well as New Zealand, the YPs have grown into a central force within SSSI.

The success of the SSSI YPs has grown over the decade through sustained efforts, but has not been uniform within each region. The special interest group has prospered through two Institute changes and an amalgamation, and recently saw the introduction of free student memberships to ensure the longevity of SSSI. There has been recent discussion as to the definition used by SSSI for YPs, currently 35 years and younger. Despite these pressures SSSI YPs continue to prosper, with many of SSSI's past and present Board Directors coming through the YP ranks. There are valuable lessons that can be learned from the SSSI YP experience over the past decade, applicable to other professional associations establishing young professional groups.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

A young professionals' network for surveyors and spatial professionals was first established in Australia and New Zealand in 2003. While there has been recent debate surrounding the definition of what constitutes a young professional (YP), the Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI) determines that it encompasses someone who is 35 years old or younger, or is a full-time student. This definition is fairly broad, but is consistent with many other professional institutes, and while there is occasionally the odd exception to this rule for the purposes of inclusion, SSSI has had this rule since the YPs were initiated.

## **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 SSI**

The SSSI was established in 2009 from the amalgamation of the Institute of Surveyors, Australia, and the Spatial Sciences Institute. This was done as an endeavour to create national unity across the professions. The YPs were formed under the SSI banner, by virtue of being younger generationally, and have avoided any political fallout from the amalgamation. Through focusing on what is important to our members, and creating an inclusive culture, the YPs have managed to continue in strength from when we were first established.

### **2.2 Establishing a YP Network**

The YPs were formed by a group of motivated individuals who wanted to create an active space for young professionals, and to have greater engagement in the governance of their professional institute. These individuals came from across the various surveying and spatial disciplines, and from different regions of Australia and New Zealand. The imperative of the group has always been to create an inclusive space regardless of professional discipline. The group wanted to engage its members, and serve them through providing both relevant professional development events, and the opportunity to learn corporate governance through volunteering.

The founding National YP Committee was driven to have influence over the direction in which their professional body was heading. The committee was highly formal in its engagement with the SSI Board of Directors, and established a formal space for itself in the SSI governance framework. This has proven greatly beneficial to the YP Committees that have followed. Overall the YPs have had great support since the inception, and a large part of this is due to the good work of the founding National YP Committee and its work to formalise itself within the governing body.

### **3. GOVERNANCE**

SSSI is structured by region, commission, and also by special interest group. The regions are made up of each Australian state and territory, with New Zealand represented as one region. The commissions cover each of the spatial and surveying professional disciplines. There are also two special interest groups: Women In Spatial, and the Young Professionals. The YPs have a national committee, made up of representatives from each region. Where possible, there are also regional committees.

### **4. REGIONAL VARIANCES**

While many outside Australia and New Zealand may be unaware, there are some not-so-subtle differences between the states, counties and territories of each. Culturally in the way people work, this has not caused any major issues to date, but each SSSI region is at a different stage of development. The industry varies in size from region to region, which results in different challenges faced by each regional YP committee, as they strive to best serve their members. A benefit of a national network or national committee allows knowledge sharing between the regional committees. This is probably the greatest aspect of having a National YP Committee to coordinate between the regions. Regional YP Committees run their own social and CPD events, and do so with varying levels of success dependent on the size of the region, the size of the profession in the region, the engagement of YPs within the region, the type of event held, and a host of other influencing factors. But the ability to retain and share knowledge between regions that may be establishing themselves, or going through a rebuilding phase, is critical to longevity.

Many of the regional committees, and even the National YP Committee to a degree, have faced rebuilding. As each committee is volunteer-based, inevitably people's commitments change. In a similar fashion to the challenges being faced by Australia and New Zealand's aging work force, knowledge retention has proven critical to SSSI's YP committees. Having a small core group at any given time is vital to ensuring the ongoing success of our YP network. The ability to handover leadership, and the appropriate timing of when to do so, has also proven vital to continued success.

### **5. ESTABLISHING CLEAR VALUES**

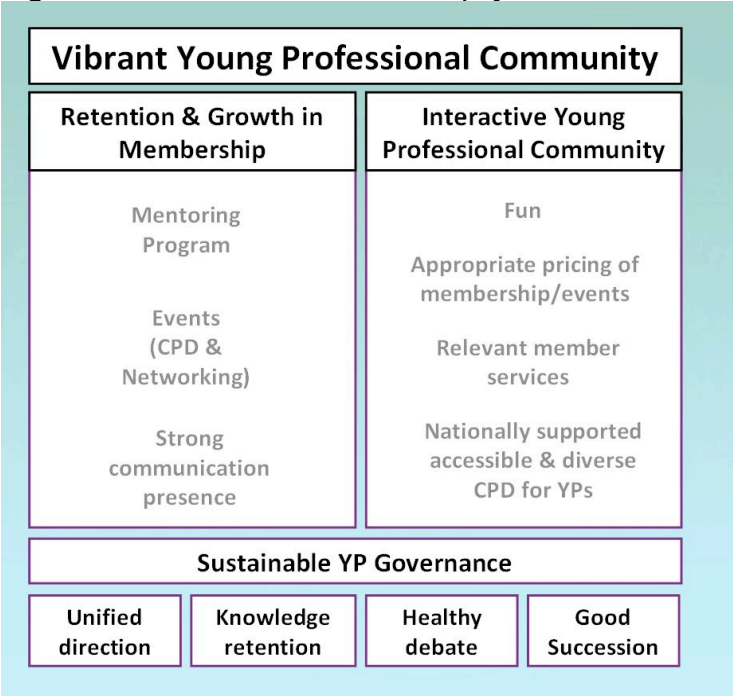
In recognising the importance of formal relationships, the National YP Committee established its own strategic plan to align itself to achieve the Institute's broader strategic plan, Strategy 2015. The National YP Committee, until 2012, had not met since 2010, and with many new faces it was an important time to focus on our values and goals. We developed a vision statement, "to promote a vibrant young professional community." Through a facilitated workshop with two of the founding YPs, we were able to develop a mission through which to achieve this vision. The SSSI National YP Committee mission is as follows:

SSSI Young Professionals will foster membership and growth of the Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute through -

- Service Delivery to Young Professionals
  - Continuing Professional Development
  - Networking
  - Events
- Representation of YPs in the SSSI
  - Governance
  - SSSI succession planning
- Leadership
  - Future of the Profession
  - Retention of YPs
  - Advice on inter-generational matters
  - University students
  - Mentoring
- Community Engagement
  - Education
  - Community participation
  - Promotion
  - Industry advocacy
  - University engagement

Through this, we were able to set an overarching philosophy that respects the history of the YPs, whilst having ownership over it ourselves. It is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: SSSI National YP Philosophy



## **6. SUPPORT**

Just as the founding YP Committee members had done, the National YP Committee continues with the support of SSSI's Board of Directors. With many YPs having served on the Board, there is a seat on the Board specifically allocated to a YP representative. There are also two positions available to YPs on SSSI's Consultative Council. SSSI's CEO, Roger Buckley, is the internal YP Ambassador, and there are two senior industry figures that are YP Patrons, Brett Bundock (ESRI Australia), and Helen Owens (Office for Spatial Policy). The support of the SSSI CEO is helpful in navigating the necessary procedures in order to get things done, and having the support and mentorship of two senior industry figures provides obvious benefits. Essentially this comes down to positioning. Positioning the YPs to succeed, through having access to support networks, both internal and external to SSSI, is another step towards achieving longevity.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The SSSI YP network has been fortunate to have good foundations. Setting up formal relationships, establishing values and guidelines, documenting processes, informal mentoring and knowledge retention, and finding internal and external support, have proven to be the framework to surviving our first decade. As the YPs begin our second decade, we believe commitment to these same fundamentals will continue, and will allow the YP network to grow.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

Simon is the Past Chair of the National YP Committee of the SSSI. He is a Chartered Geographer (GIS), a Certified GIS Professional – Asia Pacific, and a Certified Professional Manager. He has presented papers at SSSC, Spatial@Gov, Asia Geospatial Forum, and GITA's Annual Conference. He holds an MBA (Executive) from AGSM, an MS from Carnegie Mellon, and a BAppGIS, BEnvMgmt, and BA from Flinders University. Simon was South Australian Young Spatial Professional of the Year in 2011. He has just completed an internship at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

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