



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
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MAKING CONNECTIONS:
A BEST-PRACTICE GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Brought to you by:
Canadian Agricultural HR Council



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada

About This Guide

This guide was developed by the Canadian Agricultural HR Council (CAHRC) as part of the Supporting the Advancement of Women (SAWA) initiative.

It is intended to give agricultural businesses a step-by-step process for implementing a formal mentorship program to help women advance their careers. The guide includes information to help the organization set up a mentorship program, including best practices for setting benchmarks, establishing program goals, and measuring the impact of the program.

The guide pairs with a **Toolkit for Mentors and Mentees** that can be distributed to program participants to help them guide and structure the mentoring relationship.

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What is Mentorship?

A mentorship is a relationship in which a more experienced person provides guidance and support to a less experienced person. The experienced person, who acts as a trusted advisor and a source of expertise, is called the **mentor**, and the less experienced person, who receives advice, training, or counselling from the mentor, is called the **mentee**.

What is a Mentorship Program?

Mentorship relationships can be formal or informal. **Informal mentorships** may develop when a more experienced person decides to help a less experienced person improve their abilities and further their career. For example, an employer may notice that a summer student shows a particular interest in farming, and may choose to spend some extra time teaching that student a relevant skill.

Formal mentorships, or **mentorship programs**, are usually provided by an employer, an industry association, or a professional association. These are more structured mentoring relationships, which generally include a clear start and end date and a defined set of activities and outcomes. For example, an organization may ask a senior agronomist to mentor an entry-level employee. The mentor and mentee might be required to set specific career goals for the mentee, define the steps to reach those goals, and meet every two weeks to touch base and review progress.

What Are the Benefits?

Mentorships benefit the mentor, the mentee, and the organization that supports a formal mentorship program.

For the mentor, a mentorship can strengthen interpersonal and leadership skills and enhance satisfaction on a career and personal level. For the mentee, the rewards can include personal and professional growth, a stronger network, greater confidence, and the development of new skills and capabilities. And for the organization, a mentorship program can improve job satisfaction, boost retention, enhance the organization's reputation, strengthen organizational values, and improve productivity.

Women and Mentorship

While mentorship is broadly beneficial, it may be particularly important to women who want to further their careers. A [study conducted by the Telfer School of Business](#) indicated that women believe they need more career support than their male colleagues. Women are also more likely to appreciate and see value in mentorship programs and to seek out mentorship opportunities. [Another study, conducted by Catalyst](#), found that a lack of mentoring opportunities is a frequent barrier to advancement for women and people of colour.

In the agriculture sector, where women are underrepresented at the leadership level, mentorship has a critical role to play. In a 2015 survey conducted by SAWA, 40 per cent of respondents indicated that they pursued mentorship as a way to advance their career. Of those who pursued a mentorship relationship, 86 per cent felt that it had helped them move forward in their career aspirations.

By implementing a formal mentorship program in your organization, you have an opportunity to encourage women to seek and give professional support, gain confidence, enhance their skills, and prepare to step into leadership roles. Not only does this enable more women in agriculture to realize their true potential, it also enables your agricultural business to benefit from a larger and more skilled labour pool in a sector where finding labour is a growing challenge.

Getting Started

Starting a mentorship program in your organization may seem intimidating, but it can be a simple process. There are three basic steps: establishing a benchmark, setting program goals, and defining a mentorship process that fits your organizational needs and culture.

Establish a Benchmark

Benchmarking helps you identify the current levels of diversity and equal opportunity in your organization so that you can see where there is room for improvement. You can establish a benchmark by collecting a range of information about the patterns of gender.

Organization-wide. Look at the overall percentage of women your organization employs. Women make up 30 per cent of the agricultural workforce. Does your organization employ a higher or lower percentage than the sector average?

By department/area. Look at the percentage of women who are employed in different areas of your organization. For example, are there more women employed in human resources and marketing functions than in technical or field positions? In which areas are the percentages of women lowest?

By seniority level. Look at the percentage of women working in junior, middle management, and senior leadership roles in your organization. A greater proportion of men than women tend to move on to leadership roles in agriculture. Is that the case in your organization?

By training participation rates. Look at the percentage of women who participate in general, technical, or leadership training in your organization. Women may not always receive equal access or the same level of encouragement when it comes to training opportunities. Low participation rates can indicate that extra effort may be required to identify women who are good candidates for training.

By retention rates. Look at the levels of retention among women and men in your organization. Are the rates similar, or are women more likely to leave the organization voluntarily or involuntarily? If the retention rates are lower for women, it could indicate that the organizational culture is not supporting women in their roles or accommodating their needs.

Set Program Goals

Benchmarks help you see the levels of diversity your organization supports today. Setting goals enables you to decide on the levels of diversity you want to achieve in the future.

Once you have established your benchmarks, you can start to think about what you'd like to achieve with your mentorship program. What is motivating you to launch the program? What do you hope to achieve? What would you like to see change? For example, you may want to see more women in the workforce at all levels. Or you may want to promote more women to the leadership level. Perhaps you want to improve retention among the women on staff.

Next, consider how you'll measure your success. Will you collect data on training participation rates? Measure the increase in the number of women applying for leadership roles? Measure the increase in the number of women who move into various roles or leadership positions? Conduct surveys or collect feedback anonymously to gauge the levels of job satisfaction across the organization? There are many ways that mentorship can positively impact your organization. By measuring that impact, you can make more informed decisions about the investment of time and energy you choose to make in your program.

In addition to measuring the organizational impact, you'll also want to measure the individual impact the program makes on the mentors and mentees who participate. This can be accomplished by conducting interviews or

surveys to determine the levels of engagement among program participants (how frequently they met, for example, and whether they met more frequently than required), and how they feel about the process and the outcomes achieved.

Define the Process

Everyone has different ways of communicating, learning, and sharing. People may also have different schedules, priorities, and goals. That's why a mentorship program should offer enough flexibility to allow mentors and mentees to tailor a process that works best for them.

However, if you are sponsoring a mentorship program in your workplace, you will want to establish some rules and guidelines to ensure that the program meets your organizational requirements.

Here are some things to think about as you set up your program:

Define the recruitment process. How will employees learn about the mentorship program? Will everyone be invited to join, or will the organization select participants? Some organizations choose to open the program to all applicants, while others may wish to form a committee to select potential mentor/mentee pairings based on specific criteria.

Define the expectations. While it's important to give the mentor and mentee the freedom to create a process that works for them, it's a good idea for the organization to set certain minimum requirements for the program. For example, how frequently do you expect participants to meet? What is the minimum duration you'd like the program to last and the minimum amount of time you expect participants to commit to the program? Do participants need to meet up in person, or can they communicate remotely by phone, email, or video chat? Make sure the mentor and the mentee know what the organization expects of them.

Define the desired outcomes. While mentorship is designed to support individual employees in their career goals, it also serves an organizational purpose. What purpose does your organization wish to meet by sponsoring mentorships in the workplace? For example, do you want to prepare mentees to achieve a level of certification or another professional goal or milestone that connects to an organizational need? Or is the mentor expected to gain specific leadership competencies as a result of their mentoring duties? If there are organizational requirements that the mentor and mentee need to support as part of the mentorship program, make sure those requirements are clearly identified at the outset.

Provide tools and support. Most mentors and mentees need tools and support to provide guidance for the mentoring relationship. Mentees, who may not have much on-the-job experience or may be new to the organization or the workplace, can find a new mentoring relationship intimidating. And even mentors who are confident and experienced in their day-to-day work may need support in their new role as a mentor. To support the success of the mentorship program, your organization needs to provide tools that help program participants understand the expectations and develop a process that works best for them. The [Toolkit for Mentors and Mentees](#) included in this guide gives participants a simple framework for navigating the mentoring relationship.

Check in. Not every mentorship will work out satisfactorily. The pairing may not work out if the mentor's and the mentee's personalities or objectives aren't the right fit, or if work or personal commitments get in the way of the mentorship requirements. In other cases, the mentor and mentee just need a little bit of outside guidance to fine-tune the relationship. Plan to check in on the mentor and the mentee individually within the first month or two to find out whether the relationship is working and whether there's anything further that the organization can do to support it.

Gather feedback. Once participants complete a mentorship program, gather their feedback so that you can use their input to fine-tune the program over time. Information can be gathered through a survey and/or an in-person meeting. Interview the mentor and mentee separately so that they can provide candid responses about the program.



Mentorship Program Checklist

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Define the recruitment process for mentors and mentees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> If open recruitment is preferred, develop promotional posters, flyers, or emails to promote the mentorship program to employees.<input type="checkbox"/> If closed recruitment is preferred, appoint a selection committee and develop participation criteria for mentors and mentees.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Define the program expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Minimum goals for mentors<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum goals for mentees<input type="checkbox"/> Roles that each participant plays in setting additional goals<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum meeting frequency and time commitment<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum program duration<input type="checkbox"/> Preferred communication channels (in person and/or remote)
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Provide tools and support to program participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Toolkit for Mentors and Mentees<input type="checkbox"/> Additional training and support as needed
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a process for checking in on mentors and mentees within the first month or two. Plan to touch base with each participant separately to enable them to provide candid feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Are they happy with the mentoring relationship?<input type="checkbox"/> Is the mentor/mentee pairing a good fit?<input type="checkbox"/> Are they finding the time to meet regularly?<input type="checkbox"/> Is there anything the organization can do to improve the process?
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a feedback process to gather input from program participants after program completion. This information can help your organization quantify the impact of the mentorship program and improve it over time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Was the mentorship an enjoyable experience?<input type="checkbox"/> Did the mentorship accomplish the goals set by the participants?<input type="checkbox"/> Were there any challenges during the process?<input type="checkbox"/> What did participants learn during the process, and how will it further their careers?<input type="checkbox"/> Which elements of the mentorship were the most rewarding?<input type="checkbox"/> What would participants choose to do differently in future mentorships?