

Flying high: What's your value?

As students graduate and develop into Student Transition and Early Professional (STEP) memberships, we have all thought about one thing – Membership dues. Can I afford them without the assistance I once had from my graduate adviser? Does the ESA membership really benefit me? As a recent graduate, finally shifting into a new job, I can honestly say I'm finally uncovering these answers for myself.

Over the years, it has been an essential goal of ESA's Governing Board (GB) to keep membership dues as low as possible. Nevertheless, balancing low dues with the value of adding programs, services, and professional development can be a tough act. Truthfully, there has not been a dues increase in over three years for members of the Society; however, new programs have emerged to bolster your membership value.

This is especially true across the STEP membership platform where the Society and the GB have recognized the importance of its early career professional members, thus, making it a central focus in adding value to your overall membership. Why? Because, **you** are the future leaders of this great Society!

So, what is the value ESA is providing me? I have asked myself this question several times over the past 8 months while I was on the job hunt, a time where the only funding available to me was my personal bank account, especially when facing the 2015 meeting in Minneapolis. However, after recognizing the value of my membership, I knew this membership could be a benefit to my future as I continued down my path of professional development.

What benefits jump out to me as I look towards the future? Over the past year, I uncovered the following as a major value into retaining my membership:

- (1) **New Awards:** During the 2015-2016 season, the ESA GB approved four new Early Career Professional awards, each with a \$1,000 cash prize, to recognize early career professional contributions to the Entomological Society of America through four key categories: extension, outreach/public engagement, research, and teaching. Additionally, new ECP Branch awards are emerging across the society to recognize this key demographic.
- (2) **ICE 2016 benefits:** In an effort to offset costs for the upcoming International Congress, ESA has set aside funds to alleviate increased costs for 2016. In total, \$50k was awarded to international based STEP/ECP members and \$27k to US-based STEP/ECP members to attend the conference through applied travel grants. Furthermore, new volunteer opportunities have been established at national meetings, whereby early career professional members can volunteer, network, and receive a partial refund of their registration fee.
- (3) **Professional development:** Over the past several years, the STEP/ECP committee has made it a top priority to help foster career development for early professionals. This has been accomplished through Lunch & Learns organized (i.e. 'Managing job transitions as an early professional'; Minneapolis 2015), workshops (i.e. 'Challenges and Opportunities for Future Leaders: A Training Workshop for Student Transition and Early Professional Members of ESA'; Portland; 2014), and symposia ('Global Entomological Collaborations'; Orlando 2016). Additionally, the Student Representative to the ESA Governing Board is working alongside the ECP Committee

to provide further learning opportunities through webinars to advance your career development. In 2016, several exciting webinars are on the horizon including how to develop diversity and inclusion statements, becoming a respected mentor, a job application series aimed at helping STEPs/ECPs write impactful research and/or teaching statements, and “How to Stand Out from the Crowd: Making the Most ICE 2016!”

- (4) Traditional benefits: Additionally, there are several critical benefits that will continue to be offered that serve as a benchmark of your membership in the Entomological Society of America. These include a quarterly released ECP e-newsletter to provide information regarding upcoming deadlines, new offerings, and important news targeting the ECP membership. Members also have the ability to access and publish in world-renowned scientific journals that reach scientists, students, industry, extension, and more across the globe—and there are no page charges for publishing in ESA’s subscription journals!
- (5) SHOWCASING ONSELF: Perhaps the most significant contribution is the Society’s willingness to provide you with a platform to showcase yourself! One of my entomology mentors once told me that you never truly know when your first job interview starts. From the very first time you enter a professional meeting, both branch and national, you are showcasing yourself to potential employers, colleagues, collaborators, and legends in the Society. By making yourself visible, by volunteering, by getting involved, and by reaching out to others, you are showcasing yourself to a discipline where one day you will make an impact and call many of these great faces friends! However, only you can make that happen! Be visible!

As you look towards your next meeting, take each opportunity to meet a new face and take advantage of the value ESA is offering you. The best way to make the most of your meeting is to make yourself VISIBLE!

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