

# **The Florida Library Association's Mentoring Program Guidelines**

Sponsored by the FLA Leadership Development, Career Development, and Marketing & Membership Committees

## **Introduction.**

Successfully assimilating into librarianship is a process that requires adjusting to a new career while meeting the expectations and demands of the profession. A key resource in the successful transition for a new librarian is mentoring. This program expands the role of the mentor to encompass "coaching" and support. Librarian mentors demonstrate innovation, a learning-centered spirit and professional balance while never losing sight of our central responsibilities of mentoring our peers. The Mentoring Program will support our newest early career colleagues who are entering the field of librarianship. The main objective of the mentoring program is to provide new librarians with the necessary support and resources that they may need to succeed.

## **What is a Mentor?**

A Mentor is an experienced librarian who has worked in librarianship for at least five years. Mentors have skills in many areas but do not profess to be an expert but rather serve as a coach and a source of support where needed. Mentors will not work within the same library as their mentees and may even work in a different type of library setting. New librarians enrolled in the program will be matched with mentors who can help to build a mentor network for needs related to professional development.

## **Mentor Roles.**

1. Mentors will help the mentee to set goals.
2. Mentors will help the mentee to set up a networking resource.
3. Mentors will be expected to set up regular meetings to monitor progress made and to address any challenges faced.
4. Mentors will focus on the mentees' needs.

## **What do Early Career librarians need?**

Entering into librarianship requires juggling many roles and establishing priorities. There are eight areas where many new librarians may need support.

1. Professional development, time management, conflict resolution, project planning etc.
2. Access to opportunities and networks
3. Emotional support (to deal with the stress and pressure of getting off to a good start and living in a new location)

4. A sense of community (both intellectual and social)
5. Accountability
6. Institutional/political sponsorship (someone to advocate his/her best interest behind closed doors)
7. Role models
8. Confidential Safe space (to discuss and process experiences without being invalidated, questioned, devalued and/or disrespected).

### **What does a Mentor do?**

It would be impossible for a mentor to meet all of the needs discussed above. While most mentors have good intentions to meet all of these needs, the mentor recognizes that this is impossible. Instead, the mentor initiates the conversation with the mentee, asks powerful questions, validates needs, helps brainstorm solutions, makes connections, and confirms next steps. Your role is to engage in a conversation to recognize needs and brainstorm solutions but NOT serve as the sole person who carries out an action plan.

### **A mentor does the following:**

1. Sets clear and attainable goals while helping to develop an action plan.
2. Engages in conversations about advocacy and networking with new librarians.
3. Offers formative feedback and support while practicing active listening skills.
4. Maintains frequent contact but allows the mentee to be independent.
5. Sees the potential in the mentee and works with limitations.
6. Develops a strong relationship by sharing common interests while setting professional boundaries. Protects the mentee's privacy by keeping all discussions confidential.
7. Continues to self-evaluate while fine tuning one's mentoring skills.

**Are you ready to be a Mentor? If you can answer "yes" to the following questions, then YES you are ready!**

1. You accept the fact that you are not an expert in all areas but rather a coach. You will admit that you don't know (and don't have to know) everything about everything.
2. You will initiate a conversation with your mentee early in the program, and set monthly meetings to check on progress.
3. You will validate the needs your mentee brings to you and help brainstorm solutions.
4. You will help your mentee make connections to meet personal goals.

5. You will confirm next steps for the mentee to reach goals and hold your mentee accountable.
6. You will take a supportive stance that includes providing structure and maintaining confidentiality. Do not disclose information about your mentee to a third party without the mentee's permission.

Mentors come in all shapes, sizes and personalities. Not every mentor is a good match on every level. Each of you will be matched with a mentor who will help you map out the supports you may need as you navigate your first library job. Your mentor will ask you powerful questions to help you develop a plan to meet your needs so that you develop within the profession. He/she will help you find the resources you need to build a mentor network.

**Here are some things to remember as you work with your mentor:**

1. Stop looking for or expecting an expert. No one person can know everything or support you in every way.
2. Identify your needs and be specific.
3. Find your gaps in support, and with your mentor brain storm ways to expand your mentor network. You can't rely on one or two people to meet all of your needs.
4. Don't be afraid to ask for help. We all need help no matter how long we have been in this business. No one knows everything!
5. Schedule your requests. Put them on your calendar like an appointment. Procrastination narrows your mentoring network. When you do meet with a perspective mentor for your network, ask focused and informed questions about what you hope to learn from him/her.

**Rewards of being a Mentor.**

Librarians who serve as mentors can expect to find fulfillment in this role as a result of several things, including:

1. Personal satisfaction in sharing your expertise with an early career colleague.
2. A sense of renewal as you help your mentee navigate his/her first job in librarianship.
3. Opportunities to discuss librarianship, advocacy for the profession, networking, and best practices.
4. The ability to grow professionally as you explore ideas with your mentee.

*With their permission, this language was adopted from documents created by the Florida Atlantic University's Connections Mentoring Program and the Florida Gulf Coast University Lucas Center. Many thanks to Leah Plocharczyk who drafted this document in 2016.*

Questions or Comments? Please contact Peggy Glatthaar, Chair of the FLA Library Career Development Committee, [mglatthaar@fgcu.edu](mailto:mglatthaar@fgcu.edu).