



The Association for the Advancement
of Sustainability in Higher Education

AASHE Mentorship & Peer Collaboration Program Handbook



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Introduction

Thank you for participating in [AASHE's Mentorship & Peer Collaboration Program](#)! Whether you are serving as a mentee, mentor or peer collaborator, we appreciate your commitment to the field.

The purpose of this program is to help participants build supportive and mutually beneficial relationships with others in the higher education sustainability field. The program is designed to be flexible to allow participants to determine the form of collaboration that best fits their specific goals. While it lasts for only 10-months, the ultimate goal is to provide the foundation of a long-term professional relationship.

To help you get the most out of the program, this handbook guides participants through the 3 main stages of the program: initiation, cultivation and evaluation. For each stage, it describes the key deliverables and provides some tips and advice. It also includes some general guidance for mentees, mentors and peer collaborators.

Mentoring 101

Mentoring is a collaborative relationship between two people in which education, support, and professional growth are the aims. In a traditional mentorship relationship, the mentor offers their knowledge, connections and experience to assist the mentee in growing professionally. In order for this to happen, cooperation and routine participation is necessary. In a peer collaboration relationship, both parties offer their knowledge, connections and experience to each other.

A [comparative study of successful and unsuccessful mentoring relationships](#) found that successful mentoring relationships were characterized by “reciprocity, mutual respect, clear expectations, personal connection, and shared values.” Unsuccessful mentoring relationships were characterized by “poor communication, lack of commitment, personality differences, perceived (or real) competition, conflicts of interest, and the mentor’s lack of experience.”

General tips for mentors

- **Begin by understanding the mentee’s needs:** To be an effective mentor, you have to gain an understanding of the mentee’s needs and develop appropriate strategies to foster their career as well as individual development. Be patient with your mentee and listen to what they have to say.
- **Share your own experiences:** Tell your mentee about your own unique experiences; demonstrating the ups and downs of the field will show that with every seeming failure there are also joys of success. Sharing a personal side with your mentee might encourage the same from them.
- **Avoid being judgmental or biased:** Remember that your experiences and feelings are your own and they influence the way you think. It is up to you to provide guidance through friendship and understanding so your mentee is comfortable with sharing their own opinions or concerns with you. While sharing your thoughts and opinions, explain how you came to those conclusions. You should also welcome opinions even if they are different from yours.
- **Don’t be the only resource:** Help your mentee to network and build their own professional community of available mentors. You can help open the door to opportunities for your mentee.

General tips for mentees

- **Take the initiative** with your mentor: You are the one to set the basis of the relationship and you must decide what you would like to get out of the program in terms of what advice and guidance you need.
- **Give back:** Realize that you too can give back to the relationship; give your own advice and perspective when appropriate.
- **Accept constructive criticism:** Be willing to receive criticism and try to avoid feeling defensive. Remember that your mentor is trying to help. Constructive comments should be encouraged.
- **Ask questions:** Make it easy for your mentor to help by sharing your questions and challenges. Your mentor might not know the answer to everything, but attempting to discover the answers together can be just as helpful.

- **Demonstrate commitment:** One of the requirements for joining this program is a commitment to develop and sustain a mutually supportive relationship. Both parties should show a willingness to put in the time necessary to achieve this goal. This includes making sure you maintain regular contact and make time for meetings.

General tips for peer collaborators

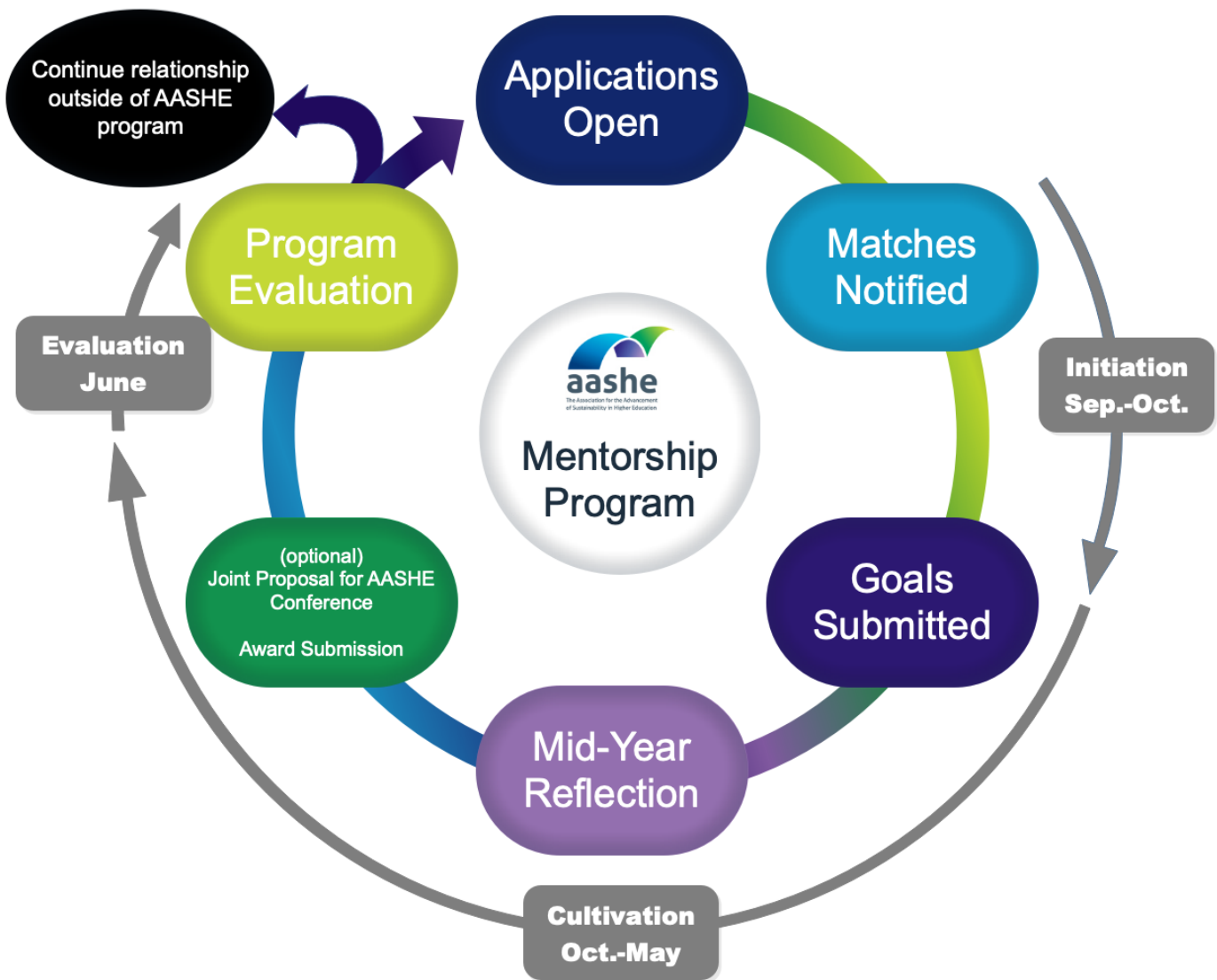
- **Create a shared vision:** To get the most out of your peer mentoring relationship, make sure to set clear goals and guidelines so that both of your priorities are met over the course of the program.
- **Develop a communication plan:** Communication is an important aspect of peer mentoring, helping to ensure that both participants are on the same page and committed to the relationship.
- **Expect to give and receive feedback:** Peer collaborators support each other by providing constructive feedback to one another.

Overcoming Common Challenges

It is common for mentoring relationships to experience challenges during the year. Here are some examples of challenges others have faced. Communicating openly may help solve some of these issues:

- **Limited time** – Despite good intentions, other priorities may make it difficult to find sufficient time to do all you want to do in the relationship. As a result, the momentum in the relationship tends to decrease.
 - Potential solution: Schedule your monthly meetings from the beginning and add them to your calendars.
- **Insufficient trust** – With only a few hours of contact each month, it may not be easy to build the kind of trust you both would like.
 - Potential solution: Plan on short email check-ins in-between your monthly meetings
- **Mismatched partners** – A mismatch between partners may result from conflicting personalities, differing career goals, areas of expertise, differences in work style, or any number of other reasons.
 - Potential solution: Think creatively on who else could serve as a pair for your mentor, mentee or peer. If you don't have a solution, contact AASHE and we will do our best to find another match.

Program Timeline



Initiation (Sept. - Oct.)

Goals During the Initiation Phase

- Hold an introductory meeting or phone call with your partner.
- Get to know each other and build a warm and trusting relationship.
- Develop goals and clear expectations for the mentorship relationship. Ideally, these intentions will include one or more tangible products or outcomes.
- Establish a schedule for future meetings. Although schedules may change, it's generally better to create an initial schedule and to make adjustments later than to not have a schedule at all.

Initiation Phase Deliverables

- **Submit your [mentorship goals](#) by the Fall deadline** - Developing a set of shared aspirations is a key first step for successful collaboration. One member of each pair is expected to submit a brief description of their goals to AASHE via [a simple online form](#). The submitted goals will be shared with you via email.

Tips for the Initiation Phase

- Use your first few meetings to get to know each other on a personal level and learn about each other's goals, interests, and background. A better understanding of one another helps build trust and open the lines of communication. It also will make the relationship more enjoyable and beneficial.
- In general, mentees should be the ones to initiate communication with their mentor. However, if you are a mentor and you haven't heard from your mentee, feel free to reach out to them. The beginning of the academic year is often a busy time for many in the AASHE community so you may have to nudge your partner a couple of times. If you haven't been able to connect with your partner after several attempts, please let AASHE know by emailing education@ashe.org. We will try to contact your partner directly to see what is going on. Depending on the circumstances, we may be able to offer you an alternate match.
- Video calls (e.g., via Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangouts) tend to be more conducive to relationship building than regular audio-only phone calls.
- The annual [AASHE Conference](#) is also a great opportunity to connect with your partner.
- Use these suggested questions to start building your relationship. As partners get to know each other, creating more specific questions will become easier. The suggestions are here to help you get started and grow from there:
 1. What are your areas of interest/expertise?
 2. How did you get involved in the higher education sustainability field?
 3. What other work experiences have you had?
 4. What are your favorite parts about your current job?
 5. What are some challenges you have faced in attempting to reach your professional objectives? How did you overcome them?
 6. What are your career aspirations?
 7. What are you hoping to get out of the mentorship relationship?
 8. How frequently will you be able to communicate?
 9. What forms of communication work best for you?
 10. What topic(s) do you want to discuss during the program?
 11. Can you see any potential challenges arising during this program? If so, how will you work together to prevent this from happening?
 12. Have you published or do you plan to publish something related to higher education sustainability? If so, what?
 13. What sustainability-related books, articles, journals, etc. do you recommend to read?
 14. What are your hobbies or interests outside of work?

- Create shared calendar invites for each of your scheduled meetings to help both parties remember the meeting and avoid getting double booked.
- Consider creating a shared agenda/notes document (e.g., a GoogleDoc) that you can use to add discussion items for your next call and record any action items from your meetings. This will serve as a reminder of past conversations and can help keep you on track.
- Use the [SMART framework](#) (or a different framework) to draft your goals and make sure they are attainable. Once you determine the goals that you will work on during the year, take the time to reflect on the activities you will engage in throughout the year to accomplish your goals.

Cultivation (Oct. - May)

Goals During the Cultivation Phase

- Deepen the relationship between partners through regular interaction and dialog (at least once a month).
- Make progress towards the goals you set during the Initiation phase.

Cultivation Phase Deliverables (optional)

- **Conduct a mid-year reflection in February** - Consider doing a mid-year reflection to evaluate how things are going and make adjustments if necessary. Use the questions listed below to help you review what has worked well so far and consider what might be improved for the remainder of the program.
- **Submit a proposal for the AASHE conference** - If you have been working on a joint project with your partner, consider submitting a proposal to share your work at the annual [AASHE Conference](#).
- **Apply for a Campus Sustainability Achievement Award** - If you completed a project with your partner, consider submitting a case study by the Spring deadline to be eligible to receive a [Campus Sustainability Achievement Award](#).

Tips for the Cultivation Phase

- Come to each meeting prepared with questions, resources, and/or talking points.
- Remember to listen. While it is important to share your point of view, it is essential to [actively listen](#) to your partner's perspectives as well.
- Respect your partner. Mentors should seek to give feedback constructively and as a guide rather than a decision maker. Likewise, mentees should show appreciation for the guidance and assistance received. Peer collaborators should work to take on both learning and guiding roles in their partnership.
- Be honest with your partner. If something is not working or you are confused, communicate that.
- Use the following questions (first individually and then with your partner) to reflect on how the mentorship relationship is developing:
 - What aspects of the relationship are working well?
 - What have we accomplished so far? Are we on track to achieve the goals we set?

- What, if anything, is not working as well as we had hoped? Do we need to revise the goals?
- What are we each gaining from our participation in this program?
- What external constraints or difficulties are affecting the partnership? How might these be resolved?
- What additional support do we need? Can AASHE help in any way?
- How will we use our remaining time together?
- Make a plan for spring to help ensure you are able to meet your goals.

Evaluation (June)

Goals During the Evaluation Phase

- Create a structure to maintain the relationship you have developed with your partner.
- Help AASHE improve the mentorship & peer collaboration program going forward.

Evaluation Phase Deliverables

- **Complete the [mentorship & peer collaboration program evaluation survey](#)** - All participants are expected to share their experiences as a participant in the program and provide suggestions for improvement. AASHE relies on participant feedback to understand the impact of the program and to strengthen the program.
- **Share any materials you've developed via the Campus Sustainability Hub** - AASHE's online library is a valuable source of information and resources for higher education sustainability practitioners. Please [submit](#) any tangible products - including publications and plans, revised syllabi, signage, outreach materials, or even photos - that came together as a result of your work together.

Tips for the Evaluation Phase

- 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 AASHE.
- Celebrate what you've achieved over the year.
- Talk openly with your partner about the kind of relationship you'd 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 doesn't have to be.
- If you want to be a part of the program again, applications for next year's program will be out later in the summer. If you intend to do the program again, think about what you can do differently next time to make the process better for you and your new mentor/mentee/peer.

Advice from past participants

- Look at the program not as a one-year event, but as the beginning of a long-term professional relationship.
- Come prepared with what you want to get out of the program before you sign up.
- Focus on building a warm trusting relationship first. Get to know each other and try to go beyond mundane issues and challenges and begin probing some of the deeper challenges around sustainability.
- The more you contribute, the more you get out of it. Look for the commonalities rather than differences between institutions.
- Utilize your partner and don't be afraid to reach out and ask questions, show your weaknesses or ask for advice.
- Offer up many options for support and relationship and let the mentee choose how they would like to engage with you.
- If the mentee is struggling with something, practice sessions can be a fun way to help them improve.
- Talk about everything you're doing because you never know what advice or experience your partner has with those same issues.
- Frequent communication (at least once/month) helps build strong relationships.
- Always schedule your next meeting before you end your current meeting!
- Set some ground rules and establish the style of the relationship before getting started.
- Define expectations, establish goals and clear tasks to be accomplished early on.
- Clarifying goals at the beginning of the year was helpful, and we were both careful to come back to them from time to time.
- The first couple of meetings, set one achievable goal or collaboration for the year. Once that is complete, set another.
- Set a schedule and stick to it, set up an agenda for each call, take notes of what is shared and follow-up with resources.
- Follow the guide. Let the mentee chart the course, but be willing to "steer" the ship once in a while if you feel like you're getting off track of your original goal, which is still very relevant. Help the mentee focus on a few things for your engagement.
- Have an agenda for your routine calls, but be willing to get off topic and explore other topics of conversation.
- Establish a recurring meeting and try to stick to a regular cadence, rescheduling if necessary but not skipping. Discuss more than just work if both parties are open to that. Doing so helps establish a more in-depth relationship.
- BE HONEST! This process is only as helpful as you allow it to be. While not a professional counselor or spiritual advisor, a mentor or peer is most helpful when you check your ego at the door and honestly look at what you are doing, both right and wrong.
- Think of the relationship in terms of having an extra person on your team who can provide fresh feedback and an outside perspective.
- Don't be afraid to participate as either a mentor or a mentee. It was a great experience and it helped me realize that I know more than I thought, and we can teach and encourage each other.