# Municipal Engineers Association

# Mentorship Guide

# Introduction

Working as an engineer for a municipality requires unique skill sets to thrive and succeed. For individuals early in their career there is a near infinite amount of skills that could be acquired to improve effectiveness in their current and future roles.

Recognizing the need to retain the wealth of knowledge from municipal practitioners with substantial experience, the MEA encourages the development of professional relationships to share that knowledge and experience through a formal mentorship program. This program is geared towards connecting engineers who are relatively new to the municipal field with well established professional engineers to help facilitate the positive transfer of knowledge.

This guide recognizes that one of the best forums for knowledge exchange is generated from one-to-one open discussion. The layout provided here is simply a template that may be used to encourage such discussion. The approach and discussion topics adopted by the mentors and mentees is solely up to them.

# Program Objectives and Expectations

The following general objectives are the primary expected outcome at the conclusion of the one year mentorship program for both Mentee and Mentor:

- **Share experience and knowledge**
- **Coach and encourage**
- **Mutual learning experience**
- **Strengthen the engineering community municipal fields**

In order for this program to be successful there are basic minimum expectations from both participants:

- It is recommended that the minimum number of meetings between mentor and mentee over the one year duration of the program is three, one hour meetings.
- Each individual should recognize and respect the others commitment to the program and be prepared in advance and punctual for all meetings.
- Meeting cancellation or rescheduling (by either party) should be made through a written email or phone text no later than 48hrs before the time of meeting.
- Mentees are expected to do their best towards achieving the goals that are set through their mentorship meetings in the designated amount of time.
- If possible it is best to meet in person as this helps establish a stronger relationship and provide the best environment for discussion.
- If any issues arise during the course of the mentorship program, participants may review the resource material provided or contact the MEA YP Committee mentorship representative. If at some point the mentorship meetings become less effective, it is recommended to refer to the resource material provided in the appendix or to contact MEA YP Committee representative for guidance.
- After the program is completed the relationship between the two participants is up to the individuals.

# Mentorship Stages

The mentorship program runs for approximately 1 year, launching at the annual MEA AGM/Workshop, thus potentially allowing mentor and mentee to meet in person, and running until November of the following year. There are three main suggested stages to this mentorship program, as follows:

**Stage 1 Getting Started**

The first step in building a positive mentorship experience is to establish a connection between the individuals involved. The first meeting should focus on establishing a connection with your mentoring associate. Regardless of the existing relationship between the mentor and mentee, a good understanding of each other's backgrounds will help guide future discussions.

The following includes some discussion topics that could be asked to get to know one another during the first meeting:

- Introductions, CV exchange
- Discuss career goals, outline required steps to achieve these goals
- Discuss what you would like to learn from this experience, set goals for the program
- Establish meeting details:
  - method (phone, Zoom/Skype, in person)
  - frequency

**Stage 2 – General Discussions and Working Towards Goals**

In the initial meeting a basic framework should have been established to guide future discussions in the attempt to achieve the established goals. General themes for conversation are provided in Appendix B to help guide discussion. The order can be adjusted to guide the program. However, the focus and discussion topics for meetings is up to both the Mentor and Mentee.

**Stage 3 – Wrap Up**

The duration of the MEA facilitated mentorship program is one year. If there are to be any future meetings it is up to the mentor and mentee. The final meeting should reflect on goals and achievements and determine what the next steps should be (if any). If the meetings plan to continue it would be good to discuss what is desired to be achieved (goals) along with the format and frequency of future meetings. Upon the completion of the mentorship cycle both the mentor and mentee will be required to complete a feedback questionnaire.

**Table 1 - Summary of Mentorship Program Stages and Outcomes**

| Stage | Activity | Intended Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| 1 - Getting Started | Ice breakers: take advantage of **Appendix-A** for suggested questions and examples of goals and objectives | <ul><li>Establish a relationship</li><li>Communicate desired goals (long term and short term)</li><li>Breakdown goals into objectives</li><li>Establish meeting details (meeting method and frequency)</li></ul> |

| 2- Discussions and Working Towards Goals | Take advantage of **Appendix-B** for suggested discussion topics/themes and questions<br><br>Discuss challenges faced while working towards objectives and goals<br><br>Use **Appendix-C** when you need hints to expand on other discussion topics | <ul><li>Knowledge and experience transfer</li><li>Complete objectives</li><li>Identify ways to overcome challenges</li></ul> |
|---|---|---|
| 3- Wrap Up | Reflect on goals and achievements and discuss next steps (if any)<br><br>Complete the MEA Mentorship Exit Survey<br><br>If there are to be any future meetings it is up to the mentor and mentee | <ul><li>Feedback to be used for program improvement</li></ul> |

# Appendix A - Stage 1

# Potential Meeting Questions

**General Questions**
- Where did your career start and how did you end up where you are?
- Why did you become an Engineer?
- Why did you choose to go into the municipal field?
- Do you enjoy your position?

**Mentor Questions**

- Why did you join the mentoring program?
- What would make this mentoring program a rewarding experience for you?
- What are some of the challenges that you experience in your current role?
- What talents or achievements are you the proudest of?
- What was the best working situation you have ever had?
- What do you like the most about your present position? Least?
- Where do you want to be in 2-3 years? 5-10?
- What motivates you to advance your career?
- If you had the opportunity to start over, what would you change?
- What are your goals for this mentoring program?

**Mentee Questions**

- What do you enjoy about being a mentor?
- To what do you attribute your success?
- What was the turning point in your career?
- Who was your mentor or role model? What did you gain from your mentor?
- Who has been an inspiration in your life?
- What strategies do you use to stay focused on your goals?
- Do you have any advice for me about…...?
- How has your career progressed?
- What attributes do you feel it takes to succeed?
- What is the best way to bring an idea forward within my municipality?
- What courses or reading do you think will help me in meeting my goals?

- Future Challenges and Megatrends (Automation, Climate Change, Demographic Change, Skill Shortage)

- How to prepare for accelerating growth in technology?

# Examples of Goals and Objectives

| Sample Goal | Examples of Objectives |
| --- | --- |
| Be more connected | • Improve networking skills<br>• Attend X professional events this year<br>• Establish and maintain professional connections with X individuals in your next professional event<br>• Identify and participate in volunteering activity |
| Climbing the career ladder | • Understand your workplace specific requirements<br>• Identify skills that you need to improve<br>• Identify and complete training courses (if any)<br>• Be more connected |
| Earning a higher degree while working | • Gain an understanding of different programs and subjects<br>• Identify specific programs and schools<br>• Evaluate your options and proceed with preferred one |

# Appendix B - Optional Themes for Stage 2

**Theme 1 – Working for a Municipality**

- Working for a municipality can be very different then for a consultant or industry, why would someone take on that change and what would be the benefit?

- How much do the dynamics vary, instead of an owner there are councillors, instead of clients there are residents. Success in not profit, but rather achieving a desired level of service on budget.

- Dealing with Unions, work performance expectation, available resources, intrinsic value...

**Theme 2 – Levels of Government and their Impact**

- Municipalities provide services to their residents. These services are often underappreciated and highly scrutinized.
- The sphere of jurisdiction is at the local municipal level, but the provincial and federal governments significantly influence how a municipality operates. Their influence comes through regulations, legislation and funding. The founding guide for the sphere of jurisdiction is the Municipal Act as it outlines a municipalities powers.
- As an individual's career progresses their involvement with provincial and federal entities increases.

**Theme 3 – Budget and Funding**

- What is the difference between capital and revenue budgets? When do operation items become considered a capital expenditure.
- How do you plan and manage municipal budgets? What level of detail goes into budgets. What happens when you exceed your allotted budget.
- What sources of funding are out there and how is it tracked and obtained.
- How do you deal with unforeseeable emergencies and urgent costs?

**Theme 4 – Career Development**

- What kind of exposure should I be getting from an area I would like to pursue and how do I get that exposure.
- What type of experiences do I need to strengthen my career?
- What should I know? How do I get there?
- How do you manage staff and teams?
- How do you deal with increasing workloads and responsibilities as you gain experience?
- How do I learn from peers and what can I learn from them?
- How do you stay up to date in your field?
- Engineers as Technical Experts vs. Engineers as Leaders (Directors, Senior Management, CAO)

**Theme 5 – Public Information Centres and Public Consultation**

- What goes into running a good PIC?
- Do you have any communication tips?
- How do you deal with complaints and difficult people?

- How do you avoid, what are the resulting outcomes, and how do you deal with bad press?

**Theme 6 – Council Format and Dealing with Councilors**

- How does the council process work and why was it set up that way? What are the Robert's Rules of Order?
- What goes into good council report writing?
- How do you prepare to speak at Council?
- How do you prepare and address political sensitive topics?
- How do you keep your personal feelings and interests separate from your decision-making?

## Theme 7 – Expertise Specific

- What technical information can be shared to broaden my technical knowledge of a certain subject (e.g. bridges, roads, transportation, water, sewer, storm, waste management and their regulations, emerging new technologies and overall design).
- What are some tips, tricks and tools to become a better designer.
- Considerations of conducting inspections, contract administration and preparing contracts.

## Theme 8 – What questions does the Mentor think the Mentee should be Asking

- How do you balance your work and home life?
- Can you tell me a story about a mistake you made during your career and what you did about it and how you learned from it?
- What do you wish you knew 10 years ago?
- Would you have stayed working for a municipality if you had the chance to go back in time.

## Theme 9 – Participating and Volunteering in Municipal Focused Associations

- What is it about being involved in professional associations that overall helps out your career?
- What are the benefits of attending events, volunteering and networking?

## Theme 10 – Senior Management Concerns

- How do issues and the associated stress factors change with career development.
- What are the concerns of senior managers?
- How do you deal with Councillors?

## Theme 11 – Procurement

- Why is the procurement process such a big deal for municipalities?
- Navigating the waters to properly procure equipment, supplies, and/or services.
- What pitfalls should be avoided and what are the potential consequences?

# Appendix C - Other Optional Discussion Questions:

How does the job evaluation / joint jobs (union evaluation) system work?

How does job ratings systems work?

Career development - PMP is it worth it? York Business School? Sigma Six? Further education?

How does OMERS work? What happens if you leave municipal to private or to another public organization (e.g. OTIP)?

Asset management history and requirements?

Succession planning considerations?

Note taking / daily journal is it worth it?

Performance evaluations?

How do you get a pay raise, is it even possible?

How do I become able to take on more responsibility?

How to get the fullest potential out of an employee and improve overall approach to work?

What are ELaws – how do you navigate and make the most use out of them?

Suggestions on how to properly use the OPSSs and OPSDs?

Discipline approach and considerations?

History and transition of roles of engineers and technologists in a municipal setting?

Differences and expectations of engineers in comparison to technologists?

Engineering advocacy

What is the toughest day you have had on the job?

What are my limitations in dealing with people's medical backgrounds?

Approach to multiculturalism and sexual identity?

Dealing with lawyers, when to bring them in?

When to reach out to an expert?

Expectations of various roles, where does one position start and the other finish? (Directors, Managers, Supervisors, Designers/Techs, Inspectors)

How do you maintain a positive attitude working in the municipal field?

How do you say no to senior management?

If you disagree / conflict with the CAO or Mayor?

Grievance procedure?

How do you deal with a significant oversight / cost overrun?

How do you deal with no staff support from management or council?

Dealing with an election year?

What to say when you don't know for sure?

Municipal service levels and service orientated business?

Why do Council's bend over backwards for industry?

What is the importance of knowing "what the true Conversation is" (the background and real issue)?

How do you get your initiatives to achieve priority by management? by council?

What is the importance of understanding the corporation and how it operates as a whole?

What should my priorities be?

How do you deal with certain types of individuals?

Should I join municipal management associations?

Envisioning the municipal engineer of the future

What does my future personal skills profile look like? (Building a personal future skills profile for a young municipal engineer and a senior municipal engineer): Ex. Young municipal engineer: data analytics, creativity, networking; Senior municipal engineer: Leadership, embracing change, mentoring, curiosity