



# AES Peer Group Mentoring Program Guide

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## AES Online Peer Group Mentoring Program Guide 2026-2027

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Key Dates for 2025 Program.....	4
What is peer-group mentoring?.....	4
Defining mentoring .....	5
Roles and responsibilities.....	6
Mentors .....	6
Associate mentors .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Mentees .....	7
AES Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group.....	7
Project Officer .....	7
Phase 1: Program set up.....	8
Mentors and associate mentors' nomination .....	8
Associate mentors selected.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Mentors and associate mentors matched .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Mentee nomination.....	8
Mentees selected and matched.....	8
Phase 2 Mentoring.....	9
Mentor Community of Practice.....	9
Online orientation session.....	9
Ongoing mentoring sessions .....	9
First mentoring group meeting .....	9
Introductions, expectations and goal setting .....	9
Ongoing mentoring meetings .....	10
Final mentoring group meeting.....	10
Phase 3: AES Peer Group Mentoring Program monitoring and continuous improvement.....	11
What else do I need to know? .....	11
Policies .....	11
Ending the relationship early.....	11
Code of conduct.....	11

# Introduction

The Australian Evaluation Society's (AES's) online Peer Group Mentoring program is part of the AES suite of offerings to support members and improve evaluation methodology, outcomes, and usage.

The program sees small groups of emerging and mid-career evaluators connect with evaluation leaders and emerging leaders with recognised expertise in a particular area of practice. Mentoring groups meet online on a regular basis over 10 months to discuss issues in their practice, and learn from and support each other. Mentees also connect with their peers between sessions. Mentors and mentees build facilitation skills, gain new insights, and connect with peers across the AES.

The program is free for AES members, and is run by a small group of AES volunteers. The program is intended to support evaluators at all levels, and is particularly helpful for evaluators who experience professional isolation.

## History of the program

The AES Group Mentoring Program was developed in response to a high level of demand for evaluation mentorship identified in the 2019-22 strategic planning membership survey.

The program was piloted from January to June 2021 and operated for a second time from May to November 2022. In response to evaluation findings from the pilot and first year, the program's next iteration was extended to run from mid-2023 to mid-2024. The pilot and the second iteration of the program were both evaluated, but the 2023-24 program was not evaluated as it was thought unlikely that significant changes would be found. The pilot and 2022 evaluations found the program was worthwhile for mentors and mentees. Mentees reported an increase in their confidence and appreciation for the field of evaluation, while mentors reported satisfaction in supporting emerging evaluators, and enjoyment of expanding their own thinking through guiding groups of mentees.

The pilot and 2023 evaluations can be found at <https://www.aes.asn.au/evaluation-resources/discussion-papers-and-reports>.

Key features of the program, such as the online group format, focus on mentoring rather than training, and facilitation of peer-to-peer connections, were found to be relevant and useful for participants. The program uses a many-to-many mentoring (MTMM) approach involving small groups of two mentors and six to seven mentees.

To support volunteer sustainability, the program now runs every 18-months, alternating between operating to a calendar year and a financial year. This gives the working group time to wrap up one iteration before initiating the next. The next program will operate from July 2026 to May 2027. AES members will be invited to submit expressions of interest for participation as mentors or mentees in the 2026-2027 program.

## Program Overview

The AES peer group mentoring program is an online mentoring program, in which two or more experienced evaluators guide a small group of emerging and mid-career evaluators through their professional journey. Participants benefit from the expertise and leadership of the mentors and from the mentee peer support, where mentees with diverse experiences can learn from other mentees in pursuit of a common learning goal and develop their support network in the evaluation field.

The group mentoring experience is different from traditional 1:1 mentoring. Mentees benefit from the program when they interact and actively engage with their groups and share experiences. Rather than a training course or series of mentor-led lectures, seminars or workshops, peer-to-peer dialogue and active engagement is expected. Mentors play a facilitatory and guiding role, and support mentees to explore ideas, find solutions to problems, build their understanding of the practice of evaluation and the importance of building a peer support network.

The AES peer-group mentoring program operates in three phases:

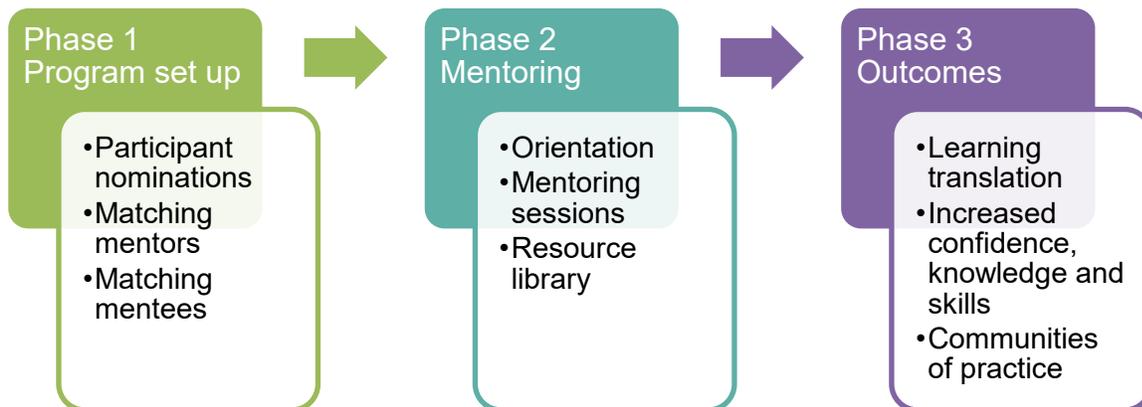


Figure 1 AES Peer Group Mentoring Program phases

Mentoring groups are led by two or more mentors who work together to support the learning and development of mentees. Mentors are AES Fellows, senior evaluators, evaluation leaders, and emerging leaders looking to build mentoring skills, who have volunteered to act as mentors to a small group of mentees. Mentors partner with at least one other mentor to lead their group. This may be a partnership between two experienced evaluators, or a partnership between an experienced evaluator and a mid-career evaluator seeking to develop skills in mentorship (known in previous years as ‘Associate Mentors’). Mentors apply to the program with their proposed mentoring partner.

Each mentor pair will meet with a group of six to seven mentees on an agreed schedule, usually once per month, over the course of ten months. The structure of each group’s mentorship program will be flexible, depending on the mentors’ specialisation focus, facilitation style preferences, and needs and

goals of the mentees involved. It is up to the mentors and mentees in each group to negotiate their own mutually agreeable format and common goal.

The peer-group mentoring program is intended to support an evolving understanding of the needs and expectations of mentees, as well as potential models that would work for the AES membership. The program will be formally evaluated again in 2026. The program was initially evaluated in 2021 and 2022. In 2023, a monitoring and feedback strategy was implemented with a view to continual improvement. Participants of the program are expected to participate in the evaluation.

The peer-group mentoring program is aligned to the [AES Values](#).

## Key Dates for 2026-27 Program

Stage	Date
Mentor expressions of interest	Due by 29 March 2026
Mentors confirmed	10 April 2026
Mentee expressions of interest open	1 May 2026
Mentee expressions of interest close	17 May 2026
Mentees selected and notified	12 June 2026
Mentors' 1 <sup>st</sup> Community of practice	12 June 2026, 12pm AEST
Orientation session for mentees and mentors	3 July 2026, 12pm AEST
First formal mentoring session	July 2026 (To be determined by each group)
Final closing session	9 May 2027, 12pm AEST
Final group session (Mentoring program) ends	May- June 2027

## What is many-to-many group mentoring?

The AES online peer group mentoring program uses a many-to-many group mentoring (MTMM) approach involving two mentors working with a small group of mentees who share similar interests and professional development goals.

Mentoring is intended to support mentees' professional development, growth, and competencies as evaluation practitioners. Unlike a traditional one-to-one mentoring program, group mentoring also benefits participants through having access to diverse experiences and perspectives that enrich understanding of the practice of evaluation. Research indicates that MTMM models produce positive outcomes, with mentors guiding mentee development and the group arrangement fostering collaborative learning and networked support (Huizing, 2012). In addition to relationships with mentors, mentees build relationships with peers, creating a peer support network intended to provide sustainable benefits beyond the life of the program.

## Defining mentoring

The AES online, group mentoring program allows each group to bring to the fore, in different ways, the following aspects:

- A structured relationship between experienced evaluators and less experienced AES members for guidance and support, while maintaining individual responsibility for learning of each participant. Through serving as role models, sharing their insights, listening objectively, acting as a sounding board, and making suggestions, mentors facilitate the learning and application of critical problem-solving skills in decision-making by mentees. They may ask open questions to challenge ways of thinking and actions taken by mentees to handle or manage difficult situations or to make progress towards their professional development goals. This relationship has a holistic focus on professional development and is based on respect, mutual trust, encouragement, constructive comments, and commitment to learning. It is goal-oriented and driven by the mentee.
- Small groups of up to seven mentees and two mentors in which AES members share their mentoring experience, develop their capacity together and learn from one another. Mentees learn not only from mentors but also from each other and the cross-fertilisation accelerates learning. This element resembles formal peer support mechanisms and communities of practice that are intended to provide mutual social support. Here, the mentor facilitates the sharing of mentee experiences to work through challenging situations. The dialogic approach inherent in MMTM allows for difficulties, contradictions and vulnerabilities to be raised which can enhance group engagement (Huizing, 2012). MTMM exposes mentees to varied professional identities, lived experiences and mentoring styles.
- Knowledge and skill-based development in specific areas that are directly relevant to workplace responsibilities, for example,
  - knowledge about the theoretical foundations of evaluation which are distinct from other forms of inquiry
  - value perspectives embedded within an evaluand
  - research methods for data collection and analysis
  - the tasks carried out during an evaluation
  - how to take a lead role to embed evaluative thinking in an organisation or explore specific issues related to a particular sector.

# Roles, responsibilities and expectations

All participants must be AES members. All AES members must adhere to the Code of Ethics. Mentors and mentees are all expected to commit to the mentoring relationship and dedicate time to its success. All participants are expected to:

- Read program guidelines and policies.
- Attend any preparation sessions.
- Sign and submit a mentoring agreement.
- Agree on a mentoring schedule, session expectations, individual and group professional goals.
- Attend mentoring meetings, prepare appropriately, and attempt any follow up actions
- Be professional, respectful and observe confidentiality.
- Contact the Project Officer if any questions or concerns arise.
- Participate in required evaluations and give feedback.

## Mentors

Mentors work together, usually in pairs. Often, a highly experienced evaluator will form a mentoring partnership with a mid-career evaluator looking to build their skills in mentorship, facilitation and leadership. Other times, two experienced evaluators work together as equal mentoring partners. There are also other ways that mentors may partner.

The mentors will lead their mentoring group of five to seven mentees for the duration of the program. Mentoring groups will meet a minimum of once per month for ten months. The structure of each group's mentorship program will depend on the mentors' specialisation focus, and the needs and goals of the mentees involved. It is up to the mentors and mentees in each group to negotiate a mutually agreeable format and common goal.

Responsibilities of the mentors include:

- Regularly attend the Mentor Community of Practice sessions to explore with other mentors good practice techniques for effective facilitation of online MTMM.
- Select a group of suitable mentees (from the program applicant pool) who are likely to be able to work together.
- Commit to mentees through sharing experience and providing practical advice.
- In consultation with the mentee group, set an agreed meeting schedule, usually once per month, and convene meetings.
- Assist mentees to set an achievable individual and/or group goal.
- Be inclusive, considering the experiences and needs of people of all levels of expertise and experience in evaluation as well as other professional skills and abilities, cultural protocols and preferred ways of working, genders, and sexualities.
- Assist the mentees to plan for success.
- Provide advice and guidance, as required.
- Reflect on progress.

## Mentees

The AES Group Mentoring program is intended to support the professional development of mentees through the translation of their learning into professional practice. To maximise the benefits of the program, mentees are required to:

- Identify their own personal mentoring goals, objectives, and motivations.
- Attend mentoring online meetings throughout the duration of the program.
- Attend to any pre or post meeting tasks.
- Actively participate in online meeting discussions and group dialogue between meetings.
- Engage in reflective practice and application of their learning.
- Track and communicate progress towards identified goal(s).
- Communicate and work through challenges.
- Contribute to the program monitoring and evaluation activities when requested.

## AES Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group

The Working Group are volunteers who:

- Set up the program by
  - Promoting the program to potential mentors, associate mentors, and mentees.
  - Conducting the mentor, associate mentor and mentee selection and matching process.
- Developing the program guide.
- Support the Mentoring Phase of the program by
  - Leading the program orientation session.
  - Attending the Mentor Community of Practice Sessions, as required.

## Project Officer

The Mentoring Project Officer is responsible for coordinating the administration of the program. This involves:

- Conducting membership liaison and communication including for the mentee nomination and selection process.
- Acting as the first point of contact for mentors and coordinating the development and sharing of a mentor resource pack.
- Acting as a point of contact for program participants throughout the program.
- Regularly checking in on program participants.
- Setting up key online meetings such as:
  - Initial orientation session for mentees and mentors.
  - Final closing session for mentees and mentors.
  - Mentor Community of Practice sessions.
- Coordinating any surveys with mentees during the program.
- Supporting the evaluation of the program through survey set up and coordination of focus groups and interviews, if required.

# Phase I: Program set up

## Mentors' nomination

Experienced evaluators and emerging leaders in evaluation who are interested in becoming mentors in the 2026-2027 program are asked to complete a combined nomination form and identify their proposed focus topic by 29 March 2026.

Prospective mentors should

- Consider each other's strengths and constraints.
- Explicitly name their expertise.
- Consider using a lead facilitator (rotating or fixed) to open, close and manage peer-to-peer group interaction.
- Decide how peer-to-peer processes will be introduced and supported.

Enquiries about mentoring can be made by emailing [mentoring@aes.asn.au](mailto:mentoring@aes.asn.au).

## Mentors are selected.

The Working Group reviews the nominations for mentors and makes selections based on their professional qualifications and experience, evaluation specialisation and proposed group focus, and motivations for becoming involved in the program.

## Mentee nomination

Potential mentees nominate through the mentee online form where personal, professional and motivational details are collected and collated. Mentees are also asked to indicate a mentoring group focus topic they are particularly interested in and why. The professional biographies of mentors and a summary of their mentoring group's focus are available on the AES website.

Interested mentees are required to complete the online nomination form by 17 May 2026.

## Mentees selected and matched

The Working Group reviews the mentee nominations and makes recommendations to mentors on based on:

- Mentee's stated goals/expectations, motivations, and alignment with their preferred mentorship focus.
- 
- The diversity of personal and professional backgrounds within each group (to support peer learning).

- The alignment of interests of each group to other potential mentees in the group (to support the group in working towards common goals).

Applicants who are not selected will be notified of the outcome and can reapply for future rounds.

## Phase 2: Mentoring

### Mentor Community of Practice

The Mentor Community of Practice enables mentors to share resources, advice and support to ensure effective engagement, collaboration and facilitation of peer-to-peer relationship building in an online environment.

These online meetings are held monthly and chaired by the Project Officer.

### Online orientation session

An orientation session for mentors and mentees is held prior to the commencement of the mentoring groups.

The purpose of the online orientation session is to:

- Provide an overview of the mentoring model, structure and how it has evolved based on insights of previous evaluation and earlier programs.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees.
- Allow mentoring groups to become acquainted and decide on their communications systems (such as WhatsApp) for out of session communication.
- Introduce participants to the project officer and their role.
- Explain the participants expected contribution to the program monitoring activities.

### Ongoing mentoring sessions

Each mentoring group's approach will be different, depending on the objectives, experiences and specific needs and interests of the participants. Suggestions for the first, subsequent and final meetings are outlined below.

### First mentoring group meeting

#### Introductions, expectations and goal setting

The first meeting is critical for establishing the foundations of a successful peer group mentoring relationship. The mentors will coordinate a mutually agreeable date for the first meeting of the

mentoring group at the orientation session. **Future meeting dates will be decided during the first meeting and set up by the mentor.**

Essential to a successful mentoring relationship are two important aspects, which should be addressed within this first meeting to help set the group up for success:

1. Setting expectations and objectives. These should be prepared in advance by all participants for a facilitated discussion and negotiation.
2. Developing a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. In a group mentoring scenario, this requires both trust between mentors and mentees, and amongst mentees. During the first meeting, the group will focus on getting to know one another.

Suggested discussion points for the first meeting:

- Getting to know each other.
- Ground rules for working together.
- Mentee expectations, goals and motivations.
- Making use of available resources including the mentoring journal to support reflective practice.
- Future meeting dates.
- Confirming everyone has access to out of session platforms for between meeting communication.
- Whether to create an opportunity to get together face-to-face at aes26.

## Ongoing mentoring meetings

The following structures were demonstrated to be helpful in the evaluation of the online group mentoring pilot and are recommended:

<b>Meeting frequency:</b>	Monthly, or more frequently by mutual agreement.
<b>Meeting duration:</b>	1.5 hours.
<b>Meeting structure:</b>	incorporates a range of useful engagement and learning transfer techniques, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check in with mentees.</li><li>• Reflection on application of the previous meeting topic.</li><li>• Meeting topic discussion.</li><li>• Bring a problem (rotating schedule for participants) where all group members debate a topic.</li></ul>

## Final mentoring group meeting

The final mentoring meetings are intended for informal reflection on progress, areas for continued development and discussion about ongoing contact.

## Phase 3: AES Peer Group Mentoring Program monitoring and continuous improvement

All program participants are expected to participate in monitoring and evaluation activities throughout the course of and following completion of the mentorship program. This may include records of self-assessments, surveys, interviews and focus groups. Mentees may be approached to participate in a future evaluation. Appointments for focus groups and interviews will be set up well in advance to encourage participation.

The Pathways Committee Mentoring Working Group encourages any suggestions and feedback on the program at any stage from all participants. Formal feedback process will be developed for the 2026-27 program.

## What else do I need to know?

### Policies

#### Ending the relationship early

Where a mentor or mentee cannot or does not wish to continue participating in the mentoring program, they should notify the project officer of their decision at the earliest opportunity.

In situations where this is due to difficulties between members of the group, or between the mentee and mentor, the project officer should be notified. If this participant wishes to work through the issue, the project officer will support the facilitation of this. Otherwise, the Mentoring Agreement includes a 'no fault' clause, which enables the mentee or mentor to end the mentoring relationship without any blame attached.

#### Code of conduct

All AES members must abide by the AES Code of Conduct. All participants are expected to adhere to the responsibilities outlined in the *Participant roles and expectations* section. In particular, participants must:

- Always observe confidentiality.
- Maintain professional behaviour.
- Fulfill agreed commitments.
- Contact the project officer with any concerns of difficulties.



