



2020 CMA Award Entry IABC Central Oklahoma: Mentorship

Background

The IABC Central Oklahoma Chapter is a small chapter (17 members) with a board consisting of six members, up from 15 members and a board of only four just a couple of years ago. Consistently over the past few years, our chapter goals included reaching more students, providing added value for current members and creating more connection within our membership base.

Mentorship has always been a key element of our chapter, though it was happening informally for many years. As part of our 2018-2019 strategic plan, we set out to formalize a mentorship program in alignment with IABC's purpose to create connection and develop strategic communicators. With a dedicated committee member and board member working together, we opened applications in March 2019 and began the inaugural year of our mentorship program in May.

Goals & Objectives

Our overall goal for the program was to create connection and develop strategic communicators by pairing experienced communications professionals with entry or mid-level professionals to provide industry-specific guidance, networking and learning opportunities.

To develop and implement the program in just a few short months, we focused on four major objectives:

1. Create mentorship program structure and communication plan to launch program.

Mentorship programs have been launched by many other IABC chapters with varying levels of success. We drew on the experience of other chapters through the mentorship toolkit provided by IABC Leader Centre and research into other chapter's programs to inform the structure of our program and how we communicated about it to potential mentors and mentees.

2. Develop a toolkit to guide mentorship pairings and meetings.

Beyond just creating an avenue for mentorship, our chapter wanted to provide support and guidance for both mentors and mentees. In many cases, this would be the first formal mentoring relationship for both mentor and mentee, and we felt some basic resources would be beneficial.

3. Recruit mentors and mentees for a total of three mentorship pairings.

For a small chapter and an inaugural year, we had high expectations for our program and the value it could bring to members at all levels.

4. Measure program and participant success through participant surveys.

Measurement is critical for a new program, and we planned from the beginning to measure the program's success through surveying both mentors and mentees at the conclusion of the program.

Budget

For the first year of our program, there was no specific budget required for implementation. Promotion of the program was targeted to members and prospective members through email and social media to existing lists and followers, as the program was positioned as a value add to members.

Implementation

Our first step in implementing this program was to research the successes and lessons learned of other chapters who had launched mentorship programs. A dedicated committee member researched the details of mentorship programs at other IABC chapters, including who was eligible for the program, how long the program lasted, and what the general expectations were of both mentors and mentees. We paired that information with details provided in the mentorship toolkit on IABC's Leader Centre to create the structure of our program.

Based on our research and the recognition that it was our first year of the program, we chose a six-month mentorship period with monthly meetings between mentor and mentee. We opened applications in April 2019 and the program ran from May through November. Prior to the official launch of the program, a committee member reached out to contacts in the communications school at the University of Central Oklahoma to promote the program to potential student members.

Our application focused on identifying where mentors and mentees were in the IABC career roadmap, the areas they were most interested in (professional growth, project success, skills development, or student support) and what specific areas of communications the mentees were most interested in or mentors had experience in. Asking these questions of both mentors and mentees helped with choosing pairings among available mentors and mentees.

(Attachment A – Spring 2019 Mentorship Application)

We created a mentorship toolkit and a mentorship agreement to be shared with both mentors and mentees. The mentorship toolkit contained useful resources to help guide discussions and set forth the qualities of a good mentor/mentee. The mentorship agreement outlined mentor and mentee goals for the program, expectations about frequency of meetings, and how to contact each other if unable to make a scheduled meeting. Each mentor/mentee pairing completed the agreement during their first meeting where they discussed their personal goals for the program. *(Attachment B – Mentorship Toolkit)*

A significant part of our implementation effort centered around our communications about the program—the website text, social media posts, email information, and application for both mentors and mentees. The mentorship committee worked on drafting and revising these materials to clearly communicate the value and the requirements of the program to ensure success from the beginning. (*Attachment C – Mentorship Communications Plan and Samples*)

We also prepared a survey to be used at the end of the program to assess the strengths of the program and any opportunities for improvement for future years of the program. (*Attachment D – Survey Responses*)

One of the key lessons we learned was the challenge of including students in a mentorship program that ran from May to November, as that timeframe encompasses summer break. One student mentee successfully completed the program using video meetings over the summer and in-person meetings once school resumed in the fall, but we plan to run future mentorship programs during the school year in order to better engage student mentees.

Another significant challenge we faced in this program was the idea of group events. While we initially planned for a group kickoff meeting, a mentorship check-in meeting partway through the program, and a final celebration event at the conclusion of the program, only the initial kickoff meeting actually happened and only with one mentee and two mentors. Including students in the program was important to us, but we quickly realized that student schedules were not conducive to the days or times we had chosen for group events. In future years of our mentorship program, we hope to better incorporate a couple of group events for mentors and mentees to meet and learn together.

Measurement and Results

1. Create mentorship program structure and communication plan to launch program.

Status: **MET**

We recognize that this is fairly tactical overall, but defining our program structure and communication plan was a critical first step in launching this program for our small chapter. We knew that we wanted a fairly simple structure rather than something complex because of minimal time for our small board to manage the program overall.

2. Develop a toolkit to guide mentorship pairings and meetings.

Status: **MET**

Using resources available through other chapters and the Leader Centre, we developed a toolkit to help mentors and mentees feel more comfortable with the program and have resources to lean on if they needed guidance on topics of discussion for their meetings. However, based on anecdotal feedback, the toolkit was not needed heavily as both mentorship pairings developed naturally over time and both mentees were highly engaged in the process and came prepared with questions at each meeting.

3. Recruit mentors and mentees for a total of three mentorship pairings

Status: **Partially met**

We opened applications for both mentors and mentees in March of 2019 and received four applications from potential mentees and two applications from potential mentors. One mentee applicant withdrew early in the process due to medical issues, and our mentorship program moved forward with three mentorship pairings. Through the course of the six-month program, one student mentee took on additional leadership responsibilities within a student organization and did not fully complete the program. The remaining two mentee participants fully engaged and completed in-person monthly meetings (plus some video call meetings) with their mentor. In the post-program evaluation, both indicated that they strongly agreed that the mentoring relationship was beneficial to their career and either agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the program to someone else.

4. Measure success through participant surveys

Status: **MET**

Our mentorship agreement at the beginning of the program asked both mentors and mentees to outline their goals for the program and clearly indicate how often they would meet and in what manner (in-person, video call, or by phone). These clearly defined goals at the beginning of the program allowed us to better measure results through our participant survey at the end of the program.

While our sample size was small with two mentorship pairings, the participant surveys showed significant success for the inaugural year of the program. Both mentees strongly agreed that the program was beneficial to their career, both agreed or strongly agreed that they achieved their goals, both strongly agreed that their mentor was responsive to questions, and both agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the program to another person.

Mentees answered an open-ended question about other comments as follows:

“I was continually amazed at the high level of expertise shared with me during each of our sessions. Questions and concerns were respectfully addressed. Feedback and encouragement was overflowing.”

“I really appreciated how open [my mentor] was. I always felt like I could come to her with anxieties and get an encouraging and truthful response.”

We wanted to allow adequate time to evaluate lessons learned from this first year of our program, and given the recognition of needing to run a school-year schedule if engaging student mentees, we will begin taking applications again in the fall of 2020 for the next round of our mentorship program.