# Proposal for an Editors Canada Mentoring Program

# Submitted to the National Executive Council

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The mentoring taskforce chaired by Carolyn Brown recommends that Editors Canada establish a national mentorship program designed to help mentees gain editing knowledge and skills, attitudes and values in a flexible, responsive and transformational environment. The underlying concept is “a community of sharing.” This program will offer valuable professional development opportunities and support the recruitment and retention of members. All aspects of the program will be consistent with current Editors Canada standards and practices.

The program will be called the John Eerkes-Medrano Mentorship Program in honour of a recently deceased, much admired long-time member of Editors Canada who mentored many editors in his lifetime.

**Description of the Proposed Program**

**Structure and design**

The program will offer one-on-one mentor-mentee relationships for a limited time period (two months), with some flexibility to allow for time extensions – to a maximum of six months. The program will offer both face-to-face mentorships and distance mentorships based on phone calls, email and Skype, depending on the availability and preferences of the mentor and mentee. Face-to-face relationships are ideal, but a mentor best suited to the needs of a mentee (through his/her area of specialization, e.g., science editing, substantive editing, or experience) may be located in a different city or region. Other programs have shown that distance mentoring can be very successful. The program will be learner-driven and responsive to the mentees’ specific needs and preferences.

In addition, for advice on limited issues, or as a “first date” before establishing a two-month mentorship, the program will offer the option of a *two-hour café mentorship* (in the format of one or two meetings) at no charge. This may help meet the needs of many potential mentees and help longer mentorships succeed. As with longer-term mentorship, the café mentorship may be face-to-face or at a distance.

A code of conduct to guide mentoring relationships will be developed. The code will include information about the scope of the program, about appropriate expectations and boundaries, and confidentiality.

**Scope of mentoring and topics to be discussed**

A mentoring relationship may address career and business/freelance issues, juggling personal and professional responsibilities, dealing with co-workers and clients, approaches to editing problems, and discussion of particular editing issues/skills. The mentor might also refer the mentee to other professional development opportunities from Editors Canada or other organizations, including books, courses and workshops.

Coaching and confidence-building are an important part of mentorship. If the mentee is enrolled in an editing course, the mentor could offer guidance regarding assignments, taking care not to cross ethical lines in the degree of assistance provided. Mentors would follow the current Editors Canada Guidelines for Ethical Editing of Theses/Dissertations, adapting the advice to other assignments. It might be necessary to consult with the instructor about how much assistance is appropriate. If the mentee is taking courses, this issue would be included in the mentorship agreement (discussed below).

The proposed mentorship program is *not* intended to train people to become editors, or to assist mentees in finding work, for example, by providing job references or offering sub-contracts. Nor is it intended for people who are not planning a career in editing, for example, writers. And finally, the mentor will not offer advice to mentees about personal problems.

**Qualifying to be a mentee or mentor**

An Editors Canada selection committee will be established to screen applicants and match mentees to mentors. The committee will have some discretionary authority regarding special requests and cases outside of the usual functioning of mentorship relationships.

Serving as a mentor and/or being mentored will be benefits of membership and therefore available to Editors Canada members only. On the recommendation of the National Executive Council, the program will also be offered to student affiliates. The taskforce recommends that student-affiliate mentees be subject to the same experience requirements and fees as other Editors Canada members.

Those applying to be mentored will be required to present a minimum level of editing training and experience (for example, having completed at least two full-day editing workshops or an editing course, or having six months’ employment as an editor, or having completed a few freelance editing assignments). The application process will be rigorous enough to adequately assess the potential mentee’s commitment, interests and needs.

Mentors will tend to be senior editors who wish to share their knowledge and experience. However, young editors might also share their expertise in particular areas (such as social media) with older editors. Potential mentors will provide a CV to the selection committee and indicate their areas of expertise, what they are willing to help mentees with (or, conversely, what they are not willing to provide).

For a mentorship program to succeed, Editors Canada needs to “sell” potential mentors on serving in this role. Mentorship has many potential benefits for mentors: being a mentor helps editors consolidate knowledge, develop professionally, grow their network, and give back to their community. Mentors are recognized as leaders, and mentorship helps them improve their personal leadership and coaching style.

Generally speaking, it would be preferable if mentors have not had a previous professional relationship with the mentee (employer-employee, workplace colleague, client-freelancer). However, the selection committee will have authority to grant exceptions to this general rule, based on the facts of the case (length and extent of previous relationship, for example). If a professional relationship is formed during the mentorship period, the mentorship agreement will be terminated.

Persons selected to be mentors will be required to participate in an orientation that covers issues such as the role of a mentor, establishing a community of practice and sharing, defining boundaries, and taking steps if the relationship exceeds those boundaries. Mentorship will be defined in a culture of mutual assistance and support. Mentors should also have access to a person or several people who “mentor the mentors,” and/or a closed Facebook group where mentors can share their experiences and discuss their roles and challenges.

**Mentorship agreements**

Once a mentee and mentor have been matched, they will jointly develop a written agreement stating what they want to accomplish, how often they will meet and the maximum number of hours they are committing to the project. A standard agreement will be offered that can be modified to meet the unique requirements for particular mentorships. This “living document,” which can be revised as the relationship evolves, will include an exit clause that allows for mentorships that are not working to be terminated.

**Administering the program**

Editors Canada will survey members to estimate the level of demand for mentorship. Such a program can operate at various scales; it is important to understand the scale of the program, the supply of mentors and the level of demand from mentees, and to take steps accordingly.

If the demand is high, a completely volunteer-operated program (as the Toronto program was) will not be viable, and the program would need to involve paid staff in the national office. (The potential cost and involvement of national office staff is being discussed with the executive director.)

Administrative tasks may include recruiting and orienting mentors (likely by volunteers), maintaining web pages concerning the program (staff), registering mentees (possibly by staff), collecting fees and disbursing honorariums (staff), tracking mentorship relationships (likely by volunteers with staff assistance with software), and resolving issues that arise in mentoring relationships (likely by volunteers).

In order to ensure commitment to participation and discourage frivolous applications, the mentees will be required to pay a nominal fee — high enough to encourage commitment but low enough to avoid posing a barrier to participation — with the level to be determined and amended from time to time by the National Executive Council. Other editorial mentorship programs have instituted fees for mentees to cover program costs and ensure commitment (see Rationale for the Proposed Program, below). Such a fee is to be allocated to administration costs and to a nominal honorarium for mentors. Mentors will be recognized in other ways as well, such as having their names published on the Editors Canada website. A scholarship fund might be created to support mentees who cannot afford to pay the fee.

If a mentorship relationship terminates early in the relationship (threshold date to be determined), fees and honorariums will be refunded/ reclaimed.

**Rationale for the Proposed Program**

As directed by the national executive council, the mentoring taskforce developed a number of its recommendations with reference to experiences reported by the Toronto branch mentorship program. The Toronto program, started as a pilot in 2007, originally had a set schedule of three-month periods in the spring and the fall. It became clear that a rolling program with variable three-month periods agreed to by the mentor and mentee would work better, and that a time period of two months resulted in better levels of commitment. Two other problems emerged: 1) a number of would-be mentees did not have adequate training and experience backgrounds to begin a mentoring relationship, and 2) and many mentees did not uphold their original commitment to the relationship.

The Toronto branch offered free mentorships but found that many mentees “dropped out,” that is, they did not uphold their original commitment to the relationship. The taskforce concluded that charging a fee would help to ensure commitment on the part of the mentee and the mentor. At the same time, it was recognized that Editors Canada membership fees and other costs to members are already relatively high.

At the program’s apex, the Toronto branch served 40 mentees per year, but this number declined over time. Based on these numbers, the national program could have requests from approximately 140 mentees per year.

In addition to the Toronto program, speed mentoring sessions have been held at annual conferences and at meetings of several branches. These sessions have proven very successful and have attracted beginning editors to the association.

The taskforce also considered Editors Canada’s experience with certification, which indicates that a new program can pose a large administrative burden that includes troubleshooting at all levels.

The taskforce studied other editor mentoring programs, particularly one offered by the Institute of Professional Editors in Australia (IPED), which has five levels of mentoring. For three months, IPED charges $200, of which $50 goes to administration and $150 to the mentor. The Society for Editors and Proofreaders in the UK also has a fee of £199.00 for proofreading, £299.00 for copy editing, only half of which is paid by the mentee, while the other half is paid through a training fund. These organizations have found a fee system useful to maintain their programs.

Finally, the taskforce reviewed mentorship programs offered by these agencies or associations:

* Society for Editors and Proofreaders (United Kingdom)
* Canadian Food Inspection Agency
* Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
* American Copy Editors Society
* OpEd Project
* Canberra Society of Editors
* Queensland Writers Centre

Overall, the most successful programs appeared to be less formal and fairly flexible.

**Alternative structures and designs for mentoring programs**

As noted above, the taskforce strongly supports brief, *two-hour café mentorship.* After some consideration, it also recommended limiting all types of mentorship to Editors Canada members and student affiliates and to editors with some experience, as described previously. However, the taskforce acknowledges that mentorship is a recruitment tool. There is a continuing demand for brief mentorship by those seeking information about a career in editing or about becoming a member of Editors Canada. Taskforce members saw these meetings as an activity best handled by a branch or twig as part of recruitment activities and not as part of a formal mentorship program.

The taskforce considered *long-term, project-oriented relationships* in which the mentee shadows or apprentices to the mentor. Many taskforce members have served as mentors for this type of mentorship. At this time, the taskforce is recommending launching the mentorship program *without* this type of mentorship, which should be further considered for addition to the program in future.

At this time, the taskforce does not recommend *group mentorships*, with one or two mentors and several mentees involved. Nor does it recommend *co-mentorship*, that is, a mentee having more than one mentor at the same time. However, these options may be considered further. Mentees will be encouraged to repeat the mentorship experience with different mentors if they are still seeking guidance.

**How This Proposal Was Developed**

The national executive council of Editors Canada established a mentoring taskforce in late 2015. The taskforce was charged with recommending a structure and guidelines for a national Editors Canada mentorship program based on the experience of the Toronto branch mentorship program, along with information available about other mentorship programs in other industries and other countries.

There was an exceptionally strong interest in this initiative, with 15 people volunteering to serve on the taskforce and two people from Australia asking to observe. Carolyn Brown served as chair, and the other members are Catherine Baudin, Kevin Burns, Carolyn Camilleri, Dave Ealey, Anita Jenkins, Juliann Krushen, Janet MacMillan, Ginny McGowan, Joanna Odrowaz, Louise St-André (for first two meetings), Isobel Stevenson, Rosemary Tanner (for first two meetings) and Ruth Wilson (for first meeting); Joe Cotterchio-Milligan provided valuable input. The observers were Pamela Hewitt and Carolyn Leslie.

The taskforce has held four teleconference meetings to date: on January 19, February 16, April 12 and May 17.