



*young*  
**IPWEA**  
*Coffee Cup Challenge*



**Experienced Professional  
Member Support Pack**



# Executive Summary

IPWEA has long been advocating for and supporting initiatives that address the engineering skills shortage problem that employers have been facing around Australia, particularly in the local government sector. In response to this issue, the Young IPWEA Committee has developed an informal engagement program, aptly named “Coffee Cup Challenge”, that will be open for IPWEA members to participate in.

The proposed structure of the program seeks to have young professionals paired with experienced professionals, with each participant to benefit from the sharing knowledge and experiences. The program focuses on the soft skills required by public works professionals as they advance their careers, such as communication, change management, leadership and interpersonal skills.

The program sets out three meetings (with exercises provided as a guide) for each pair to work through together, utilising the senior experience, knowledge and networks of the experienced professional. The experienced professional, and their organisation, also benefit from this program by becoming familiar with the thoughts, expectations and motivations of the young professional, which can be used to support the way their organisation develops future leaders, whilst maintaining relevance with young professionals.

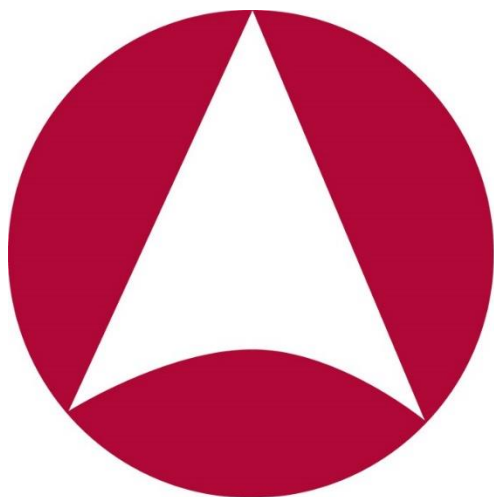
The informal nature of the program and the fact that it is low cost is our main intent as it comes back to having a simple (but guided) chat over a coffee. Nothing onerous for either member of the pair, but \$5 for a coffee and chat. There is a wealth of wisdom out there, and the intent to provide our members with an opportunity to access and pick the brains of another member at a different stage in their career.

This document provides the Young professional participant with information about how best to undertake the program.



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## Introduction

IPWEA, through the Young IPWEA program, supports IPWEA's young professionals across Australia and New Zealand. This Young IPWEA program incorporates any IPWEA member who is 35 years old or younger.

Soft skills are important to the development of young engineers. This program provides a pathway for knowledge to be transferred from more experienced practitioners to lesser experienced and young practitioners, ensuring industry knowledge is not lost through the generations. It also develops the future leaders of tomorrow, giving them the tools and support to further develop their knowledge and skillset, which they can pass on to future generations of young professionals. Likewise, it also provides more experienced practitioners with the opportunity to better understand and refine the development pathways for junior staff within their organisation.

The Young IPWEA Coffee Cup Challenge is a low cost, informal engagement program where:

- The program is driven by the young professional;
- The more senior professional (Experienced professional) will guide and provide advice;
- Networking and relationship building opportunities for the IPWEA community are created;
- IPWEA members are developed, both professionally and personally; and
- The young professionals of the industry are empowered, supported and developed to better the industry as a whole.

Through member engagement<sup>1</sup>, the Young IPWEA Committee have identified an engagement program as a priority for IPWEA to facilitate. The Coffee Cup Challenge proposed herein provides a framework and exercises for an informal partnership to complete. The Coffee Cup Challenge is intended to:

- Facilitate an informal engagement between young professionals and experienced professionals;
- Provide exercises, activities and guidelines to commence the program; and
- Ensure all participants and their organisations receive benefit from the program.

It is anticipated this relationship will continue beyond the life of the program, providing long term benefits to participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Young IPWEA Pulse Surveys, Member Surveys, Conference feedback

## About the Engagement Program

### What do we mean by Partnership?

*Experienced professional: an experienced and trusted adviser who is a member of IPWEA*

*Young professional: an under 35 years of age IPWEA Member who is given support, advice and guidance by the Experienced professional*

At one end of the spectrum are partnership relationships that focus on the extensive experience of the experienced professional. The expectation is that the knowledge, power and influence of the experienced professional will assist the young professional in achieving their career objectives. These relationships are often long term and sometimes confused with line management roles.

At the opposite end of the spectrum the focus shifts to the young professional. The emphasis is on the personal insights and intellectual challenge to be gained through interaction with a partnership. It is expected that the young professional will lead the relationship, inviting the experienced professional into their own inner dialogue to assist in working through complex career decisions. These types of relationships are more often than not fostered through formal programs that tend to be short term, and designed not to be tangled into hierarchical roles.

The partnering experience we expect in this program tends toward the latter end of the spectrum. The focus is on the personal development of the young professional. The hierarchical status of the experienced professional is not as significant as the learning potential he or she has to offer. This program provides an opportunity for those involved to share and reflect on professional life in a confidential, non-judgmental environment. It allows young professionals to explore their careers and skills in the legal profession and provides opportunities for them to connect with like-minded people, through participation in a mutually-beneficial developmental relationship.

### Why is the Partnership Important?

Young IPWEA believes the Partnership Program is an important part of professional development for members. It gives more senior members of the profession the opportunity to assist less experienced members.

Experienced professionals who volunteer are all experienced members of the profession capable of providing encouragement and advice together with regular feedback and constructive criticism. Young professionals are less experienced members of the profession who have recognised the need for contact with, and the opportunity to learn from, more experienced members of the profession from outside their immediate working environment.

The partnering relationship assumes trust and confidentiality between the experienced professional and the young professional, and the opportunity for the young professional to explore professional and personal issues in a non-judgemental atmosphere.

## Partnership Agreement

There will be a number of key principles that will ensure the challenge is a success for both the experienced professional and young professional these include:

- The partnering program is a constructive, developmental form of support – of mutual benefit to those taking part
- There will be adequate preparation and support for those taking part in the partnership program
- A clear understanding of and agreement on the level of confidentiality will be required within the experienced professional and young professional relationship
- Open communication and consultation will occur throughout the implementation and management of the challenge
- Participants will create a time frame both for the frequency of meetings and for the duration of the relationship

The experienced professional and young professional acknowledge and understand the objectives of the Coffee Cup Challenge and agree to engage in the challenge in a conscientious and professional fashion under the understanding that the experienced professional will:

- Assist in the development of the young professional
- Act as a sounding board for ideas from the young professional
- Provide guidance and direction to the young professional
- Provide advice and support in developing a career development strategy
- Help identify needs or skills upgrades that would benefit the young professional

## The Experienced professional's Role

The relationship between experienced professional and young professional is very much young professional-centred focusing on their professional and personal development. It may include the giving of advice, information, establishing facts, sign-posting, self-appraisal, etc. Whatever the techniques, the emphasis is on enabling and empowering the young professional to take charge of their own development and their environment.

To allow this transition the importance of interpersonal skills is essential. These skills include listening effectively, empathy, understanding, a non-judgemental approach and the ability to facilitate through skilled questioning.

The role of the Experienced professional is to:

- Listen
- Share information and knowledge
- Give advice on career development
- Offer different perspectives
- Offer support and encouragement
- Draw on and share your own experiences

The partnering relationship can be a very powerful positive experience for both the experienced professional and young professional. It enables and develops a greater sense of confidence, enhancing the professional and personal skills of both parties.

There are different ways a young professional can be supported, checked, encouraged and given constructive feedback. With each strategy, it is important to be aware of its purpose, appropriateness, the likely impact and its value to the young professional.

Strategies can include:-

- Giving advice – offering the young professional your opinion on the best course of action
- Giving information – giving information on a specific situation (e.g. contact for resource)
- Taking action in support – doing something on the young professional's behalf
- Observing and giving feedback – work shadowing and observation by either or both parties. Observation coupled with constructive feedback is a powerful learning tool
- Reviewing – reflection on experience can develop understanding allowing one to consider future needs, explore options and strategies

# Partnership Meetings

As a part of the \$5 Coffee Cup Challenge there will be 3 formal meetings with activities to help facilitate and lead the initial discussions. Upon completion of the 3 formal meetings it is envisaged that the experienced professional-young professional relationship would continue beyond the completion of the challenge in a way that suits the both members.

The 3 formal meetings will be as follows:

## 1. First Meeting – The Coffee Cup Challenge:

The first meeting is designed to “break the ice” for each pairing. It will be a chance for the partners to meet face-to-face and get to know each other. Each participant will be given a cheat sheet to help facilitate the initial conversation [Refer to CCC Exercise 1 Handout]

The young professional will invite their partner to coffee, at an agreed place. The young professional will buy their partner a cup of coffee. It is important this first meeting is conducted in-person – rapport is built easier in-person and will allow a greater connection between the partnerships. Participants will be less likely to get distracted with emails or other work if face-to-face.

If the partners are in different locations, the first meeting may be timed around an IPWEA organised event such as a regional forum or conference.

## 2. Second Meeting – Developing Your 5-year Plan:

In the second meeting, the experienced professional will assist their partner to develop their 5-year plan. The intention behind this exercise is to get the young professional partner thinking about the future, and the direction that they see both their professional and personal life taking. It also helps to identify the steps required to reach those goals.

A template will be provided for completion during this meeting [Refer to CCC Exercise 2 Handout].

The 5-year plan will be a personal and professional timeline with follow up actions, i.e. what training opportunities are available to assist or promote development.

This may be a confronting session for the young professional. The experienced professional is expected to help guide and support them through this session by sharing experiences and knowledge of tools and resources that could be used etc., and also discuss any known obstacles that might be preventing the young professional from taking the next step in their careers.

## 3. Third Meeting – Pain Points:

The third meeting is designed to identify the areas where the experienced professional can assist with their partner’s development. These are known as “Pain Points” and is where the program can make a real difference.

The experienced professional uses their knowledge, experience and networks to help their partner navigate and break through their Pain Points.