

Mentorship

Overview: Mentorship is a core pillar of the India RISE Fellowship, fully embedded as a dynamic learning strategy rather than a standalone add-on. The fellowship's curriculum blends advanced research training, culturally contextualized leadership development, and personalized mentorship, ensuring fellows grow into confident researchers, resilient leaders, and future mentors. Through the Mentorship Pillar, each fellow is supported by a **triad mentorship model** that cultivates individualized guidance, peer support, and professional networking. This structured yet flexible mentorship experience underpins the entire program, fostering personal and professional growth in tandem with the research and leadership training pillars.

Goals and Objectives

The Mentorship Pillar is designed to strengthen supportive relationships and build the fellow's capacity as both a mentee and a future mentor. Key goals and objectives include:

- **Personalized Guidance:** Provide one-on-one mentorship to address each fellow's unique goals, challenges, and development areas, ensuring mentorship is **personalized, goal-oriented, and reflective**. By starting with an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to outline career goals and strengths, mentors tailor their guidance to align with each fellow's aspirations.
- **Professional and Personal Growth:** Create a **safe, supportive space** for fellows to grow in confidence and resilience. Mentors serve as role models and advisors, helping fellows navigate both technical research issues and career or leadership challenges. This pillar explicitly aims to build **resilience and mentorship skills** in the fellows so that they, in turn, can mentor future trainees.
- **Network Building:** Facilitate **community-building** and networking opportunities through mentorship groups and events. The small-group mentorship sessions and peer discussions broaden each fellow's professional network across STEM disciplines. A strong network of peers and mentors helps foster collaboration and long-term career support.
- **Train-the-Trainer for Future Mentors:** Empower fellows with the skills and confidence to **mentor the next generation** of women scientists, following a "train-the-trainer" model. By experiencing high-quality mentorship themselves, and reflecting on mentorship practices, fellows are prepared to **serve as**

mentors and cultivate mentorship networks in their institutions and communities after the fellowship.

These objectives ensure that the mentorship pillar not only supports fellows during the program, but also **prepares them to become effective mentors** beyond it, multiplying the impact of the fellowship in India's STEMM ecosystem.

Structure and Implementation

Triad Mentorship Model: The India RISE Fellowship employs a triad mentorship structure combining three mentorship sources for each fellow:

- **Technical Research Advisor:** A domain-specific expert (often self-identified by the fellow) who provides guidance on research design, methods, and subject matter expertise. This ensures fellows have local, field-specific support for their Capstone research.
- **India RISE Program Mentor:** An experienced mentor appointed by the program who focuses on the fellow's professional development, leadership growth, and career planning. The Program Mentor meets regularly with the fellow to discuss progress on goals, offer career advice, and develop leadership competencies in parallel to research progress.
- **Peer Mentorship Group:** A small group of fellow peers that meets in guided sessions and connects via the online platform for collaborative learning and mutual support. These peer groups create a sense of community, allowing fellows to share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from one another in an informal mentorship setting.

Mentorship is **fully integrated with the fellowship curriculum** – sessions are aligned with what fellows are learning and the stage of their research projects. At the start of the program, fellows, with their Program Mentor, co-create a Mentorship Agreement or set expectations and discuss the fellow's IDP goals. An **initial triad meeting** (fellow, Program Mentor, and Research Advisor together) is recommended in the first two months to jointly discuss the fellow's goals, research plan, and Individual Development Plan. This kickoff meeting ensures all mentors are aligned in supporting the fellow's objectives, including plans for the Capstone Project and skill development needs.

Throughout the year, mentorship follows a structured cadence while allowing flexibility:

- Fellows participate in **six scheduled group mentorship sessions** (virtual), led by the Program Mentor with 4–6 fellows per group, to discuss common themes

and progress. These sessions often coincide with key points in the curriculum (for example, following major workshops or as Capstone milestones approach) so that discussion is relevant and timely.

- In addition, each fellow has at least **two one-on-one mentorship meetings** with their Program Mentor (either virtual or in-person) to delve deeper into individual goals, challenges, and feedback. Fellows coordinate these 1:1 meetings directly with their mentor at convenient times.
- **Ongoing peer interactions** are facilitated via dedicated mentorship group forums on the Canvas online platform. Here, fellows can asynchronously discuss topics, share resources, celebrate successes, or seek advice from peers and mentors, fostering a continuous support community beyond formal meetings.

Mentors are provided with a **Mentorship Handbook** and session guides, ensuring a common structure and high-quality experience, while still allowing flexibility for each group's needs. Each mentorship meeting is tied to the fellow's IDP and current projects, making the conversation immediately applicable. Sessions often conclude with a brief reflection or feedback exercise, so that mentors and fellows can consolidate insights and track progress toward goals. This reflective practice helps fellows develop self-awareness and ensures mentorship remains responsive to their evolving needs.

Finally, the mentorship pillar is supported by **program oversight** – the Curriculum Director and fellowship staff coordinate scheduling, provide training for mentors, and gather feedback through mentorship session surveys. This ensures quality and allows for adjustments to better serve the fellows. Mentorship is thus an iterative, feedback-informed process within the fellowship.

Key Activities and Components

The Mentorship Pillar encompasses several key activities and components that structure the mentorship experience:

- **Mentorship Orientation & IDP Development:** Early in the fellowship, fellows complete an Individual Development Plan and mentoring orientation. They identify their goals and mentoring needs, review the Mentorship Handbook, and establish ground rules with mentors (often formalized in a Mentorship Agreement). This activity lays the foundation for an effective mentor–mentee relationship by clarifying expectations and focus areas.

- **Triad Mentorship Kick-off Meeting:** In the first 1–2 months, an initial three-way meeting is held with the fellow’s Program Mentor and Research Advisor. In this meeting, the fellow’s research plans, career goals, and leadership development goals are discussed holistically. The outcome is a shared understanding among the fellow and her mentors, alignment on the Capstone Project direction, and a commitment to a mentorship plan (including meeting frequency and communication preferences).
- **Group Mentorship Sessions:** Approximately every 2 months, fellows join **small-group mentorship meetings** led by Program Mentors (often 5–8 fellows per group). Each session has a thematic focus tied to the curriculum. For example, after a grant-writing workshop, a mentorship session might focus on discussing proposal ideas or challenges. Activities in sessions can include scenario-based discussions, peer feedback on research ideas, leadership exercises, or sharing personal experiences. These group sessions encourage peer-to-peer learning and normalize common challenges (such as balancing research with personal responsibilities, or overcoming impostor syndrome) in a supportive setting.
- **One-on-One Mentoring:** Between group meetings, fellows engage in **individual mentoring conversations** with their Program Mentor (and occasionally with their Research Advisor as needed). In these confidential one-on-one meetings, mentors provide tailored advice on the fellow’s specific research project hurdles (e.g. refining methodology), career decisions (such as PhD applications or job opportunities), or leadership development (e.g. practicing difficult conversations). The fellow can seek guidance on any topic. Mentors help troubleshoot issues and also coach the fellow in soft skills like communication, time management, and self-advocacy.
- **Peer Mentorship & Networking:** The fellowship deliberately fosters **peer mentorship**. Beyond the formal sessions, fellows are encouraged to **connect** informally. For instance, fellows from earlier cohorts might share insights with current fellows, creating opportunities for near-peer mentorship across cohorts. All fellows exchange support via the online cohort forum. Networking events (such as mixers during in-person convenings, or virtual “coffee chats”) are organized to expand connections. These activities help build a lasting network of women researchers who continue to mentor and collaborate with each other even after the program.
- **Mentorship Reflection and Feedback:** After each mentorship interaction (group or one-on-one), fellows often complete a short reflection or feedback form. They might note key takeaways, new questions, or areas where they need more support. Mentors also provide feedback or notes on the sessions. This component ensures continuous improvement – the program staff review

feedback to refine mentorship activities, and fellows learn to consciously reflect on their growth. A final **Mentorship Reflection** is included in the end-of-program report, allowing fellows to articulate how mentorship contributed to their journey and how they plan to mentor others going forward.

Throughout all these activities, the mentorship pillar maintains a **strengths-based and culturally responsive approach**. Mentors recognize the local challenges early-career women in India face and provide encouragement and strategies to overcome institutional or societal barriers. The mentorship content is contextualized – for example, discussion topics might include navigating gender biases in the lab or balancing family expectations with career ambitions, all within the Indian context. This ensures the mentorship experience is **relevant and resonant** for the fellows.

Expected Outcomes and Impact

By the conclusion of the fellowship, the Mentorship Pillar yields several important outcomes for the fellows:

- **Enhanced Skills as Mentees and Future Mentors:** Fellows demonstrate improved ability to actively engage in mentoring relationships – they learn how to seek guidance, accept feedback, and set mentoring agendas. More importantly, they **develop mentorship skills to mentor future trainees**. Through observation and practice, fellows gain confidence in mentoring others, effectively creating a pipeline of trained mentors for the future.
- **Personal Growth – Confidence and Resilience:** Regular support and affirmation from mentors bolster the fellows' self-confidence. Many fellows report greater resilience in facing research and career challenges as a result of mentorship. They learn to bounce back from setbacks and maintain progress toward goals. This growth in confidence and grit is a key outcome, aligning with the program's aim to produce **resilient leaders**.
- **Goal Attainment and Career Development:** With mentors guiding them, fellows are more likely to achieve their targeted goals, such as completing a high-quality research Capstone Project and making progress on their career development plan. Mentors help keep fellows accountable and motivated. By program end, each fellow will have completed an **Individual Development Plan and Capstone Project**, tangible evidence of their development. Many will also have taken concrete steps toward career advancement (applications, proposals, skill certifications) thanks to mentor advice.

- **Expanded Professional Network:** Through their mentorship group and the broader fellowship, each fellow exits the program with a strong network of professional contacts. They form lasting relationships with mentors, peers, and even the mentors' networks. This expanded network spans disciplines and institutions, positioning fellows to collaborate on research and to access opportunities that might have been out of reach before. In essence, the mentorship pillar creates a **community of practice** – a supportive network of women in STEMM who continue to share knowledge and opportunities.
- **Contribution to a Mentoring Culture:** On a larger level, graduates of India RISE contribute to a growing culture of mentorship in Indian STEMM academia and industry. Having been “trained” in effective mentorship approaches, they are expected to propagate these practices. The **train-the-trainer aspect** means each fellow can mentor junior colleagues or students, thereby **fostering new mentorship networks** in their home institutions. Over time, this can lead to a multiplier effect where mentorship becomes more commonplace and accessible for early-career women scientists in those environments.

In summary, the Mentorship Pillar equips India RISE fellows with **meaningful mentor relationships and the skills to both benefit from and provide mentorship**. It is the human-centric backbone of the fellowship that ensures each fellow's journey is supported, reflective, and community-oriented. By integrating closely with the Research Training and Leadership Development pillars, mentorship amplifies learning – for instance, mentors guide the application of research skills and the practice of leadership techniques in real scenarios. This pillar's impact is evident not only in the fellows' personal achievements during the fellowship, but also in their continued growth and contributions as they progress in their careers, confidently leading and mentoring others in turn.

Role in the Overall Fellowship Experience

Mentorship is often described as the **“heart” of the India RISE Fellowship**. Its role in the overall experience is to knit the other elements of the program together in a cohesive support system. While the research training and leadership development modules provide knowledge and skills, the mentorship pillar provides the **personalized guidance and encouragement** needed to apply those skills and overcome challenges. For example, as fellows learn advanced research techniques, their mentors help them adapt these techniques to their specific projects; as fellows practice leadership concepts, mentors coach them through real-life leadership situations in their labs or teams.

Crucially, mentorship ensures that the fellowship is not a one-size-fits-all program but an **individualized journey** for each fellow. The mentors help translate the general curriculum into specific advice for each fellow's context (field of research, institution, personal circumstances), thereby maximizing relevance and impact. This integration means mentorship and leadership are not peripheral – they are **strategically woven throughout every aspect of the program**. Fellows benefit from this integration by having a constant thread of support and reflection running alongside their technical training.

In the big picture, the Mentorship Pillar contributes to the fellowship's mission of empowering women in STEMM. It builds a legacy of mentorship: graduates leave not only with improved capabilities but also with a mentor mindset to **"pay it forward."** Thus, the mentorship pillar plays a transformative role in the fellowship – it **creates an enduring community**, reinforces learning, and shapes the fellows into both accomplished researchers and compassionate leaders who will nurture others. This pillar exemplifies how the India RISE Fellowship goes beyond academic training to develop the **whole person**, ensuring fellows not only rise themselves but also lift others as they advance.