

A Guide to **Mentorship** in **Architecture**

Mentorship is an investment in people and in the long-term strength of the firm.



Introduction

Effective mentorship is one of the most important investments an architecture firm can make in its people. Strong mentoring relationships support professional development, strengthen employee engagement and retention, accelerate leadership development, and contribute to a more collaborative and resilient workplace culture.

This guide provides practical strategies, tools, and resources for establishing, strengthening, and evaluating mentorship programs in architecture firms of all sizes. Whether your firm is launching a formal program, refining an existing one, or looking for ways to better support individual mentoring relationships, the recommendations in this guide are designed to be flexible and adaptable.

Because every firm's culture, size, and organizational structure is different, these practices should be viewed as a framework that can be tailored to your firm's goals and needs.

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Photos by Chad Holder

How to Use This Guide

This guide is the result of two years of discussion, research, and collaboration by the AIA St. Paul Mentorship Task Force. Drawing on the experiences of architects and AEC professionals across a variety of firms, we identified common mentorship challenges and developed practical approaches to address them. While the insights and suggestions shared in this report reflect our professional experiences primarily in the Twin Cities region, we have designed this guide to be broadly applicable across the architecture profession.

Although the guide can be read from beginning to end, each section is designed to stand on its own, allowing readers to navigate directly to the topics most relevant to their organizational needs.

The guide is organized around three primary objectives:

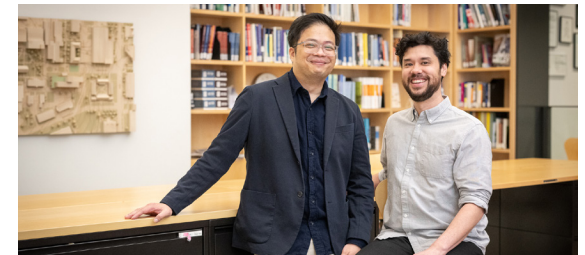
- **Help firms establish a mentorship program.** The first section provides foundational guidance, planning considerations, and resources for organizations developing a mentorship program.
- **Strengthen existing mentorship programs.** The second section offers strategies, tools, and best practices to improve the effectiveness of established programs.
- **Support mentors and mentees.** The final section provides practical guidance and resources to help both mentors and mentees build productive relationships and maximize the value of the mentoring experience.

While the focus of this guide is on firm-based mentorship programs, what is outlined in this guide could also be useful to mentorship efforts within other organizations that employ architects or architectural designers, and those schools of architecture, associations, and informal collectives (such as of small firms).

We hope this guide serves as a practical resource that encourages meaningful conversations about mentorship and helps firms build stronger people, stronger teams, and a stronger profession.

About the Task Force

The AIA St. Paul Mentorship Task Force was established in 2022 to explore how mentorship can better support architecture professionals throughout their careers. Composed of architects and AEC professionals from diverse backgrounds and practice settings, the task force examined common challenges, shared successful practices, and developed resources to help firms strengthen their mentorship efforts.



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Definitions

Mentorship can take many forms, and there is no single model that works for every firm. The following definitions establish a common vocabulary for the concepts used throughout this guide.

While your firm's terminology or approach may differ, these definitions provide a consistent framework for the recommendations that follow.

Formal Mentorship

A formal mentorship program is a structured, firm-sponsored initiative that intentionally pairs mentors and mentees to support professional development. Pairings may be based on career goals, experience, discipline, or other criteria. Firms typically provide participants with dedicated time, resources, and guidance to help mentees achieve defined professional objectives while supporting broader organizational goals such as employee engagement, retention, and leadership development.

Informal Mentorship

Informal mentorship develops organically through day-to-day work, project collaboration, professional associations, or personal connections. These relationships are generally self-directed and evolve naturally based on shared interests, experience, and trust. While less structured than formal programs, informal mentorship often plays a significant role in career development, knowledge sharing, and professional growth.



Definitions *(continued)*



Mentor (or Coach)

A mentor or coach is an experienced professional who provides guidance, shares knowledge, and supports a mentee's professional growth. Mentors help individuals develop technical expertise, professional judgment, leadership capabilities, and career strategies through coaching, feedback, and the sharing of experience.

Advocate (or Sponsor)

An advocate or sponsor is a professional who actively creates opportunities for another person's career advancement. Unlike a mentor, who primarily provides guidance and advice, a sponsor uses their influence to increase a mentee's visibility, recommend them for high-impact projects or leadership opportunities, and help expand their professional network. In many firms, sponsors also play an important role in staffing decisions, succession planning, and leadership development.

Two-Way Mentorship

The most effective mentorship relationships are built on mutual learning and a perception that both parties are gaining value. While the term "mentor" usually refers to the older or more professionally experienced person of the pair and "mentee" to the younger or less professionally experienced, in the case of two-way mentorship, both parties see themselves as mentors and mentees, valuing not just years of experience but also a more expansive view of knowledge, ideas, perspectives, skills, and ways of thinking and working. Viewing mentorship as a two-way relationship creates stronger connections and supports a culture of continuous learning within the firm.