

Frequently Asked Questions

Mentor Connect Program

The purpose of Mentor Connect is to improve the professionalism and success of Alberta lawyers.

The program engages experienced counsel to guide those with less experience in realizing their career goals and achieving greater personal and professional balance in their lives.

Specifically, a successful mentoring relationship should help lawyers to:

- *Develop practical skills.*
- *Discuss career management issues.*
- *Contribute to their sense of integrity.*
- *Increase their knowledge of legal customs.*
- *Obtain guidance and counsel on professional life as a lawyer.*
- *Encourage the use of best practices and highest ideals in the practice of law.*
- *Improve leadership bench strength within their law firms, corporate legal departments, institutions (such as universities), Not-For-Profit organizations and the profession.*

Mentees drive the conversations. They identify the issues they hope to address to improve their success and effectiveness.

For questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact the Law Society's Mentorship Team at 1-800-661-9003 or mentorship@lawsociety.ab.ca.

1. How does this work?

Mentor Connect matches individual lawyers and mentors based on areas of law, geographical proximity, and similar interests. Matching will be done by staff of the Mentorship team at the Law Society.

The goal of Mentor Connect is to provide a valuable mentoring experience for mentors and mentees alike. We ask for an initial commitment of at least three months to decide if the relationship is working and what benefits you are gaining from it. If there is a problem or the chemistry is wrong, a new pairing may be the answer. If the relationship is working, the program continues a year. You are more than welcome to keep in touch and arrange additional meetings after that but there is no obligation to do so.

Through all of this, Law Society staff will play a supporting role by:

- Maintaining a list of mentors who want to participate in the program.
- Matching mentors and mentees.
- Receiving confidential feedback from participants.

- Responding to any concerns or requests for accommodation that may arise during the program. All participants are encouraged to indicate any special needs or requirements on their registration form.
- Administering evaluation forms to mentors and mentees.
- Coordinating training of mentors.

2. What does it cost?

Participation in Mentor Connect is free.

3. How is this different from other mentoring programs that the Law Society offers?

The Law Society of Alberta has four distinct mentorship programs for its members. You can choose to participate in whichever one appeals to you the most or sign up for all of them if you want. Since each program offers unique benefits to mentors and mentees alike, you can register for as many as your time permits.

In addition to Mentor Connect, we offer:

- [Mentor Express](#), which facilitates one-time one-hour meetings between experienced lawyers as mentors and less-experienced lawyers or articling students as mentees. Each mentor meets with a cross section of mentees over the course of a year. Each mentee meets with multiple mentors.
- [AdvisorLink](#), which connects lawyers or articling students with more experienced lawyers to answer one-off substantive law inquiries. Requests are made to the Law Society by phone or through an online form.
- [Indigenous Law Mentorship Program](#), which matches Indigenous Alberta lawyers with Indigenous law students. It provides an opportunity for students to meet and connect with experienced Indigenous counsel. Students meet one-on-one with their mentor for advice, guidance and connections. Mentors and mentees are paired by Law Society staff based on similar interests and backgrounds.

4. I am a law student – can I participate?

In the future Mentor Connect may be available to law students and National Committee on Accreditation (NCA) candidates, but for now it is limited to lawyers and articling students.

5. How much time is involved?

Aim for three to five hours a month at the start and go from there.

Plan for a certain number of contacts at the outset of the relationship but remain flexible. Your dealings with each other may be completely scheduled or they may be based on mutual convenience on short notice. The objective is to create a relationship that works for both of you. You should meet on a regular basis, at least once a month in the initial phase to develop a rapport and build trust.

You decide when and where that happens. You may prefer to have lunch or coffee together at the start of each month, meet weekly by Zoom or Teams for 30 minutes, and have phone meetings in between. The key is to find a time and place that works for you.

6. Do I qualify to be a mentor?

If you have practised for at least five years and have never been suspended, disbarred from the practice of law or resigned in the face of discipline, by any law society or bar association in any jurisdiction, and have no formal disciplinary complaints pending, you can serve as a mentor in Mentor Connect.

7. Can the required five years of legal experience for mentors come from a jurisdiction outside Alberta?

Yes. A mentor's years of experience in other provinces or jurisdictions (not just Alberta) counts cumulatively toward the five-year requirement.

8. I qualify to be a mentor, but am I ready?

During your practice, you have gained hard-won experience and insight into how best to deal with clients, other lawyers and judges. You have developed office systems that work and may have seen others that do not. You know the importance of organization and developing a strategy, whether it involves running a trial, settlement negotiations or closing a deal. You enjoy practising law without letting it be the only thing in your life.

Your successes and failures have taught you lessons that might benefit others if you are willing to share. You are ready.

9. I am a member of the Law Society of Alberta, but I live and work in another province. Can I still participate in Mentor Connect?

Yes. There is nothing preventing you from participating in the program if you practise and live elsewhere.

10. I have been practising for several years. How will I benefit from being a mentee at this stage?

Mentorship can benefit a lawyer at any stage of their career. Your early training and exposure may have been to lawyers with poor practice management skills or who did not share their experience with you when you were a junior. Maybe you have practised in a firm with well-developed support systems and have recently broken away to set up your own shop. Or you are moving into a new practice area, or simply moving to a new office setting.

Having a mentor will help you recognize the hazards and let you learn from other people's mistakes as well as your own.

11. Can a lawyer be a mentor to more than one mentee at a time? Likewise, can a mentee have more than one mentor?

Yes and no. The Law Society has designed this program to encourage one-on-one interaction and to develop a relationship between the mentor and mentee. While we encourage one-on-one relationships, lawyers can serve as a mentor to more than one

mentee, and mentees can have more than one mentor, especially in circumstances where mentoring would not otherwise occur. You can also repeat the program when your original matching expires.

12. I would like to talk to a mentor living in another city. Do mentoring sessions have to be in-person?

No. While we recommend in-person mentorship sessions whenever possible, they are not always feasible, especially under the current circumstances of a global pandemic. Please let the Mentorship team at the Law Society know if you need help with video conference software or with any other part of setting up a remote meeting.

13. Do I have to repeat the orientation every time I start a new mentoring relationship?

Yes. You need to repeat the orientation regardless of previous participation. This ensures you are up to date on any mentoring rule, policy or procedure changes. Most importantly, the orientation is designed to properly launch the relationship by facilitating the opportunity to meet, discuss communication preferences and set-up a few first meetings.

14. Does legal research play a part of the relationship?

No. Mentors are neither required nor expected to do legal research.

15. Can we discuss situational matters and substantive law questions?

No. The purpose of Mentor Connect is to help new lawyers become the lawyer they would like to be and to gain insight into career management, work-life balance and dealing with difficult clients, judges and counsel. It is not to discuss substantive law questions or develop plans for your files. For that, mentees are urged to contact the Law Society's [AdvisorLink](#) service.

16. What is the mentee's professional responsibility?

Mentees should evaluate the information they receive from their mentors using their professional judgment and provide client advice based solely on their own professional opinion, research and evaluation. This does not preclude a mentor from providing or suggesting a possible referral to the mentee, but the mentor's role is not to act as a second counsel.

17. What about client confidentiality?

The provisions of the *Code of Conduct* will always apply. Take care to avoid disclosing confidential information. Be aware of the potential for conflicts of interest. There is no solicitor-client privilege for communications between a mentor and a mentee.

18. How are mentors assigned to mentees?

Factors used to match mentors with mentees include geography, personal interests, availability and professional experience. Mentors and mentees are also asked to identify any characteristics or special interests that would be important to them in the matching process.

19. Who initiates the first contact?

Law Society staff will contact the mentor and mentee to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet at the Law Society's office or virtually using video conference software. Other forms of contact like email or texting could be used once you develop a rapport. Mentorship staff at the Law Society will only participate in the first meeting.

20. What are the first things I should talk about with my mentor/mentee?

Develop a mentoring plan early on that lays out expectations and objectives. You should also review confidentiality issues as soon as possible. Confidential client information should never be discussed, and mentors should not be asked for or provide specific legal advice.

21. What are some of the joint activities that might be appropriate?

Some ideas for appropriate joint activities include the following:

- **Job shadowing.** This provides mentees with a great window into practising in a different work environment and lets mentees be introduced to other members of the mentor's team.
- **Networking.** Mentors can introduce their mentees to members of the judiciary, court officials and other lawyers, or invite mentees to sit in on court proceedings with them.
- **Professional development.** Consider attending Continuing Legal Education seminars, Canadian Bar Association sub-section meetings and other suitable law-related social events together.

22. What do I do if a personal issue arises that requires professional assistance?

Mentors are not expected to provide professional advice on personal matters, but those services are available through the [Assist Program](#). The Law Society also maintains contact information for other services available through the community and can assist with any referral that might be required.

23. What are our disclosure obligations if our discussions reveal conduct deserving of sanction, a potential liability claim, safety issues or other concerns?

Mentors may share information about mentees with the Law Society to provide them with additional support for their professionalism and conduct as a lawyer. Mentors are obligated to report serious ethical violations concerning a lawyer's violation of the Code of Professional Conduct that raise a substantial question about the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer. Rules 2.03(3) and 6.01(3) in the Code of Conduct provide guidance on this matter. When in doubt, you are encouraged to contact the [Office of the Practice Advisor](#) at the Law Society of Alberta for confidential assistance.