



American Academy  
for Park and Recreation Administration

# 2026 MENTORSHIP PROGRAM MANUAL



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration  
NRPA Leadership and Development Network  
NRPA Young Professionals Network

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## BACKGROUND

In 2014, the American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration (the Academy) underwent an effort to ensure it remains a vibrant, growing, and relevant organization to the overall profession. At this time, a specific Mentoring Committee of the Academy was developed as one method to reach out to young professionals.

The Mentoring Committee implements the Mentorship Program on an annual basis. The intent of the program is to pair seasoned professionals (Mentors) with young professionals, students, and new directors (Mentees) to share experiences and to provide development opportunities. The program has continued to grow with as many as 100+ pairings participating annually.

More information about the Mentorship Program can be found at:

<https://aapra.org/Programs/Mentorship-Program>

Resources include:

- Mentorship Manual
- Tips for Mentees
- Tips for Mentors
- Mentee Application
- Mentor Application
- Quick Resources

*This manual includes information developed by the Illinois Park & Recreation Association Mentoring Guide which was prepared by Jill Bartholomew, Joanna Tomy, Jeff Wait, Roger Key and Dr. Terry Schwartz.*

# AAPRA/NRPA NETWORKS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The AAPRA/NRPA Networks Mentorship Program is a development program for emerging leaders; new parks and recreation directors; and students of parks, recreation, and related fields. The purpose of the program is to provide each Mentee with additional development opportunities that an effective mentorship program can offer.

This manual provides guidelines and suggestions for beginning and maintaining a Mentor/Mentee relationship. The Mentorship Program should complement the career counseling relationship an employee may have with their supervisor. It is not intended to replace any of the formal or informal counseling/mentoring relationships that already exist within or outside a person's place of employment. As a matter of course, AAPRA/NRPA Networks encourage Mentees to develop several informal mentor/mentee relationships throughout their careers to nurture and foster the park and recreation profession.

## Oversight:

- The program will be managed by the Mentoring Committee of the Academy.
- The President of the Academy shall select a Chair.
- The Chair shall work with the Leadership Development Network (LDN) and Young Professionals Network (YPN) to facilitate their representatives on the Committee.
- The Committee shall have the responsibility to implement and oversee the program.

## Eligibility

- **Mentees:**
  - Should be members of NRPA and/or their state association.
  - Must be willing to commit time to the Mentorship Program.
  - Must be employed (or actively seeking employment) or be a student in the parks and recreation field.
  - Should participate in their local or state parks and recreation association.
  - Must complete and submit the online Mentee Application.
- **Mentors:**
  - Should be members of AAPRA and/or NRPA and/or their state association.
  - Must be willing to commit time to the Mentorship Program.
  - Must have significant experience in the parks and recreation field.
  - Should participate in their local or state parks and recreation association.
  - Must complete and submit the online Mentor Application.

## Promotion of the program

- All AAPRA Mentoring Committee members are required to be a Mentor.
- Mentoring Committee members are encouraged to reach out to fellow Academy members to solicit their participation in the program.
- The Mentoring Committee Chair may enlist former Externs to be mentors for the program if need suffices.
- The Mentoring Committee Chair will work with the representatives to the Committee of the LDN and YPN to further promote the program to their membership to recruit mentors and mentees.

### **Application process**

- Enrollment will occur during open recruitment for the program.
- Applications will be available on the Academy website site and through NRPA Connect.
- After the application deadline, all applications will be reviewed and Mentors/Mentees will be matched.

### **Matching Mentors with Mentees**

- Matching Mentors with Mentees may be based on such factors as: mutual areas of professional interest, schedules, geographic location, etc.
- Follow up calls by the committee may occur with Mentor/Mentee applicants to clarify areas of interest and commitment level of participants.
- Assignment will be made by the committee and information will be sent out to each Mentor/Mentee.
- A date by which Mentors/Mentees should contact one another will be established annually.

### **Monitoring the program**

- A key component is monitoring and evaluation of the program. This will include:
  - Follow up with participants to ensure that Mentors/Mentees have been contacted.
  - Year-end group meetings to share information and discuss improvements to the program.

### **Evaluation of the program**

- All participants shall provide feedback at the end of the program.
- All input shall be referred to the Mentoring Committee.
- The Mentoring Committee Chair shall provide a final report to the Academy and the LDN and YPN at the end of the mentor year.

### **Switching Mentors/Mentees**

- Although infrequent, some Mentor/Mentee pairings may not “click.” If this occurs they should direct their comments to the Chair of the Mentoring Committee. The Chair will first attempt to work with the respective Mentor/Mentee to identify how to make the match work. If unsuccessful, the Chair will work to find a new Mentor for the Mentee and vice versa.

## MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TIMELINE

- **January 2026**
  - Initial Meeting of 2026 Mentoring Committee
- **February 2026**
  - Solicitation of Academy members and other experienced professionals to be Mentors
  - Solicitation of Mentors/Mentees through various NRPA Networks
  - Virtual informational meeting on February 20, 2026
- **March 2026**
  - Application deadline is March 16, 2026
  - Announcement of Mentor/Mentee Pairs by the end of March
- **March – September / November 2026**
  - Mentors/Mentees connect and meet at least once each month
- **September 2026**
  - Mentor/Mentees meet at NRPA Conference as able
- **November / December 2026**
  - Hold Virtual Mentor Program Round Table/Workshop
  - Mentor/Mentee evaluations submitted
  - Mentoring Committee to review data and formulate revisions to the Mentor Program
  - End of formal program
- **December 2026**
  - Develop revised Mentorship Program for review by the Academy Board, LDN and YPN Networks
- **January 2027**
  - Solicitation of interest for the following year's AAPRA Mentoring Committee

## MENTORSHIP PROGRAM CODE OF ETHICS

As a Mentor within the AAPRA/NRPA Networks Program, I agree to:

- Not use any ideas, products or materials that a Mentee has, or may develop, to further my business or financial interests; and maintain the confidentiality of all ideas, products, or materials that have been entrusted to me by my Mentee.
- Encourage my Mentee to maintain the highest ethical standards.
- Maintain a high standard of personal and professional conduct with my Mentee.
- Always communicate in a truthful manner.
- Support the goals of my Mentee.
- Avoid the intent or appearance of unethical or compromising practice in relationships, actions, and communications.
- Accept only assignments for which I am qualified by my experience and competence.
- Immediately acknowledge any influences on my objectivity to my Mentee.
- Refer my Mentee to other professionals for issues or questions for which I feel unqualified.
- Maintain confidentiality

As a Mentee within the AAPRA/NRPA Networks Program, I agree to:

- Maintain the confidentiality of my mentoring relationships.
- Communicate regularly and openly with my Mentor.
- Honor my commitment to my Mentor.
- Complete any tasks agreed upon between my Mentor and myself.
- Hold all sensitive information provided through my mentor relationship in strict confidence.

## MENTOR / MENTEE GUIDELINES

Mentors and Mentees should understand the significance of the mentoring relationship, and share the responsibility for making the mentorship experience a success. It is a two-way exchange, with information and support coming from both parties. Both Mentor and Mentee should be positive, open, and honest, dependable, and prepared for each mentoring session, and respectful of one another.

### Mentor Guidelines

- Be perceived as approachable and available.
- Get to know your Mentee on a professional level.
- Provide guidance on career development.
- Make your role as a Mentor a high priority.
- Share your experiences and tell your stories – personal scenarios offer valuable, and often unforgettable, insight.
- Share your failures and successes – both are powerful lessons for learning.
- Ask questions that make the Mentee think - good questions require comparison, evaluation, and reflection. What does the Mentee think about their career? How would they like for you to help them? What expectations do they have of you?
- Support and praise the Mentee when the situation merits support and praise.
- Periodically assess the mentoring relationship. Is it giving each of you what you anticipated in the teaching relationship? Offer positive and constructive feedback on the relationship.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know but I'll follow up and get back to you".

### Mentee Guidelines

- Accept advice graciously but make your own decisions. Only you know what is truly best for you.
- Take responsibility for managing your career.
- Demonstrate confidence. Your knowledge, skills, and abilities provide valuable input to the relationship. Your Mentor can gain just as much from you as you can from your Mentor.
- Ask questions – even the ones you are hesitant to ask. Your Mentor is there to provide support and act as a provider of information.
- Confide in your Mentor and respect the confidentiality of mentoring discussions. Be honest, open, and sincere with your concerns. Your Mentor may share information with you that they may not otherwise share outside of the relationship; be conscious of this and do not share information publicly that was shared within the mentoring relationship.
- Share your perspectives on life at your level. This will help your Mentor keep in touch with people outside of their world of existence.
- Take responsibility for initiating and maintaining contact with your Mentor.

## FIRST MEETING PREPARATION

The first meeting sets the tone for the Mentor/Mentee relationship, as well as a basis for the teaching and learning that will result from this relationship. It is suggested that your initial meeting focus on defining your relationship by discussing roles and responsibilities, expectations, needs and goals.

Mentees are asked to make the initial contact with their assigned Mentor. This shows initiative and a commitment to the program.

Mentors are asked to respond to Mentees in a timely manner and to stay committed to the program throughout the year.

### **Before the Meeting**

- Develop an agenda
- Complete any preparation planning worksheets or meeting documents that might be of use
- Attend to necessary logistics (schedule the time, provide advance notice to your Mentor or Mentee, and make necessary preparations so there are no interruptions)

### **During the Meeting**

- Get acquainted
- Review the agenda to determine desired outcomes of the meeting
- Discuss expectations, roles, responsibilities, and needs
- Record decisions and outcomes
- Discuss what went well and what improvements can be made for your next meeting
- Schedule the next meeting (not more than 30 days is suggested)

### **After the Meeting**

- Review objectives that were accomplished
- Determine future meeting topics
- Summarize meeting results and next steps

*See sample meeting agenda on page 9*

## SAMPLE AGENDAS

Prior to the first meeting:

- Exchange resumes
- Review the mentor-mentee handbook
- Commit to meeting before deciding it's not the right fit

### Initial Meeting

- I. Introductions
  - a. Share your professional (and if comfortable, personal) background
  - b. Share what attracted you to this profession
  - c. Is there a favorite ice breaker that would help establish rapport?
- II. Expectations
  - a. Why each of you volunteered to be a part of the program?
  - b. What do you envision how each mentoring session would look like?
  - c. How often would you like to meet?
  - d. In what format (virtual, in-person, if logistics lend itself to that or both)?
- III. Goals
  - a. Define what a successful mentor-mentee partnership looks like
  - b. Define needs and expectations for each mentor and mentee
  - c. Document these agreements
- IV. Next Steps
  - a. Mentee to schedule the next meeting or the series of meetings
  - b. Exchange contact information

### Regular Meetings

- I. Mentee to start with updates since the last meeting
- II. Discuss mentees strengths and areas for growth
- III. Share some successes and challenges
  - a. Discuss each by sharing how the success made you feel and ideas on how to overcome the challenges
- IV. Questions and Discussion
  - a. Review prepared questions from mentee
- V. Review goals set in the initial meeting
  - a. Brainstorm ideas to move forward

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many resources can be found online to promote the success of the Mentor/Mentee relationship.

The following information about the Mentorship Program can be found on AAPRA's website, at [aapra.org/Programs/Mentorship-Program](http://aapra.org/Programs/Mentorship-Program):

[AAPRA Mentorship Program](#)

[Mentee Tips](#)

[Mentor Tips](#)

[Quick Resources](#)

Resources for discussion topics:

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252137/home.aspx> (\$19.99)

<https://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test> (free)

<https://wwwenneagraminstitute.com/type-descriptions> (for discussing Enneagram)

<https://www.workinggenius.com/> (\$25.00)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action) (TED talk)

[https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_vulnerability](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability) (TED talk)

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/mentoring-topics> (Mentoring Topics/Questions)

[https://www.uvu.edu/getinvolved/lead/docs/mentor\\_mentee\\_discussion\\_templates\\_activities.pdf](https://www.uvu.edu/getinvolved/lead/docs/mentor_mentee_discussion_templates_activities.pdf) (Template and Activities for discussion)

<https://www.truecolorsintl.com/personality-assessment#Assessments> (fees may apply)