

# Friends Partnership Mentoring Program

## *Overview and Application*



**Purpose** The purpose of the Friends Mentoring Program is to foster active, vibrant, and effective partnerships. The goal is to help a Friends organization and their U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) partner formulate a clear path forward so that they may work efficiently toward mutual goals. They will enhance understanding of these mutual goals, review the Friends' and Service's capacity to pursue the goals, and make plans to increase the capacity of the partnership, if necessary.

**Overview** The Friends Partnership Mentoring Program is a peer-based coaching opportunity to build and enhance the partnership between a Friends organization and the Service site and to strengthen both organizations to enable them to accomplish their mutual goals. A mentor relationship involves a specially trained pair of mentors (a Service employee and a Friends member), the Friends board of directors/leaders, and key Service employees from the requesting Service site.

**Mentoring Priority Areas** Mentoring is designed to address four priority areas for Friends partnerships:

1. Core management of Friends organizations—e.g., board development, bylaw development, and organizing administrative and financial operations;
2. Developing or strengthening joint partnerships—e.g., defining roles and responsibilities for Friends and Service staff, meeting effectiveness, celebrating accomplishments, and planning together;
3. Dealing with change/transition—e.g., changes in Service staff and board members, life cycle stages for nonprofit organizations, planning, repurposing; and
4. Triage/crash cart assessment—e.g., revitalizing a partnership in decline and in danger of collapse.

Using the above four priority areas, the Friends leaders, the Service site staff, and the mentors will discuss and agree upon the major focus for the mentor visit. Mentoring can reveal exciting opportunities and identify ways to build capacity to pursue these opportunities. It can also focus on an anticipated challenge or on the changes experienced as an organization progresses through normal life cycles.

## Quick Look: Applying for the Mentoring Program

1. Read, complete, and sign this application form.
2. Submit completed application to [Linda\\_Schnee@fws.gov](mailto:Linda_Schnee@fws.gov).
3. National Friends coordinator forwards application to appropriate regional Friends coordinator.
4. Regional Friends coordinator reviews application and ranks it among other applications.
5. If your application is selected, the regional Friends coordinator recruits appropriate mentors and introduces you to them.
6. Mentor team schedules and leads the first call to establish expectations and the best mentoring approach. Service project leader and liaison and Friends board members should plan to participate in this call.
7. The rest is preparation for the visit—phone calls, emails, setting a date, reviewing the mentors' proposed agenda, and gearing up for a special experience.
8. A mentoring visit is normally scheduled 2–6 months from the time of initial contact from your mentor team. If a mentor visit date cannot be scheduled once the 6 month time frame has arrived, then the current application will be closed and the partnership will need to reapply for the next application cycle.

## Process and Expectations

The Friends Partnership Mentoring Program is funded jointly by the Refuge System headquarters and the regional offices at very little expense to the individual Service site or partnership being mentored. When a partnership is chosen for mentoring, the mentor team is carefully selected to complement the purpose for which mentoring was requested. The mentors work directly with the Service Project Leader/Service Liaison and key Friends leaders to obtain additional information. This is accomplished through a process that involves a phone conference and a standard set of questions. Afterward, a site visit will be scheduled when all can participate (typically over two and one-half days), and mentors will draft a meeting agenda.

We have found that a fully successful mentoring experience requires 1) the Service Project Leader/Service Liaison and key board members/Friends leaders being fully engaged in planning for and communicating about the mentor visit and 2) key Service staff, the board of directors, and other Friends leaders being available for and participating in the mentoring site visit.

During the visit, the mentor team will assist the partnership in addressing and working on the priorities identified through the preparation process. The site visit will result in a written narrative by the mentors, a draft of which will be provided to the partnership within a month following the site visit. The narrative will summarize the mentoring session, including conclusions and commitments made by the participants. The mentors will follow up with the participants through scheduled conference calls at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months after mentoring.

## About the Mentors

Mentors are trained Friends and Service staff who have such a strong interest and commitment to supporting Friends partnerships. They have diverse experiences working with Friends partnerships and have received specialized mentor training. There are approximately 20 mentors serving on a nationwide basis, and they work in pairs consisting of one Friends member and one Service employee. The pair, once formed, is supported by the regional coordinator from the region in which the application was generated as well as by the national coordinator.

# Application

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## Who May Apply

Any U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Friends organization, in cooperation with their Service site, may apply to the mentoring program. Prior to applying, the Service Project Leader/Service Liaison and the Friends board of directors must meet to discuss the benefits of engaging in the mentoring program. If everyone agrees to submit an application, it must contain signatures of both a Friends leader (normally the president or board chair) and the Service Project Leader. If both signatures are not currently attainable, please submit an application with an explanation.

## Application Timelines

There are two application cycles for the mentoring program each year:

- Spring cycle applications due March 31, with mentor visits usually taking place later in the calendar year.
- Fall cycle applications due October 31, with mentor visits usually taking place the following calendar year.

## Next Steps

For questions or to submit an application, contact the national Friends program coordinator, [Linda Schnee](#), by email.

*Submit an application:* Complete and submit the application on the following pages.

# Friends Mentoring Application

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To apply for the mentoring program, please respond to the following five questions and obtain the required signatures. Submission instructions are at the end of the application.

1. What do you hope mentoring will accomplish for you, your organization, and/or your partnership?

2. Review the mentoring priority areas on page 1 of this application with your board and Service Project Leader/Friends Liaison. Identify those for which you are seeking mentoring and provide a description of the issues or opportunities you wish to address. If the categories provided do not address your needs, please provide a brief explanation of your needs.

3. Why is it important to your Friends board and the Service staff to have a mentor visit?

4. Please give a general description of your board, staff, and committees. List any vacant board positions/titles. Describe the board's committee structure and note which members serve on which committees.

5. Lastly, please provide Service staff positions who have responsibilities in working with the Friends group. Describe the frequency of your group's interaction with the various staff.

6. Is there anything else you feel is important to share?

**Section 3a — Date Commitments**

The first challenge in planning a mentor visit is in finding a date that works for all members of the Friends board, the Service staff, and the mentors. Mentors have limited availability but will work with a mentee group to find dates that work. Mentor visits generally take two to three days, including a site-familiarization tour provided for the mentors.

1. Mentor visits must be *completed* within nine months of the latest signature date in Section 3 of this application. Enter below the date by which the Friends and Service staff agree to commit to schedule and participate in a mentor visit.

2. For this mentor visit, does the combined Service-Friends mentee group prefer weekends or weekdays for a mentor visit?

Weekdays

Weekends

3. Mentors will work to meet the needs of successful applicants for the mentor program, though their availability for a given date is not guaranteed. Please provide three to five three-day periods that members of this Service-Friends mentee group could commit to, which would allow the mentor visit to be completed before the date that you listed above in question #1.

First Choice

Second Choice

Third Choice

Fourth Choice

Fifth Choice

