

Sponsorship playbook

Unlock potential with effective sponsorship

Background

All great leadership stories feature tales of mentors, advocates and supporters who provided words of wisdom and support in times of failure and challenge, valuable feedback that helped them grow, and access to game changing opportunities that propelled their leadership rise. In short, great leaders have powerful sponsors that enable their potential.

As distinct from mentoring, sponsorship is about *taking action* to enable talent, in addition to advice and support. Ultimately, that action involves publicly advocating for a protégé's (ie sponsee's) promotion. In that process, there are many actions sponsors can take to support their sponsee's promotion potential, including:

- Understanding and addressing barriers that inhibit potential
- Providing insight into the often unwritten rules of career advancement
- Providing opportunities and platforms where talent can demonstrate their ability
- Amplifying their impact by backing up their position or argument

Understanding their leadership potential and developing a professional relationship based on trust, candour and connection is fundamental.

In the cut and thrust of our busy professional and personal lives, finding the time and forum to nurture great talent can be tricky. The EREA Pathways to Leadership program is designed to facilitate that process by pairing sponsors and sponsees, and providing support and inspiration for both groups.

This playbook provides a guide for effective sponsorship with conversation topics and possible actions you can take throughout the six month program. This is not a precise prescription; you are encouraged to adapt to suit your style and sponsee's circumstance.



May theme: Understanding leadership potential

Great sponsorship relationships are built on a foundation of trust, candour and connection. We encourage you to meet with your sponsee every 2-4 weeks with an initial focus on getting to know each other.

In the sponsee's first session, we're exploring their leadership potential. Below are some discussion topics and questions you could ask to deepen their thinking and inform your understanding of how you can enable them.

Bring a coaching approach to these conversations – focus on asking and listening and avoid or minimise telling.

Key takeaways

- Meet with your sponsee every 2-4 weeks – set times in each other's calendar
- Be alert to actions you can take to support their growth and address barriers
- Come ready to share insights in our virtual roundtables

Understanding personality

- Read each other's Clarity 4D personality profiles and explore ways you're similar and different
- Discuss 'Strongest Areas' on page 7 – reflect on ways these strengths support your sponsee's leadership potential
- Discuss page 9 'Diversity your hidden potential'. This page lists your sponsee's growth areas and will inform their adaptive challenge. Explore how these development areas are important in the context of college leadership.
- Share your own growth areas.

Your leadership purpose

- Explore the different aspects of your sponsee's leadership purpose including:
- Greatest achievements
- Leadership promise – what can people reliably expect from you?
- Leadership values and ways they have been tested
- Leadership purpose

Adaptive challenges

- What have you set as your adaptive challenge?
- What insights did you gain from your [Immunity to Change X-Ray](#)?
- What role can I play as your sponsor to help you achieve your adaptive challenge?

Insight and action

Capture your insights below, including any actions you can take to enable talent.

June theme: The leadership challenge

Your sponsee is developing their proposal to secure support for their leadership challenge project. To elevate their thinking, we're applying [Kouzes and Posner's 5 practices of exemplary leadership](#).



Your June catch-ups are a great opportunity to provide feedback on how they're scoping the project using [the Leadership Challenge template](#), and pulling it together into a proposal format. Support their thinking by referring to the template to ask probing questions that explore each of the practices.

Your adaptive challenge

In June, you will also be working on your adaptive challenge. This is the one big thing you could change that would make the biggest difference to your leadership in the context of talent enablement. Ask your sponsee for their feedback.

July theme: Profile and networking

In July, we're working with sponsees on [their leadership profile](#) ie their identity and distinctiveness as a leader. Your feedback on their thinking is invaluable. They will share with you their draft leadership brand statements and ask for feedback by considering these questions:

- Is this the brand identity that best represents who I am and what I can do?
- Is this brand identity something that creates value in the eyes of my organisation and key stakeholders?
- What risks am I taking by exhibiting this brand? Can I live this brand?

We encourage you to consider your own leadership profile, too.

Developing professional networks will also be discussed. These are the people who you need to know to advance your career in catholic education, within and outside your current school.

August and September theme: Career strategy

In the final session, we bring it all together with a tight [career strategy](#) that sets specific, time-bound goals.

We encourage you to go through the [career strategy workbook](#) with your sponsee. Additional questions you can ask to support their thinking are below.

Career drivers

- What motivates you?
- What disengages you?

Note: keep an ear out for any limiting mindsets that might hold women back from aspiring to Principal positions, such as time and life commitments, or concerns about leaving the classroom and the real time feedback they get from that environment. Challenge these mindsets with alternative viewpoints.

Ambitions

- Where do you see your career? – Next 12 months, 5 years, 10 years
- What do you regard are the greatest risk to realising those goals?

Note: For many women, plans to start or grow a family are both real and perceived barriers to leadership. We will be inviting your participants to address these barriers by calling out and dissolving limiting mindsets while also confronting real challenges. There is much you can do as leaders to ensure parenthood isn't a career killer including enabling part-time roles in leadership and flexible careers (i.e. career side-steps by design and rapid career advancement when life stages shift).

- What do you think needs to happen to achieve each goal and mitigate risks? Specifically, what experience do you need to demonstrate, what are the skills gaps that need to close and/or relationships that need to be nurtured?
- How do you think you could gain this experience?

Note: Be prepared with some insights to share to clarify their thinking, particularly if there are blind spots.

Barriers

- What are the biggest obstacles in the way of you achieving your career goals?
- What can current leaders do to address barriers?
- Specifically, what can I do to address these barriers?

Probe across a range of areas eg self-belief, life circumstances, others (eg lack of support, inter-personal workplace conflicts, systemic challenges)

Your role as sponsor

Reflect on the specific actions you can take as sponsor to support your sponsee's career plan, including:

What feedback can I provide that will support my sponsee's growth potential?

What leadership positions are coming up that my sponsee could apply for?

How can I help my sponsee get more visibility with key stakeholders?

What else can I do to enable talent more broadly?