

**WESTERN CENTRAL CHAPTER
AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION**

North Dakota

Montana

South Dakota

Wyoming

YOUNG PLANNERS INITIATIVE

MISSION/PURPOSE:

This initiative is to identify and address the needs of young planners within the Western Central Chapter of the American Planning Association and supplement the activities of the APA in their activities to support young planners.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF THE WCC:

1. Geographically vast: The chapter's service area is larger than the states of Texas or California. The distance from Missoula, MT to Fargo, ND is farther than from Chicago, IL to Washington, DC.
2. The WCC members are from four states: North Dakota, Montana, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Each state has an independent state planning association with their own officers, by-laws, separate conferences and activities, diverse state statutes and regulations, and organizational structures.
3. Most WCC planners serve rural or small town jurisdictions and service area is sparsely populated. According to 2009 Census estimates the chapter has only two cities over a population of 100,000 (Billings, Montana and Sioux Falls, South Dakota).
4. Most WCC planners have limited staff and financial resources.
5. Most WCC planners have diverse responsibilities in addition to 'planning' duties. Often they are involved engineering, regulation, economic development, inspection, finance, and code enforcement.
6. The post-secondary institutions located in the chapter do not offer a PAB-certified planning degree. Some offer related degrees such as engineering, social sciences, public administration, and public finance.
7. The WCC does not have a 'Chapter Conference'. Each of the four states provides a state conference. However, when the Western Planner Conference is located in a chapter state, the chapter provides assistance the conference hosts.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE WCC:

1. The four state associations are well established, financially stable, and have large memberships. However, only a fraction is WCC/APA members.
2. The four states have similar economies, planning and development issues primarily serve a 'rural or small town' constituency.
3. The WCC is providing financial subsidies to the state associations which are contributing to the awareness of WCC and APA services amongst chapter planners.

4. The WCC executive committee has experienced planners with diverse backgrounds and professional credentials. The chapter's board has the ear of APA's leadership.
5. The WCC has updated by-laws and is updating its website, newsletter and strategic plan.
6. The WCC is financially stable and has a responsible budget process.

Summary:

The Western Central Chapter Executive Committee in response to the APA's Young Planners Group Task Force Report has decided to build on this APA's task force's efforts and incorporate their findings into the WCC Young Planners Initiative. The WCC's initiative is intended to supplement the APA Young Planners Task Force Report and provide relevancy and applicability to the chapter's young planners. The chapter has unique challenges and opportunities that were listed previously. The WCC Young Planners Initiative is to provide a plan on how the WCC chapter's young planners issues maybe be addressed by the chapter and our state associations.

The APA report highlighted demographic and social dynamics affecting the planning profession particularly recruiting and retaining young planners. The report provided ideas on how the dynamics should be considered in serving the issues of young planners in APA. The WCC concurs with the observations of the APA's Young Planners Group Task Force. They are certainly relevant in the WCC. The WCC applauds those whom served on the task force and the APA leadership in affording this issue the attention and consideration it rightly deserves. However, the WCC initiative is specifically targeting young planners in the WCC service area.

The chapter's sparse population and vast region requires planners in the four states to master multi-tasking and become familiar with all aspects of land use policies and issues. This fact must be considered in training the WCC's young planners. Additionally, this region with its rural character and landscape may be a significant adjustment for those from metropolitan areas. Therefore, it is crucial for planners already in the region to make a special effort to welcome new planners and recognize that we all can learn from those from other regions. This is particularly important for young professionals whom tend to be mobile and willing to adventure outside their home states. WCC planners must also provide support to the younger planners as they experience the ever-changing policies, politics, and positions in the planning profession. Younger planners don't have the experience and exposure as the more seasoned planners. It should be an obligation of experienced planners to encourage younger planners to simply 'hang in there'. There are plenty of mentoring models available for implementation by the WCC and the state associations, which would be worth pursuing.

The WCC is very cognizant of the fact that planners receiving post-secondary degrees in our chapter are not exposed to the planning in an academic setting unlike other states. Many planners in this region stumble into the planning profession from other occupations and in our very small jurisdictions they may be part-time planners. The chapter and state associations are overcoming this challenge by offering professional development opportunities in creative ways such as webinars, audio conferences, conferences and workshops which provides additional convenience and minimize travel. Young planners are more familiar with social networking opportunities and modern technology than experienced planners. The boomers and generation X's had to acquire these skills on the fly. Young planners can be helpful in 'connecting' all the planners in continuing education which could be an excellent medium that links planners' young and old together.

The WCC in partnership with our state association has developed a number of strategies or action steps that address the needs of young planners. These steps may require an investment of resources and/or time and may be implemented incrementally. As long as the leadership of the planning profession recognizes the unique issues younger planners face in today's environment, the planning profession will thrive for generations to come. Our communities are depending on us to breed a new generation of planners that will continue to serve our communities and citizens in the manner the generations before us provide us.

WCC Strategies and Action Steps.

The following strategies or actions may be applicable to WCC and state planning associations.

1. Identify sessions or presentations that have specific relevancy and applicable to young planners. The state associations should share ideas amongst the WCC states. Examine the feedback and adjust accordingly.
2. Encourage young planners to present at the conferences and workshops within the chapter.
3. Encourage and support young planners to serve on association committees and seek officer positions.
4. Provide scholarships for becoming AICP members and professional development opportunities
5. Encourage planning offices or consultants to sponsor internships
6. Encourage planners to speak in high schools or career fairs to share the planning professions.
7. At state conferences invite college students and make them feel particularly welcomed.
8. Encourage the state associations or WCC to recognize young planner's achievements.
9. Establish linkage with the colleges and universities that offer similar disciplines to planning, such as education, social services, engineering, finance, communication.
10. Encourage young planners to write articles. Insure content is relevant to young planners.
11. Establish a mentoring program.
12. The chapter and state association communication methods are enhance to accommodate the newest social networking our younger generation is comfortable with.
13. Offer student and faculty discounts for professional memberships and conferences
14. Form a Young Planners Working Group within the chapter to coordinate activities for young planners. It's a suggestion that each state identify two young planners to meet periodically and report to the executive committee and state association leadership.