

A Report from ASPO

Recruiting and Training Leadership through Professional Societies: A Report from the American Society of Preventive Oncology Junior Members Interest Group

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Introduction

The American Society of Preventive Oncology (ASPO) is a membership society composed of ~440 committed professionals engaged in clinical, educational, and research disciplines, who recognize the benefit of a multidisciplinary scientific forum for advancing a comprehensive approach to cancer prevention and control (1).⁸ In addition to many special interest groups including behavioral oncology and cancer communication, chemoprevention, diet and nutrition, molecular epidemiology, screening, and tobacco control, ASPO supports an interest group, the Junior Members Group,⁹ which features career development programs to nurture junior researchers and to provide an opportunity for those early in their career to engage in translational and transdisciplinary research.

Junior members are a self-defined group that ranges in academic rank from student to Associate Investigator. Most junior members consider ASPO their primary professional society because of the multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches espoused by ASPO, the intimate nature of the Society that allows easy access to senior investigators, and the active interest of the Society to provide a career development forum for junior investigators. This report describes a highly successful model for engaging junior members in national societies and preparing them for leadership roles.

History and Infrastructure

In 1999, with support and encouragement from senior ASPO members, five junior members from institutions across the country established a working committee to develop a junior members group to engage and integrate junior members into the Society and its administration and to prepare them for careers and leadership in cancer prevention.⁹ The objective was to create an infrastructure within the

Society's annual meeting that would provide opportunities for junior members to get experience on planning career development training activities, working in teams, and networking with other junior and senior scientists. The infrastructure was also designed to foster future leadership in ASPO and, more broadly, in the field of cancer prevention by creating pathways to positions of responsibility for junior members. Interested junior members begin with committee membership on Junior Members organizing committees and can progress to positions on the ASPO Annual Program Planning or Executive Committee (Fig. 1). The participation of Junior Members representatives on these committees has maintained the interests of Junior Members as a priority for the Society.

Process and Committees

For each annual meeting, Junior Members design and lead two sessions on separate days focusing on priority career development areas identified through evaluations completed by participants at the previous meeting. These priority areas highlight the development of research and professional skills (Table 1). The sessions have been open to all conference registrants and have been supported by the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation (2)¹⁰ and ASPO. No additional fees outside of the meeting registration fee have been charged to attend any of the sessions. Additionally, sessions afford junior members focused time to enhance research collaborations and build professional networks among junior cancer prevention scientists, as well as obtain informal mentoring from peers and senior members in attendance.

The sessions have successfully drawn attendance of Junior Members to the annual meetings. ASPO annual meetings

⁸ <http://www.aspo.org>.

⁹ The founding members of the Junior Members Group include Shine Chang, Ph.D.; Diana Buist, Ph.D.; Mary Reid, Ph.D.; Mary Beth Terry, Ph.D.; and Amy Trentham-Dietz, Ph.D.

¹⁰ <http://www.preventcancer.org>.

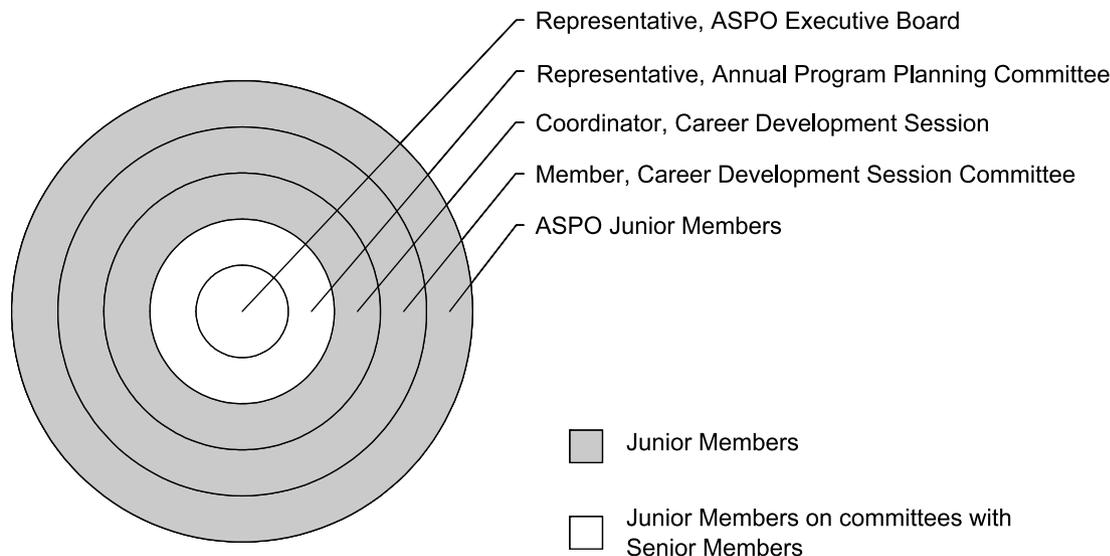


Figure 1. Diagram of infrastructure for the ASPO Junior Members Group.

have an average of 300 attendees, of which ~70 to 100 registrants attend one or both of the Junior Members sessions annually. Each session has one chair who serves a 1-year term and who had membership in an organizing committee in a previous year. The chair recruits up to five individuals to serve on the committee; ideally, committee members come from geographically diverse institutions and have a diversity of research backgrounds. The Executive or Program Planning Committee representatives typically are individuals who have previously served on and chaired a Junior Members session.

Committees identify and invite senior investigators to serve on panels and provide speakers with detailed instructions on expectations and objectives for the sessions. Committees recruit senior Society members as speakers to conserve resources (neither presenters nor committee members receive compensation) and enhance networking within the Society with the goal of identifying speakers who have not previously been involved in these training sessions. Communication between committee chairs prevents overlap of topical areas and/or presenters each year. The committees also strive to include a broad array of prevention disciplines (e.g., epidemiology, genetics, behavioral science), perspectives, geographic regions, racial ethnic groups, genders, and affiliations (industry, government, and academia) to fuel exposure to transdisciplinary research. The full Junior Members process is available at the ASPO website (1).¹¹

The sessions are easily adapted in structure and format for other societies. For example, several ASPO members repeated one session from the 2002 ASPO meeting at the 2002 International Congress of Epidemiology, expanding to include panelists with expertise in health outcomes other than cancer.

Summary

Several key components have been critical to the success of the ASPO Junior Members Group including (a) the strong commitment from the junior members, (b) support from ASPO senior leaders, (c) a detailed manual of operations, (d) an

infrastructure that encourages continuity of Junior Members on the different planning committees over several years (i.e., first year as committee member and second year as session coordinator), (e) annual evaluations of sessions to identify topical areas for future sessions and to recruit new committee members, and (e) integration into the Society via representation on the Executive and Annual Program Planning committees.

Feedback from the educational session evaluations, the large attendance at these sessions, and the results of an electronic survey conducted in 2001 (3) clearly document and show that essential areas of career development are currently not being fully met for junior scientists either within their institutions or at other national meetings. The career development topics consistently identified form essential skills that are incompletely provided, overlooked, or of lower priority in training but are needed by researchers who seek independence in their careers, particularly for individuals in academic research settings.

Other professional and scientific societies may wish to adopt the strategy of ASPO Junior Member Interest Group and its role in planning career development sessions at annual meetings; the structure and development can be easy for societies to adopt. Commitment to junior members by national societies and their senior leadership can help build stronger societies and substantially improve the fields

Table 1. Foci and topics of past ASPO Junior Members Workshops

Development of research skills
1. Scientific writing
a. Publications
b. Grants
2. Peer review
a. Manuscript review
b. NIH study section
c. Responding to manuscript reviewer comments
Development of professional skills
1. Regulating work responsibilities
2. Balancing family and work commitments
3. Networking
4. Collaborative and transdisciplinary research development
5. Leadership training
6. Mentoring and being mentored
7. Interviewing and job negotiating

¹¹ <http://www.aspo.org>.

they represent. We challenge other societies to strengthen outreach to junior members and to provide structured opportunities for ongoing involvement and leadership within their societies.

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Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention

AACR American Association
for Cancer Research

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