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## Mentorship as a Tool to Increase Women’s Empowerment in the Energy Sector



*Commissioner Stephania Luciuk, from the Canada Energy Regulator, talking with participants at AWLE's Unconscious Bias Training- Tirana, Albania, June 2023*

**October 2023** – The energy sector is widely regarded as one of the least gender diverse industries as women are consistently underrepresented, particularly in technical and managerial roles. In the Europe and Eurasia (E&E) region, as well as around the world, harmful socio-cultural norms and a lack of inclusive policies often cause women to depart from the workplace or even the workforce and, therefore, contribute to a lack of female leadership.

To expand economic growth, promoting women’s economic empowerment and advancing gender equity in the energy sector and globally is crucial. Mentorship opportunities are an

important way of improving gender equity by providing female energy sector employees with access to a wider professional network. Mentoring cultivates female employees’ ability to overcome challenges as well as provides them with fresh perspectives and constructive feedback that can help to maximize their career growth.

With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Advancing Women Leaders in Energy (AWLE) initiative focuses on mid-career training, updating human resource policies, internships, mentoring, and the creation of women in energy associations in the E&E region. The mentoring component of the initiative includes establishing mentoring programs at select national regulatory authorities (NRAs). Using materials adapted from the International Confederation of Energy Regulators (ICER) Women in Energy (WIE) initiative, these programs aim to support women at each career stage, facilitate knowledge sharing among peers, and enable mentees to apply the knowledge they gain to their current jobs and future opportunities.

### The Benefits of Mentorship

A mentor acts as a guide to help a mentee define, understand, and pursue their goals. They are someone with whom a person may:<sup>1</sup>

- Discuss career aspirations
- Formulate goals and plans
- Explore options for ongoing development
- Talk about workplace issues and problems
- Test ideas and obtain feedback on possible strategies
- Practice strategic and/or difficult conversations



*Former Wisconsin Commissioner Ellen Nowak talking with participants at AWLE's Mid-Career Training -Skopje, North Macedonia, Jan 2023*

Successful mentoring relationships ideally result in mentees’ increased communications skills and inspiration to progress in their career. Ilirjana Tolaj, an AWLE mentee from the Energy Regulatory Office of Kosovo, stated that what she learned from her mentor “ensured that the steps I take moving forward are both steady and purposeful in developing my self-confidence and expanding my knowledge – specifically on how to enhance my networking skills.” Similarly, AWLE mentee Liana Azizyan of the

Public Services Regulatory Commission of Armenia reported that she is now “even more motivated and encouraged to continue my work and face any challenges I encounter.”

While mentoring is a vehicle for learning, mentors are neither teachers nor coaches. Mentoring relationships are often more reciprocal in nature and are partnerships where all parties work collaboratively on achieving mutually defined goals. For example, becoming a mentor may have the benefit of improving leadership capacity through giving advice and suggestions, engaging with different points of view, and gaining a sense of satisfaction from providing encouragement to mentees.

Paula Conboy, AWLE mentor and Energy Market Authority of Singapore, noted, “The AWLE initiative puts an intentional framework around mentorship and gives me an opportunity to pay it forward. I have had many coaches, mentors, and champions help guide me through my career, and the chance to have a lasting positive impact on someone else’s life is a very motivating factor for me.”



During the 2022 Graduation Ceremony for the Second Class of the AWLE Mid-Career Training program, which consists of a leadership development training with a mentorship component, AWLE mentor and former Commissioner Sadzi Oliva (Illinois) shared her view on mentorship and how it can add both personal and professional value. She stated, “To me, mentorship is more than career guidance; it is also understanding how to balance your career and personal life. In my own life, there is rarely balance and little boundaries between the two, and the best compliment that I ever received from a mentor, a male mentor in fact, was ‘You’re doing an incredible job as a mom and in your career.’”

On top of the benefits mentorship can bring to both mentors and mentees, mentorship is also good for business. When companies incorporate mentoring as an important part of their culture, they are helping to enable close relationships, belonging, and a focus on improvement.<sup>2</sup> Employees who are engaged through mentoring are more likely to be productive, loyal, and invested in the success of their company. Additionally, the communication and leadership skills that mentees learn through spending face-to-face time with their mentors can help to foster their creativity, ingenuity, and ability to contribute to the success of their company as they move forward in their careers.<sup>3</sup>

### **Building a Mentoring Relationship**

As NARUC continues to institutionalize mentoring programs within interested NRAs, the USAID and NARUC [AWLE Guide to Mentoring](#) complements this initiative by covering the following topics and more:

- Different types of mentoring
- The key features of a successful mentoring relationship
- Support tools for successful mentoring
- Communication skills for mentoring
- What to avoid: specific advice for mentors and mentees
- Mentor and mentee roles

When asked how she has used the *Guide to Mentoring*, AWLE mentee Bojana Stojchevska of the Energy and Water Services Regulatory Commission of North Macedonia stated, “[My mentor and I] have used the *Guide* to structure our discussions and touch on topics such as public speaking, career planning, and unconscious bias.” She went on to note, “The AWLE Mid-Career Training program I took part in helped me to set my short-term and long-term goals, while my mentoring relationship has guided me step by step in the process of addressing my challenges and implementing those goals.”

Galina Sanduta, an AWLE mentee from the National Agency for Energy Regulation (ANRE) of Moldova, added that she used the *Guide to Mentoring* when first starting out with her mentor, Valerie Lemmie of the Kettering Foundation, and that they have since built a close relationship. She stated, “This is my first experience with a mentor, and it is a very good one for me both personally and for my career development. I would like to be able to meet [my mentor] in person and tell her how thankful I am for our friendship!” In response, Valerie said, “We took the time to get to know one another, especially about our careers to date and how our time together could be most helpful to Galina. We meet weekly, compare notes, share stories, and discuss Galina’s work products. We also talk about career objectives, like training and educational opportunities she might explore. We have been able to make our discussions fun, relevant, and informative!”

In addition to providing clarity on career goals and a supportive environment, strong mentoring relationships can produce effective teamwork. Rhode Island Public Utilities Commissioner and AWLE mentor Abigail Anthony and her AWLE mentee Anna Potravka of the National Energy And Utilities Regulatory Commission of Ukraine shared, “Our regular conversations help us gain clarity on team performance and empower us to solve challenges confidently. The mentor-mentee relationship also provides accountability as we grow and become better leaders. Our shared experience in utility regulation allows us to relate to one another, but this relationship would be useful to any woman seeking to strengthen her leadership capabilities.”

As the AWLE mentoring programs move forward, the relationships that participants build will create a safe space for supportive and productive conversations that encourage skill growth and work toward mutual goals. Throughout this process, mentees will strengthen personal skills such as confidence and competence; interpersonal skills such as networking and teamwork; and business skills, including strategy and financial management. Meanwhile, mentors will progress in their abilities to listen and learn about what their mentees are experiencing, and help their mentees navigate their context. USAID and NARUC will continue to support participants as they collaborate on solutions together.

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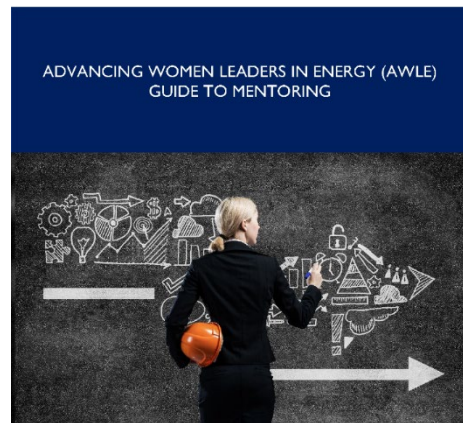
<sup>1</sup> “Advancing Women Leaders in Energy (AWLE) Guide to Mentoring.” USAID and NARUC. June 2023.

<https://pubs.naruc.org/pub/B9B30BB9-BD9E-0F15-83CF-89978DFAB4BB>

<sup>2</sup> “Benefits of Mentorship Programs.” Hubspot. <https://blog.hubspot.com/the-hustle/benefits-mentorship-program>

<sup>3</sup> Conway, Paula. “The Value of Mentorship in Running a Successful Business.” Forbes. 2019.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2019/12/31/the-value-of-mentorship-in-running-a-successful-business/>



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