

Topic Hub: Environmental Mentoring Subsection : Mentoring Strategies

Environmental mentoring relationships vary drastically, and can take the form of a one-to-one relationship, a one-to-many relationship, an interactive group of peers, or other relationships depending on the creativity of the parties involved. Whether participants are government staff, business leaders, or others, one thing common to all is that peers can be very important teachers in finding practical solutions to everyday problems.

Tips for Establishing a Mentoring Program

Successful mentoring relationships or programs should:

- Focus on a common, manageable theme, tailored to the participants;
- Understand and address potential barriers to mentoring before designing and initiating a program;
- Establish a clear, defined scope and timeline, especially for non-compensatory programs;
- Identify and invite credible mentors and participants;
- Ensure, prior to start up, that the program is legal;
- Ensure, prior to start up, that the program is affordable - by considering costs associated with mailings, listservs and other communications, publicity, mentor travel expenses, facilities and refreshments for meetings, etc.;
- Organize agendas and types of interactions (for instance, face-to-face meetings, site visits, listservs, workshops, etc.) based on the true needs of the group;
- Identify active, motivated, and skilled leaders; consider a third-party facilitator if many individuals will be involved; and
- Design a system to measure progress.

Additional tips for implementing a good mentoring program are offered by the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) publications titled, ["Tips for Successful Environmental Mentoring" \(2000\)](#), and [The Mentoring Handbook - A Guide to Environmental Mentoring for Companies, Nonprofits, and Regulators" \(2000\)](#).

Tips for Finding a Mentor or Mentoring Network

If you are seeking a mentor or mentoring group, be well-prepared. Propose an organized, clear outline to a potential mentor. In the proposal, let them know why this is a good fit, what you hope to learn from the association, the amount of time and resources expected, and what you will contribute. To help identify and get referrals for potential mentors, here are a few suggestions:

- Check with government agencies, especially Small Business Assistance programs;
- Contact the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) Association;
- Contact and/or join a professional or trade organization specific to an industry or environmental initiative;
- Look in-house for senior employees or employees trained in specific environmental areas, who might serve as internal mentor(s);
- Join appropriate listservs (e.g., P2Tech, ChemAlliance, etc.) and post your need and mentoring proposal; and
- Contact any of the applicable mentoring centers or resources in the *"Where to Go For Help"* section of this hub.

Different Mentoring Models

Mentoring relationships vary considerably. A few mentoring models for applicable to P2 issues are discussed below. Also included are actual examples of mentoring programs that were or are currently successful. Four of the basic mentoring frameworks include coaching, association or non-government organization (NGO) facilitation, peer groups and internal organizational mentoring.

Coaching. Coaching involves an outside individual or team working with a mentee to share tools and enable progress in achieving environmental goals. Coaches may be knowledgeable individual business professional(s); a group of people from an experienced company, government agency staff, service provider, technical assistance providers; or even paid consultants. The coach takes an active role in contacting mentees, providing resources and assistance, and inquiring about progress. A successful coaching relationship requires a credible coach or coaching team, and an actively engaged mentee working to achieve the desired goal(s).



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Example 1: Texas' EnviroMentor Program, operated under the Small Business Assistance Program, runs a volunteer mentoring program to assist small businesses comply with environmental regulations. The program recruits and incentivizes qualified volunteer professionals and retirees, who provide capped amounts of pro bono time and confidential assistance to small Texas businesses.

Example 2: A well-established organization shares best management practices from their own experience, with a smaller business or even a competitor, seeking to achieve the same goals, such as implementing a new technology in a specific industry, or movement to ISO 14000 certification. Employees in the mentor company are designated to administer the program. They work with the mentee to formulate a specific implementation plan, assist in carrying out the plan, and check in afterward as a follow-up activity.

Example 3: Supply chains and customer chains form the basis for this relationship. "Greening the supply chain" occurs in many ways, including but not limited to, information sharing; partnering; assisting suppliers with certifications; strategic environmental planning; green procurement; and improving communication infrastructure between customer and supplier. Reversing the roles as mentors and mentees, suppliers can mentor customer companies by educating them about specifying or purchasing products that require fewer resources and/or lower toxicity to manufacture than what the customer currently buys.

This mentoring model is similar to Example 2, except that the customer mentors directly to supplier(s), or the supplier mentors directly to customer(s). Benefits for the supplier include reduced liability resulting from supplier error, compliance with product standards, and improved corporate image. Benefits to both parties include easier access to information and support, and a continued future business partnership.

Association and NGO Facilitation. Associations are a good venue for mentoring. A trade association or environmental association (for example, Environmental Defense, etc.), may assume the role of facilitator and mentor, by providing P2 information, training and resources to its members and/or others. The association can draw on some of the more experienced members for technical assistance and support. This model requires active participation from association or NGO staff and a minimum level of commitment by members. Benefits include enhanced public image, a united voice on issues in their industry, and reduced time commitment for association members.

Example 1: The Kentucky P2 Center (KPPC) formed an environmental management system (EMS) alliance that conducts training and mentoring for EMS planning, implementation and auditing for certain sectors (including colleges and universities, and Department of Defense facilities). KPPC facilitates and delivers training by means of workshops and instruction. At workshops, peer mentors share how they set up their EMS, the drivers and techniques that work best, and other lessons learned.

Example 2: Maryland's Businesses for the Bay offers members access to other mentor members willing to provide voluntary assistance and experienced insight to other members on pollution prevention (P2) subjects and related environmental issues. Mentors serve as a peer-to-peer, question and answer resource.

Example 3: The Chemical Manufacturers Association's Responsible Care Program™ has a "mutual assistance network". This network compiles company best practices; hosts regional networking meetings; hosts an informal e-mail discussion group; and offers a Management Systems Verification process managed by technical experts and representatives.

Peer Groups Working Around A Common Issue or Initiative. This model entails an active third-party entity, possibly volunteer(s), organizing businesses and professionals for the purpose of sharing ideas, tools, and learnings, all of which are keyed around a common issue, initiative, or industry. Examples of issues or initiatives are protection of the watershed in a geographic region; reporting under the Global Reporting Initiative; or compliance with an environmental standard such as a green building code. Networking can occur within a sector or across sector lines, and promotes interaction between different-sized companies.



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The third party may or may not be directly involved in the initiative or issue, but either way, must assume an active role in soliciting and maintaining participation, and facilitating meetings and overall programs. This role can be filled by government agency staff or government contractor(s), an association, a NGO, or an interested and motivated individual, company, or consultant. Because of the variety of sectors and geographic locations typically involved in such a group, this model is enhanced by encouragement of interactions outside face-to-face meetings. Benefits include low costs and expanded networking opportunities.

Example 1: Strategic Energy Innovations (SEI) coordinates and develops the Peer Exchange portion of the Department of Energy's Rebuild America program across the U.S. The main focus of Peer Forums is to bring peers together, in any setting, community or topic, to engage them in creative exchanges of ideas. Mentoring programs maintain the momentum for projects established at the forums. They make use of peer experience and peer influence to impart ideas and strategies for success in a longer term, one-on-one relationship.

Example 2: Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) coordinates EMS work groups. TURI supports companies interested in developing and sharing EMS tools such as aspects and impact analysis methods, corrective action programs, and document writing procedures. TURI offers financial incentives to host companies, and also offers full facilitation services.

Example 3: A board of respected business leaders guides the Oregon Natural Step Network in Portland, Oregon. Mentoring activities include coordinating breakfast presentations; recognizing leaders and highlighting issues pertaining to sustainable practices; and sponsoring peer learning groups on topics such as building construction practices, eco-indicators, and implementing The Natural Step (TNS) framework for sustainability.

Internal Organizational Mentoring. In this model, one area of an organization attains environmental expertise and then mentors other branches, divisions, and facilities within the company or agency.

Example 1: The Boise State Office of Idaho's Department of Environmental Quality won an environmental award under the Idaho Gem Stars program. The Office won the award by implementing policies and acting on numerous environmental improvement strategies. The office will now help other regional offices within Idaho attain the same environmental performance levels.

Example 2: An organizational division or individual receives vocational training pertaining to lean manufacturing, or independently researches and implements lean manufacturing. The know-how can then be shared with another process line, other staff, and sister facilities.

Example 3: Some businesses offer internships/mentorships to students who are assigned a mentor, and then given projects to assist them in learning environmental and managerial best practices.

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