

FICANWest

LÄNTINEN SYÖPÄKESKUS | VÄSTRA CANCERCENTRET
WESTERN FINLAND CANCER CENTRE

GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS



CANCER RESEARCH

MENTORING PROGRAM

Foreword

Dear Mentoring Program Participant,

The FICAN West (the Western Finland Cancer Centre) coordinates oncological treatment, research and training in Western Finland. Our regional expert network is based on competent, motivated, and healthy people.

The strength of our network stems from our ability to learn from each other, and mentoring has been found to be well suited to enhance knowledge sharing as well as wellbeing at work and in expert networks. The method is based on mutual interaction to recognize and transfer the meaningful tacit knowledge at all stages of the working career. It can be used to promote research work, career development, and work wellbeing. Mentoring also has its place across many organizational boundaries in the learning of working life skills and practices.

Many thanks to you for committing to our cancer researchers' mentoring program. By participating you are in your part building our regional research excellence as well as investing in developing your own skills.

Pia Vihinen

Director

FICAN West

FICANWest

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MENTORING

Transdisciplinary peer mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship-based method where participants engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue based on their own experiences. Mentoring brings mutual benefits for all parties involved, and is generally used to help a less experienced person achieve their goals by receiving assistance and guidance from a more experienced person. Thus, mentoring is a method to develop individuals and organizations knowledge transfer, cohesion, and wellbeing at work.

Our mentoring program combines elements from cross-mentoring and peer-mentoring as means of developing translational research cooperation. We

have labeled this as transdisciplinary peer mentoring. The mentoring pairs are equal in the relationship, but in addition we connect the pairs over organizational, disciplinary, and professional groups boundaries. Our program develops cooperation between the members of the FICAN West expert network with transdisciplinary peer mentoring.

Cross-mentoring refers to mentoring, where pairs from different organizations meet to discuss their own work and role in a common network within the framework of a structural program.

Peer mentoring is a mentoring relationship between people who are at the same career stage or age, but one person usually has more experience than the other in a particular domain and can provide support as well as knowledge and skills transfer.

Mentoring relationship

Mentoring relationship has a clear beginning and an end. Mentoring pair **jointly agrees on the goals and content of their discussions**. The relationship is built through trust and respect. This is crucial for an effective mentoring relation. If you want someone to confide in you and feel comfortable sharing their experiences, you first need to focus on building trust. It is necessary to share experiences and perspectives. The best way to help someone is by sharing your own experiences. This allows your mentoring pair to understand different perspectives and hopefully opens new avenues for developing know-how, career, working practices, etc..

Well-functioning mentoring relationship **offers and accepts constructive, actionable feedback**. This back-and-forth exchange of feedback is essential for individual growth and learning. The mentoring relationship gives opportunity to step out of your comfort zone, and test new ideas and perspectives. At its best the mentoring relationship should encourage you and your pair to explore



different aspects of your professional life. Thus, offering you a chance to challenge yourself and to push further and maybe take on new responsibilities.

In addition to sharing your own thoughts and experiences it is also **important to listen and give space for dialogue**. You need patience to listen to your mentoring pair to vent about their day-to-day struggles or career pressures. It is important that you both have a feeling that you receive guidance and are respected. Thus, you need to be reliable and committed to the relationship and the mentoring process. **Confidentiality constitutes the basic foundation** for the mentoring relationship. That means, that everything you discuss should be kept between you two, if not otherwise agreed. However, participating in mentoring program and the personal take-aways and learnings can be, and perhaps should, be shared, but the confidential discussion should remain between the mentoring pairs.



Benefits from mentoring

Benefits for participants. One of the most important benefits of mentoring is that it encourages professional development. Mentoring process is a two-way street that benefits everyone involved. The participants have a chance to

- develop their skills and knowledge
- help their pair and pass on their wisdom.
- increase understanding of different perspectives of their work practices, aims, and operations
- open up their personal professional networks to each other, and identify possible collaborators in the future

In addition to the professional development, mentoring improves employee retention and longevity. Participants are likely to

- feel more valued within the organization
- can find new paths forward and feel inspired through their interactions with each other
- find greater opportunity for empathy, and a sense of equity and expertise
- reduce stress levels
- gain the experience of being seen and understood at work
- improve one's job satisfaction and psycho-social wellbeing at work.

Benefits for network. This type of transdisciplinary peer mentoring has been found to have great potential both as a **platform for cooperation and discussion** as well as for individuals as a driver of change at the institutional level. It can foster a sense of community in the workplace, as employees feel like they are part of a team and have people they can rely on. Thus, they are more likely to be engaged and productive. This helps with retention as when employees feel like they are supported and have the opportunity to develop their skills, they are more likely to stay with the organization.

Mentoring programs **encourage open communication** between employees. It supports work environment where you can feel comfortable asking for help and advice, as well as giving feedback without feeling like you are being judged. This open communication can help resolve conflicts and build trust between employees. The mentoring program boosts mutual inspiration from different organizations, which can **help reveal blind spots and enhance sharing new solutions across the organizations.**



MENTORING PROCESS

Beginning the process

Our mentoring program follows the usual mentoring program's structure, where you first apply and/or get selected for the program. The program coordinators will match the pairs. The pairs start the 8-month long program including joint seminars and mentoring pair meetings.

Meetings

Mentoring pair meetings. In our mentoring program the pair meets 5-6 times during the 8-month period. The pair makes a schedule for their meetings together. You should book enough time for each meeting from 1 to 1,5 hours. Here are few ideas how those meeting can be organized:

- a) You can meet around some other activity like over lunch, on a walk or have the meeting over some other activity you share.
- b) You can also visit each other's work places.
- c) We recommend the meetings will take place face-to-face. This is important for interaction and trust building.
- d) In addition, you can use different tools to get started with the discussion. You can ask one another thoughtful questions that encourage conversation (career path, interests, every day work practicalities, etc.).
- e) There are more tips for this in the next chapter.

Joint seminars. We will begin our program with joint **opening seminar** where you get the general instructions and principles as well as suggestions for practical ways of working. You will have time to get to know your pair a bit.

The main task is to agree on goals, timetable and rules together for your mentoring process. The program coordinators will be there to give guidance and support.

In the **intermediate event**, the mentoring pairs share their experiences of participating in the program and have opportunity to get ideas and hear about the processes of the other pairs. More detailed program is given to you closer to the event.

The **closing event** is the final joint event. It's aim is to reflect on your journey and give feedback to the whole mentoring program.

Participating in all these events is strongly recommended, and we try together fix the dates so that, it would be possible for all participants to take part.

Closing the process

Mentoring relationship ends formally at the closing event, where you have opportunity to reflect the process. In addition, you can have some sum up discussions in your last mentoring pair meeting. Although, the formal process is now closed, you can continue fruitful discussions and cooperation if you wish.



THEMES FOR MENTORING DISCUSSIONS

Here you can find ideas for different themes for discussion in your mentoring pair meetings. These are intended to give you ideas on how to approach different types of topics, and you can freely modify them. Thus, these are just examples, so feel free to find other approach too.

Professional development

Related to your professional development you can discuss both long-term career goals as well as issues related to your current research / work.

Discussing open your long-term goals clarifies the whole point of mentorship: it's to help you grow and reach these goals.

For this you can use for example SMART framework, and work out an actionable plan to start making progress toward those career goals.

One of the great reasons to have a transdisciplinary peer mentor is they can help you to evaluate and view your research from another perspective. They can help you

consider all the variables and make the best possible decision. In this activity, map out a decision / research idea / research question together, weighing the pros and cons. After you've concluded, consider how you came to the decision you did. This is a practical exercise but also a reflective one.

The **SMART** framework:

Specific - be as detailed as you can about your goals.

Measurable - have some way to measure your progress towards your goal.

Attainable - a goal needs to be something that you can reasonably attain.

Relevant - career goals should be directly related to your career path.

Timely - set a deadline so you know when you will accomplish your goal.

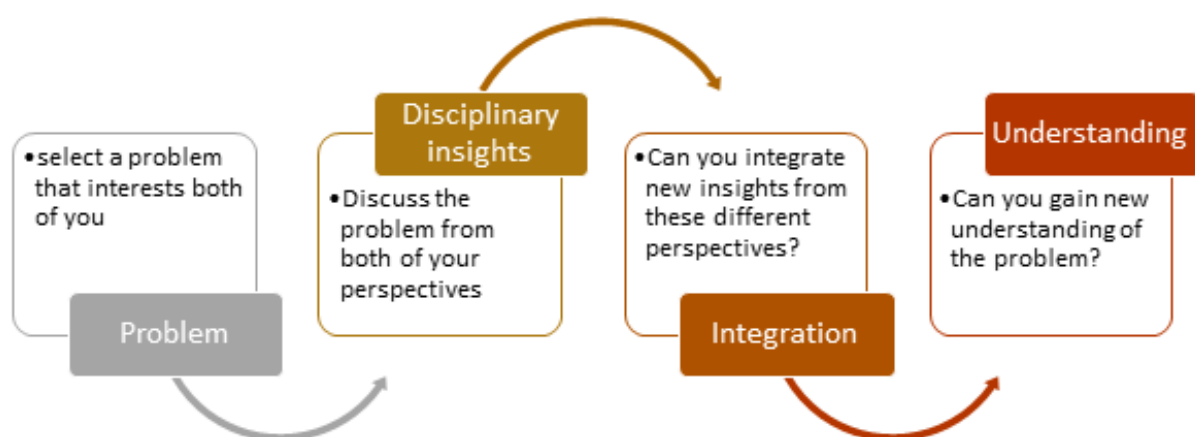
Job shadowing can be a great opportunity to learn from other employees and gain insight into their roles. Pairs can schedule a time to follow their mentoring pair around for a day. This could also be organized as a discussion where typical day is discussed in detail. The goal is to gain insight into the different sides of cancer research, different positions and responsibilities, and help to find research opportunities, point of improvement and personal career goals.

Consider a project that allows you two to work alongside each other. It could be collaborative research, planning a project or writing an article together.

Research related topics

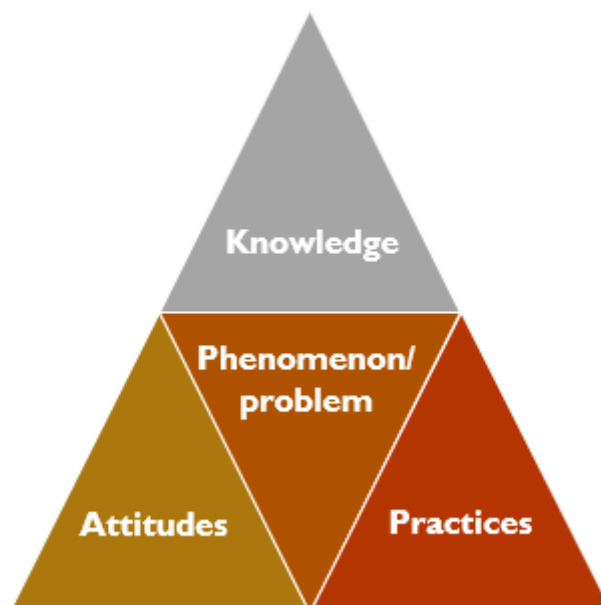
Transdisciplinary peer mentoring offers an opportunity to explore your research from another perspective. The topics can relate to building a project proposal for funding, to discuss possibilities for project funding and involvement, or other research project related themes.

You can also explore the possibilities to extend your research focus or further understand the process from research to treatment. Also discussing methodologies and the practical work and their differences in clinical and basic research might provide avenues for new ideas.



This can be approached through one-to-one conversations, reviewing documents and commenting on drafts, participating on mutually interesting seminar and discussing based on that, and sharing material for supplementary learning. The pair can also link each other with other researchers or professionals within their networks who they believe can be helpful in developing skills and professional abilities.

You can also aim to further your understanding of your research topic from different perspectives to find synergies by discussing some underlying assumptions related to research. You can discuss first the knowledge in your field related to the problem / phenomenon. Next you can discuss the practices related to study, solve or understand better the problem or phenomenon. Finally, you can try to identify underlying attitudes related to it. You should select the problem/phenomenon to be discussed together. At first, before meeting you can both think these individually, and then discuss the synergies or contradictions you may identify together.



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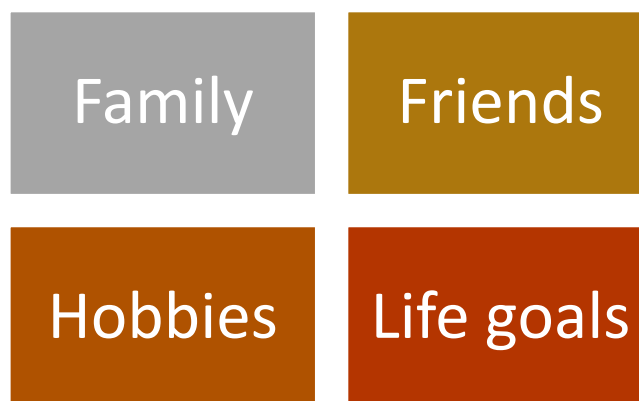
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Wellbeing related topics

The mentoring discussions can also be related to work wellbeing. To work around this theme, you could for example make a list of things you want to do or accomplish during your lifetime and share them. This encourages pairs to share their life goals or aspirations. It's a great activity to get to know one another more and talk about what's important to you. Try to write down 10 different "bucket-list" items you have and share them. From there, you can discuss how these things are balanced at the moment, and what types of changes you would like to do or need.

Another approach could be to set goals or share aspirations and to map out a path to achieve them. In this activity, you make a timeline of your life over the next 5-10 years. What do you want to accomplish? After, discuss with one another what needs to happen to close the gap between here and reaching that goal. This should be a practical discussion.

This third example is an exercise that you can use to get to know one another and/or to discuss the balance of what you want and what you have. You'll need a page, where you create four boxes.



Fill out each quadrant to get to know one another. This exercise is a great way to encourage discussion around similar interests or goals. The boxes can also

be filled with more career related items like tasks, human relations, organizing work, and network and culture to discuss for example from where the challenges stem in your work / where would you like changes. This can also be used to think about your research by using for example these headings: 1) difficult topic with no acute need for knowledge, 2) difficult topic with acute need for knowledge, 3) easy topic with no acute need for knowledge, and 4) easy topic with acute need for knowledge.

Sometimes there might come up barriers or difficulties in your relationship during the process. If this happens, don't get stuck, but dig into what's holding you or your partner back. Overcoming these challenges is where meaningful mentorship starts to happen. You can always ask support and tips from our coordinators.

We wish you a fruitful and insightful mentoring journey!

Our rules for mentoring

Timetable and location of our meetings

Topics for discussion

How we contact each other

Takeaways from mentoring meetings

Date:

Discussed themes:

Most important idea or learning:

Theme agreed for our next meeting:

Other observations:

Authors:

Anna Karhu

Anni Paalumäki

Jouni Saarni

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Työsuojelurahasto
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