

# Strong Start

Mentoring program for student planners

February 2023





# Acknowledgement of country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

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Art of Mentoring contributed to content found in this Information Pack.

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Artwork (above) by Nikita Ridgeway

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The NSW Government supports the development of the planning profession. As planners are vital to building and shaping the communities we live in, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment is helping to foster the next generation.

Strong Start planner mentoring program will connect student and graduate planners from NSW councils with experienced department planners, giving them skills, guidance and opportunities.



# How Strong Start works

Strong Start aims to help councils train, upskill, and develop student and graduate planners by making mentors available who will provide coaching, support and advice. Students and graduates will be paired with experienced planners at the department. These mentors will serve as a sounding board and role model, provide exposure to the wider planning profession beyond the mentee's placement and expand the mentees' professional networks at an early career stage.

The mentor may help the mentee achieve or work toward career goals,

introduce the mentee to new ways of thinking, challenge a mentee's assumptions, share valuable life lessons, and much more.

It's unlikely that the most suitable mentor will be in the same geographic area as the mentee. We expect meetings to happen virtually, using videoconferencing, phone, emails, and text (in fact, a mix of channels works well). We have engaged Art of Mentoring to deliver and facilitate the mentoring program on behalf of the department.

'I've had some good mentors throughout my career that were really valuable to me, and now I want to give back. I feel I have reached a point in my career where I have knowledge and experience that I want to share, and pass on some of the lessons I have learnt.'

**Gabriel Wardenburg**  
**Team Leader**  
**State Significant Acceleration,**  
**NSW Department of Planning**  
**and Environment**

## Benefits of the program

Strong Start aims to contribute to the professional development of planners.

Participants in mentoring programs report multiple benefits including improved confidence, self-awareness, clearer career direction, better communication skills, listening skills, feedback skills, more assertive communication, and enhanced management skills.

For mentees, some of the common benefits include:

- getting experienced guidance and support
- exploring your career development plan
- exploring issues and concerns in a supportive and confidential relationship
- receiving feedback and developmental guidance
- networking and learning about doing this effectively.

It isn't only the mentees who benefit. Mentors find tremendous learning and development opportunities of their own. Some of the benefits mentors frequently report include:

- giving back to the profession
- gaining personal satisfaction by making a difference for someone else
- learning and developing mentoring skills
- enriching leadership and interpersonal skills
- gaining intellectual challenge by working on issues outside day-to-day experience
- discovering fresh perspectives that may help your own work
- raising your profile and expanding professional networks

This program is not about the mentor finding a job or a promotion for the mentee. It is also not the mentor's role to take on the people leadership responsibilities of the mentee's manager.



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# Eligibility

To join as a **mentee**, you must:

- be a student or graduate planner working for a NSW council
- have endorsement from your (council) manager to participate in the program.

To join as a **mentor**, you must:

- be a planner at the department, at a senior planner level (Grade PO2) or above
- have endorsement from your manager to participate in the program.

Both mentees and mentors must also be willing to complete the online training provided, review the support resources available and engage in the relationship process, connecting with your mentee/mentor at least monthly.

## Application process

Mentees and mentors will complete a short online application form to assess eligibility for the program and to collect details about what you are looking for in a mentoring partner.

In the application form, we will ask mentees about your background and what you would like to achieve by working with a mentor. We will ask mentors about the areas in which you feel comfortable giving mentoring. Please give as much information as you can to help the matching process.

Event	Date
Applications open	Monday 20 February 2023
Applications close	5pm Friday 24 March 2023
Program information webinar	12noon Thursday 2 March 2023
Matches announced	Monday 3 April 2023
Launch webinar for matched mentors and mentees	12noon Wednesday 5 April 2023

Put this event in your calendar in anticipation that you will be matched and expected to attend.



# Commitment

Strong Start is an 8½-month program starting in April 2023.

Mentors and mentees must attend 3 online events—program launch, progress review and program close.

During the program, we expect mentors and mentees to communicate at least monthly.

Mentees and first-time mentors will also be expected to complete the Art of Mentoring online training module to prepare for the mentoring relationship. To be accepted into the program, you must commit to complete the training.

The online mentoring platform will provide your mentoring partner's details, the option to communicate with the program manager, and access to the training and resources.

During the program, you will receive frequent communications from the program manager, giving you helpful tips and information about mentoring and access to other relevant materials available for supporting mentees and mentors.

During and at the end of the program, we will invite you to give feedback about your experience.

## Time commitment

Activity	Time required
Training, reading and workshops	Up to 4 hours in total
Preparation and time spent in mentoring conversations; follow-up actions, reading, journalling	Mentees: 3 to 4 hours per month Mentors: 1 to 2 hours per month
Program check-in and feedback surveys	½ hour in total



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# Key dates and program activities

## Getting started

Activity	Date and time
Applications open	Monday 20 February 2023
Program information webinar	12 noon to 1pm AEDT Thursday 2 March 2023
Applications close	5pm Friday 24 March 2023
Matches notified	Monday 3 April 2023
Online training	Self-paced (60 to 75min total) Monday 3 to Friday 7 April 2023
Program launch webinar	Wednesday 5 April 2023

## Clarifying direction and purpose

Activity	Date and time
First mentoring meeting	Before Friday 28 April 2023  We encourage you to schedule and diarise your monthly meetings during this first one.

## Working and learning together

Activity	Date and time
Mentoring meetings	Mentors and mentees to schedule monthly meetings. We encourage you to schedule and diarise these at your first mentoring meeting.
Progress review workshop webinars for mentees	11am to 12:15pm AEDT Tuesday 18 July 2023
Progress review workshop webinars for mentors	1pm to 2:15pm AEDT Tuesday 18 July 2023

## Winding up and moving on

Activity	Date and time
Final mentoring meeting	Mentors and mentees to schedule a final meeting before the program closes
Program close webinar	Tuesday 19 December 2023

## The value of mentoring

Mentorship is a developmental relationship in which one person, usually more experienced or senior, takes time to assist the career, professional or skill development of someone else, known as a mentee. Mentoring is most often a one-on-one relationship but is sometimes done in groups.

A mentoring relationship is built on trust, in which there is an exchange of knowledge, experience and goodwill.

Mentors may help by:

- acting as a source of information and insight
- suggesting relevant options for career development or strategies for achieving professional goals
- recommending possible resources to improve specific skills
- assisting the mentee solve professional challenges in their working life
- discussing issues of professional ethics
- discussing workplace-related issues and options for addressing these.

## More information

Visit [our website](#) for more information.

We invite you to attend a free information webinar on Thursday 2 March 2023 at 12 noon AEDT to find out more and ask questions.

