Chapter Event: International Career Advancement Program (ICAP) Fellowship Virtual Brown Bag

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
When: Thursday, April 2, 2020 | 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Moderator
Nicholas Bassey | Acting Director, Center for Transformational Partnerships, USAID

Speakers
Alicia Contreras-Donello | Division Chief, Private Sector Development, USAID
Dr. Aimee Rurangwa, M.D, MPH | Senior Technical Advisor, Health and HIV/AIDS, Project Concern International (PCI)

Event Description

Despite social science research showing that diverse and inclusive leadership leads to more effective organizations, international development and foreign policy institutions continue to lack diversity at their senior levels in the United States. Although there is a long way to go, there are organizations and programs trying to help cultivate more diverse leaders in international affairs. Recognized as a successful leadership program, the International Career Advancement Program (ICAP) is a professional development and leadership program - sponsored by the Aspen Institute and the University of Denver’s Josef Korbel School of International Studies - for mid-career professionals in international affairs in the United States. The program provides career advising, peer support, senior mentors, workshops on leadership, and policy discussions to help professionals from underrepresented groups and diversity and inclusion advocates have a more effective voice, achieve their potential, and assume leadership...
Nicholas Bassey (USAID) provided background on the International Career Advancement Program (ICAP), and the ways in which it aims to bring greater diversity to senior management and policy-making positions in a wide variety of sectors, including international public service, in the government, and more. Mr. Bassey explained that ICAP assists mid-career professionals from underrepresented groups in advancing to senior positions in international affairs careers and provides a large support network for diverse leadership and talent. According to Mr. Bassey, the first class of ICAP fellows graduated in 1997, and since then, the program has generated sponsors such as the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) among others. Mr. Bassey highlighted over 500 professionals in the field of international affairs have completed the ICAP program.

To apply to ICAP, Mr. Bassey explained that candidates must (1) demonstrate commitment to increasing diversity of senior leadership in the United States in international affairs, (2) must be a United States citizen or permanent resident, (3) have seven or more years of professional experience in international affairs, (4) command of a language in addition to English, and (5) hold an advanced degree. Additionally, the candidate must highlight outstanding achievements that demonstrate the potential to serve in the highest levels of United States policymaking, provide professional recommendations indicating promise for leadership, and be committed to supporting and to mentoring others in international affairs.
3 ICAP Network Connections and Mentors

Alicia Contreras-Donello (USAID) never believed that she would work in international affairs, but the ICAP program gave her access to mentors and opportunities that have allowed her to find success in the field. Ms. Contreras-Donello stated that finding mentors from similar backgrounds as herself has been largely helpful in advancing her career. Ms. Contreras-Donello also gained exposure to many different organizations, which was refreshing in her eyes. Additionally, she explained the benefits of having other mentors who are women of color and enjoys the natural camaraderie that is found in groups of ICAP fellows.

4 Creating Meaningful Alumni Relationships

Dr. Aimee Rurangwa, M.D, MPH (Project Concern International) explained the benefits of ICAP’s alumni network, highlighting happy hours, online resources, and mentoring and networking opportunities as examples. Dr. Ruangwa believes that gaining knowledgeable, influential mentors has been the greatest gift that ICAP has given her, as she is still regularly in contact with said mentors. She explained that they offer professional and personal advice, as mentor relationships have evolved into lasting friendships over time. Dr. Rurangwa also has felt the benefits of diverse mentorship, and she finds many of them to be inspiring. She explained that underrepresented groups lack access to programs and information, but that the ICAP program bridges that gap.

5 Overcoming Challenges in Career Development

Jamila White (Mercy Corps) highlighted her experience in ICAP, mentioning that ICAP connections made the transition from contract work to strategy and leadership development easier. She found a network of mentors through the program who enabled her to make smart and calculated decisions in her career and explained that this network has opened doors she never imagined. Dr. Rurangwa explained that ICAP connections energized her to continue advancing her career in international development and to explore different focus areas in the field. She stated that ICAP is a place for individuals who want to get their foot in the door in either the government, the private sector, or the non-profit sector, and that ICAP empowers individuals to influence policy decisions. Ms. Contreras-Donello feels that sometimes when work gets overwhelming, she turns to the lessons she learned from ICAP that stressed time management and prioritization skills.