**USAID ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (UAA) – USAID MENTORING PROGRAM**

**PERIODIC SURVEY**

**AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2014**

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Periodically the UAA and USAID team that coordinates the UAA –USAID Mentoring Program sends follow-up surveys to all mentees and mentors enrolled in the program in order to identify successful approaches and problematic situations. This input is critical to strengthening the ongoing program and to developing and improving future programs. In August/September 2014 the team conducted a survey of 32 currently listed mentoring partnerships (32 mentors and 32 mentees). Twenty-two mentors (69% return rate) and thirteen mentees (41% return rate) responded.

1. **THE PROGRAM TO DATE**

Based on results of a Pilot program that was launched in collaboration with the E&E Bureau in January 2013, agreement was reached to continue the Program, beginning with another E&E group in November 2013. Thirteen mentoring partnerships were identified for this program. Three partnerships never established an ongoing relationship. Of the remaining 10 partnerships, nine mentors and four mentees completed the survey. Many of the mentees have since moved on to other bureaus.

The March 2014 program represented a significant expansion with participation of several bureaus in the Program. Working from mentee applicant profiles, 16 mentoring partnerships were identified. Most respondents to the survey were from this program. Five mentees were from Global Health, seven from LAC, and four from PPL/Asia. Three mentoring partnerships never got started for various reasons. Of the remaining 13 partnerships, three mentees were from Global Health, seven from LAC, and three from PPL/Asia. Seven pairs (both mentor and mentee) completed the survey. Of the remaining six pairs, four mentors and one mentee responded.

Three mentoring pairs are known to have continued since the January 2013 pilot program with the E&E Bureau. Of these three pairs, no mentees responded to the survey, but two of the three mentors responded.

1. **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**QUESTION 1: Length of time engaged in the mentoring relationship**

The majority of respondents (61.5% mentees and 45% mentors) indicated that they were in the mentoring relationship from four to six months.

**QUESTION 2: Description of “fit” between mentee and mentor**

Eighty-five percent of mentees and eighty percent of mentors described the “fit” as very good to excellent. No one described the “fit” as poor.

**QUESTION 3: Value of an ongoing mentoring relationship**

The overwhelming majority of mentee (84.6%) and mentor (100%) respondents agreed that the use of the mentor as an objective sounding board was of great value. The professional development counseling/advice aspect was similarly valued by mentees (100%) and mentors (94.7%).

**QUESTION 4: Elements of the mentoring relationship that contribute to or inhibit success of the mentoring relationship**

From the mentees perspective, commitment, special rapport, focus on specific goals, and frequency of contact contributed to the success of the mentoring. Mentors most often cited focus on specific goals, commitment, and frequency of contact as contributing to success.

**QUESTION 5: Importance of backstop similarity between mentee and mentor**

Fifty-eight percent of mentees and 42% of mentors indicated that having the same backstop was important. Thirty-three percent of mentees and 37% of mentors indicated it was not important. Eight percent of mentees and 21% of mentors held no opinion.

**QUESTION 6: Establishment of regular schedule for mentoring sessions**

Eight-three percent of mentees indicated that the mentoring is conducted on an ad hoc basis with the remaining having regularly scheduled sessions. Mentors’ responses were more evenly split with 53% reporting ad hoc sessions and 47% reporting regularly scheduled sessions.

**QUESTION 7: Average frequency of mentoring sessions**

Mentees responded that the frequency of mentoring sessions was monthly (70%) followed by bi-weekly (20%) and weekly (10%). Mentors indicated a frequency of bi-weekly (47%) followed by monthly (33%) and weekly (20%).

**QUESTION 8: Communication medium used in mentoring sessions**

Mentees indicated the following communications used in mentoring sessions: email (77%), telephone (69%), and Skype (31%). Mentors responded that the following methods were employed: Skype (56%) with telephone and email each registering at 44%. A couple respondents indicated that they used face time and one had face to face communication.

**QUESTION 9: Main content/substance of the mentoring sessions**

Mentees reported that the main content/substance of the mentoring sessions was career development (77%) and bureaucratic/management (62%) with technical trailing at 23%. Mentors indicated that mentoring sessions focused on career development (95%) and bureaucratic/management (95%) with technical training at 26%.

**QUESTION 10: Surprises/unexpected turns in the mentoring relationship**

Both mentees (92%) and mentors (79%) reported no surprises or unexpected events. Of those who experienced a surprise or unexpected turn, one mentee indicated surprise at how helpful it was to discuss management issues with an objective third party. Mentors commented surprise at getting along well with a mentee whom they had not met face to face.

**QUESTION 11: Difficulties posed by the virtual nature of the mentoring relationship**

Fifty-four percent of mentees indicated no difficulty while 46% of the mentees indicated a difficulty. However, most of the comments spoke to the time difference being the real difficulty. Ninety percent of mentors indicated that the virtual nature of the mentoring did not pose a difficulty with 10% indicating that it did. One mentor cited time difference a more significant difficulty than the virtual nature of the relationship.

**QUESTION 12: Usefulness of the orientation training in preparing one for a mentoring relationship**

Thirty-one percent of the mentees and 42% of the mentors did not participate in the orientation training. Of the mentees who participated, 39% found the training useful to extremely useful, and 31% found it not very useful. Of the mentors who participated, 57% found the training useful to extremely useful; no mentor found the session not very useful.

**QUESTION 13: Value of additional training or resource materials**

Most mentees (77%) did not view additional training or resource materials of value to them. However, one comment stated that skills based materials on management/career advancement techniques would be welcome. Mentors were split with 59% indicating no value to additional training or resource materials and 41% valuing additional resource and training materials.

**QUESTION 14: Usefulness of the mentoring relationship**

The overwhelming majority of mentees (85%) and mentors (94%) found the mentoring relationship useful.

**QUESTION 15: Intent to extend mentoring beyond the planned six month period**

Fifty-four percent of mentees and 32% of mentors indicated that they intend to extend beyond the original six month period. Thirty-one percent of mentees and 42% of mentors were not sure, mainly because they had not yet discussed this in the mentoring relationship. Eight percent of mentees and 11% of mentors indicated that they do not intend to extend beyond the six month period. Some respondents (eight percent of mentee respondents and 16 % of mentor respondents) indicated that they have already extended beyond the six month period and plan to continue.

Comment: For planning purposes, the responses require further exploration in order to determine the number of active mentoring partnerships that will continue. Since this is a demand driven program, all mentees on record will need to be polled first to determine their interest in continuing. For those relationships in which mentees do not wish to continue, mentors can then be polled to determine their interest in working with a new mentee.

**QUESTION 16: Recommendation to participate in this mentoring program**

Eighty-five percent of mentees indicated that they would recommend participation in this mentoring program and 15% indicated they would not. Ninety-four percent of mentors indicated that they would recommend participation in this mentoring program with another six percent stating “maybe.”

**QUESTION 17: Suggestions to improve this mentoring program**

Six mentees and 16 mentors offered suggestions to improve the UAA-USAID mentoring program (See section below)

1. **COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS ON PROGRAM STRENTHENING (edited to avoid redundancy)**

**Mentors**

* Program needs to be supplemented with additional communication for both mentors and mentees, noting FAQs and useful tips and hints
* Have a clear understanding of what each prospective mentee seeks from the program before they are accepted – and evaluate the results over time
* I think a mentor can handles more than one mentee at a time if they’re in the same backstop or in related fields
* Expand the program throughout the Agency personnel operations
* It might be useful if the mentors were given a profile of the Mentees with an emphasis on their perceived potential so as to better target advice
* We need to make sure that we get people (Mentors) who have some awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, who have recognized and learned from their mistakes, who recognize that the USAID of today is not that of their own day and who realize that for this and other reasons they will sometimes have limited wisdom on issues faced by mentees
* Periodic informal meetings of the active mentors to exchange ideas and mentoring techniques
* Have a quarterly or semi-annual “Learning” meeting of involved UAA and USAID staff, with all mentors present to give feedback and ask questions

**Mentees**

* I wish my mentor had spent more time as a career FSO as there are so many politics involved in our role that having someone who went through it their whole career and can offer advice on what mistakes not to make is crucial
* The mentor-mentee relationship is relaxed in our case. He is very helpful and it is fine for both of us that we fit our emails into our schedules
* We have worked out our own rhythm and it’s been fine, but some materials that have exercised to facilitate some useful conversations might help. Just for the reason that topics/materials that have worked for others might stimulate us to cover topics we hadn’t thought of
* My first match did not work out so well, but the second one is perfect. I would suggest assessing the mentee’s needs and objectives and then matching the skillsets of the mentor and mentee accordingly. In my particular case, I did not need so much of the same backstop or technical skills as I did an experienced manager. Thanks letting me participate in tis program. I have benefitted greatly from this experience.
* The agency is in a state of constant change. The program helps officers keep things I perspective. The more we talk, the more I realize just how vast the changes are – and out of my control. This realization helps me be a better officer and to provide better support to the rest of my team.

1. **CONCLUSIONS**

**General**

Data indicates that the program is clearly a success and should be continued and expanded. At this stage, however, the sample is small, the data limited and the implementation period short. Nevertheless, responses to date indicate high value for most mentees, mainly in terms of career development and management issues. Down the road, the program should make an effort to interview as many participants as possible to have a more comprehensive understanding as to success factors and constraints bearing on the program.

**Success Factors**

*The matching process is key to success.* To the degree possible persons of similar backstops should obviously be paired. Beyond that, a certain gut feeling, born of experience in the bureaucracy, would be important relative to profiles of the candidates on both sides of the equation.

Most *mentees placed higher value on career development and management* aspects, which makes sense. This is where the strength of the mentors presumably lies, as opposed to technical questions, which the Agency itself is more equipped to handle. This includes counseling and advice regarding professional development, and, it is assumed, on how to deal with the bureaucracy and one’s place in the hierarchy. Undoubtedly this would include personal relationships up, down and laterally. Rapport between the mentor and mentee is clearly important.

Another important area of focus is *specific goals*, which also makes sense, in order to achieve concrete objectives from the limited time allowed by the process.

Mentors should be prepared to concentrate on these success factors. Where technical advice can be added, depending on the experience of both parties, so much the better. The mentor should be careful, however, to not give technical advice where his or her expertise is lacking. The majority of respondents indicated that similar backstops was important, and this is obviously desirable, but not essential given the predominant focus on career development and management.

**Mechanics**

The six month timetable for the program seems to work well, although some pairs have continued the relationship and others intend to. On scheduling and frequency of contact, the data is somewhat inconsistent between mentors and mentees, although on balance it appears that most of the sessions are on an ad hoc basis. Also, the data indicates that most contacts were by email and telephone (or skype) and occurring between bi-weekly and monthly. The report mentioned that a couple of respondents indicated that they used “face time”and one had face to face communication. This is where Skype can be especially valuable. If face to face meetings (preferably in an informal setting) could be arranged during mentee trips to Washington, this could be especially helpful.

The mechanics of the program are good thus far. They could be adjusted over time, but success really depends on the commitment, attitude, creativity, experience, imagination and flexibility of both parties.

**Limiting Factors**

The principal constraints appear to be time and distance. These can be overcome with modern communications technology and flexibility. Obviously both sides of the equation must be prepared to assign a high priority to the process for it to work well. It appears that this has been happening in the majority of cases.

The other limiting factor may be availability of both mentors and mentees. As the program grows and exhibits a positive track record, participation and demand should increase. Additional Bureau support, which has been strong to date, would also be key for growth. More promotion would probably be helpful along with success stories and testimonials.

Within UAA, it might be good to set up an official tracking system with a person assigned to develop and build it out over time, with key data and information on success factors and constraints faced by individual participants. This, of course, would depend on willingness of participants to share the information.