

Young (minds) at Heart – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/epn/2026207>

The EPS Young Minds programme has at its heart an action committee composed of and chaired by early career researchers. Members are recruited from the Young Minds sections and the committee, and its chair represent the programme, guide the distribution of funds and provide a link between the sections and the EPS.

Participation in this committee might seem like a daunting prospect, and something which is difficult to combine with studying physics, nevertheless participating in Young Minds has been crucial to the career development of many of its former members. Here three former chairs reflect on their experience.

Antigone Marino

In 2010, I had the unique opportunity to be one of three physicists who, together with the European Physical Society (EPS), founded what would become the EPS Young Minds (YM) project. At the time, we shared a simple but ambitious vision: to create a European framework that would give young physicists a voice, foster connections across borders, and support professional growth beyond the traditional academic path. What I did not fully realize back then was how profoundly this experience would shape me, both professionally and personally.

From 2013 to 2016 I was Chair of EPS Young Minds. The experience was taking another turn, it was no longer just about having ideas but stepping beyond the boundaries of scientific research into leadership, coordination,

and long-term strategic thinking. My role came with significant responsibilities. I was involved in coordinating national Young Minds sections across Europe, acting as an interface between early-career physicists and the EPS leadership, and contributing to the strategic direction of the initiative. This meant organizing meetings, moderating discussions among people with diverse backgrounds and expectations, and helping translate ideas into concrete actions at a European level. And most of all, finding the funding to grow the project.

In Europe, there were already several initiatives by young physicists, both internationally and nationally, but what made YM special was establishing it within the EPS, a federation of national societies. We had to speak different languages: not just spoken

languages, but also the different languages that each society had at the national level regarding youth policies. This wasn't always easy, but it was a challenge that allowed me to understand European physics like I'd never seen it before. And I still believe this was one of the most important legacies YM and EPS have left me. In this multicultural environment, I learned how to negotiate, how to listen, and how to build consensus.

EPS Young Minds connected me with motivated young researchers, senior scientists, policymakers, and professionals working at the interface of science, education, and society. These connections opened doors to new collaborations and opportunities, and they broadened my perspective on what a career in physics, and beyond, could look like.

To young physicists who are considering getting involved in EPS and Young Minds, my advice is simple: do it. Take part in the project, even if it feels demanding or unfamiliar. These experiences will enlarge your opportunities, expand your horizons, and equip you with skills that will stay with you far beyond any single role or position. Sometimes, the most important steps in a career are not the obvious ones, but the ones that challenge you to grow.

Finally, let me say that seeing YM continue to grow makes me think that EPS, and I in my own small way, have done well. Leaving a project is always a sad moment, letting go is hard. But

▼ Antigone
Marino



seeing that there are people who continue to nurture your dream is one of the greatest satisfactions of any career.

Roberta Caruso

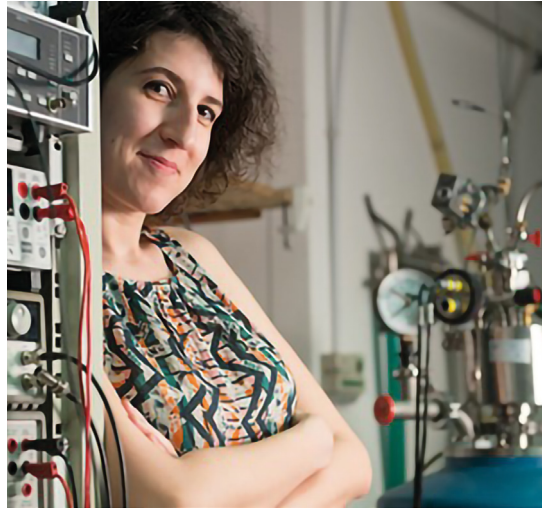
I have been part of EPS Young Minds since its inception in 2010. Around 2015, former YM Chair Dr. Antigone Marino—recognizing my drive as a young scientist—invited me to join the Action Committee. I was later elected Chair (2018–2020). My term ended just as the pandemic began, but I witnessed firsthand the network's tenacity in adapting to new challenges to support its members.

Joining the Action Committee was a turning point I didn't see coming. It gave me motivation and drive at times when my academic career felt uncertain. On several occasions, I questioned my professional value, and it was this project that kept me grounded. Through my involvement, I also learned more about myself as a scientist. While I enjoy tinkering in the lab, I realized I am not the person who "builds" science from scratch with sudden, brilliant intuitions. Instead, I'd rather discuss the massive, "big picture" implications of science with a room full of people. Young Minds was the ideal environment for valuing this way of thinking.

Looking back now, I find that colleagues frequently remember me for my leadership in YM as much as—or more than—for my scientific papers. At the time, I wasn't sure if that was a good thing, but I see now that YM gave me a "label." It distinguished me from the mass of researchers. It proved I wasn't just another physicist in a lab coat; I could be seen as a leader capable of building international communities.

Academia is tough, and there is no "easy mode" for success. But if you are willing to put in the work, Young Minds can genuinely help kickstart your career beyond the numbers that usually define academic progression.

One final thought: Don't settle. If your current research environment doesn't appreciate or support the



▲ Roberta Caruso

service work you do for the scientific community through EPS, that is their loss. If they don't see how this makes you a better, more connected scientist, maybe it is time to consider moving somewhere that does. You might not realize it now, but you really are building a global profile for yourself, even though maybe this isn't the conventional way to do it. Don't let a local mindset hold you back: if you think there's value in building communities and networks, EPS Young Minds might be the right place for you.

Richard Zeltner

When I first joined the EPS Young Minds Action Committee (EPS YM AC) in 2018, I was excited to contribute to the development of a programme which has a scope and vision that aligns very much with my own beliefs. I found it to be a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the operations and the management of a large scientific organization, as well as to increase my professional network and gather experience in international scientific collaboration.

Looking back at my time in the EPS YM AC, and as committee chair from 2020 to 2022 now, it is safe to say that my expectations on the professional learning and growth opportunities have been met. Many of the activities I was involved in sharpened and extended my skillset, benefiting my overall professional advancement. A few examples that come to mind are

contributing to the organization of large scientific conferences as well as student-led and aimed workshops, initiating collaboration with other scientific organizations and reviewing grant applications.

However, the very first associations that come to my mind when remembering my experiences in EPSYM are actually about the people I have met and connected to. Personally, I completed all my studies in Germany, and never quite ventured out far enough to experience life abroad or academic systems in other parts of Europe and beyond. But the conversations I had about living abroad, cultural diversity, different academic systems and struggles of the young minds I met, presented an incredibly enriching experience that helped me to vastly widen my perspective. This brought me a little bit closer to the 33 countries that are part of the EPS Young Minds network.

I believe that most interpersonal skills cannot be learnt in the classroom or books. I have, however, found them to be highly valuable for my personal and professional growth. Connecting with people from different backgrounds and learning how to connect and relate to them, is a critical skill in today's fast-paced and diverse work environments. My time in EPS YM AC taught me many lessons on how to do so effectively. ■

▼ Christophe Rossel and Richard Zeltner

