



Women in Defence and Security (WiDS) Mentor Program Overview

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WiDS and mentoring:

Mentoring programs are fast becoming a leading talent development tool – a great way for mentors to act as role models, share their expertise, and provide a safe risk-taking environment for “mentees”, or learners.

Application and/or acceptance to the WiDS Mentor Program is done so with the full knowledge that this is a volunteer organization, and that all involved individuals participate in this program voluntarily and will be required to sign a release waiver to said effect.

“Mentoring is a personal enhancement strategy through which one person facilitates the development of another by sharing known resources, expertise, values, skills, perspectives, attitudes and proficiencies. It allows the learner to build skills and knowledge ... and provides the opportunity for the experienced party to enhance his/her skill and knowledge areas ...” (*Triple Creek Associates*)

The process of careful partnering, coupled with the virtue of an exchange of knowledge and wisdom based on professional and life experience, is the very essence of a successful mentoring program.

FORMAL MENTORING

Formal mentorship has the following characteristics:

- It's a deliberate, conscious, voluntary relationship between two members of the organization who are not in a direct, hierarchical, or supervisory chain-of-command;
- It has a specified timeframe – in this case six months, with reviews at one month, three months, and on completion;
- It's aligned to the organization's vision, mission, values, and strategic objectives;
- It's typically focused on interpersonal support, guidance, mutual exchange, sharing of wisdom, coaching, and role modeling;
- It does not replace, intermediate, or interfere with organizational reporting relationships, including very specifically the learner's relationship and performance-related accountability with their manager; and perhaps most importantly,
- The outcome of the mentoring relationship is expected to benefit both stakeholders – the mentor and the learner – at different times, for personal growth, career development, goal achievement, and/or other goals specified at the outset. Mentoring is very much a two-way relationship.



KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The success of a mentoring arrangement lies in several factors:

- The learner must identify their objective(s) clearly, up-front. Objectives typically fall into one of the following categories:
 - Commitment to expanding personal leadership abilities
 - Interest in improving specific skill area(s)
 - Interest in learning more about other areas of the company / business
 - Desire to enhance opportunities for career advancement
 - Deepen and broaden understanding of the organization and what it takes to be successful

- Communication is of extreme importance in the success of a mentoring relationship, and has the following characteristics:
 - **Confidentiality and trust** – Participants must be able to feel confident that what they share with mentors remains confidential, and vice versa.

 - **Integrity and professionalism** – learners and mentors must be careful not to put the other party into a conflict of interest, a breach of confidentiality, or otherwise create an awkward situation for either party.

 - **Honest and open communication** - either party must be able to feel comfortable asking the other not to pursue a particular line of conversation. On an ongoing basis, neither party is likely to benefit from a relationship that does not include honest and open communication and feedback.

 - **Constructive feedback** – mentors must feel comfortable providing constructive feedback and positive recognition as part of the learners' development. Learners must be truly prepared to hear and act on this feedback. Mentors can act as a sounding board and as a mirror for learners – to reflect back how learners' behaviour may be perceived or interpreted by others and to offer options and alternatives from their own experience. Learners have a unique opportunity to benefit from honest and open feedback from someone whose only vested interest is a genuine commitment to the learner's growth and success.

 - **Frequency and consistency** – both parties need to be committed to communicating regularly, one-on-one, through a combination of in-person, telephone, and electronic media. The most effective combination of vehicles and frequency of contact is something the mentor and learner need to determine within the first 30 days of a mentoring arrangement so that the relationship does not either become a burden or lay dormant for long periods of time. Ideally, mentors and learners meet face to face monthly, in addition to which learners communicate informally with mentors weekly by phone or e-mail. The amount of time spent communicating needs to be mutually agreeable and will vary throughout the duration of the mentoring relationship.



MENTEES/LEARNER RESPONSIBILITY

The main responsibility for the success of the mentoring program rests with the learner. Learners are specifically responsible for:

- Clearly defining their **learning objectives** for the mentoring relationship up-front, and discussing changes on-going.
- Identifying for their mentor their **strengths and weaknesses** as well as the specific areas they are interested in developing / strengthening.
- Scheduling face-to-face meetings as well as informal **communication** by phone or e-mail as agreed.
- Participate in the **evaluation** of the program, including providing feedback on their specific relationship as required.
- **Journal personal progress** on learning objectives at predetermined intervals, including a final status at the end of six months.
- Identify, often with the help of their mentor, development areas where different or additional development activities are required (e.g. formal training or other types of development). It is important to keep the limitations of a mentoring relationship in mind – it is only one tool in the tool box of success.

MENTOR RESPONSIBILITY

Mentors are responsible for:

- Leading the mentorship relationship by showing the learner solid representation as a leader
- Providing a sounding board for open and honest discussion
- Challenging stereotypes and perceptions
- Holding learners accountable for their own success but also helping to guide that self-evaluation skill-set
- Helping learners identify skill gaps and potentially ways to close them
- Providing honest feedback in a non-judgemental forum
- Providing a safe risk-taking environment
- Sharing expertise and experience



HOW DOES THE WIDS MENTOR ADVISORY FIT INTO A MENTORING ARRANGEMENT?

Mentoring is a form of development – for both the learner and the mentor. The learner may wish to discuss their learning objectives for the mentoring program with their current manager as well as sharing periodic progress assessments. The Advisor is an independent member of WiDS and provides the learner with feedback relative to their observations of progress against learning objectives. The Advisor is not there to judge or intervene in the mentor/mentee relationship but to provide a sounding board and guidance as the process develops. This is essential during the initial stages of the program.

The Advisor will seek input from the mentor, and learner, for a sense of how well the mentoring relationship is working as well as for feedback. This process will be done in the strictest of confidence and is only for program assessment and enhancement.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

At various stages during the relationship, both the mentor and learner will be asked to complete a brief series of questionnaires. This is a dynamic program suited to a variety of diverse professional levels thus each relationship will be designed specific to the objectives developed.

PROGRAM COMPLETION

The WiDS formal mentoring relationship is identified as six months in duration. Upon completion of the six month period, everyone involved will jointly discuss options including continuance of the relationship, or ending the particular mentoring relationship, or other viable options.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Volunteers from various senior levels in both private and public sectors have been approached, and or have come forward for selection in this program. An application for Learners is currently under development, once completed, an applicant will complete this form and if selected, be paired with a suitable Mentor. A WiDS Advisor will be assigned to the pair and the initial meeting will be scheduled for kick-off.