

CASE STUDY

How AO Foundation launched and scaled its mentorship program advancing diversity and inclusion using MentorCity



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TATJANA TOPALOVIC,
Senior Project Manager AO Access



HIGHLIGHTS

Challenges:

- Building a mentorship program without having to do the time-consuming administrative work of pairing, prompting and tracking progress manually
- Finding a software solution that would help AO Access pioneer a new way of mentoring in their field based on non-clinical competencies
- Finding a solution that is budget-friendly and adaptable to fit their needs
- The need to have access to support especially when the mentorship program was being built for the first time

Solution:

- A mentoring software that is intuitive and easy to use accompanied by a supportive team that's accessible and there to assist when needed

Results:

- Surpassed their goal of participants for the pilot program and scaled the program in future cohorts
- Engaged a diverse group of medical professionals and facilitated mentorship based on non-clinical competencies

In the full cohort:

- 82% of participants reported an overall satisfaction with the program in terms of meeting their expectations
- 81% of participants followed through with their mentoring relationship
- 85% of the participants reported MentorCity platform was very user-friendly for participating in the mentorship program
- 83% of the participants agreed that the program gave them access to a mentor they would not have had without this program

The Client



**Transforming Surgery—
Changing Lives**



INDUSTRY
Professional
Association



LOCATION
HQ: Switzerland
Network: Global

The AO Foundation is a medically-guided, non-for-profit organization with headquarters located in Davos, Switzerland. The foundation is the premier innovator in the surgical treatment of bone fractures and disorders and drives research, development and education by delivering products, services and courses to its clinical units and its global network of surgeons, operating room personnel and partners.

At present the AO Foundation has a global network of 520,000 healthcare professionals. Each year it offers over 870 educational events around the world, supported by nearly 8,000 faculty and attended by over 82,000 participants.

The Challenge

Finding a mentoring software that allows them to build a unique mentorship program along with being adaptable and easy to manage

When AO Foundation ran its Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative (ODII) survey in 2019, the data showed that there was significant underrepresentation of women and diverse groups within medicine and leadership and governance roles. The AO leadership knew that if the organization wanted to stay relevant in a changing world and attract a diverse membership, they had to address these issues and advance positive culture change.



Tatjana Topalovic and AO President Tim Pohlemann at an event promoting AO Access

With that data in hand accompanied by other research, the ODII group set out to get approval for a program that would advance diversity, inclusion and mentorship within the organization. Those efforts led to the birth of AO Access, a program with the goal of creating more equal access for everyone regardless of gender, race, ethnicity and other diversity dimensions.

“If we really want to attract the best, we need to make sure we give everyone the same opportunity,” states Tatjana Topalovic, senior manager of AO Access while speaking about the goals of the program.

One of the initiatives the AO Access taskforces began working on was the AO Access Mentorship program that aimed to provide mentorship to the AO community and support equitable access to educational and governance positions. From her background of working in faculty development, Tatjana knew that factors like personal connections, knowing the right people, timing and luck often played a profound role in determining the career pathways and opportunities many professionals got access to.

The AO Access Mentorship program wanted to inspire and support AO’s global community to collaboratively reach new heights in personal and professional goals in an inclusive and sustainable way. With those objectives in mind, Tatjana and the AO Access members began building a mentorship program focused on non-clinical competencies, pioneering a new concept in the field of mentorship.

“Surgeons are brilliant at what they do but talking about non-clinical topics where they may not have practice - for example talking about vulnerability - is difficult for them,” shares Tatjana. “But in our mentorship program, we match across clinical specialties. There was - and still is - some resistance to this new approach. It’s common for people to wonder: ‘What benefits are there to be mentored by someone from a different clinical specialty?’ But that’s what our mentorship program is all about: it’s really about those non-clinical competencies that advance personal and professional growth.”

Based on research, AO Access compiled a list of 15 non-clinical competencies to focus on in the program including skills like the ability to empower, accessibility, active listening, creativity, empathy, respect, honesty etc.

- AO Access Mentorship Program
non-clinical competencies**
- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Ability to empower | 8. Encouraging |
| 2. Accessible | 9. Fair minded |
| 3. Active listener | 10. Flexible |
| 4. Committed | 11. Honest |
| 5. Creative | 12. Open-minded |
| 6. Desire to help others develop | 13. Respectful |
| 7. Empathic | 14. Self-aware |
| | 15. Trustworthy |

Now, the challenge was to find a tool that would allow them to build a formalized mentorship program that would fit their unique needs and their budget.

The team wanted to be able to make adaptations to suit its program and have support throughout the phase of building and implementation, especially since the program was being built for the first time.

With limited organizational capacity, Tatjana also wanted to be able to find a tool that would minimize the administrative burden of manually matching mentors and mentees and guarantee anonymity and transparency in the process.

It was also important for her to have a tool that would simplify and automate the process of prompting mentors and mentees to move forward on their goals and provide a way to track progress and evaluate the success of the program.

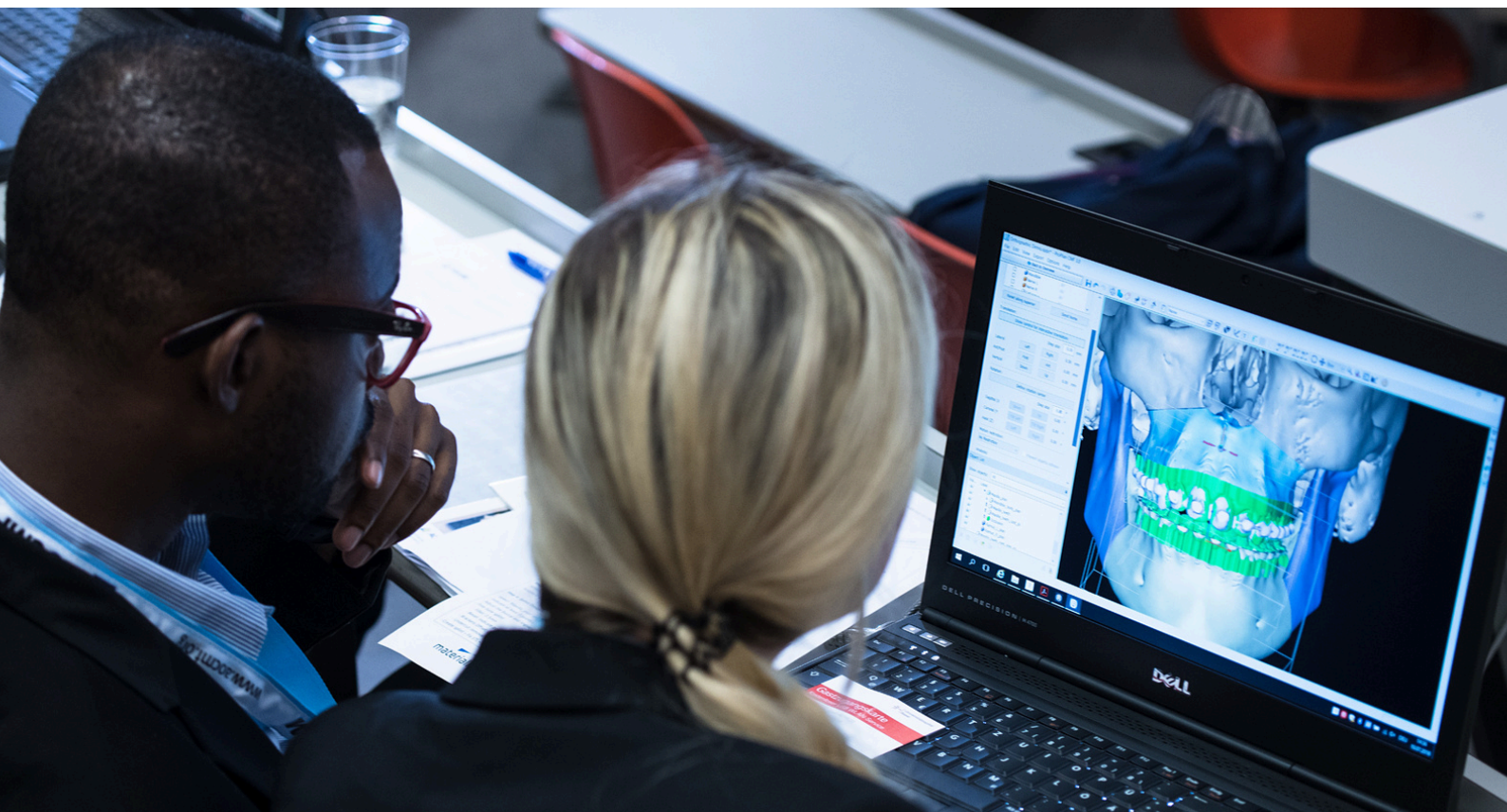
The Solution

A mentoring software that is intuitive, easy to manage and adaptable, accompanied by a team that is accessible and available to provide support

Tatjana says she did a lot of research to find the perfect tool for her program and landed upon MentorCity in the process.

“MentorCity was, for us, a really good solution,” says Tatjana. “I still recommend it everywhere I can because I really like working with Shawn and the team from MentorCity. I think its a really good combination of using what MentorCity offers and being able to adapt it.”

Once Tatjana had the program vision and design ready from AO Foundation’s side, the process of implementing it on the MentorCity platform was a smooth and seamless experience for her and her team.



Tatjana met with the MentorCity team about once a week to implement the program structure into the platform. From adding profile fields encompassing their unique non-clinical competencies to setting up prompting emails to encourage progress, Tatjana says she had a lot of support throughout the process.

“I was directly in contact with Shawn and Brian,” shares Tatjana. “Even though we're in different time zones, I can almost always reach out to him. And then he has a lot of resources and he sends quick videos when I don't know how to do something.”

For the pilot program (2022), participants were selected based on an open call and MentorCity was used to match applications anonymously based on non-clinical competencies and participants' self-identified gaps. The matching algorithms consider the competencies that a mentee is looking to develop and compares them to those in which the mentor is strong.

To take part in the full program (2023 and 2024), prospective mentors and mentees have to complete a series of continuing medical education-accredited modules on the AO learning management system.

Without MentorCity, Tatjana says they would have had to use manual excel sheets to match participants and it would have taken them a lot of time to build and run the program.

“The amount of time it saves us not doing it that way is huge,” says Tatjana. “Other than the support to human resources, being able to track, to pull reports, to see how many people have used MentorCity and for how long - none of that would have been possible manually. And we would not have been able to guarantee an unbiased mentor-mentee matching process.”

Being able to automate things like pairing, prompting emails to encourage progress and tracking progress has made life much easier for Tatjana and her team, in addition to contributing to the success of the mentorship program.

“MentorCity has definitely made the entire process much easier for the AO access team,” says Tatjana. “It has played an important role in putting mentorship in the larger context of trying to create a culture change for DEI. I think it helps us drive our message faster and larger in a very efficient way. Most of the processes in MentorCity are automated. It's more about guiding people through it. In MentorCity, that is very efficient and easy to manage.”

Tatjana also found the software very adaptable to fit their unique program needs.

“I would say that it's very intuitive and even though it's off the shelf, you can adapt it to your own needs,” she says.

For Tatjana, the customer service she received was one of the highlights of her entire experience.



“Shawn and his team are excellent,” says Tatjana. “Always solution-oriented, fast, proactive, cost efficient and also realistic in terms of budget expectations or if adaptations need to be done.”

“The assistance and the service I got was outstanding. I was always met with a positive attitude. They’re also in it because they want to do a good thing.”

For MentorCity, excellent client experience and personal touch are business values they live by.

“We really value that personal touch and connection,” explains Brian Anderson, Account Manager at MentorCity. “That’s what mentoring is about.”

“That’s how we’ve built the company as well,” says Brian. “To allow for us to really work with companies to direct their entire mentoring program to ensure it’s successful. When you sign up for MentorCity y’all get a mentor!”

The Results

A successful mentorship program that engaged a diverse group of medical professionals who reported high overall satisfaction and an intent to continue in their mentoring relationships

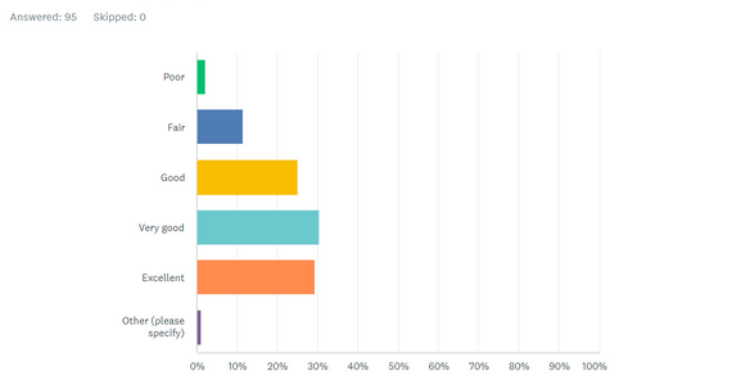
Tatjana is proud of the mentorship program AO Access has been able to create using MentorCity and says it has helped the organization advance its goals of diversity and inclusion.

“MentorCity has allowed us to pioneer this concept of mentorship based on non-clinical competencies fostering developmental mentoring.”

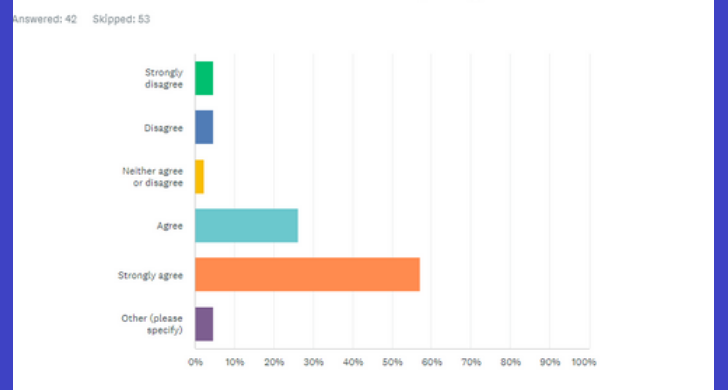
“It really helps drive this idea of professional growth based on non-clinical competencies,” shares Tatjana. “Many medical professionals don’t know what they are missing out on till they actually experience mentorship based on non-clinical competencies.”

Post program evaluations by AO Access after the full cohort

How usable was the MentorCity platform for the purpose of participating in the mentorship program?



Mentee: Has the program given you access to a mentor that you would not have had without this AO Access Mentorship Program?



AO was able to engage a diverse group of medical professionals across different global regions and clinical specialties through the AO Access mentorship program. The team surpassed its goal of participants for the pilot program and was able to scale the program in future cohorts.

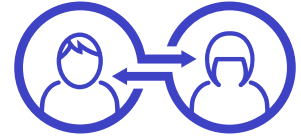
Post program evaluations showed that in the full cohort:

- 82% of participants reported an overall satisfaction with the program in terms of meeting their expectations
- 81% of participants followed through with their mentoring relationship
- 85% of the participants reported MentorCity platform was very user-friendly for participating in the mentorship program
- 81% of the mentees reported that the mentoring relationship helped them grow professionally
- 83% of the participants agreed that the program gave them access to a mentor they would not have had without this program
- 74% participants intended to continue their mentor and mentee relationship beyond the formal part of the program



MENTORING PROGRAM RESULTS

475



PARTICIPANTS MATCHED

THROUGHOUT PILOT PROGRAM AND 2 SUBSEQUENT COHORTS



81%

PARTICIPANTS FOLLOWED THROUGH

WITH THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP TILL THE END IN THE FULL COHORT

85%

RATED MENTORCITY USABILITY AS

EXCELLENT/VERY GOOD IN THE FULL COHORT



IN THE FULL COHORT

81%

PARTICIPANTS REPORTED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

74%

PARTICIPANTS INTENDED TO CONTINUE THE RELATIONSHIP

"The evaluation speaks for itself," says Tatjana with a smile.

"The way we put up the content is that it's developmental mentoring, so it's a very bidirectional relationship," she shares. "It actually doesn't necessarily matter if you're a mentee or a mentor, because a mentor can learn as much from a mentee, so there shouldn't be this hierarchy. We want to promote life-long learning and a continuous enrollment with the mentorship program."

Tatjana says the mentorship program has helped mentors and mentees find support and partners on their career journeys, grow their knowledge and gain new non-clinical competencies.

"Now they are more empathetic and effective medical professionals," says Tatjana. "Whatever makes them better surgeons overall, improves their patient care. And that's really what they committed to in their professional life. So having AO Access facilitate that - they are really very grateful for that. Some could find this in other ways, but many are more involved now. We make their progress faster."

Tatjana was elated to receive encouraging words in unsolicited feedback from some of

the participants of the mentorship program that proved that it had really touched lives.

“It's like a dream come true. It's exactly what we had set out to do as the AO Access Steering Committee and Task Forces in terms of many things actually. I could not wish for something more, really. There's always room for improvement - don't get me wrong, but to have this already is really good.”

Ready to engage, inspire and build your organization through your own unique mentorship program?



[Request a tour today](#)

MentorCity™



Success stories from Mentees of the AO Access Mentorship Pilot Program:



"My expectations were not only met, but also successfully surpassed by the mentorship program! I don't think the matching program could have done a better job, in my case! I greatly enjoy our weekly meetings and can strongly affirm I can already feel their benefits in my day-to-day activities, medical and nonmedical, as well!"

- Aleksandra Barbu, Mentee AO Access Mentorship Program

"It has enriched my knowledge and will help me in my career. It was a great project as this mentoring relationship with Dr. Travis will continue even if this program is ending officially."

- Ashutosh Bhosale, Mentee AO Access Mentorship Program



"AO mentorship program was a great initiative and an innovative concept. Helped connect people across the globe. This mentorship program was a unique experience for young surgeons like me. The quality of mentors were carefully matched. Overall, this was a fabulous three months with my dear mentor Prof Lucas."

- Adarsh Kudva, Mentee AO Access Mentorship Program

"Here comes the bias! I believed that I had none. What a mistake! Looks like my worst problem was my complete unawareness... Then I was instructed about how to make this bias less important in my decisions and the way to treat my partners. The first step is to recognize them. I was blind about them. But once I identified it I started to make an effort to make them less important in my everyday relations and decisions."

- Sergio Nossa, Mentee AO Access Mentorship Program



"The mentorship program enables young surgeons to interact with and be mentored by older and more experienced colleagues. It holds limitless opportunities for personal and career development which in turn could lead to transformation of the mentee's work environment."

- Charles Iwunze, Mentee AO Access Mentorship Program