



NEAIR

North East Association for Institutional Research
A guiding light for your institutional research community

Developing and Sustaining an Effective Mentoring Relationship

Mentor Program Toolkit

Contents

- *Principles of a Successful Mentoring Relationship*
- *Understanding Your Roles*
- *Conducting Mentor-Mentee Sessions*
- *Establishing Goals*
- *Processes for Continuous Feedback*
- *Celebrations*
- *Common Mentoring Relationship Obstacles and How to Address Them*

Principles of a Successful Mentoring Relationship

A successful mentoring relationship involves effort and commitment from both the mentor and the mentee. Below are five principles for achieving a positive outcome.

Cultivate: Work hard to develop a trusting relationship with each other. This should be a safe place to express excitement as well as frustration. Remember that you will get what you put into this program.

Feedback: Understanding the value of feedback is crucial to developing a productive mentor/mentee relationship. Regular feedback will allow mentors the chance to improve their mentoring styles, and it will enable mentees opportunities to receive feedback on their efforts. Both partners have the option to be heard.

Inquire: Ask questions. Mentees, chances are, you will be in similar (if not the same) situations as your mentor has experienced. Don't be afraid to ask questions in the safe space you have cultivated together. You are here to learn. Use the feedback you get from the mentor to improve your professional skill set. Mentors use the feedback they get from the mentee to enhance the mentoring relationship and learning experience.

Honesty: Forge a mutually beneficial relationship. This is a partnership that requires effort on the part of both the mentee and the mentor. If you feel the relationship is one-sided or the other person is not pulling their weight, bring it up in your next meeting.

Respect: Be respectful to each other. You have volunteered to be a part of this; treating each other with mutual respect will go a long way in accomplishing your goals.



Laying the Groundwork

Understanding Your Roles

Both mentors and mentees should schedule regular meetings to discuss goals, achievements, obstacles or roadblocks, and resources for the IR/IE professional. Mentors may not be an expert in every area of IR. Sometimes, mentors may refer their mentee to another person for advice.

Mentors

Mentors are exemplary members of the IR/IE field who encourage life-long learning. They have valuable experience and knowledge of the field to pass on to mentees.

Mentors will make the first contact with mentees. It's up to mentors to break the ice and get the ball rolling with a welcome email message.

Mentees

Mentees are typically newer, less-experienced members eager to learn and embark on a professional development track. Mentees and mentors should be ready to tackle the professional development goals and mentees should speak openly with their mentors about their career goals.

Contact Methods

Be sure to indicate the best and/or preferred ways to contact each other. Indicate whether or not you are planning to attend the NEAIR annual conference, and if so, try to arrange to meet each other at the conference.

Mentors take the initiative to schedule regular meetings during the year. Placing recurring meetings on the calendar fosters accountability.



Celebrations!

Take time during the year to pause and celebrate milestones and special events. It could be locking an IPEDS survey, delivering an awesome presentation, learning a new skill, developing a dashboard, presenting at a conference, or earning a certificate. Keep each other abreast of successes, small and large.

Celebrate victories big and small!

Conducting Mentor-Mentee Sessions

During the initial meeting, you may want to discuss:

- *Some information about yourself (e.g., how long you have been in IR and at your institution; other institutions where you have worked; what your experience has been as a member of NEAIR)*
- *Timeline, length, and frequency of meetings*
- *Format for the meetings (virtual, in-person, or hybrid)*
- *The mentee's professional goals*

During the initial meeting, it's also good practice to share information about personalities, learning styles, and some of the information written on the initial pairing questionnaire. Some people may be more reserved, while others are very forthright. There are personality tests available online that both mentors and mentees can use to understand each other's styles.

After you share this information, it is time to discuss the terms and goals of your mentoring relationship. What goals do you want to focus on over the year? See the section on developing SMART goals for more guidance.

Remember to define the information and challenges you discuss during these meetings, such as if they are strictly confidential or if the mentor can discuss the mentee's concerns with others who might be a resource for the mentee. Remember, to avoid damaging the relationship, get permission before sharing any content from your sessions with others.



Establishing Goals

SMART Goals. When creating your professional development plan for the program year, remember that not all goals are created equal. Goals should be specific enough to focus on the scope of the work in the mentee's portfolio but broad enough to impact professional growth. Furthermore, goals should be realistically achievable to complete within the scheduled period. To help with the process of creating your mentorship goals, utilize **SMART** principles:



- **S**trategic – Choose goals specific to your individual development and aligned with your institution's or office's mission.
- **M**easurable – Can be qualitative or quantitative.
- **A**chievable: Choose goals that are actionable and achievable with available resources.
- **R**ealistic: Choose goals that are realistic and relevant to your plan.
- **T**ime-bound – Choose goals tied to a specific timeline to allow you to focus on achieving them in a timely manner.

A **SMART** goal could look like:

I want to focus on developing effective relationships with data users at my college. My goal is to improve data users' satisfaction with the reports produced by my office by being responsive to their feedback. To do this, I will identify two or three data consumers at my college, discuss their uses for data, solicit their feedback on data resources they use, and implement changes to better meet their needs. Follow up with a means to gather input from the users on their satisfaction.

Creating a Process for Continuous Improvement Feedback

To ensure the success of the mentor/mentee relationship, both participants must be willing to engage in open and honest feedback.

Several times during the year, mentees should consider these questions and discuss their responses with their mentors:

1. In what ways are you, as a mentee, developing as a result of mentorship?
2. What extra support, guidance, challenges, or experiences could you, as a mentee, benefit from right now to continue your growth?
3. What obstacles or challenges are impeding your progress? What resources are available to you? What strategies may help you address these challenges?



Voices from the Field

"As a veteran IR person, being a mentor allows me to give back and stay connected. I am a one-person office, so I don't have other opportunities to support colleagues/staff in their professional development. Plus, being a mentor allows me to be of service, and it keeps me fresh to learn from someone when they are still fairly new in the field."

Christopher Vinger
Director of Institutional Research,
Planning, & Assessment
New York School of Interior Design

Attending the NEAIR conference?

If both the mentee and the mentor are attending the conference, make every effort to meet up at a specific place and time. Don't leave this to chance, and don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to start the year meaningfully. Find at least 15 minutes to say hello in person. Either the mentor or the mentee can make first contact.

Connect!



Be there for each other

You are not alone! Mentors guide those new to the profession and help newcomers navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and make well-informed choices that align with their goals and aspirations. Mentors have the opportunity to bolster confidence during times of uncertainty. They serve as a sounding board, lending a patient ear – often to mentees in one-person offices. Mentors benefit as well! Make a promise to show up and support each other throughout the year (and possibly beyond).



Common Mentoring Obstacles and How to Address Them

Interruptions: Your partner may have difficulty carving out uninterrupted time for your meetings and get distracted by emails and other communications. In this case, try to meet in a non-office space, such as a coffee shop or quiet outside area.

Detached: Your partner may have difficulty sharing their opinions or providing honest feedback. If so, find common ground. Do you share a similar interest or hobby? Make a personal connection—encourage honesty from your partner by directly requesting their opinion and feedback and asking open-ended questions.

Waning Interest: It may seem like your partner has lost interest in working on their goals or maybe canceling your mentorship meetings. Begin making detailed agendas for each session to discuss goals and check in with your partner about their workload – they may be in a particularly high-volume phase and unable to allocate the time to meet. They may be able to give you an estimate of when this high-volume phase will end. Remind them that mentorship meetings are intended to help them in the long-run and investing time in mentorship is a worthwhile investment.

Mentors aren't expected to have all the answers

When mentor pairings are done, the committee makes every effort to match mentee interests with mentor experience. However, one person can't be an expert in all things IR/IE. Mentors can offer to direct mentees to a colleague in the field who might be better equipped to assist the mentee or point them to other resources on a topic.

See an extensive list of resources on AIR's website:
<http://www.airweb.org/>.

Wrapping up Your Mentoring Relationship

The NEAIR mentoring program is intended to last one year, from November to the end of October. As you approach the end of the program year, schedule some time to reflect on your experiences and what each of you have learned over the year.

Revisit the goals you created at the beginning of the program. How have you progressed toward your goals? Discuss your next steps for professional growth and what might be in store for your future. You may have set short- and long-term goals at the beginning of the program. Re-evaluate your long-term goals and identify ways that you can begin to take action toward those goals.

