

# Results of the recent SEPM Community Survey

Rebekah Grmela (Right and Good Consulting) and Howard Harper (SEPM)

## INTRODUCTION

This year, SEPM Society for Sedimentary Geology decided to initiate a series of surveys to better understand the make-up and needs of the society’s members. In an effort to appropriately engage the SEPM and sedimentary geological communities, SEPM launched a 2020 Community Survey to assess some basic demographics, and personal involvement in aspects of SEPM and the sedimentary geology community. This survey took place from June 29, 2020 to July 20, 2020, for a total of 21 days. Survey responses were collected 24/7 via SurveyMonkey. Individuals could respond anonymously or could identify themselves and participate for one of four \$50 Visa Cash Gift Card incentives. The 2020 Community Survey was distributed via our organization’s membership database by email, as well as marketed and promoted across social channels including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. SEPM plans to continue regular surveying of our community to improve and grow our support of the members and the community.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Prior to 2020, basic demographic information was not considered a priority by the organization to collect or maintain, due to concerns over anonymity and privacy laws. In our 2020 Community Survey, we requested basic demographic information and we have since released a follow-up survey to our community specifically requesting information to enhance the demographic profiles of membership and the community to help our diversity and inclusion efforts as an organization. This DEI survey is entirely anonymous.

As of August 31, 2020, SEPM had 2,552 members with a basic breakdown of 69% professionals and 31% students (Figure 1A) with 71% residing in North America (Figure 1B).

Figure 1A. SEPM August Membership

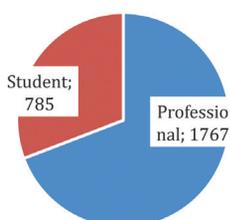
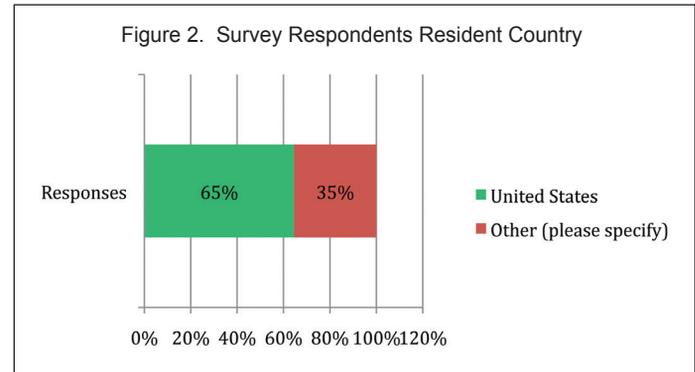


Figure 1B. Regional Membership

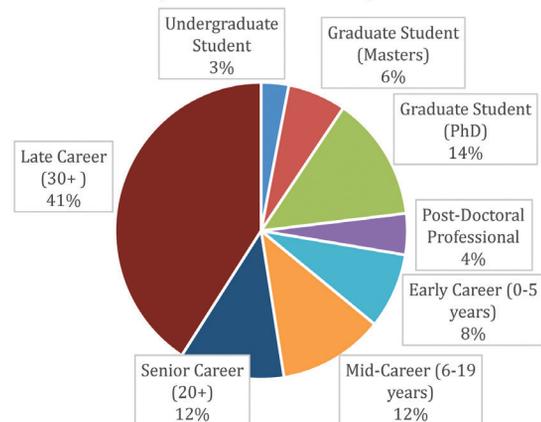


65% of survey respondents live in the United States but overall it is important to consider global economies, activities, and concerns as more than a third of respondents (35%) live outside North America, dominated by Canada, South America, and Southeast Asia regions.



In general, more than 41% of respondents in this survey self-identified as being “late” in their career, with more than 30+ years of experience (Figure 3), total students were about 23%, early career 12% with mid to senior career people about 24%. While heavier with input from the senior to late career (53%), there is significant input from the less experienced community (47%).

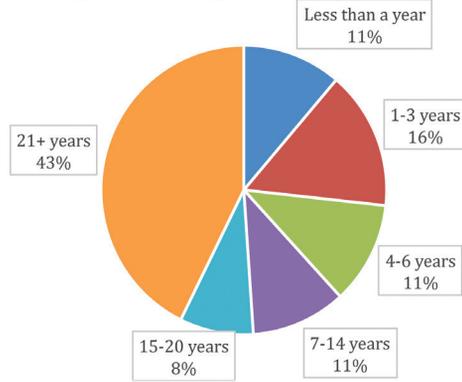
Figure 3. Career Stage



## SEPM MEMBERSHIP

Correlating with the survey participation by the more experienced career stage participants, the majority of survey respondents have also been a part of SEPM for more than 20+ years. It is worth noting, however, that almost half of membership responders (49%) have been members for 14 years or less with fairly equal percentages across those lower numbers (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Length of Membership

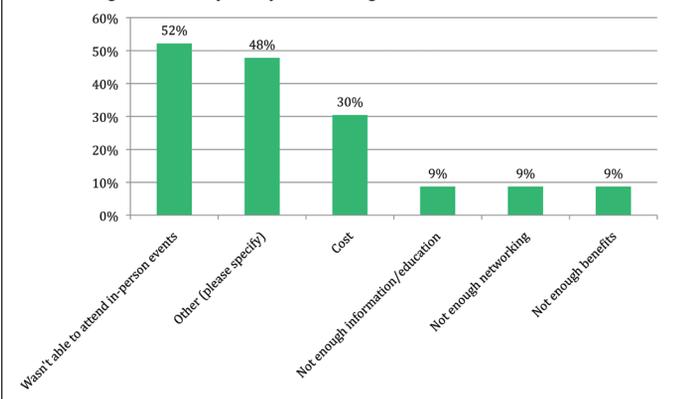


Specifically past members that had chosen to not renew their SEP membership (5%), gave these reasons for not renewing (Figure 5):

1. The most cited reasons were cost and inability to participate in in-person events as a deterrent to membership.
2. Many cited retirement and/or unemployment as their primary reason for leaving the organization (Other).
3. Change in cost and improvement of our online resources and presence were noted as improvements that would have some former members reconsider renewing their membership.

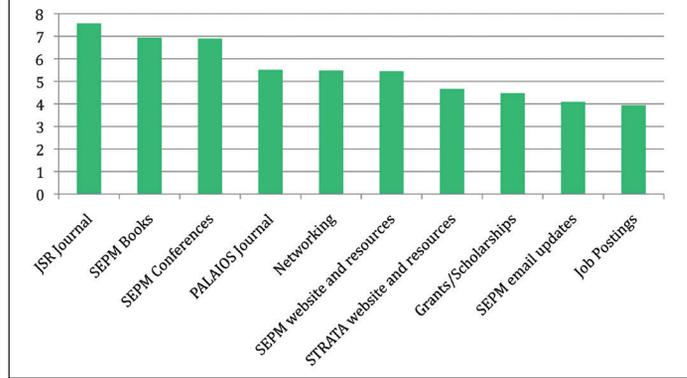
Many members maintained their membership thinking that it is a requirement for nomination for our primary organization awards, but this is generally not true as the science medals are for members or non-members and nominations can be made by anyone. Student grants however are for members only.

Figure 5. Why are you no longer a member of SEP?



We also evaluated the importance of different features and benefits available to SEP membership so as to improve our organizational offering (Figure 6). Overall, when ranked, SEP's JSR - *Journal for Sedimentary Research*, books/publications, and conferences were considered the top benefits of membership. The journal *PALAIOS*, Networking as well as resources related to the website were also considered high priorities of membership.

Figure 6. Rating Scores for SEP Benefits



Participants also requested several additional features of membership. Some of these features are already provided by our organization, but may need to be communicated better as offerings due to lack of awareness. Suggestions for SEP include:

- Providing more improved access to resources and information, such as online meetings, live webinars, virtual field trips and research guidance and mentorship.
- In particular, our student membership spoke up about the need for additional opportunities to connect and network,
- Students also want to see SEP offer enhanced, equitable, opportunities to people of color, as well as maintaining a voice in the diversity and inclusion conversation at large.

A little more than half of our survey respondents also shared what they enjoyed most about their SEP membership. Highlights include:

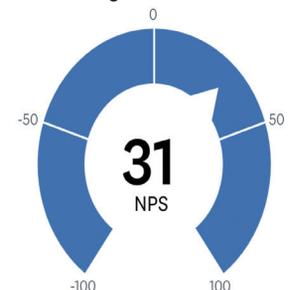
- Benefits such as our robust journal, publications, conferences and community network.
- SEP efforts to maintain our independent journals and publication processes that continue to attract verified science and talent in our community.

Overall, our membership rated our organization 4.0/5.0 in their satisfaction, as well as scored SEP with a Net Promoter Score of 31. (NPS ranges from -100 to +100 and the higher the score the better – anything above 0 is considered 'good'). While membership enjoys their experience, there is room for improvement for SEP to create passionate advocates for our organization.

Figure 7. Rating



Figure 8. NPS



**SATISFACTION**

We assessed several variables related to overall and specific satisfaction with SEPM activities. In addition to general positive sentiment as indicated above, we inquired about:

1. overall current program activities (Figure 9) – agree to strongly agree 79%;
2. opportunities to connect and network (Figure 10) – agree to strongly agree 77%;

3. continuing education and career opportunities (Figure 11) – agree to strongly agree 55%;
4. diversity and inclusiveness (Figure 12) – agree to strongly agree 57% but with a 9% disagreeing; and
5. overall SEPM culture (Figure 13) – 64% agree/strongly agree with 9% disagreeing.

Figure 9. Overall Satisfaction

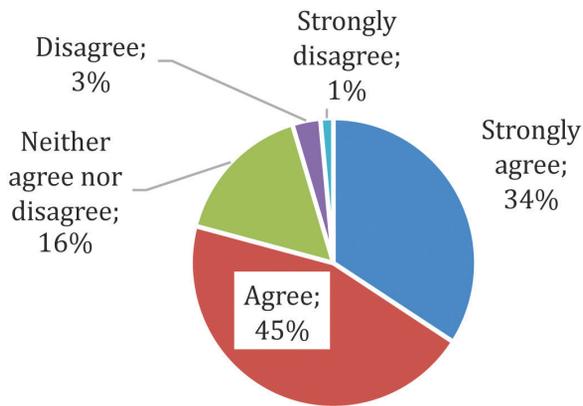


Figure 10. Network Satisfaction

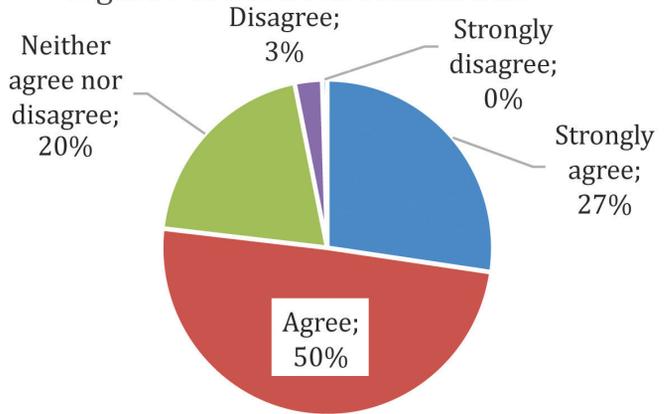


Figure 11. Training Satisfaction

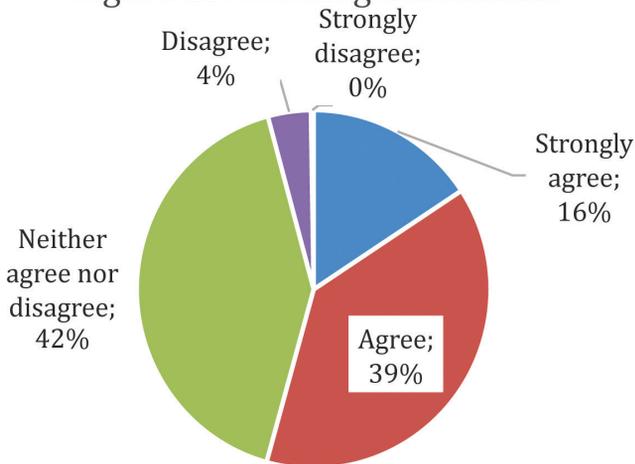


Figure 12. DEI Dedication

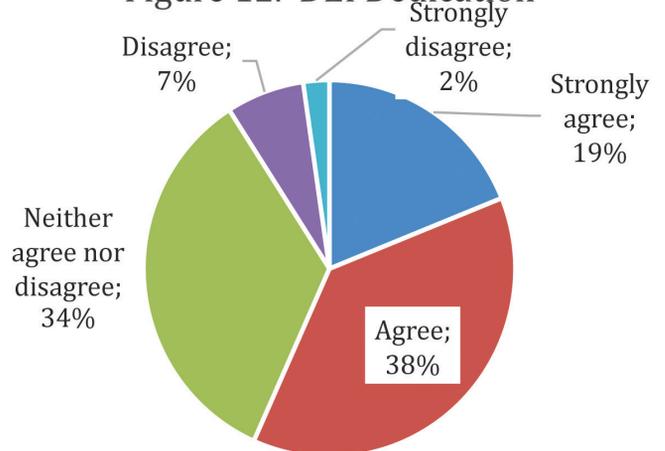
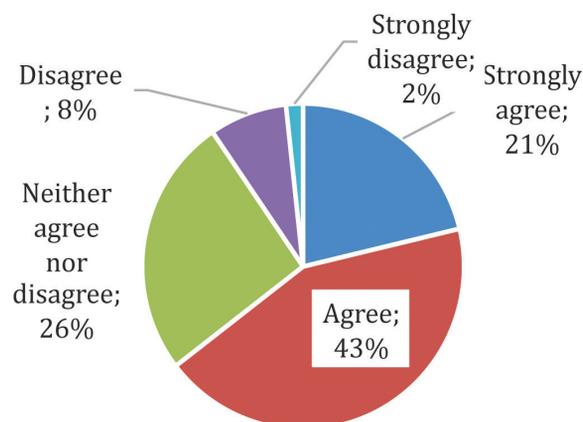


Figure 13. Culture Satisfaction



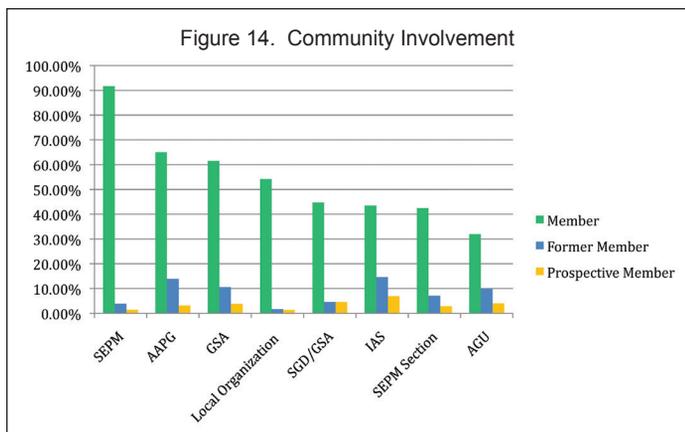
## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition to assessing our respondent's involvement with SEPM, we also dug into the overall participation in the sedimentary geology community.

- 54% of our community members were also members of a geological organization in their local community, while
- 43% were also involved in a local SEPM section organization.

In order of additional involvement,

- 65% of our survey are also members of AAPG.
- 62% GSA at large.
- 45% in GSA's Sedimentary Division, specifically.
- 44% is also currently involved in IAS, it is also the organization polled with the highest number of former and prospective members.
- 32% is also involved with AGU.



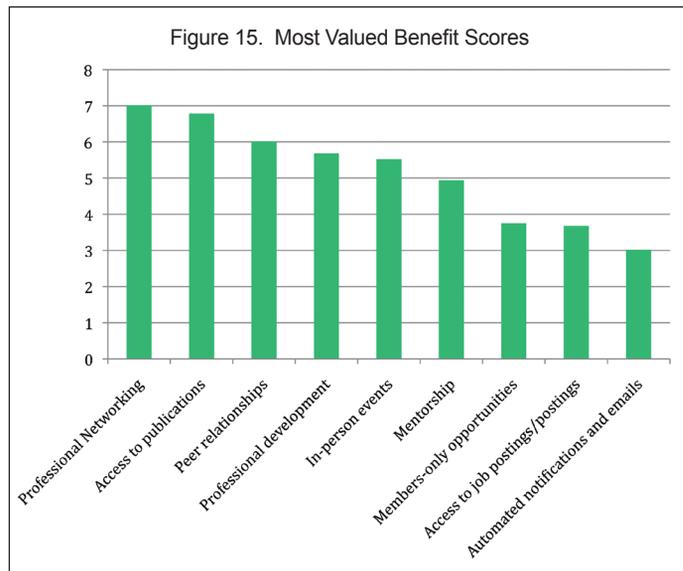
## CHALLENGES

No matter the membership level, our membership identified consistent trends in geoscience challenges. While the majority of our membership respondents identified themselves as later stage in their career, early and mid-stage career challenges were listed as a major area of concern.

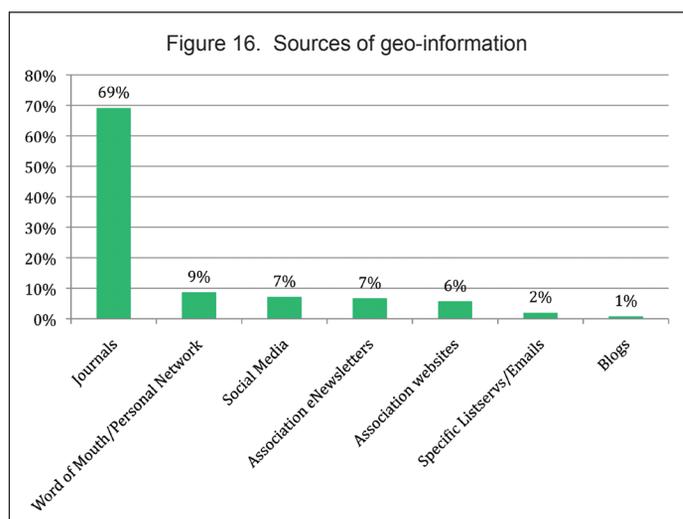
For the students, early and mid-career people, access to mentorship and "connections" in the sedimentary geology community were listed as one of the top challenges. Many respondents felt that they had limited academic and career opportunities due to their inability or lack of access to connections, grants, research and field engagements, thereby reducing their desirability for hire and future career advancement. Financial accessibility was also listed as a major burden to geoscience advancement - limited funds, scholarships, grants and research opportunities led to intentional and unintentional gatekeeping that often prioritizes a select group of researchers instead of expanding the field to women, minorities and scientists with less traditional backgrounds. Lastly, the emerging trends in open access and open data were considered major challenges to keep up with across the community.

## SOCIETY AND SEPM BENEFITS

The survey respondents also identified the primary reasons to join a scientific society such as SEPM (Figure 15). Access to publications, professional development, in-person events and professional networking, now with public health considered, we hope to continue to provide important resources to our sedimentary geology community that warrant continued SEPM membership.

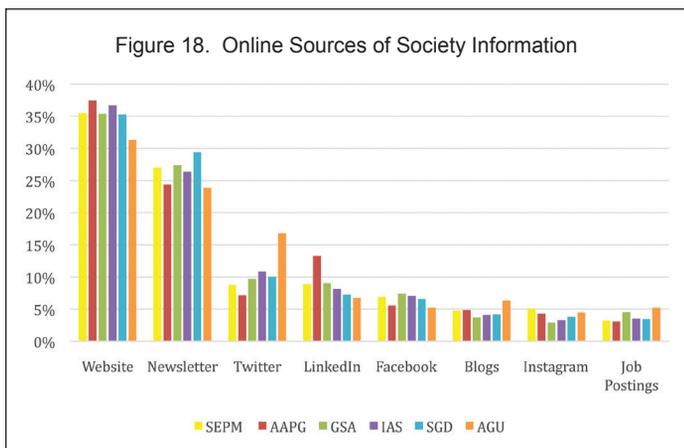
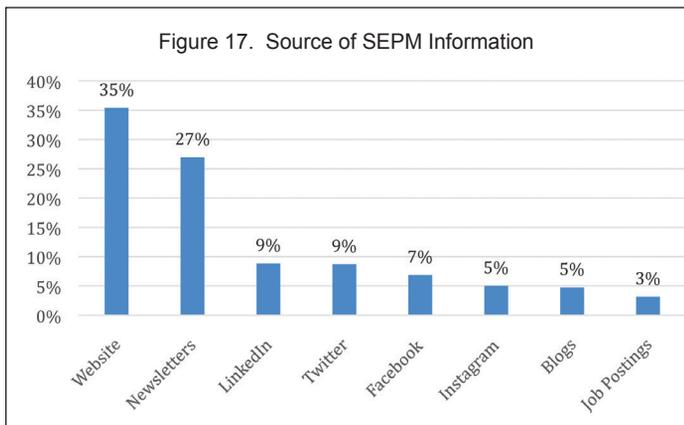


While it is obvious that peer reviewed journals are the overwhelming source of technical geoscience information (Figure 16), it will be important to continue holding networking events and updating our websites and social media platforms as these were also identified as information sources.



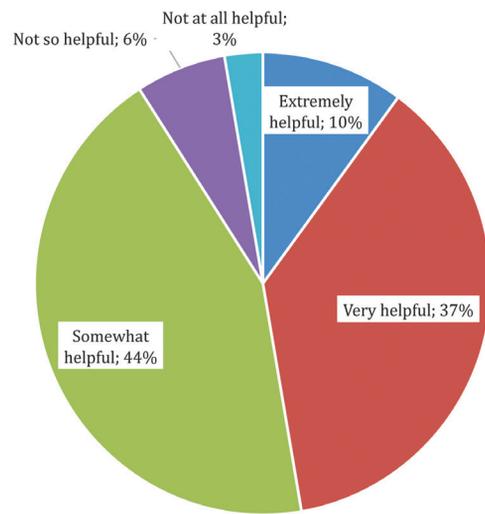
**MARKETING**

Last but not least, SEPM tapped into our surveyed network to identify the best ways to market, engage and communicate with our community (Figure 17). While there is some variation in the type of participation and marketing between the associations in the community, the majority relies most heavily on membership websites to provide their critical organization information. In addition to web content, members look closely to association newsletters. Twitter and LinkedIn were also specifically identified for current information. While used, Facebook, Instagram and Blogs hold a small percentage of audience attention. We also assessed satisfaction and opportunity within our own web and social media content as we work to improve our online presence for membership and the community. This hierarchy of online informational platforms is similar for several other geoscience organizations (Figure 18).



SEPM’s current website ([www.sepm.org](http://www.sepm.org)) was considered ‘helpful’ by 91% of the respondents but 9% did not find it helpful. The website is currently undergoing some significant redesign and we are hopeful that this will increase its helpfulness.

Figure 19. SEPM's Website



**CONCLUSIONS**

We received more than 560 total survey responses, with almost 500 self-reporting as current SEPM members. With this response rate, we can infer that around 20% of the membership participated in this community survey. This rate creates a 99% confidence in our survey with a statistically significant margin of error at +-5%. But this one, like all surveys, relies on the input from those members that take the time to become involved and it only took about 9 ½ minutes.

**NEXT STEPS**

SEPM will be building from this and other input on how to best continue to enhance the Society and maintain its core mission to disseminate information about sedimentary geology, its research and application. We encourage all SEPM members and the community to participate in any input gathering to make sure that your voice is heard and considered. More planned activity will include:

- A DEI Survey – just recently completed – to capture the diversity our community
- Web Focus Group – gathering input from a small group of ‘users’ to enhance the website.
- Plans to continue to capture input from the membership and community on a regular basis.

If you have any questions about this article please contact Rebekah Grmela ([rgrmela@sepm.org](mailto:rgrmela@sepm.org)) or Howard Harper ([hharper@sepm.org](mailto:hharper@sepm.org)).