

The Greater Philadelphia Schweitzer Fellowship Program: Fellow-Site Mentor Evaluation and Site Expansion

Nicole M. Cobb, MAOM

*Director, Greater Philadelphia Schweitzer Fellows Program
Department of Health Policy*

Though Albert Schweitzer Fellows Program (ASF) has been evaluating itself for almost a decade, this year's (2007-2008) graduating evaluation was even more rigorous, thanks to a recent grant from the an Merck Company Foundation (MCF).

Several years ago, the ASF sought support to expand and upgrade its strategic evaluation process. As the MCF is mandated to "assess value of the (non-profit, community-based) programs, fellows, and the communities and agencies they serve, and to develop efficient systems for ongoing program evaluation and improvement,"¹ the Foundation was a natural choice of funding partner for ASF. Among other goals, ASF sought to employ systematic quality improvement efforts, including measurable quality benchmarks and a "sharing best practices" approach.¹ The new evaluation was piloted in 2006, and the surveys were officially distributed in 2007-2008.

The results of this year's evaluation confirmed the value of the U.S. Schweitzer Fellows Program to the communities and agencies served, to the site mentors, and to the Fellows themselves. Due to the timing of the MCF grant funding stream, the evaluation for (2007-08) site mentors and Fellows was a post-survey. Pre-surveys were administered to only the new (2008-09) Fellows to determine their perceptions of community service prior to the Schweitzer Fellowship Program. The national ASF office compiled and evaluated the survey results with the assistance of Abt SRBI Inc., a full-service global strategy and research organization.

Among the highlights of the Fellows surveyed: 82% were "absolutely certain" that they would continue to pursue community service after the fellowship year; 93% felt that their project benefited both themselves and the clients; 84% felt their projects benefited their community site. In terms of personal values, 98% valued "helping others"; and 91% valued honesty, personal growth, and hard work.

Seven of the eight Greater Philadelphia site mentors responded to the survey (88% response rate), representing 11 Fellows mentored. Among the site mentor post-survey

results: If the Fellow's project was new, 50% of site mentors said the idea for the project evolved through collaboration between the Fellow and mentor. One hundred percent of mentors felt that the Fellows added creative elements to existing projects. Nearly half (47%) of mentors indicated the Fellow made significant contributions to their organization or the clients served. Fifty-seven percent of mentors believed their agency would continue to support and sustain the project created or worked on by the fellow, and 86% said they would recommend participating in the Schweitzer Fellows Program to another community-based agency.

The MCF grant also enabled ASF to help create new programs in other underserved regions. Since receiving the MCF grant, five new sites have been added: Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco Bay Area, CA; New Orleans, LA; Los Angeles, CA; and Houston, TX. The first U.S. Schweitzer Fellows Program was launched in Boston in 1992, with 12 Fellows. This program has been replicated in 11 locales spanning nine states, with plans in progress for the creation of additional programs.

For more information about either the survey results or Greater Philadelphia ASF, please contact Nicole M. Cobb at Nicole.cobb@jefferson.edu.

The Fellow-Site Mentor Evaluation and Site Expansion program was made possible by Merck Company Foundation.

References

1. *Executive Summary*. The Albert Schweitzer Fellowship Evaluation Project: Final Report to the Merck Company Foundation, June 2005.