 

Mentoring: A Guide

This is a short guide to introduce you to mentoring. As part of the Arts Access Aotearoa Fellowships we recommend you think about how mentorship could benefit you and your project. If you are unfamiliar with mentoring this guide will help you understand what it is, what to expect, and what you and a mentor each bring to the relationship.

You should treat the details in this guide as loose guidelines and by no means definitive. Each mentoring relationship is unique and must be driven by your needs and the ability of your mentor to support these. We’ve taken the best advice from a number of models and experiences to help you think about your own mentorship.

**What is mentoring?**
Mentoring offers focused professional development for you as an artist through guidance and support. It creates a space for knowledge to be shared, where you are made aware of opportunities and your potential. A mentor will support your creative process, helping you observe and review aspects of your practice so you can extend and develop it.

Through mentoring you should discover how to do the ‘right thing’ or how the ‘right thing’ works for you, rather than learn or be directed to ‘do things right.’

We recommend you approach mentoring as part of your Fellowship as formal mentoring, where you agree to a set number of meetings over an agreed period.

**Finding a mentor**
When selecting a mentor you need to think about what kind of support and development you want. Mentors should be an art professional with a strong track record of making, producing, or presenting work in an arts context. Generally, you will want to find an experienced artist who has skills and knowledge relevant to your project. The sharing of creative process will be core to your relationship.

If you would like assistance in finding a mentor, Arts Access Aotearoa can help you. Email fellowships@artsaccess.org.nz.

**What to expect**

Along with developing your art practice, mentoring can offer an introduction to the arts sector, advice on how-to and where-to relevant to your practice. You should also expect personal growth through the acceptance and validation of an experienced arts professional.

Expect your mentoring to be based on:

* A relationship of support for development
* Enhancing personal and professional growth
* Mutual exchange and sharing
* Honesty, confidentiality, and trust
* Big picture perspectives
* Clear boundaries set by both mentee and mentor.

**Mentee’s responsibilities**

Mentorship is driven by the mentee. To get the most out of mentoring you need to give your mentor challenges, issues, and material that they can respond to. By doing this you get to define the focus and what you need out mentorship.

Other responsibilities include:

* To reflect on what you are learning and what you want to explore next
* To set goals - short, medium, and long term
* To be open to change, being challenged, and learning
* To be open to taking constructive criticism
* To be open to coming out of your comfort zone and to taking risks
* To respect the views, experiences, and insights of your mentor
* To speak up if things aren’t working for you
* To follow through on agreed actions
* To be respectful to your mentor’s time and obligations
* To give your mentor time and space to consider what you ask of them.

**Mentor’s responsibility:**

As a mentee you have the privilege of the time and attention of an experienced artist. A mentor is also in a privileged position as they get to witness your growth and the development of your vision and share in it to a certain extent.

A mentor’s responsibilities include:

* To support, value, and validate the mentee.
* To listen attentively
* To help the mentee see the big picture
* To act as an objective eye and to encourage independence
* To be honest and generous, sharing relevant experience, information, advice, and contacts
* To provoke and question the mentee toward the highest standards and ambitions
* To give constructive critical response to the mentee’s material
* To help the mentee to critically reflect on their practice through discussion and experimentation
* To provide structure, feedback and direction, including holding the mentee accountable
* To monitor that the relationship is resulting in meaningful development.

**Other things to consider:**

Meeting space
We suggest that you meet in a neutral space to begin with until you become comfortable with one another unless it is necessary to be in a studio or working space.

Setting meetings
We recommend finding times where you both can give your full attention to the meetings and placed to get the most out of them. When, where, and how long are all questions you will need to talk with your mentor about. It might also be a good idea to plan to have time before any meetings to make sure you’re prepared, and time after to reflect on what was discussed and capture thoughts and ideas you’ve had.

Development of the relationship
A mentoring relationship can be intense, they are approached with high trust and sharing of what can be very personal work. The relationship is likely to be stronger near the end of your time together. It may be useful to bear this in mind as you plan meetings over the period of your fellowship.