



## **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

The International Association of Business Communicators – Calgary Chapter is Calgary’s largest communications professional organization. With 440 members (at time of submission), IABC/Calgary consists of members from government, corporate, education, non-profit, creative agency, and independent consultants at all stages of their careers from student to senior communicators. In 2017-2018, our chapter adopted the IABC international #1720 strategic direction, and in our chapter strategic planning, we aligned our goals and tactics to the updated vision, purpose and philosophy as well.

IABC/Calgary is governed by a board of directors comprising of 14 portfolios, one of which is the Career Services (Company of One and Mentorship program). Since 2015 and continuing to the present, our members are facing a challenging economy due to the decline of the energy industry which has resulted in budget cuts, staff reductions and job losses in companies across Calgary. Added to this is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and it’s continued impacts to our local economy, as well as the added strains to the resources, time and mental health of our members. As a result, we have had to focus on supporting our members through their most challenging year yet, while supporting our board and their portfolio volunteers, who are also dealing with these same challenges. These resourcing constraints and circumstances resulted in us having to reevaluate the priorities for our board and what supports our members need most at this time. Our mentorship program was identified as an essential component of these supports.

In previous years, IABC/Calgary, perhaps not unlike other large chapters, has found it a challenge to engage senior level communicators. Previous member surveys have shown that over half of IABC/Calgary members have 10 or more years of experience, which meant senior communicators made up a major portion of our membership. We had also found consistently in our annual member survey that senior level communicators were less satisfied with professional development opportunities than the other experience groups; we needed to find a way to keep these senior level individuals engaged in the chapter. The Mentorship program was launched in the 2015-2016 board year to both address keeping senior level communicators engaged and helping newer communicators propel their careers forward. In the six years since it’s been running, the program has become a signature program for our chapter, and the recipient of past Chapter Management Awards.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Considering the IABC international #1720 strategy, as well as the strain the COVID-19 pandemic was having on both our members and volunteers, we simplified our three year strategic plan to focus on one year, prioritizing our essential, value-added services for members, and identifying the following simplified, chapter goals for 2020-2021:

- Revitalize IABC/Calgary’s membership experience.
- Support members when and where they need it most.
- Continue to responsibly manage our finances.
- Prioritize equity, diversity and inclusion.

To meet these chapter goals, the Career Services co-director responsible for the Mentorship program set out the following objectives for the program:

- Improve recruitment process for mentorship program.
- Ensure consistent and scheduled communications for the mentorship program.



- Move to online sessions for foreseeable future to accommodate the restrictions of the pandemic.

## IMPLEMENTATION

IABC/Calgary's Mentorship Program has progressed since its inception in 2015-2016 to become one of the chapter's most important programs for members. The program intake has continued to increase over the years. Our program runs from November to June every year so this entry will be a combination of 2019-2020 (survey results/learnings) and 2020-2021 (progress to-date) as we are mid-program but have made notable progress during an unusual time with the impacts of the pandemic.

### **IABC/Calgary's Mentorship Program - An overview**

Each year, the program Director works with a dedicated team of volunteers – both senior communicators representing the mentor perspective, and junior communicators representing mentees – to assess and improve upon the program. Each September, a callout goes out via IABC/Calgary's communication channels asking for applicants to the Mentorship Program. At the same time, a pair toolkit is developed (see Attachment 1 IABC Calgary Mentorship Program Toolkit) and updated with resources such as role overview and expectations for mentors and mentees, goal setting templates, conversation starters, and extra reading resources for those keen to make the very most of the program. The Director confirms all volunteers for the program, including a Matching Coordinator, and Pair Care Coordinator.

The program is marketed through IABC/Calgary's communication channels such as the website, weekly newsletter, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (see Attachment 2 IABC Calgary Mentorship check-in Email). The program is open to any IABC member in good standing. It is not open to non-members. Additionally, the Director sends an email to prior program participants (many of our participants are returning members) and attends the new members event to make sure that they are aware of the opportunity. Once applications are collected, the Matching Coordinator carefully matches them with appropriate partners keeping in mind career goals and personal interests.

In November, a kick-off workshop is hosted by the chapter, which introduces the program as well as some professional development typically focused on leadership. For 2019-2020, we had Kristen Dyck present on how to build our personal brand. For 2020-2021, we had Jolene Ondrik, Founder of Eye on Culture, speak about communication style preferences, trust and values.

Throughout the year, mentors and mentees choose their own schedule to meet when it's convenient for them. The program volunteers set several check-in emails throughout the year including ideas to get the most out of their experiences. We also assess the interest of the group for additional networking opportunities. For this year, because of limited ability to get together in person, we have been contemplating a virtual meet-up for mentorship program participants across Canada. Mentees are provided with a Development Plan template that they are encouraged to use within the program.

In May/June, a wrap up event is hosted, which provides an opportunity for mentors and mentees to get together to celebrate their successes and we also offer another professional development opportunity. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, we were unable to have an in-person wrap up for the 2019-2020 program and a poll we conducted indicated that individuals were not interested in a virtual wrap-up at that time.



**Learnings from the 2019-2020 Program**

At the end of the 2019-2020 Mentorship Program, we sent out a survey to all participants to find out their satisfaction within the program, where they found the most value and where they could see improvement. Although we had 18 pairs, only 10 participants filled out the survey.

Feedback from the survey was quite positive. 90% of program participants were either Very Satisfied or Satisfied with their mentorship pair and 70% of participants rated their experience either Excellent or Very Good. 100% of respondents indicated that they would participate in the program again next year, or in the next couple of years. In terms of areas to improve, we did receive feedback of mentees needing to take more initiative in the relationship, which is something that we needed to reinforce at the kick-off event for the 2020-2021 program as well as within the toolkit. Anecdotally, in the comments, individuals enjoyed the kick-off event and additional opportunities to network with peers. These were important elements to not only include in the 2020-2021 program but also reinforce.

**Progress for the 2020-2021 Program**

For the 2020/21 Mentorship Program (which begun in September 2020), we have 11 mentors and 11 mentees, totaling in 22 participants in the program. Unfortunately, the numbers were lower than the previous year, but we were happy with a quality group of participants.

In speaking about ways to increase the reach of the program, we spoke to other chapters who have included students in their uptake. We again reached out to Mount Royal University who promoted the program to their students. Unfortunately, there are other mentorship programs available to students  
Some other positive stats:

- 11 new participants in the program, and 11 returning participants. It’s wonderful to see new participants in the program, but it is also great to have returning participants as it is a testament to the value of the program
- 2019-2020, we had a good mix of senior, mid-level, and junior participants
- We had two participants who had previously been mentees become mentors in the program

**Alignment to the IABC #1720 Strategic Plan**

As we further our chapter’s alignment with the IABC #1720 Strategic Plan, we have adjusted to solidify the Mentorship program’s alignment. For instance, we now directly market the program to SCMPs and CMPs as mentorship is a key component to help keep up certification. We also ensure through the program that we are not just pairing two like-minded individuals, but they are working to really develop strategic communications skills for mentees.

**BUDGET (2020-2021)**

| <b>Budget Item</b>                               | <b>Budgeted</b> | <b>Actual</b>                       |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Program promotion and thank you wrap-up expenses | \$275           | \$25 to-date<br>(Program promotion) |

Virtual events served to drastically reduce costs associated with the program this year. For example, at the beginning of the 2019 board year, we set out a budget of \$2,700 for the year (room rental, meal expenses, AV costs and speaker gifts), based on numbers from past years. With the shift to virtual in 2020, we spent \$1,026.79



(less than half) for the 2019-2020 board year. Heading into the 2020-2021 board year, we adjusted our figures to represent an entirely virtual future, with no in-person gatherings on the horizon for that year and have managed very well with the small budget outlined above.

## MEASUREMENT

The Mentorship program is measured against the portfolio director's strategic plan objectives. Our chapter strategic plan and subsequent portfolio plans are set at the beginning of each board year, evaluated mid-year, and end of year. It is also measured with regular check-ins with the pairs, as well as a year-end survey to provide insights into the program. Lastly, we ask mentorship related questions in our member survey to gain insight into the value of such a program to our wider membership. Each year, the program is consistently rated as high value.

## RESULTS

Objective 1: Improve recruitment process for mentorship program.

Results: Over the past couple of years, we've had more applicants come through as Mentors, so we looked at how to specifically target Mentees for the program. We had quite a bit of success through attending the new member event. Many of the new members, upon hearing about the program, expressed that this was something they would like to do. Additionally, from 2019-2020 year-end survey, 100% of participants indicated that they would either like to return to the program the following year or within a couple of years, so we also reached out to the prior group to let them know that applications were open for 2020-2021. We also:

- Have a mentorship program website: <https://iabccalgary.com/learn/mentorship-program/>
- Use our blog and newsletter to promote the program: <https://iabccalgary.com/blog/mentorship-a-journey-of-shared-value/>
- Strategize unique content for social media to promote participation in the program using testimonials from the program: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/iabcyyyc\\_mentoring-mentorshipprogram-yycbiz-activity-6719400208461103104-wMhI](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/iabcyyyc_mentoring-mentorshipprogram-yycbiz-activity-6719400208461103104-wMhI)

Objective 2: Ensure consistent and scheduled communications for the mentorship program.

Results: In our 2019-2020 survey, it was indicated that 90% of members felt that we had provided the "right amount of communication" about the program. Therefore, for the 2020-2021 session, our approach and cadence of communication has not been drastically changed.

Objective 3: Move to online sessions for foreseeable future to accommodate the restrictions of the pandemic.

Results: Unfortunately, we were unable to host a wrap-up event in person for the 2019-2020 year due to COVID-19 and at that time, our polls indicated that participants were not interested in a virtual wrap-up at that time.

For our kick-off event for the 2020-2021 Mentorship Program, we were thrilled to see that only 2 program members were unable to attend, and we had great participation and enthusiasm for the event. We made use of zoom functionality including break-out rooms for mentor and mentee pairs to get to know each other. We also had the opportunity for each of the program participants to introduce themselves.

To add further value in the program in a year where in-person events have been difficult; we are looking at the possibility of a cross-Canadian mentorship program participants networking event.