

HPRI Summer Fellows Program

What is a Fellows Mentor?

Mentor Role Overview, Weekly Meeting Expectations, and Capstone Responsibilities | Summer 2026

This document gives HPRI/H3E staff a practical overview of what it means to mentor a Summer Fellow. It clarifies the mentor role, the weekly meeting structure, expectations for self-directed activity planning, progress monitoring, professional mentoring, boundaries, and final capstone presentation support.

1. Mentor Role

A Fellows Mentor is a vetted staff member who works with the summer fellows and helps turn a broad interest in homelessness research, policy, services, health, data, field learning, or civic engagement into a concrete, age-appropriate project.

The mentor's role is to:

- Help the student define a feasible scope
- Identify credible sources
- Set weekly milestones
- Practice professional communication
- Connect the work to their final capstone presentation

Each fellow should have a primary and secondary mentor. The primary mentor is responsible for assigning weekly project work, defining deliverables, tracking attendance and progress, giving feedback, and helping the fellow connect the project to the capstone. A secondary mentor may provide additional coaching, context, backup supervision, and professional socialization. These mentors would cover each other if one is away or OOO during the fellowship period.

2. Core Responsibilities

Mentor Responsibility	What This Looks Like in Practice
Help fellow define a feasible project scope	Help your fellow select or refine a self-directed activity (SDA) or project-based placement that can realistically be completed during the six-week fellowship. Refer to the SDA Sheet for ideas.
Meet once per week	Hold one scheduled 20-30 min check-in each week to review progress, answer questions, clarify next steps, and document any concerns or support needs. This can be in person or over Zoom and should occur on Monday or Tuesday of each week.
Set weekly goals and deliverables	Help your fellow translate the project into manageable weekly tasks, such as selecting a

Mentor Responsibility	What This Looks Like in Practice
	topic, gathering sources, drafting a map or memo, preparing a tracker, or rehearsing a presentation.
Support structured inquiry	Guide the fellow toward credible sources, clear research questions, appropriate methods, and systems-level analysis.
Track progress and attendance	Document meetings, completed work, missed deadlines, barriers, and follow-up items so the program team can identify concerns early.
Provide feedback	Give developmentally appropriate feedback on project scope, writing, analysis, presentation structure, and professionalism.
Connect work to the capstone	Help the fellow understand how the self-directed activity becomes a final presentation, product, reflection, or evidence base.
Maintain boundaries and safety	Keep assignments age-appropriate, avoid unsupervised high-risk fieldwork, protect confidentiality, and elevate concerns promptly.
Attend mid-summer and post program mentor meeting/debrief	We'll have a check in with all mentors at the end of Week 3/beginning of Week 4 to discuss progress and troubleshoot any issues. And meet again in August post program to debrief.
Elevate Issues Early	Bring any issues to Amy's attention early so we can support and help you troubleshoot.

3. Weekly Meeting Expectation

Mentors should meet with each fellow once per week. The meeting may be brief, but it should be structured. A 20- to 30-minute check-in is usually sufficient if the fellow has a clear work plan and is making progress. Fellows who are struggling with scope, deadlines, confidence, source selection, or writing may need additional support, but the baseline expectation is one mentor meeting each week.

Because many fellows are minors, mentor meetings must follow USC youth protection expectations. Mentors should avoid private one-on-one in-person interactions with minors. All meetings and interactions should be observable and interruptible. If a student needs to speak about something privately, the mentor should move the conversation to a public or common area where others are nearby, or include another informed adult in the conversation.

If a fellow is working in a group for their self-directed activity, mentors and fellows from that group may meet together, or mentors may take turns meeting with the entire group. Group meetings are encouraged when appropriate because they support transparency, shared learning, and efficient supervision. Group assignments will become clear and be led by fellows after Week 1.

Mentors should also avoid private electronic communication with minors. Program communication should follow the “rule of three” by including another staff member, parent/guardian, or additional participant when communicating with a fellow. Mentors should use only professional or program-approved communication channels. Personal email, personal phone numbers, text messages, and personal social media accounts should not be used to communicate with fellows.

The program will use Slack as the primary communication channel for routine program communication. Slack messages should remain professional, transparent, and program-related. When communicating with fellows through Slack, mentors should use shared channels or group messages whenever possible rather than private direct messages.

Suggested Weekly Check-In Structure

- **Progress review:** What did the fellow complete since the last meeting?
- **Barrier check:** What is confusing, stalled, too broad, too sensitive, or not feasible?
- **Source and evidence check:** What sources, data, observations, or materials is the fellow using? Are they credible and appropriate?
- **Deliverable check:** What product is the fellow building: map, memo, tracker, reflection log, survey summary, case study, presentation, or other artifact?
- **Capstone bridge:** How will this week’s work appear in the final presentation or final reflection?
- **Next steps:** What should the fellow complete before the next weekly meeting?

4. Week Two Mentor Priority: Confirm Your Fellow’s Self-Directed Activity

By the beginning of Week Two (beginning June 29), each fellow should have a selected self-directed activity or a clearly defined project-based placement. The mentor should document the chosen activity category, working topic, research or learning question, likely deliverable, required sources or contacts, weekly milestones, and any boundaries or support needs. A form will be provided that they will turn into you and you’ll share with Amy.

Self-Directed Activity Plans

Activity Category	Typical Student Product	Mentor Focus
1. Homelessness, Hunger, and Community Meal Service: Union Station Homeless Services Adopt-a-Meal Project	Meal planning packet, shopping/supply list, team role plan, service-learning reflection, volunteer log, hunger systems map, or short systems analysis of food access and homelessness.	Help fellows coordinate appropriately with USHS through program staff, clarify partner needs and site rules, plan a feasible menu and supplies, assign safe and respectful team roles, prepare for service with dignity and professionalism, and connect the activity to hunger, homelessness, food access, dignity, and unmet service-system needs.
2. Community Space Planning and Youth Engagement: Young People to the Front HQ	Community space planning memo, needs and interests survey, workshop concept list, meeting reflection, youth engagement checklist, strengths-and-gaps analysis, or capstone recommendation.	Help fellows understand YPTF goals, research welcoming and trauma-informed community spaces, develop appropriate survey questions, identify possible workshop uses, prepare for the Homeless

Activity Category	Typical Student Product	Mentor Focus
		Comms Group meeting, and analyze how physical space, youth voice, safety, trust, and community engagement shape support for youth transitioning out of homelessness and community members.
3. Housing Challenges and Approaches in Another Country: A Comparative Homelessness and Housing Policy Project	Comparative policy memo, country profile, comparison chart with written analysis, short slide deck, infographic, policy brief, or capstone-ready case study.	Help fellows select a feasible country and research question, identify credible sources, compare 2-4 housing or homelessness approaches, and analyze lessons, cautions, or further questions without overgeneralizing across national contexts.
4. Community Asset Mapping	Digital resource map, neighborhood/SPA asset inventory, access-barrier chart, transit/service proximity notes, and 1-2 page analysis of where resources are concentrated, missing, or difficult to access.	Help define geography, service categories, source list, and access-barrier questions.
5. Los Angeles Policy-in-Action Tracking	Policy vs. Practice memo, public meeting notes, council file or policy timeline, stakeholder position summary, and short analysis of the gap between stated policy intent and implementation.	Help narrow the policy topic, identify council files, public meetings, local reporting, or implementation evidence, and distinguish policy intent from field reality.
6. Lived Experience Narrative Analysis	Thematic analysis memo, coded notes from an approved talk/interview/panel, systems-barrier chart, reflection on ethical listening, or short analysis connecting lived-experience themes to service-system gaps.	Help select an appropriate approved narrative source, code themes respectfully, protect dignity and confidentiality, and avoid overgeneralizing from one story.
7. Homelessness and Health: Access, Barriers, and Systems Response in Los Angeles	Health access memo, service map, care pathway or journey map, resource comparison chart, or short analysis of how housing status affects access to physical health, behavioral health, substance use treatment, harm reduction, or public health services.	Help define the health focus area, geography, resources, access barriers, and housing-health policy connection.
8. Ethical Field Observation and Reflexivity Log	2-3 structured field log entries, observation/interpretation/reflection notes, ethical concern summary, personal assumptions reflection, or short memo on power, safety, consent, and responsible field learning.	Confirm safety, confidentiality, minor-supervision requirements, observation boundaries, and the distinction between objective observation, interpretation, and reflection.

Activity Category	Typical Student Product	Mentor Focus
9. Rapid Mini-Survey Project	Short survey instrument, pilot feedback notes, revised question set, small findings summary, limitations section, or brief reflection on survey design, question wording, bias, and responsible interpretation of small samples.	Help write neutral questions, identify an ethical pilot group, use an approved platform or simulated data if needed, interpret limitations, and avoid overclaiming from small samples.
10. Los Angeles Media and Narrative Audit	Media comparison chart, framing analysis, language audit, rewritten media excerpt, source list, or short memo analyzing how homelessness is described, whose voices are included, and how coverage could be more accurate and dignified.	Help select comparable articles or clips, identify frames and missing voices, distinguish facts from opinion, and revise language for dignity, accuracy, and person-centered framing.
11. Systems Stakeholder Mapping	Stakeholder map, power/interest grid, agency and decision-maker chart, relationship diagram, or short analysis of who has authority, who is affected, where accountability sits, and how different parts of the homelessness response system interact.	Help identify decision-makers, affected groups, service providers, advocacy groups, community actors, and power/influence relationships.
12. Intervention Deep Dive	Short intervention case study, intervention model summary, local program profile, strengths/limitations chart, evidence snapshot, or brief analysis of who the intervention serves, what outcomes it aims for, and how it fits within the broader homelessness response system.	Help define the model, identify a local program or provider example, and analyze intended outcomes, strengths, limitations, implementation challenges, access, equity, and systems fit.
13. Service Learning and Systems Navigation Project	Service navigation guide, resource pathway map, journey map, access-barrier memo, resource chart, site reflection, or process analysis.	Help fellows understand how people move through service systems, identify access points and barriers, distinguish formal eligibility rules from practical obstacles, and confirm that any site contact, volunteer activity, observation, or partner communication is approved in advance.
14. Incentivizing Research Participation and Providing Comfort: Demographic Survey Donation Planning	Donation source plan, regional needs comparison, donation drive plan, item-priority list, outreach tracker, logistics memo, or short reflection on participant dignity and field-based research ethics.	Help fellows understand the Demographic Survey context, why small practical items can support dignity, comfort, trust, and participation, gather input only from approved staff, surveyors, partner sites, or approved respondents, compare

Activity Category	Typical Student Product	Mentor Focus
		regional needs including SPA 1 and the Antelope Valley, and develop a feasible donation source plan or donation drive.

5. Mentor Boundaries and Content Sensitivities

Fellows will be minors or early-career students who are new to homelessness research, policy, public health, field observation, and social services. Mentors should treat them as capable emerging professionals while keeping assignments age-appropriate, ethical, and clearly defined.

- Fellows should never handle identifiable participant, client, patient, or research-subject information unless specifically approved and supervised.
- Fellows should not conduct unsupervised outreach, service delivery, clinical assessment, crisis response, or sensitive interviews.
- Field observation should be structured, supervised, and limited to settings approved by program leadership.
- Assignments should use respectful, person-centered, strengths-based language and avoid stigmatizing or sensational descriptions.
- Mentors should elevate attendance concerns, safety concerns, parent questions, student distress, confidentiality questions, or scope problems promptly.
- When in doubt, simplify the project scope rather than allowing the fellow to pursue an overly broad, sensitive, or unmanageable project.

6. Final Capstone Presentation Responsibilities

Mentors are responsible for helping fellows prepare a coherent final capstone presentation. The mentor should ensure that the fellow understands the expected components and has enough feedback to present clearly and responsibly. Please refer to Capstone Guide for details and expectations.

Capstone Area	Mentor Responsibility
Topic and research question	Confirm that the fellow can explain the issue studied, why it matters, and the question that guided the project.
Evidence and sources	Review whether the fellow used credible sources, appropriate observations, public data, policy materials, media sources, maps, or program information.
Project deliverable	Make sure the fellow has a concrete product, such as a meal planning packet, community space plan, comparative policy memo, map, memo, tracker, analysis, field log, survey summary, case study, health access map, stakeholder map, media audit, service navigation guide, donation source plan, or other approved product.
Findings and analysis	Help the fellow identify 2-4 clear findings and explain systems-level barriers, patterns, gaps, or implications.
Recommendations or next questions	Help the fellow develop a realistic recommendation, practical insight, or next research question rather than making unsupported claims.

Capstone Area	Mentor Responsibility
Ethics and language	Check that the presentation uses respectful language, protects confidentiality, avoids stereotypes, and distinguishes evidence from opinion.
Reflection	Ask the fellow to explain what they learned, what challenged or surprised them, what assumptions changed, and what they would study next.
Presentation readiness	Review the slide structure or talking points, practice timing, and help the fellow prepare for questions.

7. Mentor Documentation Template

Mentors may copy this section for each fellow or use it as a weekly meeting record. This is for your records, no need to submit.

Details	Notes
Fellow Name	
Primary Mentor	
Secondary Mentor / Mentor	
Weekly Meeting Day/Time	
Selected Activity Category	
Working Project Title	
Research / Learning Question	
Geographic Focus or Population Focus	
Planned Deliverable	
Key Sources or Contacts	
Week Two Decision Confirmed?	Yes / No / Needs follow-up
Current Progress	
Barriers or Support Needs	
Next Weekly Milestone	
Capstone Connection	
Concerns to Elevate	

8. End-of-Week Mentor Checklist

- ☐ Met with the fellow this week.
- ☐ Confirmed or refined the fellow's selected activity category.
- ☐ Confirmed the fellow has a feasible weekly task list.
- ☐ Reviewed source plan, data plan, field observation plan, or stakeholder/contact plan.
- ☐ Identified the likely final deliverable.
- ☐ Connected the week's work to the capstone presentation.
- ☐ Documented barriers, late work, attendance issues, or support needs.
- ☐ Elevated any safety, confidentiality, scope, or student-support concerns to program leadership.

9. USC Guidelines for Interacting with Minors

Staff working with HPRI Summer Fellows must maintain professional, respectful, and age-appropriate boundaries at all times. All adults are expected to model appropriate conduct and help create a safe learning environment for minors.

- Avoid private one-on-one in person interactions with minors. All interactions should be observable and interruptible. If a student needs to speak privately, move to a public or common area or include another informed adult.
- Do not communicate privately with minors. Use the “rule of three” by including another staff member, parent/guardian, or additional participant on all communications.
- Use only professional or program-approved communication channels. Do not use personal email, phone, text, or social media accounts to communicate with fellows.
- Maintain appropriate verbal and physical boundaries. Do not use abusive, humiliating, sexual, discriminatory, or threatening language. Avoid comments about a minor's body, appearance, relationships, or sexuality.
- Limit physical contact. Appropriate contact, with consent, may include handshakes, high-fives, fist bumps, side hugs, or pats on the shoulder. Avoid full-body hugs, kisses, tickling, wrestling, massages, lap-sitting, piggyback rides, or any contact that could be misinterpreted.
- Protect privacy. Do not take, post, or share photos, recordings, names, identifying details, or personal information about minors without prior parental consent and program approval.
- Prioritize safety. Do not use alcohol, illegal drugs, weapons, or firearms while responsible for minors. Do not transport a minor alone except in an emergency, and do not use a personal vehicle for transportation.
- Treat all minors and families equitably. Do not discriminate or show favoritism. Avoid gifts, special privileges, secrecy, or special attention to one student or family.
- Report concerns promptly. Any suspected violation, boundary concern, abuse, neglect, or unsafe behavior should be reported through program leadership and USC youth protection procedures.

When in doubt, include another adult, use a public setting, keep communication transparent, protect student privacy, and ask program leadership for guidance.

