New Chapter Frequently Asked Questions

What is the role of chapters in EWB-USA? What are the benefits of being an EWB-USA chapter?

It is through the chapter structure that our engineering work around the world takes place. By becoming an official EWB-USA chapter, you will have the support of Headquarters staff – Volunteer Engagement Team, Project Engineers, and an International Community Program Manager – to guide you through the program and project process. Communities and donors partner with EWB-USA because of an organization-wide reputation of high-quality and sustainable community projects. This allows our chapters the benefit of working with an organization with a well-established project process, name recognition for fundraising, and a community-driven mission.

How much of a commitment does it take to be a successful chapter?

The success of the chapter is mainly dependent on the commitment of its members. How much time is required of any one individual depends on the level of personal interest, the number of members involved, and how you divide tasks and responsibilities. Starting with recruiting the right people to the chapter, through the process of working with a community to design and implement a project that meets their needs, and fundraising to support chapter and project activities, there is much work to do. Organizing your chapter in a way that makes it easy to share responsibilities is important. The larger the number of dedicated members that are involved, the more the work can be spread out and delegated.

What opportunities are there for people with limited time who want to be involved?

As we already mentioned, a lot goes into a running a chapter but not everyone has to take on a leadership role. A member with limited time can be asked to do specific tasks such as updating a section of the chapter website, emailing possible venues for a fundraiser, or following up with new people that come to chapter meetings. One-time tasks would likely be more appropriate than ongoing roles for this type of member.

Once we start a chapter, do we have to partner on a program?

Yes. All new chapters are expected to apply for a new program within 1 year of becoming an established chapter. EWB-USA’s mission is to support community-driven development programs worldwide by collaborating with local partners to design and implement sustainable engineering projects and this cannot be accomplished by EWB-USA chapters without partnering on a program.

We’d like to partner on a few different programs at one time, can we do this?

Eventually this may be an option for your chapter depending on the size and historical success of your previous programs and projects. However, as a new chapter it is best if you start with just one program and focus your time and energy on ensuring its success.
What is the role of chapters in fundraising? What fundraising resources are available to our chapter?

EWB-USA chapters are responsible for fundraising to support the overall operations of EWB-USA, the activities of your chapter, and the projects on which you collaborate.

One of the most valuable resources in fundraising as an EWB-USA chapter is the name-recognition, reputation and 501(c)3 status that comes with being part of a nationally recognized non-profit organization. The headquarters office supports chapter fundraising efforts through the project grants program and a year-end fundraising campaign, both of which have proven to be effective fundraising resources for chapters. Finally, each EWB-USA chapter will have the ability to solicit online donations through a donation link specific to your chapter that Headquarters provides for you.

Members and chapters support the overall operations of EWB-USA through membership dues, the chapter fee, and by paying a small portion of the costs associated with QA/QC reviews incurred at the national level.

Should we open up a bank account in preparation for becoming a new chapter?

No. Since you will be using EWB-USA’s 501(c)3 status, all donations must be processed through EWB-USA. We will track the income and expense transactions and the balance of funds held on behalf of the chapter. Financial reports will also be available to chapters online. Further guidance on chapter finances will be given once you become an established chapter.

Once we become a chapter, do we really need to have all our attendees sign up online to become EWB-USA members? Can’t they participate without officially becoming a member?

In theory, people who are not officially registered as EWB-USA members can participate in your chapter. However, there are many benefits both to the person and to the chapter of having people become official members. Only official EWB-USA members can travel on project trips, serve as chapter officers, access a members-only website full of resources, and receive EWB-USA discounts. Liability or errors and omissions insurance offered by EWB-USA only covers EWB-USA members.

We’re a potential student chapter and we’d be interested in doing a project as part of a class or capstone project. Is this possible?

EWB-USA programs and projects help meet the most basic needs of our partnering communities. As a primary focus of our mission, the needs of our community partners are the primary drivers in setting priorities. As such, it is often the case that EWB-USA projects do not easily align with the requirements of senior design or capstone projects. While the needs of the EWB-USA project and a senior design project occasionally align, this is often the exception and not the rule.
I’ve heard about regional and national committees in EWB-USA. What is their role?

EWB-USA regional and national committees support the work of EWB-USA chapters in a variety of ways. Like chapters, they are made up of members who volunteer their time with EWB-USA.

Regional Steering Committees facilitate connections between chapters and represent the voice of members in the organization. There are seven Regional Steering Committees grouped geographically with most committee members having previously held leadership positions in their chapter.

The Standing Content Committees include members with significant technical expertise and EWB-USA experience. They develop technology specific training and resources.

A number of committees serve in an official review capacity and include long-time EWB-USA members. The Application Review Committee (ARC) reviews all new program applications submitted by communities to ensure we are the right match for the assistance they are requesting. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) reviews implementation plans to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the design before implementation. Health & Safety reviewers ensure that project teams have planned adequate precautions to protect travel team and community members during.

What do you mean by a Quality Management Plan?

The quality of each EWB-USA program is the responsibility of the chapter that has adopted the program. EWB-USA expects chapters to submit only the highest quality of reports and documents. Therefore, all chapters are required to develop an internal quality management plan. EWB-USA does not dictate the methods used for the quality management plan but some example methods are: 1) Use an internal independent peer review team prior to submitting key documents to EWB-USA 2) Do a post mortem review of each document reviewed by the EWB-USA HQ or TAC to determine how improvements could be made to the document; 3) Keep a lessons learned log 4) Use design standards that have been approved for the area, etc. Note that this is not an exhaustive list of quality management plans.

The chapter application says we should reach out to nearby already established chapters for guidance and insight. What kinds of questions should we ask them?

You can ask them any general questions on how their particular chapter operates and their project experience. Some sample questions are:

- How do you increase and retain membership?
- How is your executive board and elections structured?
- How many projects have you worked on and how do you determine new potential ones?
- Where did you find your mentors? What are good qualities in a mentor?
- How do you determine who goes on the trips?
- What methods of fundraising do you use?
- What type of projects has your chapter partnered on?
- What are some of the successes and challenges you have had working with your partner community?
OK, I think we’re ready to start on our application. Anything we should do before we start?

It’s always a good idea to reach out to the Chapter and Volunteer Engagement Manager before you start on an application. They can provide you specific information on your university or geographic region that may help in the application process. They can also help with any questions you may have after taking a first look at the application. Email chapters@ewb-usa.org to set up a time to discuss your plans for a new chapter.