

## **IABC Houston: Mentoring**

*Division 2: Medium Chapters*

### **Introduction**

IABC Houston is part of a global network of more than 10,000 communications professionals in 70-plus countries. With approximately 150 members, and a broader network with more than 2,200 influential Houston-based communicators, our members are committed to improving personal and professional growth as well as organizational effectiveness through strategic communications.

IABC Houston members include public relations, marketing, and communication professionals from Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, communications agencies, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and freelance writers and consultants. All have a commitment to continuing professional development and a desire to network with other communicators.

However, something was missing at IABC Houston — a formal mentorship program that fostered our organizations focus on professional development while creating connection and developing strategic communicators.

### **Goals and Objectives**

IABC Houston's primary goal is to elevate the communications profession in Houston by offering strategic value, and professional development opportunities to our members and prospective members.

To accomplish our goal, the Houston chapter understood the need to create a mentorship program that would pair communicators with a mentor/mentee and facilitate the program with recommended tools and guidance. We established the following objectives:

- **Mentorship Committee:** Houston ranks fourth among U.S. metro areas in Fortune 500 headquarters and is home to the world's largest medical center (Texas Medical Center), oil and gas majors, energy services companies, and tech – as well as the diverse communications professionals who work in these industries. In order for our chapter to understand the needs of our diverse membership — and to maximize our reach — we needed to form a committee that represented multiple industries.
- **Recruit Program Participants:** During the launch of our program, we established a goal of recruiting a total of 10 participants — which accounts for roughly seven percent of our membership base.
- **Develop Program Material:** While many communicators have informal mentors/mentees, we understood the need to provide structure in our first-year program. This would require recommended guidance for the program while creating a clear set of



accountability and expectations for all participants.

- **Pairing Participants:** It was important for our chapter to identify and pair the correct mentor/mentee so that each individual would find the program helpful for their professional goals. It was also understood that progress checks would be maintained.

## Budget

IABC Houston allocated \$150 for food and drinks to host our official “meet your mentor” happy hour.

## Implementation

- **Sourcing Program Materials:** Led by the chapter president, a four-person committee was created in June to discuss program goals, structure and expectations. Together, and with the help of IABC international executive board member Michael Nord, the committee discussed best practices and began to outline a formal structure for our first-year program.
- **Recruiting Participants/Matching:** On Aug. 1, IABC Houston announced the launch of our new mentorship program via our monthly newsletter, social media accounts, and the homepage of our website. Through Aug. 20, individuals were allowed to register for the program as a mentor or mentee by completing our online questionnaire hosted on Google Forms. Individuals were then matched by our mentorship committee and notified with pairings, guidance and recommendations on Sept. 3.
- **Guidance and Surveys:** Throughout the launch of the program, our committee has remained focused on providing guidance with mentors/mentees on an ad-hoc basis. This includes — but is not limited to — emails, phone calls, coffee meetings, and more. Additionally, an email survey is sent every two months to program participants asking for feedback and their experience with the program.

## Results and Measurement

While the program is still in its infancy, the early returns have been enormously positive.

- **Mentorship Committee: Met**
  - Our mentorship committee consists of four members and the president of IABC Houston. Of the three women and two men, they represent a variety of industries (energy, technology, nonprofit, consultant firms) and experience-levels.
- **Recruit Program Participants: Exceeded**
  - With a goal of recruiting 10 program participants during our first-year, we exceeded our expectations by 80 percent. This was in large part due to the efforts of leveraging the chapter’s digital media channels, email communication, and its *Business Communicators* podcast.
  - Following the launch of the program, more than a half dozen members approached the mentorship committee requesting a mentor/mentee of their own. Due to demand, IABC Houston created a waitlist and is evaluating the launch of



a spring mentorship session.

- **Develop Program Material: *Exceeded***
  - Through the work of the mentorship committee, IABC Houston created robust resources for mentors/mentees.
    - **Google Form.** The document gathered information on: (1) experience level; (2) why they were interested in the program; (3) what professional competencies or career guidance they are interested in sharing or learning more about; (4) program goals; (5) past mentorship experience; (6) and more.
    - **A guide for Mentors/Mentees.** This document was created to outline: (1) benefits of participating; (2) responsibilities of the participant; (3) tips; (4) what to consider prior to meeting; (5) potential challenges; and (6) how to transition into the last phase of the program — separation.
    - **Mentoring Agreement.** A contract was created for participants that outlined program goals between the mentee and mentor, the cadence of meetings, and their signature.
  
- **Pairing Participants and Survey Results: *Exceeded.***
  - After reviewing the data acquired in the Google Form, the mentorship committee met to review the information and identify potential matches. Once matches were paired, an email was sent to all participants introducing the matches. Participants were then invited to meet their mentor/mentee at an IABC Houston happy hour in which food and drinks were provided.
  - To gain insight into how the program is developing for each participant, the mentorship committee sent an email survey requesting feedback on their experience with the match and whether or not the program was meeting their expectations. The feedback has been highlighted below:
    - “This morning I had coffee-and-coaching with my mentor, Elysa Nelson. Thanks to IABC Houston for pairing us up! I’m excited to be part of our organizations first mentoring cohort and I am looking forward to a fantastic year of learning and growing with this amazing professional.” — Amanda Swennes | Internal Comms Manager, Crown Castle
    - “The initial guidance from IABC Houston provided a great breadth of information and tips. So far, we meet every other week. This has been a great program. Todd is a great guy and he is great to bounce off ideas. Great experience so far!” — David Casey | Literacy Initiatives Associate at Neuhaus Education Center

### Work Samples (1-3)

- A Guide for Mentees
- A Guide for Mentors
- Mentoring Agreement