

Mentored Research Projects: Getting the Most Out of Your Mentors



Fellow Immersion Training in Addiction Medicine
April 2025



Learning Objectives

1. Learn how to get the most out of your research mentors
2. Assemble a team that will facilitate your success
3. Avoid and overcome common challenges
 - Seize serendipitous opportunities

Do you have a mentor?
How often do you meet?
How did you choose your mentor?
What is your mentor doing for you?
Are you facing challenges?

Understanding Career Success and Its Contributing Factors for Clinical and Translational Investigators

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Organizational Factors

1. Mentors
2. ~~Protected~~ Committed time for
research
3. Institutional resources and
support

What's the single most important key to success for a young investigator from a disadvantaged background?

"For me, the most important thing was having mentors. Not just one, but multiple mentors. I didn't plan on doing academics when I first began my career. I was in Milwaukee, doing a public-health loan obligation, it was cold, the university offered me a job back at Louisville, and I said, "okay." So I had no idea what I was doing. What got me through and kept me going is mentorship. I still use multiple mentors today, and I think that is exceptionally important that you find mentors. Not necessarily one that's assigned to you. Pick them out, what you think you need."

Flores G, Mendoza FS, DeBaun MR, Fuentes-Afflick E, Jones VF, Mendoza JA, Raphael JL, Wang CJ. Keys to academic success for under-represented minority young investigators: recommendations from the Research in Academic Pediatrics Initiative on Diversity (RAPID) National Advisory Committee. *Int J Equity Health*. 2019 Jun 18;18(1):93.

Mentoring for women, non-binary & minoritized scholars

- Challenges
 - URM's are 34% of US population, 7% of faculty - Leaky ~~pipeline~~ pathway
 - Systemic barriers to promotion
 - Systemic barriers to NIH funding
 - Barriers to leadership/mentorship positions
 - Commitment to mentoring may be there, but bandwidth can be low
 - Diversity tax
 - Negotiate for protected time + compensation/recognition for extra efforts
- Mentoring is even more critical
 - Have mentors that understand your challenges
 - Team approach can help
 - Choose an institution that supports you and your mentors

Choosing the Right Mentor

- A productive clinical researcher
- A mentor for others who have succeeded at your goals
- Someone with integrity (critical)
- Someone you like
- Someone with enough time/commitment for you
- Someone whose expectations for you match (or exceed) your own
- Your mentor's priority in the relationship is you
 - Your education
 - Your profession development
 - Your recognition
 - Your career

Why do mentors mentor?

- It advances their career
 - They may be funded to mentor - see who has K24 awards in your area
- Profession and personal satisfaction
- Good students foster better research, papers, and grants proposals
- Keeps them current and on top of their field
- Enhances productivity, inspires innovation
- Develops their professional network
- Fun and rewarding

How do you find a mentor?

- Meet with people
- Get recommendations - ask who else they recommend
- Be persistent
- Find multiple mentors, both senior and junior
- Attributes to seek:
 - Available, accessible, and interested
 - Provides opportunities and encourages mentees to take risks
 - Helps mentees develop their own agenda
 - Has prior mentoring experience

The first meeting

- Share your background, values, and needs
- Ask for feedback on a research idea
- Specifically discuss how the mentor can be helpful based on their expertise
- Follow-up with e-mail summarizing the discussion and your next steps plan to proceed

What you want out of your mentor meetings

- Regular meetings - weekly, q2 weeks, monthly, quarterly
- Prioritization of your goals and activities
- Specific feedback about ongoing work
- Decisions about projects
- Deadlines for abstracts, papers and grants
- Guidance on who else to talk to for inspiration, help, and collaboration
- Ensures you get academic credit
- Nominates you for awards
- Ensures your evaluators know about your terrific work

Cultivating the mentor-mentee relationship

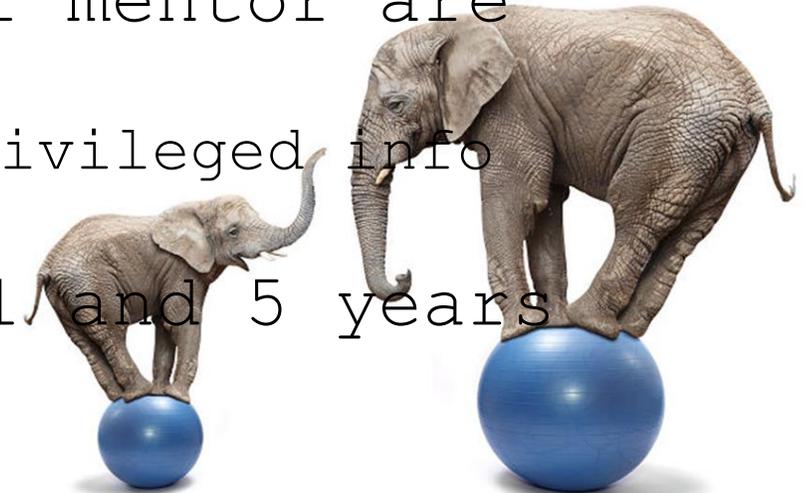
- Agree on structure and objectives of relationship
 - How often and when are you going to meet?
- Plan and set meeting agenda
- Ask questions and listen actively
- Follow through on assigned tasks
- Ask for feedback
- Manage up

Examples of mentor-mentee agenda items

- What is the precise research question and the best design?
- Do I need a biostatistician to help and who should it be?
- Who should the other authors on this paper and how should I communicate with them?
- What feedback do you have on this abstract/manuscript?
- What conference/journal should I submit this abstract/manuscript to?
- What further research skills do I need and how best to get them?
- Should I say yes to this opportunity? How do I say no?
- When I go to this conference, who should I go see and meet?

How do you get the most out of your mentor?

- Be a PROACTIVE mentee
- Remember that both you and your mentor are busy
 - Respect your mentor's time and privileged info shared
- Clarify your goals: 3 months, 1 and 5 years
- Identify your work style
- Share knowledge and skill gaps
 - Teach you mentor what you learn
- Update mentor on progress, lessons learned, growing network



Mentee Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Take initiative - drive the meetings
- Make and use an IDP
- Understand that mentors are busy
- Communicate agenda and goals for meetings
- Practice self reflection
- Clarify goals and expectations
- Have multiple mentors
- Look for opportunities to teach your mentor
- Keep your CV, IDP up to date

DON'T

- Be passive—don't wait for the mentor to initiate interactions
- Be late, disorganized
- Wait for the last minute to ask for things
- Hesitate to ask for what you need
- Stay in the comfort zone
- Stay in a mentoring relationship when it's not helpful

Key things I've gained from my mentors

- Early years: Inspiration, confidence, and opportunities
- Middle years: Roadmap to a viable career
- All along: Networking, access to resources
- Now: Guidance on being a mentor, navigating institutions, career advice, friendship

Mentor's multiple roles

- *Advisor* - shares career experience and knowledge
- *Supporter* - provides emotional and moral encouragement
- *Tutor* - gives specific feedback on performance
- *Sponsor* - seeks opportunities
- *Model* - exemplifies the kind of person one should strive to be



Mentoring challenges

- Accessibility - Uneven commitment to the relationship
 - Cancellation of meetings - not a priority
 - Insufficient review and consideration of work
 - Not following through on career sponsorship
- Team communication challenges
 - Unclear expectation and role of mentors
 - Authorship
 - Differences in opinions regarding career trajectory
- "Ownership" of mentee's project
 - All your work attributed to mentor
 - Who presents at the big meeting?
- Pathway to independence

A Mentoring Team

- Career Mentor
 - Responsible for overall career guidance and support for mentee
- Research Mentor
 - Responsible for developing the creative and/or independent research careers
- Co-Mentor
 - Works with the mentee and research mentor to provide specialized content area or methodological expertise
- Peer (Near-Peer) Mentor
 - At or near same level as mentee, works alongside to also help guide scholarship

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Advisor

- Shares career experience and knowledge
 - Time Management - promotes concept of protected time
 - Research Idea Development
 - Scholarly activities
 - Trade-offs discussed
 - Job search

Supporter

- Provides encouragement
 - Your papers will be rejected
 - Your grants will be rejected
 - In time, they will be accepted

Mentors show you how to “fail productively”

Turn rejection into success

Tutor

- Gives specific feedback on performance
 - Manuscripts
 - Grants
 - Abstracts
 - Oral presentations

Sponsor

- Seeks opportunities for you and with you
- Stakes reputation on advancing your career
 - Funding sources
 - Networking
 - Job contacts
 - Circle of influence