

UAA/USAID MENTORING PROGRAM

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The UAA/USAID Mentoring Program is ten years old. Now in Cohort 12, the program matches field-based Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) as mentees with USAID alumni (retiree volunteers) mentors. This mentee-driven program allows mentees to establish the parameters of the mentoring, such as frequency of calls (often every 3-4 weeks, for an hour) and subject matter. Conversations are confidential. The prime purpose of the program is to provide USAID career FSOs with professional and career guidance from experienced former USAID employees. At the outset of their participation in the Mentoring Program, mentors and mentees receive orientation training organized by UAA.

The Mentoring Program has sustained partnering arrangements with USAID bureaus (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and Eurasia, Global Health, Policy, Planning and Learning, and the Senior Leadership Group). UAA's purpose in supporting the program is to develop the next generation of Agency leaders. Successes to date correlate directly with a solid commitment to keep the program demand-driven, having at its core the needs, objectives, and specific requests of field-based FSOs.

The Mentoring Program results from a solid collaboration between the UAA, senior Agency leaders who have championed the program, and Bureau staff who have made it happen. The Agency saw and capitalized on the opportunity to tap the collective experience and wisdom of the USAID Alumni Association members. The USAID Center for Professional Development in the Human Capital and Talent Management Office provides invaluable support for mentee and mentor training and is a critical link between bureau leaders and the UAA.

Program monitoring and resolution of issues that may arise is a function of close coordination with bureau coordinators and their leadership, who are the program's essential partners. UAA's Mentoring Committee leads in matching mentees with mentors based on each request for such support. Tracking surveys are scheduled at six-month intervals to identify and resolve issues before they become problems.

Indicators of successful mentor/mentee engagement are: joint commitment to frequent communication is especially critical to building trust and clarifying objectives that will guide the relationship; plans and schedules to achieve them must be driven by mentee needs in the areas of career development and professional support (the mentor is not considered to be a technical consultant, even though s/he may have substantive experience in the same backstop as the mentee); and successful completion of a six-month mentoring relationship can often lead to an extension that is mutually desired and agreed to by both mentor and mentee.