



Q&A: EMERGING LEADERS GO GLOBAL TO SUPPORT THE NEXT GENERATION – November 2024

By *Rebecca Spong, Editorial Consultant, November 2024*

The Emerging Leaders Committee has had a very busy few months as it ramps up the number of events it hosts around the world. [Committee chairperson Pouya Jafari](#) speaks to ITFA editorial consultant Rebecca Spong about how his team is making a real push for Emerging Leaders to expand their global presence in order to support early-stage professionals wherever they are located and attract a broader range of talent to the industry.

Q) What has the Emerging Leaders team been up to for the past few months?

A) Since the end of September, we have held six in-person events across five countries – with events held in [Frankfurt](#), [Dubai](#), [Mumbai](#), [London](#), [New York](#) and the final one in [Chicago](#) in mid-November.

We have also had an Emerging Leaders Committee members represented at conferences in [Toronto](#), [Ljubljana](#) and [Miami](#) this quarter as part of our push to really become more global and build a strong global community.

The events always include an educational component– with the various panel discussions held this quarter focusing on the theme of “Looking to the Future” – as well as valuable networking opportunities for attendees to get to know their peers.

Following the success of the events, we hope to run a similar series of global educational and networking events next year too.

Q) What is the purpose of these events? Why are they needed?

A) The purpose of Emerging Leaders has always been to offer a way for early-stage and ambitious professionals to meet fellow trade finance professionals. Often you may find that young professionals might be the only junior member of their team or they generally lack access to industry peers who can shed light on what they are working on. We make sure we keep all our events free – and open them up to students as well.

We originally started putting on events in London, but increasingly we received interest from other regions as well – particularly during and after Covid when we ran a number of webinars that those outside of London could access.

We are now keen to keep building those global communities of emerging leaders. These events are of particular importance in markets and business cultures where it might not be common practice for people to reach out to someone they don't know and say: “we work in the same industry, let's meet up”.



Q) Is there an even greater need to provide more networking opportunities for those new in their career in today's post-covid world?

A) Absolutely. With more people working from home and generally fewer people meeting up to network in the evening, we really need to make sure we create a natural space where trade professionals can make those connections. In any industry, and ours in particular, you need to know people.

I also think that there is an expectation for early-stage professionals to learn on their own, more so than previously, when on-the-job training counted for most of your professional development. With that in mind, events such as ours are vital to support early talent as they seek to launch and progress in their careers.

Q) What are your key goals for the coming 12 months?

A) Our main goal is to keep building our global presence and double down on the success we've had across our various initiatives, including our Mentoring Programme and Annual Competition. Trade finance is becoming more complex with an increasing number of stakeholders, so we want to make sure we reach our full potential audience. We not only want to work with our traditional audience of banks, insurers, fintechs and lawyers – but we want to ensure we include people working in export finance, development banks or within the public sector. We don't want any emerging leader to feel they don't have a community to belong to.

I want to build a global community that is here to stay – and that everyone can tap into - even if they are based far away from major trade hubs such as London or New York.

We will also be looking to work with more universities and position trade finance as an attractive career option for students.

ITFA is an incredible organisation and it's unrivalled in how much work and commitment it dedicates to supporting emerging leaders.

Our loyal sponsors are also integral to the work we do, and we continue to rely on their support to deliver our work around the world. Almost all our events were either fully or partially sponsored, which helps us expand our initiative and think bigger and bigger.

Q) What else has the Emerging Leaders function achieved this year?

A) We held our Committee elections earlier this year, with everyone who put themselves up for re-election [re-elected, and some fantastic new members already taking on big responsibilities as well.](#) With such a strong mandate, we are more focused than ever on delivering on our priorities and providing value to the entire global community of early-stage and aspiring trade professionals.

In addition to our in-person events and webinars, our initiatives include our annual Emerging Leaders Competition, which just concluded its sixth year and the winner announced in September at the Cyprus conference. This competition allows Emerging Leaders to showcase an original idea



that could add value to the industry. The three shortlisted candidates are given the opportunity to present their projects to the annual ITFA conference with the competition sponsors covering the costs of their flights and accommodation.

The impact of winning or being shortlisted for an award is huge – with many winners promoted within the year they received the award. Or, at the very least they have put themselves on the map – becoming familiar faces in the industry or even elected to join the Emerging Leaders Committee.

The whole process builds a lot of confidence and standing on stage and receiving positive feedback has a genuinely transformative effect. We also really support our Emerging Leaders with their preparation for the awards, whether that is doing practice runs or securing them interviews to talk about their projects.

Our series of Autumn networking events really built upon the success of this year's Emerging Leaders competition ([See results here](#)).

We also continue to successfully run our [Martin Ashurst Mentoring Programme](#) – which offers emerging leaders' one-to-one mentorship and access to online resources and in person events. This has long been our flagship initiative and it's no exaggeration to say that a meaningful proportion of our membership has experienced career-changing results from pursuing mentoring. That applies to mentees looking for advice and guidance, but also mentors looking to pass on what they've learnt over the years.

If you are keen to find out more about the Emerging Leaders committee or discuss sponsorship opportunities – please contact info@itfa.org.