

# Mentee Handbook



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

# Welcome

Welcome to the CharityComms Peer Support Scheme! We hope you have a great experience as a mentee.

Having a mentor to talk to provides an invaluable reflective space, to talk through objectives, be listened to by an experienced comms professional in your field, sound out new ideas and learn about different approaches. Our jobs are important to us and being able to discuss challenges with someone external can be hugely beneficial. A lot of the time you have your own answers, you just need to be in the right space to talk them through with someone that will listen, reflect back and share their own experience in order to get a fresh perspective to help you progress.

Being matched with a mentor is a unique opportunity and we'd like to help you make the most of it. This handbook lays out the CharityComms approach to mentoring, and provides guidance for mentees on everything from how to approach your first mentoring meeting to how to handle the end of a mentoring relationship. These are guidelines, rather than rules, but we hope you find them useful. We look forward to hearing how things go: please keep in touch and don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at any point during your mentoring experience.

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

## Contents

- 3 In a nutshell, how it all works
- 5 Factsheet – Beginning your mentoring relationship
- 7 Case study – How to approach your first mentoring meeting
- 8 Factsheet – Working towards your mentoring goals
- 10 Case study – How to keep your goals on track
- 11 Factsheet – Ending the mentoring
- 13 Case study – How to approach the ending of your mentoring relationship
- 14 When your mentoring relationship has finished...

# 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.

## **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. This is a personal matching service and the time it takes to make a match can vary. We will do our best to help with all requests, but bear in mind there may be applications we're not able to help with.

## **Defining how it's going to work**

Once we've made a mentoring match, an introductory email is sent to mentor and mentee, so you can arrange your first meeting. This meeting is a chance to get to know each other, talk about your objectives as a mentee 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 to 12 months).

## **Keep reviewing how it's going**

We suggest reviewing how things are going after a few sessions. CharityComms will 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 goals and make the most out of being mentored.

## **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 mentor when you have your first mentoring meeting. We've got some tips on how to approach the end of your mentoring time in this pack too.



## **Respect your mentor's time**

Please remember that your mentor is giving up their time voluntarily to help you, so do make sure you respond promptly to correspondence from them.

## **Any problems, let us know**

Once we introduce you to your mentor, we leave you both to it. Feel free to get in touch any time with our mentoring manager, Lally Wentworth ([lally@charitycomms.org.uk](mailto: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 mentee as best we can.

# Beginning your mentoring relationship

**Your first mentoring meeting is a great chance to get to know your potential mentor 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**

**Be flexible** – Remember your mentor is volunteering their time to help you with your career. So do respond quickly when they get in touch with you and be as flexible as you can about when and where to meet.

**Be clear about your objectives** – Before you meet your mentor, make sure you've thought about what you want to achieve and how a mentor may be able to help you. It's important to be ready for an open discussion about what you're both looking to get out of the relationship.

**Be prepared** – Think about how you'd answer questions such as: "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?"

## **The first meeting**

**Identify goals** – Talk to your mentor about how you'd like to use your sessions together and what you'd like to achieve by the end of your agreed timeframe. Discuss your longer term goals and how you might work towards these together. It can be useful to set out key objectives and organise your meetings around them.

**Talk about confidentiality** – Sometimes you'll want to talk to your mentor about private or controversial work issues. Agree in your first meeting to keep everything you discuss confidential at all times.

**Discuss practicalities** – Allow time to discuss things like how often you will meet, how long for and where. On average, people meet every four to six weeks, for around six to 12 months. But it can be different for everyone, so see what you think is best for you both. Have an open discussion about timescales so you can agree a rough end date. Pick a venue that's quiet, like a coffee shop without music, the kind of place you'd go for a casual business meeting.

## Template for a first meeting checklist

### Introduce myself

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

### Find out about my mentor

Current job role and career history

### Discuss learning goals

What I hope to gain from the mentoring relationship and what I can expect from my mentor

### 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 the chemistry** – Have a think about whether the mentor you've been set up with feels right for you. A good match is someone you can be honest with, feel comfortable talking to, and who has career experience that's relevant to your goals.

**Follow up** – Send your mentor a follow up email clarifying what was discussed, such as what your objectives are and dates for the next few meetings. It's up to you to take the steering wheel now and keep the meetings going.

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



“ I think the first meeting with your mentor is about assessing the chemistry of the match. It's a professional friendship and you need to find out whether you spark off each other and have a rapport. It's important to agree boundaries in the first meeting. It sets the grounds for honesty in your relationship. I'd also suggest that you agree when you will review the relationship.”

**Steve Palmer**, *press and public affairs manager at Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)*



## How to approach your first mentoring meeting

**Steve Palmer is communications manager at the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and a trustee at CharityComms. He talks about the importance of using the first mentoring meeting to get to know your mentor.**

"I think the first meeting with your mentor is about assessing the chemistry of the match. It's a professional friendship and you need to find out whether you spark off each other and have a rapport.

The chemistry was immediate with my mentor. I knew within the first few minutes that we could work together. We appeared to have a lot in common. We have both worked with a range of small and large charities in PR, know how the charity sector works and have a similar level of emotional intelligence. I remember we said, "We seem to be getting on". If you don't feel your relationship is working after the first session, I don't think you'd want to pursue it. If that happens, you could talk

about what you want to do next at the end of the session or get in touch with CharityComms.

### **Agree boundaries**

I emailed my mentor to arrange the first meeting within a few days of the introduction because, if you don't do that, it can 'slope off'. When we met, we both gave a potted history of our careers and discussed what we cared about. I asked why she went into the charity sector and about her philosophy on management.

It's important to agree boundaries in the first meeting. It sets the grounds for honesty in your relationship. Decide how often you are going to meet, for how long and where – and who will email to arrange this. My mentor and I met for an hour and a half every three months, which I don't think is too onerous. You need a quiet place, like a coffee shop without music, because it's a casual business meeting. I'd also suggest that you agree when you will review the relationship.

### **Set expectations**

We also discussed whether we'd contact each other between meetings in our first session.

This meant I knew I could contact my mentor if something happened at work that I wanted to run past her.

It's useful to set expectations together, to discuss what you want to talk about and what a 'normal' meeting looks like. You can over-complicate things by bringing in your whole objectives for the year. It's more helpful to concentrate on one or two things. I wanted extra support from someone who worked in PR and communications outside my organisation who knew about leadership. I wanted their objective viewpoint about my work at SCIE as well as my personal career objectives. For example, my mentor told me I was doing the right thing writing more for trade press, which encouraged me to continue doing it.

I don't think the first meeting is something to be nervous about. It's your opportunity to get to know someone in a professional friendship way that you wouldn't normally get insight from." ■

# Working towards your mentoring goals

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

## **Focus on your goals**

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

### **Example of how your mentor might use the GROW approach to help you set goals**

**Goal:** Outline and agree the goal of the session

**Reality:** Discuss your present situation

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

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

**Log what you're learning** – After each meeting, email your mentor with a short list of key learning points and actions from the session. You might find it useful to keep a log of each session for yourself too. Highlight any useful tips and ideas that come up, as well as new goals or queries you'd like to discuss with your mentor. This will help you reflect on what you've learned and give direction to your future sessions. It's also a useful tool to refer back to when you've finished your mentoring.

**Keep a work diary** – You might also want to keep a work diary to help you organise your thoughts, recognise your skills and notice issues as they come up that might be useful to talk to your mentor about. Ahead of each meeting, email your mentor to let them know what you'd like to discuss.



## Reviewing the relationship

**Allow for change** – You might find that your objectives change as the process moves forward. Stay aware of what you want from the mentoring relationship. You may get to a point where it feels like your mentor is no longer a good match for your objectives or that things have come to a natural end. This can be a normal part of the process. Let your mentor know if you'd like to draw it to a close. Contact CharityComms at any point if you'd like to discuss this more.

**Give feedback** – Keep communicating with your mentor and let your mentor know how you're finding the sessions. Is there anything you're finding particularly helpful? Anything you'd like to be doing more of or less of? Don't forget to keep revisiting your objectives too.

**Plan ahead** – Always try to have dates in the diary for your next few meetings. If you're suddenly very busy, or you're changing jobs, let your mentor know as soon as possible. Tell CharityComms too.

**Talk to CharityComms** – Sometimes mentors get very busy with work or something else stops them from getting in touch. If that happens, do let CharityComms know and we'll look into it for you.



“ It's important not to be too rigid about the structure of your mentoring relationship. Our agreed approach meant I knew I could bring current problems to meetings that I needed more senior, non-competitive, input on. I have a special notebook dedicated to my mentoring and only use this to write notes in during sessions. Having notes in one place makes it easier to revisit that learning. My mentoring was an invaluable learning process.”

**Sally Clark**, *former head of communications at National Children's Bureau (NCB)*



## How to keep your goals on track?

**Sally Clark is former head of communications at National Children's Bureau (NCB). She explains how agreeing an approach to meetings with your mentor can help you get the most out of your mentoring relationship.**

"Assessing the chemistry you have with your mentor at your first meeting is so important for what you want to achieve. If that person does not have the right experience, they won't understand your goals.

I decided I wanted to work with a mentor because there is always so much you can learn from other communications professionals. I had just started a contract role with NCB and was embarking upon an in-house brand refresh, which we dubbed our 'brand tidy-up'. My mentor had been through two brand refreshes at his charity. I had never project managed a brand refresh before and wanted guidance so I could make the most of what could be done in the 10 months I'd be there. I'm also very dedicated to

communications and into personal development.

### **Planning ahead**

In our first meeting, my mentor and I agreed how our meetings would work. I would email him before each of our meetings, every six weeks or so, with bullet points to let him know what I wanted to talk about. This gave my mentor time to think so he could best share his experience with me. I could then go away and apply my learning to my role.

For example, I emailed him before one meeting saying that I'd like to talk about how to embed brand across the organisation in order to get people to own it. He came to our meeting with a calendar that included key messages which his organisation had produced to launch their brand internally. We talked about how to create a 'big' moment to launch a brand internally and how it's important to make it easy for staff to use. This was really helpful and I developed guidelines and templates for staff at NCB to help embed brand there.

### **Being flexible and focusing**

I think it's important not to be too rigid about the structure of

your mentoring relationship. We didn't speak between meetings as we are both very busy. But our agreed approach meant I knew I could bring current problems to meetings that I needed more senior, non-competitive, input on. For example, I mentioned that I was working on messaging and my mentor told me about how having focus groups helped his organisation to develop a new strapline. That prompted me to take the messaging I was working on to contacts in local authority children's services, and it completely changed my thinking.

I'm an avid note taker, which helped to focus me. I have a special book dedicated to my mentoring and only use this to write notes in during sessions. Having notes in one place makes it easier to revisit that learning.

I think your role will guide your goals. My mentoring relationship helped me achieve more than I thought I would at NCB. Setting an agenda before each meeting kept us on track and helped me to think about what I could do with the brand refresh with few resources. It was an invaluable learning process." ■

# Ending your mentoring

**A good ending can help both you and your mentor put what you've learned into action. This factsheet will help you think about how to approach this important part of the mentoring process.**

## Talking about the end

**Set a deadline** – Agreeing an end date at the beginning of your mentoring relationship can shape your work together, giving it structure and purpose, and a timeframe. How long you spend together will depend on what you want to achieve and the availability of your mentor. It can be anything from three months to a year.

**Be aware of change** – If you feel the relationship is petering out, have a think about why this might be happening. Perhaps your mentor has had a change in circumstances? Or your goals have changed? Do discuss the prospect of ending your work together. Try not to worry or take it personally if the relationship does end earlier than planned.

**Discuss the end in plenty of time** – Around three-quarters of the way through your agreed timeframe, have a think if this still feels like a good time to end. If you'd like to continue, chat with your mentor about whether they're able or willing to extend the mentoring. The maximum length of time for a CharityComms mentoring relationship is usually one year. After that we'll automatically email you both an evaluation form. Get in touch if you want to finish before this so we can send you your evaluation form.

## Before the final meeting

**Look over the CharityComms evaluation form** – Use the form to help you think about how the process has been and what you might want to discuss in your last meeting.

**Think about how you've changed** – Write down some notes about how you think you've changed and any new skills that you've developed during your mentoring. Make a note to ask your mentor for feedback about any changes they have noticed.

## The final meeting

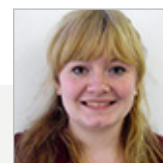
**Discuss your achievements** – Talk to your mentor about what you've achieved together. Consider all the different ways that your mentor has helped you. Let them know what has worked well – and what hasn't – and thank them for the experience. Don't forget to ask what they've gained from working with you too.

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

### **After the final meeting**

**Contact CharityComms** – Please send us your completed evaluation form. And, if you want to, get in touch to discuss how you've found the process.

**Applying for another mentor** – You may find in due course that you'd like another mentor to help you with a different aspect of your role. You're welcome to apply again on our scheme, but please remember that this is a highly popular service and we do give priority to first-time mentees. We also have a maximum limit of the number of times you are eligible to use the service.



“ My mentor and I were both on the same page from the start. By the end, I think it was quite obvious that we had helped each other as much as we could. We talked about how far we'd come and how it had been working together. She asked me questions about how useful I'd found it, gave me her contact details and said we could stay in touch. Having flexibility is important. It was great to know that, even if we didn't have another meeting, I could contact my mentor if I had any questions.”

**Sarah Bailey**, *Communications and events officer at RNIB*



## How to approach the ending of your mentoring relationship

**Sarah Bailey, former head of membership and communications at Social Value International, worked with her mentor for nine months. Now a communications and events officer at RNIB, Sarah shares her experience of ending the mentoring relationship that supported her through a merger and rebrand.**

“As the only communications professional in a small membership organisation, having support from a mentor was invaluable.

We had lots of opinions to take into account during our merger and rebrand, as well as lots of different audiences to communicate with. It was quite a political situation. I felt slightly out of my depth, so I contacted CharityComms.

They found me the perfect match. As head of membership and communications, my mentor had management, membership and brand experience and she'd gone through a rebrand in a previous job.

### **Setting an end date**

We knew when my project was going to launch, so as soon as we got started, we set a date for the mentoring to end, which I think is really important. Although we talked about other aspects and challenges of my job, we had a very definite project to work on together, which made this easy.

We had around nine months together, which felt like a good amount of time. Before each meeting, my mentor would say “You know, we have X months left – let's look at how we can make the most of it”. We thought about this all the way through our relationship, rather than just thinking “Right, it's finishing now”.

### **The last meeting**

My mentor and I were both on the same page from the start. I think it was quite obvious that we had helped each other as much as we could by the end.

By the time our last meeting came, my organisation's rebranding document was finished and our website was live, so I could show these to my mentor. We talked about how far we'd come and how it had been working together. She asked me questions about how useful I'd found it, gave me her contact details and said we could stay in touch.

Having flexibility is important. It was great to know that, even if we didn't have another meeting, I could contact my mentor if I had any questions.” ■

# When your mentoring relationship has finished...

## Interested in being a mentor yourself?

Now you know how the service works why not give something back and sign up to be a mentor to someone else? Being a mentor can be hugely rewarding, help advance your career – and someone else's.

You don't have to have 20 years of experience to be a mentor for us. People from different sized charities and job levels apply for mentors on our scheme, from comms assistants to associate directors of communications. So we're looking to recruit a broad range of mentors.

## Benefits of being a mentor:

- Share your knowledge and experience and help others progress in their career
- Develop and build on your coaching and managerial skills
- Get insight into the working world at different organisations
- Be introduced to new ideas and ways of doing things
- Engage with someone in a different job role from your own

## Want more information?

You can read more about being a mentor, access our mentor resource pack and officially sign-up on the CharityComms website: [www.charitycomms.org.uk/mentor](http://www.charitycomms.org.uk/mentor)

Please get in touch with our mentoring manager Lally with any questions you have or if you'd like to arrange a chat about how it all works.

**Lally Wentworth**, membership and mentoring manager  
[lally@charitycomms.org.uk](mailto:lally@charitycomms.org.uk)  
020 7426 881



“ My mentor has given me the support and encouragement I needed to progress my career in the sector. I wanted to pass forward the brilliant experience I've had, which is why I've become a mentor myself.”

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

