



## **The Planning Mentorship Program: Guidelines and Activities**

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2014, The APA-Texas Chapter Executive Committee established the Texas Emerging Planning Leaders (TxEPL) to enhance communication between emerging and experienced planning professionals. The Planning Mentorship Program was established by the TxEPL Steering Committee and is managed by the TxEPL Chair and Mentorship Program Chair.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Chapter's Planning Mentorship Program is to bridge the professional gap between college graduates, members of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), and members of the American Institute of Certified Planners College of Fellows (FAICP). The program is intended for professionals to gain and share valuable knowledge and insight into their planning careers from fellow professionals. The program's focus also includes:

- Fostering inter-generational communication;
- Passing on institutional knowledge about planning in Texas
- Facilitating "passing the torch" for leadership in APA and the profession
- Fostering development of lifelong relationships; and
- Providing opportunities to collaborate on projects and socialize beyond the state conference

### **COMMUNITIES**

Program participants are assigned into mentorship groups identified as "Communities." Communities are intended to have a number of individuals who will likely be at different career stages in order to have a wide range of knowledge and expertise within each group. Communities typically have between 6-8 members with a diversity of experience levels, including: students; 1-2 years; 3-5 years; 6-10 years; 11-20 years; and more than 20 years of experience.

By forming mentoring communities, it is the intent to create an environment where all members of the group can feel free to contribute, share, and bring their own unique experiences to the table. In this way, learning/mentoring is not a top-down situation but rather a 360-degree experience, where each member will be expected to contribute and teach in some form or fashion. Each community has a “Community Leader” that assists in organizing activities and communicating with their Community.

**COMMUNITY FORMATION TIMELINE**

TxAAPA members interested in participating in the mentorship program will complete an online application. Each year, the TxEPL Committee will use the completed applications to group the communities. Members will be asked to rank the preference for being matched including: location, specializations, job experiences, or alma maters. Communities will be reformed each year to ensure active participation based on the following timeframe. Any changes to the timeframe will be communicated with mentorship program participants.

| <i><b>Timeframe</b></i> | <i><b>Event</b></i>  |
|-------------------------|--|
| October 2017            | Applications sent to existing community members and prospective new members                                  |
| November 2017           | State Conference – reception held for current mentorship participants; application period for next year ends |
| November to December    | TxEPL Committee forms new mentorship communities and identifies new community leaders                        |
| January 2018            | New mentorship communities are initiated   |

**ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS**

Participants of the Planning Mentorship Program are required to be members of the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Texas). To join APA, please visit: <http://www.planning.org/join/>. Students are eligible to join at a discounted rate. For students in many collegiate planning programs, the first year of APA membership is free.

**MINIMUM INVOLVEMENT**

It is not expected of each Community member to participate in every community event. However, each member should expect to participate in a minimum of four events per year and should be willing to communicate by email or phone with other Community members.

**COMMUNITY ROLES**

Community Leader: The success of individual mentorship communities depends on the activeness of the community leader. The TxEPL Committee will work with each of the community leaders to provide support throughout the year. Specific duties include:

- Initiate communication with community members
- Schedule individual community events
- Encourage community members to attend structured activities in your section (See Community Activities Section)
- Communicate any concerns or questions to the TxEPL Committee

Community Participant: It is expected that mentorship program participants be responsive and actively participate in their community events. If a community participant is not able to attend an event, he or she should communicate this to their community leader.

TxEPL Committee: It is the role of the TxEPL Committee to form the mentorship communities each year, identify community leaders, schedule structured community events in sections across the state, and provide support to communities. The first point of contact for a community is the TxEPL Section Representative. Their contact information is listed in the Program Contact Section.

## COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Texas Planning Mentorship Program Structured Activities: These events are open to all communities and are scheduled by the TxEPL Committee. Dates will be predetermined at the beginning of the calendar year when the new communities are announced.

- *Mentorship Mash-Up*: Held in sections with numerous communities, the mentorship mash-up event is a social event in which all communities in that section are invited to network with each other. The host section typically will provide appetizers.
- *University Event*: In sections with a university planning program, the university event will be held to encourage students to network with planning professionals in that section. These events will correspond with the end of a school semester.
- *Lattes and Leadership*: Once or twice a year, the TxEPL Committee designates a week in which each of the sections host a Lattes and Leadership event. These events are interactive, small-group discussions that feature a seasoned planning professional. Mentorship communities are encouraged to attend the events in their section.
- *State Conference Events*: Each year, the state conference offers several opportunities for mentorship communities to meet up, including the Annual Leadership Forum, University and Mentorship Program Reception, section breakfasts, and plenary sessions. More information on the conference events can be found on the Texas Chapter website.

Suggested Community Activities: In addition to the structured activities, it is expected that communities meet anywhere from 3-6 times throughout the year in person or online. Below are some suggested activities and topics to discuss with your community.

## Getting Acquainted

- **Ice Breakers:** Play 'Never Have I Ever' planner style to learn what your fellow Community members have or haven't done in their planning professions.
- **Mock Interviews:** Take turns asking other members of your Community interview-type questions to get to know them better.
- **Social Gatherings:** Get to know your Community by meeting for lunch or other social events.

## Sharing Experiences

- **Office Visit:** Join a member of your Community for an hour at their office to see what their day-to-day responsibilities are.
- **Project Site Tour:** If a member of your Community is working on an interesting project, schedule a time for the group to take a site visit and let the Community member be the tour guide.
- **Public vs. Private Discussion:** Some planners have just worked in the public sector, others in the private, and some have worked in both. Schedule a time to discuss among your Community what the benefits and drawbacks are to working in both environments. If you are thinking about making a switch to the other side, this would be a great opportunity to learn more about both types of professions.
- **Communicating with Non-Planners:** Planners constantly have to communicate technical ideas to non-planning audiences. Discuss with others in your community techniques to effectively communicate with elected officials, developers, citizens, etc.

## Learning Together

- **Conferences and Seminars:** Attend a lunch and learn or seminar that you and other members of your Community find interesting. If you attend the state or national APA conference, be sure to meet up with your Community members and attend a session together.
- **Technology Tutorials:** If a member of your Community is tech-savvy, have him or her give the other Community members a tutorial on a program that is helpful in planning.
- **AICP Study Prep:** If there are members of your Community that have not yet taken their AICP Exam, have a Community meeting about the benefits of becoming AICP certified and tips for succeeding on the application and exam.

## Giving Back

- **Community Involvement:** Volunteer with your Community to help out your physical community. You could clean up your local lake or river, speak at a school career day, or help out at a food shelter.
- **Involvement in Local APA Chapter:** Volunteer to help out at a section APA event. This is a great way to bond with your fellow Community members and network with other planning professionals in your area.

## PROGRAM CONTACTS

TxEPL Chair: Kendall Wendling, AICP, [kwendling@halff.com](mailto:kwendling@halff.com)

TxEPL Mentorship Program Chair: Chelsea Irby, [Chelsea.irby@freese.com](mailto:Chelsea.irby@freese.com)

TxEPL Section Representatives:

*Central*: Rachel Tepper, [Rachel.tepper@cedarparktexas.gov](mailto:Rachel.tepper@cedarparktexas.gov)

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*Midwest*: Danielle Stellrecht, [dstellrecht@dfwjobs.com](mailto:dstellrecht@dfwjobs.com)

*North Central*: Kathryn Rush, [krush@nctcog.org](mailto:krush@nctcog.org)

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For more information on the mentorship program, please visit  
[www.txplanning.org/mentorship](http://www.txplanning.org/mentorship).