

# Professional Coaching: A Bridge to the Future

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## Background

With funding from the Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) Region I, the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) Future Leadership Committee (FLC) launched a national professional coaching pilot for early to mid-career health sciences librarians seeking to enhance existing leadership abilities and address self-identified areas for development. The overall goal of the pilot was to meet the customized learning goals of participants whether that was to pursue leadership opportunities and to address challenges that might be holding the participant back from achieving their full potential in their existing position. Those in a more senior leadership role such as department head, assistant or associate directors, or deputy directors were ineligible for this program. Individuals at this level may be interested in pursuing academic health sciences director-level positions and are eligible to participate in the AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program with three years of management experience. This coaching pilot was led by a subcommittee of FLC.

## Coaching Firm Selection

The FLC subcommittee investigated the nuances of professional developmental coaching by discussing the purpose of the project with known professional coaching contacts. Subsequently, a subcommittee developed a selection rubric, issued a request for proposals to potential coaching firms, and interviewed a short list of finalists. The subcommittee elevated proposals that offered a clear understanding of the coach-client matching process and engagement with the program evaluation. In June 2024, Culture Cultivation was awarded the contract to deliver content and match coaches with individual participants.

## Participant Recruitment

To recruit applicants, the FLC subcommittee:

- Hosted Zoom information sessions for potential applicants
- Posted information to the AAHSL Leadership Development webpage and to AAHSL lists
- Requested that AAHSL Directors encourage health sciences librarians to apply to the program
- Disseminated an announcement through the Network of the National Library of Medicine

In September 2024, nine participants were selected from a robust pool of twenty-three applicants with a broad geographic distribution across five NNLM regions and Canada.

## Program Details

The pilot consisted of one-to-one developmental coaching sessions between certified coaches and selected participants. It included:

- Participating in a robust matching process to ensure that coaches and participants formed strong working relationships
- Prioritizing the ALA Leadership and Management Competencies as foci
- Completing the DiSC assessment to provide insights into communication and behavioral patterns, and increase awareness of self and others, informing more intentional leadership styles and better communication
- Engaging in six virtual, confidential coaching sessions using empathy, knowledge, and awareness of personal, interpersonal, system, and power dynamics

Additionally, participants were encouraged to join in five optional 90-minute peer coaching group sessions between September 2024 and March 2025. The aim of these sessions was to:

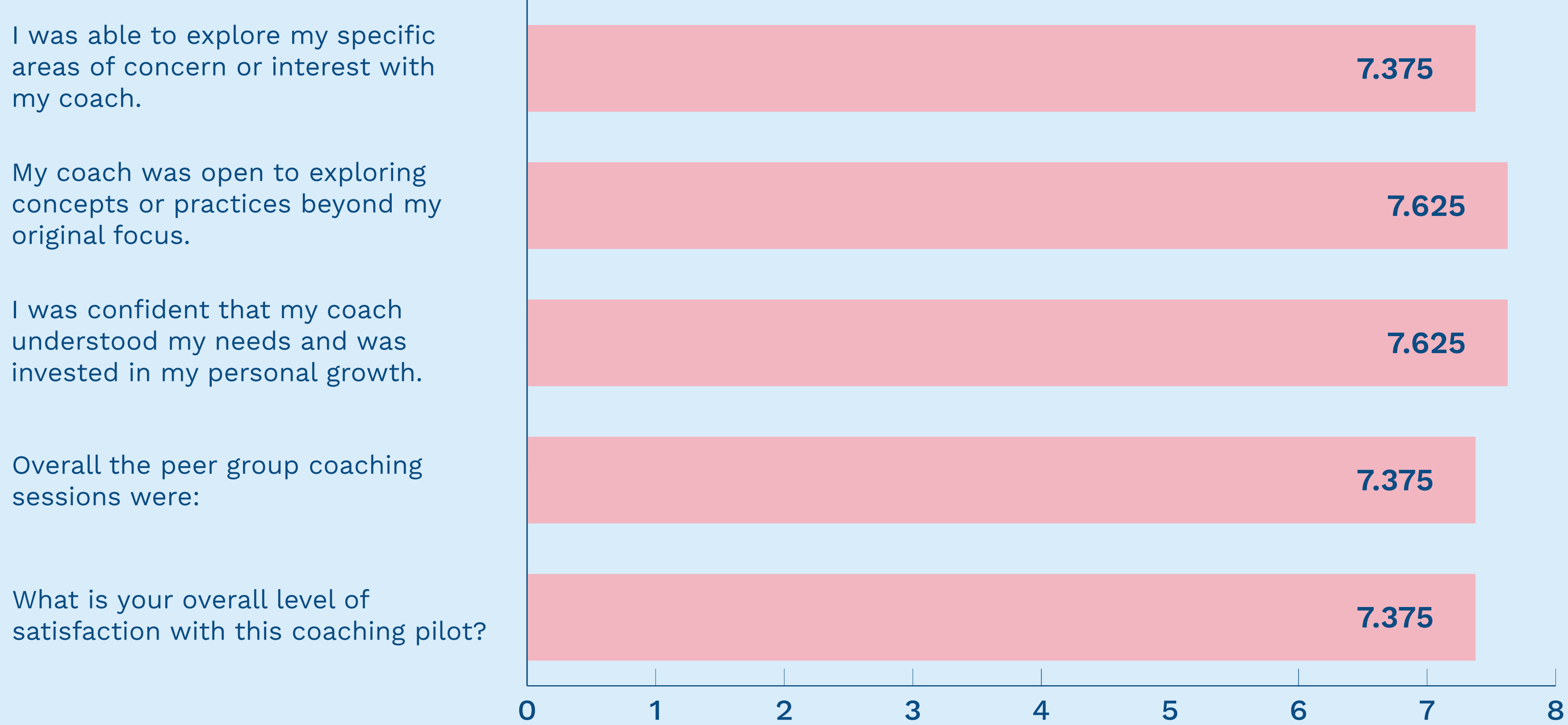
- Build leadership skills in real-time including active listening, accurately defining problems, coaching, systems thinking, giving and receiving feedback, and more
- Develop a strong network among the participants and address isolation and limiting beliefs through learning about colleagues' real-time challenges
- Provide a forum for discussing key learnings about self and leadership, including further understanding and implications of the DiSC assessment results at the group level

## Program Evaluation

### Overall Results

Eight of nine participants completed a program evaluation. Five participants responded that they plan to update their career goals; two responded that they may update their career goals; and one responded that they would not update their career goals. On average, participants engaged in 4.38 of 5 optional group coaching sessions.

The participants were also asked to rate aspects of their coaching partnership experience on a scale of 1 to 8 (1 = Not at all/About the same, to 8 = Very/highly meaningful).



### Qualitative Feedback

Participants shared their thoughts on the coaching experience - individual one-on-one sessions and the peer group coaching sessions:

- “This [coaching opportunity] has really given me the tools and confidence to pursue leadership/supervisory roles, something I was very unsure [about] before the program.”
- “A key benefit of the peer group coaching was the learning derived from the collective experiences of my colleagues. Understanding the common challenges and career paths within our library system, including those of more experienced librarians, was informative and ultimately supported a helpful reprioritization of my professional goals toward more attainable and impactful objectives.”
- “We were really able to dig to the root of my discomfort with change and confrontation. From there we explored different tools to overcome it, selected a few that I resonated with and put them into practice. I now feel like I have a toolbox of tricks ready to use when I need them.”
- “This coaching is a catalyst for meaningful and sustainable professional development for anyone at any level.”

