



WiMS Womentoring Program

Guidelines

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1. What is “womentoring”?

WIOMSA’s Network for Women in Marine Science (WiMS) is piloting a medium-term womentoring (“womentoring”) program, for the benefit of the WiMS community. A mentor (“womentor”) is someone who helps a mentee (“womentee”) grow, develop, make decisions, and receive guidance for their future. The womentor acts as a role model for the womentee, but womentoring relationships are beneficial to both parties. Womentoring is a great way to connect the WiMS community, validate the experience of the senior scientists and give a broad range of women in marine science (including students, early-career scientists, i.e. within 5-10 years of their highest degree, or those that have recently re-entered the field) an opportunity to build their network. For women in marine science, womentoring can allow participants to discuss gender-specific challenges such as navigating biases, breaking the glass ceiling, and balancing work-life responsibilities. Through womentoring, women can gain confidence, develop essential skills, expand their professional networks, and find role models who inspire and empower them to advance in their careers. A WiMS Womentoring Program can help foster a more inclusive and diverse marine science community.

2. Objectives of the WiMS Womentoring Program

The objectives of a WiMS Womentoring program are structured around several key areas, designed to support the professional and personal growth of women in this field. These



objectives can be tailored to the specific needs and context of the womentees, ensuring that the womentoring program effectively supports their growth and success in marine science.

1. Career Development and Advancement:

- To help womentees navigate their career paths by guiding career opportunities, job searching, and career transitions.
- To support womentees in setting and achieving career goals, including academic advancements, leadership roles, and other professional milestones.

2. Skill Enhancement:

- To provide womentees with opportunities to develop specific skills relevant to marine science, such as research techniques, scientific writing, public speaking, grant writing, and data analysis.
- To facilitate the acquisition of soft skills like networking, negotiation, leadership, and work-life balance.

3. Networking and Community Building:

- To create a strong support network among women in marine science in the Western Indian Ocean region, fostering a sense of community and shared experience.
- To connect womentees with a broader network of professionals, potentially leading to collaborative opportunities, partnerships, and visibility in the field.

4. Empowerment and Confidence Building:

- To empower womentees by building their confidence in their abilities and encouraging them to take on challenging roles or projects.
- To inspire womentees by sharing success stories and experiences from other women in marine science, highlighting diverse pathways to success.

5. Addressing Gender-Specific Challenges:

- To provide a safe space for womentees to discuss and find strategies to overcome gender-specific challenges in marine science, such as bias, discrimination, and balancing personal and professional responsibilities.
- To advocate for and promote gender equity within the marine science community.

6. Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:

- To promote diversity within marine science by supporting women from underrepresented backgrounds, including different ethnicities, nationalities, and socioeconomic statuses.
- To raise awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion in marine science and contribute to broader initiatives to achieve these goals.

7. Validating and enhancing the expertise of womentors

- Recognize and validate womentors' expertise, experience, and contributions by providing them with opportunities for professional growth, leadership development, and recognition within the program.
- Ensure that the womentoring experience is mutually beneficial, allowing womentors to refine their leadership and teaching skills, expand their



professional networks, and gain satisfaction from contributing to the advancement of women in marine science.

2. Eligibility

All participants will need to complete a registration form and sign an agreement to adhere to the Code of Conduct (Section 3). Further requirements include:

- **Womentors:**
 - Open to all WIOMSA members, with current valid subscription;
 - Experienced professionals (at least five years) in marine science, research, or related fields (academia, industry, government, NGOs, etc.);
 - Being passionate about supporting and guiding early-career professionals and students'
 - Can commit to regular mentoring sessions over a 6-month period (at least one 30 min-1 hour meeting per month);
 - Being available for at least one check-in meeting with the program team over the 6-month period;
 - Willingness to share career advice, skills, and experiences in a supportive and inclusive environment;
 - Both women and men working in the WIO region are eligible.
- **Womentees:**
 - Open to all WiMS members, with current valid subscription in WIOMSA;
 - Womentees can come from a broad range of women in the field of marine science, with suggested target participants including students, early-career scientists, i.e. within 5-10 years of their highest degree and those that have recently re-entered the field.
- **Program coordinators:**
 - Open to all WIOMSA and WiMS members, with current valid subscription.
- **Registration forms:**
 - womentor registration: <https://forms.gle/Nyrko4AeADyWMfdR8>
 - womentee registration: <https://forms.gle/Svqfd94ujEBt4mNE9>
 - program coordinator registration: <https://forms.gle/tvZdsu3zxKVuqcmX7>

3. Participation requirements, Code of conduct

- 1) Time commitment
 - a) Mentors and womentees will engage to dedicate time and effort towards womentoring relationship (30 min - 1 hour meetings once a month) for the duration of the pilot program (6 months);



- b) Attend scheduled program activities, including the kickoff meeting, mid-point check-in, and closing session (see 6 - Program structure - Key program activities);
 - c) Be responsive and proactive in scheduling and attending meetings with their womentoring partner.
- 2) Feedback and evaluation
- a) Complete dedicated program surveys sent by the program coordinators at key milestones (mid-point and end of the program);
 - b) Provide constructive feedback to help improve the womentoring experience for future participants;
 - c) Share insights on personal progress and program impact when requested.
- 3) Confidentiality and professionalism
- a) Respect the confidentiality of discussions between womentor and mentee;
 - b) Adhere to professional standards, fostering a positive and supportive womentoring environment;
 - c) Show respectful and inclusive behavior;
 - d) Avoid conflicts of interest or unethical behavior.
- 4) Problem resolution
- a) If any issues arise that affect the womentoring relationship or program experience, participants are encouraged to follow the problem reporting and resolution guidelines (Section 8).

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Below gives a short summary of the roles and responsibilities of both the womentor and the mentees. Please see Appendix 1 for additional resources on the best practices of building a successful womentorship. All participation in the WiMS Womentoring Program is voluntary. No monetary compensation will be offered.

Womentor Responsibilities:

- Provide guidance on career development, research, and professional challenges.
- Share knowledge, insights, and networking opportunities.
- Foster a supportive and inclusive environment.
- Offer constructive feedback and encouragement.
- Respect mentees' confidentiality and boundaries.
- Qualities of great womentors:
 - **Expertise in Marine Science or related fields:** Experienced womentors provide valuable insights, sharing their knowledge, career path, and professional perspectives to guide mentees effectively.
 - **Motivation:** Passionate womentors enjoy their work and are eager to share knowledge, fostering growth while respecting the womentor-mentee relationship and the WiMS Womentoring program.



- **Communication Skills:** Clear, positive, and constructive communication is essential for guiding, supporting, and encouraging womentees.
- **Love for Learning:** Great womentors stay informed about industry advancements through reading, workshops, and training, passing valuable knowledge to their womentees.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Effective womentors collaborate well, value diverse perspectives, and foster a supportive, team-oriented mindset
- **Commitment:** womentoring requires time and dedication. A strong womentor invests effort to build a meaningful, impactful relationship with their womentee.
- **Positive Attitude:** Encouraging and approachable womentors create a supportive environment where womentees feel comfortable discussing their goals and challenges.

Womentee Responsibilities:

- Define clear goals and expectations for the womentoring relationship.
- Be proactive in seeking advice and participating in discussions.
- Respect the womentor's time and commitments.
- Follow through on agreed actions or assignments.
- Be open to feedback and self-reflection.
- Qualities of Great womentees
 - Successful womentees share key traits that help them make the most of their womentoring experience. These qualities shape how they engage in professional settings and build meaningful womentor-mentee relationships.
 - **Motivation:** Be proactive in seeking guidance and taking initiative in your learning and career growth. Show enthusiasm and a willingness to challenge yourself.
 - **Communication Skills:** Express your goals, challenges, and feedback clearly. Be open to constructive advice and actively engage in discussions with your womentor.
 - **Love for Learning:** Stay curious, embrace new perspectives, and seek opportunities to expand your knowledge and skills. A growth mindset will help you maximize your womentoring experience.
 - **Team Player:** Respect your womentor's time and expertise, listen actively, and collaborate effectively. Being receptive to different viewpoints strengthens your professional adaptability.
 - **Commitment:** Take your womentoring relationship seriously by following through on discussions, setting goals, and dedicating time to self-improvement.
 - **Positive Attitude:** Approach challenges with resilience and optimism. A positive outlook fosters confidence, encourages problem-solving, and strengthens professional relationships.

Program Coordinator Responsibilities:



- **Develop communication materials** to promote the program and engage participants.
- **Conduct outreach** to recruit and support womentors and womentees.
- **Assist in womentor-womentee pairing** based on interests, goals, and availability.
- **Organize and participate in key events**, including the kick-off meeting and check-ins.
- **Track participant engagement** and address any challenges in womentoring relationships.
- **Gather and analyze feedback** through surveys and other evaluation tools.
- **Maintain a program calendar** to ensure key milestones and deadlines are met.
- **Manage a resource hub** with relevant womentoring guides, tools, and materials.
- **Serve as a point of contact** to facilitate problem-solving and support participants.
- **Prepare reports and summaries** on program progress and impact.
- **Support funding efforts** if applicable, including grant applications or sponsorship outreach.

5. Matching Criteria

- The WiMS Womentoring Team will pair the womentee with the womentor, based on a survey and registration form where the team will identify:
 - Shared interests or specialization (e.g., fisheries, marine biodiversity, oceanography)
 - Career stage alignment (early-career womentees with senior womentors)
 - Geographic proximity
 - Language preferences
- For this first WiMS Womentoring pilot program, we will select a maximum of 10 womentor-womentee pairs. The womentors will be first solicited from within the WiMS network. Once secured, WIOMSA and WiMS will launch calls on social media for womentees to register for the womentoring program.
- Mentors and womentees will be able to express preferences in their womentor selection process.

6. Program Structure

Duration

- The first pilot project will be planned for about 6 months, with the final wrap-up activities planned for the WIOMSA 2025 Symposium in October 2025.
- Frequency of meetings between womentors/womentees should be monthly or as mutually agreed.

Key program activities and timelines

Once womentors and womentees have been paired, a series of activities are planned to ensure that both womentors and womentees understand their roles, expectations, and how to make the



most of the experience. This structured yet flexible approach ensures engagement, accountability, and meaningful development for both womentors and mentees:

1. Kickoff Meeting (Week 1-2) – Setting the Foundation

A kickoff meeting will be held online with all womentor/mentee pairs in attendance to explain the goals of the womentoring program and expected outcomes, define the responsibilities of womentors and mentees, share best practices and guidelines for effective womentoring relationships, encourage mentees to define what they hope to achieve, and provide time for initial interactions.

2. Ongoing womentoring Sessions (At Least Monthly, Self-Scheduled)

First Meeting (Week 3-4): Establish rapport and discuss initial goals, set expectations for communication frequency and methods (see Appendix 2 for First Meeting questions).

Regular Check-ins (Monthly or Biweekly): Discuss challenges, progress, and key learnings, encourage mentees to reflect on their development, adjust goals and strategies as needed (see Appendix 3 for Guidelines for Meetings).

3. Mid-Point Check-in (Month 3-4) – Coordination Team Check-ins

One-on-One Check-ins: Program coordinators will meet separately with each womentor and mentee pair to assess progress, address challenges, and offer support.

4. Engagement activities where available (throughout)

Opportunities to participate in workshops/webinars on topics like grant writing, public speaking, or leadership skills will be highlighted by the coordination team to the womentor/ee pairs and should be encouraged by womentors when appropriate for their mentee.

5. Closing Session (Month 6 or End of Pilot) – Reflection & Next Steps

The pilot WiMS Womentoring program will aim to end by the October 2025 Symposium, with a special session or symposium event to reflect on the womentoring experience. The program coordinators will request both womentors and mentees to share key takeaways. The coordination team will try to organise a hybrid event, though in person attendance will be encouraged. The coordination team will summarise some program achievements, and will provide participants the opportunity to provide feedback via surveys or group discussions to assess effectiveness. The symposium event will be an opportunity to discuss continuation options, peer womentoring, or ways to expand the program.



Meeting Format

- The kickoff meeting, mid-point check-in, and ongoing womentor/mentee session will be virtual, unless geographic proximity and availability of the pair allows for in-person meetings between the womentor and womentee;
- The closing session at the WIOMSA Symposium will be hybrid, encouraging in-person attendance where possible.

7. Feedback and Evaluation

To ensure the womentoring program remains effective and beneficial for all participants, regular feedback is essential. The program coordinators will collect feedback from womentors and womentees to assess program effectiveness, the overall experience and identify areas for improvement both at the mid-point and at the end of the pilot program to assess.

Feedback will be gathered through surveys and interviews, focusing on key aspects such as the quality of the womentor-womentee relationship, improvements in skills and confidence, and the effectiveness of the program structure. These insights will help refine the program, ensuring it continues to meet the needs of participants and achieves its intended outcomes.

We encourage all participants to share their honest feedback, as their experiences and suggestions will directly contribute to enhancing future womentoring initiatives. Adjustments and improvements will be implemented based on this input, making the program even more impactful for future cohorts.

8. Problem reporting and resolution

Participants are encouraged to voice concerns early to prevent small issues from escalating. The womentoring program is designed to be a safe space for professional growth, and the coordination team is committed to supporting all participants in their womentoring journey. To ensure a positive and productive womentoring experience, it is important to address any concerns or challenges that may arise in a timely and structured manner. Below are the steps for reporting and resolving issues within the womentoring program.

1. Identify the Issue

Before escalating a concern, take a moment to clearly define the problem. Issues may include:

- Lack of communication or responsiveness from a womentor/womentee.
- Misalignment of expectations or unclear goals.
- Unprofessional or inappropriate behavior.



- Concerns about confidentiality or ethical conduct.

2. Attempt Direct Resolution

- If appropriate, discuss the issue directly with your womentoring partner in a respectful and professional manner.
- Express concerns clearly and propose potential solutions.
- Seek to understand their perspective and find a mutual resolution.

If the issue persists or is uncomfortable to address directly, proceed to the next step.

3. Contact the womentoring Program Coordinator

- Reach out to a program coordinator via email or a designated communication channel.
- Provide a clear summary of the issue, including any previous attempts to resolve it.
- Specify any preferred outcomes or support needed.

Confidentiality Note: All reports will be handled professionally and confidentially to ensure a fair and supportive resolution.

4. Mediation & Support

- The program coordinator will review the issue and may set up a private discussion with the reporting party.
- If needed, a mediation session may be arranged between the womentor and womentee to realign expectations.
- Additional resources or alternative solutions (such as reassigning womentor-womentee pairs) may be considered if the issue cannot be resolved.

5. Final Resolution & Follow-Up

- The program coordinator will communicate the final decision or agreed-upon resolution.
- If adjustments to the womentoring relationship are necessary, they will be made with minimal disruption to the program.
- A follow-up will be conducted to ensure the resolution is effective and both parties feel supported.

6. Escalation (If Necessary)

- If the issue is serious (e.g., harassment, discrimination, or violation of the Code of Conduct), it will be escalated to appropriate authorities within the organization.
- Further action may be taken, including formal warnings or removal from the program in cases of misconduct.



Conclusions

The WiMS Womentoring Program is more than just a womentoring initiative—it is a step toward building a strong, supportive, and inclusive community of women in marine science. By fostering meaningful womentor-womentee relationships, the program empowers participants to grow in their careers, develop essential skills, and navigate the unique challenges faced by women in the field.

Through structured activities, clear expectations, and a commitment to professional development, this pilot program aims to create lasting connections that extend beyond its six-month duration. The success of this initiative depends on the engagement, dedication, and feedback of its participants. As we conclude this pilot phase, we look forward to refining and expanding the program based on participant insights, ensuring its long-term impact.

Together, we are shaping a future where women in marine science are supported, empowered, and connected, strengthening both individual careers and the broader scientific community. We encourage all participants to stay engaged—whether as womentees, womentors, or alumni—and continue fostering the spirit of womentorship within WiMS.



Appendix 1. Additional resources on best practices

[Tips for Effective womentoring at Work](#)

[Common womentoring challenges](#)

[How to Build a Successful womentor Relationship](#)

[Building an authentic connection when womentoring](#)



Appendix 2. First Meeting questions

The following is a list of suggested questions to guide your first womentoring conversation, which will help you get to know one another and establish mutual expectations and goals. Then, note both parties' responses for future reference.

Questions to understand their background:

- What is your educational and professional background (including your current role and how long you have been with your organization)?
- What are your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- What are your short-term career goals? Long-term career goals?
- What are your hobbies/interests outside of work?

Questions to get a sense of what your womentoring partner is expecting:

- Mentors: What do you see as my role as your womentor?
- What ground rules should we set (e.g., confidentiality, openness, honesty)?
- What topics are off-limits (e.g., performance reviews, personal lives)?
- What do you think will be challenging about this womentoring relationship?
- Are there any topics of urgent interest?
- What topics do you want to cover in our conversations?
- What do you hope to gain from this womentoring relationship?
- How do you prefer to communicate between meetings?
- When is the best time for you to meet?



Appendix 3. Guidelines for meetings

Prioritizing meetings with your womentee throughout the womentoring relationship is critical for both to benefit fully from the relationship. Ensure a productive, successful relationship by implementing the following guidelines:

1. Prepare a day before the meeting

Ensure that meetings are clearly scheduled, preferably with calendar invites with reminders that allow each participant to block their calendar and dedicate 30 minutes to one hour once a month to meet. Be sure to come prepared to the meeting by reviewing your notes for a more effective womentorship session.

2. Identify next steps after each meeting

Set next steps at the end of each discussion and clarify who is responsible for each of them. If follow-up poses a challenge for either of you, use the opportunity to problem-solve together.

3. Follow up

Consider using a shared document platform to share notes of the meeting, describing how you have benefited from the conversation with inputs from both parties;

4. Don't forget important events

Note important personal events in your womentees' lives, such as their birthday, or important professional deadlines. Keep these events in mind during your womentoring sessions, as they may impact the needs or availability of the participant.

6. Share with upcoming educational events

Attend educational events (internal and external) together, such as online lectures and webinars.

7. Reflect and share what you've learned together

One of the best ways to learn is through taking time to reflect on where you have come. In the moment, challenging feedback can be hard to swallow. It is only afterward that we realize how helpful it was. In those cases, share with one another how you help one another grow. That is what the program is all about.