

# He waka eke noa: Mentoring in the Aotearoa New Zealand research community

*Kia ngātahi ai te tū, e pakari ai te tuarā*

*Stand united, stand strong*

*Whakapūpūtia mai ō mānuka, kia kore ai e whati*

*Cluster the branches of the mānuka, so they will not break*

## Context

Effective mentoring is valuable and productive at all stages of a researcher’s career, and these guidelines draw on Māori, Pasifika, and Pākehā perspectives to offer a framework for mentoring in the unique context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Enhanced mentoring practice also promises to make an important contribution to improving equity in the achievement and professional mana of researchers from groups that may have been historically disadvantaged.

Given the diverse range of mentoring needs and scenarios across the Aotearoa New Zealand research community, these guidelines are not presented as prescriptive advice but are intended to help shape productive thinking about the development of mutually-beneficial mentoring relationships. While the language of the guidelines is focused on a one-to-one mentoring relationship, the intent is that the guidelines can be readily applied and adapted for group mentoring situations.

The guidelines are freely available to be used by anyone or any group who find them helpful, but do not constitute formal advice of the Royal Society Te Apārangi.

## What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a personal development practice structured around the relationship between a mentee/teina and a mentor/tuakana. Mentoring most often takes the form of a one-on-one relationship (the mentee/teina learns by engaging with a mentor/tuakana of greater experience), but may also involve peer-to-peer mentoring (sharing experiences with colleagues at a similar career level) and group mentoring (involving multiple mentees/teina and/or multiple mentors/tuakana). Over the course of her career, a researcher’s need and opportunities for mentorship are likely to change many times—at times having one or several mentors, or having none at certain periods—and those mentoring relationships are likely to change in accordance with distinct career stages.

Mentoring in the Aotearoa New Zealand context “is an especially delicate dance” (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004, p7), which must take into consideration the interplay and interconnectedness of diverse identities, cultures, gender, class, learning and power. An effective mentoring relationship involves ‘ako’ or co-learning through the exchange of professional beliefs, knowledge, experience, and wisdom between the mentor/tuakana and mentee/teina, so as to assist and promote the becoming, being and belonging of both parties.

The core values of effective mentoring relationships are:

- Manaakitanga – cherishing and enhancing the mana of others.
- Whanaungatanga – acknowledging and building relationships.
- Kotahitanga – a shared understanding of the purpose and/or vision for the mentoring arrangement and a commitment to learning together.

In authentic mentoring relationships, learning and mentoring interactions should be transformative, assisting in the development and maturation of the individual or group by facilitating the “flow and experience of mana” between all participants (Royal, 2007, p.4).

In addition, mentoring in the Pasifika context should affirm distinct Pasifika customs, practices, and ways of being and values including:

- Reciprocity – a relationship based on mutual exchange.
- Service – working for the benefit of others.
- Respect – holding others in high esteem and accepting them for who they are.
- Relationships – establishing and valuing interactions with others.
- Family – valuing unity and sharing concern for others.

In practice, these values are manifested in different ways based on the fact that Pasifika peoples are diverse, community-oriented, and relationships are a natural part of their lives. A cultural and nuanced way to understand mentoring in the Pasifika context is to consider the concept of *talanoa*. Talanoa is a Pacific concept of communication where conversations are not confined or controlled but instead are allowed to flow and progress organically. Talanoa in the context of mentoring can be used to build rapport and trusting relationships between a mentor and mentee.

Mentoring is:

- Intended for the personal benefit of the mentee/teina in that its purpose is to improve the confidence and competence of the mentee, most typically in areas of career development and in dealing with inter-personal issues in the work place. However, there are also clear benefits for the mentor including the personal satisfaction of supporting the development of others and increased opportunities to reflect on one’s own practice.
- Voluntary – the mentee/teina or mentor/tuakana are able to withdraw at any time.
- Normally characterised by the mentor and the mentee having little or no direct interaction in their employment roles – they are not in a direct working relationship (e.g. supervisor-student, or manager-employee), and may even belong to different units or organisations.

It is important to distinguish the mentoring relationship from other forms of professional advice and support:

- The normal coaching or career development advice provided by a manager in the employment context (the role of a line manager).
- A fee-for-service coaching arrangement with a personal development coach.
- Supervision (the role of a researcher towards another researcher working under their guidance) – where a supervisor is requested to provide what is in effect mentoring, in the form of advice towards the next career stage of the supervisee, the supervisor is responsible for distinguishing between those mentoring and supervisory roles in order to protect the supervisee.
- An expert advisor service – when faced with such a need, a mentor/tuakana might assist the mentee/teina by providing contact details of reputable experts in the field.
- The provision of technical advice or support in accessing technical expertise in regard to the mentee/teina’s research programme.

- A formal personal advice service, for instance in areas of law, counselling, or mental health – as these are not areas of expertise for the mentor/tuakana, this may expose both parties in the relationship to risk, but the mentor/tuakana may advise the mentee/teina to seek relevant professional help (although it is acknowledged that knowing when this is appropriate is not straightforward).
- An advocacy role, whereby a senior colleague acts directly in assisting a junior colleague to advance their career.
- A natural continuation of a previous successful supervisor-student or manager-employee relationship – a previous supervisor or manager can become a mentor/tuakana, but only if the relationship is explicitly changed to encompass good mentoring practice and the change in circumstances is acknowledged by both parties.

## Determining the need for a mentoring relationship

There is no one reason why a person should or should not have a mentor. A researcher should not look to enter a mentoring relationship purely to satisfy their manager, supervisor, or other authority—the mentee/teina should have a genuine commitment to learning and growing for mentoring to succeed.

A mentee/teina needs to carefully identify, as well as they can, their needs when thinking of entering a mentoring relationship. Such needs may include the following:

- Independent career planning advice from someone who has relevant experience.
- A significant change in role, producing new and complex situations that are very demanding.
- Wishing to develop new personal skills or wider perspectives on their role and its possibilities.
- Better understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the workplace.
- Discussing professional issues with someone who is independent of their organisation and who brings a significantly different perspective.

## Identifying a mentor/tuakana

There is no single way to initiate discussions about whether to seek a mentor/tuakana. Some common examples are:

- A researcher is advised by their supervisor or manager that there are benefits from having a mentor/tuakana, and encourages him or her to seek one.
- The organisation employing the researcher actively encourages opt-in to a mentoring scheme within the organisation.
- A researcher suggests to another researcher that he or she might benefit from mentoring.
- A researcher realises there are benefits and decides to seek a mentor/tuakana.

A potential mentor/tuakana can be identified in a variety of ways, such as:

- Through the mentee/teina's own support community.
- A personal approach by the mentee/teina to someone they consider might be suitable.
- A manager or senior colleague offering suggestions, and if requested arranging an introduction.
- An in-house structured scheme, which develops a pool of trained mentors and establishes an introduction service.
- The Human Resource or other support systems of the employer (e.g. schemes to support under-represented groups of people may include finding prospective mentors).
- By invitation or asking to join an existing mentoring group.
- An introduction service run by the mentee/teina's professional body or a learned society.

- Through the Early Career Researcher Forum of the Royal Society Te Apārangi, or through the staff supporting membership in the Society.

## Selecting a mentor/tuakana

The success of a mentoring relationship depends on establishing a level of trust, where both parties feel able to disclose and discuss matters openly and frankly. The mentee/teina must perceive their potential mentor/tuakana to have empathy with their needs and to be able to listen to them with an open mind. In selecting a mentor/tuakana the mentee/teina should generally prioritise interpersonal qualities – such as trust, empathy, and general life skills and experience – above particular professional attributes such as specific types of research experience or technical knowledge.

The potential for establishing a mentoring relationship is normally best explored by meeting face to face, but on the clear understanding that to do so does not place an obligation on either party to continue.

## Establishing and managing a mentoring relationship

While the circumstances of each mentoring relationship will be unique, in accordance with the personal needs of the mentee/teina, each party should have a clear understanding of their mutual expectations. Some measures and actions that may help ensure a productive mentoring relationship are:

- Agreeing to an initial trial of the mentoring relationship.
- Establishing a common understanding around the need to maintain complete confidentiality.
- Agreeing to review the mentoring relationship after a fixed time period to determine whether or not it should continue.
- Keeping a mentoring journal as a record of topics discussed and actions proposed or taken.
- Establishing a protocol/tikanga—around how often to meet, for how long, in what format, and whether or not to structure the meetings.
- Meeting in a neutral, safe and anonymous public space.
- Establishing boundaries for the scope of the mentoring relationship.
- Determining a mechanism for the mentee/teina to contact the mentor/tuakana if an emergency arises, if the mentor/tuakana is comfortable with this level of commitment.

## The lifespan of a mentoring relationship

Whilst some mentoring relationships will have a long life time, others will be for a shorter term; some relationships pause temporarily, and others run their course. Ending a mentoring relationship by mutual agreement (other than as the result of a specific event that destroyed trust, or a loss of reciprocity) should be viewed as a healthy progression in the career progression of the mentee/teina, and not a failure or sign of weakness in the relationship. Thus, the mentor/tuakana and mentee/teina need to be able to openly discuss ending the relationship and be prepared to accede if the other wishes to end the relationship.

Common reasons why a mentoring relationship might cease include:

- The mentee/teina has developed such that she no longer feels the need for a mentoring relationship, or is ready to seek a different mentor whose knowledge is better aligned with the needs of the next career stage.
- The mentor/tuakana feels unable to make any further contribution—the mentee/teina may be ready to act independently, or may need to seek a new mentor.

- An agreed time period has elapsed and neither party in the relationship sees sufficient benefit in continuing.
- The circumstances of the mentee/teina or mentor/tuakana have changed so that the relationship is no longer practicable.
- The employment roles of the mentee/teina and mentor/tuakana are no longer sufficiently independent of each other.
- Breakdown of trust and/or confidence between the parties, especially if the mentee/teina no longer feels able to be open about their circumstances, or feels the mentor/tuakana is interfering in other work relationships.
- The mentee/teina considers that reciprocity has been lost or the mentor/tuakana has become overly dominant or directive in the relationship.

## Adapting these guidelines to your context

These guidelines are intended to be a start, not an end point, in shaping mentoring relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is envisaged that Māori, Pasifika, and other groups of people will adapt and develop these guidelines in ways that are distinctive and meaningful to them and their tikanga, reflecting diverse mentoring scenarios that are responsive to their collective rights, needs and interests.

## Further information

There is a wide variety of international literature on mentoring, and overseas-based professional organisations often provide advice on mentoring in the context of career development in the specific profession. References of particular relevance to the context of the Aotearoa New Zealand research community include:

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- Hook, G. R., Waaka, T., & Raumati, L. P. (2007). Mentoring Māori within a Pākehā framework. *MAI Review*, 1(3).
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- O’Brien, J. (2014). What a difference a mentor can make. *New Zealand Science Review*, 71(3), 60–61.
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