

2023 FinPro Mentoring Program: A best practice Guide.

The FinPro Mentoring Program is a formal relationship between two people—a more experienced mentor (usually senior and outside the mentee’s place of employment) and a less experienced mentee (2023 FinPro Leadership Program participant).

Mentoring has been identified as an important influence in professional development in both the public and private sector. The relationship is established to strengthen competencies needed to enhance job performance and career prospects for the mentee. Ideally, it should be based upon encouragement, constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect and a willingness to learn and share information.

The concept of a FinPro mentoring program was initiated by the FinPro Executive Committee as an additional support mechanism for the FinPro members who participate in the 2023 Financial Management and Leadership Skills Program (the ‘FinPro Leadership Program’). It also assists in addressing concerns that the Local Government Sector faces serious workforce loss in the medium to long term future unless there is an explicit attempt to transfer tacit knowledge and consequently retain skills and knowledge within the sector.

Mentoring programs are an effective way to develop skills via the transfer of knowledge from experienced to less-experienced personnel. It is envisaged that a successful intra-industry mentoring program would see early-career local government finance employees paired with a more experienced mentor whose expertise and circumstances are suited to the needs of the mentee.

This document provides some general guidelines on how to ensure that mentorship results in a positive and valuable experience for all parties involved. Importantly, these guidelines are generic and should be amended to accommodate the specific needs and circumstances applicable to your particular situation.

Terminology

Facilitator – John Brockway – FinPro member and Finance Manager Warrnambool CC.

FinPro Leadership Program – 2023 FinPro Financial Management and Leadership Skills Program.

Mentor – An individual who is experienced and knowledgeable in a particular field, who provides guidance and leadership to an assigned mentee.

Mentee – A less experienced, early to mid-career individual who is guided by an assigned mentor and who participates in the ‘FinPro Leadership Program’ in 2023.

Mentorship – A mentor / mentee relationship

Best practice mentorships

Mentorships should involve a facilitator, a mentor and a mentee. Depending on the specific circumstances, a mentorship should follow the procedure below:

- A FinPro Member applies to participate in the 'FinPro Leadership Program' and is successful in their application.
- The Program Facilitator calls for expressions for interest from suitably qualified FinPro members to be mentors for the 2023 mentees. Once received, the mentors are reviewed and, according to suitable matching criteria, matched with participants of the 2023 FinPro Leadership Program.
- At the conclusion the 'FinPro Leadership Program' the Participant will commence the Mentoring Program and becomes a mentee and is allocated a mentor.
- The facilitator considers who the mentee might be best paired with and, at the conclusion of the FinPro Leadership Program (10 May 2023), advises both parties of the pairing and initiates a meeting between the mentor and the mentee via a one hour facilitated online facilitated meeting.
- The first meeting involves a discussion about mentoring, initial discussions about what the mentee is looking for out of the program, and initial discussions about an ongoing communication schedule.
- Subsequent meetings should occur as agreed between the mentee and mentor in their first meeting. We would recommend meetings should be held every 4 weeks and can be a combination of in-person and online check-ins.
- At the second meeting, a more detailed plan of action can be developed, where goals for the mentee can be broken down into specific tasks. Tasks for the mentee to complete by the next meeting should be agreed upon.
- At the third and subsequent meetings, the mentee should present the results of the set tasks.
- From the third meeting onwards, mentor and mentee should discuss the progress made by the mentee (and include obstacles met in trying to achieve desired goals)
- The mentor can then provide feedback and analysis of issues, and offer advice and guidance for future actions.
- The mentor and mentee then negotiate the next tasks to be undertaken and decide on the next meeting date.
- Completion of the formal mentorship will be in May 2024, however, if the mentor and mentee wish to continue the mentorship beyond that timeframe, they are most welcome too.
- In May 2024 FinPro will also meet with all mentors and mentees to review the process and outcomes of the Mentoring Program.

Best practice for the facilitator

The Facilitator guides mentorship and provides a point of contact for both parties. Their role is to provide an appropriate pairing, ensure a program for interaction is developed and adhered to, facilitate negotiation if applicable, monitor the relationship's progress, and provide evaluation once the mentorship is complete.

Some general tips for the facilitator:

- Ensure you give sufficient thought to the pairing process. Consider the circumstances of both the mentor and mentee and ensure these are conducive to providing an effective mentorship. Things to consider when pairing a mentor and mentee include:
 - The nature of their roles.
 - The skills the mentor can offer in relation to the skills the mentee seeks.
 - The physical location of both the mentor and the mentee.
- Once a pairing is achieved, arrange a meeting so the two can be introduced. This initial meeting will be facilitated by FinPro and should include:
 - A discussion of the concept of mentoring to ensure expectations are realistic and compatible.
 - Provide the opportunity for break-out rooms for each mentoring pair to initially meet each other and introduce themselves.
 - Initial discussion of a mutually suitable meeting or communication schedule
 - A formal mentorship agreement which should cover expectations of both, duration of the relationship, objectives of the mentorship, and any applicable confidentiality clauses.
- It is ultimately the role of the mentor and mentee to negotiate a mutually serviceable mentorship. Avoid encouraging them to achieve unrealistic goals, but rather help facilitate and monitor the agreed aims and timeline.
- The Facilitator should be available to both parties in the instance that either party feels the relationship is not working or, for reasons beyond the control of the program, either the mentor or the mentee is no longer able to participate in the program.

Best practice for the mentor

The mentor enters into an agreement with a mentee in order to provide expertise and practical experience. In addition to acting as a sounding board for the mentee, mentors provide industry knowledge, an in-depth understanding of networking and protocol and advice on career progression.

Some general tips for the mentor:

- In providing the mentee with career guidance, the mentor might cover a range of areas, such as: the mentee's resume and job searching, performance reviews, technical skills, professional development and further study or training, work/life balance, job satisfaction, interpersonal and networking skills, and career management / planning.
- A mentorship should not be viewed as only benefiting the mentee. Mentorships provide mentors with the opportunity to invest in the lives of others and contribute to the Local Government Sector. Mentors can also inadvertently learn from the mentee.
- Mentors must have good listening skills, an inquisitive mind, a passion for their work and the Local Government Sector, the ability to provide constructive and positive feedback, patience, and good organisational skills.
- Mentors are not required to provide all the answers, instead the mentor encourages the mentee to use their available resources to identify solutions. It is, therefore, a partnership where the mentor and mentee work in a collaborative manner. Sometimes it might be easier to simply provide the mentee with the answers, but this is not conducive to a meaningful learning experience.
- Open Communication - Mentees may be apprehensive about contacting their mentor, not wanting to intrude on the mentor's time or resources. Mentors can help alleviate this concern by periodically forwarding encouraging emails to give the mentee confidence to maintain contact.
- Ensure you have a good grasp of the mentee's circumstances and structure your advice and feedback accordingly. Convey practical advice in terms of the mentee's career development goals. This means continually asking questions of the mentee, not making assumptions.
- Understand that mentoring is a commitment and you should be in a position where you can be available to the mentee in line with the mentorship agreement. There may also be instances outside of this agreement when the mentee approaches you with questions or issues. You should be open to this possibility, but should approach the mentorship facilitator if the mentee becomes too demanding.
- Provide feedback wherever possible, and bear in mind that as an early to mid -career

employee, feedback should be conveyed in a constructive and sensitive manner.

- Get the mentee active. Encourage them to attend appropriate meetings, either as an observer or as a presenter and introduce them to relevant contacts where applicable.
- Consult the mentorship facilitator if you are unhappy with the arrangement.

Best practice for the mentee

The role of the mentee is to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them by their mentor. Mentees enter into an agreement with a mentor in order to gain knowledge and experience. As such, they should be open to new information and learning experiences. Mentees should strike a careful balance between being critical and inquisitive in relation to the guidance offered by the mentor, and being respectful of the service they are providing.

Some general tips for the mentee:

- It is the mentee who is expected to drive the mentoring relationship by developing the agenda or discussion points for the mentor to comment on. It is the mentee's responsibility to build rapport with the mentor and to ask the right questions, seek relevant information and utilise the connections given by the mentor.
- Mentees should be interested in developing their careers; good listeners and communicators; able to take responsibility for their own development; open to receiving feedback; willing to accept challenges; positive about change and growth; and able to set goals and work towards them.
- Give great thought to what you want out of a mentorship prior to commencing the mentoring program. Consider your strengths and weaknesses, what you would like to learn and where you want your career to go.
- Prepare an individual development plan. Start with a skeleton plan prior to your first meeting with your mentor, and then use this and subsequent meetings to flesh out greater detail. Ensure your objectives are specific, measurable and achievable.
- Take an active role in the initial meeting with your mentor. Ask them questions such as:
 - What can you, as a mentor, bring to a mentoring relationship?
 - What positions have you held in the past?
 - What qualifications or training do you have?
 - How much time do you anticipate being able to spend working with me?
 - What type of communication methods (i.e. phone, in person, email) would you prefer for this mentoring relationship?

- Be scrupulous in the notes you take during your mentorship.
- Ask questions.
- Honour your commitments to the mentorship in terms of attendance at meetings and communication with the facilitator and mentor. Be courteous and provide advanced notice if you cannot honour a meeting commitment.
- Ask for feedback often and take it onboard in a constructive manner. Remember that you are in a mentorship to learn and receive feedback so avoid taking this personally or getting defensive.
- Make the most of the opportunities offered such as networking possibilities, attendance at meetings and seminars etc.
- Revisit your individual development plan often and assess the extent to which you are on track. Adjust where appropriate.
- Consult the mentorship Facilitator if you are unhappy with the arrangement.

Mentoring programs foster skills enhancement and information sharing, while providing a means to transfer valuable experience and expertise from experienced to early to mid-career FinPro members.

Mentoring programs can offer a plethora of benefits for all parties involved so long as the systems are in place to ensure its success. Provided the individuals involved follow best practice, the whole Local Government Finance sector should benefit greatly from this initiative.
