

Mentoring Guide for RMGPA

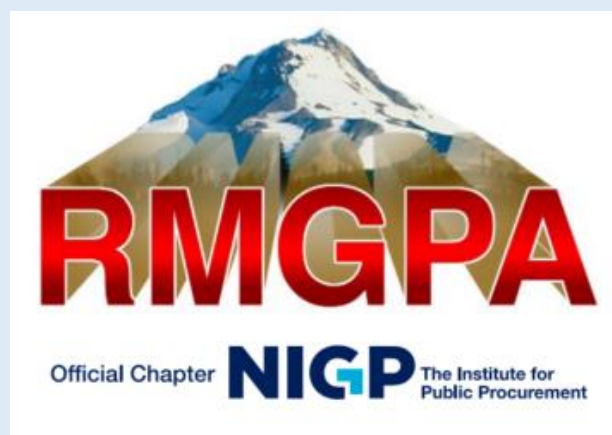


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I. WHAT IS MENTORING?

Since a relatively small number of colleges and universities offer specialized degree programs in public procurement, procurement professionals come from a wide variety of workplace and educational backgrounds. As such, much of the learning about how to be effective at your job comes from on-the-job training, professional development opportunities, and mentoring from others in the profession. This handbook focuses on mentoring in public procurement and is appropriate for directors, supervisors, and more seasoned professionals to help those newer to the profession thrive as well as advise those moving to new roles or more complex leadership positions.

There are many perspectives on the role of mentor including traits and responsibilities to the mentoring function:

- A mentor guides a less experienced person by building trust and modeling positive behaviors.
- Mentors assist mentees by providing growth experiences, listening, coaching, challenging ideas or behaviors, discussing attitudes, encouraging professional behavior, sharing, teaching by example, offering wise counsel, triggering self-awareness, building self-confidence, and providing information.
- An effective mentor understands that his or her role is to be dependable, engaged, authentic, and tuned into the needs of the mentee.
- A mentor works with others in a positive, constructive way so that both mentor and protégé have the potential to grow through the relationship.

The mentor exists in the relationship to serve the growth of the mentee. New professionals in public procurement each may bring their unique strengths to the field. No new professional comes prepared with strengths in all areas. Additionally, the new professional may lack significant practice, even in the areas in which they have considerable theory, training, or formal education.

II. THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Seasoned procurement professionals are likely to be well-positioned to provide mentees with perspectives that go beyond the office in which the mentee works. The field has gone through transitions over the years and the services of today differ from what came before. Mentors should be able to help their mentees understand the developments of the past, so they understand current best practices. The mentor has the opportunity to help the mentee

see that their “newness” can be an advantage in that they bring fresh perspective and fewer anchors to the traditions of public procurement.

Mentors can help new professionals learn the core competencies and perspectives of the field. They are also positioned to critically analyze those same core competencies. Mentors can encourage flexibility, adaptability, and nimble thinking in new professionals to help them identify “next practices” and help lead the profession forward.

The mentor should empower the mentee by listening actively and serving as a sounding board, helping mentees explore where a course of action might lead them and help define the gap between current skills and what is needed. Mentoring can include helping the mentee learn best practices, methods of advancement, and options for career pathing. In addition, it can include the emotional well-being and growth of the mentee.

As the mentee begins to map his strengths and weaknesses to his role, the mentor can assist through various functions. The mentor can challenge and support the mentee in this journey and serve as a sounding board for self-discovery.

When new professionals join public procurement, they are often surprised to find the volume and variety of demands in the role. Depending on the structure of their department and their specific position, new professionals are likely to find themselves attempting to balance their workload. In order to achieve balance, good planning is required. The mentor, with the insights gained through experience, is in a position to assist the new professional in this regard.

New professionals and those transitioning into new roles may experience a number of transitional work-life balance issues related to their new positions. Mentors can provide a sounding board, new perspectives, and personal anecdotes to help mentees explore balance issues and develop strategies to manage the busiest times and the competing demands of professional life and personal life.

The mentoring relationship should be driven by the needs of the mentee and should emphasize increasing the mentee’s understanding and ability to lead committees and/or volunteer opportunities for RMGPA.



III. TECHNIQUES FOR MENTORS

A. Questions

Asking questions is a valuable part of any mentoring relationship and can serve a variety of functions in the mentor-mentee relationship. Questions work when they contribute to the purpose and objectives of a process. For new professionals in the field of public procurement and those taking the next step in their careers, asking good questions helps explore issues and perspectives. Although context and individual preferences are incredibly important in deciding what questions will be effective, the list below will provide the mentor with a good starting point:

1. What are your goals for our relationship?
2. In what areas do you need the most help?
3. What barriers are you experiencing?
4. How are you getting connected to others in the profession?
5. Have you noticed any patterns in how you approach professional situations?
6. What has been unexpected in your experience so far?
7. Describe what has excited you the most in this role.
8. What does success look like for you?
9. In what ways are you planning to connect with professional associations?
10. What are the expectations about confidentiality, both as participants in the program as well as the content of meetings and discussions?

B. Active Listening

Active listening involves listening for total meaning, which includes both the content and the emotional context that surrounds the content. Mentors should employ active listening as a means of support and a tool to allow for the mentee to explore issues at a deep level.

C. Role Modeling

As the trust between mentor and mentee develops, it is natural that the mentee will use the mentor as a role model for behavior, whether consciously or unconsciously. As such, behaviors—both good and bad—can be passed on without explicit dialogue or instruction. It is possible for a mentor to verbalize all the “right” information to an emerging professional, yet still steer the individual poorly by role

modeling problematic behaviors. These can come in the form of interpersonal interactions, ethical decision making, microaggressions, and general workplace etiquette.

IV. Giving Feedback

Providing feedback to emerging professionals is essential but can also be a challenging task for mentors. However, the mentee is likely to not only need the input but welcome it. Using the coaching technique of asking permission is wise, but the dynamics of the mentor/mentee relationship should influence how and when feedback is provided. A key is for the mentor to use a supportive, growth-oriented perspective on the feedback being delivered and work to make it a conversation rather than a lecture.

Effective feedback is:

- Specific. It is precise rather than general.
- Factual. It details observations and information.
- Descriptive. It focuses on what or how something is done, not why.
- Clearly Understood. It involves checking in and clarifying.
- Timed to be most useful. It is closely tied to the action.
- Sensitive. It is sincere in a desire to help.
- Constructive. It focuses on controllable actions and outcomes.
- Directed at behavior. It is not focused on assumed intent.

It is important to remember that constructive feedback is not criticism. The goal is not to tear down, but rather to develop and support personal growth. When feedback is given, the mentee should decide if he prefers to discuss alternative actions at that time or if he would prefer to take time to reflect on the feedback and consider alternatives at a later time.

V. TIPS FOR MENTORS

- Discuss mentee's career goals and interests at your initial meeting and revisit them during the course of the mentoring relationship.
- Be available for your mentee and be responsive to his or her needs. Let the mentee control how you can help him or her.
- Be a good listener. Sometimes, the mentee just wants to bounce ideas off of you and is not looking for a solution.

- Ask how you can best help your mentee. Identify his or her goals and develop a plan for meeting those goals.
- Be clear about what you are willing and able to do for the mentee.
- Take the time to understand your mentee. Find out who they are, who they want to be, and what direction they want their career to go.
- Encourage your mentee to come to you with issues and proposed solutions and be receptive to open discussion. People learn more from dialogue than from a lecture.
- Create networking opportunities and provide encouragement to assist the mentee in achieving their goals.
- Be patient with your mentee, and don't be judgmental. Remember that you were once where he or she was.
- Be a receptive audience. You will learn as much from your mentee as he or she will learn from you.

VI. ENDING THE RELATIONSHIP

Even the best mentoring relationship can run their course and become ineffective. Take some time in the beginning to establish expectations on how long the mentoring relationship will last. You may want to negotiate a mentorship that is for a fixed time period. Once that is over, you can always extend the relationship.

The time you work together will depend on what your mentee wants to achieve through the mentoring and can be anywhere from three months to a year. Agreeing on an end date at the beginning of your mentoring relationship can shape your work together, giving it structure, purpose and a timeframe. Discussing how and when the relationship will end makes it comfortable for the mentor and mentee at the beginning. This makes it easier at the end.

There can be a variety of reasons for ending the relationship early:

- The relationship has fulfilled its purpose. Most mentoring relationships are started to help the mentee achieve a particular goal and once this has been achieved another mentor might be more appropriate.
- The mentor and mentee are not getting along or have different philosophies.
- A change of goals, priorities or commitments.

If the relationship is petering out, or your mentee's goals change to become ones you can't help with, bring up the prospect of ending your work together. Sometimes, you may have an early ending to your relationship because of changes like these. It's important to try not

to take this personally and if you have a clearly defined SMART goals, it helps focus the discussion objectively.

Many people find it helpful to end a mentoring relationship with a sense of purpose and direction for the future. Use your last session to look back and discuss what went well and what you may do differently next time, focus on future goals and talk about the support systems the mentee will put in place for continued development. Most importantly, encourage your mentee to continue on the journey as a lifelong learner.

VII. CLOSING THOUGHTS

Serving as a mentor can be incredibly rewarding. Mentors should treat the opportunity to help a next-generation professional as an honor and a duty to the field. The process of mentoring is instructional in nature and a personalized experience will yield the best results. Through appropriate techniques (active listening, good questioning, positive role modeling, and appropriate feedback), the emerging professional will grow to deliver best practices and develop next practices. Now more than ever, the field of public procurement needs engaged, forward-thinking professionals who are focused on procurement best practices and meaningful professional experiences.

Before you get started with your mentee, take some time to review “Being a Successful Mentee: A Guide for RMGPA.” This resource will prepare you for the questions that your mentee may ask as well as what they may expect from you as their mentor.

