



From Graduate Education to Lifelong Community

An Evaluation of the Sloan Scholars Mentoring Network

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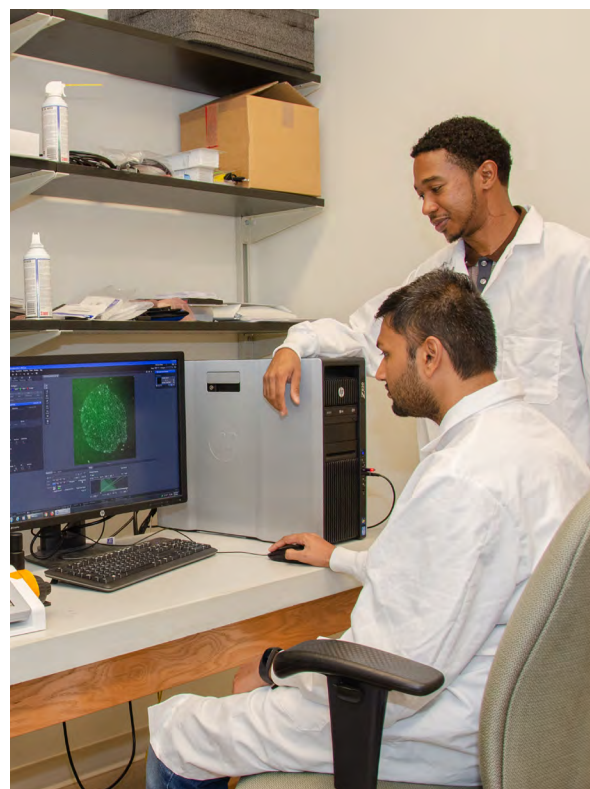
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Executive Summary

The Sloan Scholars Mentoring Network (SSMN), launched in 2016, was established to sustain connection among alumni of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation’s longstanding investments in broadening participation in STEM graduate education. Designed to support graduates of the Minority PhD Program (Legacy), University Centers of Exemplary Mentoring (UCEM), and the Sloan Indigenous Graduate Partnership (SIGP), SSMN has served more than 1,900 alumni across career stages, sectors, and geographies.

As SSMN transitions to the Sloan Scholars Network, this evaluation offers a comprehensive examination of alumni awareness, engagement, community experience, professional trajectories, and perceptions of impact. The findings reveal a network that is deeply valued and affirming—and at a pivotal moment of strategic opportunity. Key evaluation insights are described below.



KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

A Highly Accomplished and Diverse Alumni Community

Sloan Scholar alumni are thriving across sectors. Sixty percent are employed in academia, with representation across the faculty ranks from assistant professor to full professor and administrator. Others contribute across industry (23%), government (15%), nonprofit (6%), entrepreneurship, and community-rooted sectors.

Alumni described significant professional accomplishments that include securing major research funding, receiving national and international recognitions, leading labs and organizations, founding companies, influencing policy, and mentoring the next generation of STEM scholars. For many, Sloan affiliation remains a source of professional validation and identity long after graduation.



KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

Awareness of SSMN Is Strong, but Its Purpose Is Not Always Fully Visible

Eighty percent of surveyed alumni reported prior awareness of SSMN, though levels of awareness varied by program and pathway. Alumni consistently described SSMN as meaningful, affirming, and professionally relevant. However, many also expressed uncertainty about the network's purpose, scope, and intended audience, particularly those in non-academic roles or those whose graduate experience predated SSMN's establishment.

A central theme emerged: alumni experience the network not as a single-purpose program, but as a *multifunctional hub* integrating professional development, funding, relationships, community, and reciprocity. Yet this integrated role has not always been explicitly articulated. Where alignment between alumni goals and network offerings was clear, engagement deepened. Where it was less visible, participation often remained episodic.

The transition of the network from "Sloan Scholars Mentoring Network" to "Sloan Scholars Network" presents a timely opportunity to clarify identity and purpose while preserving mentoring as a foundational value expressed through multiple relational forms.



KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

Engagement Is Motivated by Growth—and Shaped by Transitions

Engagement patterns reveal both strong appreciation and uneven participation. Professional development (70%) and networking opportunities (62%) were the strongest motivators of engagement. Alumni consistently reported turning to the network during moments of transition—sector shifts, job searches, leadership changes, or geographic moves—rather than engaging based solely on career stage.

At the same time, participation is shaped by structural constraints. Scheduling conflicts (60%) and geographic barriers (62%) were the most substantial hindrances to engagement, alongside financial constraints and limited awareness among some alumni. Alumni emphasized the importance of clearer "on-ramps" to engagement and flexible participation options.



KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

Grants as Catalysts of Connection and Advancement

Grants emerged as a powerful point of connection, serving as one of the most tangible and influential engagement mechanisms within the network. More than one-third of alumni reported applying for an SSMN grant, and over 70% of non-applicants expressed interest in applying in the future.

Alumni described grants not only as financial resources, but as signals of investment and inclusion. Grants frequently catalyzed pilot research, supported travel and career transitions, strengthened competitiveness for external funding, and reinforced alumni identity within the Sloan community. The influence of grants often extended beyond the award period, shaping longer-term professional trajectories.



KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

Community as Affirmation and Aspiration

Alumni overwhelmingly characterize SSMN as a community. Many described it as a space of affirmation, shared identity, and values alignment, which was particularly meaningful given that they were often underrepresented in other professional STEM environments. For many, simply knowing others share a Sloan Scholar identity carries significance. Importantly, alumni often reported feeling connected even during periods of limited participation, suggesting that identity-based belonging functions as a foundational layer of engagement.

At the same time, alumni expressed aspirations for deeper and more sustained connection: smaller relational spaces, clearer pathways into participation, greater cross-sector visibility, and more accessible formats that accommodate professional and personal demands.





KEY EVALUATION INSIGHT

Strengthening Continuity Across the Scholar Lifecycle

The evaluation surfaced variation in alumni awareness and transition experiences rooted in historical administrative structures and the fact that some alumni graduated prior to the establishment of SSMN. For some scholars, transition into the alumni network felt ambiguous or retrospective.

With administrative oversight of Sloan-funded programs now consolidated under SSRC, there is a strategic opportunity to embed alumni identity earlier in graduate training, reinforce continuity across the full scholar lifecycle, and strengthen connectivity between alumni and current scholars.

Strategic Opportunities and Final Conclusions

The evaluation identifies nine strategic opportunities recommended for consideration across three interrelated domains:

NETWORK IDENTITY AND SCHOLAR CONTINUITY

1

Clarify SSMN's purpose as a multifunctional hub for alumni support and connection.

2

Reframe and clarify what "Mentoring" means within SSMN.

3

Strengthen continuity across the Sloan Scholar lifecycle.

SUSTAINED AND INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

4

Design engagement around career transition rather than fixed career stages.

5

Strengthen opportunities for reciprocity across the Sloan Scholar community.

6

Strengthen the architecture of community to support sustained, accessible, and cross-sector connection.

RESPONSIVE AND HIGH-IMPACT SUPPORT

7

Leverage grants as a central engagement and re-engagement mechanism.

8

Expand practice-based, sector-aligned convenings that integrate community and professional development.

9

Differentiate support where alumni experiences are structurally distinct.

The Sloan Scholars Network stands at a moment of meaningful evolution, entering its next phase with strong alumni outcomes, a deeply valued community identity, and proven engagement mechanisms. Greater clarity, intentional lifecycle alignment, and structured pathways for sustained connection can amplify these strengths for further reach and impact.

With unified administrative oversight and a refined network identity, the Sloan Scholars Network is well positioned to deepen its role as a lifelong source of affirmation, professional growth, and collective stewardship for Sloan Scholars across sectors, stages, and generations.



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