



# Youth Friendly Guide to Mentorship

**Mentorship makes work environments energizing and is a key ingredient in the engagement of adults and youth alike.** The relationships formed between mentors and mentees don't just strengthen social ties and retention—they also help **pass on the kind of information that can't be written down in an orientation binder.**

Formalizing your mentorship program is key to capacity building, workplace integration, and providing on-going support for youth.

Mentorship can take many forms, from **one on one partnerships** to **peer mentorship by experienced youth**. Mentorship can take place in person, or even entirely online. There is no one-size fits all mentorship program.

Remember that your program should always be **focused on the needs and growth of the mentee**. The young people involved in your mentorship program should have a clear voice in how it is implemented: youth know what we need.

## Mentors can be:

- Experienced youth
- Volunteer coordinators
- Staff supervisors
- Members of the Board of Directors
- Alumni, including ex-staff members and 'aged-out' youth volunteers
- Outside advisors and partners
- Knowledgeable supporters

## Mentorship 101

Here is a basic, step-by-step guide to workplace mentorship that can help guide your own program design:

### 1. Planning and Formalization:

- **Assess the resources** (human, financial, and social) that can reasonably be committed to your mentorship program and **formalize its structure**.
- **Set targets** for what you want it to accomplish. How many youth will take part? When and how will you evaluate mentees' experiences?

### 2. Matching and Screening:

- Make sure to **learn about each young mentee's career interests** and strive to match them with mentors who have relevant experience.



- **Not everyone is fit to be a mentor.** Identify those people who have both the relevant expertise and the specific skills of **listening, supporting, and stepping back** required for successful mentorship.

### 3. On-going Training:

- **Provide specific training in mentorship** to your mentors, as it will be a new experience for many of them.
- **Explicitly outline the mentor and mentee's expectations** beforehand to prevent misunderstandings, and check-in throughout the relationship to make sure both parties have the support they need to meet these goals.
- **Be flexible.** Maybe a mentor will find they need strategies for time-management coaching. Or maybe a mentee in finance will discover an interest in program delivery. A good mentorship program will **adapt to meet these needs** as they come up.

### 4. Following Up

- **Mentorship is a long-term commitment**, so remember to follow-up. Check with mentees to see how the relationship is helping them achieve their goals, and with mentors to see how the relationship is changing their own work experience.
- **Schedule regular evaluations for your program** and don't be afraid to make changes. Adjustments are usually necessary to meet the needs of the individuals the program is meant to serve.

A well-executed mentorship program makes a world of difference in avoiding tokenistic youth engagement. For the young people involved, **it shows that you're committed to our growth and our development of the skills required to do valuable, meaningful work.**

**Having a point person** to contact is another crucial aspect of mentorship. Young people new to an organization and its culture benefit immensely from having truly open access to someone who can answer questions, provide guidance, or even just help navigate bureaucracy.

It makes a world of difference to a young person to know that **someone in the organization feels genuinely implicated in our personal growth, goals, and development.** Personal relationships in an organization improve retention and build lasting commitments.

Mentorship programs require an investment of time and energy, but they pay enormous dividends as real youth-adult partnerships are forged and youth invest themselves in your organization and its mission.

## Success Story

The Canadian Environmental Network's Youth Caucus established a formal, **cross-Canada mentorship program** linking young environmental leaders with experienced mentors in the field. The focus of the program is on supporting youth-led projects within an intergenerational movement.

As with any successful mentorship program, the CEN closely monitored its effectiveness. They researched and **released a comprehensive report**<sup>1</sup> in 2010 that surveyed both youth and mentors on their experiences.

**This kind of critical reflection on successes, challenges, and solutions within a mentorship program is the best sign that the program is responding dynamically to the young partners' needs.**

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Environmental Network's Youth Caucus, Daigle, and Peterson, "Mentorship Pilot Project Report."