

*Southwest Hub*  
MENTOR GUIDE

# BACKGROUND

## ABOUT THE HUB

The NSF I-Corps™ Hub: Southwest fosters entrepreneurial thinking in academic research to create a thriving innovation ecosystem throughout the region. As a part of the National Science Foundation's National Innovation Network, The Hub fosters collaboration between leading research institutions to educate, support, and connect academic researchers to entrepreneurial opportunities.

The Hub works collaboratively to foster and catalyze entrepreneurial ecosystems through educational programs and training, networking events and mentoring, diverse community outreach, and research outcomes related to deep tech ventures to develop a systematic and comprehensive regional network of programming that accelerates the translation of federally funded research into innovations that benefit society and support deep tech workforce development and economic growth.

# BACKGROUND

## THE MENTOR PROGRAM GOAL

The goal of the program is to provide support and guidance for I-Corps Teams to support the successful completion of the I-Corps program and ultimately the successful commercialization of their products and services.

## MENTORS AND I-CORPS

The I-Corps Mentor Network embodies the public-private partnership at the heart of the NSF Innovation Corps. Through the Network, I-Corps teams have access to a broad range of commercialization expertise as well as potential sources for business relationships and partnerships.

## THE ROLE

The I-Corps Mentor plays an essential role within each project team by providing insight from the private sector. This individual typically is experienced or is an emerging entrepreneur with experience in transitioning technology out of academic labs.

The I-Corps Mentor will serve as the principal guide in determining the technology disposition. He or she also will be responsible for regularly updating the cognizant NSF I-Corps program director on progress toward this goal.

# MENTORING

## I-CORPS MENTORS

I-Corps mentors will leverage their experience to guide innovators seeking knowledge on how to apply their research. With a wide range of subject matters and team needs, our mentors can fill multiple distinct roles.

## MENTOR-IN-RESIDENCE

The mentor-in-residence leads the customer discovery process for I-Corps teams to help develop strong, validated business models and prepare them for acceleration and investment. They provide oversight and direction, evaluate progress milestones for customer discovery, assist in interpreting market signals, and help teams use information to form and test new hypotheses. This mentor should have startup experience, as their role is focused on guiding teams through the startup process.

## INDUSTRY MENTOR

Industry mentors provide real-world knowledge of a particular industry or market. They provide innovators with general knowledge, guidance on information sources, and prospective customer discovery interviews, along with setting discovery milestones. Industry mentors do **not** require startup experience.

## SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT

Subject matter experts focus on skills related guidance, whether it's scientific or technical knowledge, guidance on intellectual property, sales and marketing, logistics, manufacturing, or other key business components. They provide direction with a focus on execution elements for the business strategy. Startup experience is **not** necessary.

## NATIONAL I-CORPS MENTORS

National I-Corps mentors act as a third-party resource for their team, helping them recognize and reduce confirmation bias during the customer discovery process. The mentor should have industry contacts and a working knowledge of the target market in order to help their team identify potential interviewees.

# MENTORING

## MENTOR CHARACTERISTICS, QUALIFICATIONS, AND REQUIREMENTS

- Desire to support researchers, entrepreneurs, and innovators
- Ability to advise and coach
- Positive attitude
- Listening skills
- Relevant experience
- Ability to fulfill program time commitment

## DESIRED AREAS OF EXPERIENCE

- Academia
- Biotechnology
- Entrepreneurship
- Finance
- Investment
- Technology Startups
- I-Corps
- Marketing
- Information Technology
- Tech Transfer

## MENTOR FUNCTIONS

### WHAT

### WHEN

<b>FACILITATIVE COACHING</b>	providing a sounding board when an individual/team can do or solve it themselves
<b>GUIDANCE</b>	providing direction when an individual/team doesn't know where to start
<b>ROLE MODELING</b>	providing opportunities for vicarious learning when you're skilled at something others have the opportunity to observe
<b>INSTRUCTING</b>	providing opportunities for knowledge transfer when information needs to be shared
<b>ADVOCATING</b>	assisting practice when an individual/team needs to practice their skills
<b>SUPPORTING</b>	providing confidence when an individual/team needs encouragement and motivation
<b>NETWORKING</b>	facilitating introductions to help advance your team's progress

# MENTORING

## DOs AND DON'Ts

### DO

- Share your mistakes, struggles, and successes
- Disclose any possible conflicts of interest
- Invest time in learning about the aspiration, attributes, and preferences of your mentees
- Identify special learning opportunities in your organization or in professional networks for your mentees
- Actively help mentees develop their personal network of professional contacts
- Honor any commitments to and confidences of your mentees
- Be clear about purpose, goals, and boundaries
- Periodically validate with your mentee the value of the information and counsel you are providing
- Provide honest and regular feedback to your mentees
- Listen deeply and ask powerful questions
- Maintain and respect privacy, honesty, and integrity
- Help your mentees with problem-solving by guiding them through a logical thought process
- Set targets for your mentees and work towards them together

### DON'Ts

- Enter into any arrangement which may result in a conflict, such as entering into an employment or advisory position with a competitive organization without disclosing to the mentees
- Promise what you are unable to deliver
- Postpone or cancel meetings unless absolutely necessary
- Jump to conclusions or simply give answers
- Forget how important you are to your mentees

SPURRING  
INNOVATION