

DISTRICT INNOVATION AWARD

ITE Western District “Explore ITE” Badge Recognition Program



ITE—A Community of Transportation Professionals is proud to announce the **ITE Western District** as the recipient of the [2026 District Innovation Award](#) for its **“Explore ITE” Badge Recognition Program**.

The District Innovation Award recognizes a District that has implemented an innovative program or activity focused on leadership, management, and/or diversity and inclusion. The award celebrates creative approaches that engage members, build community, and foster a more diverse and inclusive transportation profession. The Western District’s “Explore ITE” Badge Recognition Program exemplifies this purpose by creating a structured, accessible, and scalable pathway for students and young professionals to connect more deeply with ITE.

The Western District serves a large and diverse geographic area, with Sections that vary in size, resources, and levels of member engagement. Recognizing that students, new members, and early-career professionals may not always know how to navigate the breadth of ITE opportunities available to them, the District developed “Explore ITE” to help members move beyond isolated event attendance and toward sustained, meaningful involvement.

Launched in 2024, “Explore ITE” is a gamified engagement initiative inspired by badge systems used in youth development organizations. The program challenges participants, primarily young professionals aged 35 and under, to complete a curated set of activities that promote holistic professional growth. To earn an annual “Explorer Badge,” participants must attend a Section or Professional Chapter meeting and complete two additional activities in social engagement, professional development, or service.

Participants track their progress using a “Badge Program Passport,” submitting event registrations, photos, or other documentation as proof of participation. The program is led by a dedicated Program Lead, Sophia Tan, with oversight from the District’s Career Guidance Chair, helping ensure continuity, accountability, and alignment with the Western District’s broader leadership and professional development goals.

The program was designed to be flexible, accessible, adaptable, and sustainable. It accommodates both in-person and virtual events across diverse Sections, lowers barriers to participation for students and

early-career members, allows Sections to tailor activities to local needs, and provides a repeatable annual framework with evolving badge themes.

The results demonstrate the program's impact. While total participation shifted from 27 participants in 2024 to 17 in 2025, the share of young professional participants increased from 56 percent to 82 percent, reflecting the program's success in reaching its primary audience. Participation in the District Annual Meeting also increased, with 71 percent of 2025 badge participants attending, up from 67 percent in 2024.

The program also achieved broad geographic reach across the District, with participation from Southern California, Oregon, Northern California, San Francisco, Washington, Central Coast, and Riverside Sections. This distribution highlights the program's ability to engage members across varied local contexts and reinforces its potential as a model for other Districts.

The "Explore ITE" program directly supports diversity, equity, and inclusion by creating a clear and welcoming pathway for students and young professionals—many of whom are new to the profession—to explore ITE opportunities at their own pace. Participant feedback further underscores the value of the program, with one two-year participant noting that it strengthened their relationships with other ITE members and helped them find new communities and connections within the Western District.

Through creativity, measurable outcomes, strong member feedback, and a format that can be replicated across ITE, the Western District's "Explore ITE" Badge Recognition Program demonstrates the power of intentional engagement. ITE congratulates the Western District on receiving the 2026 District Innovation Award and celebrates its leadership in building community, encouraging participation, and inspiring the next generation of transportation professionals.

Learn more about [ITE's Awards Program](#).