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My life changed eight years ago, the first time I entered a cave in Texas. Coming from rock climbing in North Mexico, I found caving a whole different beast; new things to learn, challenges to overcome, and participating in a community unlike any other. I recognize the NSS as an invaluable asset to my growth as a caver providing a platform for me to interact with cavers across the nation. While the NSS does a many things exceptionally, I see plenty of opportunity for the organization to grow specifically around attracting new members.

I am originally from Monterrey, Mexico, and started caving when I moved to Texas. I quickly started project caving in the U.S. and Mexico at Sistema Huautla, Sistema Cheve, Pozo de Montemayor, and Main Drain, to list a few. Finishing my Master's thesis on hydrology in Sistema Huautla at Western Kentucky University afforded me the pleasure of experiencing the full realm of caving from science to exploration to conservation.

My first experience with caving organizations came when I joined the student grotto of Texas A&M and immediately found a family. I became Safety Officer and President of the grotto. During my time in the student grotto, we found a big need and interest in the student community for activities like caving. Activities that involve adventure, conservation, exploration, and outdoors. We utilized very fun and interactive marketing strategies for the club, and we had approximately 100 students in our first presentation meeting. The success of the meeting proves the interest of younger communities in speleology but creates a need to develop a strategy to retain this population.

While living in Austin, Texas, hearing legendary cave stories got my mind dreaming. Surrounded by a community of mentors, my friends introduced me to project caving. My wildest and most challenging life experience happened in the deep caves in Mexico. Most expeditions I participated in existed because of some support from the NSS, including my Master's thesis. Through expeditions, I met cavers from all over America giving me a unique lens into the regional opinions and needs of the NSS community.

As a national organization with international reach, the NSS should be a source of knowledge and inspiration for the future generation of explorers, scientists and cavers. These goals can be achieved by strengthening the community with initiatives that resonate with every caver. There has been a growing trend in the interest for outdoor activities like climbing, slacklining, and hiking, among others. I see a great opportunity for speleology to seize of that trend and engage with diverse communities around the country by using social media-oriented strategies to raise awareness, as well as including collaboration with other outdoor entities. Especially with caving having so many diverse outlets, from project and recreational cavers, archeologists and hydrogeologists, cartographers and biologists, landowners, engineers, data managers, and others.

We need to understand better the type of benefits that prospective and current members of the organization want. The best way to do this is to use the data available and understand success strategies in likeminded outdoor organizations.

In my opinion, the NSS represents every caver across the country regardless of their membership to the organization, which comes with a big responsibility that must be taken seriously.

If I get elected director, I would work incessantly to:

- Bring fresh ideas into the organization to recruit new members, focusing on the image of the NSS to younger generations, while keeping the values and qualities that have characterized the NSS through the years.
- Utilize multiple strategies involving social media, events, and branding to broaden the membership in the organization by accessing more demographics and promote diversity in within.
- Promote activities that enrich our community and promote safe practices of caving.
- Pursue different venues of funding to double the amount of scholarship/grants to create more opportunities for younger cavers to fulfill their goals.

Feel free to contact me through email fdo.hdz@gmail.com or phone 979-777-3011 for further questions about my platform.