

Mentees: Interview Questions to Help Assess Fit

Choosing a mentor is about finding the right fit for you and for them. Be sure to address multiple aspects of fit, including:

Career Development

Depending on your career stage, you will need a mentor to help with different areas of professional development. Consider:

- Does this person have enough seniority/clout to advocate for you within your own institution, division, or department?
- Has this mentor successfully launched previous mentees into careers that align with your own goals?
- Can this person help you navigate your advancement process in your department?
- Can this mentor help you identify other potential members of a mentor team and help model effective methods of sharing knowledge and decisions across multidisciplinary teams?
- Can this mentor help translate institutional/professional cultures and norms in a way that fosters your sense of inclusion and belonging?

Personality and Fit

It is important to consider how your personality will fit with your mentor's, as well as how their mentoring style and priorities will match with your needs. A mismatch of these styles could lead to miscommunications and an unsatisfactory mentoring experience.

Here are some questions to consider:

- How knowledgeable are you about your own personality and communication style and the type of leadership and management with which you work best? (See the *Identifying Different Communication Styles* informational guide for more information.)
- What are previous and current mentees saying about this mentor's work- and mentoring- style?
- Do you feel confident the mentor can "meet you where you are" and reflect on how their mentoring styles can best support you?
- Is this mentor's primary focus on fostering your independent career or in you lending expertise to their project?
- Does this mentor have the time and motivation to provide the guidance you need?
- How do you feel before meeting with this person? Excitement? Motivation? Dread? Anxiety?
- Does this person serve as a role model or model behaviors you want to develop in yourself?

Availability

It is important to consider how often you want to meet and communicate with your mentor and whether they will be able to accommodate those needs. Consider these questions:

- When you schedule an interview with this mentor, do you make the appointment directly or with their assistant?
- Does this person respond to your emails or phone calls in what you consider a timely fashion?
- When asked to respond to a draft of a grant or paper, what kind of comments do you receive? Are comments vague or thorough and detailed and thoughtful? Does your mentor completely rewrite your work? What do current mentees say about the mentor's ability to provide feedback?
- When you meet, how balanced is the conversation? Who does most of the talking?
- Does this person demonstrate active listening skills? Make eye contact and show an engaging posture? Does the mentor check if their perception of what you said matches what you intended to say? How do they demonstrate they have heard and understood you?

Research Resources

If you are pursuing a career in research, it is important to make sure your mentor has the appropriate resources to advance your career in that area. Consider:

- How do your research interests overlap with this mentor?
- To what physical, intellectual (scientific, methodological) and fiscal resources do you need access to achieve your research goals? Which one(s) could your mentor provide?
- Does this mentor have experience in obtaining federal funding and successfully publishing research results?
- Does this mentor provide opportunities to successfully teach you what you need to know to continue in your area of expertise?
- Does this mentor create a positive and productive work/lab environment?
- Would this mentor provide you access to the research collaborators that you need?

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