Researchers throughout the world struggle to publish their work.

In developing and emerging countries, a lack of resources and skills, technical problems, and pressure to publish in prestigious international journals make it even tougher. Often, the visibility and influence of research in these countries are diminished.

Phyllis Freeman and Anthony Robbins of the *Journal of Public Health Policy* recognized these issues and saw the need to support developing-country researchers in publishing and communicating their work. Building on the pioneering work of Barbara Gastel and others, they developed the idea for AuthorAID and chose the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) to implement the project. After a successful 3-year pilot phase, from 2007–2009, AuthorAID continues to achieve its aims through three key components: an online knowledge community, outreach training workshops, and mentoring.

The mentoring component, which began in 2007, is crucial to the project. Initially, researchers from AuthorAID’s partner networks, the International Foundation for Science and the World Health Organization’s Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, were matched with mentors by INASP staff. In 2008, the AuthorAID Web site was launched (http://www.authoraid.info/), and in June 2009, a full online mentoring system went “live” to allow researchers to search for a suitable mentor to support and guide them in writing and publishing their research.

Through a “researcher search” on the Web site, mentorees can search for a suitable mentor working in their fields or offering the kind of support they seek. Mentors also can initiate contact with any mentoree with whom they would like to work. Although initial contact is made through the AuthorAID online mentoring system (or directly by e-mail if the mentor or mentoree has decided to make his or her e-mail address publicly visible), communication after the initial contact can be by whatever medium is most suitable for that pair.

Once contact has been established, mentors and mentorees have the option to complete a learning agreement. It sets expectations and provides a guideline for the length of the mentoring relationship, which can be days, weeks, or months, depending on the level of support required and the amount of time the mentor and mentoree are able to commit. At the end of a project, mentorees can choose a different mentor or continue with the same one if they both agree.

Other useful mentoring tools can be found in the AuthorAID resource library and will soon be available in a dedicated mentoring area on the Web site. These tools include the learning agreement, mentoring guidelines, and a comic-strip illustration of how the mentoring process works. Another forum allowing researchers to offer each other support and contribute to lively debate is the increasingly active AuthorAID discussion list.

Mentors work with a mentoree at any stage of a research project, depending on what the researcher needs most. Some mentorees require guidance for the research itself or the writing process. Others need support with data analysis, statistics, presentation skills, and proposal development. Mentors come from a wide array of backgrounds and disciplines, and not all are researchers or academicians.

A significant proportion of AuthorAID mentors have editorial backgrounds combined with extensive experience and training in working with graduate students to write up their research.

From our own work matching researchers, we know at least 200 mentoring pairs have been matched, but there most likely are more. Because of data protection and...
privacy laws, we do not monitor the online relationships and can only guess at the true numbers.

However, thanks to a 2009 survey, we know that mentoring is happening on a truly global level, with, for example, pairings of mentors from Latin America with mentorees from Asia and mentors from Europe with mentorees from Africa.

One of the most successful pairings is between a mentor and a mentoree who are both based in Tanzania and are able to have face-to-face discussions.

Response from those involved have been very positive, and more than half the respondents to a 2009 survey said finding a mentor was one of their main goals in using the AuthorAID Web site.

One mentoree wrote: “This week I am going to submit my proposal to Baranasi Hindu University, Varanasi, India for my Ph.D enrolment [sic].… For proposal writing, I am using AuthorAid (INASP). I get 140 corrections in my proposal from my mentor side. I am so glad I get correction and I learn many things from her.” We later found out that this student’s doctorate program application was successful.

Mentors also find the process rewarding. When asked about the benefits, one said it was “satisfying to have a way for me to use my specialized skills to help the world scientific community.” Another commented, “I now have a much better appreciation for the challenges facing scientists in Africa. I have also enjoyed working with my mentoree on a personal level. We met in person at a conference in Africa last month, and it was wonderful to have made that personal connection.”

Interested?

Sign up for mentoring at:

https://www.authoraid.info/join_form

Contributorship, continued

they cannot manage. For example, editors cannot resolve authorship disputes. The Croatian Medical Journal states that it follows ICMJE criteria, but it also asks people to tell the journal why they should be authors.

Session participants also discussed what is meant by “final” when journals state authors must approve the final version of a manuscript. Does “final” refer to the submitted version, the final version after revisions, the galleys, or the published version? Unless journals define “final,” authors cannot know what is meant.

Contributorship is confusing, all agreed. Journals can choose to name authors, contributors, and acknowledgements, or can choose to name contributors, listing all who had a role in the research in a transparent fashion.