

# **2023 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education**

## **Argonne National Laboratory**

### **Building a Mentoring Program to Support Organizational Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility and Reinforce Community Values**

#### **Relevant Rubric Area(s):**

1. Prevention: Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values
2. Prevention: Embedding the Values of Diversity, Inclusion, and Respect into Recruitment, Hiring, Admissions, Retention, Promotion, and Advancement

#### **Description of Work**

##### **Motivation**

Mentoring can be a transformative tool to advance career and professional development for employees at all career levels. In addition to promoting learning for both mentors and mentees, mentoring helps to expand networks and build relationships. Through a culture of mentoring, organizations can foster an inclusive and respectful environment that supports goals towards diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Despite these benefits, access to mentoring is often cited as a barrier to professional growth and advancement for women and underrepresented minorities in higher education. Organizations can overcome this barrier by designing mentoring programs that ensure equitable access to mentorship to all employees.

Argonne implemented a Lab-wide mentorship program in 2022 to provide access to mentorship for all employees in both research and operations roles at all career levels. The Argonne Mentoring Program aims to address climate indicators that guide the Lab's core values and DEIA strategy especially, ensuring employees feel valued, supported, and included and that there is equitable access to professional and career development opportunities for employees to grow. The 2018 NASEM report on sexual harassment of women in academia found that environments with organizational systems and structures that value and support diversity, inclusion, and respect are environments where sexual harassment behaviors are less likely to occur. By supporting a respectful and equitable environment, the development of the Argonne Mentoring Program applies to the Action Collaborative Rubric for Prevention: Identifying and Reinforcing Community Values.

##### **Program Development**

A collaborative team approach was used to design the Argonne Mentoring Program, with representatives who could speak to the needs of employees at all career stages, in both research and operations roles. Team members included representatives from Argonne's deployed talent management and learning and organizational development teams and staff from the operations and research areas representing the interests of students, postdocs, early-

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career, mid-career, and experienced researchers and employees in technical and administrative roles. Guiding principles for the team included providing clear guidance and expectations for mentors and mentees; ensuring support for program participants; integrating other elements of Argonne's talent strategy, such as operationalizing the core values, leadership development, and alignment with the Lab's DEIA strategy.

A 6-month pilot program with 19 mentor/mentee pairs was conducted from August 2021 – February 2022. Program elements included an orientation session, platforms to connect such as a Microsoft Teams channel, and a monthly Mentoring Meetup series to support skills development for mentors and mentees. This series was modeled after the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) curriculum, which was built on core competencies for fostering inclusive mentoring relationships and emphasizes cultural awareness in mentoring. These concepts further reinforce Argonne's core values and DEIA missions.

### **Initial Outcomes and Future Outlook**

Building on the success of the pilot, we launched the full, Lab-wide program in 2022. To ensure equitable access, we utilized a marketing approach that engaged the Laboratory's leadership teams, DEI Councils, and Employee Resource Groups. Mentors and mentees who enrolled in the program were asked a series of questions to aid in matching participants based on their skills, interests, preferences, and learning goals. The first cohort included 115 mentor/mentee pairs, with representation from all research and Laboratory operations directorates (organizational units), across 33 career levels, including 21 members of the Laboratory's 84-person extended leadership team. Feedback from the first cohort was largely positive, with over 80% of participants responding that they felt well-supported and prepared for their roles as mentors or mentees. Over 80% felt they were well-matched with their mentor or mentee and that they were able to develop positive relationships to accomplish learning goals. A common theme from the post-program survey was that participants appreciated the access to mentorship the program offered, as well as the ability to build relationships with other employees they otherwise would not have had the chance to meet.

The Argonne Mentoring Program is expected to expand and evolve over time, as we monitor progress through the lens of continuous improvement. For the next phase of the program, we invited mentors and mentees from the 2022 cohort to be ambassadors for the program, which could include participating in informational sessions, mentorship panels, and enrichment activities for new mentors and mentees. A Lab-wide steering committee will be created to guide future directions for the program and help build a culture of mentorship. The approach to developing the Argonne Mentoring Program could serve as a guide for other Action Collaborative member institutions seeking to close the accessibility gap to mentorship and foster an inclusive and respectful environment.

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