



# **Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners (MTCP)**



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## Welcome

**Thank you for taking an interest in building positive mentorship Relationships. We are here to support your journey as a lifelong learner!**

The **Emerging Leadership Working Group** is an ongoing effort of the [Western Collaborative Conservation Network](#) (WCCN) that aims to empower the next generation of collaborative conservation leaders across the American West. We strive towards a vision of a future in which a broad and inclusive network of diverse leaders are working together with communities to steward Western landscapes. We host an ongoing and dynamic forum that connects emerging leaders with mentors, resources, and peers. As part of the WCCN, this working group's reach extends across 11 western states, with over 560 students and professionals engaged in collaborative conservation.

[Crowd Conservation](#), as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, has partnered with this working group to achieve our goals to support emerging leaders. We created this toolkit to support conservation practitioners in expanding opportunities for professional development and improving our conservation outcomes. Here you will find mentorship best practices as well as reflection prompts, worksheets, and checklists to assist you in your learning and in building positive mentorship relationships.

We want to emphasize that **this is a working draft**, created for the WCCN in-person conference, [Confluence](#), and will continue to be updated over time.

### **PLEASE GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK!**

As you go through this toolkit, please consider what you find helpful, and what you would like to see more of - and then fill out this form to give us your feedback!

[FEEDBACK FORM HERE](#)

<https://forms.gle/vb1VAmqYdWWHXCSP9>

***Thank you to our Crowd Conservation team:***

Nicole Reese

Paula Short

***Thank you to the Toolkit Research Team:***

Aireona Raschke – Center for Collaborative Conservation

Alejandro Collins – New Mexico Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute

Barb Kipreos – San Mateo Resource Conservation District

Challie Facemire – Central Arizona Conservation Alliance

Jessica Archibald – Southwest Decision Resources

Keara Hudler – Independent researcher

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Kendeda Fund

Crowd Conservation

***Thank you to the supporters of this toolkit!***

Thank you to the WCCN Emerging Leadership Working Group for their support over the past two years to launch and continue this project. We would like to give a special shoutout to Travis Anklam as he was so heavily involved in the early drafts of this effort.

This toolkit is part of a research project on mentorship best practices in the field of conservation.

The information provided here came from many different sources. Our research team conducted interviews as well as informal and formal conversations. We also completed a literature review, which is provided in the Resources section. A peer-reviewed research paper is in-progress.

**Thank you to all interviewees and those who have shared their time  
and resources along the way!**

## **Why This Toolkit Exists**

We believe that conservation practitioners can benefit greatly from mentorship relationships. Those working in cross-boundary conservation in particular can benefit from these kinds of relationships as **“collaborative conservation uses practices that center human well-being, promote equitable participation, and acknowledge power dynamics,”** [Center for Collaborative Conservation](#).

Mentorship is more than just guidance, it is about building meaningful relationships, fostering leadership, and creating a culture of shared learning. Those who receive mentorship often go on to become mentors themselves, continuing the cycle of knowledge exchange and empowerment.

As we explored mentorship resources specific to the conservation field, we identified a gap, both in available information and in the number of formal, established mentorship programs. In many industries such as higher education, banking, tech, law, and business, mentorship is a well-established pathway for career growth, professional development, and leadership training. While conservation is no less dependent on the transfer of wisdom and expertise, resources dedicated to mentorship in this sector remain scarce. A chief aim of this mentorship toolkit is to help close that gap.

This toolkit was designed to help individuals seeking to build mentorship relationships as well as organizations seeking to develop and refine mentorship opportunities that make a lasting impact. Whether you are reaching out to make a mentorship connection, launching a new initiative, or improving an existing framework, this guide offers practical tools, structured methodologies, and best practices to support meaningful mentor-mentee relationships.

This toolkit covers:

- **Building Effective Mentorship Programs** – How organizations can set up mentorship initiatives, best practices for structuring relationships, and fostering meaningful connections.
- **The Mentor-Mentee Journey** – Skills for successful mentorship, communication strategies, goal-setting, and overcoming common challenges.
- **Printables & Actionable Tools** – Worksheets, checklists, templates for mentorship agreements, conversation starters, and progress tracking tools.
- **Insights & Real-World Impact** – Lessons learned from successful conservation mentorship programs.

## ***About Our Research***

This toolkit draws on two parallel bodies of work. First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with mentors, mentees, and mentorship program coordinators working in the conservation and collaborative conservation fields. Interviewees were recruited through the Western Collaborative Conservation Network and related professional networks. Interviews were conducted by members of the research team, recorded with participants' consent, and analyzed for common themes and insights. Second, we completed a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed and practitioner research on mentorship best practices in conservation, sustainability, higher education, and related fields. Key sources included research on workforce development, youth engagement, diversity and inclusion in STEM, and organizational mentorship programs. Quotes and findings from both the interviews and literature review are woven throughout this toolkit, and the full bibliography is available in the Resources section. A peer-reviewed paper reporting on our research findings is currently in progress.



# 1. What is Mentorship?

## Defining Mentorship

We use the word mentorship in this toolkit because it is widely recognized, but the scope is larger than only an early career mentee paired with a later in career mentor.

Broadly defined, mentorship is the “transfer of institutional knowledge and memory” (Cervený et al., 2022). **We view it as the process by which advice, guidance, and expertise is imparted from one person to another for the purpose of professional or personal development.** A mentor can be a professional who can offer guidance based on their own lived experience in their field, or someone with a different perspective from which they draw their knowledge or insights.



At its best, mentorship takes a holistic and reciprocal approach to the growth of each other, incorporating a variety of strategies and tools in the process.

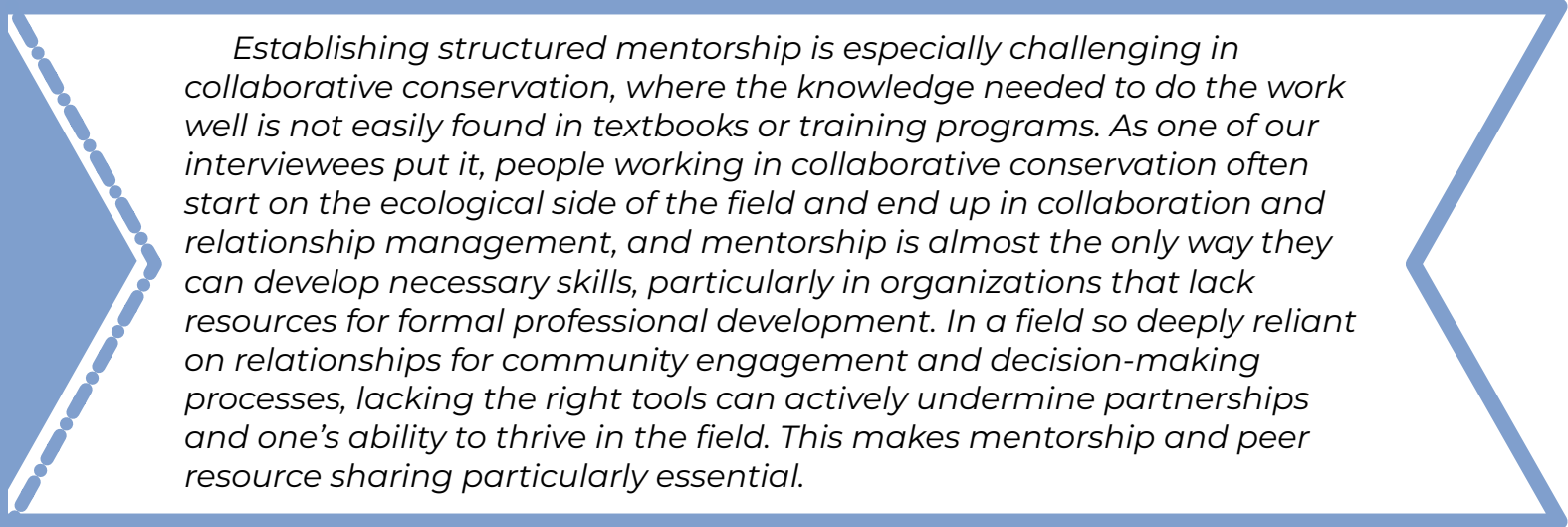
Mentorship incorporates elements of skill building, professional development, networking, coaching, guidance & advice, and listening & feedback. The interplay of these elements is the essence of a successful mentorship relationship or program.

In collaborative conservation, mentorship is best understood through the relationships that help people meet the needs they have as they move through the field. Some of those needs are learning technical skills, but mentorship can also encompass understanding why a partnership functions the way it does, how to build trust in partnerships, how to recover from mistakes, what rules and regulations are involved in land management, and how to stay connected to one’s sense of purpose and values while navigating decision-making processes or conflict. A single person usually does not meet all of those needs in mentorship, and most people rely on a network of relationships.

For this reason, mentorship comes from many directions, including supervisors, elders, younger colleagues, people in different fields, and partners outside their organizations. The most important forms of mentorship are also often not the most formal. What these relationships have in common is that they give people the guidance, encouragement, and context they need in order to participate in collaborative conservation more fully.

## Mentorship in Conservation

Unlike some fields with standardized career trajectories, conservation professionals often come from diverse backgrounds, spanning education, life experiences, personal passions, and profound connections to landscapes, ecosystems, and species. This diversity is a strength, but it also presents challenges in establishing structured mentorship that supports professionals at every stage, whether they are just entering the field or looking to guide the next generation.



*Establishing structured mentorship is especially challenging in collaborative conservation, where the knowledge needed to do the work well is not easily found in textbooks or training programs. As one of our interviewees put it, people working in collaborative conservation often start on the ecological side of the field and end up in collaboration and relationship management, and mentorship is almost the only way they can develop necessary skills, particularly in organizations that lack resources for formal professional development. In a field so deeply reliant on relationships for community engagement and decision-making processes, lacking the right tools can actively undermine partnerships and one's ability to thrive in the field. This makes mentorship and peer resource sharing particularly essential.*

Collaborative conservation is heavily dependent on relationships in order to effectively engage with communities and decision-making processes, and a lot of what determines whether someone can thrive in this field is not usually taught explicitly. New practitioners are often expected to learn through trial and error how to build trust, work across differences, navigate partnership dynamics, know who holds power or influence over decisions, and make sense of the history, tension, and informal norms that shape how work happens. Mentors can provide mentees with the direct advice, feedback, and context needed to navigate these projects and relationships throughout their career.

*Research on mentorship in conservation and related fields supports this. Cervený et al. (2022), writing about mentorship within U.S. Fish and Wildlife, describe mentoring relationships as designed to provide employee support and improve career prospects. Cooke and O'Connor (2014) describes the best mentors as exceptional listeners who offer advice without dictating, a distinction that matters especially in conservation, where practitioners are navigating complex, values-driven decisions. Baral et al. (2024) found that mentoring is central to the employee development process within federal natural resource agencies, serving both organizational goals of retention and individual wellbeing.*



### **Mentorship Program Spotlight: WeConservePA**

The Conservation Professional Mentorship Program developed by [WeConservePA](#) aims to connect seasoned professionals in Pennsylvania's conservation movement with younger or less experienced professionals in mentor-mentee relationships. Mentees receive guidance and support as they develop professional skills, set goals, and navigate career choices. Mentors hone their leadership and communication skills, and benefit from exposure to fresh perspectives and new ideas.

The partnerships facilitate the sharing of knowledge and formation of productive relationships throughout the Pennsylvania conservation landscape, ultimately helping cultivate and empower a new generation of conservationists.

## 2. The Case for Mentorship

### The Power of Mentorship in Conservation

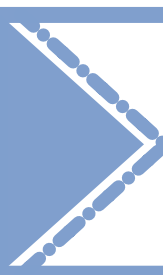
The relational complexity of collaborative conservation is part of what makes it possible to achieve together things we cannot achieve alone, but it can also make the field hard to enter and navigate equitably. People who already have trusted relationships or mentors are far better positioned to enter the field and stay than those who are left to figure it out on their own. In a field that is still disproportionately white and often shaped by middle-class norms and access, informal pathways tend to advantage the people who already face the fewest barriers.

This has consequences not only for those who get to thrive in the field, but for how well the field can meet the challenges ahead. Climate change is increasing the scale and complexity of conservation challenges, and the field will need a broader range of knowledge and lived experience to meet those challenges well. If the future of our field requires bringing more people into this work, supporting them in staying, and building the capacity needed for climate change, then we cannot keep leaving so much of what matters to be learned by chance.

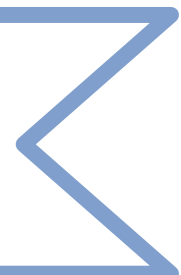
*Research bears this out. Programs that intentionally connect youth from marginalized backgrounds with conservation work have documented increases in self-efficacy, leadership confidence, and engagement in community-level conservation (Rauk et al., 2023; Weaver, 2021; Gregoire Taillefer et al., 2024). Weaver (2021), writing about a program working with Tohono O'odham students on the Arizona-Mexico border, found that restoration work can heal not just landscapes but cultural relationships as well. Livstrom et al. (2022) argue that transforming mentorship to be participatory and emancipatory produces better outcomes for mentees from underrepresented backgrounds than traditional hierarchical approaches.*

### Why Mentorship Matters

Mentorship has long been recognized as an essential tool for professional growth, knowledge transfer, and leadership development across industries. In the field of conservation, where the challenges are complex, interdisciplinary, and deeply tied to environmental stewardship, mentorship plays a particularly vital role; in collaborative conservation, projects rarely fail because there is no technical solution. More often, they run into issues on the relational side, such as weak trust, breakdowns in communication, etc. Mentorship strengthens those relational foundations by helping practitioners develop the skills and judgment that formal training rarely covers.



*Our interviews reinforced this point. Participants noted that the kind of knowledge transfer that matters most in collaborative conservation - understanding why a partnership functions the way it does, how to recover from a misstep, how to read the informal dynamics in a room - is rarely documented anywhere.*



Beyond individual projects, mentorship is essential for succession planning and transfer of institutional knowledge. As experienced professionals retire, they often take with them important relationships, wisdom, and local ecological knowledge that are not written down. Well-structured mentorship creates pathways for that knowledge to be carried forward strengthening the resilience and effectiveness of conservation efforts. This need is further underscored by the fact that many conservation organizations, especially non-government organizations (NGOs) working at the grassroots level, typically face capacity issues and significant resource constraints. It makes sense that these organizations would use mentorship as a lever to retain organizational knowledge, expand capacity and energize their members.

By investing in mentorship, organizations can:

- Ensure continuity in conservation knowledge and best practices.
- Build succession plans and ensure sustainable operations;
- Promote diversity and inclusion, helping new voices and perspectives thrive, innovate, and connect with their communities.
- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration, bridging gaps between research, policy, and community engagement.
- Increase long-term commitment to conservation careers, reduce burnout and career stagnation, and retain the many passionate and talented people in our field.
- Improve recruitment of new talent and retention of members and/or employees. Mentorship is an important signal regarding the culture of an organization and how it values talent.

Mentorship can provide guidance, perspective, and support in shaping meaningful careers in conservation. Beyond individual career development, mentorship enhances conservation as a discipline. Many ecological challenges demand collaborative problem-solving, interdisciplinary approaches, and sustained commitment that can only be learned through shared experiences.

## Why we created this Toolkit

This toolkit exists to fill the gap in mentorship resources available to conservation professionals. Here, the [Western Collaborative Conservation Network](#) and [Crowd Conservation](#) provide information and resources promoting the power of mentorship for individuals and organizations working in conservation. This document offers practical examples, tools, printable worksheets, and strategies to pursue mentorship relationships. Whether you want to become a mentor or mentee, find the right mentorship opportunities, or build a formal mentorship program for an organization, this toolkit provides the foundation for mentorship success.

Mentorship is more than a career tool. It is a force to retain talent and institutional memory, support individual well-being as well as build community, and cultivate strong organizational culture. Well-structured mentorship programs, like those pioneered by [The Wildlife Society](#), [Project Wild](#), [We Conserve PA](#), [CoalitionWild](#), and the [Society of American Foresters](#), prove that investing in mentorship strengthens entire organizations. These programs strengthen the bridge between generations of conservationists, ensuring that hard-earned expertise, research insights, and practical field skills are passed down effectively.

Above all, this toolkit is designed to be uplifting and empowering. We hope readers walk away inspired to pursue mentorship, confident that the insights, strategies, and tools presented here will provide meaningful guidance. Conservation is a collaborative effort, and mentorship is at its heart—preserving knowledge, fostering innovation, and encouraging collaboration.

### ***Mentorship Program Spotlight: National Association of Wetland Managers***

The National Association of Wetland Managers offers [MARSH \(Mentorship Assisted Resource and Support Hub\)](#) to address “the growing gap between the demand for wetland professionals and the supply of candidates trained to begin working in wetlands.”

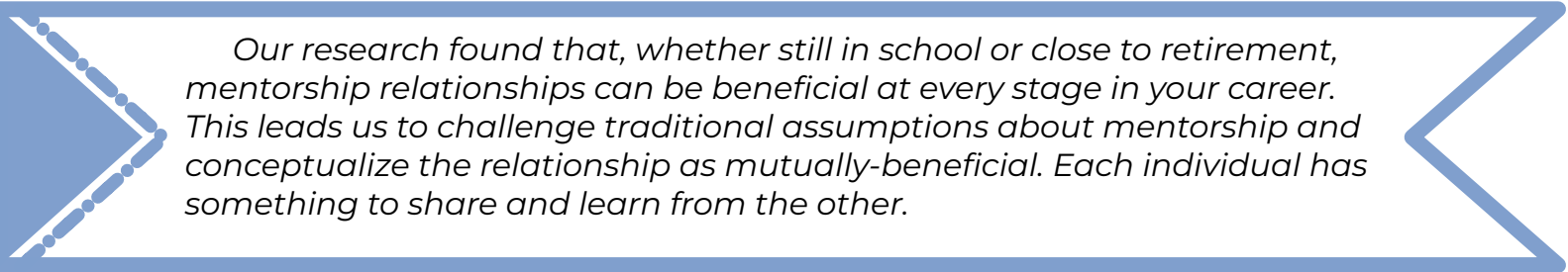
*Here's how MARSH is structured:*

- The program calls for applications for mentors in July; the application period for mentees is in September; matches are notified in December.
- The program is a one-year experience for students, early career professionals, and people transitioning between careers;
- Mentees receive networking, experience, and 1:1 coaching;
- During the yearlong program, participants are expected to commit to 3-5 hours each month for mentoring, meetings (online and in-person), networking and learning opportunities.

### 3. Before You Begin

We have created this toolkit to include three main sections, resources for [Mentees](#) (those seeking mentorship, Section 4), [Mentors](#) (those offering support, Section 5), and Organizations (those who are promoting mentorship relationships within their institutions, Section 6).

You can also find a section on informal mentoring opportunities (Section 7), including peer mentoring and non-traditional forms of mentorship, to help you think outside the box in your approach to mentorship relationships.



*Our research found that, whether still in school or close to retirement, mentorship relationships can be beneficial at every stage in your career. This leads us to challenge traditional assumptions about mentorship and conceptualize the relationship as mutually-beneficial. Each individual has something to share and learn from the other.*

Regardless of titles, like “mentor”, “mentee”, or “mentorship program coordinator”, each individual in a mentorship relationship contributes their professional expertise and personal background to build valuable and trusting mentorship relationships. **This section lays the foundation for understanding what successful mentorship looks like and provides valuable background before transitioning into the section of this toolkit with which you most align.**

## Self-Assessment

**We encourage you to consider yourself as both a mentee and a mentor;** recognize that you have both something to give and receive in every professional or personal relationship. Ultimately, this approach makes us better mentees, mentors, and advocates for mentorship within our organizations.

It is important to identify your own strengths, opportunities for improvement, and reflect on how you want to grow as an individual so that you can articulate these to help you navigate and engage in a mentorship relationship.

In order to articulate what you are seeking and what you have to offer, we have created reflective worksheets, resources and activities in this and the following sections.

**Skills to Build and Offer:** With the understanding that we all have knowledge gaps and skills we can grow, we created this list of skills that we have found to be beneficial working in collaborative conservation, and you may use this list to help generate ideas of what skills you would like to seek support in building or that you have to offer. **MTCP Tool 1: Skills Beyond School.**

**Seeking Mentorship:** We created the **MTCP Tool 2: Understanding Your "Why"** to help you identify what you are seeking in a mentorship relationship.

**Offering Support:** We created the **MTCP Tool 3: Ready for Mentorship** to help you articulate what you are able to offer in support and evaluate your capacity to do so.

## Building Mentor-Mentee Compatibility

### **Why Compatibility Matters for the right "Match"**

A mentorship relationship flourishes when mentor and mentee connect over shared values, communication styles, personality, and professional goals. While differences can bring rich perspectives, **compatibility creates the trust and safety needed for open dialogue, meaningful growth, and long-term engagement.**

In conservation, where mentorship often includes both technical knowledge and deeply personal motivations, it is crucial to ensure the relationship feels both productive and emotionally supportive. **A thoughtful match reduces the risk of misaligned expectations and increases the chance for transformational learning.**

Our interviews add an important dimension here: mentors and mentees who invest in understanding each other as whole people, not just as professional counterparts, build the kind of trust that makes honest feedback possible. As one interviewee described it, strong mentorship benefits from caring about each other in both professional and personal capacities. Getting to know each other's goals, preferences, and communication styles early on is worth the time.

Research by Straus et al. (2013) found that when mentors fail to prioritize the mentee's best interests, mentoring relationships often fail. This is not just about the mentor being well-intentioned. It requires actively listening to what the mentee needs rather than projecting what success should look like.

***"Being a mentor is dynamic, and if you're not dynamic in response to the people that you're mentoring, then you're not a good mentor, period."***

### **Core Elements of Compatibility**

Think about these dimensions when considering matching for mentor-mentee relationships:

- **Goal Alignment:** Do both individuals share similar expectations for what mentorship can achieve?
- **Communication Style:** Are they compatible in how they prefer to share ideas—structured vs. spontaneous, direct vs. reflective?
- **Learning Preferences:** Are their preferred styles of learning aligned or compatible? Hands-on guidance vs. philosophical conversation; telling vs. showing; etc. Aligning styles makes learning smoother.
- **Field Expertise & Interests:** Does the mentor's background resonate with the mentee's career path or passions within conservation?
- **Values & Vision:** Are their professional ethics, personal motivations, and leadership philosophies harmonious or at least mutually respectful?

When relationships are able to address these components, mentorship becomes more effective and fulfilling for both parties. It is important to note - a mentee does not need to only have one mentorship relationship - as one mentor may not meet all of their interests/expertise. This is also true for mentors, who can have several mentees at once, each with their own level of involvement and in its own stage of the relationship. Individuals can have a team of mentors and mentees throughout their life; these relationships can, and will, also change over time.

## Activities for Making Matches

### *The "Chemistry Session"*

Compatibility between the mentor and mentee is essential; whether part of an official mentorship or not, consider a "Chemistry Session" to check for compatibility. A Chemistry Session is a **low-pressure, introductory conversation** designed to help potential mentorship pairs explore alignment before making a commitment to stay connected. Think of it as a "trial run" for relational fit.

For those that manage or coordinate mentorship programs, explore "**MTCP Tool 4: The Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet**" to get started with ensuring compatibility and alignment of participants.

### **Objectives of a Chemistry Session**

- Build rapport through informal conversation.
- Clarify personal and professional goals.
- Discuss expectations and boundaries.
- Identify communication preferences and styles.
- Reflect on whether there is enough natural synergy to proceed.

### **Chemistry Session Format**

**Duration:** 30–60 minutes

**Method:** In-person or video call, ideally in a relaxed setting.

**Facilitator:** Optional—can be self-led or guided by a program coordinator.

### ***Sample Questions for the Chemistry Session***

- "What inspired you to seek a mentorship relationship?"
- "What are you hoping to explore or accomplish?"
- "How do you like to give and receive feedback?"
- "How do you manage your time when balancing multiple priorities?"
- "What is your idea of a successful mentorship experience?"

Ending the session with an open-ended question like "Do you feel this connection could be mutually beneficial?" helps both parties assess the potential with honesty and grace.

## Next Steps After a Chemistry Session

- If compatibility is confirmed: proceed with scheduling initial goal-setting conversations and define communication cadence.
- If compatibility is uncertain: either give it one more exploratory meeting or seek a better match—with transparency and encouragement.
- If it is a clear mismatch: respectfully close out the interaction, affirming the value of the conversation, and explore alternative matches.

This section helps support **intentional matching strategies** for mentees, mentors, and mentorship program coordinators, while providing the tools for all parties to evaluate relational fit through a structured, yet organic, process.

This Chemistry Session forms the basis of your working relationship with your mentor. **MTCP Tool 9: Mentorship Agreement & Partnership Plan** is another potential resource for formalizing the plan of work for your mentorship if this would be beneficial for you. There you will sharpen the goals for both you and your mentor, share more about your “why” and establish some check-in points and even a quick look at the conclusion of the mentorship as well.



## 4. For Mentees - those seeking mentorship

### Benefits of Mentorship for Mentees

There are myriad benefits you can realize with a great mentor! These can include:

- Acquiring specific technical or professional skills
- Professional and personal networking
- Increased productivity
- An accountability partnership
- Career guidance
- Simply someone to bounce ideas off of or a safe space to ideate and grow

Mentees in conservation fields, especially collaborative conservation, see these benefits amplified because their work environment relies on relationship-building, networking, and consensus-building.

Our interview participants described the value of these relationships in terms that go beyond career advancement:

*"I personally think it's such an incredibly rich, important, soul-affirming relationship. Mentor-mentee relationships are just so influential and important when done right."*

### Understanding Your "Why"

Before reaching out to a mentor, take time to explore your motivations and expectations. If you have not done so already in Section 3, use the **MTCP Tool 2: Understanding Your "Why" checklist to identify what you seek in a mentorship relationship.**

Now that you have a clearer idea of why you are seeking a mentor, give some thought to what you would like from a mentorship relationship. This will be helpful to you, but especially helpful to your mentor in understanding how best to support you.

It is important to be clear on what you hope to give and receive in such a relationship. Consider these questions to better identify potential mentors and clarify requests for support:

1. Why are you looking for a mentor (i.e., the skills/insights/benefits you are hoping a mentor can impart)? Do you have a specific project in mind?
2. What is a realistic time commitment for you to make in a mentorship relationship? How much of a mentor's time do you think you will need to accomplish what you would like on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis?

3. Do you want a mentor within your organization? Someone in the community? Virtual? Does that matter?

It is important that you can communicate clearly with your potential mentor what you are seeking and what investment of time and expertise might be needed to accomplish your goals. Doing so will ensure your mentor understands what is being asked of them and if they can truly meet your needs.

## How do you find a mentor?

Now that you have given thought to why you want a mentor and what you believe are the makings of a great match given your goals, style, and compatibility, it is time to find your mentor, and it may be easier than you think. Below are some great places to look, and to make sure you are a good fit, consider using the **MTCP Tool 4: Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet**.

- **Within your organization.** If there is no formalized mentorship program at your organization, is there someone at work you see as a great leader, innovator, or just someone whose path seems informative for your own? If you are new to an organization, it may be difficult to identify someone, so do not be afraid to ask around. For some mentees, reaching out to someone inside the organization can be intimidating, but most leaders view a request for mentorship as demonstrative of an employee's growth mindset, and may also be honored by your inquiry.
- **Professional networks or associations.** Do you belong to a professional organization, such as the Western Collaborative Conservation Network, Society of American Foresters, The Wildlife Society, National Association of Environmental Professionals, or Association of Conflict Resolution? Those organizations typically offer ways for members to seek mentorship. How about local, land-based networks or place-based collaboratives, like watershed councils or conservation districts? These are great places to network and meet mentors with shared interests, background, and/or technical expertise.
- **Word of Mouth.** Ask friends/colleagues about potential mentors. It could be as simple as, "I'm writing my first grant application. Do you know anyone who writes a lot of grants that could offer me some tips?" If they do know someone, see if they would be willing to facilitate an introduction.
- **Use social media/the internet.** Post a request for support or ask your question on a social media page like LinkedIn and see what kind of response you get. You may not get a mentor per se, but you might get information on additional resources that could lead to finding one.
- **Conferences and Other Gatherings.** Do not be afraid to reach out to people that you meet at conferences and other gatherings. Even if they do not turn out to be a good fit as a mentor, they can be great contacts from other organizations who can help you in your search.

## Design your Mentor-Mentee Relationship for Success

From our research, we have learned that “time and talk” are the recipe for mentorship success. Establishing a cadence for regular engagement (meetings, calls, emails) is a key predictor of the health and success of a mentor relationship.

When mentorship relationships or programs fail, lack of time investment and poor communication often emerge as the top reasons. Learning styles, communication method, and communication frequency all contribute to your preferred mentorship style.

Research on mentorship relationships supports this. Straus et al. (2013) found that active listening, not just hearing but genuinely attending to what the mentee needs, is the mechanism through which mentors help mentees set goals that are truly specific to them, rather than goals the mentor thinks they should have. Cooke and O'Connor (2014) similarly emphasize that good mentors help individual mentees achieve their own goals, whatever those goals may be.

Our interviews reinforced several practical habits that strengthen relationships over time. Mentors and mentees who build in regular feedback moments, and who offer multiple ways to share that feedback (including anonymous options when appropriate) tend to catch problems early rather than letting them accumulate. Our interviewees also noted that being willing to challenge each other respectfully, rather than keeping all interactions positive, is a sign of a relationship strong enough to sustain.



**When engaging with your mentor, consider these questions:**

**Your Preferred Mentorship Style**

- How do you **learn** best?
  - Structured discussions & scheduled check-ins
  - Hands-on guidance & fieldwork experience
  - Informal conversations & idea-sharing
  - Collaborative problem-solving sessions
  - Other
- What type of **communication frequency** do you prefer?
  - Weekly check-ins
  - Bi-weekly discussions
  - Monthly meetings
  - Flexible/as needed
  - Other
- Preferred Mentorship **Format**:
  - Virtual (email, video calls, messaging)
  - Hybrid (online + occasional in-person)
  - In-person mentorship sessions
  - Other

Give these questions serious thought and discuss with your mentor early on to ensure clarity on needs, expectations and desired outcomes.



# 5. For Mentors - those offering mentorship

## Benefits of Mentorship for Mentors

For mentors, mentorship is an opportunity to share knowledge, experience, and expertise to emerging conservation leaders. It is also an opportunity to build new relationships and expand your social capital as your mentee's career progresses to networks you could not reach alone. Not only are you passing forward institutional knowledge about the places and projects you work on, but it allows you to continue to develop your professional skills as a leader, learn from new perspectives, and gain emotional support of your own.

[Educause Review](#) notes some additional benefits for mentors include:

- **Improving communication or supervisory skills.** Effective managers and leaders need to know how to establish positive, trusted relationships. Working with a mentee, particularly one outside of your own organization, provides an opportunity to practice necessary skills, including empathy and active listening.
- **Expanding connections and networks.** Cultivating networks is a critical factor in career success and progression. Mentoring new individuals within your industry provides an opportunity to continue to build your own network as you support your mentees to expand theirs.
- **Promoting self-reflection.** Mentoring provides an opportunity to reflect not only on what you have achieved but also on how you got there. Which attributes and strengths were critical to your career path success? What should you be doing now to ensure you continue learning and developing those attributes? Asking questions of a mentee often supports deeper insights into your own learning path and achievements.

## Assessing Your Capacity to Mentor

Agreeing to mentor someone is one of the most powerful ways to give back to your profession, community, or organization as well as develop your own skills as a leader. Mentoring requires an investment of two of your most precious resources: time and knowledge. ***MTCP Tool 3: Ready for Mentorship*** can help guide your thinking as you decide to take on the rewarding opportunity to serve as a mentor.

It is important to be honest with yourself about your current capacity, and be able to communicate what amount of commitment you are willing to make to your mentee.

## Convincing Leadership to Support Mentorship

Making the case to organizational leadership for investing in mentorship requires grounding the request in outcomes that matter to decision-makers. Research provides strong footing here: Cerveny et al. (2022) found that mentorship programs help transfer institutional knowledge and organizational values from one cohort of employees to the next, a direct contribution to succession planning. Studies on workforce retention show that employees who receive mentorship are significantly more likely to remain engaged and stay at their organizations (Association for Talent Development, 2023).

Our interviews identified several strategies for building organizational support. Propose something specific rather than general. A pilot program with defined participants, a clear timeline, and a plan for evaluation is easier to approve than a broad initiative. Or, build mentorship into existing structures where possible: job descriptions, onboarding processes, annual work plans. Another request could be to provide training, especially in interpersonal skills such as relationship-building, conflict navigation, and communication, to make mentorship effective. These are areas where organizations often assume staff are already capable, but where structured support makes a measurable difference.

## Planning for Mentorship

Before entering a mentorship relationship, take time to assess whether you have what it takes to show up well. Our interviewees were candid about this: the most important question to ask yourself is whether you have the time, energy, and mental space to genuinely invest in another person's development. Agreeing to mentor without that capacity does the mentee a disservice.

Planning for mentorship also means being honest about what you bring to the relationship, and what you do not. Moss et al. (1999) recommend approaching mentorship as a genuine dialogue rather than a one-way transfer of expertise. Weiston-Serdan (2023) goes further, arguing that young people's potential is often limited when adults impose fixed ideas about what success should look like. Effective mentors enter the relationship expecting to learn, not just to teach.

The following quote from one of our interviews captures this well:

*"I think the big one is - learning goes both ways. And for the mentor to be... not just open to, but have this expectation to learn from the mentee and vice versa. I think also honoring that the mentee has power and has things to offer."*

Practical planning steps can include:

- discussing goals and expectations with your mentee in the first meeting
- agreeing on communication frequency and preferred format, and
- building in regular check-ins to assess how the relationship is going.
- Building in space for reflection, encouraging your mentee to reflect on their practice and what drives them, is one of the most valuable things a mentor can do.

## 6. For Organizations

A successful mentorship program does not only benefit individuals, it strengthens the conservation movement as a whole. When emerging professionals feel supported and connected, they are more likely to remain engaged, pursue leadership roles, and drive innovative solutions to environmental challenges.

As conservation careers become more diverse and interconnected, encouraging mentorship through a strong mentorship framework can help professionals at all levels find the clarity, confidence, and purpose needed to make a difference in their work.

### Benefits of Mentorship Programs for Organizations

Establishing a mentorship culture in conservation organizations, whether through formal or informal programming, can product the following benefits:

- **Removing Barriers to Entry in STEM Fields**

The report, "[Corporate Best Practices for Mentoring Women in STEM](#)," notes "Mentoring programs can help break the cycle of girls and young women shying away from STEM. By meeting and learning from STEM professionals, girls may be better able to see themselves in STEM related careers and learn about what it takes to become a STEM professional. Over time, this will lead to more STEM-focused women students, graduates, and professionals—and eventually, to a more equitable workforce."

- **Employee Engagement and Retention**

Based on the Association for Talent Development [study](#), when companies offer mentorship programs employee engagement and retention increased by 50%. Even more remarkable, data from the Emerging Workforce [study](#) showed that 35% of employees surveyed who did not receive regular mentoring planned to look for a new job within the next twelve months.

- **Improved Succession Planning**

Effective organizational mentorship programs can be vital to succession planning efforts. Even without formal programs, establishing a mentorship culture will create opportunities for information-sharing, identifying key leaders as mentors and improving the collective organizational memory.

- **Affirming and Sustaining Organizational Culture**

Mentorship programs provide connectivity for all employees – the senior leadership, mid-level managers, early-career and even frontline and support professionals. Because we spend a considerable amount of our time at work, it is increasingly important to feel connected, empowered and engaged. Mentorship is a powerful way to demonstrate investment in employee development. It is a way to reinforce organizational values and embody them in real-time as an example both for mentors and mentees.

## **Mentorship Program Spotlight:**

### **Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA)**

The ANCA Mentor Program fosters partnerships and collaboration by pairing ANCA members based on specific needs, areas of expertise, and desired outcomes.

Program participants engage in regular one-on-one meetings where mentees receive personalized guidance on leadership challenges and strategies. By sharing knowledge and experiences, mentors help mentees navigate the many aspects of managing nature centers effectively, promoting long-term success in the field.

A unique service to the nature and environmental learning center profession, the Mentor Program is available exclusively to current ANCA members.

Here's how ANCA Mentor Program is structured:

- Mentees complete a program interest form and are matched based on their goals;
- Once paired, Mentees and Mentors develop a mentor plan using program handbooks for guidance;
- A "Schedule" is proposed based on 6+ months with milestones to meet at:
  - First 3 months;
  - 3-6 months;
  - 6+ months, including how to know when their mentorship is "complete"
- Program includes FAQs, expectations and other program details

*"Working with my Mentor has been invaluable and incredibly constructive. We have had three great sessions that have already directly benefited our programs and organization. Thank you so much for this mentorship program, it's just the best!" — ANCA Mentee*

## Organizational Readiness

The decision to initiate a mentorship program within an organization requires careful consideration of the time and other resources required and available for success. ***MTCP Tool 5: The Organizational Mentorship Program Readiness Checklist*** provides an overview of the key components to a healthy mentorship program. Ask your leadership team these questions to see if you are ready to initiate a mentorship program.

Notice that much of this checklist is focused on investing time and a commitment to sustaining a program over time. In our experience, establishing a mentorship program is relatively easy – it is the time needed to cultivate mentor-mentee relationships and sustain the program long term that requires the most effort. The absence of this time commitment is a key reason that organizational mentorship programs fail to meet desired outcomes.

It is worth naming directly that funding for capacity building is genuinely limited in the conservation field. Many organizations want to support mentorship but cannot afford to create dedicated programs or hire program staff. This is not a reason to forgo mentorship, but it does shape what is realistic. Starting small, with two or three pairs, a shared commitment to check in quarterly, and a simple evaluation at the end, is more sustainable than launching a comprehensive program without the resources to maintain it. Our interviews suggest that even modest, consistent effort creates meaningful returns.

## Key Challenges in Mentorship

Mentorship is not always easy to access or navigate, and being honest about common challenges makes this toolkit more useful for practitioners who are actually living them.

Finding a mentor can itself be a barrier. Baral et al. (2024) found that access to mentors was particularly difficult for early-career and lower-grade employees, who often need mentorship most. Within organizations without formal programs, finding mentorship often depends on individual initiative, and not everyone has the confidence or networks to take that initiative.

Power dynamics and identity differences can complicate mentorship relationships when they go unnamed. Livstrom et al. (2022) found that mentors from overrepresented backgrounds may have a limited understanding of the systemic barriers their mentees face, and that this can undermine the relationship even when both parties are acting in good faith. Hanner (2009) argues that for mentees from minoritized backgrounds, the success of a mentorship relationship depends significantly on whether a mentor takes the time to understand their cultural background and perspective, not just their professional goals.

Practical strategies for navigating these challenges include: naming potential differences in identity and experience early in the relationship rather than treating them as invisible; creating multiple, varied channels for feedback so that mentees can be honest without risk; and checking in explicitly about whether the relationship is meeting the mentee's needs, rather than waiting for them to raise concerns.

## The Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet

This **MTCP Tool 4: Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet** serves as a **comprehensive guide** to ensure mentor-mentee pairings are **intentional, compatible, and effective**.

**Check out our MTCP Tool 6: Mentorship Best Practices Reference Sheet to review our findings and share them with your colleagues!**

## Evaluating Mentorship Experiences

Reflecting and evaluating a mentorship relationship or program is an invaluable step for growth and professional development. We have developed a mentorship reflection tool for mentees, mentors, and peers.

Drawing from the [AASHE Mentorship & Peer Collaboration Program Handbook](#), here are some tips for evaluation:

- Reflect on the program (what worked, what could be improved, what have you learned about being an effective partner, etc.) while the experience is still fresh in your mind and share your feedback with your organization.
- Celebrate what you have achieved over the year!
- Talk openly with your partner about the kind of relationship you would like to have beyond the program and develop a mutually agreeable plan that enables you to achieve it. The program may be officially over, but the relationship you developed does not have to be.

We designed this reflection tool to help individuals and mentorship program coordinators evaluate their mentorship experience, track impact, and support continuous learning. It includes prompts for both mentors and mentees and can be used as an informal reflection tool or for a more formal assessment of structured mentorship programs. **MTCP Tool 7: Mentorship Reflection**

## 7. For Informal Mentoring Opportunities

Mentorship does not always arrive with a designated role or formal structure. Many of the most influential developmental experiences come through **unofficial relationships and learning environments** that offer guidance, support, and skill-building.

This section delves into the diversity of expressions of mentorship.

### Peer Support/Mentorship & Collaborative Learning

One form of mentorship that is especially common and especially valuable in collaborative conservation is cross-organizational mentorship. When people from different organizations work together on shared challenges, they inevitably exchange knowledge, perspective, and support.

This is mentorship, even when it is not named as such. Our interview participants noted that this kind of informal peer exchange is foundational to how the collaborative conservation field actually develops its practitioners, and that by building in explicit opportunities for cross-organizational mentoring relationships can strengthen both individual capacity and the partnerships themselves.

**Definition:** Learning through shared dialogue, emotional encouragement, and skill exchange with colleagues at a similar level.

#### **Mentorship Value:**

- Cultivates psychological safety and connection.
- Promotes horizontal knowledge-sharing across specialties.
- Encourages vulnerability, experimentation, and growth.

#### **Example Applications:**

- Peer mentoring pods in conservation NGOs tackling burnout and retention.
- Slack channels or lunch sessions devoted to “tricky situations” or field reflections.

**Tip:** *Peer mentoring often happens organically—creating space for it allows culture to carry it forward.*

# Starting an Informal Mentoring Program at Work

You can use this planning sheet as a guide for starting an informal mentorship program:

## **MTCP Tool 8: Planning Sheet - Launching an Informal Mentoring Program**

Once you have completed the planning sheet with your team, the following steps will help you start making connections.

### **1. Define the Intent & Culture of the Program**

Start with clarity on what you are hoping to cultivate, some examples may include:

- Foster growth and skill-sharing
- Build cross-functional relationships
- Create a safe space for questions, exploration, and encouragement

What other goals can you think of? What do you want to encourage within your team or group?

Once you are able to articulate the goals you hope to achieve, then you are able to begin communicating your intent with others.

### **2. Identify Initial Participants**

Look for people who:

- Have expressed interest in mentorship (even casually).
- Are new to the organization and seeking guidance.
- Have specific skills or experience they are open to sharing.

**Tip:** Start with a few willing participants, and grow from there.

### **3. Organize Low-Stakes Connection Opportunities**

#### **After-Work Meetups**

- Casual gatherings once a month at a coffee shop, park, a trail, or virtual hangout.
- Use icebreakers or guided prompts, here are a couple of examples:
  - “What’s one thing you wish you knew when you started your role?”
  - “What skill do you want to develop this year?”
  - “What’s an experience in the field that you did not know how to handle? What would you have done differently based on what you know now?”

## ***Brown-Bag Sessions***

- Host 30–45 minute lunch sessions (in-person or virtual).
- Rotate topics led by mentors or peer volunteers. Ask participants what they are struggling with or need help with - use a grassroots approach to learning.
  - “Navigating career changes in conservation”
  - “Getting comfortable with giving and receiving feedback”
  - “Burnout prevention and managing work-life blend”
  - “How to mediate conflict between stakeholders within a watershed”

## ***Topic-Based Skill Circles***

- Create mini-mentoring groups focused on themes relevant to your team. You can review ***MTCP Tool 1: Skills Beyond School*** for ideas to help you brainstorm these topics.
- Let groups form organically by interest!

## ***4. Keep Momentum with Mini-Initiatives***

In order to keep momentum going within a team or group to promote mentorship and peer-learning opportunities, try to maintain consistent touchstones or activities that encourage participants to connect. These do not need to be time consuming or long-term commitments.

Consider hosting:

- A “Mentorship Moment” in team meetings—sharing what someone learned from a colleague.
- Monthly newsletters with tips or spotlights on informal mentor stories.
- Anonymous suggestion box to learn what employees want next.

## ***5. Encourage Reflection & Sharing***

Within your team or group, consider prompting discussions around learning and professional development on a regular basis. Here are a couple of reflection prompts to give you some ideas:

- “What is one thing I learned from someone this month?”
- “How have I supported someone’s growth recently?”
- “Who helped me feel more confident or capable?”

This reinforces the idea that **mentorship is a mindset**, not just a title.

## Beyond Titles — Nontraditional Mentorship

Below are several meaningful, often-overlooked forms of mentorship, including ideas for how to **recognize, nurture, and integrate** them into a comprehensive mentoring culture.

### ***1. Task Forces, Working Groups & Communities of Practice***

**Definition:** Short-term or ongoing groups where professionals collaboratively solve problems, share insights, and reflect on best practices.

**Mentorship Value:**

- Exposes participants to diverse viewpoints and approaches.
- Enables learning through observation and conversation.
- Builds professional networks organically.

**Example Applications:**

- Conservation coalitions tackling invasive species management.
- Working groups on climate justice policy sharing advocacy strategies.

**Tip:** Recognize and document learning moments within these groups to elevate their mentorship potential.

### ***2. Learning from Thought Leaders & Authors***

**Definition:** Deep engagement with published work, media, or digital content from experts, often one-way but personally transformative. Utilizing published and/or scholarly sources can also create confidence in the subject matter for those whom – even if they know a lot about a topic – may feel affirmed when their information aligns with an “expert.”

**Mentorship Value:**

- Encourages **independent insight-building** and perspective broadening.
- Helps individuals identify values, frameworks, and professional inspiration.
- Sparks dialogue about **how theory connects to practice**.

**Example Applications:**

- Reading case-studies as part of mentorship discussions.
- Podcast discussion groups featuring conservation leaders.

**Tip:** Curate suggested reading lists or media libraries within mentoring programs to scaffold self-guided mentorship.

### 3. Reverse Mentorship

**Definition:** Junior or early-career professionals provide mentorship to senior staff, especially around new technology, social trends, or inclusion.

#### Mentorship Value:

- Disrupts hierarchical norms, encouraging equity and humility.
- Offers fresh insight into emerging priorities and generational shifts.
- Supports intergenerational dialogue and (organizational)culture evolution.

#### Example Applications:

- Younger staff mentoring leadership on digital tools for outreach.
- DEI-focused mentorship pairs that uplift marginalized perspectives.

**Tip:** Normalize reverse mentorship by celebrating curiosity across roles—not just expertise.

### 4. Micro Mentorship

**Definition:** Brief, impactful guidance from colleagues, managers, or collaborators during moments of decision-making, creativity, or crisis.

#### Mentorship Value:

- Encourages reflection, growth, and confidence.
- Happens through simple acts: a thoughtful suggestion, honest feedback, or shared wisdom.
- Builds a culture where mentorship is a behavior, not a title.

#### Example Applications:

- A field biologist casually mentoring a student during equipment setup.
- A grant writer advising a new team member on storytelling through proposals.

## The Mosaic of Mentorship

Imagine a mosaic: tiny, colorful pieces, each shaped by its own story. Some are smooth, some angular. All contribute to a beautiful scene.

Mentorship is a mosaic. Every mentee brings a unique hue — shaped by race, culture, gender, ability, faith, and lived experience. When mentors learn to see these pieces clearly, honor their edges, and arrange them with care, they build something far more powerful than guidance. They build **belonging**.

We invite mentors to open their eyes — not just to what is familiar, but to what is different, overlooked, or misunderstood. It is a call to embrace Diversity, Equity,

Inclusion, and Accessibility not as a checklist, but as a posture of humility, curiosity, and love.

While we want to honor the importance of this work, we recognize that it is nuanced: no checklist or tool will provide the depth of understanding and appreciation to shape our approach to mentorship and, perhaps more importantly, how effective mentorship and mentorship programs can truly change the landscape for these important issues. This is an area for deeper exploration and understanding.

With that in mind, here are some thoughts.

- **Diversity** is the presence of difference — in identity, background, and perspective. It is the richness of the mosaic.
- **Equity** is the practice of fairness — adjusting support so each person can thrive. It is noticing which tiles need extra support or space to shine.
- **Inclusion & Accessibility** is the act of welcoming — making sure every voice is heard and valued. It is inviting every piece to the table, not just the ones that match.

Below we provide some tools for mentoring that honor diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. This is meant to be a beginning of a self-reflection process, one that is continued and expanded on for our entire lives.

### ***The Listening Lens***

Before offering advice, ask:

- What might I not know about this person's experience?
- What assumptions am I making?
- How can I invite their story before I share mine?

### ***The Equity Compass***

Tailor your support:

- Offer flexible formats (audio, visual, written)
- Ask about access needs (transportation, tech, time)
- Validate lived experiences — even if they are unfamiliar
- Remove barriers (including hidden barriers)
- Think beyond compliance to allow everyone to thrive

### ***The Inclusion and Accessibility Check***

Reflect regularly:

- Who is missing from this conversation?
- Whose voice needs amplification?
- How can I make space without taking space?
- Is everyone able to participate?

Central to this vitally important work is the question, “Can every person, across the full spectrum of human ability, learn, contribute, and belong?”

## Bringing It All Together

By recognizing these alternative sources of mentorship, organizations can **shift from gatekeeping to gateway-building**—expanding access to guidance, trust, and learning in creative, inclusive ways.

Consider weaving these formats into your overall mentorship strategy:

- Include peer mentoring in onboarding.
- Host apprentice-style training days.
- Encourage mentorship journaling during informal coaching.
- Build storytelling circles around incidental wisdom-sharing.

Mentorship is a culture—**one that thrives when every contribution counts.**

Check out our ***MTCP Tool 6: Mentorship Best Practices Reference Sheet*** to review our findings and share them with your colleagues!



## 8. Closing Reflection: Cultivating a Legacy Through Mentorship

The success of conservation depends on relationships and knowledge sharing.

This toolkit is an invitation to do just that - to extend a hand, share wisdom, and build bridges across experience and enthusiasm. Mentorship passes on not only knowledge but also values, relationships, and networks. It helps the next generation of conservationists find their voice and purpose.

Everyone can mentor, and everyone can benefit from mentorship. Our hope is that this toolkit serves as a living resource - strengthening mentorship efforts across communities, institutions, and continents.

### ***PLEASE GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK!***

As you go through this toolkit, please consider what you find helpful, and what you would like to see more of - and then fill out this form to give us your feedback!

[FEEDBACK FORM HERE](https://forms.gle/vb1VAmqYdWWHXCSP9)

<https://forms.gle/vb1VAmqYdWWHXCSP9>

**We at Crowd Conservation are available to help consult, co-develop or lead a mentorship program with your organization or network.** Learn more on our [website](#), or contact Nicole Reese [nicole@crowd-conservation.org](mailto:nicole@crowd-conservation.org).

## 9. Resources

Here is a link to our ever-growing [Bibliography](#).

**The following pages are the reflection worksheets and check lists we have created for your use in the order in which they are referenced in this Toolkit.**

[\*\*MTCP Tool 1: Skills Beyond School\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 2: Understanding Your "Why"\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 3: Ready for Mentorship\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 4: The Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 5: The Organizational Mentorship Program Readiness Checklist\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 6: Mentorship Best Practices Reference Sheet\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 7: Mentorship Reflection\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 8: Planning Sheet - Launching an Informal Mentoring Program\*\*](#)

[\*\*MTCP Tool 9: Mentorship Agreement & Partnership Plan\*\*](#)

# Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 1: Skills Beyond School

Collaborative conservation needs much more than the technical skills to understand the ecology of a place. For long-term, durable impact, we need to improve and manage relationships too.

To be successful, one may need to build partnerships among diverse or conflicting stakeholders, communicate effectively with different audiences, coordinate projects, manage group dynamics and build trusting relationships.

These lists are not exhaustive, but meant to give you a starting point for self-reflection and discussion with colleagues.

## *Empathy Skills: Developing a Collaborative Mindset*

- Relationship-building
- Humility and empathy
- Curiosity/creativity
- Finding common ground
- Building trust
- Demonstrating flexibility
- Empowering others
- Developing cultural literacy
- Active Listening/Reframing

## *Process Design & Management Skills Meeting Management - maintaining momentum and effective meetings*

- Fundamentals of project management
- Providing coordination support/Project and task management with other partner organizations/roles and responsibilities
- Developing agendas and work plans
- Drafting process and project objectives
- Meeting facilitation
- Creating meeting summaries and reports/ note-taking
- Synthesizing complex conservation topics and conversations
- Group communications (pre/post meeting info, updates, etc.)
- Process evaluation and reflection
- Post-project analysis (after-action-reviews)

### *Stakeholder Engagement Skills / engaging with the broader community*

- Facilitation Principles and Ethics (IAP2 resources)
- Situation assessment and identifying stakeholders/rightsholders (who should be at the table, who is being impacted, whose voices are underrepresented, who should be invited to participate)
- Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes
- Integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice for meaningful collaboration
- Mediation and conflict resolution
- Communicating to diverse audiences
- Participatory learning activities
- Adaptive management and systems thinking
- Social Science: how we measure people, attitudes, and behaviors
- Behavior change science and social marketing
- Friend- and Fund-raising / building support

For those who are not coming into this field from a science or biology background, here are some knowledge sets you may want to learn more about:

- The scientific method
- Generally speaking: the water cycle, the nutrient cycles (carbon, nitrogen)
- Social-ecological systems and ecosystem services
- The specific ecosystems of your community: rangeland, forest, wetland, desert, etc
- Native species, especially the threatened and endangered species in your area
- Relevant policy and history: local, regional, and nation-wide
- The NEPA process and how government regulates public lands, if you are working with public land managers
- Hot topics that may be relevant: Western water law, wildfire mitigation, urban-wildland interface, data centers, etc
- Framing the global climate challenge

*Here are a few resources to learn more:*

- [Center for Collaborative Conservation Foundations](#)
- [Conservation Leadership Capacity Study](#)
- [Institute for Conservation Leadership - Working Together](#)
- [Western Conservation Leadership Development Program](#)
- [Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Conservation Leaders Confluence](#)

# **Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 2:**

## **Understanding Your "Why"**

Before reaching out to a mentor, take time to explore your motivations and expectations. Use this checklist to identify what you seek in a mentorship relationship.

### **1. Clarify Your Motivations**

- What is driving me to seek a mentor right now?
- Am I looking for career guidance, skill development, leadership growth, personal support, or something else?
- Do I need mentorship to navigate a transition, such as changing careers, advancing in a field, or launching a new initiative?

### **2. Define Your Goals**

- What specific skills, knowledge, or perspectives do I want to gain from mentorship?
- What short-term and long-term goals will mentorship help me achieve?
- How will I measure success in my mentorship experience?

### **3. Identify Ideal Mentor Qualities**

- What type of mentor would be most valuable to me—a subject-matter expert, industry leader, or someone with shared experiences?
- Do I want a mentor who provides structured guidance, informal advice, or hands-on learning experiences?
- What qualities do I admire in potential mentors—communication style, availability, values, or leadership approach?

### **4. Assess Your Own Readiness**

- Am I willing to actively engage in a mentorship relationship, ask thoughtful questions, and receive constructive feedback?
- Can I commit to regular meetings, goal-setting exercises, and follow-through?
- How will I contribute to making the mentorship mutually beneficial, rather than just seeking advice?

## **5. Plan Your Outreach Strategy**

- Where can I find mentors—through professional networks, industry events, workplace programs, or online platforms?
- How will I introduce myself—via email, networking events, or direct connections?
- What key points should I include in my mentorship request to show clarity, enthusiasm, and commitment?

## **6. Prepare for Long-Term Growth**

- How will I apply what I learn from mentorship in my personal and professional development?
- How do I see myself becoming a mentor in the future?
- What steps can I take to sustain a mentorship relationship beyond formal interactions?

# **Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 3: Ready for Mentorship**

## ***1. Understanding Your Motivation***

- How would I like to support someone's growth and development?

## ***2. Assessing Your Expertise & Experience***

- How can sharing relevant knowledge or experience benefit a mentee?
- Have I navigated challenges in my field that I can help others overcome? What lessons learned can I share?
- What insights can I provide into career paths, skills development, or leadership strategies?

## ***3. Evaluating Availability & Commitment***

- Can I dedicate time regularly to mentorship conversations and check-ins? How much time and when?
- How long am I willing to work with a mentee?

## ***4. Assessing Your Mentorship Style***

- What are my preferred learning/communication styles? How will that influence a mentorship relationship?
- How can I be adaptable in working with mentees who may learn differently?
- In what ways can I provide constructive feedback that builds confidence and encourages growth?

## ***5. Determining Your Boundaries & Expectations***

- What level of involvement am I comfortable with when engaging with a mentee - career coaching, skill-building, personal development? What is the scope of advice/guidance I'm willing to offer?
- How will I handle conflicts or miscommunications/understandings with a mentee?

## ***6. Considering Long-Term Impact***

- How can mentorship be a learning opportunity for myself as well?
- Would I want to continue mentoring beyond a single mentee or program cycle?
- How will I measure the success of my mentorship experience?

# Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 4: The Mentor-Mentee Matching Worksheet

## **Section 1: Personal & Professional Information**

- Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Preferred Contact Method (Email, Phone, Video Call): \_\_\_\_\_
- Current Role/Position: \_\_\_\_\_
- Organization/Institution: \_\_\_\_\_
- Years of Experience in Conservation: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Section 2: Mentorship Goals**

- What are your top three mentorship objectives?
  - Career guidance
  - Skill development
  - Leadership training
  - Networking support
  - Research collaboration
  - Conservation strategy insights
  - Personal growth & confidence-building
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- What specific topics or areas do you want mentorship to focus on?
- (e.g., habitat restoration, environmental policy, community engagement)
- Do you prefer a mentor with technical expertise, leadership experience, broad industry knowledge, or something else?

## **Section 3: Mentor-Mentee Compatibility Indicators**

- What qualities are most important in a mentor?
  - Encouraging & supportive
  - Goal-oriented & structured
  - Knowledgeable & experienced
  - Open-minded & adaptable
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

- Are you looking for mentorship with a specific cultural, geographic, or institutional background?
- How would you describe your ideal mentor-mentee dynamic?
  - Highly structured with predefined milestones
  - Casual & fluid, adjusting as needed
  - A mix of professional development and personal guidance

#### ***Section 4: Final Considerations***

- What are three expectations you have for your mentorship experience?
- How will you contribute to the mentorship relationship? (e.g., asking questions, engaging actively, implementing advice)
- How will you measure mentorship success? (e.g., achieving personal goals, developing professional skills, expanding networks)

Once you have committed to working with your mentorship match, consider reviewing **MTCP Tool 9: Mentorship Agreement & Partnership Plan** to develop a more structured agreement and plan.

# **Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 5: Organizational Mentorship Program Readiness Checklist**

## ***Organizational Commitment***

- Do we prioritize mentorship as part of our organizational culture and values?
- Are leadership and management committed to supporting mentorship initiatives?
- Have we allocated time and resources to plan and implement mentorship programs?

## ***Program Objectives***

- Have we clearly defined the goals and expected outcomes of our mentorship program?
- Are the program's objectives aligned with the needs of our staff and organizational priorities?
- Have we considered specific benefits, such as retaining institutional memory, reducing turnover, or fostering collaboration?

## ***Resources and Capacity***

- Do we have a designated person or team to oversee the mentorship program?
- Are there sufficient financial resources to support program activities and events?
- Do we have tools, templates, or materials for mentors and mentees to use, such as agreements and progress trackers?

## ***Mentor and Mentee Engagement***

- Have we identified potential mentors within our organization and assessed their willingness and capacity to participate?
- Do we understand the needs and interests of potential mentees to ensure the program meets their development goals?
- Are we prepared to pair mentors and mentees based on compatibility and shared objectives?

## ***Program Structure and Implementation***

- Have we developed a structured program framework, including guidelines for mentor-mentee relationships?
- Are expectations for mentors and mentees clearly communicated and understood?
- Do we have a plan for regular meetings, reviews, and feedback?

### ***Successful Launch Events***

- Have we planned a kickoff event to introduce the mentorship program and its goals to participants?
- Does the event include an overview of the program structure, expectations, and timeline?
- Are there engaging icebreaker activities or opportunities for mentors and mentees to meet informally?
- Have we incorporated inspiring speakers or testimonials from successful mentors and mentees?
- Do we have materials ready to provide, such as mentorship agreements, program guides, or tools for mentees?

### ***Momentum-Sustaining Events***

- Have we scheduled regular check-in events to reinforce program goals and maintain engagement?
- Are there opportunities for mentors and mentees to share their progress and experiences with others?
- Do we offer professional development workshops or training sessions tied to mentorship themes?
- Are there social gatherings, such as networking mixers, to keep relationships strong and energize participants?
- Is there a mechanism to recognize mentor and mentee achievements, such as awards or acknowledgment ceremonies?

### ***Evaluation and Sustainability***

- Do we have a system to measure the program's success and gather participant feedback?
- Is there a plan for addressing challenges or making adjustments based on evaluations?
- [Are we prepared to sustain the program over time and adapt to evolving needs?

# **Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 6: Mentorship Best Practices in the Conservation Reference Sheet**

## ***1. Embrace Mentorship as Community-Building***

All programs prioritize connection and collaboration alongside professional development.

### ***Best Practice:***

- Design mentorship structures that foster relationships beyond the mentor-mentee pair—such as peer clusters, group calls, and community forums.
- Use onboarding materials and conversation prompts that center values like stewardship, curiosity, and collective learning.

## ***2. Offer Structured Yet Adaptable Frameworks***

The Wildlife Society outlines mentor steps and mentee milestones, but emphasizes flexibility in format.

### ***Best Practice:***

- Provide guidance (e.g. role definitions, timelines) but allow mentoring pairs to personalize their experience based on comfort, needs, and style.
- Share tools like goal-setting worksheets or communication preference guides to support customization.

## ***3. Use Mentorship to Support Diversity and Inclusion***

CoalitionWILD's global program emphasizes cross-cultural, intergenerational connection.

### ***Best Practice:***

- Prioritize inclusive recruitment across geography, gender, race, and life experience.
- Pair mentors and mentees who complement—not necessarily mirror—each other's perspectives.
- Offer optional "chemistry sessions" before finalizing matches (like the ones we explored earlier!).

#### **4. Integrate Reflection and Reciprocity**

Several programs encourage mentors to learn from mentees, embracing two-way transformation.

##### **Best Practice:**

- Build in reflection prompts, joint journaling exercises, or periodic "learning circles" for mentors and mentees.
- Normalize the idea that mentors benefit too—evolving their leadership, empathy, and insight.

#### **5. Embed Mentorship Into Career Pathways**

Programs like MENTOR Fellowships link mentorship with academic study, fieldwork, and long-term leadership development.

##### **Best Practice:**

- Position mentorship as a core part of professional development—not a bonus or add-on.
- Offer mentorship alongside onboarding, training, fellowships, internships, or leadership programs.

#### **6. Showcase Impact Stories & Lessons Learned**

Several programs publish feedback, evaluation reports, or participant spotlights.

##### **Best Practice:**

- Collect and share mentee journeys through blogs, panels, or visual storytelling.
- Use storytelling to recruit future mentors and energize funders or organizational leaders.

# Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 7: Mentorship Reflection

## ***Section 1: Relationship Experience***

### **For both mentor and mentee**

- How often did you interact with your partner? Once a week, month, every 2 months, once, never?
- What was the most meaningful conversation or moment you shared?
- How did you build trust or connection?
- What communication habits worked well? What might you change next time?

## ***Section 2: Goal Progress***

### **For mentees**

- What goals did you set at the start of the mentorship?
- Which goals did you achieve, partially meet, or revise?
- How has mentorship influenced your confidence, clarity, or skills?

### **For mentors**

- How did your mentee grow during your time together?
- Were there moments where you adjusted your approach or expectations? How so?
- What insights did you gain by supporting someone else's journey?

## ***Section 3: Learning & Insight***

### **For both mentor and mentee**

- What did you learn from your mentoring partner that surprised you?
- In what ways did the relationship challenge or expand your thinking?
- How has mentorship influenced your values or priorities?
- Have you co-created any deliverables or tangible things that you can share?
- Do you have any milestones that you'd like to celebrate?
- What have you learned about being an effective partner?

## ***Section 4: Feedback & Recommendations***

### **For program reflection**

- What structure or support would make future mentorship easier or more impactful?
- Are there tools or resources you wish you'd had earlier?
- What advice would you offer new mentors or mentees starting out?
- Would you consider mentoring again—or becoming a mentor?
- Would you be willing to provide a testimonial for use in marketing the program? (If so, please provide your testimonial here.)

## ***Section 5: Continuing the Relationship***

### **For both mentor and mentee**

- Do you plan to stay in touch moving forward? If so, how have you determined to stay connected over time?
- How will you continue growing—from this experience, or with future mentors/mentees?
- May we follow up with you in a year to learn more insights from your mentoring experience?

# Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 8: Planning Sheet - Launching an Informal Mentoring Program

## ***Define Program Vision & Goals***

- What do we hope this mentoring initiative will accomplish?
  - Foster professional growth
  - Promote cross-team connection
  - Encourage knowledge sharing
  - Support new employee onboarding
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- How will we describe the spirit of this program?

## ***Identify and Engage Initial Planning Team***

- Who are 2–5 people who can help organize and spread the word?
- How often will we check in to refine plans or troubleshoot?

### Plan Program Activities

- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly

### Choose 2–3 starter formats:

- Brown-bag lunch sessions (Topic: \_\_\_\_\_)
- After-work coffee or tea meetups
- "Mentor Moments" at team meetings
- Peer Skill Circles (Theme: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Virtual hangouts on shared interests

## ***Develop a Communication Plan***

- How will we invite people to participate?
  - Email blast
  - Chat channel
  - Flyers/posters
  - Word of mouth
- What language will we use to describe it?  
E.g., "No pressure, no prep—just meaningful conversation and professional connection."

## **Measure Engagement**

How will we track participation and impact?

- RSVP lists
- Session feedback
- Informal testimonials
- Reflection check-ins
- Future mentorship requests

## **Next Steps & Timelin**

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Lead Person</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
Finalize activities & schedule		
Create outreach materials		
Launch first event/session		
Collect feedback & adapt		

# Mentorship Toolkit for Conservation Practitioners Tool 9: Mentorship Agreement & Partnership Plan

*A shared commitment between mentor and mentee to support growth, clarity, and accountability.*

## **SECTION 1 — Purpose of the Mentorship**

What brings us together? What do we hope this relationship will support?

**Mentee's Purpose Statement:**

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**Mentor's Purpose Statement:**

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## **SECTION 2 — Goals for This Mentorship (3–5 max)**

*Clear, achievable goals help guide the relationship.*

**Goal 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Why it matters: \_\_\_\_\_
- What success looks like: \_\_\_\_\_
- Support needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Why it matters: \_\_\_\_\_
- What success looks like: \_\_\_\_\_
- Support needed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

- Why it matters: \_\_\_\_\_
- What success looks like: \_\_\_\_\_
- Support needed: \_\_\_\_\_

### **SECTION 3 — Framework for Engagement**

Describe the structure of how you'll engage during your mentorship. Include how frequently you'll meet and for how long, but also if you're meeting in-person or virtually, if there's a standing agenda, etc. Again, the level of formality is an item for discussion and agreement. However, research shows that mentorships where at least some of the framework for engagement is mutually structured and agreed upon generally report better results.

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### **SECTION 4 — Roles & Responsibilities**

*What we each commit to in this partnership.*

#### **Mentor commits to:**

- Providing guidance grounded in experience
- Asking thoughtful questions
- Offering constructive, caring feedback
- Respecting boundaries and confidentiality
- Supporting mentee visibility and growth
- Naming bias or barriers when relevant

#### **Additional commitments:**

#### **Mentee commits to:**

- Driving the relationship (scheduling, agenda, follow-through)
- Being open and honest about goals and challenges
- Seeking and applying feedback
- Respecting time and boundaries
- Bringing topics or questions to each meeting

#### **Additional commitments:**

## **SECTION 6 — Duration & Checkpoints**

Mentorship Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_ End Date / Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Check-ins:**

- Midpoint reflection date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Final reflection date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **At the end, we will:**

- Continue the mentorship
- Redefine goals
- Transition or close the relationship
- Celebrate accomplishments

## **SECTION 7 — Signatures (Optional but Powerful)**

**Mentor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mentee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_