



From the American College of Epidemiology

American College of Epidemiology mentoring guidelines

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ABSTRACT

Career mentoring is beneficial for mobility, growth and development at all stages of an epidemiologist's career. The American College of Epidemiology (ACE) provides a variety of opportunities to be mentored and to mentor, facilitated through the Career Mentoring Committee. ACE has now moved to a new level of engagement in mentoring, offering a more inclusive and structured one-on-one mentoring program for epidemiologists to achieve their professional goals. This program has recently been formalized in the Mentoring Guidelines that were developed by the Career Mentoring Committee. The Mentoring Guidelines can be used as a resource for both mentee and mentor as they offer suggestions for specific areas for mentoring and guiding principles of the mentee – mentor relationship. It is the hope of the Career Mentoring Committee and ACE that the adoption of the mentoring program will contribute positively to the professional success of ACE members at various career stages and in various career paths.

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Career mentoring is beneficial for mobility, growth, and development at all stages of an epidemiologist's career [1]. For early career epidemiologists, benefits of being mentored can include learning about their institution's culture and values that influence career trajectories and expectations for success (e.g. in academia, these involve tenure and promotion criteria, service level, and so forth). For midcareer epidemiologists, being mentored may focus more on developing leadership and management skills, learning to become comfortable with delegation, balancing multiple roles, and negotiating skills. Finally, for more experienced epidemiologists, having a mentor may help with developing a vision for institutional growth, building consensus, and further developing one's leadership skills. At all career stages, having mentors can expand one's professional network and improve skills from communication to work life balance. Research has shown that the benefits of mentoring are mutual and lead to better career outcomes for both the mentors and mentees [2].

In recognition of these benefits and requisite skills, the American College of Epidemiology (ACE) provides a variety of opportunities to be mentored and to mentor, particularly through the Career Mentoring Committee. These include events in settings such as

educational opportunities, networking at the Annual Meeting, and developing one-on-one mentoring partnerships based on individual requests. In a 2013 article on "Mentoring in Epidemiology and Public Health Training," ACE Fellow and past President Faith G. Davis concluded that "An understanding of the benefits of mentorship and the application of recruitment and mentoring programs across the full spectrum of educational levels is important in our discipline" [3]. ACE also hosted a forum entitled "The Art of Mentoring: Can Good Mentoring be Learned?" in a meeting focused on doctoral training in epidemiology in 2002 [4]. The forum suggested that mentoring be institutionalized and that "...models for training in mentoring in epidemiology should be discussed by professional organizations and developed for dissemination" [4].

In line with ACE's goals of recognizing and promoting excellence in epidemiology and promoting the professional development of epidemiologists through educational initiatives, ACE has now moved to a new level of engagement in mentoring, offering a more inclusive and structured mentoring program for epidemiologists. The program aims to provide career advice and mentoring to help participants achieve their professional goals. The Mentoring Guidelines were developed by the Career Mentoring Committee and approved in 2017 [5]. ACE offers one-on-one mentoring, pairing a mentee with a more experienced mentor for the duration of at least one year. To the extent possible, mentees are paired with mentors based on common area of research focus and, more importantly, employment in a similar sector (e.g. academia, industry, government, and so forth). Any ACE associate member, full

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member or fellow in good standing is eligible to request a mentor. The mentors will serve as counselors, guides, teachers, tutors, or coaches, depending on the nature of the particular relationship. Although there are many potential dimensions of a successful mentee-mentor relationship, we envision that a mentee experiences the value of seeking professional advice in a collegial and unhurried environment characterized by mutual respect, trust, and absence of conflict of interest, of brainstorming goals and action steps, and receiving critical feedback on the experience.

ACE recognizes that interdisciplinary or team mentoring is one of the recently developed models of effective mentoring [6–8]. Thus, assuming the mentee already has one or more mentors at their home institution or company, the mentoring experience provided by ACE aims to be complementary to the existing mentoring relationships or team in that it provides an impartial, external perspective. Such perspectives are particularly useful when the mentee would like guidance on a career move, impending negotiations, or strategies to deal with a difficult colleague or superior. Furthermore, the ACE mentoring experience aims to be distinct from the potentially more formal, hierarchical mentoring occurring in the context of promotion and tenure processes in academic and other institutions and opens the door for more lifestyle, life course, and contextual elements of mentoring. As such, the ACE mentoring experience has a potentially broader spectrum of mentoring components to add value to the formal mentoring at the mentee's institution. This is particularly valuable for those who have few epidemiology coworkers such as in industry, state government, and/or newly established epidemiology programs. This may also be the case for epidemiologists who are highly specialized. The ACE mentoring program is also suitable for epidemiologists who would like to develop a professional competency such as leadership, grant writing, and oral presentation, for which drawing on the full ACE membership is an advantage.

Given the broad range of mentoring components, a key prerequisite is that the mentee develop clear goals and expectations for his/her mentoring relationship in consultation with the mentor [2,9–13]. Successful mentoring is furthermore facilitated by the mentee having a keen understanding of his/her values, personality, strengths and weaknesses, being willing to learn, being open to criticism, taking the initiative, and following through on commitments. For the mentor, the experience will be rewarding as he/she contributes to the professional development of another colleague. The mentoring guidelines can be used as a resource for both mentee and mentor as they offer suggestions for specific areas for mentoring and guiding principles of the mentee-mentor relationship. They also point to a number of other resources on mentoring.

The Career Mentoring Committee stands ready to receive individual mentorship requests and will facilitate the mentee-mentor pairing. Starting in fall 2018, all members will be asked to indicate whether they wish to be mentored and wish to mentor in the

context of their membership renewals. The Career Mentoring Committee will then systematically assign mentee-mentor pairings, starting with the requests received from early career and associate members. In summary, it is the hope of the Career Mentoring Committee and ACE that the adoption of the mentoring program as outlined in the Mentoring Guidelines will contribute positively to the professional success of ACE members at various career stages and in various career paths and in that process to a greater engagement of its members.

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