

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

# Strong Start

Mentoring program for student planners

April 2024





# Acknowledgement of country

The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

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Artwork (above) by Nikita Ridgeway

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The NSW Government supports the development of the planning profession. As planners are vital to building and shaping the communities we live in, the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is helping to foster the next generation.

Strong Start planner mentoring program will connect student and graduate planners from NSW councils with experienced department planners, giving them skills, guidance and opportunities.

# How Strong Start works

Strong Start aims to help councils train, upskill, and develop student and graduate planners by making mentors available who will provide coaching, support and advice.

Students and graduates will be paired with experienced planners at the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. In 2024, we are also expanding the program to include senior planners from NSW councils as mentors, giving them the opportunity to shape the next generation of planners.

The mentor will serve as a sounding board and role model, provide

exposure to the wider planning profession beyond the mentee's placement and expand the mentees' professional networks at an early career stage.

The mentor may help the mentee achieve or work toward career goals, introduce the mentee to new ways of thinking, challenge a mentee's assumptions, share valuable life lessons, and much more.

The 2024 program will offer one-to-one mentoring and group mentoring, or 'Group Loops' where participants can take part in peer-to-peer mentoring and networking.

In instances where mentors and mentees are not in the same geographic area, meetings will happen virtually using videoconferencing, phone, emails, and text (in fact, a mix of channels works well).

We have engaged Mentorloop to deliver and facilitate the mentoring program on behalf of the department.

## Benefits of the program

Strong Start aims to contribute to the professional development of planners.

Participants in mentoring programs report multiple benefits including improved confidence, self-awareness, clearer career direction, better communication skills, listening skills, feedback skills, more assertive communication, and enhanced management skills.

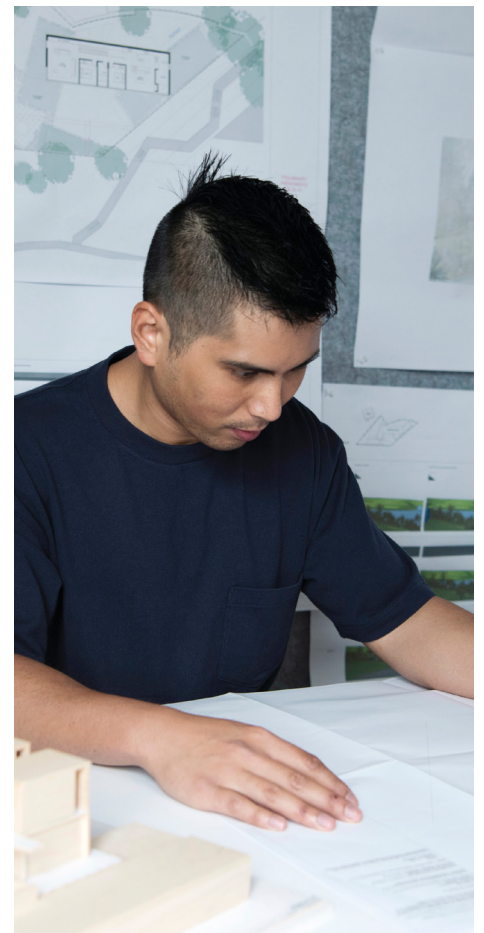
For mentees, some of the common benefits include:

- getting experienced guidance and support
- exploring your career development plan
- exploring issues and concerns in a supportive and confidential relationship
- receiving feedback and developmental guidance
- networking and learning about doing this effectively.

It isn't only the mentees who benefit. Mentors find tremendous learning and development opportunities of their own. Some of the benefits mentors frequently report include:

- giving back to the profession
- gaining personal satisfaction by making a difference for someone else
- learning and developing mentoring skills
- enriching leadership and interpersonal skills
- gaining intellectual challenge by working on issues outside day-to-day experience
- discovering fresh perspectives that may help your own work
- raising your profile and expanding professional networks

This program is not about providing technical planning advice or training, or the mentor finding a job or a promotion for the mentee. It is also not the mentor's role to take on the people leadership responsibilities of the mentee's manager.



# Eligibility

To join as a **mentee**, you must:

- be a student or graduate planner working for a NSW council
- have endorsement from your (council) manager to participate in the program.

To join as a **mentor**, you must:

- be a senior planner (Grade PO2) or above at the department or a senior planner at a NSW council
- have endorsement from your manager to participate in the program.

Both mentees and mentors must also be willing to complete the registration provided, review the support resources available and engage in the relationship process, connecting with your mentee/mentor at least monthly.

# Application process

Mentees and mentors will complete a short online application form to assess eligibility for the program and to collect details about what you are looking for in a mentoring partner.

In the application form, we will ask mentees about your background and what you would like to achieve by working with a mentor. We will ask mentors about the areas in which you feel comfortable giving mentoring. Please give as much information as you can to help the matching process.

Event	Date
Applications open	Monday 22 April 2024
Applications close	5pm Friday 10 May 2024
Mentor matches announced	Friday 17 May 2024
Program launch webinar for matched mentors and mentees	12-1pm Tuesday 21 May 2024  Put this event in your calendar in anticipation that you will be matched and expected to attend.



# Commitment

Strong Start runs from May - December 2024

Mentors and mentees must attend 3 online events – program launch, progress review and program close.

During the program, we expect mentors and mentees to communicate at least monthly.

Mentees and first-time mentors will also be expected to complete the Mentorloop registration form to prepare for the mentoring relationship. To be accepted into the program, you must have the approval of your manager to participate.

The online mentoring platform will provide your mentoring partner's details, the option to communicate with the program manager, and access to the platform and resources.

During the program, you will receive frequent communications from the platform, giving you helpful tips and information about mentoring and access to other relevant materials available for supporting mentees and mentors.

During the program, we will invite you to give feedback about your experience.

## Time commitment

Activity	Time required
Training, reading and workshops	Up to 4 hours in total
Preparation and time spent in mentoring conversations; follow-up actions, reading, journaling	Mentees: 3 to 4 hours per month Mentors: 1 to 2 hours per month
Program check-in and feedback surveys	½ hour in total



# Key dates and program activities

## Getting started

Activity	Date and time
Applications open	Monday 22 April 2024
Applications close	5pm Friday 10 May 2024
Matches notified	Friday 17 May 2024
Program launch webinar	12-1pm Tuesday 21 May 2024

## Clarifying direction and purpose

Activity	Date and time
First mentoring meeting	TBC  We encourage you to schedule and diarise your monthly meetings during this first one.

## Working and learning together

Activity	Date and time
Mentoring meetings	Mentors and mentees to schedule monthly meetings. We encourage you to schedule and diarise these at your first mentoring meeting.

Progress review webinars TBC

## Winding up and moving on

Activity	Date and time
Final mentoring meeting	Mentors and mentees to schedule a final meeting before the program closes

Program close webinar TBC December 2024

## The value of mentoring

Mentorship is a developmental relationship in which one person, usually more experienced or senior, takes time to assist the career, professional or skill development of someone else, known as a mentee. Mentoring is most often a one-on-one relationship but is sometimes done in groups.

A mentoring relationship is built on trust, in which there is an exchange of knowledge, experience and goodwill.

Mentors may help by:

- acting as a source of information and insight
- suggesting relevant options for career development or strategies for achieving professional goals
- recommending possible resources to improve specific skills
- assisting the mentee solve professional challenges in their working life
- discussing issues of professional ethics
- discussing workplace-related issues and options for addressing these.

# More information

Visit [our website](#) for more information.

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[planning.nsw.gov.au/strong-start](http://planning.nsw.gov.au/strong-start)