

NCAPA Mentorship Program Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a Mentorship Program?

Many paralegals do not have mentors to help them identify their strengths, improve their performance, and set career goals. The Mentorship Program is a link between paralegals who want to help others learn how to achieve their goals/succeed in the paralegal profession and those who are willing to take the initiative to seek an experienced paralegal or legal professional's guidance. NCAPA hopes to encourage the use of mentoring as a developmental tool.

What are the program's goals and objectives?

NCAPA's Mentorship Program aims to provide mentees with coaching, job and career advice, counseling, and care that a mentor can provide. Mentoring is an approach that provides members with the support that often results in making substantial contributions to the organization. The objective is to provide access to a broad group of paralegals and legal professionals; as such, mentors and mentees will vary by area of law, experience, and other factors.

For mentees, what are the objectives?

- Gain exposure to different options, perspectives, and organizational cultures.
- Expand the range of contacts and develop their networks.
- Discover and understand "the rules of the game" in the professional world.
- Develop a greater sense of career direction and improve job performance.

What can the program do for me as a mentee?

It is up to you to take the initiative and take action. You must set your own goals for self-improvement, better work performance, and long-term career strategy. Your mentor will be there to serve as a guide, to help you refine your goals, and to support you as you work toward achieving them. However, it is up to you to personally achieve the goals you have set for yourself. Mentors will help you to refine your career plans but cannot intervene for you.

What can my mentor do for me?

Your mentor can help you make a plan and encourage you to pursue it strategically. Your mentor can tell you how others see you and suggest ways to make positive changes. However, your mentor cannot make a decision for you, run your career, make calls for you or use their influence for you. You have to take the initiative to do those things for yourself.

How do mentors benefit from the program?

Apart from the satisfaction of helping another paralegal or legal professional reach their goals, many mentors develop a new perspective, learn about another organization or area of law, gain additional insight into their own paths and values, and go through a reflective process similar to the mentee. As they help someone else evaluate their career challenges and goals, mentors often find themselves evaluating their career paths. Given the opportunity to personally witness the positive impact of mentoring on the mentees,

mentors are often inspired to reach out to their co-workers in more supportive ways or to seek informal mentors for themselves.

What is expected of the mentees?

Each mentee is responsible for defining a career goal and strategy (with the mentor's help) and striving to achieve those career goals. Logistically, the mentee is responsible for the following:

- Meeting with their mentor for a total of one hour per month for the six-month program commitment;
- Responding to committee follow-ups to ensure the pair is progressing;
- Evaluating their progress in the Mentoring Action Plan; and
- Participating in the final evaluation process.

How many mentees and mentors will be selected?

Anyone can be a mentor if they are willing to make the commitment and have at least five years of experience as a paralegal or legal professional. A mentor needs to be able to listen, offer suggestions, and maintain confidentiality. A mentor does not have to intervene for the mentee or tell them what to do. The program recruiting process provides the best possible match. Every mentee is guaranteed a match.

What if I know someone with whom I would like to be matched?

Both individuals must apply. Each individual will need to indicate on their application form, in the "Other Comments" section, that they would like to be matched with the other individual. The Mentorship Committee does not guarantee the match since it has to consider the group's needs as a whole but will attempt to accommodate you.

How will a mentor and mentee work together?

The mentor and mentee will work together to develop and sign the Mentorship Agreement that indicates what each is responsible for, the goals of the relationship, how they will assess their progress and any other pertinent information.

What if I am not comfortable with my mentor/mentee?

The purpose of your first meeting is to see whether the mentor/mentee are compatible. The match is not final until both the mentor and mentee have accepted the match. The Mentorship Committee will check in with the mentor and mentee to see how the relationship is progressing and whether they are moving towards the goals the mentee set. Please let the Mentorship Committee know if the partnership is not working the way you had hoped. Often, a problem in a relationship is a question of miscommunication that can be cleared up through open discussion. Occasionally, rematching will be necessary, but normally re-matching will be considered only during the program's first month.

How much time can I spend with my mentor/mentee?

You are given a recommended amount of one hour of official time each month to meet. It is up to you to negotiate and arrange meetings to ensure that mentoring does not interfere with your regular duties. You and your partner may agree to meet more than the one hour a month. Additional time must be spent outside of the normal working hours "on your own time," e.g., during weekends.

How long does the program last?

Each program will last six (6) months.

Where does the program fit in the NCAPA approach to career development?

It is important for all of us to assess our skills and developmental needs regularly. Periodic self-evaluations can help identify the challenges that we are currently facing and the skills and personal resources we need to be successful. The NCAPA Mentorship Program is a tool that enables mentees to make a self-assessment based on the knowledge that they will receive from mentors. The program will consist of a diversified group of participants who will share experiences, be empowered, and encouraged to approach their individual career development.