
Engaging Researchers: AuthorAID at INASP

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Supporting Developing Country Researchers in Getting Published

With thanks to:

- Barbara Gastel
Texas A&M University



Stuart Church,
Pure Usability Ltd.



The AuthorAID Concept

- Originators – Phyllis Freeman and Anthony Robbins (Journal of Public Health Policy)
- Precedents – China Medical Board Program in Biomedical Writing and others
- Key features – a knowledge community connecting and supporting researchers from across the globe. Matching senior researchers with early career researchers in mentorships.
- Not a single program; rather, an approach available to use in various contexts

AuthorAID at INASP: An Overview

- Funded by Sida (Sweden) and DFID (UK)
- Begun in 2007
- 3 years expected, at least initially
- Largely a carefully evaluated pilot project
- Main components
 - Mentoring (scientific and editorial) by volunteers
 - Workshops
 - Openly accessible content

AuthorAID at INASP: An Overview (cont)

- Main partners
 - WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR)
 - International Foundation for Science (IFS)
 - National University of Rwanda (NUR)

Mentorships: Current Status

- IFS: 14 pairs
- TDR: 5 pairs
- NUR: 3 pairs
- Other: Matching not complete
- 4 of these pairs are a South/South pairing
- The TDR pairs are tropical disease researchers, the IFS pairs are social scientists and the NUR researchers are cross-disciplinary.

The Web Site - www.authoraaid.info

- Developed by Pure Usability Ltd. (1/1/08)
- Key features:
 - Resources
 - Blogs/discussion forums
 - Profile search
 - Workshops/events
- Some statistics
 - 4,000 visits from 117 countries
 - 245 registered users

The “Finished” Web Site

- Also to be at www.authoraid.info

Some features:

- Online collaboration space
 - Online matching
 - Better resources including teaching packs
-
- To continue to evolve

Online Knowledge Community

The developers of the AuthorAID website (Pure Usability Ltd) engaged the researchers who would be using the online knowledge community by involving them in the design of the site through extensive user research.



Interviews and surveys

Online survey of prospective mentors and mentees (with links to TDR and IFS) by Stuart Church (Pure Usability)

- 112 junior researchers from 36 countries
- 56 senior researchers from 20 countries
- Face to face contextual interviews (10 potential mentees)
- Existing users survey & website test (16 responses)
- Existing mentor and mentee interviews (3 mentors and 4 mentees responded to a survey; 2 mentors and 3 mentees were phone interviewed)

Some Survey Findings

Junior Researchers

- Most commonly perceived major problem:
Statistical analysis
- Among other commonly perceived difficulties:
 - Finding suitable journals
 - Understanding the peer review process
 - Responding to referees' comments
 - Writing manuscripts in English

Considerable interest in finding mentors (75% answered 'very interested'.)

Some Survey Findings (Contd.)

- Preferred mode of communication with other researchers, for both junior and senior researchers – email.
- Researchers: relatively little experience with social networking etc on websites.
- Most common first languages of junior researchers: English (54%), Arabic (13%), Swahili (8%), Spanish (7%).

Some Desires of Prospective Mentees

- Find out about other sites that can help to write and publish papers
- Be able to find documents quickly
- Be able to easily understand the language if it's written in English.
- Be able to view the content in preferred language
- Find out about workshops and other events

Some Desires of Prospective Mentees (Contd.)

- Avoid (or get help with) paying page fees
- See what problems peers are facing
- Get advice from people who know subject area well
- Find answers to general questions or problems
- Understand how to respond to referees' comments

Some Desires of Prospective Mentees (Contd.)

- Find out more about how the publication process works
- Find the appropriate statistical analyses for a data set
- Find appropriate journals in which to publish research.
- Better understand the peer review process

Interviews: Some Observations

- Infrastructure constraints
- Lack of information on journal processes
- Lack of awareness of web-based resources
- Mentors may be well placed to steal ideas and contradict supervisors
- Lack of web experience
- Institutional constraints (workload, culture etc
- Financial constraints

Mentoring Relationships

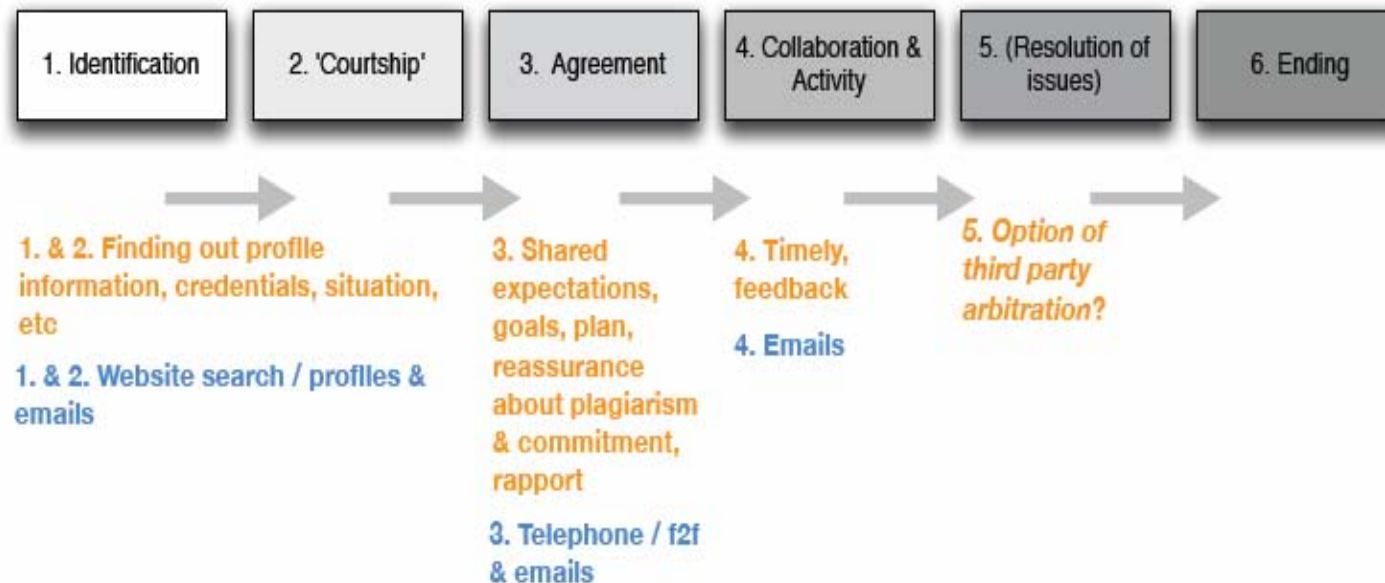
- Communication media – 80% used email
- Communication frequency – 1-3 times a week depending on internet reliability
- Internet reliability – main barrier to communication (Took one mentee 3 days to upload an attachment)
- Rapport – in the initial stages, a phone conversation or face-to-face meeting was essential for good communication

Possible mentoring lifecycle

Mentoring is a **social** relationship that develops over **time**

Participants have different **needs** at different **times**

Where possible, different **media** should be used to meet these different **needs**

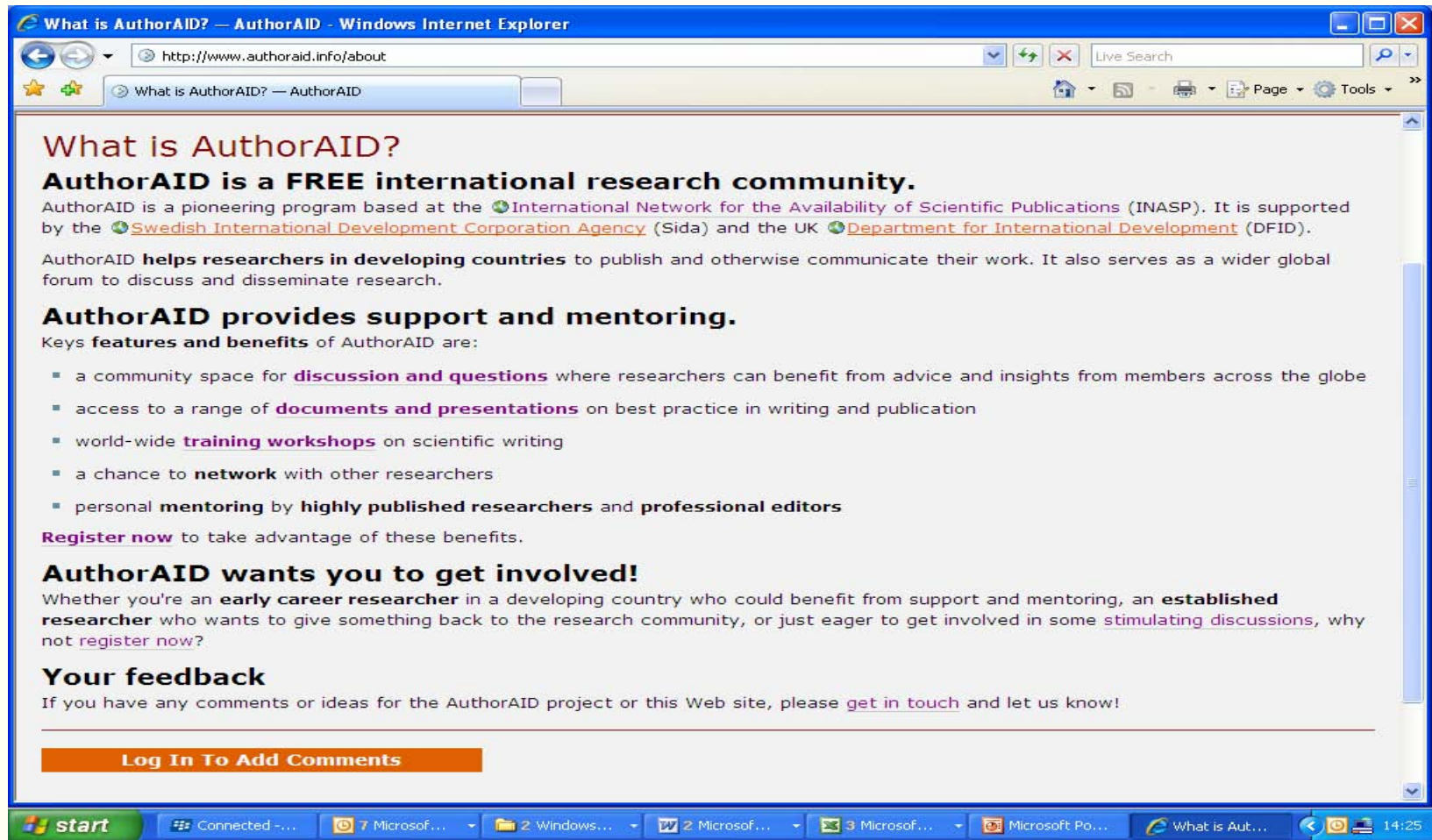


Pure Usability

The Mentoring Journey and AuthorAID

1. FIND OUT about how the mentoring scheme works
2. SEARCH for a mentor or mentee (this is the search facility, which means that users can search by location, interest etc to find potential matches)
3. CONTACT the mentor (a web-based contact form which delivers email to the recipient)
4. FILL IN a learning agreement and agree on expectations
5. CREATE A SHARED SPACE (probably best managed by mentors - they can create a space and invite a mentee to join it; once there they will be able to share files and ideas)

Finding out..



What is AuthorAID? — AuthorAID - Windows Internet Explorer

http://www.authoraid.info/about

Live Search

What is AuthorAID? — AuthorAID

What is AuthorAID?

AuthorAID is a FREE international research community.

AuthorAID is a pioneering program based at the [International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications \(INASP\)](#). It is supported by the [Swedish International Development Corporation Agency \(Sida\)](#) and the UK [Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#).

AuthorAID **helps researchers in developing countries** to publish and otherwise communicate their work. It also serves as a wider global forum to discuss and disseminate research.

AuthorAID provides support and mentoring.

Keys **features and benefits** of AuthorAID are:

- a community space for **discussion and questions** where researchers can benefit from advice and insights from members across the globe
- access to a range of **documents and presentations** on best practice in writing and publication
- world-wide **training workshops** on scientific writing
- a chance to **network** with other researchers
- personal **mentoring** by **highly published researchers** and **professional editors**

Register now to take advantage of these benefits.

AuthorAID wants you to get involved!

Whether you're an **early career researcher** in a developing country who could benefit from support and mentoring, an **established researcher** who wants to give something back to the research community, or just eager to get involved in some **stimulating discussions**, why not **register now**?

Your feedback

If you have any comments or ideas for the AuthorAID project or this Web site, please **get in touch** and let us know!

Log In To Add Comments

Search and contact

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "AuthorAID - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar displays "http://www.authoraid.info/author/bgastel". The page content includes a navigation bar with "Info" and "Welcome! You are now logged in." Below this is a profile section for "Barbara Gastel" with a small portrait photo. Her affiliation is listed as "Texas A&M University, Texas, United States". A biography paragraph follows, describing her role as a knowledge community editor for AuthorAID @ INASP and her work on scientific writing. A link "View all content created by Barbara Gastel" is provided. Below the biography is a contact form titled "Feedback for author" with fields for "Subject" (marked as required) and "Message" (also marked as required), and a "Send" button. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the start button and several open applications including Microsoft Office Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe Reader.

Other Support Features of the AuthorAID Website

- Blogs
- Discussion forums
- Mentor journey 'comic'
- Workshops and events

Discussion Forums

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window displaying the AuthorAID website. The address bar shows the URL <http://www.authoraid.info/discussions/getting-started-with-authoraid>. The website has a navigation menu with links for Home, About, News & Updates, Community Discussion (selected), Training & Events, and Resource Library. A breadcrumb trail reads: You Are Here: Home → Community Discussions → Getting Started With AuthorAID. The main heading is "Getting started with AuthorAID" with a link to "Up to Community Discussions" and a "Show only unanswered" filter. Below this is a "Log In To Start A New Conversation" button. A table lists four discussions with their respective authors, reply counts, and most recent comments. At the bottom, there is another "Log In To Start A New Conversation" button, a "Powered by Ploneboard" notice, and a copyright notice for 2007-2008 INASP. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications and the system clock at 16:00.

conversation	replies	most recent comment
Mentorship by John Bosco Odongo	No replies yet	by John Bosco Odongo August 04, 2008
Getting a mentor by stephen juma ndombi	1	by Julie Walker August 04, 2008
Accessing peers' profiles by Maxwell Barson	2	by Ed Crewe July 31, 2008
How to link up as authors by AMON KABULI	1	by Ben Bywater June 11, 2008

Blogs

Annual-Meeting Scholarships and More: CSE
By [Barbara Gastel](#) | Aug 26, 2008

Recently I received an announcement that might interest some of you. It came from the [Council of Science Editors](#) (CSE), an organization in which I am active. Even if this announcement does not apply to you, you might find CSE a helpful resource.

The announcement was for a scholarship program through which editors in developing countries can receive funding to attend the [Read More](#)

A New and Better Site
By [Barbara Gastel](#) | Jul 19, 2008

Looking at this blog, you might think that I am having a quiet summer. After all, no new post has appeared in more than a month. Perhaps you think that I am relaxing at the beach or vacationing in the mountains.

Actually, this summer has been busy. Since returning from the Spanish course in Mexico, I have done lots of teaching, writing, and editing. Sadly, I have also flown many miles to see my husband's mother one last time and to attend her memorial ... [Read More](#)

A Message from Mexico
By [Barbara Gastel](#) | Jun 18, 2008

Greetings from Mexico! This time, I am away to learn, not to teach.

For many years, I have wanted to study Spanish. This language has become increasingly important in the United States. Also, I am working more and more with people in other countries who are native speakers of Spanish.

"How can I best start learning Spanish?" I asked a colleague whose job is to facilitate collaboration with Spanish-speaking countries. He suggested an "immersion ... [Read More](#)

[Comments \(1\)](#)

News Archive

- [August 2008](#)
- [July 2008](#)
- [June 2008](#)
- [April 2008](#)
- [March 2008](#)
- [February 2008](#)
- [January 2008](#)
- [November 2007](#)

Latest News

- [Annual-Meeting Scholarships and More: CSE](#)
Aug 26, 2008
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Mar 26, 2008
- [PDFs of Two Presentations](#)
Feb 11, 2008

The Blog: Intended Tone, Content, and Style

- Friendly and encouraging
- Engaging
- Informative
- Concrete
- Conversational
- Easy for non-native speakers of English to read

Some Themes of Blog Postings

- The AuthorAID Web site
- AuthorAID workshops
- The writing process
- Writing style
- Online resources
- Other resources

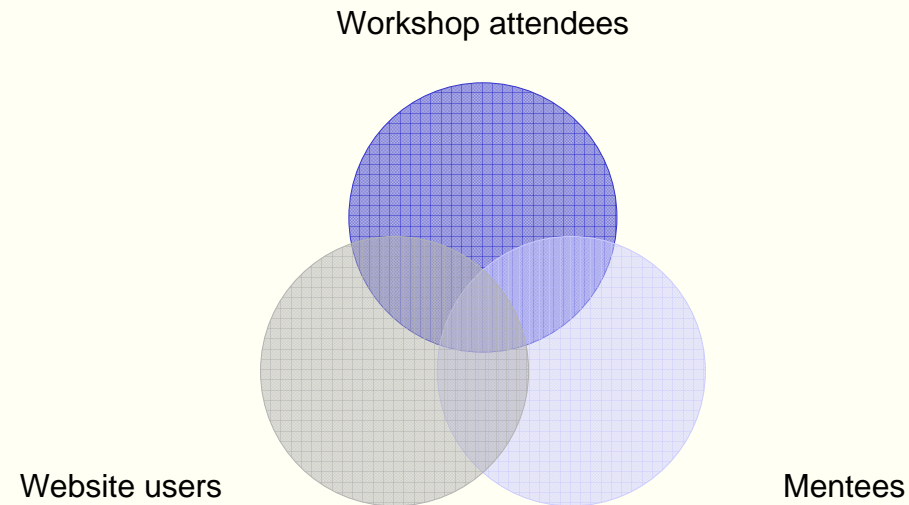
Workshops

- Currently supporting the pilot groups
- One in Asia, Africa and Latin America per year
- Workshops have two parts – one presentation based, one practical work based
- Workshops use a multiplier effect through using local co-facilitators, through encouraging attendees to share what they learn, and through posting workshop materials on the AuthorAID site"
- Free to attend



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Synergy between workshops, website and mentoring



- Most workshop attendees reported they expect to join the mentor scheme
- Most report using the website
- The workshops resulted in increase usage of the AuthorAID site
- Blog postings on the site cover the workshops
- Materials from workshops available on the website

Challenges

- Maintaining interest and momentum
- Getting enough mentors in a broad range of subject areas
- Ensuring sustainability of the project
- Extending workshops to the largest audience possible
- Developing guidelines and documentation

Success Stories

- “I have shared my information from the workshop with two of my friends who are working on their MSc research project. I have provided an entire copy of the workshop materials. Besides I have forwarded emails to selected list of my contacts of the online presence of AuthorAID.info and its rich resources/services for scientific writing.”
- “I have run a 2 and half hours orientation to our students as they were preparing to start their theses. I used the material I got during the workshop.”

Conclusions

- Engaging researchers in the design of their own space can be successful
- Researchers can engage with each other worldwide through websites and social networking tools, but initial contact should ideally be by phone or face-to-face
- The efficacy of a web-based learning community can be greatly enhanced by supporting workshops.

And finally...

We are always looking for new mentors.

If you're interested in volunteering, please contact:
authoraid@inasp.info

Thank you!