Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity (ISEO) Mentorship Guide for program participants

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Table of contents

[Introduction 3](#_Toc198899986)

[The Four Phases of Mentorship 3](#_Toc198899987)

[Benefits of Mentorship 5](#_Toc198899988)

[Cultural Awareness in Mentorship 5](#_Toc198899989)

[Indigenous knowledge-sharing protocols 5](#_Toc198899990)

[Respecting traditional boundaries and community obligations 6](#_Toc198899991)

[The role of the mentor 6](#_Toc198899992)

[Responsibilities 6](#_Toc198899993)

[Characteristics of an effective mentor 7](#_Toc198899994)

[The role of the mentee 8](#_Toc198899995)

[Responsibilities 8](#_Toc198899996)

[Characteristics of an effective mentee 8](#_Toc198899997)

[The role of ISEO in supporting participants 9](#_Toc198899998)

[Testimonial 9](#_Toc198899999)

[Annex: ISEO Mentorship Progress Checklist 10](#_Toc198900000)

Introduction

In the summer of 2016, 30 post-secondary Indigenous students from across Canada participated in the first *Indigenous Youth Summer Employment Opportunity* (IYSEO). It was a special project proposed by the Assembly of First Nations and implemented by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) and the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO) to expand efforts to recruit and retain Indigenous young people into the federal public service. The positive response to IYSEO 2016 resulted in a second iteration of IYSEO which took place in summer 2017 with 99 students hired. In December 2017, the OCHRO and President of the Public Service Commission (PSC) agreed that the initiative should evolve and rest at the PSC. Since then, the PSC has been managing what is now called the [*Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity*](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/Indigenous_Student_Employment_Opportunity_-_MANAGERS) (ISEO).

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate active connections by clarifying the roles of mentors and mentees, and to provide information and tools to energize and elevate these relationships once a match is made and a wonderful mentorship journey begins.

What is Mentorship?

Mentorship is a trusted relationship in which an experienced individual, a mentor, provides guidance, knowledge, and encouragement to support the personal or professional growth of a mentee. It is rooted in a spirit of mutual learning, respect, and commitment to shared goals.

Traditionally, mentoring has been used to provide insight not only into workplace success, but also into broader life skills. For Indigenous participants, mentorship can include navigating both cultural and organizational landscapes, honouring community values, and developing confidence in one’s unique path.

## The Four Phases of Mentorship

Mentoring relationships naturally evolve over time. Understanding these four phases can help both mentors and mentees navigate the journey with intention.

**1. Initiation – *Coming into relation***

This is where the foundation is built. In this phase:

* You get to know one another.
* Honour protocols and allow time for the relationship to develop organically.
* Acknowledge and respect the mentor/mentee’s identity, community ties, and lived experiences.
* Establish the goals, duration, and scope of the mentorship.
* Clarify roles, expectations, intentions, and communication preferences.
* Recognize that mentorship is mutual; both mentor and mentee bring gifts, teachings, and knowledge.

**2. Cultivation – *Walking together***

This is the core of the relationship where growth takes place:

* Engage in regular conversations.
* Share experiences and ask questions.
* Learn to navigate colonial systems, the organization, prepare for opportunities, and develop career strategies.
* Incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, such as learning through observation, experience, and community wisdom.
* Implement your action plan, build confidence, and develop skills.
* Create safe spaces where the mentee can speak truthfully, including about systemic barriers or trauma.

**3. Separation – *Letting go with respect***

At some point, the formal mentorship relationship will begin to wind down:

* Reflect on the journey and acknowledge progress.
* Celebrate accomplishments and mutual benefits.
* End the formal relationship with appreciation and clarity.
* Consider sharing experiences in feedback form to continue to build strengths in Mentorship program.

**4. Redefinition – *Becoming relatives***

After the formal mentorship has ended, the relationship may shift:

* Stay connected in a way that honours ongoing reciprocity: offering support, encouragement, and learning as equals.
* Others may part ways respectfully, having completed their journey together.

**💭 Remember**: ending the mentoring relationship is a natural part of the process: it reflects growth and readiness to move forward.

## Benefits of Mentorship

**For the Mentor:**

* Share your experience and give back
* Strengthen leadership and communication skills
* Gain fresh perspectives from a new generation
* Experience personal and professional renewal
* Foster reconciliation and inclusion through meaningful engagement
* Increase recognition and a sense of fulfillment at work

**For the Mentee:**

* Build confidence and develop key competencies
* Receive encouragement, feedback, and practical advice
* Gain insight into organizational culture and career paths
* Expand your professional network
* Learn from diverse leadership styles
* Explore career possibilities and plan for your future
* Feel supported, seen, and empowered

# Cultural Awareness in Mentorship

## Indigenous knowledge-sharing protocols

In many Indigenous cultures, knowledge is shared through storytelling, lived experience, and relationships, not only through formal or linear teaching methods. As an Indigenous mentor or mentee, it’s important to remember and understand that knowledge sharing may:

* Be situational and context-dependent, emerging naturally through trust and conversation
* Involve stories, metaphors, or symbols that may carry layered meaning
* Require patience and humility, especially when learning about perspectives or practices that are unfamiliar.
* Be open and ready to grow and learn as you build meaningful relationship

**💡 Tip**: Listen with intention, honour what is shared, and ask permission before repeating or applying cultural knowledge in other contexts.

## Respecting traditional boundaries and community obligations

Participants may carry community responsibilities, such as caring for family members, attending ceremonies, or participating in seasonal activities. These obligations may influence scheduling, availability, or emotional energy levels.

Mentorship should be flexible and inclusive of these realities. Respecting traditional boundaries means:

* Acknowledging and validating Indigenous ways of knowing and being as valuable and legitimate forms of knowledge and leadership
* Not prying into spiritual or personal matters unless the mentee offers them freely
* Understanding that identity is deeply rooted in family, Nation, and land; and that professional goals may be shaped by these ties.

**💡 Tip**: Create space to check in about cultural needs or obligations and be supportive if these shift the rhythm of the mentorship.

# The role of the mentor

A mentor is typically an Indigenous leader or a trusted ally who shares knowledge, skills, and guidance to support a mentee’s career development. Mentors play a vital role in reconciliation by fostering professional opportunities for Indigenous youth. Their role is to provide guidance, support and feedback based on identified developmental needs. The mentor helps the mentee understand the organization and acts as sounding board for concerns about professional choices.

## Responsibilities

* Foster a safe, respectful and culturally responsive space.
* Support mentees in both professional and personal development, integrating mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being whenever possible.
* Support mentee to navigate the public service culture and systems (e.g., unwritten rules, networks, career paths). Create space for reflection of teachings. Model inclusive leadership and career planning, that reflects Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
* Actively identify and facilitate opportunities for visibility (e.g., shadowing, networking events).
* Validate and uplift the mentee’s lived experience and support their self-determination by aligning mentorship with their goals, strengths, and cultural identity.
* Remain accessible and open-minded, checking in regularly to adapt guidance as the mentee’s needs and interests evolve.

 **Key points to remember or to consider if the mentor is not Indigenous:**

* Create space to build learning opportunities as you develop meaningful relationships
* Prior to engagement with mentee build cultural competency
* Build deeper understanding that mentee is being guided by Indigenous community, cultural protocols.
* Attend cultural competency training
* Attend sharing circles to gain understanding and build confidence
* Provide tips on active listening, cultural humility, and unlearning biases.
* Encourage learning about the mentee's Nation, community context, and historical realities, **with the mentee’s consent**.
* Encourage building knowledge and experiences of Indigenous communities with the mentee such as collaboratively building agenda for meetings and including opening prayer, land acknowledgment and understanding of roles of Elders and how to seek their guidance appropriately.
* Be mindful of intergenerational trauma and the impacts of systemic racism.
* Demonstrate patience, gentleness, and avoid interpreting silence or caution as disengagement.

## Characteristics of an effective mentor

* Encourages self-reflection and growth through storytelling and shared lived experiences
* Builds a safe space for the mentee to express aspirations, challenges, and identity-related experiences
* Acts as a trusted person
* Is a proactive listener
* Interacts with the mentee as equals
* Is authentic, patient and understanding of the development and the journey of the mentee
* Seeks to understand and respect the personal, cultural and traditional beliefs and values of the mentee.

# The role of the mentee

A mentee is responsible for taking an active role in their professional development by setting clear goals, seeking guidance, and engaging in discussions with their mentor.

## Responsibilities

* Drive the relationship by initiating contact and following through on commitments
* Be open to storytelling as a method of knowledge sharing
* Practice self-awareness to reflect on what you're learning and where you want to go
* Ask for feedback regularly and apply insights to future actions
* Communicate boundaries and preferred styles of engagement, especially when navigating cultural or personal contexts.
* Share insights and observations of personal growth in relation to mentee mentor relationship

## Characteristics of an effective mentee

* Be diligent, clear and realistic about goals and how the mentor can support them
* Organize meetings and write agendas
* Carry out previously agreed upon follow-up activities
* Commit to the mentoring relationship and focus on achieving your goals
* Clarify expectations with your mentor
* React responsively to feedback and desire to apply what is learned
* Show respect for the mentor's time and resources
* Be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses and be open to discussing your difficulties and successes.

# The role of ISEO in supporting participants

ISEO provides the structure and support to ensure meaningful mentorship experiences. This includes:

* Matching participants thoughtfully, taking into account shared interests, career goals, and fields of studies/work.
* Offering orientation sessions and ongoing support for mentors and mentees.
* Providing resources, learning tools, and cultural competency guidance.
* Tracking outcomes and collecting feedback to strengthen the program.

For any questions or support, please contact the Indigenous Centre of Expertise team by email at cfp.cea-icoe.psc@cfp-psc.gc.ca.

# Testimonial

“*The ISEO program is a fantastic opportunity for mentors and mentees alike. It was enriching to share my experiences and network with my mentee and be a small part of her success, and in turn, learn from her insights and experiences. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know my mentee and am grateful to ISEO for creating this opportunity*” – **Participating Mentor, Summer 2024**

# Annex: ISEO Mentorship Progress Checklist

This checklist is a tool to help both mentors and mentees stay engaged, track milestones, and reflect on growth over the course of the mentorship relationship. Complete it together or individually, and revisit it at each check-in.

**At the Start (Session 1)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Completed** |
| Scheduled initial meeting and introductions |[ ]
| Reviewed the Mentorship Guide and Agreement together |[ ]
| Established [SMART](https://intranet.canada.ca/hr-rh/ptm-grt/pm-gr/pmc-dgr/smart-eng.asp) goals for the mentorship term |[ ]
| Discussed preferred communication styles and scheduling |[ ]
| Shared cultural background, boundaries, and any obligations (if comfortable) |[ ]

**Building the Relationship (Session 2)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Completed** |
| Held 1–2 regular check-in meetings |[ ]
| Discussed strengths, aspirations, and areas for growth |[ ]
| Identified opportunities for learning or shadowing |[ ]
| Talked about public service values and workplace culture |[ ]
| Reflected on cultural identity and experience in the workplace (if applicable) |[ ]

**Deepening Learning (Session 3)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Completed** |
| Completed second check-in and reflected on progress |[ ]
| Updated or revised SMART goals, if needed |[ ]
| Engaged in a practical activity (e.g., resume review, team meeting, mock interview) |[ ]
| Shared feedback on the mentorship relationship |[ ]
| Explored new areas of interest (e.g., networking, development programs) |[ ]

**Wrapping Up (Session 4)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Completed** |
| Completed final check-in and discussed key takeaways |[ ]
| Reflected on professional and personal growth |[ ]
| Identified next steps or future opportunities |[ ]
| Expressed gratitude and decided how to stay in touch (if desired) |[ ]
| Completed any post-program feedback or evaluations |[ ]