



Standards Council of Canada
Conseil canadien des normes

Young Professionals Standardization Framework

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Introduction

Proactive engagement and retention of young professionals in Canada's standardization network is a key objective for the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) and its partners. Of the 3,300 SCC members, roughly 16% are under 40 years of age. Appropriate training and guidance are required to position young professionals to adequately participate in standardization activities and ensure effective succession planning. A national framework offered by SCC in collaboration with partner organizations will provide guidance for the engagement of these future experts to understand and advocate the need for, and benefits of, the standardization system.

With that objective in mind, SCC created in 2015 the SCC Young Professionals Advisory Panel ("Panel"), a virtual group of young professionals to solicit ideas and identify requirements for a program tailored to their needs. Furthermore, SCC conducted extensive research on existing young professional programs offered in Canada by government, industry, academia, labour organizations, SCC accredited Standards Development Organizations (SDOs), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), as well as other National Standards Bodies of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and IEC to identify opportunities for collaboration and existing best practices. In 2017, SCC invited key stakeholders, representatives of academia, government, industry, trade unions, and Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) to become members of the SCC Young Leaders Task Force ("Task Force") to discuss the development of a framework for a sustainable program for young professionals to increase their skills and knowledge of standardization and their opportunities to participate in the standardization network.

The framework for the Young Professionals Standardization Framework (YPSF) is based on the feedback received from members of the Task Force, recommendations from external consultants, the Panel, and an extensive review of other relevant programs and documents collected by the Standards and International Relations Branch.

Strategic Objective

Based on our research findings, young professionals have identified similar characteristics in their career development:

- *More uncertainty* – Young professionals are making initial choices for their careers which may lead to uncertainty and changes in employment status to further explore career choices.
- *Less experience* – Young professionals have less experience in their careers specifically within standardization. As a result, they depend on peer guidance and technology to facilitate knowledge exchange.
- *Less power* – Young professionals have limited financial resources and less power with their employers, and as such rely on employer support for participation in standardization activities.

The Young Professionals Standardization Framework (YPSF) aims to strategically engage with its target audience while acknowledging key particularities such as level of standardization knowledge, geographic location, level of participation, background, skills, and gender.

The YPSF will guide stakeholder organizations to achieve common goals such as the engagement, attraction, retention, and recognition of young professionals in standardization activities and ensure effective succession planning for the standardization network.

Target Audiences

The young professionals demographic is essential for standardization succession planning and how the standardization network within Canada respond requires serious consideration and action. All stakeholders need to determine how the next generation entering the field of standardization is similar or different from preceding generations and how the strategy needs to be adapted as a result.

To improve young professional participation, organizations need to invest more resources to identify and understand young professionals' needs and values; adapt and sustain a strategy that achieves young professional participation in standardization.

For the purposes of this framework, young professionals are defined as individuals between the ages of 21 and 39 years of age.

Identified target audiences include:

- Young professionals
- Students, specifically from engineering, sciences and technology disciplines
- Employers of young professionals from key sectors

- Stakeholders from new and emerging key sectors
- Member organizations whose representatives are transitioning/retiring
- Technical committees at Standards Development Organizations

Identified Challenges and Potential Solutions

The core strategic challenges for young professionals to participate in national and international standards development and conformity assessment activities were identified. These include:

1. Funds and resources

Young professionals lack access to funding to participate in standards development and conformity assessment activities, especially to attend international meetings and workshops. Some young professionals dedicate their free time and own resources to participate in standardization work activities.

The following are some of the most significant challenges:

Cost poses barriers to participation - where membership fees are required, organizations may provide discounts to students; however, membership becomes increasingly expensive once the student graduates. This potentially prohibits the person from continuing in the standardization activity.

Organizational support of cost - If the employer organizations are not financially supportive of participation in standardization activities, it is more difficult for young professionals to find the resources necessary to fund this activity. Moreover, while membership and participation in technical meetings may be supported, additional support for activities such as training and conference attendance may be more limited.

Funds, time, and resources need to be allocated to effectively support the participation of young professionals. A sustainable program tailored to young professionals is needed to address these challenges which are facing all standardization partners in the network. In addition, the network should collaboratively develop program offerings, link and leverage its existing offerings, best practices, resources and knowledge of existing national and international programs to address these gaps and achieve common goals.

2. Lack of standardization awareness

The knowledge and understanding of standardization by young professionals is usually overestimated.

Members of the Task Force with established programs for young professionals have identified a lack of awareness about available programs and opportunities as barriers to participation in areas related to their profession.

The following summarizes some of the key issues:

Standardization awareness and role – Many young professionals have not heard of standardization in their organization/industry or the role that standards play within their profession and why it is important.

Career benefits – Young professionals, as they begin their careers, may not have been exposed to standardization. They may need to learn how to participate and how to leverage their participation to build future network and career opportunities.

Task Force members identified various solutions to overcome these challenges: ensure flexible engagement options such as allowing virtual participation; develop a communications strategy to effectively communicate participation opportunities; convey to committee Chairs the importance of involving young professionals; research to identify key stakeholders and then outreach to the right audiences; engage with academics and professional organizations to incorporate standards into curriculum; engage program alumni/young committee members in the program's selection committee; and be constantly open to discuss and review the selection process with young professionals.

3. Tools to participate

The lack of the right tools to facilitate participation was also identified as a barrier.

Offering young professionals with a wide range of tools such as varied training (soft and hard skills), networking opportunities, mentorship programs, a centralized hub of information, will facilitate their engagement, participation, and retention.

4. Value proposition

Prior to engaging in standards-related opportunities, young professionals look for answers to the question “what’s in it for me?”. As they pursue their career and build their skills and abilities, it is important for them to seek opportunities that will bring them personal and professional growth. It is important that young professionals have an understanding of the value and role that standardization plays in Canada. We must provide young professionals with engagement value propositions that meet their needs or capabilities.

Young professionals report that there is a resistance on part of their employers to support their participation in standards-related activities and the need to have the right information to express to their employers the business case for participation.

Greater awareness by young professionals on the value and benefit of standardization matched with a clear understanding of stakeholder needs of how supporting young professionals' participation will translate to business/marketing, economic, social and environmental benefits,

may facilitate employers' consent and support for young professionals' participation in standards and conformity assessment activities. This can be achieved by developing the value proposition through a well-defined business case.

5. Knowledge gap

Young professionals tend to think they don't know enough about standardization processes and its operating environments and as a result, feel intimidated by its complexities. On the other hand, organizations' members/experts are either retiring or nearing retirement resulting in them leaving the organizations' standardization activities. There is a real need for organizations to build in succession planning in their organizations to transfer the knowledge to younger generations.

To address this knowledge gap and ensure effective succession planning, it is important to raise awareness among organizations' members/experts and their participation in standardization activities. There is a need to identify successors, develop guidelines for effective transfer of knowledge, identify and target specific focus areas for engagement of young professionals such as committees with an older than average membership or committees whose standards would benefit from a younger perspective.

Value Proposition of the Young Professionals Standardization Strategy

Various benefits of a formal young professionals program have been identified for those various stakeholders:

1. For young professionals

- Increase knowledge and understanding of standardization
- Develop professionally
- Gain professional recognition
- Learn more about related state-of-the-art technologies, global market opportunities, future potential changes in regulations
- Develop leadership and communication skills
- Gain new skills and valuable experience to add to resume
- Develop practical experience as a committee member
- Influence the development of standards and conformity assessment schemes
- Network with leading experts, potential clients, and competitors in their sector and gain business intelligence

2. For employers

- Gain business intelligence at international standards meetings

- Gain access to a new customer base for product/service
- Increase consumer confidence and reduce risk with suppliers and products
- Access the most up-to-date information on emerging technology and policy trends for a competitive advantage
- Network with leading experts, clients, and competitors in their sector
- Participation in standardization maximizes revenue, optimize efficiencies and reduce costs by:
 - leading to stronger and more reliable product design that can be sold in multiple markets
 - simplifying product/service design
 - allowing the creation of economical standardized parts/services when developing new products/services
 - Influencing technical content, contributing to removing barriers to commercialization and ensuring that standards respond to their business and to Canadian industry needs

3. For National Standards Bodies/ Standard Development Organizations

- Increase member participation and retention in standards and conformity assessment activities
- Ensure succession planning in national and international standards and conformity assessment policy and technical committees
- Advocate the benefits of standardization
- Contribute new ideas and concepts to enable innovation and economic growth

Young Professionals Standardization Framework

Upon review of the feedback received from the Task Force, previous consultations with young professionals, and extensive research, the Standards and International Relations Branch (SIRB) developed a Young Professionals Standardization Network Framework which outlines the key program areas for success. These program areas are as follows:

1. Partnerships and collaboration

Proactive engagement and retention of young professionals in Canada's standardization network is a key objective for the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) and its partners (national standardization system/network). Of the 3,300 SCC members, roughly 16% are under 40 years of age. Appropriate training and guidance are required to position young professionals effectively to participate in standardization activities and ensure effective succession planning.

Objective(s):

Develop a national program using a model of collaboration and partnership with relevant stakeholders. The program would create and maximize common program offerings that benefit all partners while at the same time leveraging existing resources and services that will inspire these future leaders to understand and advocate the need for, and benefits of, the standardization system, both nationally and internationally.

Develop strategies that target employers to encourage and sustain their participation by organizations in standardization activities. These strategies should help employers meet their goals, inform employers about the value of participation and promote employer support of young professionals in standardization activities. Note that the needs of employers may differ greatly within an industry.

2. Outreach and engagement

Young Professionals look for opportunities to voice their concerns and share ideas. Providing them with the right tools to express their thoughts can be extremely beneficial. It gives them an opportunity to build their profile, interact with others, while at the same time permit new ideas to flourish for the continuous improvement of services and the development of a value proposition aligned with their needs.

Objective(s):

Undergo work to identify relevant stakeholders who would participate in the national program. Once identified, understand their preferred means of engagement and have the appropriate tools in place to educate, and empower young professionals as a means to recruit and keep them involved in standardization. By ensuring the engagement of young professionals it will ensure effective program delivery and monitoring.

Create sustainable engagement paths with distinct rewards or recognition for achieving particular milestones. Young professionals are more accustomed to programs oriented around recognition than senior professionals. As younger professionals, they logically have less professional accomplishments and thus need more substantial third-party validation of their expertise.

3. Communication and Awareness Building

Conversations with people who are not engaged in standardization often lead to the question: “What are standards?”. The lack of knowledge about standards and the value of participation in the standards development process is an impediment to participation. In addition, the benefits of participation in the standardization system are often unclear to young professionals. Furthermore, the current membership may not realize the importance of engaging young professionals early on in the standards development process or of ensuring that committees are considering succession and work continuity of technical committees to adequately prepare young professionals as future standards professionals.

It is important to create and sustain benefits-oriented communication strategies that consistently reinforce the value of engagement through communication channels that are familiar to young professionals.

Objective(s):

Develop a communication strategy to raise standards awareness amongst the identified target audiences to address their specific needs. It is important for young professionals to be able to clearly communicate the value proposition (Investment and Return on Investment - ROI) and the benefit of participation in standards development or conformity assessment activities to their employer. Employers may then be more willing to authorize the participation of their young professionals in standardization-related activities. The development of a value proposition for the targeted audiences will provide the necessary toolkit for young professionals to ensure effective succession planning in national and international standardization activities.

Keys to a successful communication strategy include the following:

- *Outcomes-oriented* – Highlight the impact of their participation.
- *Realistic* – The messages should be concise, believable and realistic.
- *Peer-based* – Focus on peer support and acceptance through approaches and methods such as testimonials by young professionals.
- *Media selection* – Communicate to young professionals through their preferred media channels such as text-based, social media.
- *Business-oriented digital channels* – Select digital channels according to young professionals' preferences that address their professional needs.

4. Education and training

Stakeholders need to allocate a larger investment to awareness and knowledge building to inform and educate young professionals about standardization and how their participation is relevant to their professional lives. Training will address the lack of awareness and identified knowledge gap, which will, in turn, ensure that young professionals are equipped to participate, understanding the value of these activities.

Trained members will be better equipped to represent Canada and lead internationally if provided with the right amount of information, through the right medium to contribute more effectively and efficiently. In-person and online training, webinars, mentorship, and workshops are much desired and needed.

Objective(s):

Develop a variety of training and mentorship opportunities to facilitate and encourage the participation of young professionals in standardization. In collaboration with identified partners, host various standardization networking opportunities (workshops, focus groups, webinars, work/study attachments, etc.) to expose young professionals to the standardization network and seek out their feedback.

Develop outreach strategies that link young professionals with more senior industry, professional and standardization leaders and specifically focus on identifying and developing young leaders as peer opinion leaders.

Create trial engagement strategies designed to allow young professionals a low-risk means of experimenting with key aspects of standardization and to experience the engagement value proposition without a substantial investment of time or financial resources. Examples might be participation as observers for standards development activities. The goal is to allow the young professional to self-define an engagement path and sample the best of what is available.

Conclusion

Regardless of the importance organizations currently place on young professional engagement, it is important to understand this demographic, what are the barriers to their engagement and how best to engage them. It is critical for all stakeholder organizations to determine how the next generation entering the standardization network is similar or different from preceding generations and how the strategy and mindsets need to be adapted to engage young professionals as new members, technical experts and/or employees.

To successfully identify the role of young professionals within the standardization network and develop value propositions designed to meet their unique needs will give us an advantage in the global competition for time, money and quality leadership engagement.

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Appendix 3: Reference documents

- Young Leaders' Program Action Plan – The Way Forward by Chris Cobb
- Young Leaders Program Workshop – Workshop Report by Intersol
- Young Professionals Program – Action Plan by Intersol
- Engaging Young Association Members – A Strategic White Paper for the Association Industry by Association Laboratory Inc.© 2015