

## Emerging Scholars Research Mentoring Event

### Guidance for Discussion

The purpose of this event is to form new connections and create conversations between mentors and emerging scholars via topical and professional development discussion. Please briefly introduce yourselves and together determine the focus of your conversation to maximize this time. We have provided conversation starters for each discussion group in the pages that follow. Please review the guidance for your assigned group, but feel free to select other topics as you see fit. Discussions are meant to be informal.

### Contents

Group 1: Pursuing a career in academia.....	2
Groups 2: Pursuing a career outside of academia (e.g., in government, public policy, applied research organizations, and think tanks).....	3
Group 3: Strategies for successful grant writing and funding.....	4
Group 4: Preparing for the academic job market (e.g., CVs, interviews, job talks).....	5
Group 5: Getting published and navigating the peer-review process.....	6
Group 6: Building professional networks and collaborations.....	7
Group 7: Conducting policy-relevant research.....	8
Group 8: Emerging directions and opportunities in poverty and economic mobility research.....	9
Group 9: Work-life balance.....	10

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The purpose of this information collection is to gather information and share information focused on professional development among individuals (mentors and mentees) attending the 2026 RECS Emerging Scholars Mentoring Event. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1.0 hour per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This collection of information is voluntary. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0617 and the expiration date is 09/30/2026. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact [recs2026mentorship@childtrends.org](mailto:recs2026mentorship@childtrends.org).



## Group 1: Pursuing a career in academia

1. What is some general advice for people entering the academic job market? (i.e., What should I focus on in graduate school to best prepare for an academic position? How do I stand out in my application? What are some tips for giving a successful job talk? What are some tips for negotiating and what should I negotiate for?)
2. How important is a post-doc for getting an academic job and how can I think about them strategically? (i.e., Is it best to look for a post-doc that is similar to and builds upon my work in graduate school, or is it better to look for a post-doc that gives me a new and different experience? What is most important to get out of a post-doc to be successful at getting an academic job afterwards?)
3. What are key considerations regarding a career in academia? (i.e., What are common misconceptions about academic careers that early career scholars should keep in mind? How do you balance interests in practice, teaching, and research while in academia? What is work-life balance like? What are the tradeoffs in a tenure-track versus non-tenure track position? What are important accomplishments to consider early in your career as you work toward becoming tenured? How do expectations differ across institution types?)
4. What advice is there for early career academics other than "publish or perish"?
5. What recommendations do you have regarding how to pursue a core research agenda? (i.e., How can I identify an agenda? How do research agendas evolve over time? How should I think about the tradeoffs between pursuing trending topics versus long-term, foundational questions?)

## Group 2: Pursuing a career outside of academia (e.g., in government, public policy, applied research organizations, and think tanks)

1. What career options are available outside of academia? (i.e., What are different options for research careers outside of academia? What are examples of applied positions within a university setting? What career options are available within government? What are examples of positions within federal, state, and local governments? What are the key considerations of these different career options? What career paths did you consider?)
2. How can I explore and best prepare for research positions outside academia? (i.e., What skills should I aim to develop during graduate school? How can I pursue applied experiences/internships to gain experience during graduate school? What are the challenges in pursuing these careers when my mentors in graduate school are in tenure-track academic positions, and how can I overcome them?)
3. What things should I consider when applying for jobs outside academia? (i.e., What resources or websites are available and most useful? What skills should I highlight when applying for jobs outside academia? How do I prepare for interviews? What does a successful job talk look like? What should I ask interviewers to help determine if a position is right for me?)
4. How does a career in applied research organizations differ from academic ones? (i.e., What are the main differences? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different positions? How does research differ in these settings? What is day-to-day life like? What is work-life balance like? What are common sources of funding? How much freedom do researchers have to direct their own research?)
5. What does success look like in settings outside of academia? (i.e., How is impact measured? What do leadership positions look like? What kinds of activities are rewarded?)
6. What does career advancement look like in jobs outside of academia? (i.e., How can I seek mentorship within or outside my organization? Where can I find additional trainings and professional development opportunities? How can I raise my visibility and profile within my organization? What are considerations for seeking internal promotions versus finding a new job to advance my career? How do promotions work in jobs outside of academia? How and when should I decide whether to seek additional education?)
7. To what extent is it possible to move in and out of academia? (i.e., Does choosing a non-academic job close the door to academia later? What might a path back to academia look like in the future? What are the pros and cons of moving between academic and non-academic jobs? How do these vary by career stage?)

## Group 3: Strategies for successful grant writing and funding

1. What are some common sources of research funding? (i.e., How do I find out about funding opportunity announcements? How do I know if a funding opportunity is right for me? How do I get funding for small/pilot projects? What is the difference between a grant, contract, and a cooperative agreement?)
2. What insights do you have into the grant review process? (i.e., What actually happens during proposal review panels that applicants rarely see?)
3. What things should I consider *before* applying for funding? (i.e., How do I know if my proposal idea is of interest to the funder? How do I balance pursuing my own research interests and conducting research that is in line with the funder's priorities? What are the benefits of partnering with other researchers at my institution or elsewhere? How much experience do I need in the proposed topic before applying for a grant?)
4. How do I write a successful grant application? (i.e., What are the key components of a strong application, and how does this vary by type of funder? What are the top reasons applications score poorly? How do I get training on grant writing? How do I write a strong aims page?)
5. Do you have key lessons learned to share? (i.e., What are key lessons learned from your experience writing or reviewing proposals? What are the next steps when my application isn't funded?)
6. What is the best piece of advice you have regarding developing strong proposals?

## Group 4: Preparing for the academic job market (e.g., CVs, interviews, job talks)

1. How can I best position myself in the job market? (i.e., What should I focus on in graduate school to best prepare for an academic position? How do I stand out in my application? How can I best frame my research trajectory?)
2. What distinguishes a strong application package overall? (i.e., How do the CV, cover letter, research statement, and teaching statement work together? What signals make a candidate feel like a “fit” on paper before the interview stage?)
3. What are some tips for giving a successful job talk? (i.e., What separates a good job talk from one that leads to an offer? What are common mistakes candidates make during a job talk?)
4. What questions should I be asking during an interview to assess whether a position is the right fit for me? (i.e., How do I learn about departmental culture, expectations for tenure, mentoring support, collaboration opportunities, and work-life balance?)
5. What are some tips for negotiating? (i.e., What should candidates realistically negotiate when considering a job offer? How much flexibility do institutions typically have? What are common mistakes candidates make when evaluating offers?)

## Group 5: Getting published and navigating the peer-review process

1. How do I select an appropriate journal for my topic that also has high impact? (i.e., How do I tailor my research to a specific journal? What do I do with papers that can't seem to find a journal home? How do I interpret journal scope and audience? What are the tradeoffs between top-tier journals and more specialized outlets?)
2. How do I carve out time to write? (i.e., How do I overcome writer's block? How do I balance my course work with writing?)
4. How does the peer review process work? (i.e., What actually happens behind the scenes once a paper is submitted? What separates a "revise and resubmit" from a rejection in practice? Is it always advisable to revise and resubmit? How do I effectively respond to reviewers' comments? What if I disagree with comments?)
5. How do I think about incorporating non-peer-reviewed publications into my broader publishing strategy? (i.e., How do I decide when a piece is better suited for a peer-reviewed journal versus a public-facing outlet? What role do these outputs play—translation, early dissemination, agenda-setting? How should I think about timing relative to journal publication? What tradeoffs should I weigh when deciding whether to invest in peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed publications? Are there particular formats or outlets you've found especially effective, and why?)
6. What advice do you have for navigating co-authorship and collaboration? (i.e., How should responsibilities be divided among co-authors during writing and revision? What are best practices for determining author order? How should I handle disagreements about how to respond to reviewers?)

## Group 6: Building professional networks and collaborations

1. What opportunities are there to build my network as a student, recent graduate, or junior staff or faculty member? (i.e., How can I leverage conferences to build my network? How can I be more proactive? How can I build on my current network to further expand it? How does one go about connecting with someone you want to build a relationship with? How do I overcome anxiety about meeting new individuals?)
2. How do I establish research collaborations? (i.e., How can I network to find future co-authors? How do I maintain a relationship with my graduate school mentors and colleagues post-graduation? How should early-career scholars navigate collaborations with more senior academics?)
3. What are key elements of successful collaborations? (i.e., How do I identify the right collaborators? How do I negotiate roles and responsibilities? What are strategies to keep each other accountable? What are common reasons collaborations fail or fizzle out?)
4. What do I do if a collaborative relationship needs improvement? (i.e., How do I navigate different expectations about workload, roles, and responsibilities?)
5. What types of collaboration should I think about to help improve my chances of tenure? (i.e., Should I focus on collaborations that will lead to the most publications, or ones that result in fewer publications with big names?)

## Group 7: Conducting policy-relevant research

1. How can I identify research questions that matter to policymakers? (i.e., What are effective ways to align scholarly work with real-world policy needs? In your experience, where do strong policy-relevant research questions come from?)
2. How can I learn about how policymaking works in my domain? (i.e., What timelines and constraints shape whether research gets used? What factors affect uptake of evidence? How are decisions made in practice?)
3. How can I communicate research to policymakers? (i.e., How can I translate complex findings without losing nuance or credibility? How can I tailor communication for specific audiences? What formats or channels [e.g., briefs, testimony, direct engagement] have you found most effective?)
4. What makes research more likely to be taken up, or ignored, by policymakers? (i.e., How much does timing matter relative to policy windows or legislative cycles? How do relationships and trust with policymakers or intermediaries influence whether research is used? What role does clarity of messaging and framing play, especially in translating complex findings into actionable insights? How important is the credibility of the messenger versus the strength of the evidence itself? And when research is not used, what tends to be the reason—misalignment with priorities, lack of accessibility, competing narratives, or something else?)
5. What are strategies to build relationships with policymakers? (i.e., How do meaningful researcher-policy relationships typically begin? What makes policymakers trust and return to a particular researcher? How can early-career scholars build connections without established networks?)
6. What ethical considerations should researchers be aware of? (i.e., Where is the line between informing policy and advocating for a position?)
7. What does a sustainable career combining scholarship and policy engagement look like? (i.e., To what extent is policy engagement valued in academic and non-academic roles? What are the risks of investing heavily in policy work as an early-career scholar? How should I balance publishing in academic journals with producing policy-facing outputs?)

## Group 8: Emerging directions and opportunities in poverty and economic mobility research

1. How are poverty, self-sufficiency, and economic mobility currently being defined and measured in research? (i.e., What measures are most commonly used, and why? Where do they fall short in capturing families' experiences? What additional dimensions, if any, are important to consider? Which aspects of economic wellbeing or mobility remain difficult to measure well, and why?)
2. What topics feel "overstudied," and which areas remain underexplored in poverty and economic mobility research? (i.e., Where do you see saturation—questions that have been asked repeatedly? Where are there clear gaps, particularly in relation to emerging policy challenges? Are there areas that are "understudied" because they are harder to measure or less visible in existing data systems? Where do you see opportunities to push the field in new or more meaningful directions?)
3. How can we address changes in technology and labor markets and their impact on poverty and economic mobility in our work? (i.e., How are automation, AI, and labor market polarization changing mobility prospects? What do new forms of work mean for economic security and advancement? What emerging trends and data should researchers be paying attention to?)
4. What opportunities exist to connect policy and research? (i.e., What recent policy experiments [e.g., cash transfers, place-based policies] are most promising? How can I use the roll out of policies as natural experiments? How should researchers evaluate policies that have diffuse or long-term effects?)
5. How should early career scholars position themselves in a crowded and evolving research area? (i.e., Is it better to specialize narrowly or develop a broader portfolio? How can I identify a research area that is both meaningful and sustainable?)
6. How can I collaborate with human service providers in my research? (i.e., How do I establish relationships with human service providers at the federal, state, or local level? How do I gain access to administrative data?)

## Group 9: Work-life balance

1. What does work-life balance actually mean? (i.e., What does balance look like in your current career stage, and how has that changed over time? Is balance a realistic goal, or is it more about managing competing priorities? What are signs that things are out of balance, even if productivity is high?)
2. What service demands should I expect as a junior faculty member, and which can I say no to? (i.e., How do I balance service demands with other obligations?)
3. What recommendations do you have for balancing schoolwork/work with personal life? (i.e., What boundaries have you found to be essential? What support structures have made a difference for you? How do major life events intersect with academic timelines? What advice would you give to someone trying to align career milestones with personal goals?)
4. How can I balance interests in practice, teaching, and research in my career? (i.e., What strategies help protect time for research, teaching and service demands? How do you decide what not to do when everything feels important?)
5. How have you learned to set boundaries and say no in ways that protect your time and priorities without closing off important opportunities? (i.e., What signals help you recognize when something is not aligned with your priorities? How do you say no, especially to senior colleagues or desirable opportunities, while maintaining professional relationships? What boundaries have been most important for sustaining your work and wellbeing over time?)