

**Illinois Arts Alliance
Mentor Connection Service**

Tip Sheet: Mentee Goal Setting

The first step towards setting your mentoring program goals is to consider what you want to achieve during the time you have with your mentor. Remember these goals are your own, not the ones that someone else (boss, mentor, best friend) thinks you should be setting.

Spend some time thinking about what you want to achieve with the help of your mentor in the time you have together. Then select the ones that you feel best reflect what you want to do and what you can accomplish in your given time.

Talk about them together. Whether you work on your goals alone or with your mentor, be sure to spend some time in your early meetings discussing each one and how it might be accomplished.

Write your goals down using an affirmative voice. State what you want to do rather than what you don't want to do. Putting your goals in writing helps you focus and clarify your efforts. It also helps your mentor better understand what you want to achieve.

Make them as clear and exact as possible. Include dates, times and other measurable terms that will help you identify when you've reached your goal. Of course, there is always room for reevaluation if your original goal was unrealistic or if your needs change.

Prioritize them. Assuming you have more than one goal, list them with respect to their importance to you. This is another way to help you focus on what is most meaningful to you first.

Consider your timeframe and be realistic. Set yourself up for success by making them achievable within the time you and your mentor have together. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it or you may not be able to meet it within the mentoring program's timeframe. Sometimes it is helpful to set smaller goals that will assist you with achieving the larger overall goal. You and your mentor can work on this together. But remember they are your goals and you are in the driver's seat.

Base your goals on your own performance. Set goals in which you have the greatest control over outcomes. Some professional goals are less successful because they require someone else to do something that you have no control over. Establishing goals that are driven by your actions and activities means you will have more control over their achievement.

Be realistic: It is important to set goals that you can achieve. It is also helpful to consider some of the obstacles you might encounter that could hinder your ability to achieve them as stated. At the same time, don't be afraid to challenge yourself.

Be open to re-evaluating your goals with your mentor midway through your time period. This is your mentoring experience and it is important that you get out of it what you need. If you find that one of your original goals is not attainable in the timeframe, or your needs or desires have changed, don't be afraid to adjust your goals accordingly. Life never happens in a straight line. The insight and understanding you will gain about yourself through the mentoring process could very well change how you feel about one or more of your goals. Work with your mentor (if you like) to make the goal one that is more appropriate and helpful for you. This is your experience, make it the best.

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SMART Goals:

This is a time-honored tool for setting goals that you might find helpful. It pretty much sums up the main points made above. A SMART Goal is one that includes the following attributes:

- **S** Specific
- **M** Measurable
- **A** Attainable
- **R** Relevant
- **T** Time-bound

For example, instead of having “increase my professional network” as a goal, it is more powerful to say “To have met and communicated with 10 new professional contacts by the end of the mentoring program.”

How Your Mentor Can Help

You and your mentor can talk about the ways that you can accomplish this goal within the time frame you’ve defined. Your mentor can give you suggestions about how to meet this goal, help you make appropriate contacts, take you to networking events and hold you accountable for following through with the plans you make to achieve the goal.

As you are working towards your goal, your mentor can listen to what you’re learning about your professional skills and your personal insights, ask you questions that may help you move closer to the goal’s achievement and encourage you to continue in your efforts.

Achieving Goals

When you have achieved a goal with the help of your mentor, take the time with him or her to enjoy the satisfaction of having done so. Absorb the implications of its achievement, and observe the progress you have made towards other goals. If the goal was a significant one (or even if it isn’t), you and your mentor may choose to reward yourselves appropriately.