

**National Association of Plant Breeders
Early Career Working Group
June 2021**

2020/2021 Annual Report

The Early Career Working Group (ECWG) of the NAPB has the mission of assisting self-defined early career professionals with three primary objectives: securing professional employment and defining their career paths; providing social spaces to establish relationships with their peers; and to provide service and mentoring opportunities.

In September of 2020, the ECWG leadership was entirely renewed with three new board members. Deb Menicos was chair, Sarah Turner-Hisong was vice chair, and Chandler Levinson was secretary. The year was overall very positive for the ECWG. The monthly meetings were attended by 5 to 15 people, with a core group of 10 persons attending most meetings.

With these objectives in mind, the ECWG has the following accomplishments and activities to report September 2020 – July 2021.

Securing professional employment and defining career paths:

- Hosted the third annual webinar series titled “From Here to There: The Twists and Turns of a Plant Breeding Career”.
 - Three monthly webinars hosted in April, May and June 2021 using the NAPB Zoom account interviewing established Plant Breeding professionals about their career paths and advice for emerging professionals across a variety of disciplines.
 - Webinar interview participants represented professionals from private industry, academia, commodity groups, and extension
 - Researchers from Bayer who had unconventional path leading them to breeding
 - Early career professors and researchers at the University of Georgia
 - Early career researchers in three companies providing computing support to breeders (NSIP, Computomics, and Gencove)
 - Webinars were recorded and uploaded to YouTube on the NAPB channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/plantbreedgenomics/videos>).

Providing social spaces to establish relationships with their peers:

- Hosted three online “Coffee Hours” in January, March and April 2021
 - Casual, online video meeting hosted midday across time zones.
 - Each “Coffee Hour” had a designated host in charge of establishing a meeting link, advertising, and providing conversational starts.

- Topics included: “Cross-cultural mentoring”, “COVID-19 one year check-in, how are you doing?” and “Joining a new workplace”.
- Attendance averaged around 9 participants.
- Fostered social interactions in the second half of the monthly meetings
 - A topic to trigger conversation around professional development was chosen for every monthly meeting. We managed to take the time to have these conversations about every other meeting. The goal of this was to increase connection between members of the ECWG, which was successful.
- Planning social interactions at the 2021 Annual Meeting.
 - ECWG networking lunch break at the 2021 Annual Meeting, on August 18th from 12:00pm to 12:55pm. (Listed on the official schedule thanks to the planning committee.)
 - We will host an interactive icebreaker event along with normal meeting activities during the break.

Enhance Training Opportunities and Exposure for Early Career Researchers:

- Advocated for speaking selection spot for Early Career Researcher at Annual Meetings.
 - Speaker spot selected from Early Career Researcher abstracts submitted for poster presentation at the Annual Meeting by the Education Committee.
- Early Career highlights were added to every newsletter.
- Launching of a new mentoring program entitled Mentoring Circle.
 - The program aims to gather NAPB members from every career stages (students, early career, established professionals) into groups of 4 to 6 persons chosen based on interest. The program will feature a yearly event and a newsletter.
 - 31 persons responded, and were grouped in 7 “circles” of 4 to 5 individuals

Upcoming Concerns moving Into Next Year:

- Make sure the momentum of the mentoring program is kept
- Maintain participation of active members