Report on Mid-Term Monitoring of Mentors

USAID/UAA Mentoring Program - (Regular Cohort 1)

February 2014

1. Background

The USAID Alumni Association (UAA) and USAID are collaborating on a mentoring program that matches alumni, as mentors, with active USAID Foreign Service personnel who are assigned overseas. After a successful pilot, involving 12 pairs, the first regular mentoring group of 13 was launched in early November 2013. In January and February 2014 the mentors were surveyed to find out how the mentoring is going and, in preparation for a second group of mentors, what might be improved. As of the writing, ten responses have been received and form the basis of this report.

1. How is the Mentoring Going

With the exception of two cases, the mentoring reportedly is going well and progressing, although still in an early stage for several mentors. Relationships have been built, exchanges are almost universally underway, and relevant career and work issues are being discussed. The two exceptional cases share an apparent lack of interest on the behalf of the mentees, perhaps due to being pressured to sign up.

* 1. Results of Interactions to Date

All the mentors have had interactions with their assigned mentee. Some have had only a single meeting or discussion, but are planning more. Six mentors report positive feedback from the mentees, while the others were unsure of the question or had little to report. Seven have discussed career development, work objectives, and/or work problems with their mentee.

* 1. Fit

One mentor who reported the lack of interest on the part of the mentee did not answer the question on degree to which the match was a good fit with the mentee. All but one of those commenting on the fit judged it it as “very good” or “excellent.” The most common reasons given for these positive assessments of fit are: shared experiences, similar personalities, and mutual professional and personal interests. In the one case of only an “Okay” fit, the reason given is lack of communications.

* 1. Virtual Nature of the Relationship

Seven use Skype and/or telephone to handle the virtual nature of the relationship. One is not sure yet and another indicates that communications are in limbo at the moment.

* 1. Surprises

Generally there were no surprises. Among the few surprises are: the mentee appearing to be able, confident and performing; unrest in one country was making it difficult to find time for conservations; and, in one case, a lack of enthusiasm.

* 1. Categories of Discussion

The most discussed category of issues is bureaucratic/management, followed by career development and technical. Only one mentor reported a single category.

* 1. How Much Time

Certainly an average of well below an hour a week. Most sessions seem to be 45 minutes to an hour, but not every week. One mentor reports talking for up to 90 minutes at a time, but only once or twice a month. Except for one mentor devoting an hour a week to research or reading, almost all the reported time is used for Skype and telephone calls. With one exception, email seems used only to set the time for conversations.

* 1. Satisfaction

Four mentors are satisfied with their role in contributing to the UAA objective of strengthening USAID. One mentor is not sure how effective s/he has been so far. Another wants to be more of a coach than a mentor. One suggests the question should be addressed to the mentees. One points out it is quite a leap to ascribe results at a level of strengthening USAID. And, finally, one mentor indicated a lack of satisfaction.

1. What Might be Improved

A number of suggestions for improvement are found throughout the various responses with the call for continued UAA and USAID appraisal and program refinement.

* 1. Training

Five mentors considered the preparation or training they received as useful. Specifically mentioned were tips on structuring the mentor/mentee sessions for maximum benefit; handout materials; how to start and probing questions; importance of listening; benefit of frequent exchange; and clarification on the nature of the role. Three did not receive any training and one questioned whether training was essential as chemistry evolves naturally or it is time to move on. One mentioned that it was useful that the mentees had had similar training.

Suggestions to improve the training or preparation included: having a clearer idea on what areas the mentee wanted guidance; having work plan vetted by UAA and the sponsoring bureau; better focusing initial probing questions on mentee’s interests; periodic handouts or links to relevant articles; opportunity two or three times a year for mentors to share ideas and experiences; and accepting an irregular pace in communications.

* 1. Problems/Issues

The two cases of lack of interest on part of the mentee raised the issue of the need to be sure that the mentees are really interested in being mentored.

* 1. More Helpful

Suggestions on how the UAA Strengthening USAID Committee could be more helpful included: offer training to new employees on how USAID-related legislation is formulated, the role of Congressional committee staffs, how USAID relates to those staffs, and the content of the legislation itself; continue to gather data on the mentor/mentee program, assess its impact and modify the program as needed; encourage mentors and mentees to exchange resumes as a way to know each other better; and periodic links to mentoring or management literature.

* 1. Get-Togethers

When asked if they would be interested in periodic get-togethers of mentors, three checked “yes”; four checked “possibly”; and four checked “no”. One pointed out that as s/he did not live in the D.C. area, participation would need to be virtual. Another noted that work and travel schedules make it unlikely; however, possibly s/he could join a telephone conference.

In terms of frequency of such get-togethers, answers included: six months, couple times a year; every six months?; perhaps quarterly; and if via teleconference, every twoplus months. As to purpose, answers included: to share ideas and experiences; to identify challenges; and to discuss common issues that need to be raised with USAID.

It was suggested that the gatherings include current mentors, those between assignments, and possibly future mentors, even if primarily as listeners.

Annex: Questionnaire

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***USAID Alumni Association (UAA) Mentoring Program***

***January 2014 Follow-Up with Mentors***

1. How would you describe results of your interactions to date with your mentee?

a. Building the Foundation for a productive relationship:

b. Feedback from mentee:

c. Relevance of your conversations to current work objectives and/or career development:

1. Your perceived value of the relationship: At this point, how would you describe the “fit” between you and the mentee?

a. Excellent\_\_\_ Very Good\_\_\_\_ Okay\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_\_

b. To what do you attribute the fit or lack of fit?

1. How useful was the preparation or training for this task?

How could it be improved for you or the mentee?

1. How have you handled the virtual nature of the relationship, including ways that you have found to minimize the limitations imposed by distance?
2. What surprises or unexpected turns in the relationship have you experienced?
3. Please categorize and describe the main content/substance of your discussions (check all that apply).

Technical\_\_\_\_ Bureaucratic/Management\_\_\_\_

Career Development\_\_\_\_ Mixed\_\_\_\_\_

1. How could the program be improved?
   1. Are there problems/issues that you would like to bring to our attention?
   2. How could we (the UAA Strengthening USAID Committee) be more helpful?

1. On average, how much time are you devoting to this each week?
2. In conversations e.g., Skype, telephone) \_\_\_
3. In e-mail exchanges \_\_\_
4. Other (research/reading, etc.) \_\_
5. At this early stage, are you satisfied with your role in contributing to the UAA objective of strengthening USAID? Please comment.
6. Would you be interested in periodic get-togethers of mentors?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ Possibly\_\_\_

If yes, how often and what would you see as the goal of the get- together?

1. May we share your above responses (non-attributed) with other UAA mentors?

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

***Thank you for your participation in this UAA Mentoring Program!***