

AES Peer Group Mentoring Program Guide

July 2024

Table of contents

Introduction	2
Program overview	2
Key dates for 2025 program	4
What is peer group mentoring?	4
Defining mentoring	5
Roles and responsibilities	6
Mentors	6
Associate mentors	6
Mentees	7
AES Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group	7
Project Officer	7
Phase 1: Program set up	8
Mentors and associate mentors' nomination	8
Mentors selected	8
Associate mentors selected	8
Mentors and associate mentors matched	8
Mentee nomination	8
Mentees selected and matched	9
Phase 2 Mentoring	9
Mentor Community of Practice	9
Online orientation session	9
Ongoing mentoring sessions	9
First mentoring group meeting	10
Ongoing mentoring meetings	10
Final mentoring group meeting	11
Phase 3 AES Peer Group Mentoring Program monitoring and continuous improvement	11
What else do I need to know?	11
Policies	11

Introduction

The Australian Evaluation Society's (AES's) peer-group mentoring program is part of the AES suite of offerings to support members and improve evaluation methodology, outcomes, and usage. The program was developed in response to a high level of demand for evaluation mentorship identified in the 2019-22 strategic planning membership survey.

The AES Group Mentoring Program was piloted from January to June 2021 and operated for a second time from May to November 2022. In response to evaluation findings from the pilot and first year, the program's next iteration was extended to run from mid-2023 to mid-2024. The pilot and the second iteration of the program were both evaluated, but the 2023-24 program was not evaluated as it was thought unlikely that significant changes would be found. The pilot and 2022 evaluations found the program was worthwhile for mentors and mentees. Mentees reported an increase in their confidence and appreciation for the field of evaluation, while mentors reported satisfaction in supporting emerging evaluators, and enjoyment of expanding their own thinking through guiding groups of mentees.

The pilot and 2023 evaluations can be found at <https://www.aes.asn.au/evaluation-resources/discussion-papers-and-reports>.

Key features of the program, such as the online group format, focus on mentoring rather than training, and facilitation of peer-to-peer connections, were found to be relevant and useful for participants. The evaluations recommended repeating the program in years to come.

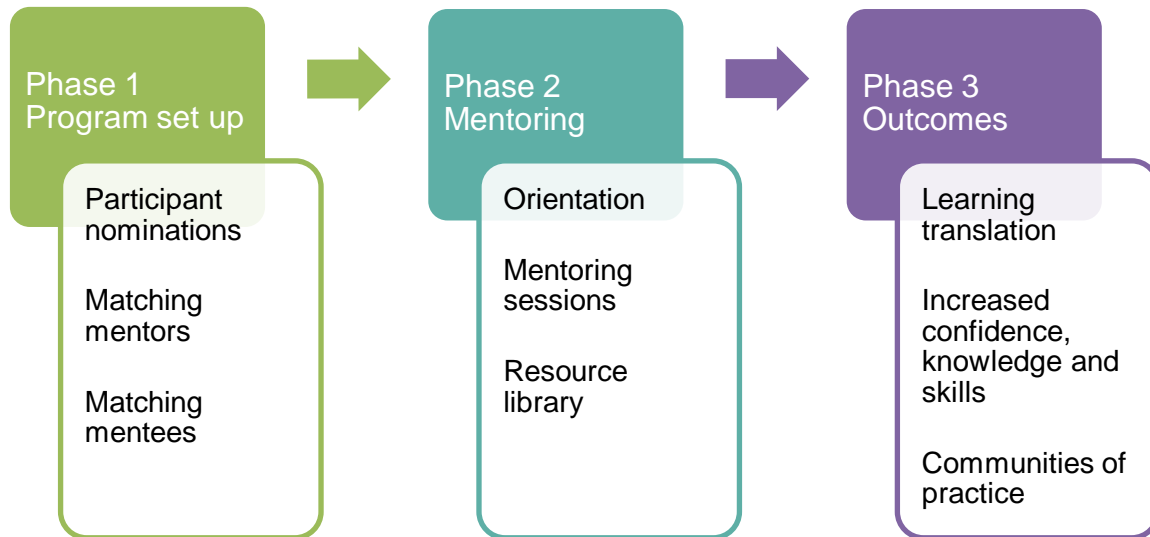
The next iteration of the program is planned to operate from January to December 2025, giving the AES Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group six months to wrap up the previous program and initiate the next program. AES members will be invited to submit expressions of interest for participation as mentors or mentees in the 2025 program.

Program overview

The AES peer-group mentoring program is an online mentoring program, in which seasoned evaluators guide a small group of emerging and mid-career evaluators through their professional journey. Participants benefit from the expertise and leadership of the mentors and from the mentee peer support, where mentees with diverse experiences can learn from other mentees in pursuit of a common learning goal and develop their support network in the evaluation field.

The AES Group Mentoring Program operates in three phases:

AES Group Mentoring Program phases



Mentoring groups are led by a mentor and an associate mentor (where possible), who work as a team to support the learning and development of mentees. Mentors are AES Fellows and senior evaluators who have volunteered to act as mentors to a small group of mentees. Associate mentors are experienced evaluators seeking to develop skills in mentorship. Each mentor will meet with a group of five to seven mentees on an agreed schedule, usually once per month, over the course of ten to twelve months. The structure of each group's mentorship program will be flexible, depending on the mentor's specialisation focus, facilitation style preferences, and needs and goals of the mentees involved. It will be up to the mentor, associate mentor and mentees in each group to negotiate their own mutually agreeable format and common goal.

The peer-group mentoring program is intended to support an evolving understanding of the needs and expectations of mentees, as well as potential models that would work for the AES membership. The program was formally evaluated in 2021 and 2022. In 2023, a monitoring and feedback strategy was implemented with a view to continual improvement, and the program was formally evaluated. The Working Group will consider information and evaluation needs into the future and will recommend another program evaluation in the future. Participants of the program may be expected to participate in a future evaluation.

The peer-group mentoring program complies with AES Values.

Key dates for 2025 program

Stage	Date
Mentor expressions of interest	Open 20 September; close 1 October 2024
Mentors confirmed	7 October 2024
Mentee expressions of interest open	22 October 2024
Mentee expressions of interest close	10 November 2024
Mentees selected and notified	9 December 2024
Mentors' first Community of practice	4 February 2025, 12pm AEST
Orientation session for mentees and mentors	11 February 2025, 12pm AEST
First formal mentoring session	February 2025
Final closing session	2 December 2025, 12pm AEST
Mentoring program ends	December 2025

What is peer group mentoring?

Peer-group mentoring involves a mentor and associate mentor working a group of mentees with similar interests in pursuit of their professional development goals.

Mentoring is intended to support mentees' professional development, growth, and competencies as evaluation practitioners. Unlike a traditional one-to-one mentoring program, group mentoring also benefits participants through having access to diverse experiences and perspectives supporting the development of a richer understanding of the practice of evaluation. Not only are mentees able to build relationships with their mentors, but they are also able to build relationships with their peers and it is intended that this peer support network will provide a sustainable benefit to mentees beyond the program.

Defining mentoring

The AES online, group mentoring program takes a broad approach in defining mentoring. It allows each group to bring to the fore, in different ways, the following aspects:

- A structured relationship between expert evaluators and less experienced AES members for guidance and support, while maintaining individual responsibility for learning of each participant. Through serving as a role model, sharing their insights, listening objectively, acting as a sounding board, and making suggestions, mentors facilitate the learning and application of critical problem-solving skills in decision-making by mentees. They may ask open questions to challenge ways of thinking and actions taken by mentees to handle or manage difficult situations or to make progress towards their professional development goals. This relationship has a holistic focus on professional development and is based on respect, mutual trust, encouragement, constructive comments, and commitment to learning. It is goal-oriented and driven by the mentee.
- Small groups of up to seven mentees and one or two mentors in which AES members staff share their mentoring experience, develop their capacity together and learn from one another. This element resembles formal peer support mechanisms and communities of practice that are intended to provide mutual social support. Here, the mentor facilitates the sharing of mentee experiences to work through challenging situations.
- Knowledge and skill-based development in specific areas that are directly relevant to workplace responsibilities, for example,
 - knowledge about the theoretical foundations of evaluation which are distinct from other forms of inquiry
 - value perspectives embedded within an evaluation
 - research methods for data collection and analysis
 - the tasks carried out during an evaluation
 - how to take a lead role to embed evaluative thinking in an organisation or explore specific issues related to a particular sector.

This is similar to coaching in which the coach directs instruction, provides appropriate direction, and makes suggestions to share expertise within an organisation.

Roles and responsibilities

All participants must be AES members. Both the mentor, associate mentors and mentees are expected to commit to the relationship and dedicate time to its success. All participants are expected to:

- Read program guidelines and policies.
- Attend any preparation sessions.
- Sign and submit a mentoring agreement.
- Agree on a mentoring schedule, session expectations, individual and group professional goals.
- Attend mentoring meetings, prepare appropriately, and attempt any follow up actions.
- Be professional, respectful and observe confidentiality.
- Contact the Project Officer if any questions or concerns arise.
- Participate in required evaluations and give feedback.

Mentors

The mentors will lead their mentoring group, of five to seven mentees, while working in partnership with an associate mentor to run the mentoring sessions. Mentoring groups will meet a minimum of once per month for six months. The structure of each group's mentorship program will depend on the mentor's specialisation focus, and the needs and goals of the mentees involved. It will be up to the mentor / associate mentor and mentees in each group to negotiate a mutually agreeable format and common goal.

Responsibilities of the mentor include the following:

- Select a group of suitable mentees who are and likely to be able to work together.
- Commit to mentees through sharing experience and providing practical advice.
- In consultation with the group, set an agreed meeting schedule, usually once per month, and convene meetings.
- Assist mentees to set an achievable individual and/or group goal.
- Be inclusive, considering the experiences and needs of people of all levels of expertise and experience in evaluation as well as other professional skills and abilities, cultural protocols and preferred ways of working, genders, and sexualities.
- Assist the mentees to plan for success.
- Provide advice and guidance, as required.
- Reflect on progress.

Associate mentors

The associate mentor's role is to support the mentor to lead the mentoring group, assisting the mentor to plan and run the program, and learning from the mentor through this process. The associate mentor will keep in touch with the mentor and mentees between meetings and act as back up to the mentor.

Mentees

The AES Group Mentoring program is intended to support the professional development of mentees through the translation of their learning into professional practice. To maximise the benefits of the program, mentees are required to:

- Identify their own personal mentoring goals, objectives, and motivations.
- Attend mentoring online meetings throughout the duration of the program.
- Attend to any pre or post meeting tasks.
- Actively participate in online meeting discussions and group dialogue between meetings.
- Engage in reflective practice and application of their learning.
- Track and communicate progress towards identified goal(s).
- Communicate and work through challenges.
- Contribute to the program monitoring and evaluation activities when requested.

AES Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group

The Working Group are volunteers who:

- set up the program by
 - promoting the program to potential mentors, associate mentors, and mentees
 - conducting the mentor, associate mentor and mentee selection and matching process.
- develop the program guide
- support the Mentoring Phase of the program by
 - leading the program orientation session
 - attending the Mentor Community of Practice Sessions, as required.

Project Officer

The Mentoring Project Officer is responsible for coordinating the administration of the program.

This involves:

- Conducting membership liaison and communication including for the mentee nomination and selection process.
- Acting as the first point of contact for mentors and coordinating the development and sharing of a mentor resource pack.
- Acting as a point of contact for program participants throughout the program.
- Regularly checking in on program participants.
- Setting up key online meetings such as:
 - initial orientation session for mentees and mentors
 - final closing session for mentees and mentors
 - Mentor Community of Practice sessions.
- Coordinating any surveys with mentees during the program.
- Supporting the evaluation of the program through survey set up and coordination of focus groups and interviews, if required..

Phase 1: Program set up

Mentors and associate mentors' nomination

Potential mentors and associate mentors are asked to complete a nomination form by 1 October 2024.

Enquiries about mentoring can be made by emailing mentoring@aes.asn.au.

Mentors selected

The Working Group reviews the mentor nominations and selects mentors based on their professional qualifications and experience, evaluation specialisation and focus and motivations for becoming involved in the program.

Applicants who are not selected may be approached to participate as an associate mentor, if appropriate.

Associate mentors selected

The Working Group reviews the associate mentor nominations and selects associate mentors based on their professional qualifications and experience, evaluation specialisation and focus and motivations for becoming involved in the program. Where a selected mentor has expressed a preference for a particular associate mentor, this will be seriously considered. Applicants who are not selected may be approached to participate as a mentee, if appropriate..

Mentors and associate mentors matched

The pairing of mentors and associate mentors will be done by the AES Pathways Committee. Matching mentors and associate mentors will be based on:

- the associate mentors' area of specific interest
- areas of experience
- any expressed preferences

Mentors and associate mentors will be consulted to confirm they are happy with the suggested matching.

Mentee nomination

Potential mentees nominate through the mentee online form (available from 22 October) where personal, professional and motivational details are collected and collated. Mentees are also asked to indicate a mentoring group focus topic they are particularly interested in and why. The professional biographies of mentors and a summary of their mentoring group's focus are available on the AES website (from 22 October).

Interested mentees are required to complete the online nomination form by 10 November 2024 – the nomination form is available on the AES website from 22 October.

Mentees selected and matched

The Working Group reviews the mentee nominations and selects mentees based on:

- mentee's stated goals/expectations and alignment with their preferred mentorship focus
- the diversity of personal and professional backgrounds within each group (to support peer learning)
- the alignment of interests of each group to other potential mentees in the group (to support the group in working towards common goals).

Applicants who are not selected will be notified of the outcome and can reapply for future rounds.

Phase 2 Mentoring

Mentor Community of Practice

The Mentor Community of Practice enables mentors and associate mentors to share resources, advice and support to ensure effective engagement, collaboration and facilitate peer to peer relationship building in an online environment. These online meetings are held monthly and chaired by the Project Officer.

Online orientation session

An orientation session for mentors, associate mentors and mentees is held prior to the commencement of the mentoring groups.

The purpose of the online orientation session is to:

- Provide an overview of the mentoring model, structure and how it has evolved based on insights of previous evaluation and earlier programs.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of mentors, associate mentors and mentees.
- Allow mentoring groups to become acquainted and decide on their communications systems (such as WhatsApp) for out of session communication.
- Introduce participants to the project officer and their role.
- Explain the participants expected contribution to the program monitoring activities.

Ongoing mentoring sessions

Each mentoring group's approach will be different, depending on the objectives, experiences and specific needs and interests of the participants. Suggestions for the first, subsequent and final meetings are outlined below.

First mentoring group meeting

Introductions, expectations and goal setting

The first meeting is critical for establishing the foundations of a successful peer group mentoring relationship. The mentor and associate mentor will coordinate a mutually agreeable date for the first meeting of the mentoring group at the orientation session. **Future meeting dates will be decided during the first meeting and set up by the mentor.**

Essential to a successful mentoring relationship are two important aspects, which should be addressed within this first meeting to help set the group up for success:

- Setting expectations and objectives. These should be prepared in advance by all participants for a facilitated discussion and negotiation.
- Developing a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. In a group mentoring scenario, this requires both trust between mentors and mentees, and amongst mentees. During the first meeting, the group will focus on getting to know one another.

Suggested discussion points for the first meeting:

- Getting to know each other
- Ground rules for working together
- Mentee expectations, goals and motivations
- Making use of available resources including the mentoring journal to support reflective practice.
- Future meeting dates
- Confirming everyone has access to out of session platforms for between meeting communication
- Whether to create an opportunity to get together face-to-face at aes25.

Ongoing mentoring meetings

The following structures were demonstrated to be helpful in the evaluation of the online group mentoring pilot and are recommended:

Meeting frequency:	Monthly, or more frequently by mutual agreement
Meeting duration:	1.5 hours
Meeting structure:	incorporates a range of useful engagement and learning transfer techniques, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check in with mentees• Reflection on application of the previous meeting topic• Meeting topic discussion• Bring a problem (rotating schedule for participants) where all group members debate a topic.

Final mentoring group meeting

It is suggested that the final mentoring meetings be used for informal reflection on progress and areas for continued development and discussion about ongoing contact.

Phase 3 AES Peer Group Mentoring Program monitoring and continuous improvement

All program participants will be expected to participate in monitoring and evaluation activities throughout the course of and following completion of the mentorship program. This may include records of self-assessments, surveys, interviews and focus groups. Mentees may be approached to participate in a future evaluation. Appointments for focus groups and interviews will be set up well in advance to encourage participation.

The Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group encourages any suggestions and feedback on the program at any stage from all participants. Formal feedback process will be developed for the 2025 program.

What else do I need to know?

Policies

Ending the relationship early

Where a mentor or mentee cannot or does not wish to continue participating in the mentorship, they should notify the project officer of their decision at the earliest opportunity.

In situations where this is due to difficulties between members of the group, or between the mentee and mentor, the project officer should be notified. If this participant wishes to work through the issue, the project officer will support the facilitation of this. Otherwise, the Mentoring Agreement includes a 'no fault' clause, which enables the mentee or mentor to end the mentoring relationship without any blame attached.

Code of conduct

All participants are expected to adhere to the responsibilities outlined in the Participant roles and expectations section. In particular, participants must:

- Always observe confidentiality
- Maintain professional behaviour
- Fulfill agreed commitments
- Contact the project officer with any concerns of difficulties.