



UAA/USAID Mentoring Program



USAID Alumni Association (UAA) and USAID Mentoring Program End of Cohort 12 Program Evaluation Summary Covering September 2022 - June 2023

Background

The UAA/USAID Mentoring Program has a proven record of success connecting field-based Foreign Service Officers (mentees) with UAA-member retired FSOs (mentors) to offer valuable advice and guidance for personal and professional growth. The Program has over 12 years of broad-ranging experience, benefiting more than 350 FSOs to date, supporting the Agency's leadership priorities to fortify the workforce and UAA's objective to foster the next generation of development leaders.

In October 2022, UAA launched Cohort 12 with 38 UAA retirees mentoring 44 FSOs in the Senior Leadership Group (Mission Directors, Deputy Mission Directors, and Aid Representatives), the Global Health Bureau (GH), and the Africa Bureau (AFR). Mentee-mentor partnerships officially began in January 2023 and ran until June 2023. Of the 44 FSOs, 12 were SLG, 13 GH, and 19 AFR.

Evaluation Purpose:

This evaluation was designed to solicit feedback from mentors and mentees to improve program management and implementation to support the Agency's priorities for leader development.

Methodology:

Mentors and mentees were surveyed in separate anonymous surveys administered via Google Forms in late August 2023. The evaluation questions focused on (1) participant demographics, (2) program benefits and concerns, (3) program commitment, and (4) mentor-mentee relationships. Respondents were given 4 weeks to complete the Google Mentor or Mentee Form.

Respondents Profiles:

The response rate for mentors was 58% (22), and for mentees was 45% (20). Of the mentors who completed the survey, 82% had previously served as a mentor for more than 2 years, including some for more than 5 years, 55% had mentored for more than years, 55% were also mentoring mentees from previous cohorts, and 18% were serving for the first time.

Of the mentees who completed the survey, 25% (5) were in SLG positions, and 75% (15) were non-SLG FSOs. With regard to length of time in the foreign service, 35% had 15 years or more of service, 20% had 10 to 14 years, 7% had 2 to 4 years, and only one person had less than 2 years.

Major Themes and Issues

The UAA/USAID Mentoring Program is highly valued and popular with mentees and mentors. All but one mentee surveyed said they would recommend the mentoring program to other employees.

The top three themes most frequently discussed between mentor pairs were: (1) managing up, (2) career development and promotion, and (3) leading a team, office, and mission. Within these themes, the main issues mentees wanted to address throughout the mentoring period were:

- How to manage up and down and chains of command, from senior leadership to supervisors and subordinates.
- How to effectively lead and manage for career advancement.
- How to engage in interagency collaboration.
- How to manage in-office and interagency conflicts.
- Tools for managing a challenging mission environment.
- Guidance for DMDs in setting goals and managing relationships with MDs.
- How to manage under-staffed offices.
- Backstop-specific discussions.
- USAID internal-specific issues and processes, such as navigating the newly instituted employee evaluation process.
- Future career trajectory options.

Program Observations:

- The mentor-mentee matches were largely successful. Most mentors stated they had a good understanding of mentee concerns and issues. Meetings worked well when the mentee had clear goals and an idea of how to manage the relationship.
- Likewise, 90% of mentees reported their mentors met their expectations in knowledge, skill, and ability, and 70% said their mentor ranged from good to excellent in understanding and assisting with current Agency priorities.
- 80% of mentees met with their mentor once or twice a month.
- Sixty percent of mentees said they met with their mentor for the required six months of the program and 35% were still meeting after the program ended. Of the mentor respondents, 54% plan to continue mentoring their cohort 12 mentees while 54% of mentors are also still mentoring mentees from previous cohorts.
- Mentees valued the mentor's broad knowledge of USAID, similar experience, having someone to talk to outside of the mission, and mutual rapport; and while not a requirement, having the same backstop was a plus.
- Ninety-five percent of mentor respondents found the pre-program mentor training useful.

Program Concerns

- Challenges to the mentoring relationship included time zone differences, heavy workloads of mentees, mentee health emergencies, and mentee availability.
- Less than 5% of mentor-mentee matches stopped meeting after three months due to heavy mentee workloads, mentee scheduling problems, mentee medevacs and home leave, and not useful or unfocused conversations.
- Three mentees cited difficulty formulating useful discussions, and one mentor-mentee relationship never took off.
- A few mentees cited preference for a more recent retiree with familiarity about current personnel processes and not out of touch with issues currently facing managers and leaders.
- A few mentors cited concern about their mentees not committing time to meet regularly, not developing goal-oriented meeting agendas, and not having clarity about the purpose of the mentor relationship.

Mentee Program Comments:

- “Retired mission directors are ideal mentors! Matching the mentee with the right mentor is the key to success.”
- “I am very happy with my mentor match -- it worked out very well for me, and I appreciated the input and advice I received. It was value-added to my work.”
- “Mentoring should be mandatory for all in the SLG.”
- “Recruit more recent retirees each year who are more familiar with USAID's current or recent processes.”
- One mentee said, “despite a significant amount of time away from the Agency, and lacking current information on an issue of great concern, my mentor was very good at building up my general confidence in some trying situations.”
- “Continue this great program.”
- “Match mentees and mentors that have diverse backgrounds.”
- It’s beneficial when the mentee and mentor are the same backstop, when requested.
- Encourage mentors not to spend much time talking about their own experiences and accomplishments, especially when not relevant or useful to the challenge at hand. Encourage mentors to listen and discuss the topic on the table.

Mentor Program Comments:

- Reinforce that the program is anonymous, voluntary, and mentee-driven. Stress the need for mentee commitment to initiate regular and agreed meeting times and mentee motivation and initiative in raising and discussing his/her concerns for discussion.
- “Mentee commitment is what makes or breaks the effectiveness of the program.”
- Clarify expectations, e.g., distinguish the role of USAID/HCTM and UAA retirees, especially regarding USAID internal issues and processes. If UAA retirees are expected to address internal personnel processes, provide periodic updates to mentors about promotion patterns and requirements and resources within the Agency. Also, urge USAID to clarify and ensure appropriate training and guidance about navigating the various personnel processes, e.g., preparing performance evaluations, bidding and promotions.
- Retiree mentors can supplement but not substitute for necessary in-house mentoring and training. Mentoring is an important element of career development, but few FSOs seem to be getting the natural in-house mentoring

that retirees were given at AID.

- In mentee training, convey the purpose of a mentor and the importance of having a plan for professional development.
- Provide a good way to decide when to end the mentoring relationship before the end of the program if objectives are met early, or the match is not working, including a process for rematching, if possible.