

Report to *C. elegans* community on mentor match program initiative

Sander van den Heuvel, Brent Derry, Jane Hubbard (WormBoard mentor match sub-committee)

Mentor match initiative

To foster diversity, equity and inclusion in the *C. elegans* research community, we propose a “mentor match” program to facilitate mentoring relationships for career development.

Rationale

Mentoring within the larger *C. elegans* community, in contrast to intra-institutional mentoring, provides an opportunity for mentees to gain from the collective experience of the community. The community already does this on an *ad hoc* basis, but a more open and accessible mentoring program is needed, especially for people who are members of underrepresented groups in our community.

Preface

Based on support from the community climate survey of July 2020, we surveyed self-identified potential mentees* for their priorities, opinions, and concerns on the logistics of the match, the need for (and content of) guidelines, and more.

*From the 2020 climate survey, >160 people expressed interest in helping with diversity initiatives (thanks!). As of Aug 11, 50 signed up as potential mentees and 37 as potential mentors. 88% of the 50 potential mentees surveyed responded

See all survey questions and responses here: [prospective mentee survey](#)

Summary of survey

- Respondents: 93% from doctoral degree-granting institutions
 - 39.5% graduate students,
 - 39.5% postdoc,
 - 21% assistant professor
- What do you feel a mentor could best help with? (included open text, grouped below)
 - ~30% professional challenges,
 - ~30% preparing grant proposals and manuscripts,
 - ~10% job/transition to independence,
 - ~10% career development,
 - ~10% lab management
 - ~10% teaching-related

Several noted all of the above.
- Regarding the “match” - what is important?
 - *Institutional type?*
 - 33% “very important” or “important”;
 - 67% “not important” or “neutral”
 - *Same diversity group?*
 - 35% “very important”, or preferable;
 - 65% “not important” or “neutral”
 - *Committee or 1-1 mentor?*
 - 44% one-one,
 - 42% committee,
 - 14% either,
 - *Logistics of matching?*
 - 56% prefer a short list,
 - 35% prefer the mentor to reach out to them

- 5% want to choose from a large list
- 4% mentors to choose mentees; match to similar fields.
- *Additional open-ended comments*
 - Need for both mentors and mentees to be committed and for clear guidelines to be set for both
 - Confidentiality
 - Time limits
 - Identity-driven matching
 - Geographical distribution – “covering all continents”
 - Especially useful for someone starting a lab far from other worm people
 - Overall expression of support for the program

**Based on these results, we propose the following plan.
This plan will be reevaluated over time and modified as necessary based on future survey responses from both mentors and mentees.**

Overview of mentor match program (v1.0)

The mentor match will focus initially on early career investigators and postdoctoral fellows. Priority will be given to prospective mentees who are members of groups that are underrepresented in STEM (e.g., racial, ethnic, LGBTQ+, religious, disability, disadvantaged), or that otherwise face equity challenges.

We will consider expanding the program to graduate students in the future, since the survey shows that many graduate students also desire access to mentors. In the near term, however, graduate students may wish to consider recruiting community members to their thesis advisory committees if this is acceptable within their departmental procedures.

In addition to the match, to help those who face challenges in their professional lives related to discrimination or unequal treatment, regardless of where they are in their career, we are also working to assemble lists of potential networking contacts representing various groups who can be contacted by graduate students, postdocs and early career investigators. This is a work in progress and is part of our original longer-term initiative for a diversity portal. It will be centralized with the help of WormBase and community members who have reached out to us.

[Future link to relevant page here]

Committee or 1-1 mentoring?

While survey responses were split, the single mentor is logistically easier to arrange more frequent meetings/contact and to maintain privacy. That said, upon mutual agreement by a potential committee of 2-3 mentors, a committee structure could be pursued. In the latter case, annual meetings may be considered.

Match Logistics

1. Initially, a match committee composed of 2 WormBoard members plus 2-3 members, each, of prospective/past mentees and mentors (total of 6-8 committee members) will coordinate mentor-mentee contacts. The match committee membership will turn over in a staggered fashion every two years to maintain continuity. In this way, many people in the community will be involved over the years.
2. The match committee will assemble and update annually (by January 1 of each calendar year, starting 2021) a list of all potential mentors with information on their field of study,

expertise and experience (e.g. grant review panels, teaching, administrative work, journal editorship, faculty search committees), as well as some personal information (gender, minority group, type of institution, etc.).

3. Prospective mentors will have the option of indicating that they are available for short-term mentoring (e.g. for one grant submission cycle) or longer-term mentoring (e.g., for transition of postdoc through job search to independence). Prospective mentors will be asked to annually to be added, remain or come off the list for that calendar year.
4. The list of mentors will be posted on WormBase [\[add future link\]](#) so that prospective mentees can look into research interests, location, etc. and consider fit. **Once a match is made, the name(s) of the mentor/mentee matches will also be listed on WormBase.**
5. Mentees will fill out a form* focusing on what they need the most help with.

***Mentee form: (choose as many as you wish) [\[will add link to future form here\]](#)**

- Do you seek advice on grant writing or submission/review process?
 - Do you seek advice on manuscript writing or submission/review process?
 - Do you need help navigating administrative and other demands external to your research program?
 - Do you need input/advice on professional activities, such as manuscript reviewing, meeting organization, etc.?
 - Do you need mentoring with teaching, course design, dealing with student issues, etc.?
 - Do you want advice on managing responsibilities outside your trainee's or staff research project (i.e., personal challenges that can impact their mental health or toxic personalities in the lab or administration)?
 - Do you need help with management of your laboratory finances?
 - Do you need assistance with networking to enhance visibility, input from colleagues, etc.?
 - Would you prefer a mentor from a similar type of institution?
 - Do you prefer a mentor who is part of a specific group based on nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, LGBTQ+, disability, or other? (if so, indicate desired group and indicate whether you wish this information to be confidential to the committee or shared with prospective mentors)
 - Please list several potential mentors, ideally 5 from the list posted here [\[future link to WormBase-posted mentor list here\]](#). Please be aware that the availability of mentors may depend on previous mentoring commitments or other activities taken on since the last mentor cycle. Postdoc mentees are encouraged to discuss their choices with their advisor to avoid any potential conflicts of interest about which they may not be aware.
6. The match committee will contact prospective mentors based on replies on the mentee form. Mentors will then reach out to the mentee. Once the match is mutually confirmed, the match committee will be notified and the match will be posted on WormBase. Prospective mentee/mentor matches can also be made outside the committee. However, we ask that these also be brought to the attention of the match committee, so that the match can be posted and participants can be contacted in the future to evaluate their experience with the program. In cases where a mentee wishes a mentoring committee, they may reach out to additional listed mentors to fill out the committee and indicate to the match committee the outcome.

Guidelines for mentees and mentors

- Both parties agree to a general professional code of mentor/mentee conduct including, but not limited to,
 - maintenance of confidentiality, objectivity and equal partnership
 - maintenance of professional communication
 - respect for each other's time (e.g., adherence to meeting times and to mutually set deadlines)
 - while both parties are expected to honor the commitment, either party may request to end the match if circumstances change or if the match is unproductive or incompatible. Either or both parties must notify the match committee in this case.
- Frequency and time of mentor/mentee contact will depend on the goals of the mentee.
- Recommended contact with mentor via email and/or virtual meetings once every three months, or more frequently at first, but subject to negotiation with mentor.
- For postdocs, 2 years of mentoring as a starting point, but could extend if both parties agree.
- For early career investigators, mentoring until promotion, but again, this will be negotiable.

Follow-up

- the match committee is open to feedback throughout the process
- mentors and mentees agree to participate in follow up surveys

****INITIAL ROLLOUT PLANNED FOR END OF NOVEMBER 2020****

The community will be notified by WormBase posting, LabHeads list, social media
Plan for rollout:

- **September/October: assemble match committee**
- **October/November: gather mentor data and finalize mentee form**
- **November: Post mentor list/info on WormBase and send notification to open program for mentee applications**