

## Bridging Strengths and Building Our Connection Through Mentorship

In human centred design, the ‘first cut’ at a potential solution is shared with a small number of stakeholders in order to validate the concept and solicit ways to make it better. This document shares an overview of the initial design of a mentorship program for underrepresented women and gender diverse people in Waterloo Region.

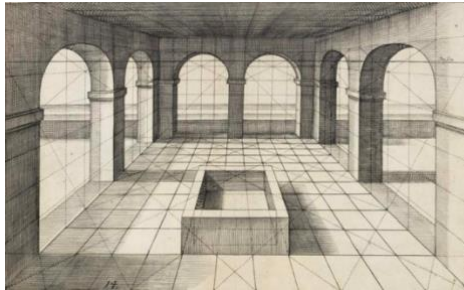
In March 2023, a team of four community members led by Capacity Canada facilitators were challenged to devise an innovative approach to mentorship that would increase the participation of equity-deserving groups in leadership roles within the nonprofit sector. The team was given a research brief that summarized some of the work that has been done in this area and was tasked with developing an early concept solution.

### Guiding Principles

The group decided this concept would be grounded in the idea of radical equality or self-directed learning where everyone has something to teach and something to learn. This would remove the hierarchy of mentor and mentee and bake confidence-building and networking into its design. The group also wanted a mentorship experience that would enable knowledge transfer and skill development in a way that was safe, interactive and collaborative.

### Concept Design - Overview

An online environment that facilitates one to one, one to many, many to many mentoring connections, interaction and collaboration in a safe, private, supportive and non-judgmental way. This environment facilitates learning and growth of the participants to enable them to acquire the skills required for leadership roles in nonprofit organizations.



Preliminary design of a simple and familiar tool-set that uses gamification to enable participants to share their experience and skills in a safe, interactive, and collaborative way and where participants can play the role of both mentor and mentee. The ‘game’ can be engaged with online or in person (as projections).

These images provide visual metaphors for the online gathering spaces that would be used and designed by the mentorship participants for different purposes. The above image conveys the idea of initial meeting space with rooms off to each side different activities. The raised area in the center of the space represents the reflection which is an important activity in a mentorship space.

Other spaces that would be accessible to facilitate different kinds of interactions include:



The Library – to access training & resources for mentors & mentees



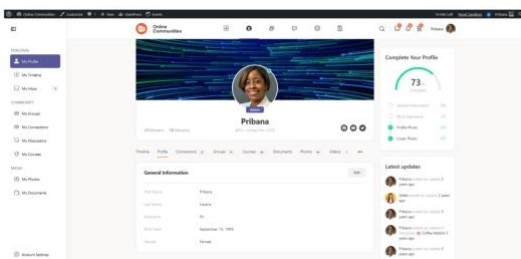
The Forest – a place for one-to-one conversation



The Rabbit Hole – a space for in-depth, topical, ‘deep dives’

### Concept Design – Cohort Profile

Individuals would join as cohorts and upon joining, be presented with a set of questions to complete that would constitute their profile.



#### Sample Questions

- What do you want to learn?
- What skills do you want to share?
- What challenges are you interested in overcoming?
- Are you interested in becoming a mentor for other women?
- What is your experience of the nonprofit sector currently?
- What dream project would you design for yourself?

**Concept Design – Community Animator**

This community of mentors and mentees would be facilitated through their experience by an individual responsible for coordinating networking opportunities, monitoring group discussions and providing general support for the mentorship site. The design team recommended that local organizations could work in partnership to develop and manage the site and its associated activities.

**Working Title Options**

*Dream Machine – A Mentoring and Networking Site for Women in Waterloo Region*

*The Open Hearth Project*

**Next Steps**

The guiding principles and concept design could be used to inspire changes within current mentoring groups, or provide the foundation of a grant proposal for a Waterloo Region mentorship project.

To learn more about this project, visit: <https://capacitycanada.ca/makeover-project/>