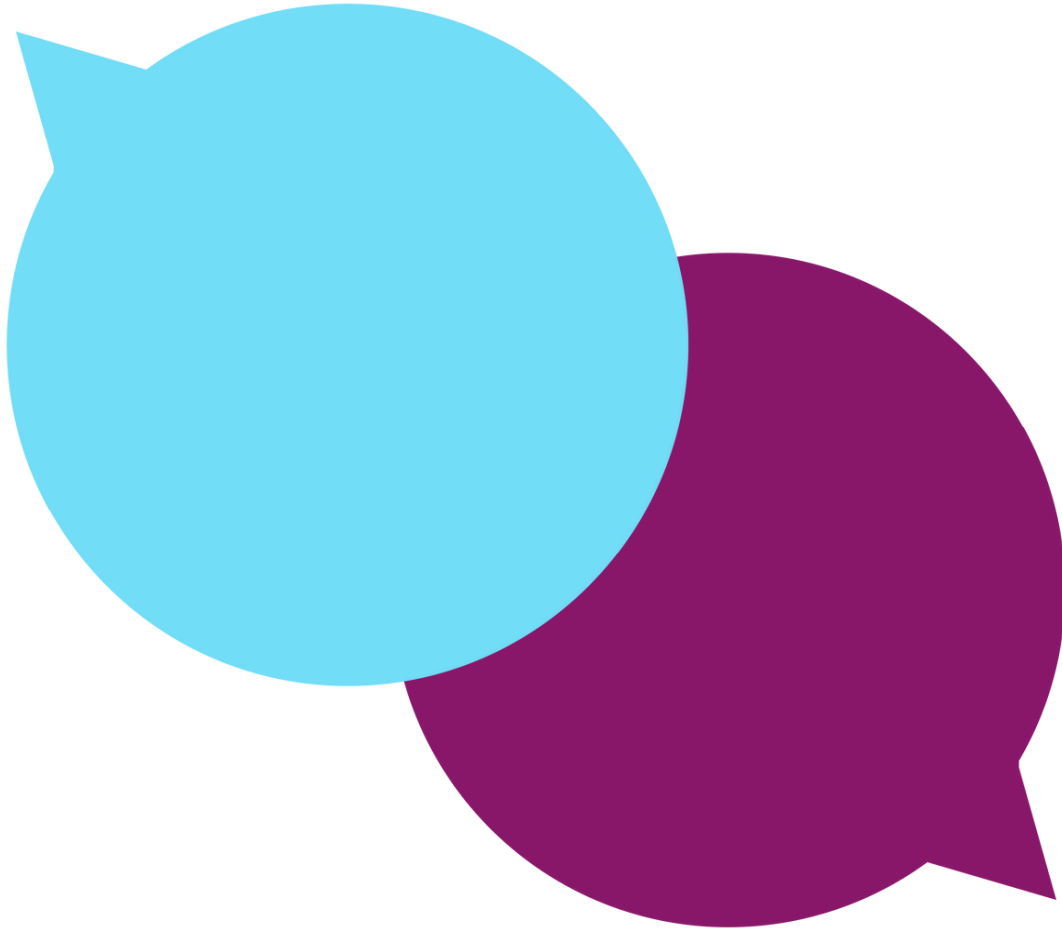


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Co-mentoring with the Association of Chairs

Case study

Introduction

Chairing can be challenging.

It's a unique voluntary role that often requires support, advice, and guidance from those who understand what it's like. That's why the Association of Chairs offers a number of support services to chairs, including a co-mentoring scheme.



Having a co-mentor to talk to outside of your organisation provides a helpful reflective space to talk through your experiences as a chair, be listened to by someone who has a valuable perspective to share, sound out new ideas and learn about different approaches.

This is a pilot scheme, made possible by London funder City Bridge Foundation, so it is initially focusing on London-based chairs (that is if you or your charity are based in Greater London or serve Greater London). You do not have to be a member of AoC.

This case study was kindly contributed by Natalie Mendez, chair of Alternatives to Violence Project Britain, and Vicky Beckwith, chair of the Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse. They were matched together as co-mentors by AoC in 2025.

Natalie Mendez



My name is Natalie Mendez. I am chair of trustees at Alternatives to Violence Project Britain. AVPB is a national charity. We provide experiential workshops, in-person and online; and distance learning courses which give people the necessary skills to navigate conflict nonviolently and empower them to build better relationships. I joined AVPB in November 2024 and was formally voted onto the board in February 2025.

How co-mentoring works for us

We meet monthly, usually for an hour. Initially we met in person, as we had booked onto the same AoC networking event in London. This was a great opportunity to get to know each other and explore where each of us were in our learning journeys so far as chairs and also explore what our roles looked like as chairs specifically within our charities. Following this, we then met both in person and online, depending on what worked with our schedules. We were then able to identify 3 main objectives each and this provided the structure of our subsequent meetings. It also kept us accountable and focused on 'tuning out' other responsibilities and challenges we faced at work or home.



Why I signed up for co-mentoring

I had just started my new role as chair of trustees and whilst I have experience as a chair and trustee in other charities, I was keen to engage in a joint learning experience, alongside embarking on my new role as chair, in a charity which is very different to the experiences that I have so far gained in my leadership development journey. I didn't have any specific expectations from the co-mentor scheme but wanted us both to be able to bring learning, reflection and value to each other. What interested me was my co-mentor coming from a different charity, with different work and life experiences which would enhance my learning and my own perspectives. I believe this way of learning is incredibly valuable for leadership development. And I absolutely love meeting new people!

What we talk about

We covered a range of topics but the ones that were our main focus were: leadership skills and development, wellbeing, challenges we faced in our roles as chairs, strategy, self-leadership. We also talked about personal challenges, business development, our values as leaders, diversity, equity and inclusion. We shared 'how we were feeling' and how we could turn those into opportunities for growth in ourselves and for the charities which we serve.

The benefits of co-mentoring for me

Whilst there have been numerous benefits from having a co-mentor, the top three benefits for me have been:

- Having a safe space to explore the challenges faced in my role as chair and gaining new perspectives and brainstorming alternative ways of working.
- Having an 'accountability partner' who could keep me focused on the bigger picture for our charity and 'work through and articulate' how we were working to support our board of trustees. It was a regular focused meeting in which we could 'cut through the noise of daily challenges' and clarify what was important right now.
- Having an 'accountability partner' who could keep me focused on the bigger picture for me personally and professionally.

My biggest learning so far

It reinforced the value and opportunity that learning models such as co-mentorship can bring in terms of shared learning, diversity of perspective and the importance of creating a safe space for leaders to be vulnerable and feel 'care and compassion'. Our health and wellbeing is critical to our work as leaders in everything we do (both professionally and personally). I am very grateful to AoC for giving us the opportunity to have a 'safe space' but also having a co-mentor that held me accountable for my own health and wellbeing and steadily 'steered' me when faced with challenges. Time is our most valuable resource but it can also be our scarcest. The monthly one-hour meetings were invaluable in re-aligning ourselves with our priorities and reminding us that our health and wellbeing are a priority.

My tips if you're thinking about signing up

Don't think 'I don't have time'. It's really worthwhile for your organisation, your role as a trustee and chair and for your own personal development. Once you come together as co-mentors you can explore how you can make it work together. The beauty is in the joint accountability so you make it work, as you don't want to let your co-mentor down! It is an amazing opportunity to 'learn' together, particularly in a role that can often feel very isolating. An 'outside perspective and curiosity' is a fantastic way of adding value to your development as a leader as well as for your charity! Lean in and give it a go!

Vicky Beckwith



My name is Vicky Beckwith and I am chair of the Centre for Action on Rape and Abuse (CARA), which is a rape crisis charity based in Essex, where I am originally from. I have been on the trustee board since January 2019; I applied to be on the board after working with CARA during a project I led at the University of Essex, Tackling Sexual Violence, Harassment and Hate Crime. I became chair in November 2024, so although I have been on the board for a relatively long time, I am new to the role of chair.

How co-mentoring works for us

I meet my co-mentor monthly, usually for an hour. Initially we met in person, having booked onto the same AoC networking event in London, and spent some time getting to know each other and figuring out what our objectives were. Following this, we met both in person and online, depending on what worked with our schedules, and my co-mentor was brilliant in keeping us on track; she identified clear objectives that we referred to at every meeting, and we linked our conversation back to these to keep ourselves accountable and make sure that we were progressing.



Why I signed up for co-mentoring

Being new to the role of chair, I was keen to engage with as much support, learning, and development as I could to help me in this role, and I quickly became a member of the Association of Chairs following recommendations from a fellow board member and another trusted friend. This friend is well-established in the charity sector and explained how much they had benefited from the co-mentoring scheme, so as soon as the opportunity arose, I signed up. I didn't have any clear expectations from the scheme, I just know that I always get a lot out of engaging with peers and colleagues, and if anything, I would get to know someone with a different skill set and experiences from mine, which is always a source of great learning and growth.

What we talk about

We cover lots of different topics, including our daily challenges in our role, as well as our overall career development, and have spoken about some of the personal aspects of our lives. We have had some interesting conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as strategy and self-care. We have also explored setting up our own businesses and navigating imposter syndrome!

The benefits of co-mentoring for me

I've really valued having someone who understands the role of a chair and who has a lot more experience than me, as I have learned a lot from them and appreciate how much they know and how good they are at addressing very complex difficulties. It has made me reflect how I tend to err on caution in terms of my career development, and how the problems I perceive as 'problems' are possibly more like opportunities, so it's helped me to reframe this and be a better leader.

My biggest learning so far

That I still have so much to learn, but I think that will be true for my entire life!

My tips if you're thinking about signing up

I really recommend it, particularly if you want to connect with someone who will support and challenge you to think differently and open you up to seeing things from another perspective. Even if you're not sure exactly what you want out of it, go into it with an open mind and also be very assured that the AoC team are excellent at matching co-mentors, it feels like it was an ideal pairing!



Are you interested in co-mentoring?

Find out more <https://associationofchairs.co.uk/community/co-mentoring-scheme-information/>

About the Association of Chairs

Charity chairs and trustees are unpaid. They should not be unsupported too.

That's why we're here.

We champion all charity and non-profit chairs and their boards – no matter how big or small your organisation is, no matter where you are on your chairing journey.

Our membership includes vice chairs, co-chairs, and former chairs, as well as trustees and governance specialists. We understand the challenges of chairing and are here to help.

We share and support

With our lively community and regular groups and events, we provide a safe and supportive network.

We learn and develop

With over 40 bespoke resources plus regular events, webinars, and training for both chairs and trustees, there are plenty of opportunities to grow your expertise and share your own experiences.

Become part of our collaborative community today – find out more: <https://www.associationofchairs.org.uk/join-us-or-renew/>

