

Mentor Handbook



CharityComms' guide
to everything you need
to know about being
a mentor on our
Peer Support Scheme

Welcome

Welcome to the CharityComms Peer Support Scheme! We're very proud and grateful to have such an excellent group of mentors taking part in our scheme, sharing their career experiences and knowledge with individuals in our CharityComms network.

As a mentor on our scheme, you can expect to be matched with a talented individual working in charity communications who is keen to have a chat about their work. This could be a specific comms challenge or a more personal issue like building up confidence in the work place. Our mentees have found that being able to vocalise their challenges to an experienced, sympathetic ear gives them a new and fresh perspective that really helps them progress.

Being a mentor is both a beneficial and rewarding role. The feedback we get consistently from mentors taking part in the scheme is that they learned just as much through the process as their mentee. It's a great way of developing and building on your coaching and managerial skills. It's also a brilliant opportunity to get insight into the working world at different organisations, being introduced to new ideas and ways of doing things.

This handbook lays out the CharityComms approach to mentoring, and provides guidance for mentors on everything from how to approach your first meeting to how to handle the end of a mentoring relationship. These are guidelines, rather than rules, but we hope they help you make the most of your mentoring relationship.

Thanks so much for being part of our mentoring scheme. We look forward to hearing how things go – please don't hesitate to get in touch with any questions or comments.

Lally Wentworth, membership and mentoring manager
lally@charitycomms.org.uk

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“ I really enjoyed my time as a mentor and got so much more out of it than I expected. It allowed me the opportunity to think about and evaluate how I currently work and why I do what I do.”

Niamh Paul, *celebrity liaison manager, Teenage Cancer Trust*

In a nutshell, how it all works

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a development partnership through which one person shares knowledge, experience, skills or information to support the development of someone else. CharityComms matches comms professionals working in the charity sector in mentoring relationships with external comms colleagues to help them with their professional development. CharityComms mentors are contributors to the scheme who volunteer their time to support, encourage and challenge participants.

How we make a match

The mentoring scheme is a personal matching service. Applicants fill out an online form with information on their job role, career experience and what they're looking to get out of the scheme. We ask mentees to approach the scheme with one clear objective in mind, so we can find a mentor with the right experience. We then review our extensive network of contacts to find an appropriate match.

Defining how it's going to work

Once we've made a mentoring match, an intro email is sent to mentor and mentee, so you can arrange your first meeting. This is a chance to get to know each other, talk about the mentee's objectives, let the mentee know how you feel you might be able to help as a mentor and assess if it feels like a good match. We provide you with a check-list of what to go through on your first meeting, which includes planning how often you'll meet and roughly over what time period (on average people tend to meet every four to six weeks for an hour or so over a time period of six – 12 months).

Keep reviewing how it's going

We suggest reviewing how things are going after a few sessions. CharityComms will also check in with you both from time to time to see how you're getting on. We also provide guidelines on how to keep on track with your mentee's objectives.

Be open about how long you'll be meeting

The length of time a mentoring relationship continues varies between everyone involved with the scheme. It's good to discuss this with your mentee when you start the mentoring. We've got some tips on how to approach the end of your mentoring time in this pack too.

Any problems, let us know

Once we introduce you to your mentee, we leave you both to it. Feel free to get in touch any time with our mentoring manager, Lally Wentworth (lally@charitycomms.org.uk) if you have any questions or problems. We always welcome your feedback and will support you in your role as a mentor as best we can.

10 top tips for being a great mentor

Being a mentor can be hugely rewarding, help advance your career – and someone else's. We share 10 things mentors can do to make the relationship work.

1

Use your instincts

Knowing if your mentoring relationship is going to work is a lot about instinct. Use your first meeting with your mentee to assess the chemistry. Ask lots of questions and get to know each other so you get a sense of whether this is the right match for both of you.

2

Be realistic

Have an honest discussion about what you can expect to achieve in the time you have together. Find out what your mentee wants from the relationship and decide together if that's achievable.

3

Set parameters and agendas – but be flexible

Set some overall goals for the mentoring relationship at the beginning, and add some specific objectives for the month ahead each time you meet. This will help you to see the progress you're making. If you decide to have an agenda for each meeting, don't make it too rigid. Allow time for your mentee to share other concerns that have come up since you last spoke.

4

Focus on the positives

Your mentee may have asked for a mentor because they were having some specific problems or felt stuck. When you're discussing their challenges, remember to ask them about their strengths and successes as well as areas they want to improve on. Try to frame things positively and focus on what they are good at.

5

Remember to really listen

Having someone to talk freely to, who understands the sector, is one of the biggest benefits of having a mentor. Often, your mentee will already know what they want to do to solve a problem or move forward, they just need to talk it through. Listening, and making sure your mentee feels heard, is one of the most important parts of your role.

6

Remember what you're not

You're a work mentor, not a therapist/counsellor/parent/best friend. Don't feel pressured into going into areas you don't feel comfortable with or aren't qualified to tackle. Instead, find out where you can signpost your mentee to for extra support if they need it. You can contact CharityComms if you need any support with this.

7

Keep moving forward

Ahead of each meeting, ask your mentee to let you know what they want to discuss. And after your meeting, ask them to email you with any learning and action points. This can help you avoid getting stuck on the same issues or covering the same ground.

8

Try not to hand-hold or problem solve

You don't need to have an answer to every question, or solution to every problem. Encourage your mentee to find their own solutions by reflecting back what they say, asking questions and sharing your experiences.

9

Share ideas and contacts

Email your mentee details of useful books, events, blogs or forums. If you know people they might be interested to meet, and you feel it's appropriate, put them in touch with your contacts and colleagues.

10

Enjoy it

Being a mentor can give you insight into your own work challenges and management style. Your mentee might come up with approaches and ideas you hadn't thought of. And it can be very satisfying to know that you're making a difference to someone else's career.



“ Being able to pass on your experience is the best thing about being a mentor and it's nice to have insight into another organisation. Mentoring also helps me manage people in my team. I've learnt to listen and am reminded not to take everything at face value, knowing there might be things people aren't comfortable to say.”

Shaf Mansour, head of digital content and communities at Barnardo's

Beginning your mentoring relationship

Your first mentoring meeting is a great chance to get to know your potential mentee and assess whether you can work together. It's also about setting some goals and boundaries. This factsheet will help you get started and plan ahead.

Before you meet

Make the first contact with your mentee – We suggest mentors contact their mentee by email to arrange the first meeting within a week after the match is made.

Prepare to meet your mentee – It can be helpful to ask your mentee for brief background information. For example, they could send you their CV or LinkedIn profile. You can also read over your mentee's application form, which we will share with you, to get an understanding of where they are at in their career.

The first meeting

Ask open questions – Good questions that will help you find out how you can support your mentee include: "Tell me about your relationships at work"; "How did you get to where you are?"; "What key challenges do you face in your role?"; and "What are your career goals over the next three years?"

Identify goals – Ask your mentee how they'd like to use your sessions together and what they'd like to achieve by the end of your agreed timeframe. Discuss their longer term goals and how you can support them to work towards these.

Set boundaries – It's important to mention confidentiality early on in your first meeting to help your mentee feel comfortable. Discussing what you both want out of the process, and your mentee's expectations of what mentoring is, can help to establish your working relationship.

For example, explain how you think you can help meet their goals, and your limitations in terms of what you can offer.

Discuss practicalities – Allow time to discuss things like how often you will meet, how long for and where, and put some dates in the diary. Have an open discussion about timescales so that you can agree a rough end date.

Template for a first meeting checklist

Introduce myself

A brief career history, what I enjoy working on and why.

Find out about my mentee

Relationships at work, career history and goals, and key challenges.

Discuss learning goals

What I can offer and what my mentee can expect. Use a GROW audit or similar? (see page 9)

Tackle practicalities

How long we'll meet for and where, when we'll review the relationship and keeping in touch between meetings.

Action points

Date of next three meetings

Following the first meeting

Assess chemistry – A good match feels natural, comfortable and honest. Ask your mentee if they want to work with you at the end of the first session. Suggest they send you, or CharityComms, an email if they change their mind and try not to take a 'No' personally.

Follow up – Suggest your mentee sends you a follow up email clarifying what was discussed and what they want to talk about next time. This will help them set their own agenda.

Check in with CharityComms – We'd love to know how your first meeting went. If the match doesn't feel right for any reason, get in touch and we can discuss options.



“ What I liked most about being a manager at work was trying to find out what people were good at. With mentoring, I felt you could help someone by sharing your experience without having to deal with the HR side of management. The first meeting is about seeing if you connect. So making it quite informal is good. If the chemistry isn't there, I think it's absolutely fine to not go ahead.”

Bertie Bosrédon, *digital consultant*



How to approach your first mentoring meeting

James Baker is sharing his passion for digital communications as a mentor. The digital marketing manager at NSPCC has mentored three people through CharityComms so far. Here, he offers advice on creating an informal, honest and useful first mentoring meeting.

"I aim to make my mentee feel as relaxed as possible in the first session and that approach starts before we meet. I send a friendly email as I think it's easier if the first contact comes from the mentor – it can be daunting if you're asking somebody for help.

I ask about the mentee's previous experience and if we could find time to meet for a coffee in the next couple of weeks. Once we agree a date, I suggest they think about their key challenges at work to discuss when we meet. I will read over the information CharityComms sends mentors about the first meeting to help me prepare.

Setting boundaries

Being honest with each other is so important in the first meeting.

To introduce myself, I talk a bit about my background as it helps potential mentees consider if I'm the right mentor for them. They might ask me about challenges I've faced and I answer honestly. I hope this helps them see that everybody makes mistakes and to feel more comfortable.

Early on, I'll mention confidentiality. I always make it clear that I'm not going to talk to anyone else about what we discuss. I hope that helps mentees see that my job isn't to judge them so they're more likely to talk openly about their challenges. It's a small sector and there's not many people working in digital in charities. So there's a chance that you will meet your mentee in a professional environment.

Setting expectations is a good idea. I'm clear about what I'm willing to help my mentees with. I'll say I'm happy to read over briefs or documents they're working on to offer comments but I wouldn't write a digital strategy or communications plan for a campaign. I explain that I'm there to listen and help them to find their own way of dealing with a situation.

Asking the right questions

I don't have an agenda but I will

ask my mentee to think about their objectives and what support they're looking for. Often, it's about how to put forward the business case for change and influence more senior people so I try to get a good understanding of their relationships at work. I find out more about their background to help me understand how digital fits into their role. It's useful to replay back to my mentee what I have understood as it can help them to clarify exactly what they are trying to get out of the relationship, and for us to set goals.

Assessing the match

Towards the end of the meeting, I ask if they think they'd like to work with me. If it's a 'Yes', I get three dates in the diary for the next meetings, which usually last for an hour and are monthly. It can be hard to say 'No' face to face. I normally say 'If you do change your mind, just drop me an email'. Nobody has yet. For me, it's a good match if it's natural and feels like a conversation with a friend, and they're not guarded.

Everyone will approach the first session differently but I've found making it informal can help you build a relationship that works for both of you." ■

During your mentoring relationship

Once you and your mentee have got to know each other, it's time to really start working towards their goals. This factsheet aims to help you support your mentee to do this.

Keep on track of mentee goals

Set goals – You might find that using management tools, like a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) audit, can help your mentee consider how they can develop their skills to meet their goals. Or you could also use an approach like GROW (see below) to set goals for each of your sessions.

Break down goals into small steps – Help your mentee get to where they want to be by identifying actions and steps they can take to get to their ultimate goal.

Example of how you might use the GROW approach to setting goals

Goal: Outline and agree the goal of the session.

Reality: Discuss, actively listen and understand your mentee's present situation.

Options: What are all the different ways in which they could approach this issue?

Will: Which option, or options, would your mentee choose?
What commitment, on a scale of one to 10, do they have to take these agreed actions?

Be clear

Keep in touch – If you can't continue to mentor for whatever reason, for example, if you're suddenly very busy, let your mentee know as soon as possible. Let CharityComms know too. And get in touch with us if you have trouble contacting your mentee.

Plan ahead – Always try to have a few dates in the diary for your next few meetings.

Review regularly

Encourage self-reflection – Suggest your mentee keeps a work diary. This can help them organise their thoughts, recognise their skills and notice if the same issues come up. Ask them to report back on what they're doing differently if they decide they want to change anything.

Ask for feedback – At the end, ask your mentee how they found each session. This will prompt them to think about what was helpful and other support they might want. It can also help you both keep track of mentee goals.

Get support for you – Talk to CharityComms if you need help with anything, or if it feels like boundaries have blurred, for whatever reason.



“ Things change so mentors and mentees need to review their work together to see if they're both getting what they need from the relationship. I did this with my mentees at every session by asking them if the information I provided, or my responses to their questions, was helpful. Feedback can help you know the best approach to take.”

Kellie Stewart, *communications manager at Bliss*

Template session form

What was addressed in the last session or can we bring forward from the last session?

What is today's agenda?

Key areas to work on

How does my mentee think today's session went?

Action points from today's session?

What mentoring isn't...

Counselling – Like counsellors, mentors act as a sounding board when mentees are solving a problem or making difficult decisions. They also help mentees clarify issues so they can see the larger picture. But unlike counselling, mentoring is not about supporting someone through personal emotional issues.

Coaching – Mentees learn from the experience of mentors, often someone further ahead on their chosen career path. Coaching is more fundamentally about how a person thinks, feels and acts in situations. And a coach is a trained professional who will not necessarily have the same career experience as the person they support.

Mentoring skills

Listening – A key skill in mentoring. It's so important not to go into 'solution mode' but to listen to your mentee which will help them feel heard, valued and understood.

Reflecting – Offer your mentee's thought or idea back to them using their, or your own, words. Rather than you telling them what to do, encourage your mentee to come up with their own solutions. This can help them grow in confidence and improve their problem solving skills.



“ Listen 80% talk 20%. A lot of the time people will have their mind made up already, they just need to talk it through with someone to realise what it is.”

Branislava Milosevic, *digital consultant*



How to keep on track of your mentee's goals

Coral Stanion-Nazeri has mentored two people through CharityComms. The digital services partner at Action for Children explains why setting boundaries, staying positive and encouraging self-reflection are key to supporting mentee goals.

“What people think they want may not actually be the root of what they need. When I meet my mentee, I will have read what they've told CharityComms they want out of a mentoring relationship and I'll use our first meeting to dig beneath this.

I start thinking about goals by asking my mentee to consider what they're good at and where they want to be. Usually, when you've asked for a mentor you've got a problem. I find doing a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) audit helps mentees look at it in a more positive way. If you're feeling stuck at work, it can help you to look outside the situation and be more aspirational, which can shape what it is that you want help with.

I explain that I expect my mentees to define what they want to get out of me and set a schedule. Boundaries like this are important in setting goals.

Small steps

Doing the SOAR audit can help break goals down into small steps. For example, one mentee wanted help growing into her management role as running her team wasn't going too well. I worked with her to focus less on how horrible work was because she couldn't trust her team and more on how she wanted it to be. We'd set small actions at the end of sessions, like trying out saying 'No' more or setting up a steering group so she could practice letting go of control. I'd ask 'What are you going to do if that doesn't work?' and 'What's the next step after that?'.

Now things are going better in her role and her boss says her team are developing. She feels more confident at work, something that wasn't a goal she came to me with, but it's an outcome and maybe what was underlying.

Learning together

We keep track of how we're doing against our schedule. I don't like to impose structure

but will mention actions we set at the end of a session at the beginning of our next meeting. This helps you track how little things are building towards what your mentee wanted to do to start with and if you're moving in the right direction.

Keeping a diary can be a good way to keep track of mentee's goals. If, for example, someone wants to be a better manager, they could keep a record of what they notice about their strengths when they're managing people. Doing this self-reflection on how they got to where they are can help people see patterns themselves which you can discuss.

If you don't set goals together, it's more difficult to track progress. Change can be difficult. It's easy to get stuck discussing the same things, but with clear goals, you can keep track of progress and both learn something. I've learnt that it's easy to jump into solution mode but sometimes the best thing to do is listen, question and let your mentee work through what they need." ■

Ending your mentoring relationship

A good ending can help both you and your mentee put what you've learned into action at work – so it's an important part of the mentoring process. This factsheet will help you think about how to approach the ending of your mentoring relationship.

Talking about the end

At the beginning – Agreeing an end date at the beginning of your mentoring relationship can shape your work together, giving it structure, purpose and a timeframe. The time you work together will depend on what your mentee wants to achieve through the mentoring and can be anything from three months to a year.

When things have changed – 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.

Towards the end of the time you agreed – You could remind your mentee that the end is coming up around three quarters of the way through your agreed timeframe. Ask if they'd still like to end then or, if you both agree, you might want to continue. Under the CharityComms umbrella, mentoring can go on for up to one year when we'll automatically email you both an evaluation form. If you tell us that you'll finish the mentoring before this, we email this form then.

Before the final meeting

Look over the CharityComms evaluation form – Contact CharityComms to let us know that your final session is coming up and we'll send you a link to our evaluation form. Reading this before the final session will help you consider the process as a whole and what you might want to discuss.

Think about how your mentee has changed – Tell them what you have noticed. For example, if they've become better at problem solving or leading their team, mentioning it can help your mentee consider what it was that caused them to change.

Checklist of things to discuss in your final session

- What were your mentee's goals when you started working together?
- How has your mentee developed or changed?
- What did your mentee find useful about the mentoring? What wasn't so useful?
- What has your mentee learned?
- What have you learned?
- How would your mentee like to use their learning in the future?
- Will you keep in touch?

The final session

Revisit your mentee's goals – Talk about what has been achieved and how they got there.

Talk about the future – Discuss what else your mentee wants to do professionally and how what they may have learnt through the mentoring process might help them do this. It's a good idea to consider whether you'll keep in touch and how.

Reflect on your work together – Ask your mentee what they found useful about the mentoring and what could have been different. You can use this information to help with your own career and any future mentoring relationships.

After the final meeting

Contact CharityComms – Send us your completed evaluation form. And, if you want to, get in touch to discuss how you've found the process and to request another mentee.

Take your mentee's feedback on board – If a mentee fills out our evaluation form, we will pass on their feedback to you which can help you think about what you've learnt from being a mentor.



“ Through being a mentor, I've learnt the skills to help somebody come up with the answers themselves and to help them feel empowered to do their job better. The skills I've learnt in that area have been immense. Also, I've found I have case studies already in my head when I come to write my CV or talk in my appraisal, as I've spent time discussing experiences with my mentee.”

James Baker, *digital marketing manager at NSPCC*



How to approach the ending of your mentoring relationship

A former mentee herself, Kellie Stewart has mentored three communications colleagues. The communications manager at Bliss shares her top tips on managing the end of the mentoring relationship.

"For me, talking about the end of a mentoring relationship starts in your very first meeting. With my three mentees, we agreed a 12-month timescale in the first session. Then, when it comes towards the end of this time, you can reference this and check you're both still happy to end. If you don't set that up in the beginning and you bring up ending later, the mentee might wonder 'Why now?'

Being flexible and not taking things personally is useful when you're approaching the end of your mentoring relationship. I worked with one of my mentees, a communications officer, for six months. He had taken on some PR work in his role, so wanted some insight into that. Towards the end, our relationship started to dwindle off as we tried to find times to meet. He emailed me to tell me that he was very grateful for my support and that he was going back to full-time education. Another mentee said 'This will be our last session' after about eight months. She was changing jobs.

I wasn't frustrated at all by these endings. It was absolutely fine that my mentees wanted to end early. I was able to support them with what they needed and they no longer needed the support.

The final session

When you have agreed a final session, it's nice to have a more informal one, perhaps meeting in a different place. The final session with the mentee I worked with for 12 months was much more informal. We met for a coffee, caught up as she'd started a new job and chatted about the whole year. It was an opportunity for us to recap and remind ourselves of her goals at the beginning. You could also explore what other support your mentee might need in the future and discuss whether you will stay in touch.

One of the main things I've learnt from being a mentor is setting clear parameters to make sure that everybody's expectations are being managed. I think that's important from the beginning, and helps you approach the ending, so you're both on the same page." ■

