

Best Practices for an Effective Mentoring Program for New Planning Council/Body (PC/B) Members*

Introduction

Planning Councils/Bodies (PC/Bs) sometimes use mentoring programs to support new member “integration” and engagement and improve retention. An experienced, “veteran” member is matched with a new member for the first 3, 6, or even 12 months. Usually the Membership Committee takes primary responsibility for a mentoring program, with support from the Planning Council Support (PCS) staff.

Here are some best practices from successful mentoring programs.

Best Practices

1. **Choose mentors with care.** Require that the mentor has at least a year or two of experience on the PC/B. Some people love to share their knowledge and experience, and others find it hard. A mentor should offer advice that provides the right balance of helpfulness, proactive support, and respect for the new member’s intelligence and independence. A mentor should be able to offer advice without sending out negative vibes when the member doesn’t choose to take it.
2. **Match committee membership where practical.** Choose a mentor who serves on the same committee the new member will be joining, so advice and support are available at both committee and full PC/B meetings.
3. **Work hard to provide a good “match.”** Spend some time on matching mentors and new members, considering experience, interests, and style. Be careful about putting a very shy new member with a very outspoken mentor. Focus on helping the mentor and new member make a personal connection. Try a “speed dating” approach, with five-minute discussions between each mentor and each new member to facilitate a good match.
4. **Make sure mentors understand what is expected of them.** Be clear about mentor responsibilities, what to do, and what to avoid. Put these expectations in writing in a simple “Mentoring Job Description.”
5. **Be sure the new members know what to expect.** They should receive the Mentor Job Description, and perhaps some suggestions for how to maximize the value of having a mentor.

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6. **Provide a brief training session for mentors.** Include expectations, including helping the new member become comfortable and willing to speak in meetings, be active in a committee, etc. Consider using role plays as part of the session.
7. **Have mentors attend orientation with their new members.** Mentor participation in orientation helps to support the training process and also ensures that mentors and new members have the same information.
8. **Have mentors sit with their members at PC/B meetings** – for at least the first 3-4 meetings.
9. **Be sure mentors have information and materials needed to assist their members.** Be sure mentors are comfortable asking PC Support staff for help when they can't answer a question or provide needed information.
10. **Review and assess your mentoring program annually.** The responsible committee should ask for input from both mentors and members. Use that input to refine the Mentor Job Description and the mentoring process as needed.