

How to Start a YP Group

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This document is to be meant as an outline to help you start a Young Professionals Group in your AIChE Local Section. Below are many suggestions collected throughout the years on best practices, structure, ideas for activities, and a little bit of background on the interest of the Institute on promoting new members and seeing them become the future leaders of both industry and the Institute.

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The Benefits of a Young Professional Group

In the mid-2000s, the Institute noticed that there were a lot of older members of the institute – then a huge drop-off as ages got younger. Thus, the Young Professionals Committee (YPC) was born – a group to focus on the needs of young Chemical Engineers under the age of 35. The YPC has grown tremendously since those early days. In recent years, there is a huge emphasis at the Annual and Spring Meetings on the needs of the YPC, and the committee receives tremendous support from AIChE leadership.

This interest in attracting and retaining young professional members has also been happening on the local section level as well. Not everybody has the time, funding, or opportunity to travel to the large meetings. Many people interact with their Local Sections as their main conduit to AIChE on a regular basis, and in recent years, different local sections have formed their own Young Professionals groups.

There is interest in local YP Groups for many reasons, including:

- Networking & Jobs
- Keeping technical skills up to date
- Meet new people
- Mentoring
- Find safe ways to practice leadership
- Have fun

This document is meant to assist you and offer suggestions on attracting YP members or starting your own YP Group.

Important: This guide is only meant to offer suggestions. There is no “one size fits all” model, and we encourage you to use your own creativity to optimize your YP Group to your local section’s strengths. That said, there will be common experiences – working with a local section, leadership structure, budget, events, attracting new members, etc. – that will apply across all local sections, and this document is meant to give guidance on how to get started and what to expect as you develop a program to attract YPs.

How to Approach a Local Section

AIChE Leadership is vested in the success of young professionals. Increasing interest and membership of young professionals has been a major focus for the Institute’s President and Board of Directors – both in their words and actions. Local sections are vital in the Institute’s efforts to attract and retain young professional members.

A YP group is a great way for a local section to attract young professional members to their meetings. All YP groups are currently attached to local sections. Young professional groups are beneficial to local sections as a possible source of attracting and retaining new members as well as a source of future leaders in their section. A current list of local sections is here: <http://www.aiche.org/localsections>

When proposing a YP group to your local section leadership, be sure to emphasize the benefits to the local section. You will have to rely on them for logistical and financial support, so you have to give your best sales pitch. Some arguments for benefits to local sections that you could include:

- Networking
- Job Candidates
- Professional development
- Increase LS Membership for members age 35 and under
- Increase technical skills at a younger age
- Leadership Development

Feel free to come up with your own ideas, vision, and activities. Hopefully, it should be a quick approval.

Age – Young Professional AIChE members are considered those under the age of 35 and have graduated from an undergraduate institution. This encompasses a diverse group of young engineers, including new professionals, Masters or PhD students, post-docs, and young faculty.

Officially, YPC designates a young professional as members under the age of 35. There can be exceptions - it’s okay to have older members come to YP events - however it is recommended that members running the group meet the age qualification. It is also OK to have undergraduate students attend your events – they are the future members of AIChE and your local section and would be a great way for them to network.

For Local Section Leaders Looking To Start A YP Section

In many cases, a young professional or a group of young professionals will look to start a section themselves. However, sometimes local section leadership may attempt to start one themselves.

For those leaders who are looking to start a young professional group themselves, these are our suggestions:

Survey your market – Does your local section have enough people to sustain monthly events? If you find only 5 individuals who meet the age requirements with no local universities, building a sustainable model may not be achieved.

Obtain Buy-in From Young Professionals – As mentioned in the age section, the goal is to have individuals who meet the age requirement to run the group. At the beginning, this rule can be bended, but start trying to identify and recruit members for these positions and begin giving some authority – to create programming, to recruit new members, and to run the group – to them.

Begin figuring out new sources of membership – Is there a major company who supplies a significant source of AIChE members? Network with managers to identify new candidates. If you have local universities, new graduates will be a great source of membership in a YP Group.

Provide structure and promote events – Identify events that will cater to your audience. Promote those as much as you can – on your websites, at your local section meetings, and even individual emails and phone calls. Eventually the structure will need to be self-sustaining, so try building toward that. Established members may also choose to advise young professionals to share ideas of how to progress their interests within the local section.

Structure, Budget, and Administration

Now that you've successfully convinced your local section to support a Young Professionals group or to support outreach activities, what will the group look like? Below are some ideas for how to put together and run your group.

Local Section Involvement – Essentially your YP Group is an extension of your local section. As a result, you will be subject to the rules, regulations, bylaws, and policies of the local section. After you receive approval, work with the local section to agree on procedures and the expected level of their involvement.

Structure – There is no “One size fits all” structure. Different YP groups have come up with their own structures – the one constant is a **chair** of the group, the person who will lead everything. What your group will look like will be dependent on the number of people interested and your needs. Below are some suggestions on different positions that could be incorporated into your local section. In the beginning, we recommend to keep it simple and consider having more than one person run the group. As you grow, feel free to use different roles to your best advantage.

Chair – The person who runs the show. Sets goals for the group, motivates and leads members, interacts with local section and the larger YP group, sets board meetings (If you have them) and location, sets meeting agendas, and always tries to represent AIChE, the local section, and your YP group in the best light. For smaller sections, they may also be responsible for programming, membership, budget, and anything/everything that needs to be done.

Vice Chair - #2. Can share responsibilities with or advise the chair. Can also be assigned to special projects¹. It is advised that you have a Vice Chair to help maintain your YP Group.

Treasurer – Someone who sets the budget and ensures reimbursements are made. This is a relatively simple position since the local section will most likely be the source of your YP Group’s budget. In addition, no YP Group currently requires dues. See below for budget.

Secretary – Takes notes at board meetings/historian. This can also be an optional position.

Administrator – A treasurer/secretary mix.

Webmaster – Manages web presence. This can include website, group communication tools (Google Groups or similar), Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other social media.

Programming/Event Planner – Sets up events!

Membership/Outreach – Tries to attract new members – from industry, local section meetings, graduating students, and others. Outreach chair can focus on local colleges or K-12 outreach.

Local university Liaison – Works with local universities.

Again, no single YP Group contains all of these officers. If you have two dedicated members, have a chair and a vice chair. If you have a 3rd, figure out the best opportunity to utilize their skills for your growth. Be flexible. And if you see a need elsewhere, create that position.

Filling Leadership Positions – The majority of current YP groups appoints their leaders or fills their positions on a volunteer basis. The Chicago YP Group holds elections for their top positions, but not their committees, as they are very large.

In many cases, especially early on, it is difficult to find volunteers, but don’t get discouraged! Keep planning events to attract new members and recruit potential leaders whenever possible.

Positions on Local Section Boards – Many local sections with young professional groups try to involve young professionals on their boards. Local sections recruit young people for various positions, may choose to have a YP member act as a “YP Liaison” or a director position, or find other uses for those individuals. Typically these positions are fairly simple and require little investment of the YP’s time – for example, planning social events or visits to nearby student chapters. This integrates young

¹ In the Chicago YP Group, the Vice Chair is the primary YP Representative to a regional conference. He/She helps set up and organize the conference.

representatives to the rest of the board and can be great sources for filling vacancies in local section leadership. This can be discussed with your local section.

Budget – Most YP groups have a small operating budget, generously provided by the overseeing local section. The range of budgets given to YP groups varies. Typically, if the group is successful in attracting YPs to the section, then the local section board may expand the group’s budget.

This budget can be used to buy demos for K-12 outreach, used for outreach events to local colleges², or maybe an event. Some YP events may have a small fee for members to attend. Work with your local section treasurer to figure out reimbursement procedures, if they have any itemized reporting requirements, or if there are items you can or cannot spend money on. Note that your budget may not be able to cover food and drink at every event.

The AIChE Local Sections Committee offers Project Connect grants to assist local sections with their efforts to reach out to students, recent chemical engineering graduates, and new engineers. More information can be found here - <http://www.aiche.org/community/awards/project-connect-grants>

Corporate Sponsorship – Some YP Groups sections have looked for corporate sponsorship in the past. This is a decision that should be made with your overseeing local section.

Members – New members can come from a variety of different sources, including (but not limited to)

- Current AIChE Members
- Engineering companies
- Local Conferences
- Graduating students (Both undergraduate and graduate)
- New employees in area
- Social Media

When a new member comes to an event or contacts your group, welcome them, find out what they would like to see from their local section, and see if they would be interested in helping out in a small way.

Board Meetings – It is good for officers to meet periodically to advise on updates, events, membership, initiatives, and other issues. This can be monthly, quarterly, or of another consistent frequency. The chair will set the agenda – a good outline is announcements, committee reports, old business, new business, and closure. This can be done over the phone or in person. We recommend extending the invitation to everybody in the YP Group unless there are sensitive items to discuss

Website/Social Media – It is important to find ways to notify members of events and keep people updated to foster a sense of community. Many YP groups set up their own website. AIChE offers no cost websites to its local sections, and it is easy to add a **Young Professionals Tab** to the local section’s website– work with your local section’s webmaster to set this up³.

² For example, if you are doing an event at a local college, you might buy the students pizza using money from the budget

³ Contact the YPC Local Sections Subcommittee if you are having trouble.

Many groups use a **group listserv/email blast** to advertise events, elections, job opportunities, and other announcements. Some groups are also on **Facebook** (to advertise events and post pictures) or **LinkedIn** (especially useful to foster networking). East Tennessee gives out **flyers** and offers **door prizes** at their meetings. We have heard reports that South Texas has given out **swag** with their logo and website – pens, coffee mugs, etc.

Activities

You can take activities and events in a lot of different directions – social, technical, sports, volunteering, outreach, and more.

Typically, we recommend social activities in the beginning. Something like a happy hour – where people can relax, network, and have a good time – is easy to plan and would interest people in our age bracket. However, there are many other ideas.

Setting up your event – Usually one or two people will be assigned to put together an event. This can consist of an initial **email** announcement, announcements at **local section meetings**, advertising on your **website or social media**, advertising on the **AICHe YPC website**, **word of mouth**, advertising with **local colleges**, and via **corporations**. Be sure to be clear about location, time, and if there are any fees involved (an admission fee, be clear who is paying for food/drinks, etc.).

Be sure to send a **reminder** a day or so before your event.

Someone should arrive early or on time to ensure everything is running smoothly, to set up AV equipment (If necessary), and to welcome guests. A sign is usually useful too. In addition, a **sign-in sheet** is an excellent idea - consider collecting name, email, company, ask if they would like to be added to an email list, permission to post photos online. You may also to seek how they found out about the event, if they are a member of a local section, and what they are looking to get out of attendance (to help you better focus your programming).

Location – For the larger sections, it may be good to vary the location. A city with a large area and bad traffic like Houston may not be able to expand their attendance by having meetings in only one area of the city. A small city may be able to keep events in a central area. Again, figure out what works best for your members in your metropolitan area.

Ideas for programming:

Social – The possibilities are endless for a social event. As mentioned above, **happy hours** are easy to set up. Other ideas include trips to historical landmarks, museums, the beach, bakeries, and art galleries.

Sports – Playing sports is fun when people from all skill levels can participate. One of the most popular events in the Chicago YP group is **Whirleyball** (Think lacrosse meets basketball on bumper cars), a sport that nobody is actually good in, quite fun, and therefore accessible to all. The South Texas

Section has attended a Houston Astros **baseball game** as an YP event, and other YP groups can find major or minor league teams to support. East Tennessee YP group has a **salsa dancing** event with a lesson, free dancing, and prizes.

You could also use sports to organize a **barbeque** or other party. Other possibilities could include soccer, ultimate frisbee, volleyball, bocce, bowling, flag football, baseball/softball, rock climbing, trampoline park, or ice skating. Find something that works for you!

Technical – A **technical speaker** can be found from the local section – or one of your members may be a subject matter expert and eager to share their knowledge. Of course, you could mix a technical and social event into one big event.

The Chicago Local Section has used **AICHe Webinars** as the basis for their meetings. One year they watched a webinar on beer brewing, brewed their own beer (some members are hobbyists), then drunk it at a future event. Another time they did a wine webinar paired with a wine tasting. There is a Chocolate webinar that could also be of interest to members.

Some larger YP groups have done **plant tours**, but these are usually difficult to organize. Chicago YP Group has done a tour of a pump company and a process safety company. A **brewery tour** can be both educational for a chemical engineer and be popular among attendees.

Activities with local colleges – St. Louis local section does an annual **trivia contest** with local colleges, which has become a huge hit. Other YP groups talk to local colleges on a variety of topics, such as AICHe after graduation, resume advice, mock interviews, financial planning, and career days.

Career Development – You may consider a **roundtable** to discuss various topics – international travel for instance. You may also bring in someone experienced in **HR or recruiting** to discuss the best practices in a career search. This area is always changing, and it is important to stay on top of your job search skills.

Volunteer – Volunteering is always a great event and makes the world a better place. Places like schools, food pantries, running races, soup kitchens, cleanup of a forest, or a thousand other possibilities could be a great event.

AICHe even has a K-12 Initiative who may be able to assist in providing ideas or provide contacts to organize or participate in certain events. They may be contacted on the AICHe website <http://www.aiche.org/community/k-12>.

Activities with other professional societies – Sometimes it's nice to make new friends and to network with new people. If there are other professional groups in your area, you may consider having an event or two with them. If you do, ensure that it is very clear who is doing what, if one group or another is paying for food, and that it is in your YP Group's best interest to participate.

Aftermath – Be sure to follow up to express your appreciation that they attended (especially with new members). It may convince them to attend more events. An email, a friend request on Facebook or

connection on LinkedIn, etc. are very effective. Be sure to get their feedback about the event as well. If they are very excited, you may consider asking them to get involved in your YP leadership!

Other AIChE and YP Group Information

YPC – Currently, the AIChE YPC is headed by a Chair, Vice Chair, and Past Chair. There are many subcommittees – including Local Sections, Publications (Newsletters, social media, marketing), Programming (Focusing on the Annual Meeting, Spring Meeting, and regional student conferences), Retention & Recruitment (Outreach to industry, undergraduate and graduate students, K-12, and others), Global Undergraduate Student Video Competition, AIChE Beer Brewing Competition, and Treasurer. There are currently over 50 people on the organization chart, and this is a great way to get involved, network, and grow the role of young professionals within the institute. There are many opportunities for growth.

There are monthly conference calls to keep updated on activities. To learn more, visit www.aiche.org/ypc or email ypc@aiche.org. Be sure to register for the email list or to email them requesting to be added.

The YPC has regional representatives and a new YP Group Liaison who will help you with the above information. Contact the YPC Local Section Chair or the YPC Local Sections Subcommittee Chair for more information, or email ypc@aiche.org

AIChE Staff – Members of AIChE Staff are awesome. They have done amazing work in helping the YPC get set up throughout the years, and they can help us out with any questions that the YPC or your local section cannot answer. Please go through those channels before contacting staff. Staff can be reached via email at ypc@aiche.org, localsections@aiche.org or by phone at 646-495-1333.