

Basic Tool Kit for NEAIR Mentors

Many find being a mentor a responsibility that comes with no formal training or official skill set. Although you may be experienced in IR, you have no idea what to expect as a mentor. Well the mentee does not really know what to expect either. So the NEAIR Membership Committee has come up with a few pointers and “tools” that may help you in your mentor role. Some of these are provided in direct response to the feedback we received from mentors and mentees; others are examples of “good practice” that we gleaned from other sources.

The 1st Contact

You make the 1st contact

It's up to you to break the ice and get the ball rolling. You are the experienced NEAIR member, so YOU should reach out to your mentee. As soon as you have been paired with a mentee, send a welcoming email.

A fact or two about yourself

Share some info about yourself and your association with NEAIR. For example, tell how long you have been in IR, and at your institution; what has been your experience as a member of NEAIR.

Ask broad question(s)

Give the mentee something to respond back to you by asking a couple of questions that are easy, non-threatening, and quick to answer. Maybe ask if they are new to IR, new to their institution, and/or new to NEAIR.

Set the expectations

Relieve some of your anxiety, and theirs, by indicating that you are happy to serve as resource person and that you are definitely not an expert on everything. You welcome questions, but your responses may suggest a referral to colleagues or other resources.

Contact methods

Be sure to indicate the best and/or preferred ways to contact you. Indicate whether or not you are planning to attend the conference and if so, try to arrange to meet your mentee there.

Encourage a response back

End by encouraging (expecting, actually) a response from them.

If you can't find just the right words for the 1st contact, try some of the text in the attached sample.

(Continued on back)

Additional Pointers

Attending the conference?

If you are attending the annual conference and your mentee is too, make every effort to meet up with them at a SPECIFIC PLACE & TIME. Please do not leave this to chance. Many complaints from mentees have come from situations when the mentor indicated that they would meet at the conference and they never “hooked up”. BE SPECIFIC with time and place. If you miss the mentee for some reason, LEAVE A MESSAGE on their hotel phone. As a committed mentor, please make every effort to set an example for what a mentor *should* be (your mentee will likely be a mentor some day!).

I’m not the expert on THAT!

When mentor pairings are done, the committee makes every effort to match mentee interests with mentor experience. However, these matches are NEVER perfect. It’s best if you indicate that you are happy to serve as a RESOURCE person and you are not an expert on everything in the IR world. You can offer to direct them to other colleagues or to point them to other resources on a topic. (See extensive list of links on AIR’s website <http://www.airweb.org/>.)

I never hear from the mentee!

After the initial contact via email and/or at the conference, you may not hear from the individual unless YOU initiate a follow-up. Sometimes newcomers are introverts, shy, overwhelmed, uncomfortable (don’t want to appear dumb) or just plain unclear that they can and should contact you (although you may have said it multiple times that they could). Put a notation on

your calendar to send them a quick email every 3-4 months just to ask, “How are you doing?” Usually they will respond back that they are fine and thanks for asking and that’s it. Often this quick contact may spark more contact from them because you reached out. Always – you will have brightened their day and lightened their load, because you made the effort to show that you care!

The number one negative feedback from mentees was that THEY NEVER HEARD FROM THEIR MENTORS either after the first contact or after the conference.

Apparently there is lack of interest in what I can offer as a mentor!

Well, this may be the rare case in some pairings, but if you both have the same understanding about the program, this may be avoided. At some point early in your communications, be sure to gently but clearly find out their expectations, and if they differ from those of the program, reaffirm what you (and the program) *can* do.

Maintaining Contact

The NEAIR Mentor Program asks that you attempt to contact your mentee several times during the year (even though you told the mentee to contact you). As mentioned above, it is very helpful to put it on your calendar to email them every 3-4 months just to say, “How’s it going?” It’s short and effective! You can take the opportunity to ask additional questions such as “What projects are you working on?” or “What are your biggest challenges?” Share your own challenges with IR and steps you have found helpful in meeting them.

Attachment

Sample Text

Mentor's 1st Contact with Mentee Via Email

Yesterday I was pleased to receive word that I have been paired with you in the NEAIR mentoring program. I look forward to being a resource for you and hope that we can meet sometime soon.

I've been a member of NEAIR for about 10 or so years (since I joined XYZ College) and have found our colleagues in the organization to be very friendly and helpful. They really are into networking and supporting each other. I hope you will have the same experience.

The Mentor Program Coordinator provided me with your responses to the Mentor Request Form and I see that you have indicated that setting up an IR office is the most important area. Are you a newcomer to the field, to ABC College, and/or to NEAIR?

By the way, I am attending the annual conference in Saratoga Springs and will arrive late Saturday afternoon. If you are planning to arrive that day too, perhaps we could meet at the "Welcome Reception" which is from 5:30 to 6:30 pm? Let me know if this fits with your itinerary. If you will arrive on Sunday, then let's meet at the Mentor Program & Newcomers Reception at 4:10pm.

I look forward to hearing from you. Feel free to contact me by phone or email.