Global Affairs Canada | Affaires mondiales Canada

Canada

The Data Advocates Reciprocal Mentorship Program

Solving data challenges together

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Program Overview

The Global Affairs Canada Transformation Implementation Plan (2023 to 2026) Data Insights Outcome includes a commitment to **cultivate a network of "Data Advocates"** who are creatively incentivized to promote data culture.

Given culture change starts at the top, our **approach to deploying Data Advocates focuses first on the data literacy of managers**, recognizing that this target audience has **unique learning needs, requiring greater flexibility** than offered via traditional course programming.

To address this, we drew **foundational elements from Health Canada's Reverse Mentorship Program for Data, the Sub-Saharan Africa Branch's Collaborative Mentoring Program, and consulted the department's Data & Digital Steering Committee (co-chaired by the Chief Data Officer and Chief Information Officer) to develop and launch a Data Advocates Reciprocal Mentorship Pilot Program** in 2024-2025 that maximized flexibility in learning by matching data specialists (a.k.a. Data Advocates) with managers.

The 2025-2026 iteration flows from the lessons learned from that pilot, including focusing engagement around resolving a specific data challenge, identified by the manager and opening up the definition of "manager" to include Deputy Directors.

Through this two-way relationship, **managers** benefit from the knowledge and experience of data advocates to assist them in **better understanding data concepts**, interpreting the data-related implications of policy or operational decisions, and **progress towards solving a data challenge** they identify.

Data advocates benefit from the knowledge and experience of managers to assist them in better understanding the **strategic considerations** involved in decision- making, to receive **guidance in their career development**, and finally to **put into practice their data skills** in helping address an organizational data challenge.
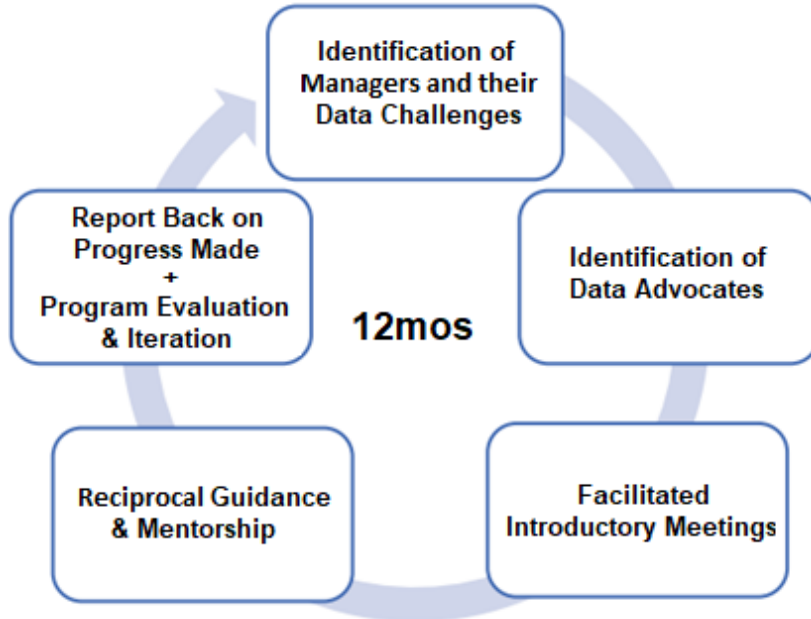
Program Approach

Our approach is flexible and dynamic to:

- Address organizational data challenges through an exchange of skills, knowledge and understanding
- Support managers in viewing data-related issues through the lens of specialist colleagues and understand the latest approaches and tools
- Support specialists in viewing issues through the strategic and corporate lens of senior managers

PARTICIPANT'S TIME COMMITMENT = ~15-20hrs

12mos

- Identification of Managers and their Data Challenges
- Identification of Data Advocates
- Facilitated Introductory Meetings
- Reciprocal Guidance & Mentorship
- Report Back on Progress Made + Program Evaluation & Iteration

Terms of Reference

Led by Global Affairs Canada's (GAC's) Chief Data Officer and coordinated by the Data Governance and Engagement division (RRU), the Data Advocates reciprocal mentorship program has been created to support the learning and professional development of both departmental Data Specialists (a.k.a. Data Advocates) and Managers, equally.

What is the goal of the program?

The goal of this initiative is to "[i]ncrease data literacy across the entire department and cultivate a network of 'data advocates' who are creatively incentivized to promote data cultures", per action item 4 of the GAC 2023-2026 Transformation Implementation Plan's "Data Insights" outcome, aided by centering the engagement around a specific data challenge.

The sub-goals of the program are to:

- Increase data literacy among managers

- Increase strategic corporate awareness among specialists

- Optimize internal talent

- Foster a continuous learning culture

- Further advance an innovative workplace

- Make headway on data challenges impacting the organization

- Gain insights and adjust the next iteration of the Program to best meet organizational needs

Who is eligible participation in the program?

- **Data Advocates**: All GAC employees (Canada-based and locally-engaged; rotational and non-rotational, etc.) who possess intermediate to advanced knowledge, experience, and competency in relation to data concepts and practices, and have strong advocacy skills. In addition to their manager's approval, a supporting reference is required.

- **Managers:** EX and EX minus 1 employees serving either at Headquarters or Abroad.

What do participants get out of it?

It is an opportunity **for Managers** to benefit from the knowledge and experience of Data Advocates to assist them in better understanding data concepts, interpreting the data-related implications of policy or operational decisions, and to make progress on a data challenge identified by the manager (effectively serving as Data Advisors "on demand" to the Manager); and **for Data Advocates** to benefit from the knowledge and experience of Managers to assist them in better understanding the strategic considerations involved in decision-making, to receive guidance in their career development, and to put into practice their data skills in helping address an organizational data challenge. Opportunities for regular engagement by and with the Chief Data Officer will also be facilitated for Data Advocates.

What is expected of the participants?

- The Data Advocate will be paired with a Manager in an advisory capacity, revolving around a specific data challenge impacting the Manager, which might include providing them with summations, interpretations, considerations, recommendations and/or any other guidance that the manager might request to pursue resolution of the data challenge.

- The Manager will be paired with a Data Advocate and support them by ensuring information on the data challenge is shared, that time is taken to discuss the issues involved, to be clear on what guidance is being requested, to share any strategic considerations at play, that feedback is provided on any supporting products they prepare, and that guidance is provided in relation to career development.

- The Data Advocate will keep their own manager(s) aware of their work on this initiative so that accomplishments can be noted in their Performance Plans.

- The Data Advocate and/or the Manager will reach out to RRU should any challenges be experienced.

What is not expected of the participants?

- Data Advocates are not expected to provide technical support or troubleshoot specific technical issues faced by the Manager; technical problems should be directed to the appropriate IT support channels.

- Data Advocates are not an extra FTE to be tasked by the Manager on work related to their daily operations.

- Neither Data Advocates nor Managers are expected to be knowledgeable in ALL aspects of either data or business line subject matter, respectively.

- Pairings should consult with departmental experts as necessary; RRU can assist with connections in this regard, if necessary.

- The Program does not aim to be a substitute for formal professional training; rather, it complements such programs by providing practical insights and perspectives.

How does the selection process work?

NUMBER OF OPPORTUNITIES

The number of pairings will be limited to **thirteen** (1 per branch + 1 from a special bureau). This number will be re-assessed each year.

SOLICITATION OF APPLICATIONS

- Directors General and Heads of Mission across the department will be asked by the CDO via email to encourage **Managers** under them to apply for the management side of the equation, along with indicating a data challenge they propose as the central focus of the pairing.

- For Data Advocates, a broadcast message will subsequently be issued by the Chief Data Officer announcing the 2025-2026 iteration of the program and inviting interested employees to apply for consideration as **Data Advocates.** Directors General and Heads of Mission will be asked to highlight this broadcast message within their bureaus/missions to encourage employees to apply.

- Following either the email or the broadcast publication, applicants will have two weeks to submit their candidacy to RRU via an online form (links to be found in the email and broadcast message).

- The application for **Managers** consists of their name, whether they self-declare as members of an equity-deserving group, and proposed data challenge via online form (link to be found in the email).

- The application for the **Data Advocates** consists of three items: their name and short Letter of Interest via online form (link to be found in the broadcast message), confirmation of their manager's approval, and a brief Letter of Support (these latter two items by email to data-donnees-rru@international.gc.ca).

LETTER OF INTEREST (DATA ADVOCATES)

Interested candidates are asked to submit a short "letter" of interest to RRU via online form. This letter, of a maximum length of 400 words, must indicate:

- Their motivation or reason for their interest
- Their qualifications in relation to the eligibility requirements
- What data-related areas of competency or knowledge are their strongest
- Their official language preference (English, French or Bilingual)
- Candidates are invited to self-declare if they are members of an equity-deserving group

Along with the short letter of interest, candidates require evidence of the **approval of their manager**, and brief **Letter of Support from a reference** that can attest to the candidate's qualifications and suitability. The nature of the relationship between the two must be identified (employee, colleague, manager, etc.). These are to be sent by email to data-donnees-rru@international.gc.ca.

CANDIDATE SELECTION

- RRU will conduct an initial screening of the candidate applications received, applying employment equity as well as diversity and inclusion lenses, and subsequently submit a shortlist to the Chief Data Officer of those candidates who are found to have adequately demonstrated their eligibility and/or a strong data challenge, as well as recommendations for pairings between the two.
- The Chief Data Officer will review the shortlisted candidates for approval.
- All candidates from the short-list who have been approved will be notified, as will those who have not.

Duration of the program

The program runs from September 2025 to August 2026.

PHASE 1: LAUNCH (SEPTEMBER 2025 TO EARLY OCTOBER 2025)

- Call-out issued for Manager nominees, including the data challenge in question.
- Call-out issued, subsequently, for Data Advocate participants via broadcast message, including the data challenge details so that candidates might target their skillsets.

PHASE 2: FACILITATED INTRODUCTORY MEETING (LATE OCTOBER 2025)

- Introduction/refresher to Design Thinking with breakouts for pairings to apply the first two steps (Empathize & Define) to their identified data challenge.
- Agree on practical approach to the arrangement (e.g. meetings, products, means of communication).

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER (OCTOBER 2025 TO JULY 2026)

- Share knowledge and expertise, centering on the data challenge and moving through the remaining design thinking steps.
- Engage RRU should any challenges be experienced.

PHASE 4: REPORTING (AUGUST 2026)

- Pairings report back on progress made.
- Evaluate the mentoring relationship & the achievement of objectives.
- Share lessons learned.

How will the program be evaluated?

Both Managers and Data Advocates will be asked to complete pre-program and post-program questionnaires to assess whether the goal of the program was met, whether the benefits intended were realized, whether expectations of each role were met, and what recommendations each might have in relation to improving the program (a.k.a. lessons learned).