



## Graduate Research Fellowship

### *Tips and Guidance for Successful Fellow-Mentor Relationships*

When you applied to the Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) Graduate Research Fellowship you developed a *Professional Mentor & Outreach Plan* in collaboration with your professional mentor.

This document is intended to help you build a productive professional relationship with your mentor. It is based upon feedback from previous fellows. In this conversation:

- Build rapport with your mentor – an open, honest exchange of ideas, concerns, feedback and tips.
- Discuss your mutual goals, professional growth opportunities, and skills you would like to gain/refine.
- Review your outreach plan and discuss new opportunities, set initial goals, and draft a timeline.
- Schedule regular interactions.

*VASG encourages you to schedule your next meeting with your mentor before October.* At that time, you and other fellows will be invited to participate in a virtual meeting to discuss how these conversations went, share any ideas you have for the upcoming year, and learn more about what the other fellows are planning.

### BUILDING RAPPORT

A mentor's job is NOT to be your academic advisor, a course instructor, or someone who grades you. Quite the opposite; they are your coach. You should be honest and reflective with them without fear of being judged. However, you need to build that kind of rapport and it does not happen with one conversation or meeting. One of the first steps in building a good working relationship is getting to know your mentor. Below are some suggested questions you may consider asking them:

- What part of your job do you enjoy the most?
- Tell me about the audiences and stakeholders you work with. What are they like? What about them would be surprising to someone who doesn't work with them regularly?
- What do you see as the value of mentoring a graduate student like me?

### DISCUSS YOUR MUTUAL GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES

Mentors are a valuable professional resource for fellows, and likewise, fellows can provide a range of opportunities for their mentors. Mentors are well-suited to help nurture your professional skills, may have the ability to connect you with a range of end-users, and can advance your understanding of how your science may make a difference in coastal and marine resource management. These can be unique opportunities to gain concrete, hands-on experience with their network of stakeholders, end-users, natural resource managers, and policy makers.

We encourage you to discuss your short- and long-term professional goals with your mentor and identify mutually beneficial opportunities for collaboration. These may include co-authored material, attending or co-organizing events and meetings, shadowing your mentor, and a range of other unique opportunities.

In Collaboration With



## REVIEW AND REVISE YOUR PLAN

We encourage you to review the *Professional Mentor & Outreach Plan* you submitted together as part of your fellowship application to see if there are things that could be further refined, to discuss how you may need to adapt your plan as a result of COVID-19, and consider new opportunities that may have emerged since last fall. The plan should be a living document, and we anticipate it will change.

Start the conversation any way you would like, or use the questions below to help:

- What parts of the plan do you think are the most important?
- What do you think are the challenges of the current plan?
- What aspects will be impacted by COVID-19 and what parts of the plan can be executed virtually?
- Is there anything that you think is missing from the current plan?
- What deliverables will be the most useful for you to have at the end of my fellowship?
- What timeline do you think is ideal for this plan and the deliverables?
- What do you think is the time commitment of the plan? Are you comfortable with that level of commitment?
- When my fellowship is completed, what achievements would need to happen in order for you to feel like our work together was successful and mutually beneficial?

## SCHEDULING THE NEXT INTERACTION

Before you finish your first meeting, make sure you and your mentor have scheduled another time to touch base and have established a **regular schedule** of communication. Some possible opportunities include:

- Asking your mentor to review your draft individualized professional development plan.
- Scheduling a phone call or virtual meeting to touch base on your progress and finalize changes to your *Professional Mentorship & Outreach Plan*.
- Identifying an upcoming meeting or conference (virtual or in-person, as appropriate) for you both to attend and schedule a time to debrief together after the event.
- Identifying future opportunities to shadow your mentor at their job.
- Inviting your mentor to participate in field or lab work next year.