

# FWEA Students & Young Professionals 2026 Summer Newsletter

## Message from the Chair

As my term as Chair of the FWEA Students & Young Professionals Committee (SYPC) comes to a close, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what an incredible experience it has been to serve this committee and our members. Over the past year, I have had the privilege of working alongside a dedicated group of volunteers, students, and young professionals who are passionate about supporting and strengthening the water industry. Together, we have expanded professional development opportunities, supported student programs and scholarships, organized networking events, and continued to build connections across Florida. From activities at the 2026 Florida Water Resources Conference (FWRC), to online monthly meetings the enthusiasm and commitment of our members have made every success possible.

In this newsletter, we celebrate many of those accomplishments, including the achievements of our scholarship recipients, Student Design Competition teams, Poster Competition participants, and members who have represented SYPC at conferences and events across the country. I am incredibly proud of what our committee has accomplished and grateful to everyone who contributed their time, ideas, and energy throughout the year. I would also like to extend a sincere thank you to our sponsors, FWEA leadership, and countless volunteers whose support allows our programs to thrive. Your investment in students and young professionals continues to make a lasting impact on the future of our industry.

As I transition from the Chair role, I am excited to welcome Angel Villarruel-Moore as the new SYPC Chair. Angel has been a dedicated leader within our committee and brings tremendous experience, enthusiasm, and vision to the role. I am confident that SYPC will continue to grow and succeed under Angel's leadership, and I look forward to supporting the committee in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Chair. It has truly been an honor, and I look forward to seeing all that S&YPC accomplishes in the years ahead.

**Olga Mikhalechishina, El**  
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Florida Water  
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Association

STUDENTS & YOUNG  
PROFESSIONALS  
COMMITTEE



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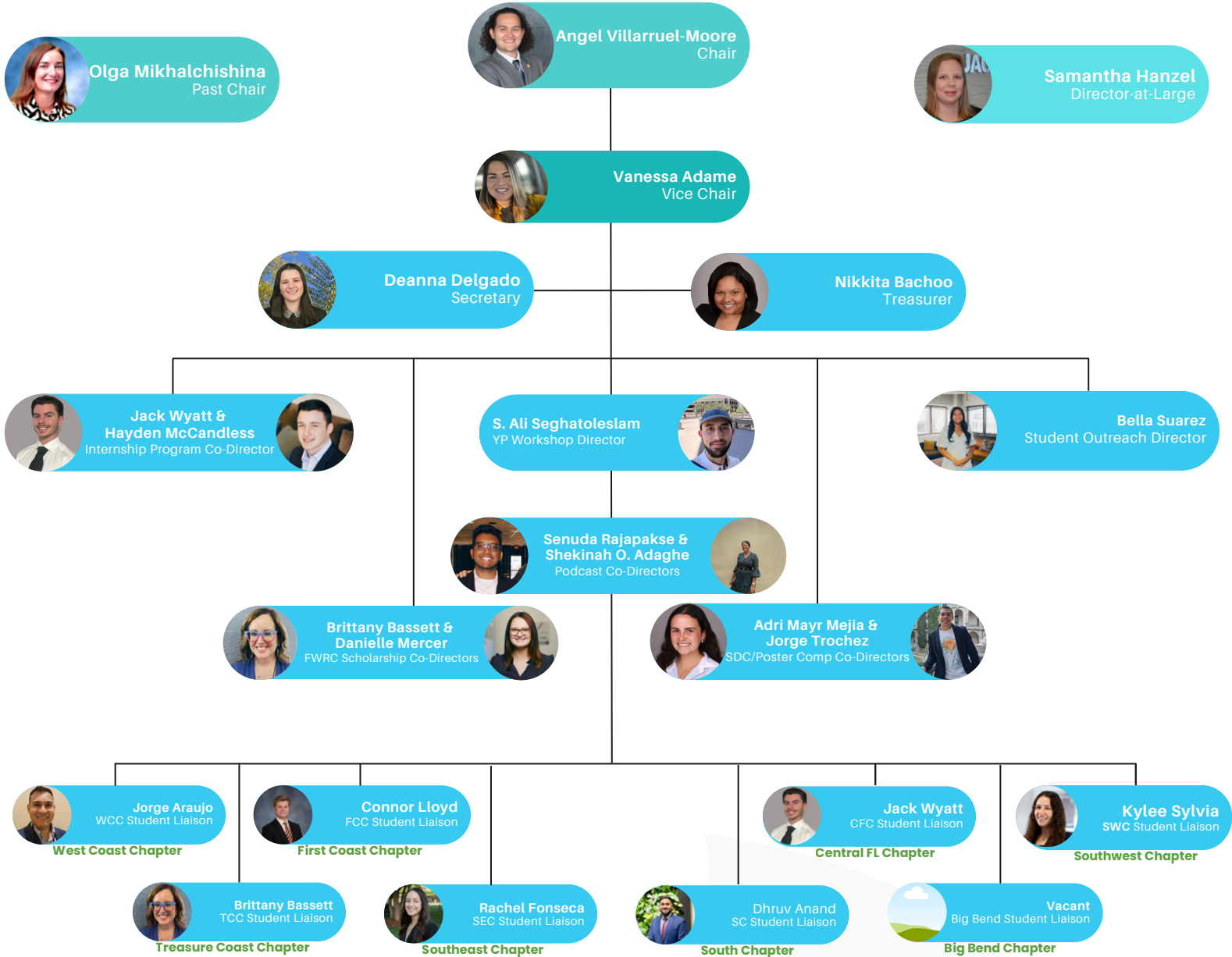
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info@fwea.org



# 2026-27 SYPC Leadership Organizational Chart

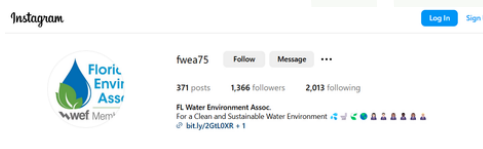


**Are you a student or young professional interested in becoming involved? Please contact: [sypc@fwea.org](mailto:sypc@fwea.org)**

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## Student Design Competition

The 2026 Student Design Competition (SDC) was held at FWRC and tasked students with designing and presenting solutions to real-world engineering problems. Teams from various universities traveled to Daytona Beach on April 26, 2026, to compete in either the Wastewater or Environmental categories and presented on topics such as wastewater treatment facility improvements, stormwater management, and soil remediation.

The competition aims to give students interested in pursuing a career in water/wastewater engineering and sciences real-world design experience. This year, six teams from four universities and colleges across Florida competed in one of two categories. First-place winners received a \$4,000 travel allowance to represent Florida at the national Water Environment Federation Technical and Exhibition Conference (WEFTEC) in New Orleans, along with a \$1,000 Norm Casey Scholarship. All other teams received a \$500 participation bonus. Congratulations to all the students who participated!

Special recognition goes to the students from the University of South Florida for winning first place in the wastewater category and to the students from Florida Gulf Coast University for winning first place in the environmental category. These teams will represent Florida at the national stage during WEFTEC in September 2026!

We would like to express our gratitude to all of our SYPC sponsors and the panel of SDC judges for volunteering at this year's SDC. We look forward to seeing the research and design projects that students will bring to the 30 Annual SDC next year!

### Deanna Delgado

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair  
sypc@fwea.com



SCD Wastewater Winners (USF)



SCD Wastewater Winners (USF)



## FWRC Poster Competition

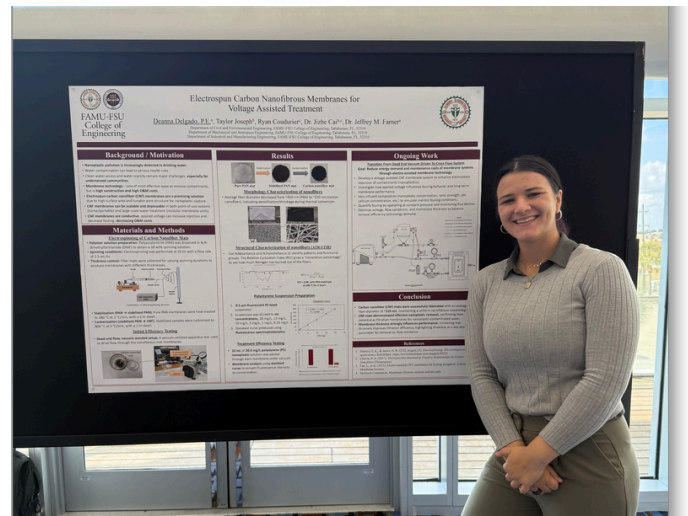
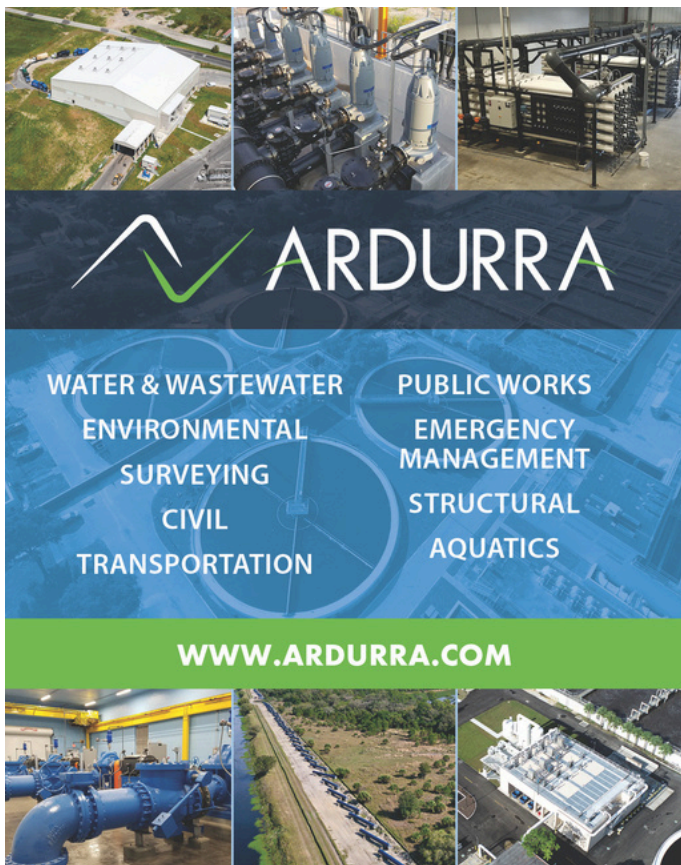
The SYPC Poster Competition provides students and young professionals the opportunity to attend FWRC by presenting a project that relates to the field of wastewater engineering, water resources, and other environmental topics. On April 26, 2026, posters were displayed, and presenters discussed their research data, plans, or case studies to the panel of judges. Congratulations to Dennis Ssekimpi, the first-place winner of the SYPC Poster Competition. Dennis, a student at FAMU-FSU College of Engineering, discussed his research on the development and evaluation of a diffusion based model for adsorption of 1,4-dioxane on zeolite and GAC for the purpose of environmental remediation.

### Deanna Delgado

FWEA SYPC Secretary Chair  
sypc@fwea.com



Dennis Ssekimpi (FAMU-FSU) – First Place Winner



Deanna Delgado (FAMU-FSU) – Participant





# InFLOW and YP Utility Worker Scholarships

## SYPC Scholarships Brought New Faces to FWRC 2026!

At the 2026 FWRC from April 26 to 29 at the Daytona Beach Ocean Center, SYPC proudly hosted two impactful scholarship programs: the InFLOW Scholarship and the YP Utility Workers Scholarship. These initiatives helped promising students and young professionals attend by covering travel, registration, meals, and accommodations, allowing them to participate fully in FWRC's extensive programming.

### YP Utility Worker Scholarships

The YP Utility Workers Scholarship Program is designed to engage and develop promising young professionals working in Florida's water industry by providing an immersive conference experience. Scholarship recipients receive a customized three-day conference agenda focused on attending technical sessions, exploring the exhibit hall, networking with industry professionals, and participating in Young Professional events and activities.



YP Utility Worker Scholars

### YP Utility Workers Scholarship: Supporting Growth and Community

"As a wastewater operator, the YP Utility Worker Scholarship experience has been both inspiring and meaningful. It has given me a greater appreciation for the dedication, teamwork, and hard work required to keep our community's essential systems operating safely and efficiently every day. This opportunity also reinforced the importance of continuing education and supporting individuals who are committed to growing within the utility industry. I learned a lot in the reclamation and reuse course, especially the importance of treating wastewater before it enters the environment and its positive impact on the ecosystem. Overall, the experience has strengthened my motivation to continue developing professionally, serve my community with pride, and contribute positively to the future of the utility field."

**Ryan Bermingham**

YP Utility Worker Scholarship Winner





# InFLOW and YP Utility Worker Scholarships

## InFLOW: Introducing Future Leaders to Opportunities in Water

Designed to increase diversity and inclusion in the water sector, the InFLOW program welcomed eight students currently enrolled in technical or community colleges. Over a two-day program, students attended the Young Professionals Workshop, the Student Design Competition, and a Water Treatment Plant Tour. They also explored the exhibit hall and connected with professionals, mentors, and potential employers.



**InFLOW Scholars**

### InFLOW Scholarship: Building Connections

"I had a wonderful experience at the FWRC conference. I was able to learn networking skills and connect with industry professionals. Throughout the conference there were engaging activities such as a mentor match up session, workshops, and a career fair. I feel that I have a better idea of what the water industry is all about and how I can get involved. I am very thankful to have had this opportunity to grow and meet fellow peers interested in the water resources industry."

**Purnata Talukder**

**InFLOW Scholar**

"Coming to FWRC 2026 I wasn't really sure what to expect, but looking back I had an absolute blast. Getting to meet practicing engineers and water treatment operators was a lot fun, and I finally got to ask my back log of questions. I got to see all kinds of cool technology and systems for water management, and learn about what is commonly practiced too. I also really liked hearing from the panel speakers we had and their personal experience navigating their careers with what they would've done differently. I would absolutely recommend this scholarship to anyone who might be considering working in the water industry because there truly is a place for everyone."

**Alejandro Garcia**

**InFLOW Scholar**





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## FWRC YP Workshop

This year's YP Workshop featured two of our favorite alumni speakers: Erin Mosley and Stephen Crawford. Erin guided us through handling various conflicts we may face, while Stephen focused on financial advice for young professionals. A key takeaway—if you missed it—was to invest even a small amount as early as possible; it can make a significant impact. During Erin's segment, we practiced listening. Have you ever listened for 60 seconds about something someone knows and loves without responding? It was surprisingly challenging, as many of us tend to respond with encouragement or personal stories to build connection. We also received a surprise from Stephen—a copy of "The Tortoise and the Hare." Remember, slow and steady wins the race! If you can't invest hundreds now, starting with \$20 when you can helps build a habit for long-term gains. Thank you all for attending, and for those who couldn't make it this year, we hope to see you next time!

**Gabby Squillante**

GAI Consultants

[g.squillante@gaiconsultants.com](mailto:g.squillante@gaiconsultants.com)



Keynote speaker Steven Crawford discussing financial health fundamentals.

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## Young Professionals Summit 2026

As the recipient of the 2025 FWEA Young Professional of the Year Award, I had the opportunity to attend the 2026 WEF/AWWA YP Summit in Charlotte, NC. There, I connected with YPs from across the country (including friends I hadn't seen since college) and gained valuable insight into leadership principles, volunteer engagement strategies, and emerging industry trends. The summit reinforced the importance of storytelling, financial literacy, and thoughtful implementation of tools like AI in the water sector. It was also great catching up with other Florida YPs and sharing ideas on how we can continue strengthening our local FWEA and FSAWWA Student & YP initiatives. Outside of the sessions and workshops, I made it a point to explore Charlotte with my wife. When we weren't catching up on toddler-free sleep, we tracked down local coffee shops, visited farmers markets, and even checked out the U.S. National Whitewater Center! Overall, the trip was both professionally rewarding and personally memorable, and served as a great reminder that our industry thrives because of the people who come together to support it, something perfectly captured in my favorite quote from the summit: **"Everyone Has a Place in Water."**

**Angel Villarruel-Moore**

Carollo Engineers  
[avmoore@carollo.com](mailto:avmoore@carollo.com)







## National Water Policy Fly-In

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to participate in the National Water Policy Fly-In in Washington DC through my involvement with WEF and FWEA. As a utility engineer, most of my day is spent reviewing plans, managing projects, and solving infrastructure challenges here in Florida. Traveling to Washington DC gave me a chance to see a completely different side of our profession. Alongside water professionals from across the country, I met with congressional and Senate offices to discuss issues affecting utilities and communities, including infrastructure funding, regulatory challenges, workforce development, resiliency, and the importance of sound, science-based water policy. It was exciting to walk the halls of Capitol Hill, meet with legislative staff and elected officials, and share real-world experiences from the utility industry.

One of the biggest takeaways from the trip was realizing how important it is for water professionals to tell our story. Many policymakers are interested in learning about the challenges utilities face, but they rely on us to explain how those challenges impact the communities we serve. During the Fly-In, I had the opportunity to meet directly with Senator Ashley Moody, engage with congressional offices and Senate staff, and discuss water policy priorities impacting utilities across Florida and the nation. The experience later led to an upcoming Water Environment Federation "My Water Story" feature where I interviewed Congressman Aaron Bean about the importance of water infrastructure, public health, and utility investment. The experience showed me that advocacy is not about politics; it is about communication, education, and relationship building. Whether you are an engineer, operator, scientist, consultant, or utility professional, your perspective matters. I left Washington with a greater appreciation for the role our industry plays in protecting public health and supporting economic growth, and I would encourage other young professionals to get involved and help be a voice for water.

**Zach Loeb**

Clay County Utility Authority

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# Upcoming Events

## First Coast Chapter

**September 14**

Annual Golf Outing  
07:30 AM

## Southwest Chapter

**September 26**

Southwest Chapter & FWA Region V 25<sup>th</sup>  
Annual Charity Golf Tournament

## Manasota Chapter

**September 17**

Long Drive Competition  
05:30 PM – 08:30 PM

## West Coast Chapter

**September 11**

YP Seawater Desalination Plant Tour  
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

**October 15**

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly Luncheon  
11:30 AM – 01:30 PM

## Central Florida Chapter

**September 18**

26<sup>th</sup> Annual Sporting Golf Tournament  
07:30 AM – 03:00 PM

## Conference

**September 26 – 30**

Water Environment Federation's Technical  
Exhibition and Conference  
Visit [weftec.org](http://weftec.org) to learn more



Additional Events listed at:

[FWEA Calendar of Events](#)

## Looking to get involved in the FWEA's SYPC?

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## Sponsorship Levels

### SILVER LEVEL (\$500):

- Company logo displayed on **SYPC website** and at the **FWRC Student Design Competition**
- **Business card ad** in SYPC newsletters
- One **FWRC YP Workshop** ticket

### GOLD LEVEL (\$1000):

- Company logo displayed on **SYPC website** and at the **FWRC Student Design Competition**
- Receive **resumes** from students actively involved in SYPC initiatives
- Semiannual **quarter page ad** in SYPC newsletters
- Two **FWRC YP Workshop** tickets
- Company **job portal** included on the FWEA Internship Program website

### Your Donation Supports the Following Events

#### STUDENT DESIGN COMPETITION

First Place teams receive a Norm Casey Scholarship from FWEA plus travel allowance to attend WEFTEC to compete in the National Competition.

#### SYPC POSTER COMPETITION

First and Second Place winners receive monetary prizes.

#### YP OF THE YEAR AWARD

Recipient receives travel allowance to attend National YP Summit.

#### STUDENT OUTREACH

Funds are allocated each year to support various student activities.



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