

NZSA Mentoring Program Cohort 2 Overview

Author: Lisa Thomasen

Date: January 2024

For years, NZSA members have discussed the benefits and possibilities of mentoring amongst our members. The NZSA Mentoring Program was launched in 2022 with the first cohort running from May – October with 14 mentor / mentee pairs. The second cohort of the program ran from May – October 2023 with 14 mentors and 22 mentees.

This report will summarise the set up and outcomes of Cohort 2 of the program and outline the plan for Cohort 3 which will run in 2024.

The report summarising the first cohort of the mentoring program can be found [here](#).

A few stats on Cohort 2:

- 14 mentors – 8 of whom were involved in Cohort 1
- 22 mentees – 4 of whom were involved in Cohort 1
- 10 mentoring pairs
- 4 mentoring groups with 2 – 3 mentees
- 1 peer mentoring group consisting of 3 mentees
- 2 people involved as both a mentor and mentee

Close out surveys were sent out to both mentors and mentees following the close out sessions.

Twelve of the mentors in the program and twenty of the mentees responded to the close out surveys.

Frequency of Meet ups

There was roughly an even split between irregular, fortnightly or monthly catch ups across the mentoring groups. Most mentoring groups achieved the minimum number of 3 catch ups throughout the 6-month period.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
Irregularly	4	6
Fortnightly	4	3
Monthly	4	11

Frequency of meet ups throughout the program

Interactions

Most groups were based in different parts of the country, so much of the interaction was virtual, with most groups having online meetings. Three of the groups were able to have the majority of their interactions in person, with one group managing to connect in person despite most of their interactions being virtual.

Many participants in the program have shared that they would like to have more opportunities to connect in person. Despite this preference, many groups were able to create meaningful connections with only virtual interaction, even when they had not previously met.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
In person	4	4
Online meetings	9	16
Via email	6	5

How pairs interacted throughout the program

Plans for Closing Out Cohort 2

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. This question allowed respondents to select multiple options. Most groups are keen to continue the mentoring relationship informally, with a few indicating they are keen to continue the mentoring relationship formally. Those who continue formally can choose to be part of Cohort 3 to enable them to connect with other mentoring groups throughout the program. Multiple groups had not yet discussed this and were unsure about what their plans were. Some indicated in the close out sessions that they planned to have this discussion with their group to ensure everyone was on the same page.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
Conclude the mentoring relationship	2	3
Continue the mentoring relationship informally	5	8
Continue the mentoring relationship formally	2	1
Unsure	4	9

Plans for closing out Cohort 2 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 9 mentees would like to continue to be involved as mentors or mentees respectively. There are also 2 mentees who would like to the opportunity to be both a mentor and a mentee in the next round. It is encouraging to see that being involved as a mentee in the program has given some individuals the confidence and inspiration to become mentors themselves.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
Be a mentor in Cohort 2	8	2
Be a mentee in Cohort 2	0	7
Be <i>both</i> a mentor and mentee in Cohort 2	0	2
Take a break from the program for now	2	6
Unsure	2	3

Expressions of Interest for Involvement in the program going forward

Experiences of the Program

A Likert scale question with four options was asked in the survey. The question asked respondents to use the scale *Disagree – Somewhat – Agree – Definitely Agree* 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 *Agree or Definitely Agree* for each statement. Mentors were given two statements that were not included in the survey for mentees.

All but one of the survey respondents enjoyed participating in the program and would recommend the program to others in the NZSA. The majority of participants in the program felt that the individual/s they were grouped with were a good match and that the program met their expectations. The introduction of mentoring groups this year led to a decrease in these scores compared to last year. Some mentors felt their mentee/s were not very engaged in the program or were unclear what their mentee/s wanted to get out of the program. The scores for these two questions are similar those from last year.

	Mentor Responses	Mentee Responses
My mentor / mentee/s were a good match for me	10	14
The program met my expectations	10	15
I enjoyed participating in the program	12	19
I would recommend the program to others in the NZSA	12	19
My mentee/s were engaged in the program	10	
My mentees' expectations and goals of the program were clear to me	9	

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 benefits from the program were confidence in their ability to add value as a mentor and exposure to new ideas. More mentors selected exposure to new ideas as a benefit this year compared with Cohort 1. For mentees, the most common benefits were career advice and developing their professional networks. Both of these benefits were also the top benefits for mentees involved in Cohort 1, however, less mentees got benefit from CV / job application advice this year while more experienced support with setting goals.

Benefits for Mentors	Frequency
Confidence in ability to add value as a mentor	8
Exposure to new ideas / ways of working	6
Communication skills	5
Developing your professional network	5
Leadership skills	4
Opportunity to give back / provide value to NZSA	2
Connection to NZSA early career membership	1
Friendship	1

Summary of benefits to mentors

Benefits for Mentees	Frequency
Career advice e.g. career planning, career progression	13
Developing your professional network	10
Exposure to new ideas / ways of working	9
Goal setting	7
Support with soft skills e.g. time management, communication, stakeholder management	6
Support with personal skills e.g. work-life balance, building confidence	6
CV / job application advice	3
Support with technical stats skills	1

Summary of benefits to mentees

Testimonials

I learned at least as much as my mentees. – Mentor Cohort 2

Had some fantastic discussions and think I got as much benefit out of the sessions as my mentees. I really looked forward to catching up and sharing ideas at our mentoring catch ups. It was nice to reflect on the challenges that we all faced and share ideas on how to tackle these – Mentor Cohort 2

My mentor was amazing at talking me through situations at work that I wasn't sure how to navigate, by sharing her experience and thinking with me about possible solutions and building my confidence. – Mentee Cohort 2

I found it really useful and learned a lot. I enjoyed the group-style mentoring. I think it was really helpful to have more than two viewpoints on a topic. – Mentee Cohort 2

The NZSA Mentoring Program provided opportunities to meet and network with other statisticians working in a diverse range of organisations. The program helped me to develop skills necessary for achieving work-life balance and building resilience working for a small team of statisticians in a large organisation. – Mentee Cohort 2

Learnings from Cohort 2

Participants were asked to share suggestions and ideas for future cohorts of the mentoring program. These are summarised below in themes and many of these will be incorporated into the planning for Cohort 3.

Suggestions for Improvement

In person connection and networking

- More opportunities for networking with others in the program – especially in person ones
- Start mentoring program in Nov / Dec to coincide with NZSA conferences which could provide opportunities for prospective groups to connect in person
- Use NZSA funding to support mentees to attend NZSA conference to meet their mentor
- Would be nice to be grouped with someone in the same part of the country to allow for in person connection
- Possible opportunity for NZSA to sponsor opportunities for groups to meet in person
- Possibility of a Slack channel or similar to allow program participants to interact throughout the program
- Mentees have interest in interacting and networking with the wider mentoring group, rather than just fellow mentees

Program Timing

- Start program earlier in the year than May
- Extend the period from 6 to 7 months

Program Expectations

- Have clearer expectations / conditions for the program to filter out mentees who are less engaged
- Clarity on program expectations shared with both mentors and mentees upfront
- Encourage mentoring groups to have a conversation early on where expectations and 'rules of engagement' are clarified with some tips to guide these discussions

Other Suggestions

- Have program participants contribute to a centralised list of topics to discuss in mentoring sessions to give others ideas
- Provide support for mentees in their journey towards becoming mentors

Comparisons to Cohort 1

The new additions to Cohort 2 included mentoring groups, peer mentoring and two participants being involved as both a mentor and a mentee. Specific feedback relating to these is summarised below.

Mentoring Groups

There were 4 mentoring groups, one with 3 mentees and the others with 2 mentees.

- Limit number of mentees in the mentoring groups that consisted of a mentor with 2 or 3 mentees. One of the groups had 3 mentees which made it challenging to find times that suited everyone.
- In the group setting, it can be more challenging to find topics that are relevant and of interest to the whole group given the different career stages and areas each mentee was working in. This was especially true for the group with 3 mentees.
- The mentoring groups provided good networking opportunities.
- Having multiple perspectives was very valuable.
- Mentors were able to learn lots from their mentees and being in a group allowed conversations to be more collaborative.

Peer Mentoring

This year there was 1 peer mentoring group consisting of 3 mentees. I attended one of their catch ups to check in and give them some suggestions. While there were some benefits to the peer mentoring group and it meant these individuals didn't miss out on being involved in the mentoring program, this format has a different set of challenges to the other formats.

- Group found it challenging without a leader to help facilitate.
- Would likely be more successful when someone in the group has the drive and confidence to take the lead. This is more challenging when the group consists of introverts.
- While some benefits were experienced, these individuals were disappointed not to have a mentor and their overall experiences of the program were less positive.

Mentor and mentee

This year there were 2 program participants who were involved as both a mentor and a mentee. One of them was involved as a mentor last year, and the other as a mentee. As mentors, both were in a 1:1 pair while as mentees, one was in a 1:1 pair and the other individual was involved in a mentoring group with 2 mentees. Both individuals were able to get value from both mentoring relationships and found the time commitment manageable.

This option will be offered again in Cohort 3 to those who have been previously involved in the program to ensure they are aware of the program structure and time commitment before committing to two mentoring groups.

Cohort 3

Cohort 3 will be offered in 2024, with a similar format to Cohorts 1 and 2, incorporating some of the suggested changes.

The plan for Cohort 3 is currently:

- Cohort 3 launch webinar on Friday 2nd February
- Survey for expressions of interest open for 2 weeks until mid-February
- Pairings communicated throughout March
- Initial meet and greet sessions held in late March / early April
- Program running from April - September
- Mid-point catch up sessions for mentors and mentees in June / July
- Program close out and overview in October

Lunch 'n' Learn Sessions

The Mentoring Program will also be facilitating a selection of lunch 'n' learn sessions throughout the year. The timing and topics for these will be confirmed closer to the time and promoted via the NZSA mailing list. The first of these sessions is scheduled for midday on Wednesday the 21st of February and will cover the topic of professional development.

Lean In Circles

Lean In Circles are small groups which connect regularly for peer-to-peer mentoring, networking and support. This year I am planning to set up a Lean In Circle aimed at women in the NZSA with the purpose of expanding networks, building connections and creating future opportunities for self-selection of mentors / mentees where an initial connection has already been established. Lean In Circle members do not need to be currently involved in the mentoring program to participate. If this initiative proves beneficial and there is sufficient demand, I will look to expand this initiative to all NZSA members. The first circle will involve a 1-hour call per month covering a variety of topics of interest to the group including discussions on resources created by Brene Brown. Expressions of interest for this are open until the end of January and involves emailing me preferred timings (day of week, time of day) and any discussion topics of interest.

Program Co-ordinator

Lisa Thomasen is the NZSA Mentoring Program Co-ordinator. Lisa has been working as a consultant industry statistician at the Fonterra Research & Development Centre in Palmerston North, New Zealand, for going on 8 years. In this role she has supported teams with their stats and data needs for projects to launch new dairy products and tweak existing ones. This has included modelling the performance of milk powders, analysing cheesecake performance, and investigating consumer preferences of yoghurts. Lisa has a particular interest in encouraging robust data management and experimental design in the projects she is involved with. Prior to her role at Fonterra, Lisa completed an MSc in Statistics at the University of Canterbury where she focused on modelling the population dynamics of a NZ fish stock. Lisa is an active member of the NZSA, having been the Student & Early Career rep for 5 years before resigning from that role to focus on mentoring. Lisa's goal is to cement mentoring and its benefits as part of the culture of the NZSA.

Lisa can be contacted via email lisa.thomasen@fonterra.com or on LinkedIn.

Acknowledgements

I would like to formally acknowledge everyone who has been involved in the second cohort of the NZSA Mentoring Program. It has been encouraging to see how many NZSA members are excited by this initiative.

A massive thank you to the 14 mentors and 22 mentees who were part of the second cohort. Thanks for your contribution to embedding mentoring as part of the NZSA culture.

Thank you to Beatrix and Ian for your support of the program as the Code of Conduct representatives.

Thank you to Alistair Ramsden and Jie Kang for sharing their experiences as a mentor and mentee from the first cohort of the program in the launch webinar for Cohort 2.

I would also like to acknowledge Lizzie Korevaar for sharing resources and ideas from the SSA mentoring program which gave me some good ideas during the planning phase for Cohort 2.