

Operational Guidance for SITCOM's Conservation Interagency Mentorship Program

Draft, September 2023

This document serves as the operational guidance for the State Interagency Training Committee's (SITCOM) Conservation Mentor/Cohort Program. This document is meant to be a living document that can be updated and revised to meet the changing needs and demands of the professional conservation landscape. It is anticipated that this document will be reviewed at least once per year.

Program Mission

The SITCOM Conservation Mentor/Cohort Program provides resources for both new and experienced professional staff, supporting them to:

- 1. achieve their professional development goals,***
- 2. build a stronger community/network of professionals, and***
- 3. be empowered to navigate personal and professional challenges on the job.***

Program Audience

This program is open to conservation staff from all conservation agencies and departments in Wisconsin. Both mentees and mentors within the program complete an onboarding process to determine the best match and match style to suit their professional goals.

SITCOM Initiatives

As this program is managed and maintained through SITCOM, it has been designed to support a number of SITCOM's initiatives, which support SITCOM's mission:

1. Enhance the quality of professional conservation training programs
- 2. Support new and experienced conservationists in growing as professionals**
- 3. Coordinate partner agency and organization training programs and support their collaboration**
4. Consistently measure and evaluate the training landscape and actively address areas of need

Program Process and Overview

1. Onboarding and Matchmaking

- This program is aimed at supporting a wide variety of needs, interests, and match styles to complement the unique demands of our state’s interagency conservation landscape. The following considerations will be taken within this program:
 - **Dynamic match length**, with shorter or longer matches based on the needs of the participants, both mentors and mentees
 - **Diversity of topics**, with matches able to serve both short-term, specific feedback matches and long-term, professional development matches
- Interested participants (both mentors and mentees) attend a workshop, developed by SITCOM, to introduce program expectations and guidelines and begin drafting a professional development plan (PDP), along with supervisor feedback and approval.
- Interested participants complete an onboarding application process that identifies their personal/professional needs and professional development goals.
- Applicants meet with Program Coordinator(s) to review application and identify a list of “best fit” qualities for a mentee, mentor, or both. Using a database of applicants, Program Coordinator(s) work to coordinate matches based on “best fit” qualities.
- When a potential match is identified, all parties, including an appropriate supervisor, are contacted by Program Coordinator(s) to confirm and determine next steps for contact.
- **The following match styles (both in-person and virtual) are supported by this program:**

One-on-One “Traditional” Mentee-Mentor Match



Small Group Cohort Match without Mentor



Small Group Cohort Match with Mentor



Large Group Community Match



2. Mentorship and Cohort Experience

- Once Program Coordinator(s) have contacted potential matches, mentees and mentors are tasked with planning an initial meeting to introduce themselves, review their professional development goals, and determine an ideal schedule for future meetings.
- Beyond the initial meeting, matches are given the freedom to determine their own schedule for meetings and expectations for communication.
- Participants contribute to their match by sharing experiences, challenges, and questions as they relate to all participants' professional development goals.

3. Review, Re-Engage, and Program Exit

- Program Coordinator(s) and participants will determine a timeline for review and check-in for progress towards their professional development goals. Should a match be beneficial to both parties, participants can continue for as long as they deem appropriate.
- Should a match not be beneficial to both parties, or should a match determine that they have achieved their goals and are interested in a new match, program coordinator(s) can reconnect with participants to determine new "best fit" qualities and professional development goals.
- Participants may at any time choose to not participate and exit the program.

Participant Expectations

• Mentees

- Mentees contribute to their match and/or cohort group by sharing their experiences, challenges, and questions as they relate to their or their cohort's development goals.
- Mentees identify their professional development goals that they wish to accomplish through participation in this program, and they are encouraged to use these goals to guide their interactions with their mentors or cohort groups.
- **Specifically, mentees are responsible for:**
 - Writing and maintaining professional development plan (PDP)
 - Working with mentor to schedule meetings
 - Recording progress towards accomplishing PDP goals through artifact collection
 - Reflecting on the process, establishing new PDP or goals as needed
 - Communicating with mentor, cohort members, and program coordinator(s)

• Mentors






- Mentors contribute to their match and/or cohort group by sharing experiences, challenges, and questions related to their mentee's or cohort's development goals.
- Mentors work to support their mentee and/or cohort group work towards accomplishing their professional development goals, and they are encouraged to use these goals to guide their interactions with their mentees or cohort groups.

- **Specifically, mentors are responsible for:**
 - Supporting mentee to develop and maintain PDP
 - Working with mentee(s) to schedule meetings
 - Recording meetings and events in calendar
 - Helping mentees reflecting on the process, establishing new goals as needed
 - Communicating with mentee(s), fellow mentors, and program coordinator(s)

Professional Development Plans

Both mentees and mentors develop a professional development plan (PDP) related to their participation in the program. These PDPs include 2-3 goal statements that will be used to track an individual's progress and development throughout their participation in the program.

Professional development goals will be constructed using the SMART goal format:

S	Specific	Make your goal specific and narrow for more effective planning	
M	Measurable	Make sure your goal and progress are measurable	
A	Achievable	Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal within a certain time frame	
R	Relevant	Your goal should align with your values and long-term objectives	
T	Time-based	Set a realistic but ambitious end date to clarify task prioritization and increase motivation	



[Image Credit](#)

Sample PDP goals:

- I will create a stronger conservation community throughout the summer of 2024 by introducing myself to at least 5 different landowners in my area and getting to know their conservation concerns. I will record these concerns and create a community-based event where I can invite community members to hear from others who share these issues and provide solutions.

- By the end of 2024, I will have grown my network of professionals by attending at least 4 different conservation events hosted by different partners, meeting at least 2 individuals at each event, and following up with at least 1 other professional to reflect on something experienced at each event.
- Over the next three months I will improve my public speaking skills as a conservation professional by leading a staff meeting in March, hosting an area tour in April, and delivering a public address in May.

Operational Notes

- Program Management
 - The program will be coordinated and led by WI Land+Water staff:
 - Statewide Training Coordinator
 - Conservation Training and Membership Services Manager
 - Other program coordinators will be volunteers who are staff members of one of the partners or a current sitting member of SITCOM.
- Program Participation
 - The mentees and mentors of this program can be from any and all professional conservation agency, department, or program.
 - Mentee and mentor participation and engagement must be approved by a supervisor.
 - Mentees and mentors are free to make their own schedules and agenda for meetings and events. Program-wide, group events will be managed by program coordinator(s).

Pilot Program Timeline

- September 29: Goal for Operational Guidance Review and Approval by agency leadership
 - DATCP, NRCS, WDNR, UW-Ext, WI L+W, and others
- October 2-13: Pilot program application process is open
- October 16-27: Pilot program applicants matched and connected
- November 6: Onboarding informational workshop
- November 6-February 29: Pilot program operation period
- February 2024: Feedback session from pilot participants
- March 2024: WI Land+Water Annual Conference to kick off full program

Throughout the pilot process, the SITCOM Mentor/Cohort Task Force will be tasked with reviewing each step and providing guidance and insights based on observations, concerns, and experiences.

Recording of feedback, collection of artifacts, and summarizing data and outcomes will be carried out by program coordinator(s).