

FOR MENTEEES



ORGANIZATIONS
IN SOLIDARITY

ADVANCING EQUITY: APPROACHING MENTORSHIP



May 2023



WCAPS | WOMEN OF COLOR ADVANCING PEACE,
SECURITY, AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

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The Organizations

Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation (WCAPS) is a platform devoted to women of color that cultivates a strong voice and network for its members while encouraging dialogue and strategies for engaging in policy discussions on an international scale. Through our dedication to mentorship and partnerships and our passion for changing the global community landscape, we remain committed to achieving our vision of advancing the leadership and professional development of women of color in the fields of international peace, security, and conflict transformation.

OrgsinSolidarity (OiS) is a partnership formed among more than 300 organizations and individuals who are signatories to the WCAPS United States or United Kingdom Standing Together Against Racism and Discrimination Statements. Our mission is to combat racist beliefs, attitudes, and acts of discrimination, and integrate diversity within all levels of our organizations and as individuals in the peace and security, foreign policy and national security fields. We evaluate the current state of affairs, educate, elevate and support diverse voices and perspectives and the individuals who hold them, giving due recognition and credit to achievements of Black people and people of color, and creating a world where all people are treated fairly, equitably, and with respect.

The core commitment of OiS' Mentorship Working Group is to develop and support mentorship opportunities for people of color in our organizations. Its primary goals are to: (1) expand access to mentorship opportunities for people of color in the peacebuilding and international security fields, and (2) communicate values that create a successful and meaningful mentorship environment, especially for people of color, in these spaces.

ABOUT

The Author



Kimberly Gillies helps social impact leaders actualize their visions. She lends executive office, management, and operations expertise to mission-driven teams so they can work more effectively—and enjoyably—together. Since studying peace, justice, and gender at Tufts University, she has served in cross-functional leadership roles and partnered with organizational leaders to create positive, holistic change within workplaces and society.

Gratitude

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Connect with us!



The publication designer: Tamera Allen


INTRODUCTION

Mentorship has been and remains widely recognized as mutually beneficial for organizations and individuals. More recently, and as explored in Organizations In Solidarity's (OiS) recent report, [Advancing Equity: Mentorship in Peace and Security](#), research has found these positive correlations extend to the diversity and equity of organizations and the professional experiences of people of color.

Together with the [Advancing Equity](#) report, we intend the OiS Mentorship Guide series to serve as a foundation of knowledge, support, and inspiration from which aspiring and long-time professionals in peace, security, and foreign policy can build life- and field-changing relationships through mentorship. **This guide focuses on support for mentees, and we encourage readers to explore its companion guide for mentors.**

These resources are featured on the [OiS Mentorship Hub](#), a free online community platform designed to increase the accessibility and quality of mentorship within and across peace, security, and foreign policy. In doing so, we can amplify the impact and equity of these efforts and the experiences of practitioners, especially those of color.

WHAT WE MEAN BY "MENTORSHIP"



Given the ambiguity that surrounds “mentorship” and society’s frequent use of language as a means of exclusion, we first aim to establish shared definitions of concepts and terminology central to this guide.

WHAT WE MEAN BY "MENTORSHIP"

There is neither a singular experience of mentorship nor a one-size-fits-all approach to it. Each individual and each partnership has the opportunity to engage with mentorship in a way that suits their needs, capacity, style, and goals.

Our definitions of *mentorship*, *mentor*, and *mentee* intentionally embrace and highlight the diversity of individuals in the roles of “learner” or “teacher” in a given mentoring relationship. The formats, focus, and impact of these experiences can be just as wide ranging.

Mentorship:

the sharing of experience, knowledge, or advice centered around learning or changing an individual (e.g., through skill development, situational analysis, advice sharing, etc.) (Gallo et al., 2019).

Mentor:

an experienced and knowledgeable person who advises another less experienced or knowledgeable person who aspires to a similar level of knowledge and experience (a mentee).

Mentee:

a person who receives advice, training, or guidance from a more experienced or skilled person (a mentor).

WHAT WE MEAN BY "MENTORSHIP"

Mentorship Structures:

Traditionally, mentorship is understood to be a long-term relationship where a senior professional helps a more junior one, but such a view limits the opportunity and potential benefits of mentorship. Peers, junior colleagues, and timebound focus groups are increasingly common and powerful formats for mentorship.

Mentorship Topics:

Mentorship can focus on something specific like how to address an instance of discrimination or it can offer more general guidance, like one's approach to holistic decision-making throughout their life. No topic is inherently off the table for mentorship, hence the importance of a mentor and mentee setting and revisiting expectations and boundaries throughout the relationship.

Practicing Mentorship:

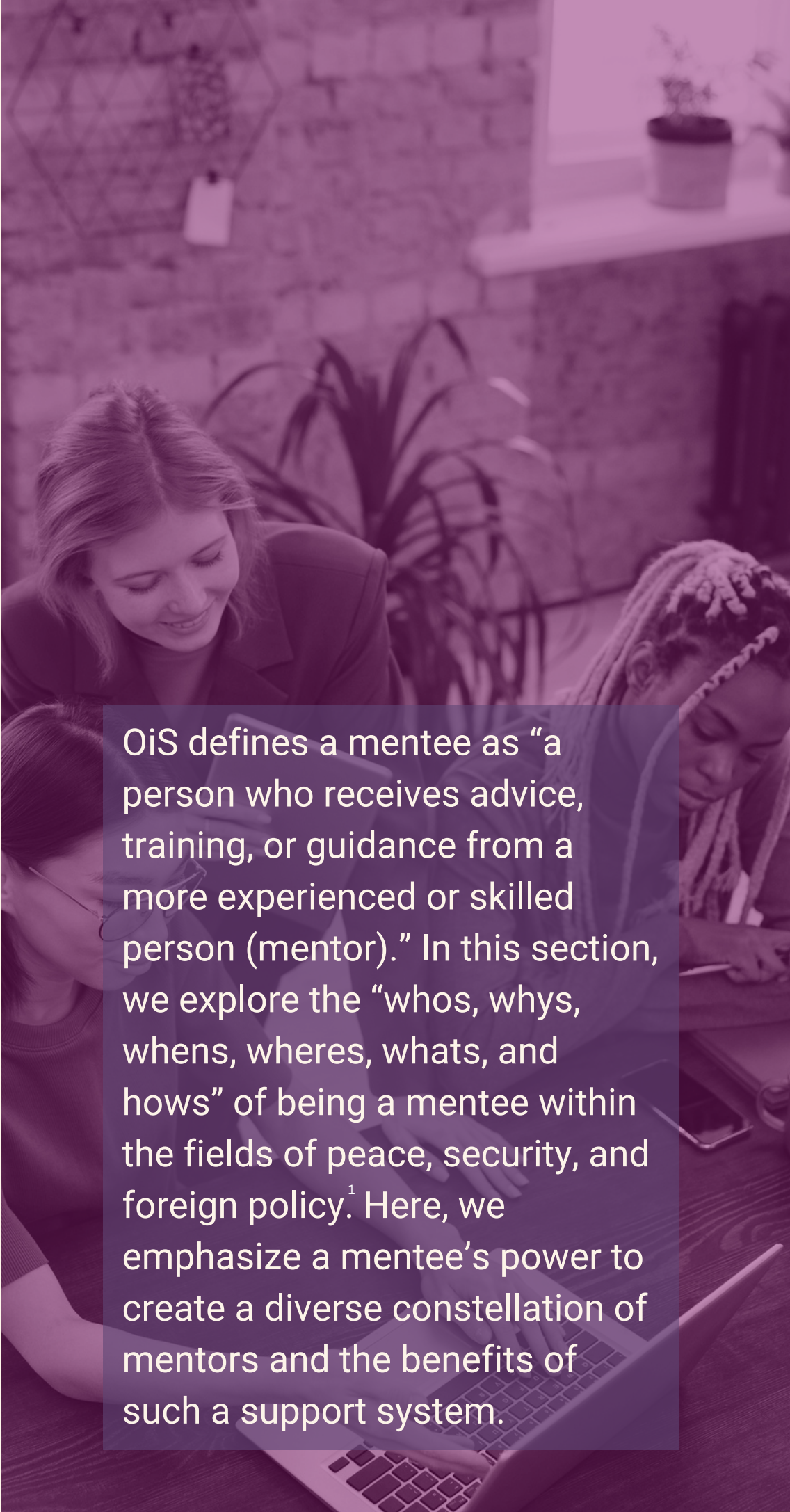
Mentorship can be something one does, and it can be something in which one believes. As an activity, mentorship's impact is felt strongly by those directly participating, but it likely does not influence the greater system or culture in which it takes place. As a value, individuals, communities, or organizations prioritize mentorship within and across their commitments and decision-making and more heavily influence their environment.

WHAT WE MEAN BY "MENTORSHIP"

Mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching are often used interchangeably. While there are certainly similarities among them, there are key and complementary differences that can shape one's approach to and satisfaction with a relationship. For more information on or examples of mentorship or these complementary relationships, please visit [Glossary and References](#) in this guide or the [Resources](#) section on the [OIS Mentorship Hub](#).



FOR MENTEEES



OiS defines a mentee as “a person who receives advice, training, or guidance from a more experienced or skilled person (mentor).” In this section, we explore the “whos, whys, whens, wheres, whats, and hows” of being a mentee within the fields of peace, security, and foreign policy.¹ Here, we emphasize a mentee’s power to create a diverse constellation of mentors and the benefits of such a support system.

FOR MENTEES

Who Can Be a Mentee?

Everyone can—and should—be mentored. As highlighted in this guide and [***Advancing Equity: Mentorship in Peace and Security***](#), the benefits of mentorship are wide-reaching, available to all, and can result from learning partnerships between any two or more individuals in diverse formats. Throughout every stage of one’s personal and professional life, transitions, obstacles, and identity-based challenges come and go. Asking for perspective, advice, or guidance can help any peace, security, or foreign policy professional navigate these hurdles, especially people of color who face systemic barriers to entry, retention, advancement, and belonging.

Why Seek Mentorship?

Long-standing research has shown that mentorship facilitates better performance, increases employee engagement, reduces turnover, expedites career advancement, and motivates mentees to become mentors to others (Gillies, 2023). More recently, research has explored the benefits of mentorship related to diversity, equity, and inclusion within organizations and how it can improve the experience and equitable recognition of people of color.

¹ In the companion guide for mentors, we advocate for mentors, especially white mentors, to proactively engage mentees of color.

FOR MENTEES

Given mentorship’s dynamic formats, topics, timeframes, and benefits, it can be helpful for a prospective mentee to reflect on their reason for seeking mentorship and their desired outcomes from it at a particular point in time (Goldstein, 2021). A prospective mentee does not need to have a definitive or unchanging answer to such questions, but awareness of their current experience and aspirations, of their “knowns” and “unknowns,” can make it easier to identify where, when, and how to find appropriate support. Once a mentoring relationship is established, this shared purpose and knowledge can help a mentee and mentor remain committed to the relationship, particularly in times of adversity.

When To Be Mentored?

A mentor can provide guidance, resources, and moral support to a mentee, but the intrinsic change mentorship aims to achieve is primarily dependent upon a mentee. The more a mentee invests in mentorship—the more they listen, share, learn, and practice—the greater will be their reward (Sastry, 2020).

Phone calls and meetings are the most obvious commitments between partners, but a mentee’s independent work between those sessions is just as important. It follows that a mentee should consider their capacity when pursuing mentorship to help ensure they find the right mentor for the right time. Joining formal mentoring programs can dramatically expedite the process of finding and establishing relationships with a new mentor. Such programs can be structured to help mentees with specific situations or more holistic growth, and their materials and community can help a mentee get the most out of an experience, including by connecting them with a mentor they otherwise may never have met.

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For mentoring programs that focus on supporting professionals of color in peace, security, and foreign policy, visit the [Mentorship and Network Opportunities](#) database on the [OiS Mentorship Hub](#).

Where To Find Mentors?

In the companion guide for mentors, we advocate for peace, security, and foreign policy professionals to proactively offer mentorship to those who could benefit from it, specifically people of color. Similarly, we want to highlight the power that a prospective mentee has to build and engage their own network to facilitate access to meaningful short- and long-term support.

A strong and broad network often increases accessibility to and effectiveness of mentorship. It enables a mentee to go directly to a familiar and reliable source of information or guidance, as well as to benefit from warm introductions to secondary connections. Continuously building relationships with people from diverse backgrounds can make it easier for a mentee to find the specific advice they need when they need it, and it can make a request for help feel less transactional than a cold request (Weisberg & Zakin, 2021).



FOR MENTEES

Relationship building, or “networking,” takes time and effort. Thankfully, there are many ways of doing it, and one’s preexisting network is often more powerful and wide-reaching than one imagines. Some mentees enjoy striking up conversations with strangers at events and can invest their resources in conferences and networking events. Others may prefer one-on-one informational coffees while still others may prefer seeking guidance from friends, relatives, teammates, or classmates.² The key is for a mentee to consistently foster genuine relationships in a way that feels authentic and rewarding to them and being willing to thoughtfully ask those connections for help.

Professional colleagues are excellent starting points for relationship building and mentorship. By expressing interest in or collaborating on a project with a prospective mentor a mentee can deepen a relationship, demonstrate professionalism and know-how, and strengthen their existing skill set.³ With this approach (and others), keep in mind that a great mentor is defined by how they engage with and support a mentee—not by a title, degree, or subject matter expertise. A good learning partnership requires committed individuals who have the bandwidth to help one another and the knowledge needed to progress. Oftentimes, a mentee can find these qualities within peers who are just a step or two ahead of them; an experience gap that allows a mentor to share expertise, foresee pitfalls, offer actionable advice, and easily understand important social context within which a mentee is operating (Mills, n.d.).

² Personal connections can be impactful mentors and network members. Even if they lack industry-specific experience, they often can ask a mentee thoughtful questions, quickly understand a mentee’s perspective and why they need support, and may be able and eager to introduce a mentee to other individuals or communities who are well-positioned to help (Goldstein, 2021).

³ Keep in mind that a mentor can be junior, senior, or a peer of a mentee. Both parties should be mindful of unpaid labor by compensating for the work or ensuring clear boundaries and recognition for the volunteered hours.

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Professional networks, events, fellowships, or mentoring programs can further facilitate access to people, experiences, and mentorship. These groups and activities often convene people for the explicit purpose of making connections, exchanging support, and providing resources, structure, and mentor-mentee matches. Explore the [Mentorship and Network Opportunities](#) database on the [OiS Mentorship Hub](#) to learn more about mentor-related programming within peace, security, and foreign policy.

What is Expected of A Mentee?

Like any partnership, roles, responsibilities, expectations, and boundaries of a mentee and mentor need to be established and re-established by a mentee and mentor as the relationship progresses (Goldstein, 2021). Each should clearly and respectfully share their needs and preferences while respecting and accommodating those of their partner.

Areas where partners can set expectations includes but is not limited to:

- **Goals.** Mentors can help mentees in countless ways. By acknowledging, planning for, and working toward shared goals, a mentee can help a mentor more easily focus their support, identify questions to ask, feedback to offer, or ideas to propose (Sastry, 2020).
- **Timeframe.** Establishing a period for reliable engagement—whether it is a one-time call or months-long partnership—allows both a mentee and mentor to fully understand and follow through on the commitment they make to their partner. Clarity here makes it easier to transition a relationship at its end.

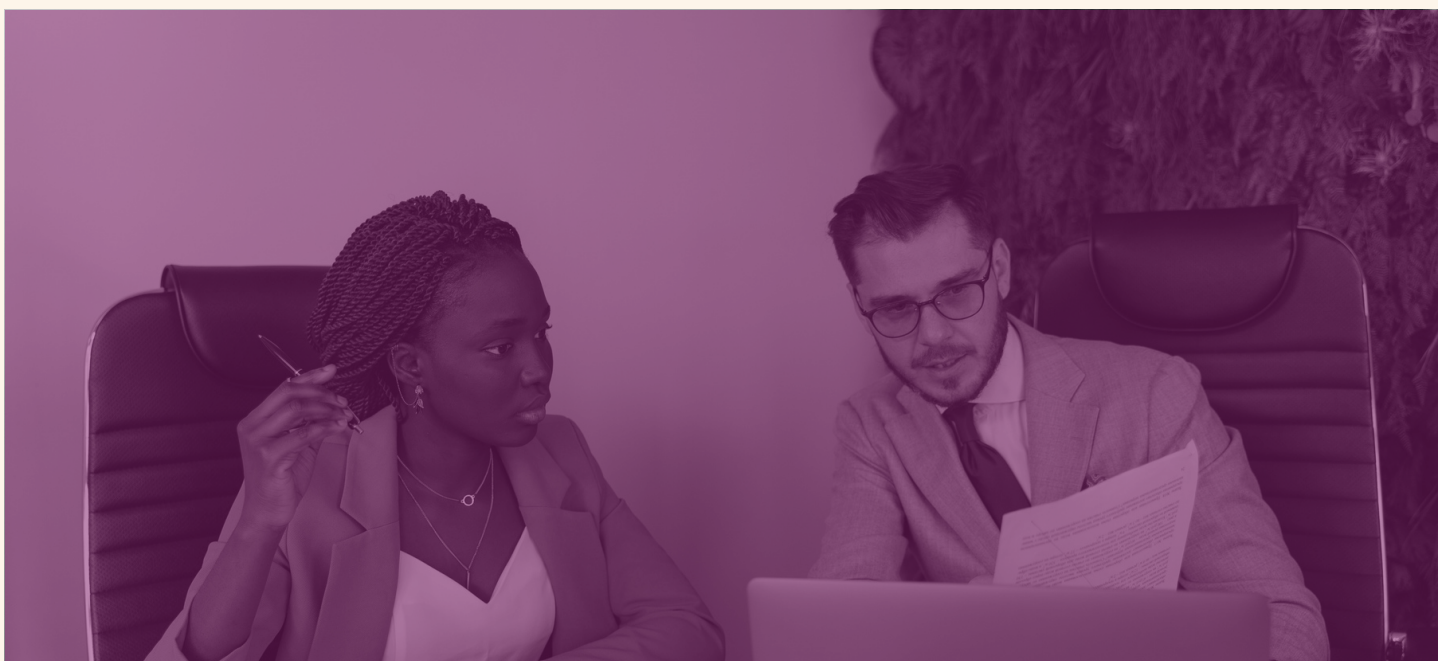
FOR MENTEES

There is no one-size-fits-all method or approach to setting and resetting expectations, and each mentoring pair must jointly determine what works well and feels most important for them at a given time.

- **Availability, responsiveness, and communication norms.** Sharing and agreeing to communication approaches (e.g., emailing, texting, response time, frequency of check-ins) helps ensure both participants feel respected and understood.
- **Topics and expertise.** When a mentor openly acknowledges that a skill, situation, or question is outside of their knowledge-base, they can refocus their support on areas within their wheelhouse while modeling self-awareness, authenticity, and integrity to a mentee. Responding to a question with, “I do not know, and I will try to find out,” exemplifies an honest, solutions-oriented approach that is invaluable not only in mentorship but also in the workplace.
- **Confidentiality.** Critical to trust building and relationship success, both parties need to establish what is shareable and what is private information. Creating a mutual understanding of confidentiality helps each partner moderate what, when, and how they share.
- **Administrative Roles.** Clarifying administrative structures and accountability methods in these conversations can help improve communication, reduce ambiguity, and increase focus of conversations between a mentee and mentor. In the early days, it may make sense for a mentor to lead on these responsibilities so a mentee can observe, practice, and gain confidence in those skill sets. Gradually, a mentee can take ownership of these elements and adapt them to suit the ongoing needs of the relationship (Cater & Bryda, n.d.).

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- **Agendas.** In new relationships, agendas can serve as fruitful icebreakers that enable a mentee and mentor to feel prepared for a conversation, clear on its purpose, and confident that the other is being thoughtful in their engagement (Mills, n.d.). By sharing an agenda with a mentor in advance of a conversation, a mentee enables a mentor to start thinking about advice and resources to share during the discussion and the partners can focus their time together addressing the most important topics (Sastry, 2020).
- **Accountability.** Other accountability structures, like goal-setting or work planning, can further amplify the impact of mentorship. Depending on a mentee's goals, it may be helpful to consider developing and tracking priorities using resources like **SMARTIE**, **PURE**, **CLEAR**, or **SMEAC** planning and evaluation tools (SMARTIE Goals Worksheet, 2021) (Zelenska, 2021).



FOR MENTEES

How To Approach Being A Mentee

While the primary driver of mentorship is to facilitate internal growth within a mentee, successful mentorship is a mutually beneficial partnership. A mentor can hugely benefit from a mentee's experience, perspective, and expertise. During each conversation, a mentee can ask a mentor if there is a way in which they can offer advice, insight, or support. Practicing this approach can reinforce a sense of partnership and create opportunities for a mentee to collaborate with, advise, or help a mentor.

A mentee's offer of support can demonstrate commitment to and gratitude for a mentor, who is oftentimes freely volunteering their hard-earned experience and limited time to a mentee. By practicing awareness, flexibility, and accountability, a mentee can exhibit both appreciation for a mentor's guidance and their own professionalism. Examples of professional behavior include: addressing mentors using appropriate titles, being mindful of boundaries, sending thank you notes, completing an agreed-upon action, being punctual, and relaying the ways in which a one has utilized or reflected upon a partner's advice.

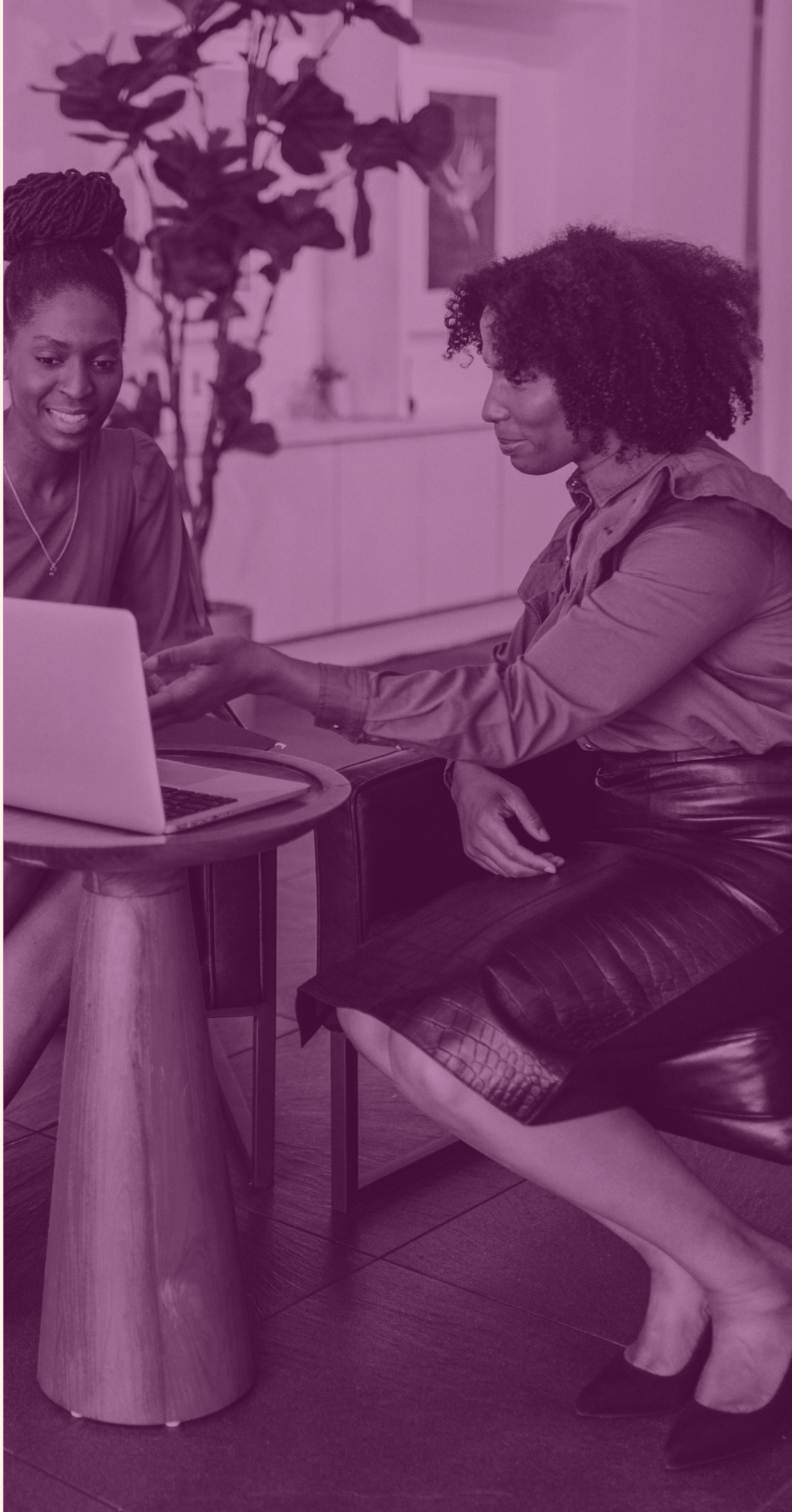
FOR MENTEES

A mentor, like a mentee, is human. Very few mentors will have the time, expertise, and perspective to meet 100 percent of a mentee's needs at a given time, let alone over a lifetime. By creating a "portfolio" or "constellation" of mentors, a mentee can practice professional flexibility with a mentor, avoid overburdening a relationship, more easily seek out multiple perspectives regarding important and challenging situations, and receive versatile, reliable expertise (Sastry, 2020).⁴ This approach to mentorship can help a mentee think critically about the advice they receive from each mentor and customize their own path forward (Weisberg & Zakin, 2021).

When creating one's constellation of mentors, racial diversity is a worthy consideration, especially since mentors and mentees typically default to building relationships with people who look like them (Green, 2019). For a mentee of color, having a mentor who shares their racial identity can alleviate hesitancy to share or the need to explain experiences of discrimination or race-based professional obstacles. Such topics are often easier to meaningfully discuss and address in homogenous groups. However, if a mentee exclusively seeks mentorship from someone who looks like them, they may severely limit their access to potential support, perspectives, networks, and opportunities. By creating a diverse portfolio of mentors who consistently practice self-education, awareness, and empathy, a mentee can allay feelings of isolation, exclusion, or insecurity while expanding their access to all of the powerful benefits mentorship has to offer (Gillies, 2023).

⁴ By "professional flexibility" we mean communicating and practicing understanding of and adaptability for competing priorities to a degree that still enables one to fulfill their own professional needs. Both partners' time is valuable and should be mutually treated as such.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

Everyone has the potential to be a successful mentee. A mentee has the power to ask for and engage in mentorship with diverse mentors in equally diverse formats. In doing so, a mentee increases their likelihood of strong performance, high engagement, positive recognition, career advancement, a sense of belonging, and support for professional opportunities (Gillies, 2023).

Mentorship has no singular recipe for success. It can happen in a moment or over a lifetime, between peers or senior and junior staff, in groups or one-on-one. Regardless of its format, mentorship that fosters empathy and learning can consistently and positively change the diversity, equity, and inclusion of organizations and the professional experiences and recognition of people of color.

Organizations in Solidarity created the [OiS Mentorship Hub](#) to welcome, connect, and support peace, security, and foreign policy professionals in making mentorship more accessible and impactful across these disciplines, especially for people of color. Join the Hub to explore its resources, build relationships, and help normalize effective mentorship of people of color across peace, security, and foreign policy disciplines.

GLOSSARY AND REFERENCES



GLOSSARY

Mentorship

There is neither a singular experience of mentorship nor a one-size-fits-all approach. Each individual and each partnership has the opportunity to approach and engage with mentorship in a way that suits their needs, capacity, style, and goals.

Mentorship: the sharing of experience, knowledge, or advice centered around learning or changing an individual (e.g., through skill development, situational analysis, advice sharing, etc.) (Gallo et al., 2019).

- **Mentor:** an experienced and knowledgeable person who advises another less experienced or knowledgeable person who aspires to a similar level of knowledge and experience (mentee).
- **Mentee:** a person who receives advice, training, or guidance from a more experienced or skilled person (mentor).

Common Mentorship Structures

- **Traditional or Vertical:** a more senior individual helps a more junior individual.
- **Reverse:** a more junior individual helps a more senior individual.
- **Peer to Peer:** an individual helps another with comparable professional status or experience.

GLOSSARY

- **Formal:** a relationship formed with the explicit objective of offering and receiving help (often established through a program or the initiative of an individual).
- **Informal:** a relationship that involves the sharing of experience, knowledge, or advice between two or more individuals whether or not a “helping relationship” is explicitly established.
- **Timebound:** a relationship with a notable beginning and end (often determined by a program or shared objective).
- **Ongoing:** an enduring relationship that evolves with and between individuals.
- **One-on-One:** a mentoring relationship between two individuals.
- **Group:** a mentoring relationship between more than two individuals (who often come together through a commonality such as career stage, subject matter interest, identity, desired skill, etc.).

Mentorship

Phases:

Like all relationships, mentorship evolves over time. Regardless of its duration, each experience involves four predictable phases⁵ as outlined by [The Center for Mentoring Excellence](#): preparation, negotiation, enabling growth, and closure.

- **Preparation:** getting oneself, and the relationship, ready for trust building; an opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the mentoring relationship and process.

⁵ Mentoring Month Webinar Week 3: Making The Most of Your Mentoring Relationship. (2022, January 20). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb1WRKtlyh8>

GLOSSARY

- **Negotiation:** setting agreements and expectations; understanding what and how each participant plans to give to and benefit from the partnership.
- **Enabling Growth:** the primary stage of learning and development; a focused period of skill-building, reflection, networking, etc.
- **Closure or Redefinition:** an opportunity to look back and move forward; some relationships come to a close while others will continue, albeit with an adjusted understanding.

Mentorship Topics:

The topics, skills, or experiences that mentorship supports are as diverse as the formats in which it takes place. It can focus on something specific like competency development, or it can offer more general guidance, like how to approach holistic decision-making. Common mentoring topics in the field of peace and security include: enhancing subject matter expertise, skill development, career advancement, personal growth, networking, navigating transitions, intergenerational learning, overcoming identity-based obstacles, or health and wellbeing.

GLOSSARY

Practicing Mentorship:

Mentorship can be something one does, and it can be something in which one believes:

- **Mentorship as an Activity:** A distinct, time-bound engagement. The impact is felt strongly by those participating, but it likely does not influence the greater system or culture in which it takes place.
- **Mentorship as a Value:** Individuals, organizations, and communities prioritize mentorship within and across their commitments and decision-making. In this practice, mentorship influences the behaviors and cultures of a workplace or community.

These definitions intentionally embrace and highlight some of the overlap and complementary differences of learning relationships and participants within them. We hope highlighting the diversity of these terms, models, and approaches increases readers' understanding and utilization of the range and nuance of mentorship.

Overlapping Relationships

The following definitions intentionally embrace and highlight overlap and complementary differences between the relationship types, as well as the range of roles an individual can play in a given situation. Mentoring partners should take the time to align their understanding before engaging in a relationship to appropriately set and meet expectations.

GLOSSARY

Sponsorship:

public or private (i.e. “behind closed doors”) advocacy by a leader with power who advocates for an individual who has less.

- **Sponsor:** a leader with social, economic, or organizational power who believes in, advocates for, and uses their capital on behalf of a protégé (Gallo et al., 2019).
- **Protégé:** a professional whom a sponsor sees as a top or high-potential performer who deserves to be awarded opportunities or protected from disapproval (Gallo et al., 2019).

Sponsorship vs. Mentorship:

Sponsors can be mentors, and mentors can be sponsors, but that’s not always the case. It is critical to recognize the fluidity of these roles and activities, as well as their boundaries.

- Where mentorship fosters internal change within a mentee, sponsorship facilitates external change in how others see the protégé and what opportunities are available to them (Gallo et al., 2019).
- Mentorship often involves high investment of time and knowledge but low risk to the mentor, whereas sponsorship requires minimal time but poses a higher risk to the sponsor due to the investment of their social capital and the public nature of the relationship (Gallo et al., 2019).

GLOSSARY

Network:

the collective of individuals with whom one has or has had a positive relationship.

- **Formal or Professional Network:** a group of people organized by and connected through a commonality. These networks often involve membership fees, social events, and educational resources.
- **Informal or Personal Network:** the collective of individuals with whom one builds relationships over the course of their life. These can include co-workers, colleagues, academic peers or alumni, friends, family, members of one's community, etc.
- **Networking vs. Mentorship:** While networking and mentorship do not always go hand in hand, many mentors leverage their networks as a means of bolstering their support for a mentee. Examples of this could include: inviting a mentee to networking and training events; connecting a mentee with colleagues who work on portfolios of interest, looping mentees into potential career opportunities, etc.

GLOSSARY

Coaching:

typically a paid relationship where a coach engages a client in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires the client to maximize their personal and professional potential (ICF, the Gold Standard in Coaching).

- **Coaching vs. Mentorship:** Whereas a coach is trained, certified, and paid for the explicit purpose of building the skills of or confidence of their client, a mentor is typically not formally trained, certified, or paid to provide hands-on assistance in these domains. A mentor is often better suited to serve as an adviser or sounding board who can share knowledge, experiences, and ideas with a mentee without directly assisting them in decision-making (Wong, 2021). That said, a mentor absolutely can use coaching techniques to encourage a mentee's reflection and growth.

Counseling:

typically a paid relationship aimed at empowering an individual to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals (What Is Professional Counseling?, n.d.).

- **Counseling vs. Mentorship:** Similar to a coach, a counselor is a trained and certified professional who is paid to support a client's mental and emotional wellbeing. While a mentor can hold space for and offer advice regarding a mentee's difficult personal or professional issues, it is important for both a mentor and a mentee to set and respect appropriate boundaries that support the integrity of the relationship and advice exchanged.

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