

IMPAACT Early Career Investigator Mentor Guidelines

Thank you for mentoring an IMPAACT Early Career Investigator! A good mentoring relationship can play an instrumental role in the success and career of an Early Career Investigator, as positive mentoring relationships can strengthen the investigator's networks and build confidence as they navigate the intricacies of the HIV-research community. This document provides general guidelines to assist you in structuring your mentoring relationship with the investigator.

Mentoring the next generation of scientists is a shared professional responsibility of all scientists and is crucial to ensuring that the scientific leadership of the IMPAACT Network is reflective of the communities served. Thank you for sharing your time and network with an IMPAACT Early Career Investigator!

I. Getting Started

Building Trust Through Communication

Although it's been observed that the best mentor-mentee dynamics usually emerge when the mentee assumes responsibility for overseeing the mentoring connection, Early Career Investigators may be initially hesitant about taking on this role. Help the investigator take the lead, identify needs, and seek advice by assuring them that their success is also a priority for you. Reach out to the investigator, especially early in the relationship to establish rapport. Discuss both parties' communication preferences, needs and any boundaries to ensure both mentor and mentee feel respected. Laying this foundation early on will instill a sense of confidence and support the investigator's professional growth.

Structure Your First Meeting and Prepare for Your Role

The first meeting is an opportunity to set the tone for your mentoring relationship and to clarify interests and needs. Be sure to set aside enough time for this meeting and consider structuring it with an agenda. Ask the investigator to carefully identify their specific goals for this mentoring relationship before meeting with you (e.g., type of support needed from the mentor, specific guidance needed related to the project, specific skills they want to develop). Requesting a copy of their CV before the first meeting may also be helpful.

Agree on the Goals of Your Relationship

After learning more about the investigator's project goals, work together to discuss how your mentoring relationship can best support their completion. There will be a degree of trial and error until you are able to determine the appropriate style and quantity of support.

Establishing a schedule for routine communication – whether in person, virtually, or via email will aid the investigator in addressing project challenges. When setting up regular

meetings, the needs of the investigator, your own needs, and the project requirements should all be considered when determining the frequency and duration of these check ins. Note that not all Early Career Investigators will require the same structure. A combination of regular meetings and good email communication can increase the success of the project and the mentorship experience while reducing the frequency and duration of ad-hoc meetings.

Clarify and Respect Confidentiality

The mentoring relationship should function as a secure environment where the investigator can freely voice project-related worries and actively seek career advice from their mentor. Whenever relevant, highlighting the principle of confidentiality for both participants will encourage a climate of candid and open communication.

Action Items:

- Set up an initial meeting with the Early Career Investigator to discuss research project and expectations regarding mentor support.
- Be prepared to structure and plan the first meeting.
- Define expectations for support, meeting frequency and length.
- Emphasize the confidentiality of the relationship.

II. Managing the Evolving Mentoring Relationship

Provide Examples of Good Practice

Give advance thought to what your own experiences have taught you. What support were you given that you can now pass on? Think about how you can help the investigator better navigate their project and the IMPAACT network.

Share your experiences, perspectives, and approaches which allowed you to advance in your career. Consider sharing some of the key challenges you were confronted with in terms of research, grantsmanship, publishing, etc. Share examples of the options you identified for resolving the problem, your decision-making strategy, the actions you took, and the outcomes you obtained.

Encourage Networking

Professional integration into academia and the scientific community relies on both what you know, and *who* you know. Getting connected with other researchers and becoming known in the field can enhance the Early Career Investigator's reputation, visibility, ability to collaborate on research and writing, and their competitiveness when it comes to seeking funding. Encourage the investigator to take part in activities (in person or virtual), and share opportunities that help them develop skills and expand their networks.

Give Constructive Feedback

Provide regular feedback to the investigator to help the research project stay on track and to promote professional development. To ensure the greatest impact on the project, be sure that feedback is given promptly and consistently. Equally important, feedback should be given in a clear, non-judgmental way.

When delivering feedback, consider the following:

- Acknowledge the investigator's contributions as well as noting areas for improvement.
- When delivering feedback, provide specific examples and clear directives about which items or actions should be modified. Make sure that feedback is objective.
- When planning to give feedback, keep things simple. Instead of compiling an extensive list of shortcomings that might overwhelm and discourage the investigator, choose a limited set of areas you intend to address.
- Maintain eye contact and a measured tone when delivering feedback. Be aware of cross-cultural differences which may complicate the feedback process. Note that each investigator will have a different level of familiarity with and comfort receiving feedback.

III. Resources

[Introduction to effective mentorship for early-career research scientists](#)

IV. References

Guide adapted from the following sources:

[Des Jarlais, Christine D. Mentor Orientation & Guidelines, 2004](#)

[University of California San Francisco. UCSF Graduate Student Mentoring Program: Guidelines for Faculty Mentors, 2004](#)

[University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Clinical and Translational Research. Mentors: Best Practices for Giving Feedback, no date](#)

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