



Strengthening the future of our national geospatial industry: Intergenerational knowledge exchange and soft skills development in the SSSI Mentoring Program

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Diversity of age is an important aspect of the broader diversity and inclusion conversation, as is diversity between the **balance of technical and soft skills**. The Australian geospatial and surveying industry, compiling location intelligence professionals from across the nation, is demographically positioned to lose a significant portion of its members to retirement over the coming decade, which would cause a large loss of experience and the business benefits this brings. On the other hand, young professionals can bring many benefits in breaking organisations out of the 'expertise trap' to leverage future-facing innovations and collaborations, discussed in the Harvard Business Review¹. With the industry set to pivot to adopt and adapt to new

technological developments and new ways of thinking as **digital twins**, **artificial intelligence** and **machine learning** become the new foundations of the way of working as we move rapidly towards the fourth industrial revolution, soft skills are also becoming increasingly important.

The **Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute (SSSI) Mentoring Program**, led by the SSSI National Young Professionals and supported by the SSSI Board, is making momentous headway on both of these fronts. The program, which began in 2018 and has supported almost 400 participants since then, brings mentors and mentees together from all generations in the industry. The vision of the program is to facilitate structured **intergenerational**

¹ Finklestein, S. (2019) 'Don't Be Blinded by Your Own Expertise', *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2019 issue (pp.153–158)

knowledge and wisdom exchange to strengthen the industry, especially important as we navigate the ways in which COVID-19 is disrupting the ways that we work, live and learn.

“Investing in capacity building of our people is an important priority for our industry, especially right now - supporting students as they are looking to enter the industry for the first time, young professionals as they are working up to their first leadership positions in their organisations, and experienced professionals to give back to those who are stepping up is vital for changing the culture of our industry, shining a bright light on our national future in a global context” says Roshni Sharma, Chair of the SSSI National Young Professionals.



The strength of the 2020 Mentoring Program is its national reach, leveraging the wisdom and learnings of the diverse technical as well as geographic facets of our industry in the pairing of mentors and mentees. Open to all, and with a portion of international participants each year, the program is also working to support cultural diversity and diversity of heritage in our industry.

The program covers a range of soft skills, from understanding industry trends and leveraging these for career goal setting, getting a foot in the door in the industry, teamwork and communication, emotional intelligence and leadership, networking, time and priority management, managing up and working relationships, continuous learning and personal/professional development, and adding value for your employer while adding value to yourself. Mentors and mentees meet on a fortnightly basis to discuss set topics as well as other areas of professional life they may wish to speak about.

“The next generation of spatial professionals need to practice an inclusive

culture whilst they develop their careers. Diversity is a key element of success to the profession and in turn contributes to our Nation’s growth. The SSSI Board and Leadership are very keen to invest and foster the diversity agenda in the spatial profession, and are very happy to note the commitment and achievements of SSSI YPs” says Dr Zaffar Sadiq Mohamed-Ghouse FRGS FSSSI, President SSSI.

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- Dr. Zaffar Sadiq Mohamed-Ghouse

Mentees enjoy the experience of gaining feedback and guidance from their mentors – including relief in being able to find out what the ‘real world’ is really like and understanding the opportunities available to them through the depth and breadth of the industry. “The entire program has been very insightful. It covered all topics related to career, personal and professional development and also pointed me to the most important things at different stages of my development. I have learnt a lot from my mentor. The program has also helped me to reflect on various areas of improvement for me. It's been a great journey so far.”



Similarly, mentors are finding that they enjoy realising how much they have to give back, and gaining new perspectives and an appreciation of how far they had come and what they are taking for granted. “The opportunity to engage with and share my experiences with bright, enthusiastic, talented young people, passionate about the industry and excited about the next

phase in their lives. It has been a privilege to participate and rewarding for me personally."

The SSSI Young Professionals shares the broader vision of the Surveying & Spatial Sciences Institute, seeing a future where all location intelligence professionals intuitively have clear career pathways, know where to find the training and professional development they individually crave, have strong and resilient industry networks across Australia and the world, and take pride in their industry's identity and achievements, its unity and legacy. The SSSI Young Professionals are making momentous headway in working to achieve this vision, through the SSSI Mentoring Program, engagement with almost 100 staff and leaders in the tertiary educational development space across Australia, and a monthly webinar series, 'Career Lift: Tools for emerging leaders' throughout 2020. ■

In February 2020 the Co-Convenors of the Spatial and Surveying Diversity Leadership Network issued a call to the spatial sector to showcase leaders in our sector who are investing in opening doors, challenging bias, and creating workplace cultures that foster a sense of belonging and inclusion. This case study is a direct outcome of that call. For more on Diversity & Inclusion in the Spatial sector visit the [2026 Agenda – Diversity & Inclusion webpage](#) or connect at diversity@2026agenda.com

