



**2026–27**

**MENTORSHIP**

**PROGRAM**

**TOOLKIT**



## 2026–27 MENTORSHIP PROGRAM DETAILS AND GUIDELINES

Professional development and relationship building is at the core of NCEDA's mission, and **mentorship** is a key opportunity for NCEDA members to engage and learn from each other in a meaningful way. The NCEDA Emerging Executives Initiative is excited to announce the 2026-27 NCEDA Mentorship Program! **The application period is open August 20 – September 11, 2026.**

If you are an experienced practitioner or allied professional, apply to be a **mentor** and coach someone through a challenging project, advise on a career move, or be a sounding board for new ideas. If you are new to economic development, apply to be a **mentee** to find help with common project obstacles and have support in the advancement of your career. **This Mentorship Program is open to all NCEDA members.**

### Objectives

- To support those that are new to the field of economic development, including practitioners and allies as well as experts in the industry wanting to give back
- To establish a trusting relationship with accountability and responsibility between the mentor and mentee

### Outline

This is a nine (9) month commitment from October 2026 – June 2027. At the conclusion of the nine (9) month mentorship program, each mentor and mentee will have the option to end or continue with the existing mentorship relationship and/or program.

- **August/September:** Application Submission
- **Mid-September:** Application Review / Pairings
- **Late September:** Virtual Introductions and Orientation
  - Set expectations and determine communication preference (email, phone, virtual, and/or in-person)
- **October:** Kickoff Reception for Mentors/Mentees at Fall Conference
- **October – May:** Monthly Check-Ins
  - Expectations for one-hour meetings each month (virtual, phone, or in-person)
- **Mid-February:** Midway Point Virtual Check-In for Mentors and Mentees (calendar invitation will be sent mid-late January)
- **June:** Mentorship Program Celebration at Annual Conference

### Criteria

- Applicants must be members of NCEDA for the duration of the program.
- Applicants must be committed for the full nine-month period (*October 2026 – June 2027*).

## Mentorship Program Benefits

- Encourage professional and personal development
- Increase confidence and identify career goals
- Develop deeper relationships with other industry professionals
- Build a stronger field of North Carolina economic development professionals who will continue to bring prosperity to all parts of our state

## Mentor Characteristics

- Be available – provide your time, experience, encouragement, feedback, and advice
- Be an active listener – be attentive and remove potential distractions from your conversation
- Build on your mentee's strengths and give constructive feedback
- Be on time for meetings
- Be willing to admit you do not have all the answers, but offer to assist
- Be understanding
- Be approachable
- Take ownership of the relationship
- Help guide your mentee to identify realistic, attainable goals
- Share your experiences
- Celebrate successes
- Have fun

## Mentee Characteristics

- Be available
- Take ownership of the relationship
- Be open and honest – tell your mentor what you need from the relationship
- Be respectful of your Mentor's time
- Be approachable
- Have fun

## Mentor Relationship Phases

It is important to establish a clear understanding of expectations at the first meeting. Each party should come prepared for all meetings so the relationship can develop smoothly.

| <b>Purpose</b>          | <b>Engagement</b>       | <b>Growth</b>               | <b>Completion</b>                    |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Establish Compatibility | Build Rapport and Trust | Build Skills                | Offer Reflection                     |
| Set Expectations        | Clarify Expectations    | Overcome Barriers to Growth | Build Confidence to Continue Growing |
|                         | Become Acquainted       | Develop Growth Mindset      | Pay it Forward                       |
|                         | Celebrate Milestones    | Explore Accountability      |                                      |
|                         |                         | Provide Feedback            |                                      |

### Mentee: Build An Action Plan with Assistance from the Mentor

The mentee should brainstorm up to four career or work-related objectives (goals) to work on during the mentorship program. Together, you and your mentor should develop a plan of action to reach these objectives. Your mentor should help you determine where to focus and how best to accomplish these goals. Complete the form below for each goal early in the process, and continuously update it as needed.

#### Example:

**Objective:** Improve weekly staff meetings with my team.

**Action Steps:** Identify current friction points to improve; Create weekly agenda template; Assign roles in team meetings; and create a system for follow-ups after meetings

| Objectives (Goals) | Action Steps |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Objective #1:      |              |
| Objective #2:      |              |
| Objective #3:      |              |

### Mentee Skills Inventory Guide

**Instructions:** Review each skill in column one. In the next columns, indicate how comfortable you are in using each skill by checking **V (very comfortable)**, **M (moderately comfortable)**, or **U (uncomfortable)**. In column five, identify a concrete situation when you were either comfortable or uncomfortable using the skill. Insert a checkmark in column six for each skill you feel needs improvement.

| SKILLS                                                          | V | M | U | EXAMPLES | NEEDS WORK |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------|------------|
| Establishing Relationships with Public Sector/Elected Officials |   |   |   |          |            |
| Being an Active Listener                                        |   |   |   |          |            |
| Relationship Building                                           |   |   |   |          |            |
| Initiating Conversation                                         |   |   |   |          |            |

|                                                                                                                                        |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Keeping Agreements                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Operating from my Strengths                                                                                                            |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having a Positive Attitude                                                                                                             |  |  |  |  |  |
| Being Values-Centered                                                                                                                  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Knowing my Vision/Purpose                                                                                                              |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having Emotional Intelligence                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |
| Building Positive Habits                                                                                                               |  |  |  |  |  |
| Effective Goal Setting                                                                                                                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Taking Action Consistently                                                                                                             |  |  |  |  |  |
| Managing Time/Projects                                                                                                                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Being an Effective Communicator                                                                                                        |  |  |  |  |  |
| Welcoming Feedback                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Being a Change Agent                                                                                                                   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Adapting to Change                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having Problem-Solving Skills                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having Self-Motivation                                                                                                                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Resolving Conflict                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having Self-Reflection / Ability to Assess Self-Performance                                                                            |  |  |  |  |  |
| Being Resourceful                                                                                                                      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Having Resilience in Light of Setbacks                                                                                                 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Desired Skill Development: <i>If not listed above, please list additional skills you would like to strengthen during this program.</i> |  |  |  |  |  |

## Mentorship Program Conversation Starter Questions

**Instructions:** These questions are optional but can help initiate conversations between the mentor and mentee.

1. Have you ever been involved in a mentoring relationship? What did you learn from that experience?
2. What would success look like for you?
3. What are the biggest challenges you're facing in your role right now?
4. Are there any skills you are struggling with or would like to improve?
5. What areas do you feel you need to work on or skills you need to develop to advance in your career?
6. What kind of feedback have you received recently, and how have you acted on it?
7. Looking back over the past year, what accomplishments are you most proud of?
8. Are there any upcoming opportunities or projects you'd like to get involved in?
9. What motivates you to stay engaged and productive in your work?
10. Where did you go to school?
11. What was your path to Economic Development?
12. What areas of Economic Development would you like to learn more about?
13. What areas of the profession have had a meaningful impact on your life?
14. What books, articles, and/or podcasts have you used to get a better understanding of this profession?
15. What unique life experience(s) has shaped your career path?
16. What are some tools you've used to deal with stressful situations?

## First Year Mentorship Program Optional Monthly Agendas

**Instructions:** If this is the mentee's first year in the program, this is the best place to start. These optional agendas are designed to help mentors and mentees structure their monthly conversations and can be used as a guide throughout the year. If the mentee has participated in the mentorship program previously, the guide also includes **Year Two Optional Monthly Agendas** beginning on page 11.

### Month 1 (October): Kickoff & Goal Setting

**Focus:** Building rapport & setting expectations

**Objectives:**

- Get to know each other
- Clarify goals and expectations
- Establish communication style and meeting cadence

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What do you hope to gain from this mentorship?
- What's your background and current role?
- What's your preferred way to communicate and receive feedback?

### Meeting Agenda Template:

1. Icebreaker / introductions
2. Discuss background and professional journeys
3. Outline mentorship expectations
4. Establish goals using **SMART** framework to help set effective, achievable goals:
  - **Specific:** Clear, well-defined, and unambiguous.
  - **Measurable:** With specific criteria that measure your progress.
  - **Achievable:** Attainable and not impossible to achieve.
  - **Relevant:** Aligned with broader objectives or career path.
  - **Time-bound:** With a clearly defined deadline or time frame.

*SMART Goal Template: Use this table to define and track your SMART goals:*

| Specific | Measurable | Achievable | Relevant | Time-bound |
|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------|
|          |            |            |          |            |
|          |            |            |          |            |
|          |            |            |          |            |

5. Review the next steps and confirm the next meeting

### Month 2 (November): Self-Awareness & Strengths

**Focus:** Personal values, strengths, and growth areas

#### Objectives:

- Build self-awareness
- Understand natural talents
- Identify areas for improvement

#### Discussion Prompts:

- What are your top strengths?
- What feedback have you received in the past?
- How do your strengths help or hinder you?

### Meeting Agenda Template:

1. Review progress since last meeting
2. Review Skills Inventory
3. Identify development areas
4. Assign action steps for next meeting

### Month 3 (December): Career Development Planning

**Focus:** Career path exploration and planning

#### Objectives:

- Clarify long-term career vision
- Identify skills or experiences needed
- Align current actions with future goals

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What's your 3–5 year career goal?
- What's holding you back from your next step?
- What skills would help you advance?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Review of the SMART goal progress
2. Discuss long-term career aspirations
3. Identify skill or experience gaps
4. Agree on next developmental actions
5. Schedule a check-in point

### Month 4 (January): Communication & Influence

**Focus:** Enhancing communication effectiveness

**Objectives:**

- Improve verbal and written communication
- Learn to adapt to different styles
- Build confidence in giving/receiving feedback

**Discussion Prompts:**

- How do you adapt your message to different audiences?
- When was a time you communicated really well—or poorly?
- How do you handle conflict?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss recent communication experiences
2. Practice giving or receiving feedback
3. Review or role-play common scenarios
4. Identify 1–2 communication habits to improve
5. Plan next steps

### Month 5 (February): Leadership & Decision-Making

**Focus:** Developing a leadership mindset

**Objectives:**

- Define what leadership means personally
- Build confidence in decision-making
- Practice accountability and ownership

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What leadership traits do you admire?
- When have you had to step up as a leader?
- How do you approach tough decisions?



**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Share examples of leadership moments
2. Review decision-making frameworks
3. Discuss accountability and initiative
4. Define a leadership goal for the year
5. Follow up on any shadowing or reading

**Month 6 (March): Networking & Relationship Building**

**Focus:** Building meaningful professional connections

**Objectives:**

- Improve networking comfort and skills
- Learn how to nurture professional relationships
- Leverage networks for opportunities

**Discussion Prompts:**

- How do you currently network?
- Who's in your "go-to" circle professionally?
- How do you follow up after meeting someone new?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Review current networking habits
2. Brainstorm strategies for relationship-building
3. Share event(s) or networking opportunities
4. Role-play outreach or introductions
5. Set a networking goal for the month

**Month 7 (April): Problem Solving & Strategic Thinking**

**Focus:** Critical thinking and adaptability

**Objectives:**

- Enhance problem-solving approach
- Apply frameworks to real situations
- Learn from failures and pivots

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What's a recent challenge you've faced?
- How do you approach solving complex problems?
- How do you measure the success of a decision?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a recent or upcoming challenge
2. Apply a problem-solving model
3. Brainstorm multiple solutions
4. Reflect on what success would look like

## Month 8 (May): Personal Brand & Visibility

**Focus:** Reputation management and presence

**Objectives:**

- Define personal brand
- Improve visibility in your field
- Prepare for advancement opportunities

**Discussion Prompts:**

- How would others describe your professional presence?
- What's on your LinkedIn or digital footprint?
- Where do you want to be seen or heard?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Reflect on your current brand and visibility
2. Review personal materials (LinkedIn, bios, etc.)
3. Craft or refine an elevator pitch
4. Set visibility goals (one new platform, presentation, etc.)
5. Commit to one visibility action

## Month 9 (June): Reflection & Celebration

**Focus:** Review, reflect, and celebrate achievements

**Objectives:**

- Reflect on growth and progress
- Celebrate wins
- Plan next steps after the program

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What are you most proud of from this experience?
- What has changed since Month 1?
- What are your next steps?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Reflect on goals and growth
2. Share lessons learned
3. Celebrate progress and success
4. Identify future areas of development
5. Exchange final feedback and stay-in-touch plan

## Optional Meeting Agenda Idea

**Focus:** Applying and Interviewing

**Objectives:**

- Review and refine mentee's resume and cover letter.
- Discuss best practices for tailoring application materials to specific roles.
- Practice responding to common interview questions with clarity and confidence.

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What job(s) are you targeting with your resume?
- How does your resume reflect your most relevant strengths?
- What's the biggest challenge you face when writing cover letters?
- How do you usually prepare for interviews?
- Are there particular interview questions you find difficult?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

## 1. Resume Review

- Discuss strengths and gap
- Suggest improvements and formatting tips

## 2. Cover Letter Writing

- Brainstorm themes or key messages
- Review structure and personalize to job description

## 3. Interview Preparation

- Practice 2–3 common questions (mock interview style)
- Share tips on confidence, tone, and follow-up etiquette

## 4. Action Plan &amp; Wrap-up

- Assign tasks: resume edits, final draft, mock interview prep
- Schedule next meeting or touchpoint

**Year Two Mentorship Program Monthly Agendas**

**Instructions:** These optional agendas are designed to help mentors and mentees structure more in-depth conversations during the second year of their mentorship relationship. **Year Two** builds on the foundation established in Year One, with a focus on applying skills, taking on greater professional responsibility, and continuing to support career growth and development.

**Month 1 (October): Year 2 Reset & Professional Growth**

**Focus:** Reflecting on Year One and setting the direction for Year Two

**Objectives:**

- Reflect on Year one growth and lessons learned
- Identify current priorities and areas for continued development
- Set goals and expectations for Year two
- Discuss how the mentorship relationship can evolve

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What has changed most in your career since Year one?
- What are you most proud of from the past year?
- Where are you currently looking for more guidance or perspective?
- What would make Year two valuable for you?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Reflect on Year one accomplishments and lessons learned
2. Discuss current role, priorities, and challenges
3. Identify areas of continued development
4. Set two–four broad goals for Year two
5. Discuss expectations for the mentorship relationship
6. Confirm next steps

**Month 2 (November): Executive Presence & Professional Credibility**

**Focus:** Building confidence, credibility, and professional presence

**Objectives:**

- Strengthen professional confidence
- Explore how credibility is built through communication and actions
- Prepare for interactions with senior leaders and other key stakeholders

**Discussion Prompts:**

- How do you want others to perceive you professionally?
- When do you feel most confident in your role?
- What makes someone credible in economic development?
- Where would you like to become more comfortable or confident?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss professional presence and confidence
2. Share examples of situations that require greater presence
3. Discuss credibility-building behaviors
4. Practice or role-play a challenging professional interaction
5. Identify one area to focus on before the next meeting

**Month 3 (December): Strategic Thinking & Professional Judgment**

**Focus:** Looking beyond individual tasks to the bigger picture

**Objectives:**

- Strengthen strategic thinking
- Connect day-to-day work to larger organizational and community goals
- Explore how experienced professionals evaluate options and make decisions

**Discussion Prompts:**

- How do you decide what deserves your attention?
- What makes a decision strategic?
- How do you balance competing priorities?
- When have you had to make a recommendation without having all the information?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a current or recent work challenge
2. Consider the broader context and stakeholders
3. Explore possible approaches and tradeoffs
4. Discuss how to make and communicate a recommendation
5. Identify a strategic-thinking takeaway

**Month 4 (January): Leading Without Authority**

**Focus:** Influencing people and building support across organizations

**Objectives:**

- Develop influence and collaboration skills
- Learn to build buy-in for ideas and initiatives
- Explore how to work effectively with partners and stakeholders

**Discussion Prompts:**

- Who do you need to influence in your current role?
- How do you gain buy-in from people you do not supervise?
- What makes people willing to support an initiative?
- How do you handle competing priorities or interests?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a current collaborative project or relationship
2. Identify key stakeholders and their interests
3. Explore ways to build trust and gain buy-in
4. Discuss a challenging partnership or situation
5. Identify an opportunity to practice influencing without authority

**Month 5 (February): Negotiation, Conflict & Difficult Conversations**

**Focus:** Handling disagreement while maintaining productive relationships

**Objectives:**

- Build confidence in difficult conversations
- Explore negotiation and conflict-resolution approaches
- Practice addressing issues directly and constructively

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What types of conflict are most difficult for you?
- How do you respond when someone strongly disagrees with you?
- When is it better to compromise, and when should you stand firm?
- What makes a difficult conversation productive?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a recent or anticipated difficult conversation
2. Explore the underlying issue and desired outcome
3. Share approaches for preparing and communicating
4. Role-play or talk through a challenging scenario
5. Discuss lessons and next steps

**Month 6 (March): Project Leadership & Accountability**

**Focus:** Taking greater ownership of complex work

**Objectives:**

- Strengthen project leadership skills
- Explore delegation, prioritization, and accountability
- Discuss managing competing priorities, stakeholders, and deadlines

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What project or responsibility is stretching you right now?
- Where do projects tend to get stuck?
- How do you hold others accountable?
- What could you delegate or approach differently?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a current project or initiative
2. Identify responsibilities, stakeholders, and potential challenges
3. Explore delegation and accountability
4. Discuss communication and follow-through
5. Identify one project leadership practice to try

**Month 7 (April): Navigating Change, Uncertainty & Setbacks**

**Focus:** Building adaptability and resilience as responsibilities increase

**Objectives:**

- Explore strategies for managing change and uncertainty
- Learn from setbacks and unexpected outcomes
- Build confidence in adapting while maintaining perspective

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What changes are affecting your work right now?
- How do you respond when a plan does not work?
- What has a past setback taught you?
- How do you make decisions when information is incomplete?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss a current change, setback, or uncertainty
2. Separate what can and cannot be controlled
3. Explore different ways to respond
4. Share lessons from past experiences
5. Discuss strategies for staying adaptable and effective

**Month 8 (May): Career Advancement & Professional Impact**

**Focus:** Preparing for greater responsibility and increasing professional impact

**Objectives:**

- Explore the mentee's next stage of career development
- Identify experiences and relationships that support advancement
- Discuss ways to contribute more broadly to the profession

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What might the next step in your career look like?
- What experiences would help prepare you for it?
- What are you becoming known for professionally?
- Who are the people who know and support your work?
- How can you begin creating opportunities for others?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Discuss career direction and aspirations
2. Explore experiences or skills that would support future opportunities
3. Discuss professional relationships and advocates
4. Identify ways to increase professional contribution and visibility
5. Discuss one opportunity for continued growth

**Month 9 (June): Reflection, Next Steps & Paying It Forward**

**Focus:** Reflecting on two years of growth and looking ahead

**Objectives:**

- Reflect on the mentorship experience and professional development
- Celebrate accomplishments and lessons learned
- Identify continued areas of growth
- Discuss how the relationship and professional development can continue

**Discussion Prompts:**

- What are you most proud of from the past two years?
- What has changed most in how you approach your work?
- What do you still want to learn or improve?
- What advice would you give yourself at the beginning of Year one?
- How can you support or mentor others moving forward?

**Meeting Agenda Template:**

1. Reflect on Year two conversations and experiences
2. Discuss major lessons and areas of growth
3. Celebrate accomplishments and milestones
4. Discuss continued professional development
5. Talk about opportunities to support others
6. Exchange feedback and discuss staying connected

**Contact Us**

If you have any questions or need additional support throughout the mentorship program, please feel free to reach out to us.

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