

# IEEE Technical Activities Operations

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## Adapting Chapter Meetings and Mentoring to Online: IAS Engaging Members

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IEEE Industry Applications Society (IAS) introduced new programs and adapted existing ones to engage with chapters, students, and young professionals (YP) online.

### Chapter Virtual Meetings

“Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, there was a risk that the existing contacts to the chapters would be lost. When a student branch chapter chair contacted me saying: ‘We are in quarantine, please help us to do something useful,’ the idea of the Chapter’s Virtual Meeting Program was born,” says Péter Magyar, IAS Director of Chapter Development and former IAS Chapters and Membership Department (CMD) Chair.

“To encourage chapters to host virtual events, we developed a database of speakers composed of the IAS Executive Board Members, technical department chairs, distinguished lecturers, CMD committee members, and YP speakers. The database is fairly diverse and extensive which provides chapters plenty of choices for the type of event they would like to host. It is also an opportunity for chapters to engage directly with the IAS leadership and other prominent IAS members. These virtual events will play a great role in strengthening the link between the IAS leadership and IAS members and keeping the chapters ‘alive’ during these challenging times,” says Lesley Arakkal, IAS CMD Chair.

The program is advertised to chapters in a circular. CMD lists potential speakers on the [CMD webpage](https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html) (<https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html>). Then, Chapters contact the speaker. If the speaker accepts, the speaker and chapter make an agreement on topics, date and time, and online platform. Topics can be a technical presentation or general information about the department/committee programs, conferences, or participation possibilities in the committee activity. The chapter informs CMD about the event and details about the event are published on the CMD webpage.

A few board members as well as other volunteers have already had the opportunity to [participate in some of these virtual meetings](https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html) (<https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html>). So far, 14 virtual meetings have been held. Five meetings are in the planning stages and have been announced. The list of available presenters also continues to grow.

“The overall feedback has been very positive. We have received emails from chapters thanking the speakers and highlighting the positive impact it has had on their chapter members who have had the opportunity to engage with prominent IAS members. The feedback from the speakers has also been very encouraging. The speakers have expressed their delight in taking part in the virtual events. One of the recurring comments we have received is the relative ease with which these webinars can be arranged and executed,” says Arakkal.

Some feedback has included:

- “I’m happy to see IEEE IAS supporting the student branch chapters for sustaining the activities in this really difficult scenario.”
- “I have read the speakers’ list finding that those potential speakers are brilliant.”
- “The session can be marked as a success as the number of attendees was around 60. The session opened the creative portal in the students’ mind. The attendees gave enormous positive feedback encouraging us more to organize such technical seminars.”

“One meeting host is going to organize a quiz after the presentations. He asked me to present a ‘virtual certificate’ to the winner,” says Magyar.

Since the speakers do this free of charge, some meeting hosts provide ‘virtual mementos’ for the speakers.

“I recommend that other societies host a similar initiative with their chapters. This is an ideal opportunity to engage with your chapters at a time when traditional chapter activity is not possible. Providing chapters with this program and a database of speakers will certainly encourage chapters to host virtual events,” says Arakkal.

### **Students and Young Professionals**

CMD has also been engaging with its students and YPs online by adapting its mentoring program.

When IAS CMD conducted a survey of its YPs and students, “Mentoring” came up as a priority. In response, IAS has launched many programs to attract and retain YPs within the society including the Global Mentoring Program (GMP) Contest.

“The GMP contest was planned to kick off in the 2nd quarter of 2020. However, due to COVID-19, the committee decided to incorporate the ‘virtual mentoring’ aspect into the contest guidelines. This enables the interested student branches and YP affinity groups to participate in the competition without facing major challenges,” says Nishad Mendis, IAS Board member.

IAS is also continuing to engage students through its *Club of 6 events*, student-led technical paper conferences. Currently, there are 14 such conferences and two are in preparation. These events are organized *by students for students* and they will be held as virtual events this year similar to the Chapter Virtual Meetings.

### **Planning for the Future**

According to Mendis, “With COVID everything is virtual. We should promote similar events as much as possible. There are plenty of resources available in the industry. Also, IEEE has very active volunteers at ground level that can be approached for help.”

“We look forward to finding new ways that we can adapt and evolve our existing programs to cater to the needs of our membership base,” says Arakkal.

Visit the [IAS virtual chapter events page \(https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html\)](https://ias.ieee.org/chapters-membership.html) for more information.

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