**2 – Continuing Education**

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* 1. **Career Building Block Workshop – Akron Canton Section**

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| **1. Section/Branch** | Akron-Canton Section |  |
| **2. Section/Branch Size** |  |  |
| **3. Project Contact** |  | |
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| **4. Project Category** | Continuing Education | |
| **5. Project Description** | Recognizing a need for engineers to develop non-technical skills necessary for career advancement, the Akron-Canton Section developed the Career Building Block Workshop Series prior to the 2016-2017 year to provide local civil engineers with the opportunity to practice these skills with their peers. Originally intended as a one-year project, the workshops were so well-received that new series were planned for following years. The workshops provide a learn-by-doing environment for civil engineers to strengthen skills needed to be effective in their current role or to prepare for future career opportunities. The interactive workshops simulate a variety of non-technical activities that civil engineers, who tend to be more introverted and less comfortable in social situations, may encounter as part of their job. :. PDHs are offered for each workshop. | |
| **6. The Process**  (What you did, When and How) | The Workshop Committee participated in weekly conference calls, beginning in August 2016, in order to identify the workshop goals, topics, format, logistics (mechanics, timetable, and materials), and to discuss the numerous details required for a quality workshop series including: a comprehensive advertising plan to attract participants, contacting local business leaders (public and private) to encourage staff participation, setting up a Dropbox account to manage and share all materials with committee members, securing local employers to host the workshops, setting a schedule for the workshop series to avoid competing professional society meetings and conferences, the registration process, dinner options, wayfinding signs, icebreaker activities to begin conversations between participants during dinner, how to incorporate a guest speaker, preparing materials for each workshop, holding practice workshops one week prior to the events to receive constructive feedback from volunteer participants, preparation of workshop materials, and dividing and assigning these numerous tasks to each committee member. The workshops were held in the evenings of November 3, 2016, February 2, 2017 and April 6, 2017. The workshops began with a short talk from a local experienced guest speaker, providing expert insider tips and guidance on the subject matter. This was followed by an explanation of the exercises and the scenarios they would encounter. Attendees then broke out into small groups for each exercise. At the end of the program, attendees were provided with some additional comments to reinforce what they had learned and were given the opportunity for Q&A. The Section President closed each workshop with a few words about ASCE and the advantages of membership. The group was then dismissed. The total duration of each workshop, including the meal, was two hours. Since the beginning of the workshop series inception, it has branched out to include a member of the younger member committee to help provide feedback and new ideas to keep younger members interested and topics relevant to their personal and professional growth. | |
| **7. Those in Charge** (Committee, Task Committee, Etc.) | A Workshop Committee was created to plan and run the workshops. The committee originally consisted of four volunteers, two of whom were members of our Board of Directors. Committee members represented different fields of civil engineering, such as transportation, structural, water resources, and construction. As this has become a long-term project the makeup of the committee changes from year to year, but maintains variety in terms of committee members’ disciplines, ages, etc. The committee chair managed the overall workshop production. All committee members equally shared in the preparation and production of the workshop. | |
| **8. Time Frame**  (When Started, When Completed) | The concept was first proposed to the Board of Directors in April 2016. Planning began in August 2016. The first workshop was held in November 2016 and the last workshop was held in April 2017. The Committee has started a new version of the workshop series that started October, 2020 and will continue into next year which will focus efforts on transitioning to a virtual format. | |
| **9. Success Factors**  (The Parts that Worked Really Well) | The workshops were held in the different offices of local employers, or at the University of Akron at no cost to our Section. The host employer also donated beverages, keeping costs low. The registration fee ($15) covered the cost of the meal. Prior to the start of each workshop, participants were asked to pair up with someone and to learn their name, where they work, and what they do. After dinner, they were then asked to stand and introduce each other to the whole group. There were many attendees who did not know many or anyone else at the workshop, so this provided an opportunity for camaraderie in our civil engineering community, which may not otherwise occur.  We have recently implemented a survey at the conclusion of our workshops for attendees to provide feedback about the workshop and to give ideas for future workshops. We have found that the last 5 minutes are enough time for people to fill out the survey and provide meaningful feedback. The surveys consist of 5-10 questions. | |
| **10. Setback Factors**  (The Parts that did Not Work Well) | The April workshops were not as well attended as November and February. From feedback we received from potential participants, the April workshop interfered with spring outdoor activities. Timing is everything. | |
| **11. Creativity**  (This is something off the wall that we did) | For the Project Management and Supervisor Skills workshops we asked engineers to role-play various personalities such as a know-it-all, a chatterbox, criticizing coworkers, or a defensive employee, even if it made them feel uncomfortable, for the sake of the person acting as the project manager or supervisor. We hoped for the best from naturally conservative engineers, but were completely surprised at how eager and more than willing they were to take on a different personality. Many mentioned after the workshops how much fun it was to role-play.  Another activity we have tried was speed mentoring or round table talks. Our registration included if the person wanted to participate as a mentor or a mentee. The mentors were separated and given two mentees to talk to. We gave them ice breaker topics from basic getting to know you questions to difficult “what would you do” topics. The mentees then rotated after 7 minutes and talked with another mentor. We found that people enjoyed the deeper conversations and got a lot of great information from more experienced individuals. | |
| **12. Administration**  (What was most Important?) | Holding weekly committee conference calls and following up with the distribution of meeting minutes was essential in documenting our ideas and kept our planning organized. Meeting minutes always included ‘action items’ for each committee member to complete before the next conference call. | |
| **13. Follow-Up**  (What was most important?) | Sending a thank you to our guest speakers and our host employers was extremely important. We also gave our guest speakers a gift (thermos with ASCE logo or wine tumbler) to show our appreciation. After each workshop, the committee members met and discussed what worked well and what could be improved upon. Lastly, after the first and second workshop, we emailed workshop past participants the flyers for the upcoming (second and third) workshops since many participants were not ASCE members and did not receive the monthly Section newsletter with the advertisement. | |
| **14. Recommendations**  (What you should ALWAYS do with this project?) | Promote the workshops at every opportunity – newsletters, announcement at monthly Section meetings, passing out flyers, word of mouth, social media, and personal phone calls to anyone who may be interested in the workshops. Make it easy to attend by keeping the registration cost low. Establish an agenda with time limits for each portion of the workshop and stay on schedule. Having the Section president give opening and/or closing remarks about ASCE helps to inform non-members of the advantages of ASCE. | |
| **15. Cautions**  (What you should NEVER do with this project?) | Don’t take this on if you don’t have a committed group of people to organize and run the workshops. | |
| **16. The Outcome** | Based on our observations and comments from participants, the workshop series has beens very successful. | |
| **17. Ongoing Activity**  (Would you do it again?) | Yes. The workshop series has continued, with changes to a virtual format planned for this year. We are in the process of trying to figure out how to do panel discussions virtually and find topics that are relevant to the current time and world situations. | |
| **18. Speaker Contact Information**  (person from your Region who would be willing to speak about the Best Practice) |  | |
| Name | Judith Bennett, P.E., PTOE | |
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| **19. Additional Comments** | **In order to raise more interest in the events for the future, we highly recommend having someone take pictures during the events, and posting them on our social media tagging the speakers or important attendees and thanking them for their time and effort in making the event successful. The more content, the better recognition of what we are doing. If we already have the next event planned, it is a good plug to advertise that along with the posts.** | |