



Australia Awards

Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility

Developmental leadership
for women in the Pacific:
Cultivating networks for change
in Australia Award WLI alumni

November 2023



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Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Executive Summary

This case study adds to a growing body of GTF (Global Tracer Facility) research using social network analysis (SNA) to map Australia Award alumni networks. Specifically, it examined connections between alumni that were part of Cohorts 1–3 of the Women Leading and Influencing program (WLI), an on-award leadership course aimed at building developmental leadership skills. Women from these three cohorts participated in the intensive leadership and mentoring components of the program in 2018 and 2019. The long-term impact of the program on their leadership confidence and skills was measured along with evaluating whether new connections were formed during participation and maintained in the present. SNA was also used as an innovative approach to distinguish key alumni among these cohorts that were using their skills, knowledge and networks in alignment with developmental leadership objectives. This case study was conducted as a research partnership between the GTF and the WLI program team and formed the first part of a two-phase research project.

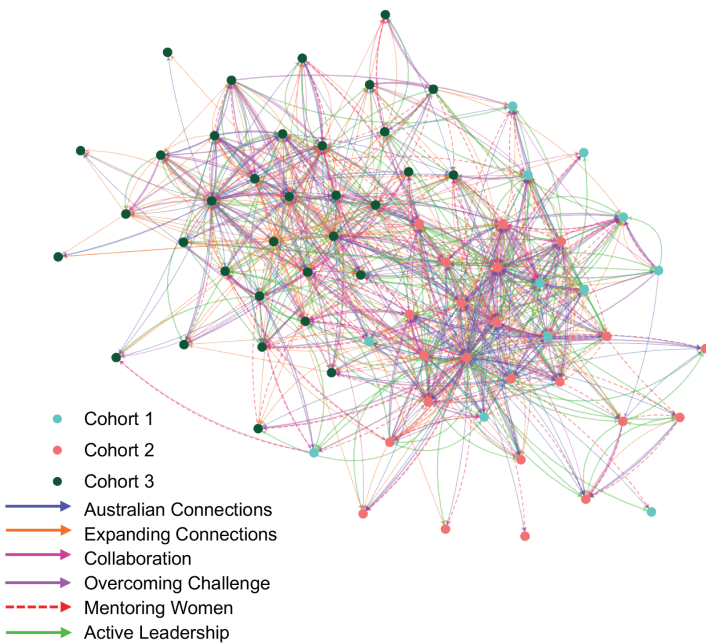
In Phase 1, described in this report, 56 of the 69 alumni that were part of WLI Cohorts 1–3 responded to an online survey investigating their attitudes towards the WLI program and their social networks with WLI peers. In addition to measuring the new connections formed during program participation, current connections maintained between alumni were also examined including: networks for developing connections with Australia (the *Australian connections network*); for expanding professional connections (the *expanding connections network*); for collaboration (the *collaboration network*); for seeking advice to overcome professional challenges (the *overcoming challenge network*), and for identifying WLI peers that were mentoring other women (the *mentoring women network*) and actively using their skills to enact change in their context (the *active leadership network*).

Alumni attitudes towards WLI and networks for support, collaboration and developmental leadership

All alumni developed new connections with WLI peers during their participation in the WLI program. In addition, all alumni were part of a reported relationship in the Australian Connections network, which is the highest level of connectivity found for this network across all GTF SNA case studies. This suggests that WLI alumni may use their WLI connections more for this purpose than other alumni groups. The large majority of WLI alumni (83%) were also part of a collaborative relationship with a WLI peer, illustrating their motivation to work collectively to enact sustainable change in their contexts. Furthermore, most alumni believed the program enhanced their Australia Awards scholarship experience and had clear aspirations and strategies about how they want to lead and influence change. Collectively, these findings highlight how the WLI program supports the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards by providing alumni with opportunities to develop networks of professional support and collaboration with fellow alumni, and the skills, knowledge and confidence for developmental leadership.

Across Cohorts 1–3, 12 WLI alumni were identified through SNA as key network members, either due to their influential position in the professional support networks (the brokers) or because they were highly regarded by their WLI peers as exhibiting developmental leadership behaviours (the leaders). When all current connections between alumni were mapped together, a high level of connectivity was found among all WLI alumni in Cohorts 1–3.

Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by cohort



Implications for on-award programs aimed at strengthening Australia Award outcomes

Using SNA to identify brokers and leaders within alumni networks, as illustrated in this case study, can support the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards program. For instance, individuals that hold broker roles can be the focus of information campaigns designed to improve alumni engagement as this will ensure that information spreads effectively to all network members. Knowing who the network leaders are for an alumni group is also useful for the Australia Awards when considering the recruitment of new mentors for future alumni and for targeted professional development programs.

This case study also builds on other GTF SNA research that suggests enrichment opportunities that foster a collective goal or interest among participating alumni may encourage more cohesive alumni networks. Importantly for WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3, increased cohesion with their peers strengthened the outcomes of the Australia Awards by cultivating coalitions for change and coalitions for support. For this group of women who are emerging leaders in the Pacific, these coalitions spanned different cohorts and different countries. The role of coalitions for support may be particularly important once alumni return to their home countries following their Australia Award experience.

Findings from this case study will be used to inform the second phase of this mixed-methods research project. Phase 2 will involve qualitative interviews with a sample of the 12 key network members identified in Phase 1 to explore how these women are driving change, and how their experience of the Australia Awards and WLI program have contributed to their capacity for developmental leadership.



Developmental leadership for women in the Pacific: Cultivating networks for change in Australia Award WLI alumni

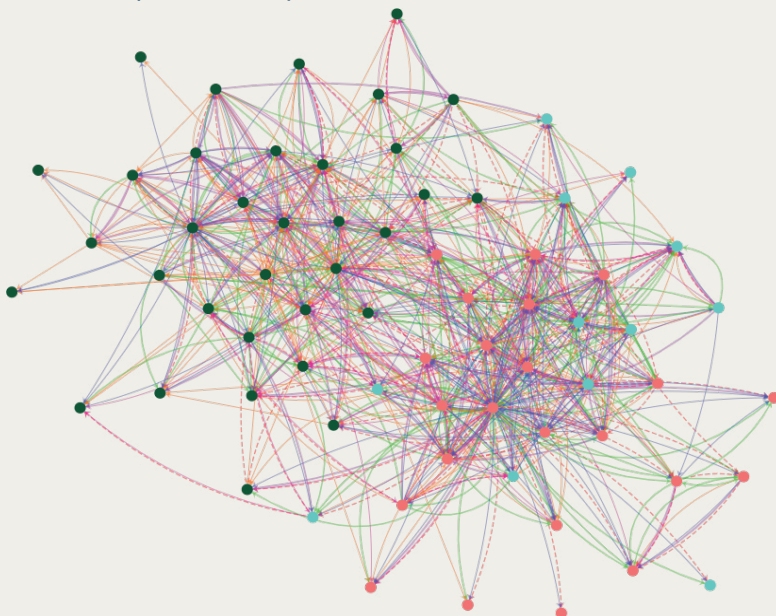
This case study used social network analysis to examine the long-term impact of the Australia Awards and an on-award enrichment program, the Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) program.

- All alumni in Cohorts 1-3 of the program developed new connections with WLI peers during their participation in the WLI program.
- All alumni were part of a connection with a WLI peer that they used to build ties with Australia and Australian organisations.
- The large majority of alumni were also part of a **collaborative relationship**, demonstrating they had worked with WLI peers after becoming involved in the program. This illustrates alumni's motivation to work collectively to enact sustainable change in their contexts.
- Most alumni believed the **program enhanced their Australia Awards scholarship experience** and had clear aspirations and strategies about how they want to lead and influence change.

The strong and cohesive nature of connections between WLI alumni highlight that this on-award enrichment program and the Australia Awards cultivated **coalitions for change** and **coalitions for support** within this group of women leaders in the Pacific.

A network map of alumni

Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by cohort.



- Cohort 1
- Cohort 2
- Cohort 3
- Australian Connections
- Expanding Connections
- Collaboration
- Overcoming Challenge
- - - - - Mentoring Women
- Active Leadership

Leaders and Brokers

The case study identified **8 leaders and 4 brokers** as key members of the network.

Leader

Highly connected and recognised by their peers as exhibiting developmental leadership skills.

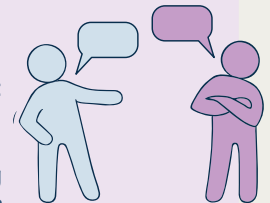


Future initiatives

looking to engage Pacific mentors or provide targeted professional development could focus on working with these women who are highly regarded in the region.

Broker

Members of the cohort that have important positions in the network by influencing the flow of information.



Program engagement initiatives can target brokers whose position in a network means they can facilitate the effective spread of information to all members of a network.

Case study participants:
56 women who were part of the Women Leading and Influencing program in cohorts 1-3



1. Introduction

Information about the GTF

The Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility (GTF) commenced in 2016 and is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Research by the GTF helps DFAT to assess the development contributions and public and economic diplomacy outcomes of Australia's investment in the Australia Awards. The key research and reporting activities being undertaken annually by the GTF are a quantitative Global Tracer Survey and qualitative Case Studies, which are prepared concurrently throughout the project.

GTF and SNA

Over the last three years, the GTF has developed a suite of social network analysis case studies, exploring networks of Australia Award alumni from Kiribati, and the contribution of on-award leadership programs and post-award alumni workshops to developing new alumni connections. Social network analysis (SNA) involves examining the patterns of interaction between people and studying how these patterns can influence the individual.

A social network can be found in many different contexts, for instance, in a classroom, in a staff group or an alumni cohort. GTF's SNA case studies have allowed DFAT and associated Australia Awards partners to better understand how alumni form networks, and then use these networks to support their professional development and to maintain contact with Australia. The current case study examined the long-term impact of an on-award enrichment program for Australia Awards alumni in the Pacific, the Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing (WLI) program.

Partnership with the WLI

The WLI program is a high-profile initiative designed to support Australia Award alumni from the Pacific build their developmental leadership skills through on-award and reintegration enrichment programs involving training and mentoring¹. Developmental leadership is conceptualised in the program as 'as a political process that mobilises people and resources towards a collective outcome' (Lovai et al, 2022, p6).



WLI alumni in Cohorts 1, 2 (pictured on the left) and 3 (pictured on the right) during intensive workshops for the program

1 Women Leading and Influencing. "About WLI". Women Leading and Influencing. <https://www.wliprogram.org/about-us> (accessed September 2023)

This case study was designed to measure the long-term impact of the WLI program for the first three cohorts of participating Australia Award alumni. While WLI is a leadership program for women and men, the first three cohorts of participants were all women. These women completed face-to-face intensive Leadership and Mentoring workshops for the WLI program in Australia in 2018 (Cohorts 1 and 2) and 2019 (Cohort 3) while on-award and then returned to their home countries. The case study analysis includes investigating the interconnectivity within and across the first three cohorts of the program and how connections between alumni support the growth of developmental leadership skills.

This case study was part of a new approach to GTF's use of SNA to examine the long-term outcomes of the Australia Awards. The GTF worked in partnership with WLI to undertake this study as a joint research project, enabling the strengths of both teams to be drawn on. The GTF and WLI program teams collaborated to design the research questions and data collection tools, to optimise alumni engagement during fieldwork and to interpret the research findings. This case study offers DFAT an exemplar of how its programs in this space can work together to develop high quality information for communicating the benefits and identifying areas of improvement for both the Australia Awards and enrichment programs like the WLI initiative.

The partnership between the GTF and WLI program teams also provided an opportunity to widen the scope of the traditional GTF case study structure into a sequential mixed-methods analysis project. Phase 1 of this project is described in this case study report. Phase 2 of the project will comprise a second case study involving in-depth interviews with key alumni identified in Phase 1. Phase 2 will provide a deeper, contextual analysis of how alumni connections highlighted in Phase 1 are being used to support developmental leadership in action.

Case study objectives

The purpose of all GTF research is to examine the impact of the Australia Awards and its overall aim; that is, to support partner countries to achieve their development goals through education and knowledge transfer, and to build enduring relationships with Australia that advance mutual interests. Linked to this aim are two long-term program outcomes outlined in *the Australia Awards Global Strategic Framework and Australia Awards Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework*:

- Program Outcome 1: Alumni use their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.
- Program Outcome 2: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

Both the Australia Awards and the WLI program are designed to foster the skills, connections, and motivation of alumni to implement developmental change in their home countries and communities (Program Outcome 1). Furthermore, previous GTF SNA case studies have demonstrated that on-award enrichment programs like WLI help alumni to form ongoing professional networks of support with alumni from their own and other countries (Program Outcome 2). To support the findings of previous GTF SNA case studies and provide evidence of the positive long-term impact of on-award enrichment programs to Australia Award alumni, this case study had three aims:

- To determine if WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3 forged new connections with their peers as part of their participation in the WLI program and if they currently used these connections for professional support and collaboration opportunities,
- To use SNA to identify key alumni across the three cohorts that are using their skills, knowledge, and connections in line with developmental leadership priorities,
- To investigate alumni attitudes towards the WLI program to determine if it provided an opportunity for alumni to build on the knowledge and skills developed during their Australia Awards scholarship.

2. Approach

This chapter provides an overview of the research approach used in this case study including information about the participants involved, the survey developed and the data collection procedures.

Table 1: Country of citizenship of WLI alumni, cohorts 1–3

Country	(n)
Papua New Guinea	36
Fiji	11
Solomon Islands	8
Samoa	3
Tonga	3
Vanuatu	3
Nauru	2
Federated States of Micronesia	1
Kiribati	1
Tuvalu	1

2.1 Participants

There were 69 women alumni across the first three cohorts of the WLI program (Cohort 1 n=12, Cohort 2 n=23, Cohort 3 n=34) from a range of countries. The table below shows the distribution of the countries of citizenship for the three alumni cohorts.

2.2 Survey framework

The survey instrument in this case study was designed to examine different social networks or connections between alumni from cohorts 1–3 of the Australia Awards WLI program. The GTF engaged with the WLI program team as part of two survey design workshops to ensure the instrument was fit for purpose.

The final structure of the survey developed for the project contained three sections – (1) introduction & social networks, (2) experience of the Australia Awards and the WLI program, and (3) background information. The social network section contained seven questions asking alumni to nominate fellow WLI peers in cohorts 1–3 that they connect with or regard as displaying characteristics associated with developmental leadership. Data from these questions was used to form seven alumni networks.

2.3 Data collection

The survey data was collected using an online survey platform. Each alum in the target population was provided with a unique URL to link to the survey via email invitation. The GTF employed an approach to survey collection which involved: having a clearly defined target population; identifying the extent to which the target population can be reliably contacted; and providing each member of the population with a unique access link to the survey. This approach helps to ensure accurate data collection, enables a clear understanding of response patterns, and provides a baseline from which to examine the validity of survey responses and findings.

Contact details for all alumni were provided by the WLI program team. Prior to full survey implementation, alumni in the target population were contacted to inform them of the upcoming survey and provide an opportunity for them to opt-out of participation.² Fieldwork commenced on June 20 and closed on July 31, 2023. Survey response data were collected and stored on servers in Australia. Throughout the fieldwork period, response data were routinely extracted by the GTF team and used for updating response lists. Alumni who had not responded to the survey were contacted via email with personalised reminders to complete the survey.³ The WLI program team also played a crucial role in contacting non-respondents through the WLI portal and social media to facilitate a high response rate. In total, the GTF team sent three reminder emails during fieldwork to encourage alumni to participate in the survey.

Of the 69 alumni successfully contacted via email and invited to participate, **56 responded to the survey and were included in the analysis for this report—a response rate of 81 per cent.**

This response rate was very high in comparison to other GTF research and alumni-based surveys conducted internationally and is also higher than other GTF SNA research. As an example, the GTF SNA case study conducted in 2022 achieved a response rate of 64 per cent.⁴ The high response rate achieved for this case study is likely to be due to the research partnership between the GTF and the WLI program. Combined, these partners offered strong processes and established relationships with Australia Awards alumni, leading to efficient data collection processes from partners alumni trust.

² To aid in data collection, a dropdown list of WLI Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 alumni names was programmed into the online survey software. Alumni were informed prior to fieldwork that all WLI Cohorts 1, 2, and 3 alumni names would be included and asked to notify researchers if they wanted their name removed from the list and/or did not want to participate in the case study. There were no alumni who asked for their name to be removed and/or said that they did not want to participate.

³ For example, alumni who had started the survey but not completed were encouraged to finish and alumni who had been mentioned by others as members of their network were sent a tailored message.

⁴ See: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/people-people/social-network-analysis-australia-awards-alumni-workshops>

3. Alumni professional connections and collaboration

This research found that all 69 WLI alumni in Cohorts 1–3 were part of a new connection that developed through participation in the program. Furthermore, all alumni either reported going to a WLI peer and/or would be contacted by a peer to build connections with Australia. The high level of connectivity between WLI alumni for this purpose is a unique finding to this SNA GTF case study. Approximately 83 per cent of alumni were also part of a collaborative relationship with a WLI peer. These data demonstrate how on-award programs can contribute to the long-term program outcomes of the Australia Awards by providing alumni with opportunities to develop networks of professional support and collaboration with fellow alumni.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents social network data to explore the first aim of the case study:

- To determine if WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3 forged new connections with their peers as part of their participation in the WLI program and if they currently used these connections for professional support and collaboration opportunities.

Four of the seven alumni networks explored in this case study are described in this chapter. These network data investigate new connections made between alumni that were facilitated through participation in the WLI program and professional connections between alumni that exist in the present (four-five years after commencing in the program). These networks and the survey questions used to collect their data are specified below:

1. The **New Connections network**.
Alumni were asked: Which WLI alumni did you develop a new connection (e.g. a professional contact or a new friendship) with during your participation in the WLI program? This can only include alumni that you did not know before the program.
2. The **Australian Connections network**.
Alumni were asked: Which WLI alumni would you contact if you want to develop connections with Australians or Australian organisations?
3. The **Expanding Connections network**.
Alumni were asked: Which WLI alumni would you contact to expand your professional network (e.g. to put you in contact with new people or new job opportunities)?
4. The **Collaboration network**.
Alumni were asked: Since becoming involved with WLI, which WLI alumni have you worked with on shared projects or initiatives related to the WLI program? This could include formal or informal projects or any sort of collaboration.

Table 2: Median number of connections and number of isolates for the New Connections, Australian Connections, Expanding Connections and Collaboration network

Network	Median number of connections*	Number of isolates
New Connections	15	0
Australian Connections	4	0
Expanding Connections	5	3
Collaboration	4	12

* This value includes the number of connections an alumni reported having in a network as well as the number of times an alumni was nominated as a connection by a peer.

Social network terms

Ties—Relationships in a network/between alumni

Isolates—Network members/alumni with no ties in a network

Dyadic relationship—A relationship between two people

Clustered relationships—Broader than a dyadic relationship, when relationships overlap with one another in a network

The results of the SNA presented in this Chapter and Chapter 4 are based on the responses of the 56 alumni who completed the social network section of the survey. In the survey, an alum could nominate any of their workshop peers as someone they developed a connection with during their participation in the program.

Table 2 summarises some statistics for the four networks described in this chapter including the median number of connections an alum had in each network (including connections they reported and times they were selected as a connection by their peers) and the number of isolates in each network. Table 2 shows that alumni commonly had more connections in the New Connections network and a smaller but similar number of connections in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections and Collaboration networks. All alumni were part of a connection or reported relationship in the New Connections and Australian Connections networks.

3.2 New connections facilitated by the WLI on-award enrichment program

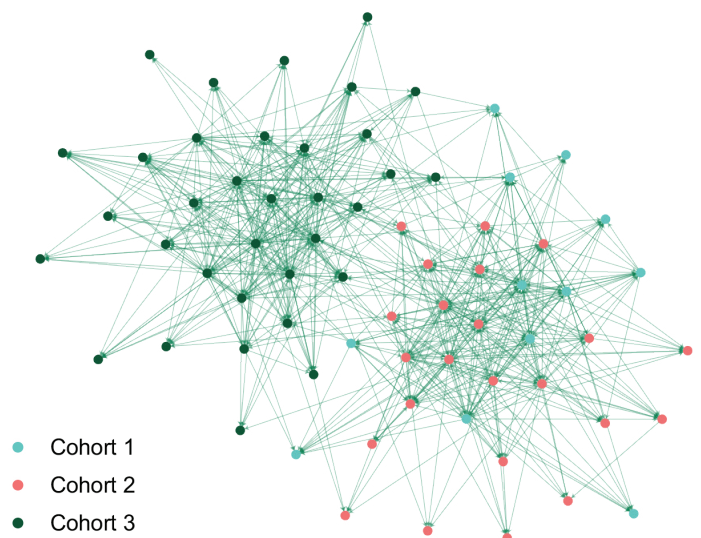
To build on the data described in Table 2, each of these four networks was visualised in a social network map. Figure 1 shows the 69 WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3 with each circle in the visualisation representing an alum. The colour of each circle represents an alum’s cohort (light blue circles=Cohort 1; orange circles=Cohort 2; dark green circles=Cohort 3). Across the seven network questions asked all 69 alumni in Cohorts 1–3 were nominated by at least one of their fellow alum in at least two network questions. Thus, all 69 alumni are represented in all the network maps presented in this report.

To explore each network graphically, the program VpNet (SNA Toolbox Pty Ltd, 2023) was used to create network visualisations. In each visualisation or network map, a circle is an alumni member, and a line between circles represents a tie or relationship between alumni. The arrowheads represented on the ties illustrate the direction of the relationship.

Figure 1 maps the New Connections network and shows a highly clustered pattern of connections. The map shows relationships reported between alumni from the same cohort and between alumni from different cohorts. Two larger subgroups are evident in the map that separate Cohort 1 and 2 alumni (the orange and light blue circles) from Cohort 3 alumni (dark green circles). This finding aligns with the delivery of the intensive training components of the WLI program for these cohorts – Cohorts 1 and 2 both began the WLI program in 2018 and completed their intensive training workshop together in 2018, while Cohort 3 began in 2019 and completed an intensive training workshop in 2019. As noted for the data presented in Table 2, all alumni in this network developed a new connection during participation in the WLI program.

On average⁵, an alum had 15 connections in this network. The New Connections network had the highest density or the greatest number of connections of all networks studied in this case study. The level of connection represented in this network demonstrates that the WLI program helped to forge new relationships between alumni, from the same and different cohorts, aligning with a key objective of the Australia Awards.

Figure 1: New Connections network: Relationships between alumni made during the WLI program by cohort



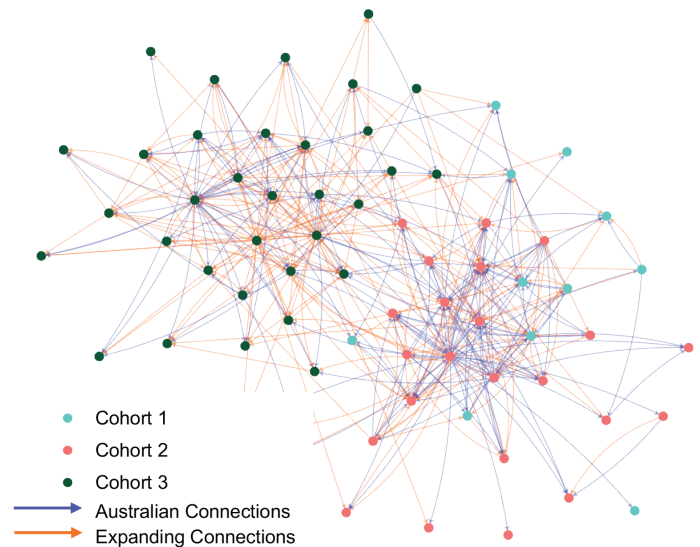
⁵ The median number of connections was used to represent average connections for this network and all networks reported due to the skewed distributions of these data.

3.3 Alumni networks for professional support and collaboration

Figure 2 is a combined visualisation of the Australian Connections and Expanding Connections networks. This network map illustrates current relationships reported by alumni that help them to build ties with Australia and Australian organisations (blue ties), and relationships that help them to expand their professional network (orange ties). Relationships in Figure 2 are also highly clustered, and while the two subgroups of Cohorts 1 and 2, and Cohort 3 are still evident in the map, there also appear to be more connections across the two cohort subgroups than seen in the New Connections network. All 69 alumni are part of a relationship in the Australian Connections network, either reporting that they would contact a WLI alum and/or would be contacted by a WLI alum to develop connections with Australia, while 96 per cent of alumni were part of a relationship in the Expanding Connections network. The latter network was important for WLI alumni from Cohorts 1–3 as the vast majority (98%) were currently working and building their careers. Eighty-two per cent of responding alumni were employed full-time and very few were employed part-time (4%) or not employed (2%), while 11 per cent were self-employed and 7 per cent were studying. On average, an alum had four connections in the Australian Connections network and five connections in the Expanding Connections network.

Previous GTF SNA case studies have investigated the degree to which other Australia Award alumni groups contact one another to make connections with Australia. Data for WLI alumni show a higher level of connectivity between alumni for this purpose than found in other GTF case studies⁶ (Buckley et al, 2023; Buckley & Clarke, 2021). This suggests that WLI alumni in Cohorts 1–3 may use this network more frequently to make connections with Australia than other alumni groups.

Figure 2: Australian Connections and Expanding Connections networks: Relationships between alumni for developing connections with Australia and for expanding professional networks by cohort

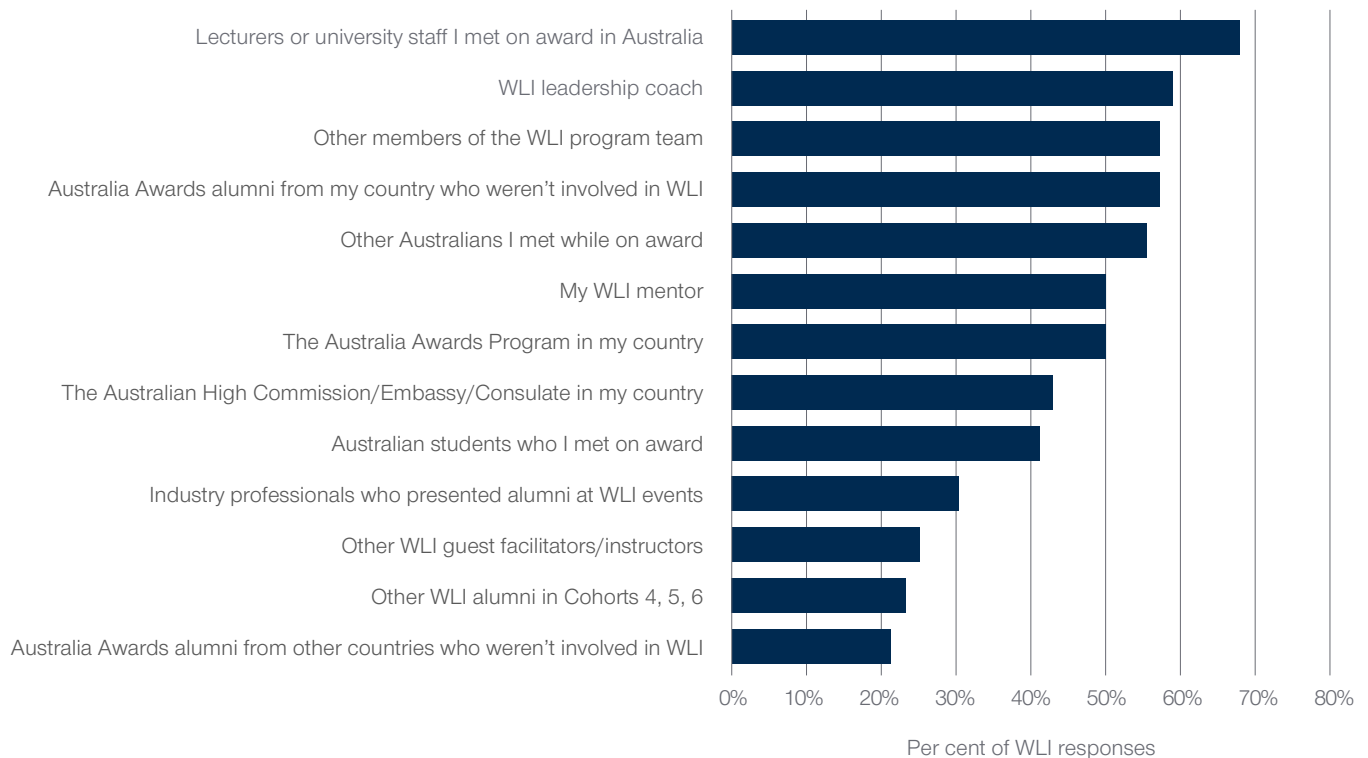


⁶ For instance, in the GTF SNA study of the Australia Awards Leadership Program 2013-2014 cohort, approximately two thirds of alumni were connected to one another through their Australian connections network. In the GTF SNA study of the 2018 Regional Alumni Workshop, approximately 84% of alumni were connected to one another through their Australian connections network.

To complement the visualisation in Figure 2 for these two professional support networks, network statistics⁷ were calculated and identified four 'brokers' in these two networks. These four women, from two different cohorts, had important positions in the network. These positions, determined by their connections, demonstrate their high level of influence over the flow of information in the network. Identifying brokers in Australia Award alumni networks is useful for program engagement initiatives. For example, ensuring that brokers are aware of new program or professional development information and asking them to disperse this information to their contacts can facilitate the effective spread of information to all members of a network.

Alumni were also asked who they currently contact to develop connections with Australia or Australian organisations outside of the WLI network. Figure 3 illustrates that almost 70 per cent of WLI alumni would approach lecturers or university staff they met while on-award, followed by their WLI leadership coach and other members of the WLI program team. Alumni were also likely to reach out to Australia Awards alumni from their home country who did not attend the WLI program, other Australians they met while on-award, their WLI mentor and the Australia Awards program in their country.

Figure 3: People outside of the WLI Cohort 1–3 group that alumni contact to develop connections with Australia or Australian organisations (n=56)



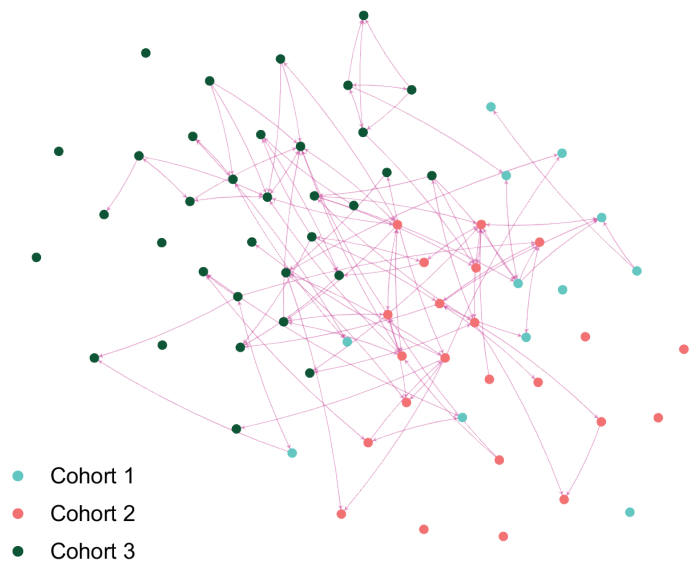
⁷ Between centrality statistics were calculated to identify brokers in each network.

In comparison to alumni that participated in a previous GTF SNA case study that examined the impact of another on-award leadership program (Buckley & Clarke, 2021), this WLI study shows a larger proportion of alumni who reported they would contact industry professionals, mentors, other Australians they met on award and lecturers and university staff they met on award⁸.

In addition to the above sources, alumni were also asked about other Pacific connections facilitated through the WLI program. Around half of alumni responded that they found the Pacific steering committee members, Pacific guest speakers and friends of the program, and WLI alumni from other cohorts had been useful for their leadership and professional development.

To highlight examples of collaboration between WLI alumni, alumni were also asked to identify any WLI Cohort 1–3 peers they had collaborated with on a WLI-related initiative since becoming involved with the program. Alumni responses were used to create the Collaboration network, which is visualised in Figure 4. Relationships in this map are more dyadic, which is a structure that is typical of collaborative group work that is more likely to happen in smaller groups rather than larger clustered relationships. Connections reported in this network were also the most likely to be reciprocated and there are also more relationships spanning across different cohorts. Approximately 83 per cent of alumni were part of a collaborative connection. This illustrates that the large majority of WLI alumni have strived to use their networks, skills and knowledge developed through the program and the Australia Awards to lead and influence change in their contexts with other WLI peers.

Figure 4: Collaboration network: Relationships between alumni related to collaborations on WLI-related initiatives by cohort



8 See: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/social-network-analysis-australia-awards-leadership-program-cohort>

4. Alumni connectivity and leadership

Social network data presented in this chapter identified eight alumni who stand out as highly regarded by their WLI peers for actively engaging in behaviours and work that is characteristic of developmental leadership. This chapter also explores combinations of networks together in a range of maps. When all current network data collected in this case study were considered together, all alumni were part of a connection with a WLI peer. This is the first time an SNA GTF case study has found this level of connectivity among a group of alumni. It reflects high levels of alumni engagement with the WLI program and demonstrates how the program and the Australia Awards have cultivated groups of women in the Pacific focussed on enacting change in their contexts.

4.1 Developmental leadership in WLI alumni

This chapter examines the second aim of the case study:

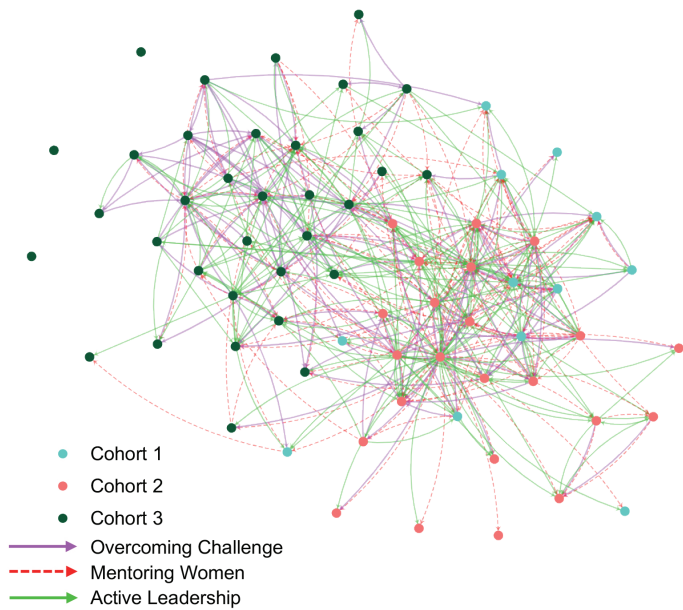
- To use SNA to identify key alumni across the three cohorts that are using their skills, knowledge and connections in line with developmental leadership priorities.

The last three of the seven alumni networks are presented in this chapter to explore this aim. These networks and the survey questions used to collect their data are specified below:

1. The **Overcoming Challenge** network. Which WLI alumni would you go to for advice to overcome professional challenges (e.g. implementing change at work, dealing with difficult relationships, managing difficult projects)?
2. The **Mentoring Women** network. Which WLI alumni are actively mentoring or supporting the leadership development of other women in their context?
3. The **Active Leadership** network. Which WLI alumni are actively using their leadership skills and networks to address a particular issue or challenge?

By responding to these network questions, alumni highlighted peers who they believed were displaying developmental leadership qualities via their support of peers and work to create sustainable change. Data collected with these network questions is presented in Figure 5 as a combined visualisation of the Overcoming Challenge (purple ties), Mentoring Women (red dashed ties) and Active Leadership (green ties) networks.

Figure 5: Identifying developmental leadership: Alumni nominations of Relationships between alumni related to collaborations on WLI-related initiatives by cohort



There are several important findings represented in Figure 5. Over 90 per cent of alumni (91%) were recognised by a WLI peer as using developmental leadership skills. On average, an alum nominated 1 peer in the Overcoming Challenge network, 1 peer in the Mentoring Women network and 2 peers in the Active Leadership network. These data provide evidence that the WLI program and the Australia Awards are successfully supporting alumni to use their skills, knowledge, and networks to contribute to sustainable development.

Eight women, from different cohorts and four countries, were more frequently identified as leaders. To illustrate the level of regard directed towards these women, Table 3 shows the number of times four of these eight alumni were selected across the three networks. Table 3 also shows how many times these women were nominated by a peer as a new connection facilitated by the WLI program, providing an example that their impact extended into other networks. These data demonstrate how SNA can capture the shared perspective of leadership among a group of Australia Award alumni by highlighting individuals who are highly regarded by multiple peers.

Table 3: Number of selections in key leadership networks and New Connections network for four WLI alumni leaders

	Overcoming Challenge	Mentoring Women	Active Leadership	New Connections
Alumni 1	12	10	14	15
Alumni 2	9	5	10	15
Alumni 3	7	6	7	17
Alumni 4	6	6	8	18

4.2 Combined current connections

Figure 6 presents a combined visualisation of the three developmental leadership networks described in Figure 5 along with the professional support and collaboration networks presented in the previous Chapter.

As a map that overlays all the current connections investigated in this case study, Figure 6 again emphasises the high level of connectivity between WLI alumni and reflects the high engagement level of Cohorts 1–3 alumni with the WLI program. While the two subgroups of Cohorts 1 and 2, and Cohort 3 are still slightly separated with more connections within these subgroups, Figure 6 also shows relationships exist between alumni across these subgroups for various purposes. These findings illustrate that the WLI program and the Australia Awards has successfully fostered communities of women in Cohorts 1–3 that support each other and work together to lead and influence change in their contexts.

Figure 6: Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by cohort

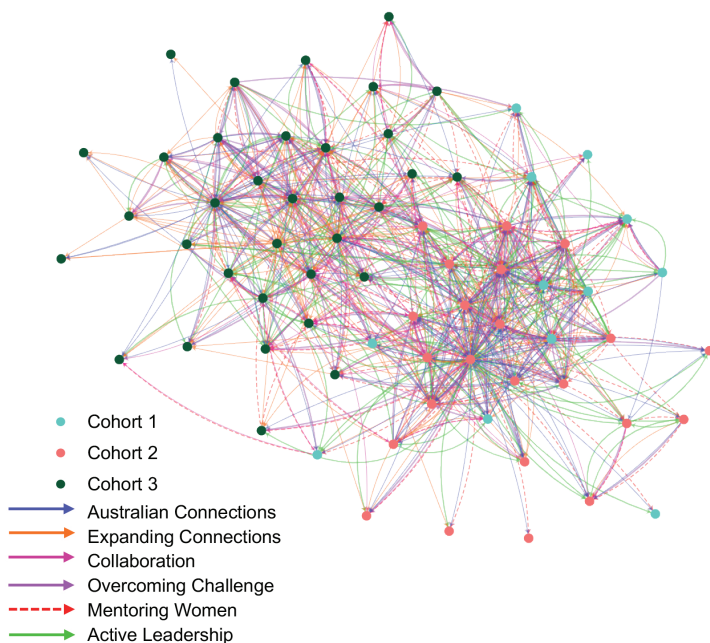
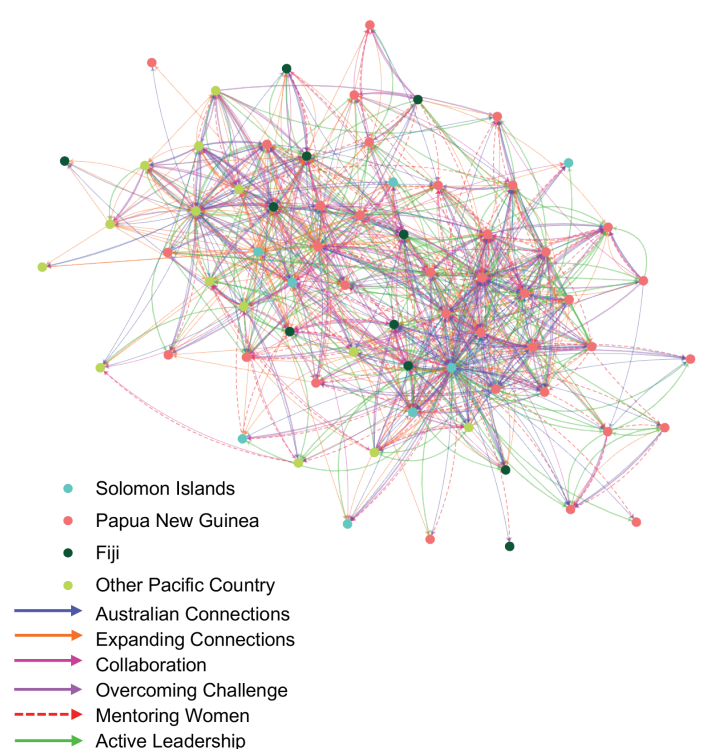


Figure 7 presents the same combined current connection map but displays alumni country⁹ rather than cohort. This visualisation shows connections between alumni from the same and different countries, showing how interconnected WLI alumni are, regardless of nationality. While there are groups of alumni from the same country who seem more highly connected with one another (e.g. the group of orange dots in the middle right section of the map representing alumni from PNG), there is also substantial blending of alumni from different countries among the relationships displayed. This demonstrates the breath of this alumni network, and the capacity of the WLI program to foster a connected network of women leaders across the Pacific.

Figure 7: Combined current relationships among WLI alumni in the Australian Connections, Expanding Connections, Collaboration, Overcoming Challenge, Mentoring Women and Active Leadership networks by country



⁹ To keep the identities of alumni from Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Nauru, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati and Tuvalu confidential in this network map, all alumni from these countries are grouped into a country category called 'Other Pacific Island Country'

5. Alumni leadership attitudes and perceptions of WLI program

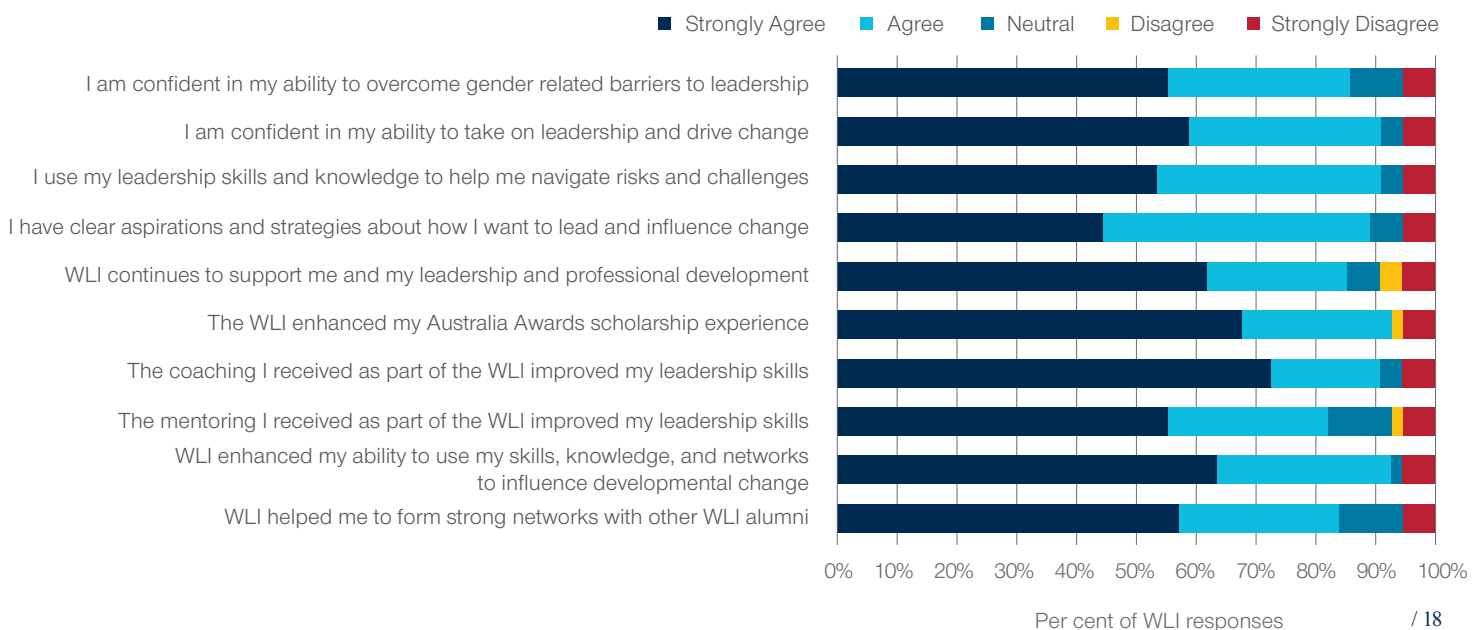
This chapter explores alumni attitudes and perceptions of the content of the WLI program and how equipped they feel to contribute to developmental leadership following their participation and Australia Award experience. Most alumni found the WLI program to have a positive impact on their skills and abilities, with nearly all alumni either agreeing or strongly agreeing when asked about the program.

5.1 Alumni perceptions of the WLI program and their leadership skills

Figure 8 shows that 93 per cent of alumni agreed or strongly agreed that WLI enhanced their ability to use their skills, knowledge, and networks to influence developmental change. Most alumni also agreed or strongly agreed that the coaching and mentoring they received as part of the WLI improved their leadership skills (91% and 82%, respectively). The large majority of alumni also agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to form strong networks with other WLI alumni (84%) and that the program enhanced their Australia Awards scholarship experience (93%).

Of the responding alumni, 85 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the WLI continues to support them, and their leadership and professional development. Alumni are also confident in their ability to take on leadership and drive change (91%) and to overcome gender-related barriers to leadership (86%). Most alumni are actively using their leadership skills and knowledge from the WLI to help navigate risks and challenges (91%) and have clear aspirations and strategies about how they want to lead and influence change (91%). These responses support findings in Chapters 3 and 4 that demonstrate the positive long-term impact of the WLI program and the way it has fostered networks to strengthen the objectives of the Australia Awards.

Figure 8: Alumni attitudes and perceptions of the WLI program (n=56)



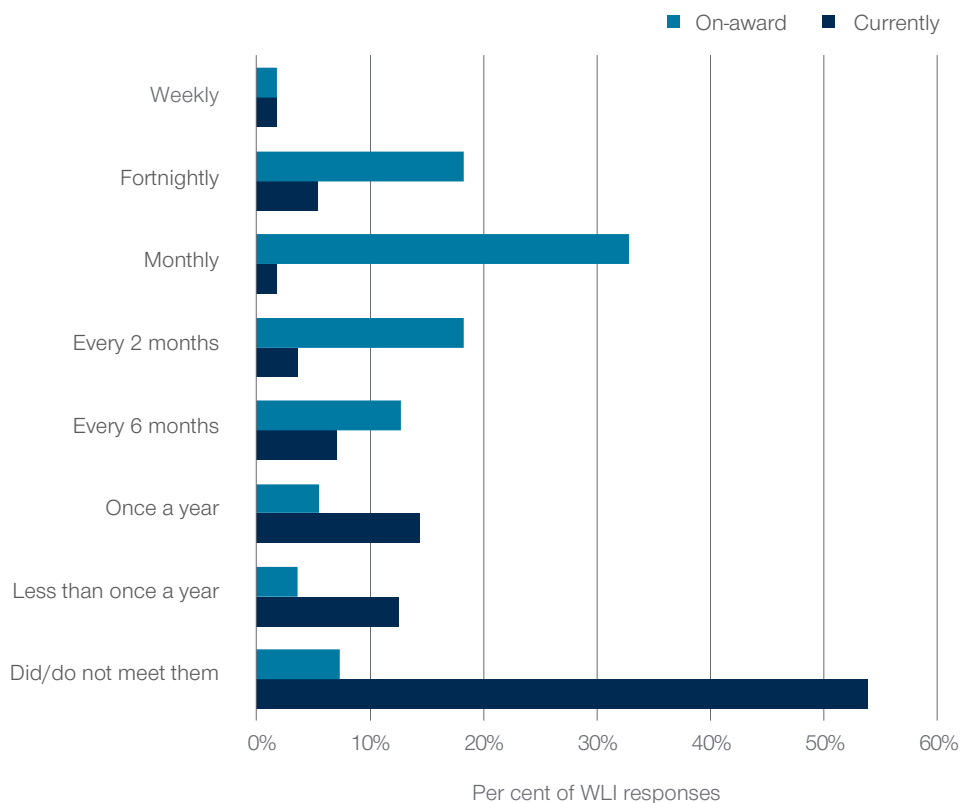
5.2 Support from mentors and other Pacific connections

Figure 8 showed the majority of alumni found the mentoring they received in the WLI program helpful. To further examine the support provided by mentors, alumni were asked how frequently they met with their WLI mentor, both on-award and in the present. These data are presented in Figure 9. Most alumni met with their mentors at least monthly during their time on-award (53%), with only nine per cent meeting once a year or less. Four of the alumni responded saying they never met with their mentor.

As expected, alumni reported meeting with their mentor far less frequently at the time of the survey compared to when they were on-award. A third of alumni meet with their mentor once every six months or less (34%), and half no longer meet their mentor at all (54%). Nine per cent still meet at least monthly. The positive impact of the mentoring component of the WLI program can be seen in the large proportion of WLI alumni (46%) who are still maintaining their relationship with their mentor in the present.

Alumni were also asked which other Pacific connections made during participation in the WLI program have been most useful for their long-term professional development. Half of the alumni responding reported that Pacific guest speakers and friends of the program as well as WLI peers from Cohorts 4–6 were useful while 48% found connections with the Pacific Steering Committee members most useful.

Figure 9: Frequency of alumni contact with mentor (n=55)



6. Implications for the Australia Awards

6.1 Summary of findings

In this case study, SNA was used to examine the long-term impact of an on-award enrichment program for women leaders in the Pacific. Results demonstrated that WLI alumni in Cohorts 1–3 are highly connected to one another. New relationships between alumni were established for all members of Cohorts 1–3 during participation in the program in 2018 and 2019. These relationships are also maintained in the present, particularly when alumni need support developing connections with Australia. More broadly, this finding supports GTF research from the Global Tracer Survey, which collects data from a wide range of Australian development alumni¹⁰ and shows programs and initiatives like WLI that are embedded both during and post award are successful at building the connections with Australia and Australians that the Australia Awards strives to achieve (Hsien & Edwards, 2023). For this case study, the use of SNA demonstrates these connections with Australia are cultivated and/or reinforced via relationships between alumni with a shared experience of an on-award leadership program.

SNA was also used in the case study to highlight eight women who were more frequently identified in WLI Cohorts 1–3 as developmental leaders by their peers. When all current connections investigated in the case were considered, all alumni were connected to one another in the combined network. This included connections between alumni across cohorts and countries. These findings illustrate a level of connectivity that has not been seen in previous GTF SNA case studies and provides evidence for a high level of alumni engagement with the program and the Australia Awards. This high level of engagement among alumni is also substantiated by the high response rate of WLI alumni in this case study.

High levels of alumni engagement are also reflected in the traditional survey data collected and alumni attitudes towards the program. Alumni highly valued the contribution of the WLI program to their career development and to enhancing their Australia Award experience. The ability of the WLI program to equip alumni with skills and knowledge, as well as provide a strong support network of mentors, means alumni feel confident to take on leadership, drive change, and overcome gender-related barriers to leadership.

¹⁰ See <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/people-people/australia-awards-alumni-global-tracer-survey-2022>

6.2 Developmental leadership in action – coalitions for change and coalitions for support

Findings reinforce the long-term networking outcomes of the Australia Awards that have consistently been found in GTF SNA case studies. On-award leadership programs that encourage a collective goal could be especially important for increasing cohesion across a group of alumni and strengthening the Australia Award networking objectives. This is exemplified by the high level of connectivity found between WLI alumni, who are actively using their WLI connections to support their professional development. Alumni also believe these networks have a shared purpose for creating sustainable change and feel they are equipped with the skills and confidence for developmental leadership.

Across networks that provide professional support, four alumni were identified as brokers whose network position resulted in them having a stronger influence over the flow of information in the WLI network. If these four women – who were from two cohorts and two countries – were removed from the group, information would spread less effectively across the network. Initiatives designed to communicate information to all WLI alumni in Cohorts 1–3 would benefit from targeting these four brokers who are well-placed to ensure that information reaches all WLI alumni.

The eight women who were highly regarded by their WLI peers as exhibiting developmental leadership skills were from three cohorts and four countries. In total, the brokers and leaders represent 12 key alumni in the network who are driving change within their relationships and in their work addressing challenges in their contexts. Future initiatives looking to recruit Pacific mentors could recruit these women who are highly regarded in the region. Given these 12 women are the ‘changemakers’ for Cohorts 1–3, they could also be the target of professional development training programs with wider network benefits likely through their connections and the support they provide to the rest of the network. Phase 2 of this project will involve interviewing a sample of these 12 women to understand how they are driving change, and how their experience of the Australia Awards and WLI program have contributed to their capacity for developmental leadership.

While this case study has highlighted these 12 women as key network members, all 69 members of WLI Cohorts 1–3 are emerging leaders in the Pacific region. Findings showed that over 80 per cent of alumni have engaged in a collaboration with their WLI peers to address a WLI-related initiative and provides evidence of alumni leadership via coalitions for change. The high level of connectivity found across networks show that these Australia Award alumni have also formed coalitions for support that facilitate connections with Australia, expand professional networks, help to overcome professional challenges, and are used to mentor each other and other women. The evidence here shows that on-award enrichment programs that facilitate these support networks are valuable for women alumni of the Australia Awards and their reintegration process following their award experience.

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8. Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GTF	Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility
SNA	Social Network Analysis
WLI	Women Leading and Influencing

Annex 1: Survey instrument and limitations

Survey instrument

The survey instrument for this case study is outlined below. The three sections included the social network questions, traditional survey items around the Australia Awards and the WLI program, and background and demographic questions to provide context to the results.

Section 1 – Social networks

- Networks among alumni that are new connections
- Networks among alumni for connecting with Australians or Australian organisations
- Networks among alumni for advice for overcoming professional challenges
- Networks among alumni for expanding professional networks
- Networks among alumni who have collaborated on WLI projects or initiatives
- Noted alumni who are actively mentoring or supporting the leadership development of other women
- Noted alumni who are actively using their leadership skills and networks to address a particular issue or challenge
- Other connections with Australia or Australian organisations
- Pacific connections facilitated through WLI.

Section 2 – Australia Awards and WLI program

- Views of the WLI program
- Views of own leadership skills
- Frequency of contact with WLI mentor

Section 3 – Background information

- Employment
- Award details
- Demographic characteristics.

Limitations

Positive response bias

The issue of positive bias in survey research is relevant to the current study as it is likely that alumni who positively regarded the WLI program experience, formed social networks with their peers, and in general were positive about their experience receiving an Australian Government scholarship and the future career opportunities it provided were more likely to respond to the survey. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (Mawer, 2014), emphasises this issue in alumni research noting that:

... those who reply to sample surveys are likely to be engaged with alumni associations or tracing (e.g. Day, Stackhouse and Geddes, 2009) and disproportionately represent the 'successful' outcomes of scholarship programmes (p.9).

The possible impact of positive bias should be considered when interpreting the findings from this case study and the implications drawn around the Australia Awards.

With an understanding of this issue in alumni survey research, the GTF implemented processes to mitigate and identify any bias in the data collected. These processes included:

- Working with the WLI team as part of the research partnership to understand how the WLI program was created, conducted and evaluated by WLI;
- Creating a unique URL for each alum in the target population to access the survey so that the GTF could identify any patterns in how alumni were responding to the survey;
- Developing survey items focussed on avoiding leading questions and ensuring a wide range of response options;
- Working carefully during fieldwork to provide tailored 'reminder' emails to alumni to encourage high levels of participation;
- Engaging with WLI to reach out to alumni and encourage them to respond to the survey.

It is also important to note that case study findings are drawn from the responses of 56 alumni (81% of the target population) and are not representative of all the alumni that participated in the WLI program in cohorts 1–3.

Social Network Analysis

Due to the way that data is collected and analysed, SNA as a research approach is more sensitive to missing data issues. A high response rate for SNA research is therefore more important than it may be in other traditional research studies. For this case study, the response rate of 81 per cent is higher than other alumni-related survey research and the highest SNA response rate for the GTF to date.

It should also be noted that while the GTF team consulted with WLI about the survey design and the social networks that would be explored, it is possible the case study did not capture all the network types or ways alumni were connecting to one another that were important for the WLI cohorts.