

# THE BRIDGE MENTORSHIP HANDBOOK

**Mentorship as a Key to a  
Successful Transition from  
Academia to the Professional  
World**



CREATIVE  
MENTORSHIP

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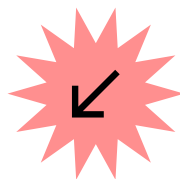


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Music4Change

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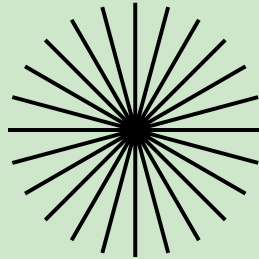
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# A BRIDGE THAT EMPOWERS YOU - INTRODUCTION



Are you currently in the final stage of your studies or academic research, preparing to take a step into the job market, but unsure where to start? Are you part of a university collective that has long been thinking about what could be valuable and useful for your students in their next career steps? If your answer to any of these questions is YES, we invite you to explore this handbook

This handbook is intended for everyone who recognizes the value of intergenerational and cross-sectoral exchange of knowledge and experience. It is designed for those who believe in the potential of non-formal education. This handbook is designed for all students and young researchers who aspire to do something meaningful for themselves while simultaneously acquiring new knowledge.

**Above all, The Bridge handbook is dedicated to final-year students, doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, as well as recent graduates. Its purpose is to prepare you for entering the job market, to highlight the importance of mentorship as one of the most powerful forms of non-formal education, and to encourage you to unlock your full potential.**



This handbook can also be **useful to professionals interested in becoming mentors** and sharing their knowledge and experience with others. **Finally, it is intended for university staff as well**, since mentorship, as a model of non-formal support that is significantly different from academic tutoring, represents one of the most powerful tools for supporting students who want to confidently step into the job market or further develop their professional paths.

The handbook was created by **Creative Mentorship**, an expert organization established in 2011 in the field of mentorship and professional development in culture, the arts, media, and the creative industries. This handbook is also one of the outcomes of the **Erasmus+ project Music4Change (M4C)**, within which the pilot mentorship programme **The Bridge** was developed and delivered. The project M4C was led by the University of Bergen, in collaboration with partner universities and institutions from Norway, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Greece, Austria, and Germany. You can learn more about the M4C project on its [website](#).

You won't find a long or overly formal text here. This handbook offers concrete suggestions, proven methods, and encouragement that can significantly support your (or someone else's) professional journey – because in the times we live in, every genuine act of support and shared knowledge is a true treasure.

## A LITTLE ABOUT *THE BRIDGE* MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME, WHICH SERVED AS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS HANDBOOK...



**The Bridge mentee:** *This mentorship scheme has really helped me reconnect with all my professional sides and passions. I feel much more confident and ready to move forward and think big with my ideas for the future.*

**The Bridge** is an innovative mentorship programme designed for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers in the field of music from around the world. The programme was created to provide them with support in their personal and professional development and to help them transition from an academic environment into a professional context. It is based on the **Creative Mentorship methodology** and implemented by Creative Mentorship organization in collaboration with the University of Bergen, lead partner of the M4C project with other partners including the University of Edinburgh, University of Groningen, Gustav Mahler Private University for Music, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and the European Music Council in Bonn.

Over the period of one year, through *The Bridge* programme, 22 participants (11 mentoring pairs) from different countries worked with dedication on achieving their professional and personal goals. The programme included:

- **Regular one-to-one mentoring sessions (on average once a month)**
- **Three group workshops focused on mentoring (Kick Off, Mid Term, and Wrap Up)**
- **Three informal consultations, along with individual consultations as needed**
- **Ongoing support from the Creative Mentorship team.**

You can read more about *The Bridge* mentorship programme [at this link](#).



After the implementation of *The Bridge* mentorship programme, **here are some statistical results and participant feedback:**

- 100% of participants would recommend taking part in this mentorship programme
- 100% would continue to apply mentorship in their personal and professional development
- 90% stated that the mentorship programme inspired and empowered them to implement new ideas and projects
- 90% felt empowered after the mentorship programme to become mentors themselves in the future.

## WHY DO WE SHARE THESE PERCENTAGES AND TALK ABOUT *THE BRIDGE* PROGRAMME?



Even though Creative Mentorship has been designing and implementing mentorship and educational programmes since 2011 for professionals in the fields of culture, arts, creative industries, and media, *The Bridge* was our first mentorship programme that:

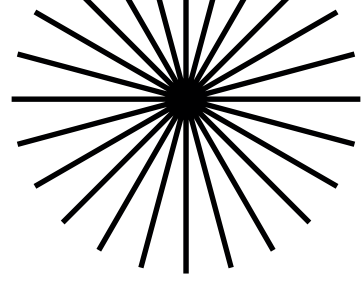
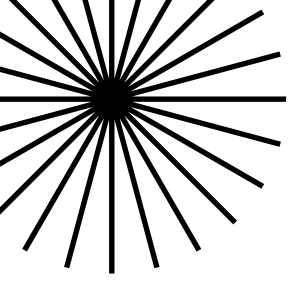
- Was entirely dedicated to final-year students preparing for the job market or seeking personal and professional development
- Focused on mentees from a single field – music
- Brought together participants from all over the world, representing different countries (11 countries / 4 continents), cultures, generations, and time zones
- Was implemented completely online.

Our initial hypothesis when designing the programme proved to be 100% correct: **Mentorship support that is not academic in the traditional sense, but focused on enhancing personal and professional competencies of final-year students and young researchers, significantly influence their future career development.** Throughout *The Bridge* mentorship programme, mentees were encouraged to develop their personal projects and professional ideas – not as a departure from their research work, but as a natural extension of it. ***The Bridge* demonstrated that academic and practical work can meaningfully coexist, strengthening not only individual careers but the broader field of music research, production, and education.** This kind of **non-academic mentorship also strengthens the academic institutions to which these students belong - it represents a valuable added benefit to existing mechanisms such as formal studies and academic supervision.**

In this handbook, we will share with you the conclusions, insights, and statements from participants of *The Bridge* programme, to clearly demonstrate why it is valuable to make the decision to engage in mentorship today – whether as a mentee, mentor, or as an initiator of a mentorship programme within your institution or organization.



**YOUR FIRST STEPS  
INTO THE MENTORSHIP  
PROCESS  
(OR: HOW TO  
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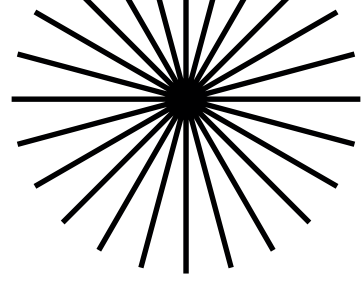
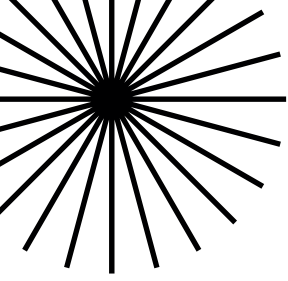
For **STUDENTS** who feel they would benefit from guidance from a practitioner outside academia, mentorship can provide valuable support in taking their next – or first – steps in their careers. Many students develop their own ideas and projects alongside their studies, seek additional non-formal training, or look for ways to connect academic work with experience from other industries and sectors. These needs most often emerge toward the end of one’s studies, at the moment of entering the job market or after taking the first steps into it, when exploring new or alternative professional pathways becomes especially important.

If you want to become a **MENTOR** and share your knowledge and experience with other professionals, this handbook is also for you. Perhaps you already know young professionals in your environment and believe that support from someone who has gone through a similar experience could make their journey easier. Maybe you want to connect with people from other generations, sectors, or cultures. Or maybe simply helping someone whose work contributes to positive societal change gives you fulfilment.

**The Bridge mentor:** *I was in the same place academically and professionally as my mentee, so I knew exactly how it felt.*

Your future mentee will greatly value personal and professional support because it is likely the type of understanding they will need when they start working with you.

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If you are **UNIVERSITY STAFF** and would like to offer your students a different, practical, and valuable experience they can apply even after graduation, it is worth considering starting a mentorship programme at your institution. Mentorship can be one of the most valuable tools for empowering students and preparing them for the challenges ahead – and in the following text, we explain how. Perhaps the best inspiration to launch a programme within your institution is a sentence like this:

***The Bridge mentee:*** *I think I'm going to look back years from now and say, "Yes, this thing changed the course of my life". It is huge, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I hope that you continue with it and that more people get to experience it. Thank you again!*

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**MYTHS AND  
MISCONCEPTIONS  
ABOUT  
MENTORSHIP**

One of the reasons people hesitate to enter a mentorship relationship is the existence of numerous myths and misconceptions. Some of the most common include:



- **Successful and experienced people don't always have time to share their knowledge with those who are just starting out -**  
There's a common myth that successful and experienced people don't have time to share their knowledge with those who are just starting out. Since 2011, we've seen that this isn't true—many remarkable professionals are willing to dedicate their time, expertise, and experience to mentor someone eager to grow both personally and professionally.
- **Mentorship is too time-consuming** – Many think they don't have time for mentorship because they have “more important” obligations. The truth is, a mentorship process does not need to take much time to be high-quality and useful. Once we do have a mentoring process, it saves us the time, as it directs us in the right direction, to work smart, not just hard.
- **A mentor must be older than the mentee** – This is not true. A mentorship relationship involves exchanging experience and refreshing perspectives, so sometimes even a younger person can be a fantastic mentor. There are entire mentorship programs built around the concept of reverse mentorship.
- **Only the mentee benefits from mentorship** – This is also false. Since 2011 Creative Mentorship shows that both sides grow and learn through the process – both mentors and mentees, as mentorship is a two-way interactive process.

The statements of *The Bridge* mentors confirm this as well:

**The Bridge mentor:** *Through this relationship, I got an opportunity to re-think my own attitudes and professional experience, as well as to talk about some new topics and explore art in a new way. I hope there will be an opportunity to collaborate with my mentee in the future.*

**The Bridge mentor:** *Rewarding exchange and ability to reflect on various stages of career as well as personal development.*

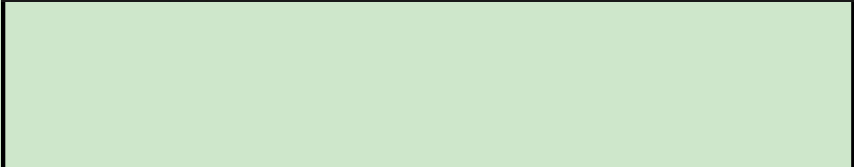


**The Bridge mentor:** *We knew each other already as peers from 15 years ago and had a lot in common. But the experience gave me an opportunity to understand the academic side and struggles better. It was a privilege to be involved, it was an interesting process, and I enjoy being useful and contributing. I felt appreciated.*

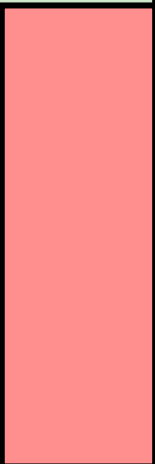
**The Bridge mentor:** *I realise that very often we are not aware of our qualities, and helping my mentee to find her own has helped me realise in which areas I am good at.*

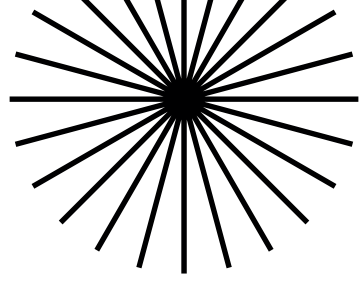
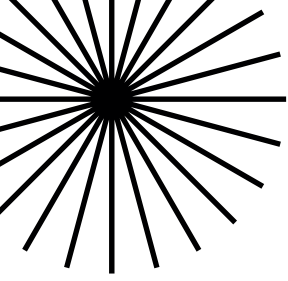
- **Mentorship meetings must be long** – A quality mentorship meeting typically lasts around an hour. It is crucial that the mentee comes well-prepared – with clear questions and dilemmas. They can even email their mentor beforehand with proposed discussion topics, so the mentor can better support them during the session.
- **The mentor leads the mentorship relationship** – In fact, it is the mentee who defines the goals, asks questions, and proposes meeting topics. The mentor provides support, asks additional questions, and shares relevant experience.
- **Mentorship is only for those with an urgent problem** – Mentorship is not a tool for solving a single specific problem. It is a process of reflection, communication, learning, and continuous development. Once adopted, it will be useful throughout one's entire career – and life.

**The Bridge mentor:** *My mentee found a solution and was able to identify problems more specifically and reported these back to me. She became unstuck, and this was good for her confidence.*



**WHY WOULD IT BE IN THE INTEREST OF AN INSTITUTION (UNIVERSITY) TO LAUNCH A MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME?**

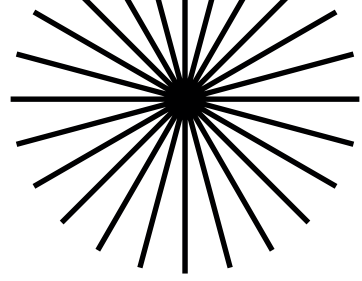
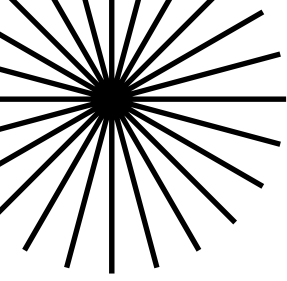




Although Creative Mentorship has been implementing mentorship since 2011, **The Bridge was the first mentorship programme we designed and implemented – based on our experience and developed methodology – exclusively for doctoral and postdoctoral students, as well as those who have recently completed their studies.** Throughout the programme, **mentees were encouraged to develop their personal projects and professional ideas** – not as a departure from their research work, but as a natural extension of it. *The Bridge* demonstrated that academic and practical work can meaningfully coexist, strengthening not only individual careers but the broader field of music research, production, and education. This kind of non-academic mentorship also strengthens the academic institutions to which these students belong - it represents a valuable added benefit to existing mechanisms such as formal studies and academic supervision.

**The Bridge mentee:** *I found the mentorship very useful for helping me reconnect with the world of work in my field. Over the past few years, I had become quite disconnected from the practice of delivering arts/music projects in community and health settings and the community surrounding this field. I was not sure of how to position myself and whether or not I could find a way of bringing this side of me together with my academic skills.*

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They also shared why being part of a formal mentorship programme like *The Bridge* was valuable to them, especially as they prepared to transition more smoothly into the job market:

***The Bridge mentee:*** *The three most important contributions of The Bridge Mentorship Programme for me personally were, first, the space it provided for personal insight and reflection. It allowed me to explore my own values, priorities, and approach to work-life balance in a way that felt meaningful and relevant. Second, the program offered deep and thoughtful conversations with my mentor, which opened up new perspectives on both life and career, often in ways I didn't expect. Third, having someone to talk to outside of the usual academic or professional structures was incredibly valuable. It gave me a sense of support and understanding that complemented, rather than replicated, my existing networks.*

***The Bridge mentee:*** *First: The building of a valuable relationship with a person that has similar interests and values. Second: The acquaintance with the mentorship philosophy and its great importance.*

***The Bridge mentee:*** *Normalizing asking for help and support and having somebody that wholeheartedly wants to give their support; Feeling of belonging to a wonderful group/network of people; getting a job.*

Experience gained through working on *The Bridge* programme has shown that mentorship programmes represent an excellent opportunity to support and empower students during their studies, so that upon graduation, they are truly prepared to take confident steps into the labour market or continue developing their professional paths with greater certainty.

**For universities, this type of mentorship programme brings significant added value, as it complements formal education with structured non-formal learning and provides students with practical guidance, confidence, and professional orientation that extend beyond academic training.**

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**WHY DO WE ENTER A  
MENTORSHIP RELATIONSHIP?**



If you are a mentee seeking support, it is important to understand that working with a mentor does not necessarily mean you will launch your own project or immediately implement ideas you have in mind. The success of a mentorship relationship is primarily measured by how you feel afterwards:

- Empowered and ready for the next steps
- Inspired to continue learning and developing
- Having a clear picture of the next moves that bring you closer to your goal
- More confident
- Ready to establish connections more easily with colleagues, potential collaborators, and partners
- Having an expanded network
- Equipped with new knowledge and skills.

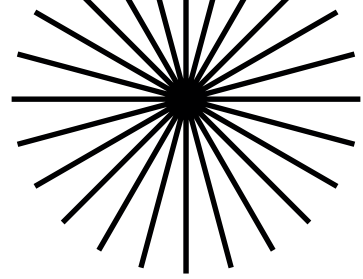
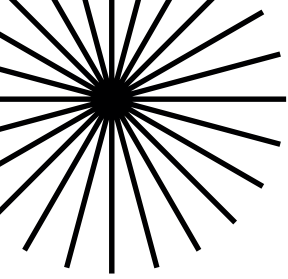
Of course, completing concrete project, advancing at work, or making a major career leap can be part of the results of a successful mentorship relationship. But we want to emphasize: this is not the only measure of success!

***The Bridge mentee:*** *My mentor gave me advice for the future of my career and helped me see my strengths.*

***The Bridge mentee:*** *My confidence in my writing has grown. I feel less afraid of putting my ideas on paper and sharing them. My goals of fleshing out post-doc project ideas have been realised. Thanks to the support of my mentor, my international research network has expanded significantly, as we have found common research interests and identified potential collaborations. When I have hit major personal and professional hurdles and milestones, my mentor was one of the first people I contacted for support or celebration.*



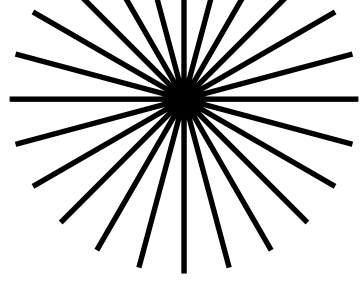
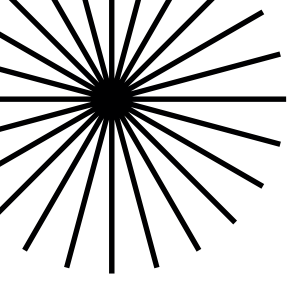
## **HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT MENTOR?**



If there is no active mentorship programme you can join, it doesn't mean you can't seek out the right mentor on your own. Consider whether there are people in your surroundings whose knowledge and experience inspire you, and whom you believe could support your personal and professional development, as well as your transition into the job market you wish to enter. It could be a professional whose work you admire or someone who comes highly recommended. Don't waste time – take action!

Taking action begins with analysing your personal needs and then defining clear goals – a crucial step before you start searching for a mentor. Below are recommendations for setting goals and identifying the right mentor:

- **Understand your needs and desires** – Take time to reflect on your most important areas of development at this moment. This could be enhancing professional skills, personal growth, better work organization, or exploring a new field.
  - **Separate realistic from unrealistic goals** – Be honest with yourself about what you can achieve in the short term and what requires a longer period or additional resources.
  - **Define a key area for improvement** – Instead of trying to work on everything at once, focus on one or two areas that are most important right now and directly contribute to achieving your goals.
  - **Set a specific, measurable goal** – Select one area that aligns with your priorities and formulate a clear development goal. Well-defined goals should address all the questions of the **SMARTER model**, which is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound, Exciting, and Rewarding. Formulate your goal clearly so you can track your progress (e.g., “By the end of the year, I want to complete the first version of my music project” rather than “I want to improve my work”).
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- **Map resources and priorities** – Make a list of everything already available to you (skills, contacts, tools, experience) and identify what else you need.
- **Consider long-term aspirations** – Ask yourself where you want to be in 3 to 5 years, and think about how a mentor can help you take those steps.
- **Find a mentor aligned with your goal** – Once you know exactly what you want, it becomes easier to find a mentor with relevant experience and perspective to help you achieve your goal.

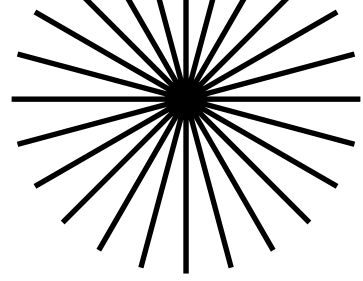
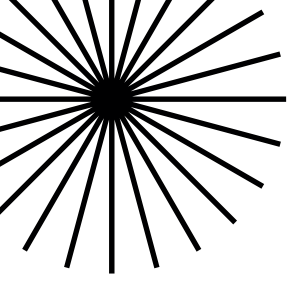
**The Bridge mentee:** *My mentor and I have similar scholarly interests and lived experiences. I was extremely comfortable sharing with them both professional and personal concerns and issues.*

- **Consider the knowledge, experience, and skills required** – Think first about what expertise this person should have. The experience, knowledge, and skills of a mentor can significantly help you reach your goals, overcome challenges, and enhance your interests:

**The Bridge mentee:** *My mentor's experience, knowledge, and skills were relevant to my goals, interests, and challenges to a great extent. All of the above were relevant, and I could constantly relate, learn new concepts, and uncover new perspectives.*

**The Bridge mentee:** *During the mentorship year, I encountered various opportunities to further my career. Each time, I could reflect with my mentor to really evaluate how this step could help me achieve my goals.*

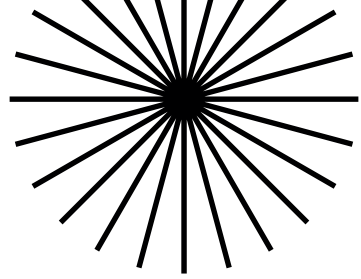
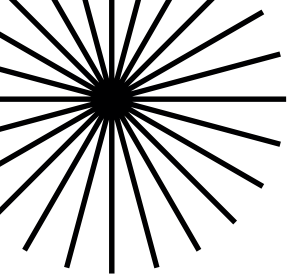
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- **Sector relevance** – Based on your priorities and needs, you may sometimes require a mentor from a different sector, which is why it's important to stay open and aware of opportunities for intersectoral connection. For example, if you want to start your own cultural organization, you may not necessarily need a mentor from the cultural field – instead, someone from the business sector could be far more helpful in guiding you through the first steps of establishing and developing your organization.
- **Shared values** – Values are very important and you and your future mentor should share the same core principles. Try to find a mentor whose core values match your own (to the extent possible). Here is what one of the mentees from *The Bridge* mentorship programme says about this:

***The Bridge mentee:*** *Our research interests and values are so well aligned, yet we come from different contexts and levels of experience. I have really cherished hearing my mentor's perspectives on things I have struggled with and research questions I am exploring.*

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When you do thorough research, prepare well, and make a good match with your mentor, it truly yields excellent results.

***The Bridge mentee:*** *Everything I had hoped to learn and develop through this mentorship, my mentor has supported in a gentle yet challenging way that has been incredibly productive for me. Not only that – I have also gained a friend and colleague. We are already planning to collaborate on new projects and write together.*

The fact that the benefits are equally shared by both mentees and mentors is also reflected in the statements of participants from *The Bridge* mentorship programme, who, after working with their mentees, have nothing but praise to share:

***The Bridge mentor:*** *Mentorship is very helpful for both sides, since you can meet colleagues that you never would have met without such a programme. The professional and personal exchange 1:1 is perfect when you target a deep contact, which is shaped by trust and safety.*

***The Bridge mentor:*** *Mentorship was useful to me, especially due to the fact that I already participated in the program as a mentee a few years ago. This experience helped me gain insight from the other side. In my opinion, mentorships as a model of learning is very useful - when you are a mentee, you are guided, and it's easier to achieve goals in this way, and as a mentor, it is an opportunity to systematize your experience. I would say that the benefits are equal on both parts.*

***The Bridge mentor:*** *As my first mentorship experience, it gave me confidence that I can be useful to a younger generation and help them to go faster through their uncertainties and realise their full potential.*

***The Bridge mentor:*** *I believe in mentorship - it opens doors and helps unlock ourselves!*

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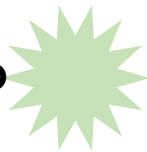
## HOW TO GET IN TOUCH WITH A POTENTIAL MENTOR?



If you are not part of a mentorship programme offered by your institution, it is important to take initiative and make the first step yourself. Send an email in which you introduce yourself, describe your current challenges, and explain why you are seeking a mentor. Then outline why you believe this person would be a good mentor for you. Finally, suggest an initial meeting so you can get to know each other and discuss expectations, working dynamics, and the possible structure and schedule of your mentorship relationship.

It is also important to express appreciation in advance for the mentor's time and willingness to consider a potential collaboration. A mentor can expect a mentee who is proactive, organised, reliable, and genuinely committed to the process, providing a clear sense of what the relationship may look like. Our experience shows that mentors often gain a great deal from mentorship: exposure to new ideas and perspectives from a younger generation, the opportunity to reflect on and systematise their own knowledge and experience, and, perhaps most importantly, the personal satisfaction that comes from supporting another human being in their growth and development.

# WHAT IF/WHEN A MENTOR AGREES TO COLLABORATE AND YOU SCHEDULE YOUR FIRST MEETING?



That's great news and an excellent first step – and we're here to help! On the [Creative Mentorship website](#), you will find very detailed and practical tools to help you plan and conduct your first mentorship meeting, organize the mentorship work, define what a mentorship meeting should look like, understand the “ground rules,” and much more.

Each Tool starts with an explanation of the context in which it could be used, as well as the goal that one could achieve by using it. Step-by-step instructions explain the mentoring process techniques, followed by a template that could be printed. These PDF templates are the essence of each tool. They are designed to provide guidance and inspiration, to be a starting point for discussions, and to support the mentoring process. Therefore, the most important part of the Tools is the way in which you will use them and the content that you will create by using them.

On the [Creative Mentorship website](#), you will find free downloadable tools designed for:

- [Mentees](#)
- [Mentors](#)
- [Mentorship programme coordinators](#)



It is important to recognize that the mentorship we recommend you pursue and discuss in this guide is not the traditional, academic mentorship you may have encountered during your studies. Here is what participants in *The Bridge* mentorship programme say about why this type of mentorship is so important and valuable:

- **I think informal relationships (i.e., not "academic supervisor" or "boss"), like mentorships, are able to sit productively between personal and professional. It allows for more digging into the grey areas... personal conversations about work, collegial conversations about personal growth. It's a unique thing.**
- **It was a focused and bespoke way of honing in on personal and professional goals, life choices, and areas that needed further attention.**
- **It offers another approach to guidance/coaching/being in a teacher/learner relationship. It is not better, just very different. Because there is no strict goal or end result that is expected to be achieved, there is more freedom for other aspects to emerge.**

What is the worst that could happen? The worst thing that could happen is that the potential mentor might say no, or that they currently don't have enough time to work with you. OF COURSE, THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD :) This happens, but it should not be a reason to give up on finding your mentor. Thank them and continue your search. We are confident that someone in your immediate or broader surroundings would be happy to work with you and invest their knowledge, experience, and time in you!

## CONCLUSION



We hope that, after reading this handbook, we have convinced you that mentorship can be one of the most powerful “bridges” in the transition from academia to the professional world. Although this handbook is primarily intended for prospective mentees, we also hope that, through the topics and principles addressed, it has inspired potential mentors who are considering how they might contribute to society. Mentorship is a space in which investing your time, knowledge, and experience can truly make a difference.

We further hope that this handbook encourages university staff to reflect on the value of initiating non-academic mentorship programmes within their institutions. Such programmes can be among the most meaningful and impactful initiatives a university can offer to support its students beyond formal education.

Mentorship is a powerful principle that, once experienced, often transforms the way we approach future conversations, professional opportunities, and meaningful connections. This has been affirmed by more than 500 participants in Creative Mentorship programmes since 2011, who are now creating positive impact across the Western Balkans and around the world.

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## IMPRESSUM

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