

# The CSE Mentorship Program: Opportunities for Giving Back or Benefitting from Experiences of Others

**Patricia K Baskin on Behalf of the CSE Mentorship Committee**

Do you have expertise in particular facets of editing and publishing that may be valuable to others? Do you need an outside perspective on your career path or a sounding board for ideas and challenges you have in your current position? Navigating a career in scientific editing and publishing can be tough, so the CSE Mentorship Program is designed to help make that path a little easier by connecting interested mentees with a veteran member of CSE. This article provides an overview for those unfamiliar with the program, focusing on how it works, what materials are used to kick-start a mentoring dyad relationship, and some feedback we have received from those who have participated in the program. It will highlight comments from mentors who are giving back by sharing their expertise with others and comments from mentees who describe the key benefits they derive from the mentoring partnerships.

## Developing the Program

While serving as CSE President in 2017, I read an article advocating that professional organizations like ours should offer the opportunity for networked members with expertise in their careers to mentor more junior members who are actively building their careers. During this period, I was also working with other senior leaders at my own organization to set up a similar mentoring program for our in-house staff. I also reviewed mentoring programs that were being implemented by similar organizations and developed a mentorship proposal for the CSE board. Emphasizing that such a mentoring program would add value and opportunities to CSE membership, I obtained the Board's approval for a mentorship committee and proceeded to

invite all CSE past presidents and other interested seasoned volunteers to join.

The mentorship program debuted that spring with special help from Tim Cross and Ken Heideman, who chaired the committee while I finished my presidential rotation, after which Leslie Neistadt and I assumed the chair duties. We now have an enthusiastic committee, some of whom (Heather Goodell, Angela Cochran, Rhea Williams, and Diane Sullenberger) have served for several years, looks along with a cadre of active and dedicated mentoring volunteers. We strive to match those who apply to be mentors with those who want mentoring—we call these pairs “dyads”—by looking at the expertise of the mentor and the needs of the mentee. During the first year, we formed 10 dyads; we have 27 dyads so far this year. Most participants—both mentors and mentees—have reported positive experiences, citing the benefits of enhancing their networks, gaining knowledge about publishing or editing, and gaining new friends.

## How the Program Works

As described on the CSE Mentorship Program web page,<sup>1</sup> the program “offers the opportunity to gain insights into the dynamic scholarly publishing field through a one-on-one relationship with a veteran member of CSE.” The specifics of that relationship can vary based on the participant's needs: some mentees want to learn more nuts-and-bolts skills, while others are interested in less tangible skills such as handling interpersonal workplace dynamics, working with management, self-advocating, or just having thoughts about changing the direction of their careers. Mentors can help find resources for learning, help mentees network by providing contacts, or just be available to discuss difficult issues in publication, for example, publication ethics issues or addressing management of journal workflow or other people.

## Participating in the Program

If you are interested in requesting a mentor, membership in CSE is required, and we have a formal application that can

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be found on the CSE website along with basic information about the program. Currently, we do not have a mentor application; if you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact the CSE headquarters.

In the past year, the Mentorship Committee has established a collaboration with the Scholarship Program to arrange mentors for the scholarship winners and also with the Certificate Program subcommittee to arrange mentoring for those candidates working on their projects.

### Activities: What Are You Committing to?

The mentor/mentee relationship was designed for 1 year, from one CSE Annual Meeting to the next; however, the program is flexible and we welcome applications at any time of the year to maximize benefits to CSE members. Some dyads continue informally well beyond this “term” as both members often find the relationship to be beneficial. Activities usually include monthly phone calls or personal meetings during the annual meeting or locally if this is practical.

The Mentorship Committee provides oversight and planning, develops and maintains lists of interested mentors and mentees, and screens the applications, matching mentees and mentors. We provide basic training materials for both the mentor and mentee, with a 3-month plan that helps orient the first few months’ meetings and establish goals for follow-up discussions (Figures 1 and 2). Participants have related that the materials (e.g., lists of topics suggested for the first 3 meetings) were especially helpful at the beginning to help the conversations get started.

### Benefits of the Program

As a new program, we felt it was essential to solicit feedback whenever possible to ensure the program was meeting the needs of both mentees and mentors. We have received feedback in several different ways: annual meeting roundtables

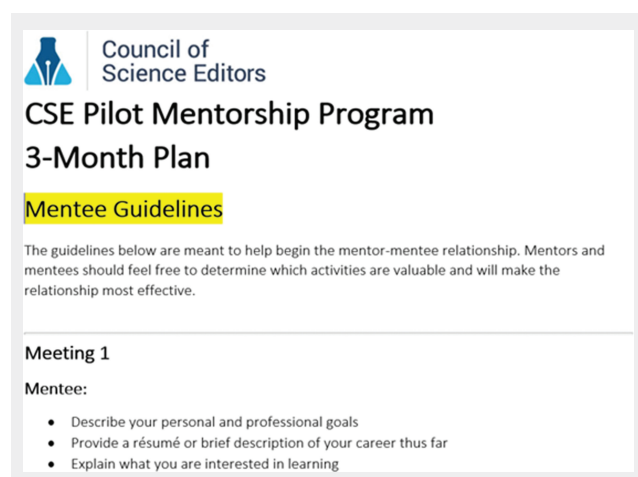


Figure 1. 3-month plan, mentee guidelines.



Figure 2. 3-month plan, mentor guidelines.

and breakfast groups, survey responses, two CSE Connect sessions in 2021, and by word-of-mouth. The Committee has sent two surveys—to both members of each dyad—to help us to continually evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

In our recent survey for mentors and another for mentees, we asked the dyad pairs to make comments about participating in the program and received the following list of perceived benefits:

- Introduction to others who could help them in job searches
- Having an objective sounding board to further develop their thoughts and ideas relating to their work and careers
- An outside perspective on career questions and support in considering their career path
- Someone outside their organization to provide perspective and general idea generation
- Being able to discuss concerns/challenges with someone who has been in their shoes
- Notification of potentially relevant early career opportunities
- Advice specific to their situation, friendship, and encouragement
- Having someone to talk to about professional topics that are difficult to discuss when no local colleagues are available or might have a conflict
- More confidence in their abilities and knowledge
- Encouragement for getting involved in career-development opportunities

During the two 2021 CSE Connect sessions, both members of the mentorship dyads shared their experiences while participating in the Mentorship Program. They carry

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the same themes as the comments from the surveys but were more detailed in their descriptions. Their comments have been edited for clarity and concision and to preserve participants' anonymity.

*Mentors on how they were able to help:*

- Some of my mentees have had definite goals with questions and objectives they work on over a year's time; others have wanted informal conversations to discuss day-to-day issues or long-range work or career planning. Others want to improve leadership skills, time management skills, or skills at giving constructive feedback to their staff. I helped connect someone who felt socially isolated as a writer in a research institution with someone in journal management who could help her transition to a new career. Another mentee was an early-career professional with a publishing vendor who requested advice about counseling staff and increasing productivity on her team. I encouraged another industry professional who wanted to change careers and explore opportunities in journal management to visit an editorial office and explore writing for a pharmaceutical company.
- I was surprised to discover that I could be very helpful early on as a mentor for a mentee early in their career. My mentee was looking for opportunities to build a career in areas in which I did not have experience. However, having a larger network and years of experience working in society publishing and networking at CSE, I was able to refer the mentee to outside resources in those areas.
- Even if you have a different background or you find out a mentee needs advice about something that's not your area of expertise, you can probably find someone, drawing from your contacts, for whatever question you may not be sure about yourself.
- I've had several mentees and many have had different needs, so I was working on different things with different people. I realized I had skills and experience in many different areas.
- I was assigned an undergraduate student in a technical writing program and when we talked the first time, he mentioned that he also had a great deal of interest in marine biology. It turns out I have a friend who owns an editorial services company and who has a PhD in oceanography. This was sheer coincidence, but I put them in touch and the undergraduate is now a doctoral student working toward a career in which he can combine both interests. I happened to know somebody in his area of interest who was helpful.
- My mentee's goal was to get noticed at their job, where they were in a sea of people and didn't know how to

stand out to possibly be promoted. It was great to brainstorm some ideas together about what projects she could initiate or participate in that would emphasize her skills to her supervisor. It was an awesome experience.

*Mentors on how the experience benefited them:*

- I was able to open doors to connect a mentee to people in the field for informational interviewing and found a tremendous sense of satisfaction in helping the mentee explore new career opportunities. It affirmed my own sense of professionalism and breadth of experience in publishing and editing.
- I realized during mentoring that I had reached a level at which I could offer valuable help to newcomers and those wanting to change careers by providing them with resources or connecting them with other people who could help them.
- Acting as a mentor has immensely improved my own communication skills and confidence in working with other professionals.
- Mentoring has given me opportunities to share what I have learned and it has increased my ability to actively listen and understand the challenges that other people are facing in our field today.
- With each partnership I've had, I just enjoyed meeting with the mentee. I feel like I have made another friend with this connection, and I've learned as much from them as they learned from me.
- When the formal part of our mentorship ended after a year, we said "why don't we keep meeting": Both of us were benefitting from the relationship. The help goes both ways, and we share what we're working on and brainstorm together, so I've really enjoyed the relationship and am grateful to CSE for making it possible.
- I have a mentee who works at another society, and we have similar concerns to discuss. Especially in this past year with the pandemic, we've had numerous conversations about how the other society is addressing various issues. It's definitely a 2-way street, and it's certainly been rewarding on both sides. Although I was the more experienced person, my mentee brought things to the table I haven't thought about. I have another mentee from another society who is less experienced, but I'm happy to share what I've learned from "being around for a while."

*Mentors on why they mentor:*

- What drew me to the mentoring program was that I had gotten to a point where I realized I could give back, and I could potentially guide someone; truthfully,

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I never thought I would get to that point. I really love mentoring the team members at my job so I thought I could be helpful here. As an introvert, I used to avoid networking, but I find this a good opportunity for a one-on-one relationship that's easier for an introvert. In my early career, this type of opportunity would have been a good fit for me. It's a good way to develop a network. The relationship was surprisingly mutually beneficial as I learned much from my mentee about her experience at her society and journals that I brought back to my own. Despite being in different disciplines, we all face common issues, and it's great to be able to talk through those with someone and brainstorm solutions. Also, it's beneficial to talk about other topics such as strategy and leadership and even politics of the office. It's been an incredibly enjoyable and rewarding experience.

- Serving as a mentor is interesting from a lot of standpoints. I was honored and a bit scared wondering if I had the necessary experience for this. The training documentation was helpful in having some guidelines to start the process, but you can personalize it as well. I'm delighted to be matched with someone who is working in the same industry, and I look forward to continuing.
- I've had great relationships with the mentees I've worked with, and I definitely encourage people who are thinking about being a mentor to do so. At first, you feel you have a bit of imposter syndrome as the supposed expert and wonder if you really know enough to be a mentor, but we all have different experiences and at different levels, and it's fulfilling to share experiences and resources. I'm a big fan of the program and I encourage people to get involved.

*Mentees on how the experience benefited them:*

- Mentoring has been a wonderful experience for me. My background is in science, and editing is a whole different world. I had stayed home for several years to care for children and wanted to get into a new field rather than return to a research area that had changed radically while I was away. I heard my mentor speak at a CSE conference on editing and thought it would be great to have a mentor to talk with about how I could advance my career. My mentor was wonderful in giving me feedback, helping me gain confidence, and sharing her experiences. She familiarized me with resources I didn't know were available and recommended BELS (Board of Editors in the Life Sciences), which I hadn't heard about. I've been able to pass on the mentoring to others and this experience has been invaluable to me. I hope my experience will inspire some of you to accept a mentoring position.

- I met my first mentor through email, on Teams, and in person a few times. It was great to talk face-to-face with her. She connected me to other people in the field and after our year ended, I still reach out to her time-to-time with questions. During my second mentorship, we met only through Teams and we focused on open access (OA). She helped me gain a much better understanding of OA. I suggest providing questions for each other ahead of time and have open conversations to open possibilities for discussion topics.
- I joined CSE to learn more about the editing and publishing industry and was not completely clear on what to expect when I was assigned to two mentors because I had some different needs. I could not have asked for a better mentoring experience all around, and the journey since has been a pleasant and inspiring one. Both my mentors were communicative and open to questions in a wide range of fields, and they always took the time to follow up with me and connect me with folks who have been very beneficial for my career. I truly appreciate the time and effort they put into mentoring me and encouraging me to ask relevant questions regarding different career paths. The combination of structured topics to discuss and freeform discussion was particularly helpful to me to gain a better idea of the publishing industry. They always took the initiative to connect me with others in the industry, which gave me the benefit of hearing multiple viewpoints. These fulfilling collaborations continue to this day, and I can't say enough positive things about the CSE mentorship program.
- I think the program is great because it really molds to the mentee's needs. Before I was paired with my mentor, I did have some editing and publishing experience, but I was still rather new to the field, and I just wanted somebody to talk to that could give me guidance. We met regularly and our mentorship was interesting because she just kind of let me talk. We had a few talking points the first couple of meetings, but after that, I would just talk with her about what was going on in my world and my concerns about my job. She was really great, almost like a college friend, someone to talk with and encourage me and put me in contact with a few of her colleagues that I did reach out to, and I found it very rewarding. I really appreciated the fact that there is flexibility about how you and your mentor can follow in the direction that works well for you individually.
- At the time I was paired with my mentor, I was a new member of the CSE and also a new medical editor who was looking to find my way in the field. I entered the program hoping to learn more about the process a

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manuscript undergoes to become a published paper and how this process works from the perspective of the journal. I was also interested in understanding the different types of editing roles that were involved along the way, with the goal of learning how to focus my efforts to develop more specialized skills. I benefited greatly from my mentor's insight into the management of a journal, and the different roles editors play. Through her coaching questions and advice, we talked through my interests and strengths. Her guidance helped me realize that manuscript editing was my editing passion and that I should focus my education on the technical aspects of this type of editing. She directed me toward some resources, which were helpful learning tools and also sought to connect me with other journal editors. Being involved with the program provided me with the opportunity to connect with a very accomplished member of CSE, and her support and interest in my growth as an editor were encouraging and very much appreciated. I highly recommend the Mentorship Program.

It was exciting and gratifying to receive feedback from dyad members, and we look forward to integrating some new features in the future. For example, we plan to set up group meetings of the mentors and separate group meetings with the mentees. Both groups would like to

hear from the others about how they navigated the dyad relationship and suggest ways they can enrich their own mentor–mentee discussions and make them more effective. We are also looking for ways to create some CSE webinars on relevant topics to further enhance the training materials. One suggestion that came from a CSE Connect session was to create a “mentor bookshelf” of resources for mentors to recommend to their mentees.

**Future mentees:** Those of us who have experienced formal or informal positive mentoring relationships that influenced our careers understand that having an individual interested in you and your career development can make an immense difference navigating your professional development. The committee welcomes your participation in this mentorship program and look forward to reviewing your mentee applications.

**Future mentors:** With the requests for mentors increasing rapidly over the past 2 years, we are calling for mentors with a wide range of skills; please consider contacting one of us or the CSE staff and describing your expertise to help us match you to a mentee seeking guidance. You'll gain the satisfaction of guiding the career success of others in your profession by sharing your career insights and savvy for their benefit.

And, finally, consider joining the Mentorship Committee and sharing your ideas to help make the Program even better!