MENTORING GUIDE

MENTORING OVERVIEW

*Mentoring is... the process in which successful individuals go out of their way to help others establish goals and develop skills to reach them.*

- Linda Phillips-Jones, Ph.D., *The New Mentors and Protégés*

**What is the National Science Foundation Innovation Corps (I-Corps)**
The NSF I-Corps Mid-Atlantic Region (Pennsylvania, Maryland, DC, Virginia and North Carolina) program helps researchers and entrepreneurs explore the potential for their discoveries to become products and services that can benefit society.
The program centers around the concepts espoused in Steve Blank's book, *The Startup Owner's Manual* (PDF version of the book can be found here). Participants form teams and attend a 3-session program focused on identifying how their innovation meets customer needs. There are two types of teams:

1. Faculty, postdoctoral researchers, graduate students, and/or undergraduates who are developing a scientific or technical discovery at any institution in the Mid-Atlantic region. These teams begin in the regional I-Corps program (3-session) and depending on eligibility, commitment, and interest progress to the national I-Corps Teams program (7-weeks, $50K grant).

2. Local qualifying technology entrepreneurs with a desire to commercialize their business ideas. These participants may be eligible to attend the regional I-Corps program but are usually not eligible to attend NSF’s national I-Corps Teams program.

### The Mentor Program Goal

The goal of the program is to provide support and guidance for I-Corps Teams to support the successful completion of the I-Corps program and ultimately the successful commercialization of their products and services.

### Mentors and Mentoring

Effective mentors are good listeners. Mentors need to understand the innovators, their level of experience, and stage of the idea to provide appropriate guidance.

Often, a researcher has no fixed commercial idea, or even desire to build a business, but wants to seek knowledge about where their research can be applied. Students might have very little real-world experience, but want to “build an app.” As the team's ideas advance, assistance becomes more specific, with subject matter expertise or deep domain contacts being increasingly important. Recognizing these disparate conditions and needs, we have defined the following roles mentors can serve:

- **Mentor-in-Residence (MIR)** – An MIR's goal is to help teams develop strong, validated business models, Minimum Viable Products and go-to-market strategies, preparing them for acceleration and investment. MIRs lead the customer discovery process for teams as part of a long-term relationship. The MIRs role is to guide and help reinforce the I-Corps Lean Startup process and coordinate engagements between teams and other mentor roles. They need not have specific industry experience. They provide consistent oversight and direction, evaluating progress milestones for customer discovery, and
assisting in interpreting market signals. They help teams find Industry Mentors (IM) and Subject Matter Experts (SME) and interpret their input, ensuring that teams use new information to form and test new hypotheses. Startup experience is crucial for these mentors, as they are intended to guide teams through the startup process.

- **Industry Mentor (IM)** – IMs provide deep real-world knowledge of a particular industry, or market. At early stages of development, they provide innovators with general domain knowledge, including guidance on information sources, thought leaders, etc., as well as prospective customer discovery interview introductions. For more advanced teams, they help teams understand regulatory environments, common business practices, buying ecosystems, financial models, and other advanced topics for their industries. They coordinate with MIRs to create appropriate discovery milestones and interpret findings. They do not require startup experience, but it’s preferable.

- **Subject Matter Expert (SME)** – SMEs focus on specific technical or skills related guidance. Some SMEs provide scientific or technical knowledge; others, counseling related to legal, intellectual property, sales and marketing, logistics, manufacturing, and other key business components. They coordinate with MIRs to create appropriate discovery milestones and interpret findings. They provide specific and, sometimes, detailed direction, with a focus on execution elements for the business vs. the business model or Go-To-Market strategy. Startup experience is not necessary.

- **National I-Corps Mentor (NIM)** – National I-Corps Mentors are advisors that have two primary roles. First, by being a third-party resource for the team, the mentor can help the team recognize and reduce confirmation bias during the customer discovery process. In this role, the I-Corps Mentor is in some ways an extension of the I-Corps Teaching Team in helping the team absorb and apply the relevant lessons. Second, the I-Corps Mentor should be someone that has industry contacts and knows the ecosystem of the target market area. I-Corps teams will be interviewing more than 100 potential customers and potential partners in person. A good mentor can help the team find the right people to interview.

  **Note**: National I-Corps Mentoring is a rewarding experience that requires a serious commitment. NIMs are expected to attend all sessions and participate in many of the interviews.

Mentors can fill more than one role, and the nature of assistance changes over time, but they must understand their role in the context of the innovator and the team’s phase of development. Through long-term engagement, along with defined roles, we seek to provide the right mentoring tools at the right time via a coordinated effort led by our Mentors. We hope this results in successful startups led by teams that understand how to follow where the market leads.
Mentor Characteristics, Qualifications, and Requirements

- Enthusiasm for the Program
- Ability to Advise and Coach
- Listening Skills
- Positive Attitude
- Respected by Colleagues
- Significant and Relevant Experience
- No Personal Agenda
- Time Commitment Appropriate To the Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>MIR</th>
<th>IM</th>
<th>SME</th>
<th>NIM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Startup Business Experience</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Desirable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership Experience</td>
<td>Desirable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Desirable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific Vertical Industry Experience (i.e. IT, Aerospace, Energy, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Horizontal Business Experience (i.e. Management, Marketing, Accounting, HR, Sales)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean Startup Methodology</td>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Desirable</td>
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</table>

Desired Experience

- Academia
- Technology
- Legal
- Medicine
- Biotechnology
- Marketing
- HR
- Military
- Information Technology
- Finance
- Social Media
- Corporate Executive
- Founder
- Investor
- Tech Transfer
- SBIR/STTR and/or National I-Corps
- Government
# Mentoring Roles and Functions

I-Corps Mentors serve Mentees through a combination of seven functions that constitute the complete mentor role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What? Activities like...</th>
<th>Why?...provides...</th>
<th>When &amp; Where ...which is appropriate if...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitative Coaching</td>
<td>a sounding board</td>
<td>an individual can do or solve it him or herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>direction</td>
<td>an individual has no idea where to start, or is headed down a dangerous path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role modeling</td>
<td>vicarious learning</td>
<td>you’re highly skilled at something that others have the opportunity to observe. Sharing experience/war stories?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructing</td>
<td>knowledge transfer</td>
<td>information needs to be shared and there’s only one right answer or way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocating</td>
<td>practice</td>
<td>an individual needs to practice new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>confidence</td>
<td>an individual lacks confidence, and you can encourage and motivate them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>When appropriate to Introduce people that can advance the individual’s progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mentor Responsibilities**

- Identify the mentoring functions that you can best provide to a given mentee and communicate this to your mentee.
- Encourage your mentee to find someone who can provide the functions that you cannot provide.
- Make the time to serve your mentee in the best ways you can.

**Mentee Responsibilities**

- Determine the functions any given mentor can provide and respect his or her limits.
- Find people who can provide the functions your mentor cannot.
- Drive the mentoring relationship; set goals, meetings, and prompt discussions.
- Be respectful of schedule and time e.g meetings or Office Hours.
Mutual Responsibilities
● Clarify expectations by completing a mentoring agreement.
● Define confidentiality appropriately, then maintain it.
● Address problems (e.g., unmet expectations) with one another, rather than ignoring them or expecting them to go away.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: FOR MENTORS

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A MENTOR?
The following outlines your roles and responsibilities as a mentor:

Coach
● Helps mentee see issues from a different perspective
● Identifies mentee’s leadership style, attitudes, and behaviors that are not helpful
● Increases mentee’s awareness on the effect she/he has on others
● Asks probing questions, challenges the mentee’s thinking, and explores alternative perspective
● Listens with an open mind
● Gives and receives feedback, as needed
● Fosters strategies to address obstacles that mentees have faced in the past and are facing now

Role Model
● Provides a good example from which the mentee can learn
● Shares information on your own successes and failures, if appropriate
● Leads by example

Instructor
● Assists your mentee in cultivating skills for living and working with people of diverse backgrounds and opinions
● Maintains focus on skill development

Advocate
● Helps mentee develop the connection she/he needs to gain experience
● Helps mentee find information or other resources that might be useful in resolving his/her problem or achieving his/her objective
● Provides and promotes support networks for your mentee both in the workplace and in the community
Supporter
- Gives support as mentee learns by sometimes making mistakes
- Recognizes achievements and celebrates accomplishments
- Encourages the use of resources and contacts
- Promotes the self-esteem and confidence of your mentee
- Empowers your mentee as a leader, professional, and engaged citizen
- Is available to your mentee
- Provides emotional support when needed
- Creates a spirit of mutual learning, trust, and respect
- Even if mentor does not see commercial potential, encourages mentee to continue their entrepreneurial journey and learn for themselves

Networker
- Makes your network available to mentee when appropriate
- Provides introductions to:
  - Investors
  - Team members
  - Strategic partners
  - Customers
### Dos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dos</th>
<th>Don’ts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share your mistakes, struggles, and successes.</td>
<td>Think that you are going to change the world overnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclose any possible conflicts of interest.</td>
<td>Try to solve all the mentee’s problems at one meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest time in learning about the aspiration, attributes and preferences of your mentee – the better you know your mentee the more detailed guidance you can provide.</td>
<td>Enter into any arrangement which may result in a conflict such as entering into an employment or advisory position with a competitive organization without disclosing to the mentee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodically identify special learning opportunities in your organization or in professional networks for your mentee.</td>
<td>Promise what you are unable to deliver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively assist the mentee in developing his/her own personal network of professional Contacts.</td>
<td>Postpone or cancel meetings unless absolutely necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor any commitments to and confidences of your mentee.</td>
<td>Jump to conclusions or simply give answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be clear about purpose, goals, and boundaries.</td>
<td>Be judgmental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodically validate with your mentee the value of the information and counsel you are providing.</td>
<td>Forget how important you are to your mentee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide honest and regular feedback to your Mentee.</td>
<td>Stray into management – stick to your mentoring role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen deeply and ask powerful questions.</td>
<td>Try to inflict your beliefs on a mentee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain and respect privacy, honesty and Integrity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help your mentee with problem-solving by guiding them through a logical thought Process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set targets for your mentee and work towards them together.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remember the 80/20 rule: the mentee should do 80% of the talking.</td>
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</table>
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: FOR MENTEES

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A MENTEE?
You have entered into a partnership with a mentor who will help you achieve goals. Keep in mind that this relationship needs nurturing from both you and your mentor. Your mentor is not expected to “take care of you” or intercede on your behalf when challenges occur. Your mentor is the person who will help you learn to handle your own challenges.

As your mentor exercises his/her roles and responsibilities, you must also perform several roles and responsibilities:

Be Committed
- Know what is expected from you
- Have realistic expectations of your mentor’s time and your ability to achieve your goals
- Be willing to learn and accept constructive criticism

Be an Active Participant
- Seek advice and counsel. Your mentor does not always know when you need help
- Actively explore career options and life choices with your mentor
- Listen and observe. Try to keep an open mind, even if you don’t agree
- Ask questions. Questioning is a key component in learning
- Ask for clarification. Don’t expect to understand everything at once
- Inquire about resources. Your mentor probably already has a network established
- Help solve. You learn most effectively by doing
- Make suggestions. You have fresh ideas to share
- Be flexible – only then will you truly grow
- Make sure that you attend all meetings and appointments as scheduled
- Engage in cultivating skills for living and working with people of diverse backgrounds
- Enhance your self-esteem and confidence in partnership with your mentor
- Create a spirit of mutual learning, trust, and respect
- Discuss diverse roles and contribution to society
- Discuss strategies to address obstacles that mentees might face

Practice What You Learn
- Develop your own planning skills. The same methods do not work for everyone
- Develop self-assessment tools. There are long-term benefits from learning to know yourself, your capabilities, and limitations
- Seek out support networks with your mentor
- Assess yourself honestly. Keep in mind - no one is perfect
- Empower yourself to become a leader, professional, and engaged citizen with the support of your mentor
- Follow through quickly when your mentor contacts you
If problems (e.g., your mentor’s unwillingness to meet with you) develop during the course of the program, contact the mentoring team. Take the Initiative

- Take the lead when it is required
- Look for new ways of doing things and be adventurous in pursuing them

**Be Reliable and Persistent**

- Show that you can be relied upon to finish tasks
- Finish things on time
- If you cannot get something done, let your mentor know in advance
- Do not give up when things go wrong, use your mistakes as a lesson for how to do it better the next time

**Be Focused on Learning**

- Be interested in your own learning
- Constantly look for ways to develop yourself
- Be as interested in people skills as technical skills
- Look for feedback and use it

**Exhibit Interpersonal Skills**

- Understand the impact of your own personality
- Know the impact you make on first meeting
- Understand body language and be careful of mixed messages (words and body language saying different things)
- Always try to understand how people issues impact any problem
## Dos and Don’ts for Mentees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dos</th>
<th>Don’ts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarify your goals</td>
<td>Depend on your mentor to identify your goals for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show openness to the wisdom of your mentor</td>
<td>Assume your mentor has unlimited time for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that not everything your mentor says will be usable immediately</td>
<td>Get defensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow your mentor time to respond</td>
<td>Talk non-stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let your mentor know how you are applying his or her advice</td>
<td>Assume that mentors don’t care if you are following their advice or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your mentor to be critical</td>
<td>Reject what you don’t like to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect the professional boundaries of the relationship</td>
<td>Overstep the boundaries without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support your mentor with others</td>
<td>Keep quiet about difficult feelings or issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk through disagreements with each other</td>
<td>Be afraid to ask for help or access to opportunities and resources you see or need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help identifying training, development, research or access to key resources</td>
<td>Ask for things that are irrelevant or unreasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help in promoting your visibility attending key meetings or co-publishing research</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Mentors shall adhere to and operate within UMD Policies.
- Mentors may not invest in ventures they are currently mentoring.
- Any initiative pertaining to an operational or consulting role for a mentor must be initiated by the mentee.
- Mentors will maintain strict confidentiality concerning proprietary information.
- Mentors shall notify Mentee regarding any potential conflict of interest.

Best Practices

- Sign up for a scheduling appointment application to allow Mentees to view your availability and automatically schedule appointments (The free Calendly.com application works well)
- Sign up for a video conference service. (The free functionality available with Zoom should be sufficient and integrates with Calendly)

Onboarding/Training By Role

- **Mentor-in-Residence (MIR)** - MIRs are expected to have a strong grasp of the I-Corps Lean Startup Process. The onboarding and training process consists of the following steps:
  - Apply through this link. Your application and LinkedIn profile will be reviewed.
  - Interview with UMD I-Corps Team Member
  - Review and Sign to signify acceptance of this Mentoring Guide and Agreement.
  - Audit one Mid-Atlantic Hub I-Corps Course and debrief with a UMD-I-Corps Team Member.
  - Participate in a second I-Corps Course and Co-Host alongside an I-Corps instructor or approved Mentor break-out session.

- **Industry Mentor (IM)**
  - Apply through this link. Your application and LinkedIn profile will be reviewed.
  - Interview with UMD I-Corps Team Member
  - Review and Sign to signify acceptance of this Mentoring Guide and Agreement.

- **Subject Matter Expert (SME)**
  - Apply through this link. Your application and LinkedIn profile will be reviewed.
  - Interview with UMD I-Corps Team Member
  - Review and Sign to signify acceptance of this Mentoring Guide and Agreement.

- **National I-Corps Mentor (NIM)**
  - Experience as a Mentor-In Residence (MIR) desirable
  - Interview with I-Corp Hub Team Member
I, the undersigned, read and understand the Mentoring Guide.

_____________________________________
Signature

_____________________________________
Print Name

_____________________________________
Date