

Selecting a Mentor

NIH-HHS Mentoring Program

You can use the HHS Mentoring database to be automatically matched with a mentor, select from a list of individuals interested in serving as mentors, or identify a potential mentor in your community independently. After sending a match request to your potential mentor, he or she may accept the request and have a conversation with you before you confirm or decline the mentoring relationship. Below are some **recommendations** on how to engage in these preliminary conversations:

Etiquette

- Review and become familiar with information on the NIH Mentoring Program. You should be able to respond easily to questions about the program. Not knowing may give the impression that you are not motivated.
- If you meet in person, arrive on time; if possible, be early.
- If there is a life-threatening emergency and you must cancel, notify the potential mentor immediately, convey genuine regret, and reschedule immediately. If they decline the offer to reschedule, do not be offended. Move onto the next option.
- Present yourself in a professional manner: speech, dress, eye contact, etc. You want the individual to have a positive memory of the experience.
- Comments about other employees and past/present managers should be positive and appropriate. Unnecessary name-dropping is never good!

Questions to ask potential mentors

You can use these questions as launching grounds for you to customize in your conversation:

1. Ask questions about their program areas.
2. How long have you been with NIH?
3. What has been your career path and former positions? Have you worked in many IC's?
4. Have you ever participated in a career development program? If so, please describe your experience(s).
5. Have you ever mentored before? Was it formally or informally? If so, in which ways do you think you were the most helpful to your previous mentees? Can you give me some examples? How was it enjoyable or beneficial to you?
6. Were you mentored? If so, please tell me a little about that experience.
7. What do you consider the most important characteristics of a mentor?
8. What characteristics do you look for in a mentee?
9. How would you characterize your leadership style?
10. What special skills and interests do you have? (You will have some assistance from the Competencies that they had previously selected in their profile)
11. Given your experience with mentoring, what are some of the major obstacles you have experienced? Moreover, how would you handle or avoid a reoccurrence?
12. At this time in your current workload, would you consider being a mentor? If so, would you be able to devote the required amount of time to the program?

After Each Conversation or Meeting

- Within 24 hours of the interview, send a thank you note expressing your appreciation they took the time meeting with you and discussed your development. Once again, indicate when you are planning to get back to them.
- Make notes and summarize the conversation for yourself. This will assist you with the selection process and remind you of each session.

Characteristics of a Good Mentor

- Good ego-strength: What this means is that s/he does not get his feelings hurt easily and has no problem saying 'no.'
- Forward moving: Model of continuous learning
- Positive: Communicates hope and optimism, sense of humor
- Accessible: Has the time to take on a mentee and keep to scheduled meetings
- Empathic: Ability to identify with the mentee, willing to disclose similar situations from their past
- Open-minded: Willing to listen and not be judgmental or offended when mentees choose a different solution
- Consistent: reliable source of information, communication, and availability
- Patient: Willing to work with the mentee during the development process and understanding it will not happen overnight
- Honest: Be able to provide honest, accurate, appropriate feedback, and good ethical judgment. Trustworthy
- Savvy: Able to navigate through the political environment of the workplace and share this skill with the mentee.
- Mature: Professional, and yet approachable. Mentors must be willing to share their knowledge, and should have a wide range of experience.
- Open: Willing to share information and experiences openly
- Good Communication
- Expertise: For technical and career gaps, must have technical expertises
- Motivating: Encouraging, positive, and empowering