NZSA Mentoring Program Overview

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Cohort 1 of the NZSA mentoring program ran from May – October 2022. Close out surveys were sent out to both mentors and mentees in November to gather feedback on the successes and future opportunities for the program.

All 14 of the mentors in the program and 13 of the mentees responded to the close out survey.

Plans for Closing Out Cohort 1

The close out session highlighted the four options available to individuals for the next stage for the mentoring relationship. The survey asked how they planned to close out the program with a question allowing respondents to select multiple options. Most pairs were keen to continue the mentoring relationship informally, but a few pairs indicated they are keen to continue the mentoring relationship formally. Those who continue formally can choose to be part of Cohort 2 to enable them to connect with other mentoring pairs throughout the program.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
Conclude the mentoring relationship	1	0
Continue the mentoring relationship informally	7	10
Continue the mentoring relationship formally	3	3
Unsure	3	3

Plans for closing out Cohort 1 of the Mentoring Program

Intended Future Involvement in Mentoring Program

Participants were asked to indicate how they would like to be involved in the program going forward. It is a testament to the success of the program that 8 mentors and 6 mentees would like to continue to be involved as mentors or mentees respectively. There are also 6 people who would like to be involved as both a mentor and a mentee in an upcoming cohort. This highlights that there are early career members who feel they have something to offer as a mentor and that the desire for a mentor is not limited to those who are students or in the first few years of their stats career.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
Be a mentor in Cohort 2	8	0
Be a mentee in Cohort 2	0	6
Be *both* a mentor and mentee in Cohort 2	4	2
Take a break from the program for now	1	3
Unsure	1	3

Expressions of interest for involvement in the program going forward

Experiences of the Mentoring Program

A Likert scale question with three options was asked in the survey. The question asked respondents to use the scale *Definitely – Somewhat – Not at all* to indicate their agreement with the statements in the table below. The table summarises the responses from this question by including the number of respondents who selected *Definitely* for each statement. Note that the counts are from a total of 14 mentors and 13 mentees who responded to the survey. Mentors were given two statements that were not included in the survey for mentees.

The majority of participants in the program felt that the person they were paired with was a good match, enjoyed participating in the program and would recommend it to others in the NZSA. Some mentors felt their mentees were not very engaged in the program or were unclear what their mentee wanted to get out of the program. These are areas to focus on for Cohort 2 of the program.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
My mentor / mentee was a good match for me	12	13
The program met my expectations	11	12
I enjoyed participating in the program	13	13
I would recommend the program to others in the NZSA	13	13
My mentee was engaged in the program	9	
My mentee's expectations and goals of the program were clear to me	8	

Summary of respondents who expressed definite agreement with the given statements

Benefits of the Mentoring Program

There are many benefits of a mentoring program for both mentors and mentees. Some of these benefits are summarised in the tables below. The benefits have been ordered with the benefits which were experienced by more people at the top. For mentors, the most common benefit from the program was confidence in their ability to add value as a mentor. For mentees, the most common benefits were career advice and developing their professional networks.

Benefits for Mentors	Frequency
Confidence in ability to add value as a mentor	8
Communication skills	5
Leadership skills	5
Developing your professional network	5
Exposure to new ideas / ways of working	4
Opportunity to give back / provide value to NZSA	3
Connection to NZSA early career membership	2
Gained a new team member	1

Summary of benefits to mentors

Benefits for Mentees	Frequency
Career advice e.g. career planning, career progression	10
Developing your professional network	9
CV / job application advice	8
Support with soft skills e.g. time management, communication, stakeholder management	7
Support with personal skills e.g. work-life balance, building confidence	6
Exposure to new ideas / ways of working	6
Goal setting	4
Support with technical stats skills	3

Summary of benefits to mentees

Testimonials

Respondents were given a free text field to share their experiences and highlights of the program. This allowed for more personalised perspectives to be captured. A selection of testimonials was collated from these comments to promote the benefits of the program in the words of the program participants.

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I didn't really know what my strengths would be in mentoring as it was my first time being a mentor formally. The program built my confidence in mentoring. – Mentor Cohort 1

Found it to be extremely rewarding. Very interesting chats with my mentee - and despite the different stages in our careers / lives, there was a lot of overlap in the challenges, opportunities, etc we face. – Mentor Cohort 1

There are two main reasons why I am enthusiastic about taking part (1) I think statisticians can be quite isolated and (2) I would have really appreciated such a programme when I was a young statistician. – Mentor Cohort 1

My mentor also gave me advice throughout the interview process for a job I applied for during the program. I got the job! – Mentee Cohort 1

The mentoring programme is an excellent opportunity for me to build connections with and learn from more experienced statisticians. – Mentee Cohort 1

This was a great experience. My mentor and I get along very well, and over the past six months we have built a very good relationship. We mostly discuss non-technical aspects of work (work-life balance, time management, working with other people...), which is something that I was struggling with. My mentor has a lot of experience and anecdotes that she shared with me. – Mentee Cohort 1

[A mentor is] an encourager, accountability partner and much more. – Mentee Cohort 1

I am the only statistician at my workplace, so having another statistician to talk to was reassuring and helpful. – Mentee Cohort 1

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Learnings from Cohort 1

Participants were asked to share suggestions and ideas for future cohorts of the mentoring program. Theses have been grouped into two themes – improvements to the current format and suggested changes to the current format. These are summarised below and many of these will be incorporated into the planning for Cohort 2.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Asking for mentees to share specific details about themselves and/or the mentor they are seeking (e.g. gender, stage of career, ethnicity, location, academic background)
- Clarity on role of mentor and who is responsible for taking a lead in communications and arranging meetings
- Clarity on level of stats technical support expected and key focus areas for mentoring relationship
- Advice on finding a balance between mentee led contact and mentor led contact / follow up
- Suggestions of Icebreakers, questions for mentees to ask and topics for discussion to help pairs get started
- Have the meet and greet sessions earlier, before the mentor and mentee have their initial meeting
- More meet and greet sessions throughout the program
- Sharing of relevant resources related to mentoring

Suggestions of Alternative Approaches

- Students may find people with less than 5 years' experience could still be valuable mentors
- Mentoring groups where one mentor may be assigned to 2 – 3 mentees. An opportunity for mentees to learn from each other as well as from their mentor.
- Focus groups for technical stats support
- Mentoring speed date sessions to identify mentee priorities and areas of interest to assist with matching pairs
- Opportunities for short presentations to share tips including productivity tools, using software, social media etc

Other Learnings

There is an opportunity for check ins with pairs during the program to ensure everything is going well and they have the support they need. I was unaware that one of the mentees dropped out two months into the program. Had I been aware of this earlier, there may have been an opportunity to assign another mentee to that mentor.

The first cohort of the program restricted participants to being *either* a mentor or mentee. There may be opportunities to explore some individuals taking on both roles. This may allow for more pairs to be matched in a given cohort. Care will need to be taken to ensure anyone acting as both a mentor and mentee is aware of and comfortable with the extra commitment involved. There will also need to be a consideration on how this may affect the dynamics of the meet and greet sessions. In the first instance, this option will be restricted to individuals who took part in Cohort 1.

While the main focus of the program is to pair student and early career statisticians with experienced mentors, there may be opportunities to explore mentoring outside of these parameters. This could include allowing early career statisticians to mentor students or giving experienced statisticians the opportunity to be mentees themselves.