

Guidance on Fellow-Mentor Relationships

The goal of partnering with a professional mentor, termed the Professional Development Mentor, is to allow Fellows to form a collaborative, professional growth-oriented relationship with a professional who can use a Fellow's research and findings in the 'real' world. The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) considers this professional mentorship a national "best management practice" for fellowships, since it better prepares future scientists, engineers, and other coastal and marine professionals to effectively solve complex societal challenges.

GOALS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Objectives of the fellow-mentor relationship:

- Develop the professional skills of the Fellow, including communication, collaboration, project management, and other critical skills for effective engagement between science and the public;
- Design effective outreach and engagement strategies, products and deliverables that can move science, technologies, and other pertinent knowledge from the Fellow's research into the hands of a decision-maker and/or stakeholder who would benefit from that information.

Mentors provide a unique professional development opportunity for fellows, advancing a student's understanding of how their science may make a difference in coastal and marine communities. WHOISG and MITSG encourage creative approaches to the Fellow-mentor activities that advance the Fellow's professional growth and engagement with the regulators, industry, and the general public. Selected Fellows will work with their faculty advisor(s) and their Sea Grant Liaisons to identify potential Professional Development Mentors and, by the end of Year 1 of their Fellowship, draft an ***individualized mentorship and outreach plan*** to promote the systematic consideration and attention to how experiences grow the Fellow's professional competencies.

EXPECTATIONS

Fellows are expected to actively work with their Mentors to implement their proposed mentorship and outreach plan, and participate in concrete, hands-on activities. These activities should help the Fellow grow professionally, and gain experience engaging with non-experts in their field. Fellows and Mentors should work together on these activities and discuss the experiences. At a minimum, Mentors are expected to meet periodically with the Fellow to reflect upon the Fellow's work, and provide guidance on issues associated with: communicating the Fellow's research to non-experts, advancing the information to managers or policy makers, promoting adoption of the innovation or technology, or other application(s) of their graduate activities. Fellows could attend events or meetings at the mentor's organization, shadow their mentor, co-author materials, or engage in other activities that are mutually beneficial and value-added. Professional Development Mentors will be invited to participate in WHOISG and MITSG's activities such as annual meetings.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Professional Development Mentors should be individuals whose work requires the application of scientific information, research, or rigorous inquiry and evidence-based knowledge; particularly, the information, data, and/or findings that will result from the student's graduate activities. The type of outreach and role of the Mentor will be determined and defined by the Fellow, their faculty advisor(s), and the Mentor. The activities should complement the proposed research and the student's interests.

Fellows should work with their faculty advisor(s) and Sea Grant Liaisons to identify potential mentors early in the fellowship. The faculty advisor(s) as well as Liaisons can help identify a Mentor and aid the Fellow and their Mentor in developing a mentorship and outreach plan. This plan should be signed by both the Fellow and the Professional Development Mentor and emailed to seagrant-research@whoi.edu **no later than August 31, 2025**. Fellows are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:

- Fellows are strongly encouraged to work with their Mentor to ensure that their mentorship and outreach plan is relevant to non-experts. Should adjustments to the originally proposed outreach plan be needed, pursuant to § 200.308 Revision of Budget and Program Plans, NOAA and Sea Grant require prior approval.
- In selecting a Professional Development Mentor, Fellows should carefully consider their possible audiences for their research results and products they may want to develop, and select a Mentor whose professional experience best fits their research and career goal interests. There should be a clear rationale for why the Fellow selected a particular Mentor, and the plan should clearly benefit both the Fellow and the Mentor.
- Fellows should identify a clear set of activities and outputs (e.g., presentations to resource managers or the general public, outreach products, etc.) in their mentorship and outreach plan. Mentorship plans should consider short- and long term outcomes, such as changes in regulation or improved understanding of a targeted audience.
- Fellows should set a clear plan for working with their Mentors, including a schedule for meetings and a timeline for activities and products. The actual hourly commitment by a mentor will vary with the type of professional development and outreach activities planned.
- WHOISG and MITSG recognize that results of a project may not be ready for outreach activities during the fellowship period. Outreach and engagement is an ongoing process, and students should develop a mentorship and outreach plan that fosters continuous dialogue and engagement throughout the project, not just at the end.
- Fellows are strongly encouraged to select only one Mentor. Those interested in working with more than one mentor should discuss this with your Sea Grant Liaisons first.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL MENTORS

A Professional Development Mentor can be from the public, private, or non-profit sector. Fellows should work with their faculty advisor(s) and their Sea Grant Liaisons to discuss and select a Professional Development Mentor. Fellows are encouraged to reach out to potential mentors early in the fellowship to discuss your mutual goals, develop a rapport, and identify emerging opportunities.