

GISCI Mentoring Guide

This guide is designed to help mentors and mentees maximize the benefits of their mentoring relationship.

How to Select a Mentor:

Step 1: The mentee visits www.gisci.org

Step 2: The mentee will search the manifest of GISPs by the search criteria "Mentor." This will pull all the potential GISPs serving as mentors in the program organized by geographic location.

Step 3: The mentee will complete our web form. The mentee will provide his or her own contact information and the name of the mentor(s) the mentee is interested in working with.

Step 4: GISCI will send the mentee's contact information to the potential mentor.

Step 5: The mentor will indicate his or her willingness or ability to help at that time. If the mentor is able to assist, the mentor will contact the mentee directly.

Step 6: The mentor and mentee will communicate and engage in activities designed to strengthen the mentee's professional development.

Step 7: After 6-months, the GISP and mentee will evaluate the mentoring relationship and GISCI will award one contribution point to the GISP based on a positive evaluation.

Communal documents on the Mentor/Mentee website page will include:

1. ***GISCI Mentoring Guide***. This will include expectations of each party, what is not expected, meeting tips, and what the outcome should be.
2. 6-month status check form to be submitted to GISCI (necessary to receive contribution points)

If the relationship is not productive, the mentor or the mentee should notify GISCI immediately. The communal documents on the website will be vehicles for expressing displeasure with the relationship. If the relationship is satisfactory, GISCI sees no need to intervene with cumbersome checks.

Contribution Points for Mentors

All GISPs who participate in the program will receive one contribution point (Type Y) for each mentee they assist. The contribution points will be given out with the completion of the 6-month status check form. No contribution points will be given out for the relationship unless that form is received and meets certain criteria. Upon receipt, GISCI will send out an email to the mentor thanking them for their involvement. This email will be used for documentation.

Additional information is outlined in the following sections entitled:

- What to Look for in a Mentor
- How to be an Effective Mentee
- Getting Started on the GISCI Mentoring Program
- How to be an Effective Mentor
- How Long Should the Mentoring Connection Last

What to Look for in a Mentor

Mentoring relationships work best when mentees select their mentors themselves. However, with the wide variety of public and private organizations that use and employ GIS professionals spread across the globe, it is sometimes difficult to find a mentor with the characteristics one needs. Therefore, the GISCI/GISP Mentoring Program relies heavily upon an informal e-mail mentoring relationship to facilitate mentoring pairs in different geographical locations to keep in touch.

Here are some tips on what to look for in a mentor.

The most important consideration is someone you can respect. If you know of someone who has accomplished things that you admire and hope to achieve yourself, ask that person for guidance. The person should also be someone you could trust to discuss sensitive career issues confidentially.

If your goal is to advance professionally, seek someone who has achieved slightly beyond your current short term goal. If you select a mentor who has achieved a level far greater than your short-term goal, the path to advancement may have changed since that person was at your level. Therefore, his or her guidance may not be as helpful as from someone who has been at your level more recently.

Look for someone who is patient and has the time to go over your goals and work with you on a career development plan.

Look for a person who will support your needs and aspirations, who will encourage you to accept challenges and overcome difficulties, and who will motivate and inspire you to reach your full potential.

Look for someone who is genuinely interested in people, has a desire to help others, knows how to effectively communicate and actively listen, and is able to resolve conflict and give appropriate feedback.

Look for a person who is self-confident and appreciates a developing employee without seeing them as a threat.

Seek someone who takes pride in their organization, who relishes challenges and understands the mission, vision, and values of the organization.

How to be an Effective Mentee

Here are some ways the mentee can make the mentoring connection successful.

The mentee has to want to be a partner in the mentoring connection. To that end, they prepare and do the appropriate "homework" prior to communicating/meetings with their mentor. They work to gain the skills and knowledge so that their GIS abilities to grow. They're flexible, listen to their mentor, and consider new options. They take initiative, seeking the mentors advice when needed. And they focus on the goal, not getting lost in the process (if it isn't clear, they ask the mentor how the process leads to the goal).

The mentee has to know and be able to discuss their needs and objectives with their mentor. This means that he or she has to look inside themselves to identify areas that may need work and share them with the mentor.

The mentee must take responsibility for his or her career and goals. Although they have the benefit of the mentor's guidance, they are responsible for their own path. The mentor may guide the mentee on the path to achieve job advancement, for instance, but it is the mentee who must earn it.

The mentee needs to be able to receive feedback and look at the situation from the mentor's perspective to gain a more objective viewpoint. One of the biggest values of the connection is the ability to have a more experienced person's viewpoint; sometimes when it is our own situation we are looking at, we cannot see the forest for the trees.

The mentee has to be willing to try new things, to consider different ways of "getting there from here."

The mentee has to periodically assess the progress of the relationship, letting the mentor know when priorities must be reset.

Getting Started on the GISCI Mentoring Program

What do you do once you have connected with a mentoring partner?

The first meeting, whether by e-mail, on the phone, or it's face to face, should be a time of getting to know each other, building rapport, sharing your career histories, and setting up guidelines.

Talk about any expectations you may have, especially the level of confidentiality you will have.

Discuss how often and for how long you will email/meet. It is suggested that in the initial stages partners exchange a number of emails over a short period of time. It may need to be more often when working on a specific goal, such as preparing the GISP submittal, applying for graduate school, or considering a transition to another portion of the GIS career field and wants to learn all about that field before making a decision.

Decide how you will communicate. Will this communication be via email, phone, or face to face? If you will be meeting in person, decide on the location.

Decide how long you expect your formal partnership to last. We suggest a commitment of one year; it can take a while to establish the trust where both feel open to sharing honest thoughts and ideas.

Set up a checkpoint date approximately at the midpoint, when you will determine if the partnership is working for both of you, if the goals are being reached, or if perhaps a different partnership might be more beneficial at that point.

Within a few weeks, begin to define the mentee's short and long term goals while the mentor reacts to the goals and begins to provide their experiences.

How to be an Effective Mentor

A mentor should take pride in their organization, relish new challenges, and understand and support the mission, vision, and values of the organization.

A mentor should be:

- Supportive
- Patient
- Respected
- People-oriented
- A Good Motivator
- Respectful of Others
- An Effective Teacher
- Self-confident

A mentor can expect his or her mentee to be competent, credible, ambitious, eager to learn, loyal, and candid; have a positive attitude; and be able to listen, work as a partner, keep confidences, and accept responsibilities.

As a mentor, you should be aware of the stages of mentoring:

Lay the foundation

In this first phase, the foundation is established. As the two partners get to know each other, boundaries are set as to what each expects of the connection. As they begin to know more about each other and become comfortable, trust is established. They reach a point where they can discuss things openly and honestly.

Clarify where they're going

In this phase, the mentor helps the mentee look at realistic possibilities and options. Together they develop a plan to help the mentee reach his or her goals and aspirations. The mentor's roles in this phase are primarily as coach, motivator, and teacher. He or she devotes more time to this phase than any other, focusing on providing detailed information on many workplace issues and procedures and sharing the benefits and insights of his or her experiences. It helps to give examples of good and bad experiences, share what did and did not work along the career path, and suggest pitfalls to avoid. During this time, the mentor gives a lot of praise and builds the mentee's self confidence.

Help the mentee grow.

In this stage, the mentor serves most as a counselor, guide, and door-opener. The mentor persuades the mentee to find answers on their own. The mentor also prods the mentee to take risks, try new strategies, ask questions, and make discoveries. Some of the activities a mentor might recommend to his or her mentee during this period are:

Formal training that could help the mentee become well-rounded and aid in career advancement

- Reading books, articles, journals, and other publications to enhance knowledge
- Pursuing new projects or special assignments
- Giving presentations
- Participating in GISCI projects, working groups, or special events
- Assuming lead person responsibilities
- Representing the supervisor at meetings
- Switching jobs with a coworker for a short period of time
- Attending conferences and symposiums
- Writing an article for a newsletter, magazine, or professional publication
- Teaching a course or presenting a lunch and learn about GIS to co-workers
- Shadowing a GISP for a day

How Long Should the Mentoring Connection Last?

The minimum amount of time the relationship must last is 6 months but there is no maximum. Some mentoring relationships last a lifetime depending on the willingness of the two parties.

The mentoring connection may last for only a short time if the mentee's need is to reach a specific goal. Examples include:

Students who are nearing graduation or considering focusing their educational path in GIS.

An individual who has failed to attain GISP and wants a mentor to give him or her advice before trying again

An individual who is thinking of making a transition to another portion of the GIS career field and wants to learn all about that field before making a decision In reality, there are also many examples of connections that lasted into retirement based on the friendships that developed.

If you are interested in being a mentor, look around for someone who could use your help and guidance. The relationships that cause us to grow the most are those that challenge us. Often this is due to our differences as individuals. So if you wish to learn and understand more about yourself and others, form a mentoring partnership with someone different than yourself.