

MEPI Alumni Connection

رابطة خريجي ميبي



MEPI



2020 MEPI Alumni Survey

Leadership Development Fellowship Alumni Report



Acknowledgments

The MEPI Alumni Connection develops an active alumni network that fosters long-lasting relationships and opportunities to stimulate social and business entrepreneurship in the MENA region. The MEPI Alumni Connection supports community leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa to strengthen their networks, collaborate on leadership initiatives, and develop their skills in order to contribute to their communities.

IREX would like to acknowledge the contributions of MEPI alumni who took the time to respond thoughtfully to the biennial survey and share their experiences. Data collection outreach was conducted by the program team and supported by MEPI staff and partners. Analysis and drafting of this report were conducted by the program team.

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MEPI Alumni Connection

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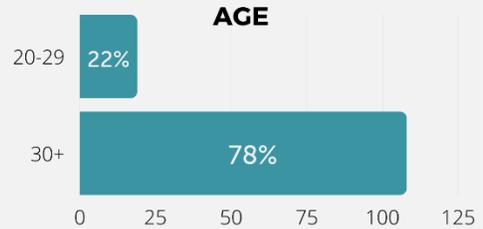


2020 MEPI Alumni Survey: Leadership Development Fellowship Alumni Highlights

2020 MEPI Alumni Survey Leadership Development Fellowship Alumni Highlights

In total, 
138 respondents
(from 2008 to 2020
program completion years)

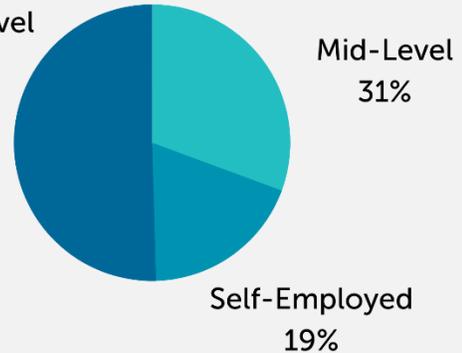
Respondent Profile



Respondents' Impact on Communities



Executive Level
50%



Alumni conducted at least one project in their community in the past year

Introduction and Background

For nearly two decades, the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has fostered partnerships between citizens, civil society, the private sector, and governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to resolve local challenges and promote shared interests in the areas of participatory governance and economic opportunity and reform. The MEPI Alumni Connection aims to further strengthen and sustain a network of approximately 1,500 graduates since 2003 of MEPI leadership programs including the Student Leaders Program, Tomorrow's Leaders Program, Leadership Development Fellowship (LDF), previously the Leaders for Democracy Fellowship. The MEPI Alumni Connection offers a variety of activities to meet the needs of the alumni by promoting community and business leadership through alumni engagement in countries across the MENA region, including Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

This report presents the results of responses from alumni of the Leadership Development Fellowship to the 2020 MEPI alumni survey. The LDF program is an intensive civic engagement and social entrepreneurship fellowship. Participants are hosted by U.S. academic institutions where they develop leadership skills and expand their understanding of civil society and participatory governance and how both may be applied in their home communities. The program provides early and mid-career professionals from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with the opportunity to complete training in leadership, civic engagement, participatory governance, conflict transformation, and effective communication. Fellows spent three months in the United States (English language programming) or Lebanon at an American style university (Arabic language programming) to gain academic skills and practical experience as well as networking opportunities with like-minded peers and professionals.

Methodology and Limitations

In 2020, the MEPI Alumni Connection team surveyed alumni from all years of MEPI leadership programs (2003-2020) to gain a better understanding of the backgrounds and needs of these alumni, the impact of MEPI leadership programming in MENA, and to assess mid-line results of the MEPI Alumni Connection Program. The survey is conducted biennially, following an initial Needs Assessment conducted in 2018.

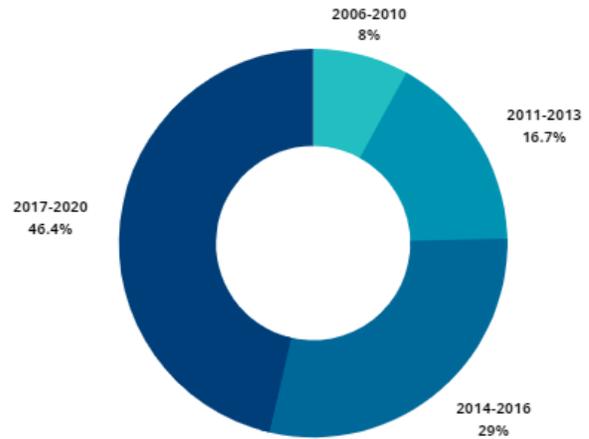
From July-September 2020, an online survey with up to 64 questions provided in English and Arabic was distributed to all MEPI leadership alumni with contact information in the MEPI Alumni Connection database. The questions were designed to learn more about MEPI alumni; the impact of MEPI programming on alumni's personal, professional, and community leadership development; and the reach of MEPI programming and alumni in MENA.

Responses were collected using SurveyMonkey. The survey was first distributed to a representative group of 20% of the alumni for one week to gauge the effectiveness of the questionnaire. In response, IREX made fewer questions required, reordered questions to encourage responsiveness and then distributed the survey to the other 80% of alumni. Alumni that had not completed the survey received reminders approximately weekly via SurveyMonkey. Alumni were also encouraged by IREX, MEPI, US Embassies and other MEPI leadership program stakeholders via program platforms and activities to complete the survey. The IREX program team called a selection of alumni from diverse programs and countries who had not responded to the survey to encourage them to do so. Alumni who completed the survey were eligible to be randomly selected for a professional development honorarium.

The survey closed in September 2020 with a response rate of 30% (504/1663). Prior to analysis, responses were cleaned of duplicates and responses from individuals not eligible for the MEPI Alumni Connection, leaving a total 408 valid responses. Of these 408 respondents, 138 were alumni of LDF.

The results were analyzed through quantitative data analysis and qualitative coding. For analysis and reporting, open-ended answers in Arabic were translated to English. The data were disaggregated and further analyzed by gender, citizenship, age, MEPI program type and, where relevant, program completion year. The lengthy nature of the survey resulted in varied – and often low – response rates for many questions. Responses included in this report represent 44% (138/315) of eligible LDF alumni with contact information in the MEPI Alumni Connection database at the time of the survey.

Number of LDF Alumni Respondents by MEPI Program Completion Year



Results

Respondent Profile

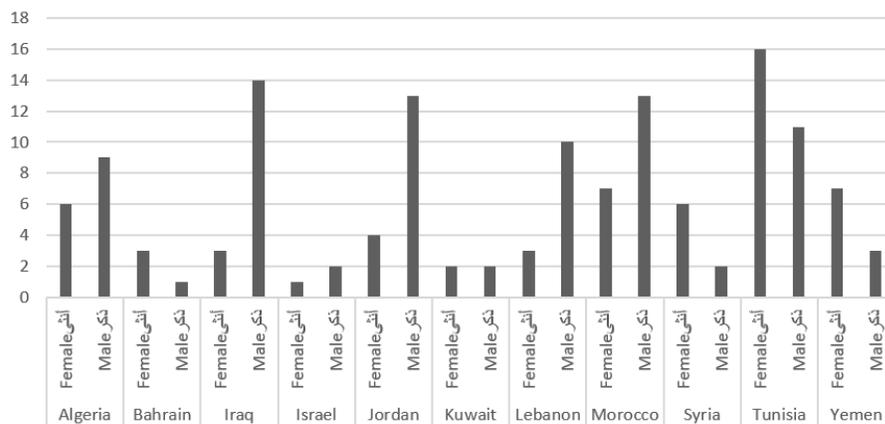
Program Completion Year

A total of 138 Leadership Development Fellowship (LDF) alumni responded to the survey. The vast majority (46%) completed the LDF program between 2017 and 2020.

Age and Gender

Whereas 78% (108/138) of respondents were above the age of 30, 22% (30/138) were between 20 and 29 – reflecting LDF’s focus on mid-career professionals. Meanwhile, more respondents identified as male at 58% (80/138) than female at 42% (58/138).

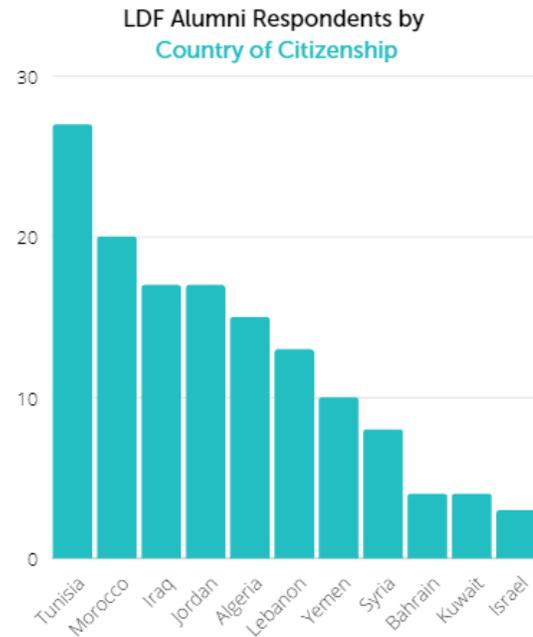
Gender Breakdown by Country of Citizenship



Citizenship & Place of Residence

Respondents were citizens of all MEPI-Alumni-Connection-eligible MENA countries, with the greatest number hailing from Tunisia at 20% (27/138), followed by Morocco at 15% (20/138), and Iraq and Jordan each at 12% (17/138).

The respondents' current or primary countries of residence, however, were much more varied, illustrating that not everyone resided in their country of citizenship. A sizeable number were living in North America and Europe including the U.S. at 17% (3/18), France at 11% (2/18), and Germany at 11% (2/18). Other places of residence include Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

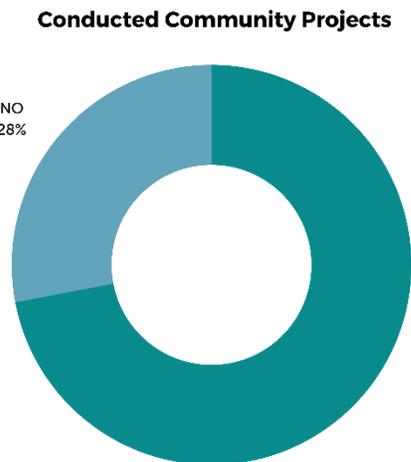


Impact of MEPI

1. WHAT HAVE THE LDF ALUMNI DONE AFTER THEIR MEPI PROGRAM?

Overall, the alumni reported becoming better leaders in their communities through the MEPI program.

1.1 COMMUNITY PROJECTS



The majority, 72% (93/130), of the respondents said they conducted a project in their community in the past two years. More males, at 57% (53/93), conducted a project in their communities. Through their projects, the alumni respondents report having reached 94,334 beneficiaries in total, with each alum reaching from 5 to 25,000 people.

Among those who started a project in the last two years, more than half (55%) conducted a project in youth engagement, followed by projects in education (43%) and civic engagement (35%).

Of the 105 LDF alumni who reported collaborating with someone in the last two years, almost a quarter, or 25% (26/105), did so in collaboration with someone they met through their specific MEPI leadership program. 39% (41/105) collaborated with someone they met through the larger MEPI alumni network and 7% (7/105) collaborated with someone they met through the U.S. DoS alumni network. This underscores the fact that MEPI (and other international exchange programs) strengthen networks and support community engagement.

1.2 LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Many, 65% (90/138), alumni served in a leadership role in the past year.

65% Served in Leadership Roles in the past year

Of these, 52 roles were in community settings, 47 were in professional settings, and 11 were in academic settings. It is worth noting that these responses are not mutually exclusive as the question allowed for multiple selections.

Number of Leadership Roles Served by Leadership Type



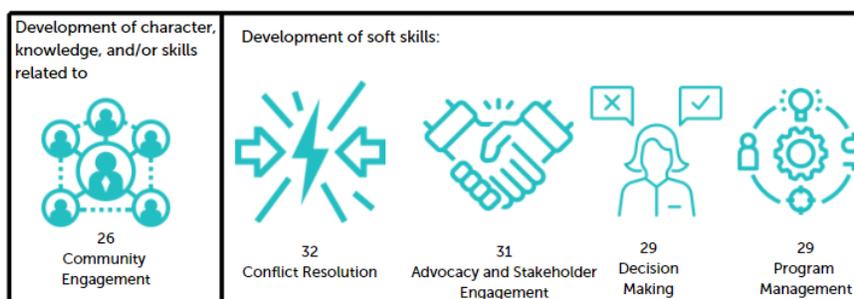
Respondents also showed initiative by forming new businesses and organizations. 50% (70/138) of respondents (48 males, 22 females) indicated starting their own business (for-profit) or organization (non-profit/non-governmental) after their MEPI experience.

North Africa had the greatest number of alumni creating new businesses and organizations: 19% (13/70) from Morocco, 19% (13/70) from Tunisia, and 16% (11/70) from Algeria.

2. IMPACT OF MEPI ON ALUMNI

When asked how MEPI developed their ability to make an impact in their community, alumni highlighted a wide range of benefits. These include, most notably, the development of various soft skills and the development of their character, knowledge, and/or skills that helped them better engage with their communities (26 mentions). The top soft skills highlighted were conflict resolution (32 mentions), advocacy and stakeholder engagement (31 mentions), decision making (29 mentions), and program management (29 mentions).

Q. How has MEPI helped you develop your ability to make an impact in your community?



“ I work as a Marketing and Product Development Manager at a Destination Management Company in Morocco. I have started this year in a field somehow new to me and in a position new. Since I have not received any academic training or studied Marketing I rely mostly on skills I gained through the trainings I received as a state department program participant and alumna.. ”

“ I participated in the LDF Program, and this experience, which extended over a period of three months in the United States of America, gave me an important opportunity on the cognitive level, as I acquired leadership skills and was able to create a network of relationships with Arab colleagues and with people of Arab and foreign nationalities that is an important asset in my development field Professional. ”

In total, 62% (86/138) of alumni found the MEPI program life changing. Disaggregated by gender, 48 females and 46 males held this view. According to respondents, the MEPI program helped them develop personally and professionally: it empowered them to act (32), encouraged them to engage in the community (27), provided them with critical academic opportunities (26), enhanced their networks and instilled a sense of camaraderie among program participants (14), and increased their self-reflection (13).

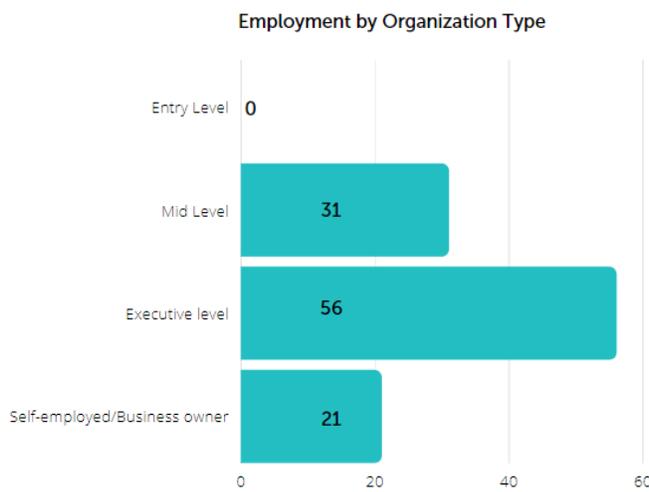
Q. Many alumni say that MEPI was a life-changing experience. How, if at all, did MEPI change your life?



“ MEPI was the window through which I overlooked the rich diversity that the Arab world knows, and that difference is a right and strength for me before others, and that the individual possesses the energy for positive change. ”

“ I participated in the summit where I established relationships with the SLP participants for whom I served as a mentor when the mentorship program started I had already clear idea about their projects and the participants themselves and their experiences in the program in the US as I met with the program leaders at the summit. ”

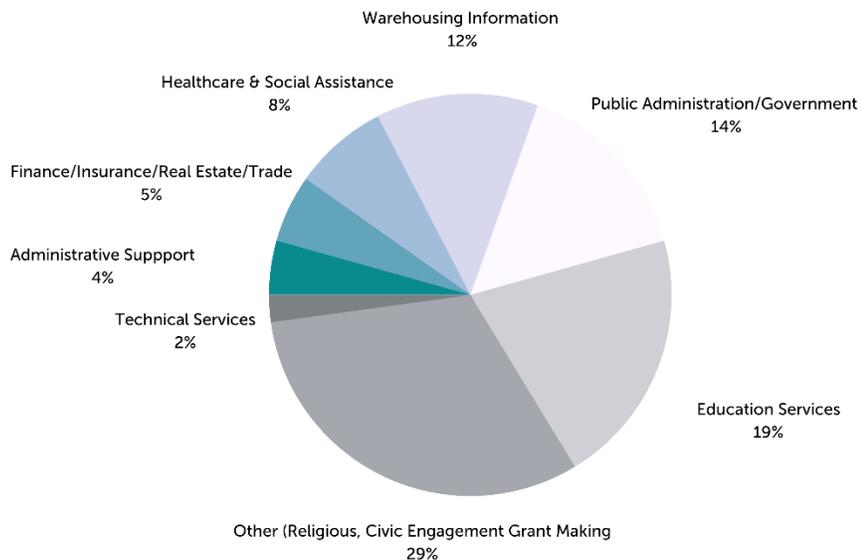
EMPLOYMENT



Most alumni, 81% (112/138), indicated that they were currently employed, with 60% (67/112) of male respondents and 40% (45/112) of female respondents indicating as much. Of those employed, 0% (0/112) hold entry level positions, 28% (31/112) hold mid-level positions, and 50% (56/112) hold executive level positions. A smaller percentage of alumni at 19% (21/112) were self-employed or business owners.

The industry most represented by alumni is education services (20). Other represented industries include public administration and government (15), warehousing information (13), healthcare and social assistance (7), finance and insurance (5), administrative support (4), scientific research (2), and technical services (2). Agriculture, construction/manufacturing/trade, hospitality, and mining/quarrying/oil and gas were all selected by one alumni each.

Employment by Industry Type



Impact of MEPI Alumni Connection Program

1. ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES

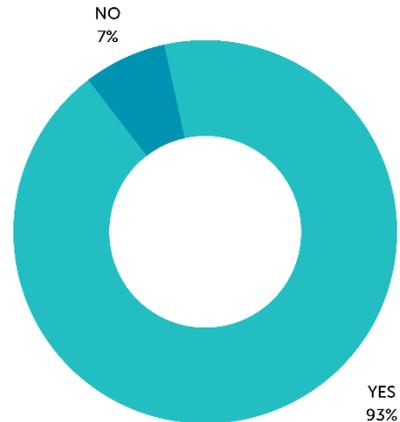
Overall, 94% (129/138) of respondents had some form of professional contact with other MEPI alumni, of which, 78% (100/129) made this contact through the alumni network, the most common medium for coordination among alumni, regardless of gender. 9% (11/129) of alumni served as mentors and 7% (9/129) as mentees. 5% (7/129) engaged with other alumni as a business partner and 1% (1/129) engaged through a business investor. Another 1% (1/129) of alumni engaged with alumni through a professional association.

In the past two years, 78% (107/138) of LDF alumni respondents participated in networking or professional development activities organized by the MEPI Alumni Connection specifically.

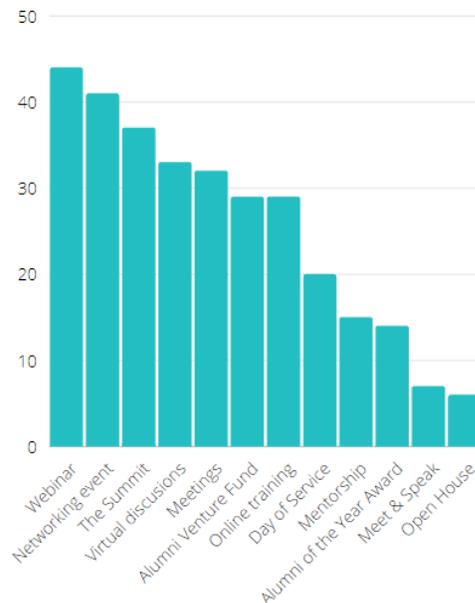
Of those 107 LDF alumni, 44% (44/107) attended a webinar. This trend may have influenced by MEPI Alumni Connection activities transitioning to an online format in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Other activities include networking events attended by 38% (41/107) of respondents; the summit, attended by 35% (37/104); virtual discussions, attended by 31% (33/107); the Alumni Venture Fund, which engaged 27% (29/107) of respondents; online trainings attended by 27% (29/107), MEPI Day of Service events attended by 19% (20/107); mentorship, completed by 14% (15/107) of alumni, the Alumni of the Year award, which engaged by 13% (14/107) of alumni; Meet & Speak attended by 7% (7/107) of alumni; and open house events attended by 6% (6/107) alumni respondents.

Among the 22% (31/138) of alumni who answered that they did not participate in any MEPI Alumni Connection activities, the top reason 74% (23/31) was, "I was not invited to any MEPI Alumni networking events during the past year." Other answers include "It was too difficult for me to travel to any MEPI Alumni events during the past year," said by 13% (4/31) of alumni

Employment by Industry Type



Participation in Alumni Event



respondents, and “I was not interested in the topic of any MEPI Alumni events during the past year,” according to 13% (4/31) alumni respondents.

WHAT WERE THE IMPACTS OF THE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES?

LDF alumni mentioned networking and professional development events led to collaborations with a MEPI or DoS alumni. 50% (59/119) of the respondents indicated that they collaborated with a MEPI or DoS alumni on a project, initiative, or business idea in the past two years. A much larger portion collaborated with CSOs. 91% (109/119) of respondents organized a total of 804 events and/or activities in collaboration with CSOs to promote specific issues and awareness during the past two years, with an average of 15 events organized by each respondent. Despite a higher number of male LDF survey respondents, there were more events conducted in collaboration with CSOs lead by female LDF alumni with a percentage of 58% (69/119).

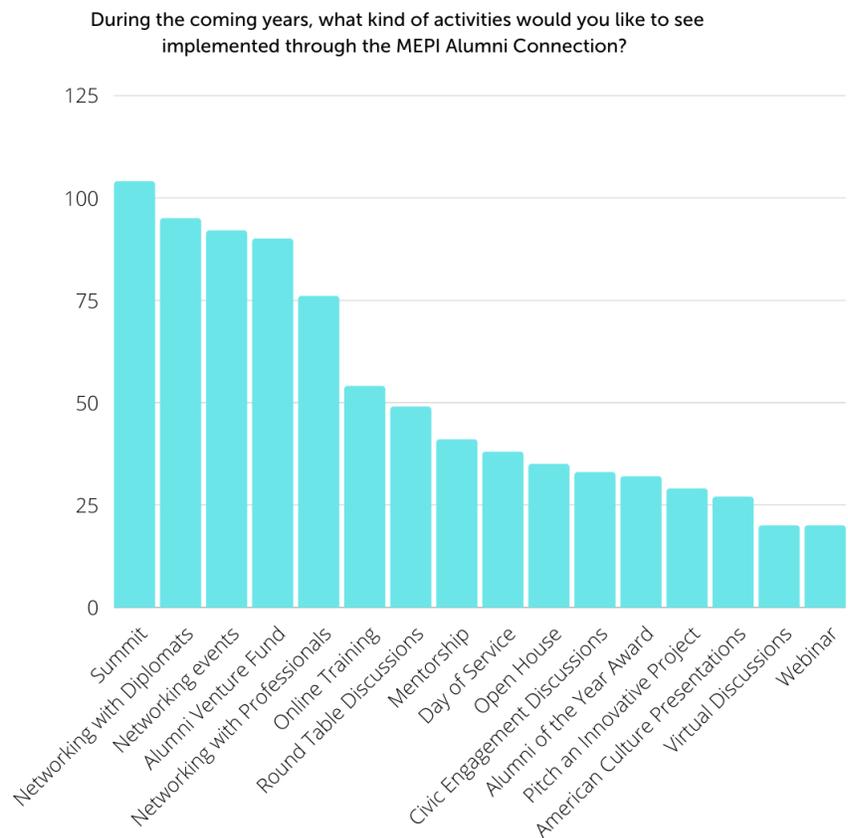
The most common support alumni received for their community projects was the Alumni Venture Fund with 21% (29/138) respondents indicating as much. Other forms of support include the MEPI Day of Service (7% or 9/138 respondents), training or resources (4% or 7/138 respondents), partnership with MEPI alumni (4% or 6/138 respondents), and mentorship (4% or 6/138 respondents).

MEPI Alumni Interests

1. WHAT ACTIVITIES DO THE LDF ALUMNI WANT THROUGH THE MEPI ALUMNI CONNECTION?

Alumni displayed a high interest in networking events (with both professionals and diplomats), a summit, mentorship, panel discussions, and online training, among many other opportunities, as depicted below.

In terms of the skills that the respondents would like to further develop to advance their community and professional leadership⁴, the alumni had many and varied interests. 75% of alumni surveyed were interested in a summit (104/139); 69% (95/138) were interested in networking with diplomats, 67% (92/138) in networking events; 65% (90/138) in the alumni venture fund; 55% (76/138) in networking with professionals and 34% (54/139)



were interested in online training. Meanwhile, 36% (49/138) were interested in round table discussions; 28% (41/138) in mentorship, 28% (38/138) in day of service, 25% (35/138) in open houses; 24% (33/138) in civic engagement activities, 23% (32/138) alumni of the year award, 21% (29/139) pitch an innovative project, 20% (27/138) in American cultural presentations; and 15% (20/138) were interested in each virtual discussions and webinars.

Among areas for technical skills development, respondents were most interested in advocacy and stakeholder engagement (22% or 31/138), decision making (21% or 29/138), and community engagement (19% or 26/138). Over half (63% or 70/111) of the alumni respondents said that MEPI Alumni Connection offers resources appropriate and relevant to their current professional or academic level.

2. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT WOULD THE LDF ALUMNI WANT TO GAIN THROUGH THE MEPI ALUMNI CONNECTION PROGRAM?

Most respondents desire both financial and non-financial resources to launch projects or initiatives. In terms of financial resources, respondents felt grants (77% or 106/138), followed by investments (45% or 62/138), and donations (26% or 36/138) would most help them feel prepared to improve their projects or start new ones. Regarding non-financial resources, a partner(s) (55% or 76/138), followed by access to alumni or professionals with relevant experience (48% or 66/138), a professional mentor (46% or 64/138), in-person training (43% or 60/138), and online training (24% or 33/138) would help them feel prepared to launch an initiative.

The majority (87%) of alumni follow at least one MEPI social media page—the most popular being the official MEPI Facebook page (59% or 81/138), immediately followed by the MEPI Alumni Facebook group (61% or 84/138), the LDF Facebook group (55% or 82/138), Program’s cohort page (15% or 20/138), the MEPI Alumni LinkedIn Group (31% or 43/138), and the MEPI Instagram (9% or 12/138). On MEPI social media, respondents note wanting to see content of interviews, alumni success stories, social initiatives, activities opportunities, and monitoring the needs of every country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, MEPI’s Leaders for Democracy Fellowship (LDF) and the MEPI Alumni Connection had significant impact on the participants and subsequently the larger communities.

In terms of the MEPI Alumni Connection, the program is meeting its goal to develop an active alumni network that fosters long-lasting relationships and opportunities to stimulate social and business entrepreneurship in the MENA region. Alumni connections remained strong following LDF program participation with 50% of alumni reporting collaborating with another alum on a MEPI or DoS on a project, initiative, or business idea. Meanwhile, a substantial majority (90%) indicated collaborating with CSOs to promote specific issues.

Survey results show high demand for financial support to start community projects and initiatives. Additionally, alumni show a strong desire for networking opportunities, particularly with diplomats and career professionals. Accordingly, the U.S. Department of State and MEPI Alumni Connection Program should continue to offer grants to support alumni’s projects and entrepreneurial activities. Meanwhile, networking events should continue to be made widely available.

In the same vein, as 14% of alumni completed some form of mentorship, while just 4% received support for their projects through mentorship, it is important to ensure that future mentoring opportunities align with alumni's interests so as to facilitate increased participation in these events. MEPI should prioritize opportunities to network with individuals in professions and with skills that alumni find practical and relevant to their aspirations.

MEPI Alumni Connection should take extra steps to ensure that all program participants, especially women, feel safe while participating in program activities; in order to address the issue of a few participants reporting that they didn't always feel safe during the program, follow-up research will need to be done on why they didn't feel safe and what can be done to address the issue.

In terms of MEPI programming, responses and feedback from the LDF alumni indicate that the LDF program aligns very well with the MEPI's mission of "fostering partnerships among citizens, civil society, the private sector, and government institutions to generate shared solutions that promote stability and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa." Responses indicate that the Leadership Development Fellowship has been particularly strong in fostering partnerships with civil society. Over one-third of the alumni-led community projects focused on "civic engagement" and, thereby, participatory governance, which is one of the core objectives of the MEPI program. Economic opportunity, which is the other core objective of the MEPI program, was also tackled through various avenues: professional skills (whereby 60% of respondents indicated being employed) and starting new businesses – indeed, 70 alumni started businesses or organizations after their experience with MEPI.