



## CESSDA ERIC Agenda 21-24, Tasks 21-22 Widening of CESSDA European Coverage

# D2 Strategy for the Development of the Mentorship Programme

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## Executive Summary

After three rounds of the CESSDA Mentorship Programme and with experiences from twenty mentorships, it is time to evaluate the programme and see how it can be further developed.

The overall conclusion is that the programme has fulfilled its purpose but could benefit from more flexibility. Experience shows that circumstances can change quickly, from delayed decisions on institutionalising to pandemics, which requires an ability to quickly adjust established plans and reallocate resources. It would also be an advantage for the programme to have a wider range of experts to choose from when appointing mentors.

Until now, the programme has only been open to CESSDA partners and new members. It would benefit from being open to all CESSDA SPs, regardless of their level of maturity. More mature SPs who want to develop new services could then seek support from, and collaboration with, colleagues with more expertise in the field.

The new concept of the Mentorship programme is intended to be an asset to CESSDA and all its member and partner SPs by facilitating the exchange of general and specialised expertise. To achieve that, the programme needs a solid foundation and sustainability of mentorship within CESSDA ERIC.

Finally, the planning of an improved Mentorship programme and development of a new concept for sustainable funding led to the proposal of a new CESSDA SP office that will bring together various tools and services to build a data archiving service (DAS). Mentoring would benefit from being integrated into a regular CESSDA service to support Service Providers (SPs) in partner and member countries.

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADP	Slovenian Social Science Data Archives
AUSSDA	Austrian Social Science Data Archive
CDC	CESSDA Data Catalogue
CESSDA	Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives
CSDA	Czech Social Science Data Archive
CTS	CoreTrustSeal
DAG	Data Archiving Guide

DAS	Data Archiving Service
DDI	Data Documentation Initiative
DMEG	Data Management Expert Guide
ERIC	European Research Infrastructure Consortium
FORS	Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MDO	Metadata Office
MO	Main Office
PM	Person Month
RD	Resource Directory
SaW	Strengthening and Widening
SEEDS	South-Eastern European Data Services
SERSCIDA	Support for Establishment of National/Regional Social Sciences Data Archives
SSHOC	Social Science and Humanities Open Cloud
SND	Swedish National Data Service
SP	Service Provider
SPF	Service Providers Forum
TtT	Train-the-Trainer
WG	Work Group

## Introduction

This document provides a Strategy for the Development of the Mentorship Programme within the CESSDA. CESSDA Mentorship Programmes<sup>1</sup> have taken place annually since 2019 in the form of CESSDA projects. Based on lessons learned from these experiences, this document proposes a new concept for the Mentorship Programme, which is more flexible and can benefit all CESSDA members<sup>2</sup> and partner SPs. Moreover, this document suggests a sustainability plan to go from an annual or bi-annual project to an ongoing CESSDA programme. Before turning to the following sections, it is important to stress the value of Mentorship for CESSDA.

## Value of mentoring

Mentorship is widely recognized as an effective form of learning distinct from formal classroom-based instruction. While mentorship programmes vary widely, key elements typically include 1) a one-to-one relationship between mentor and mentee, 2) a flexible and informal structure that can be easily adapted as conditions change, and 3) recognition that while the mentor has more experience in particular domains, the learning and benefits of mentorship are mutual.

Within CESSDA, the Mentorship Programme has entailed developing a more structured way of sharing expertise that is widely distributed among all the SPs. Mentees, mentors and CESSDA as an institution all benefit from mentoring. For **mentees**, the benefits are due largely to the customised nature of the mentorship interaction. The mentee can identify (sometimes with guidance from the mentor) an area of need and develop specific activities to address that need. The absence of a formal hierarchy between mentor and mentee makes this more comfortable for both. Mentees and mentors both develop stronger networks with colleagues in CESSDA and outside of their home institutions.

While **mentors** are often seen as the ones “giving”, by sharing their expertise and supporting a mentee, they also benefit from the programme. Mentors often have years of hard-earned lessons and experience, but many of them do not have opportunities to teach the next generation through courses or workshops. As mentors, they can do this and many report this as rewarding and satisfying. Mentors also form productive relationships with colleagues and often, even though they have less experience in one domain, provide new

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<sup>1</sup> CESSDA website, Mentorship Programme: <https://www.cessda.eu/Strategy-Expertise/Mentorship-Programme> [accessed 2022-11-01]

<sup>2</sup> In this document, the term CESSDA member also includes Switzerland, which is formally a CESSDA observer.

ideas and insights into changing practices. Lastly, mentors invariably gain a deeper understanding of the conditions and challenges in less mature archives.

As an institution, **CESSDA** also benefits from mentoring activities. Mentoring is an excellent complement to CESSDA's formal training programme, as it facilitates bilateral knowledge sharing. It also provides a structured format for SPs to fulfil CESSDA Annex 2 obligations. Indeed, the importance of member SPs that support each other as well as partner SPs is obvious when reading Annex 2 of the CESSDA ERIC statutes,<sup>3</sup> where several obligations relate to mentorship and knowledge sharing, for example 6, 10 and 11. Finally, mentorship fosters collaboration between mentee and mentor SPs and thus integrates all CESSDA partner and member SPs.

## Past mentoring experiences

Learning from each other has always been central for CESSDA SPs. Since the establishment of CESSDA in 1976, newer SPs have sent their staff to more mature SPs to learn from them. A more organised way of knowledge exchange was introduced in 1987 when CESSDA held its first Expert Seminar, an annual two-day meeting that invites staff from all SPs and focuses on a topic of importance for a data service. In addition, several larger projects have dealt with support for building data services, SERSCIDA<sup>4</sup> (Support for Establishment of National/Regional Social Science Data Archives), SEEDS<sup>5</sup> (South-Eastern European Data Services), and CESSDA SaW<sup>6</sup> (Strengthening and Widening).

Organised one-to-one support was first introduced in the project "CESSDA Widening Activities 2019", part of the CESSDA Work Plan 2019.<sup>7</sup> One of the project's main activities was to offer more active support to CESSDA partner SPs. For this purpose, the Mentorship Programme was started, an activity where CESSDA partners and new member SPs could apply for support and be matched with experts participating in the programme. The purpose of the Mentorship Programme is to help mentees to define and realise short-term goals. These may be strategic, policy-related, practical, or technical.

Applicants to the Mentorship Programme 2019 described their current situation and goals for the coming year in terms of institutionalising their archive and building and developing their services. They also explained how the mentors could support them and expected benefits

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<sup>3</sup> CESSDA ERIC Statutes:

<https://www.cessda.eu/CESSDA-Documents/Statutes/STATUTES-ERIC-CESSDA-UPD-05.08.2021.pdf> [accessed 2022-11-01]

<sup>4</sup> SERSCIDA project website: <http://www.serscida.eu/en/> [accessed 2022-11-01]

<sup>5</sup> SEEDS project website: <https://seedsproject.ch/> [accessed 2022-11-01]

<sup>6</sup> CESSDA SaW project website: <https://cessdasaw.eu/> [accessed 2022-11-01]

<sup>7</sup> Bornatici Christina, Alfredsson Iris, Bradic-Martinovic Aleksandra, Glavica Marijana, Hegedus Peter, Kurta Amela, Leontiyeva Yana, Morkevičius Vaidas, Vipavc Brvar Irena, Zibert Gregor. (2020). CESSDA Widening Activities 2019: Deliverable 3 - Report on the Online Support Service and the Mentorship Programme. CESSDA: Bergen.

from the mentorship. Based on the received applications, the Mentorship Programme team, composed of CESSDA member SPs, distributed the mentees among them by matching expressed needs and available expertise. The mentor was the mentee's primary contact and was responsible for active support and regular interactions throughout the mentoring period. The mentor was also in regular contact with the other mentors to share the needs of their mentees and, if necessary, together find solutions for support. Achieved goals and activities were reported in a final report. The report also addressed what went well and what could be improved in the Mentorship Programme, as well as an update on the mentee's situation and plans for the following year.

The Mentorship Programme 2019 was considered successful and was continued in the project "Widening Activities and Journals Outreach 2020",<sup>8</sup> and the Agenda 21–22 task "Widening the CESSDA European Coverage". A similar concept as described above was applied in the following Mentorship Programmes. The only change was the addition of site visits, which were tested (but not funded) within some mentorships in 2019, and which resulted in fruitful discussions and concrete progress.

## Mentees and mentors

The invitation to the Mentorship Programme has so far been sent to CESSDA partners and new member SPs. Currently, twelve countries are listed as CESSDA partners.<sup>9</sup> Since the start of the Mentorship Programme in 2019, six former partner countries – Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, North Macedonia, and Serbia – have become members of CESSDA ERIC. As new members their SP have continued to be invited to the Mentorship Programme. How long one is considered a new member has not yet been defined.

In the three Mentorship Programmes to date, 22 countries have been invited to participate (Table 1). Two thirds of these have participated at least once and more than a quarter of them twice.

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<sup>8</sup> Christina Bornatici, Irena Vipavc Brvar, & Iris Alfredsson. (2021). CESSDA Widening Activities and Journals Outreach 2020: Deliverable 5 - Report from the Mentorship Programme and the Pilot Newsletter (1.3). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5724066>.

<sup>9</sup> On the CESSDA website <https://www.cessda.eu/About/Consortium> [accessed 2022-11-01] the following countries are listed as partners: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Estonia, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine.



**Table 1: Invitation and participation in Mentorship Programmes 2019–2022**

Invited countries	Partner or Member	Mentor		
		2019	2020	2021–22
Albania	P			
Belgium	M			
Bosnia & Herzegovina	P	TARKI		ADP
Bulgaria	P		SND	
Croatia	P/M 2019	ADP	ADP	
Estonia	P			
Iceland	P/M 2020			SND
Ireland	P/M 2020		SND	
Italy	P/M 2021	SND		FORS
Kosovo	P	CSDA	ADP	
Latvia	P			TARKI
Lithuania	P	ADP		AUSSDA
Luxembourg	P			
Montenegro	P			
North Macedonia	P/M 2019	SND		
Poland	P			
Portugal	M		FORS	
Romania	P		FORS	*
Russia	P (until 2022)			
Serbia	P/M 2019	FORS		
Slovakia	M			CSDA
Ukraine	P			*CSDA

\*Romania withdrew from the Mentorship Programme 2021–2022 due to a lack of staff. In 2022, CSDA volunteered to mentor Ukraine SP as an in-kind support.

The level of maturity varies a lot, both between partners and between new members. Some partner countries have well-established DAS, often a member of the former umbrella organisation CESSDA, which is seeking support to get their country to apply for a CESSDA ERIC membership. Others have established promising infrastructures and are already offering some services. Several countries have participated in various projects together with CESSDA members. In a few partner countries there are only initial initiatives to establish a DAS. Among the members, the length of membership does not always correspond to the level of maturity. Some new member SPs are well established and have a long history as DAS, while others have been members for a longer period but still work on a project basis.

The mentors were chosen among the Mentorship Programme team, consisting of CESSDA member SPs involved in the task. In 2019 there were five mentors, in 2020 three mentors, and in 2021–2022 six mentors. A mentor with experience from working at an established DAS usually has extensive knowledge of the general workflow at a DAS, as well as of policies and the legal framework for data management. It can be more challenging to find the right expertise for mentorship when it comes to more specific knowledge, for example about a particular tool.

## Experiences from the Mentorship Programmes 2019–2022

While the Mentorship Programmes have generally worked well and been valuable to participants, lessons have been learned that can be used to develop the programme. Key lessons are listed below.

### **Need for flexibility**

Applications from countries that approach CESSDA membership often show ambitious goals and a readiness to start acting as a national SP. However, delayed decisions on the institutionalising and funding often affect the plans, with delays in hiring staff and starting to work on a full scale. This has consequences for the planning of the mentorship and for several mentees the focus can shift during the year. The shift in focus affects the content of the mentorship and in some cases it also means that the organisation must reduce its involvement in the Mentorship Programme due to a lack of staff.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic was a rare and very unexpected event that greatly affected the 2020 Mentorship Programme. Initial plans had to be changed due to postponements of decisions, delays, or funding cuts, and originally planned site visits had to be cancelled.

Both examples call for a need to have a more flexible mentorship, with the opportunity to review the activities (partially or entirely) or even reallocate the resources to another

one-to-one mentorship. More flexible start and end dates, for example focusing on a specific activity and a shorter period for which the mentee has staff, could be one solution.

The Mentorship Programme would also benefit from being more flexible regarding the duration and timing of the mentorship as well as the size of the funding. A solution that would give more flexibility and possibility to tailor support would be to change Mentoring from an Agenda task to a continuous CESSDA activity supported by stable institutional funding. With this approach, the Mentorship Programme would become a regular CESSDA activity.

### **Benefits of site visits**

In 2019 the Mentorship Programme did not include funding for site visits. Despite this, in three cases the mentees managed to visit their mentors, and the visits were considered an essential and fruitful exchange of experiences in both directions. The Mentorship Programme 2020 recognized the benefits of site visits and the budget covered three mentorships, all including a site visit. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic these visits had to be cancelled. However, during the Mentorship Programme 2021–22, several visits were carried out and considered to be of great value.

The opportunity to follow the work at another institution on site and to collaborate closely and intensively with the institution's various experts has over the years proven to be highly appreciated by mentees. These site visits are rare opportunities to meet all the staff at an SP, and it strengthens the relationship between visitors and hosts. The opportunities for site visits should therefore be maintained in future Mentorship Programmes, but do not need to be mandatory or central to the mentoring activities in order to satisfy the need for flexibility expressed above.

### **Answer to specific knowledge demands**

The fact that the mentors are decided before the mentee's needs are known can prove to be problematic if the needs are of a more specific nature. Already in 2019 and 2020, some of the applications mentioned a need for support related to different aspects of using Dataverse. The demand for Dataverse support became apparent in 2021, when almost all applicants mentioned that they used or planned to use Dataverse. Many new DAS choose Dataverse as software for their research data repository, while more established DAS often use a different solution. Many mentors therefore lack expertise in issues related to Dataverse and this competence must consequently be sought outside of the mentorship team. In this case, the role of the mentors was to advise the mentee on where to seek support.

While other examples (primarily technical) could also have been added, this compelling example calls for a different selection of mentors within all CESSDA member SPs based on the specific knowledge demands of the mentees.

### **Overlap with other CESSDA activities**

During the review of the 2020 applications, it turned out that several requests concerned expertise found in other teams within CESSDA. CESSDA has already built expertise in certain areas, for example the Trust Working Group (WG) for certification issues and the CESSDA Metadata Office (MDO) for metadata issues. In 2020, some of the requests were solved by guiding the applicants to other CESSDA WGs and projects. Issues related to metadata and the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) standard, CESSDA Data Catalogue (CDC), CoreTrustSeal (CTS), and Dataverse were transferred to the MDO, Tools WG, Trust WG, and the SSHOC (Social Science and Humanities Open Cloud) project.<sup>10</sup> The Mentorship Programme followed up by contacting the applicants to see if they had received the requested support.

To ensure that existing expertise within CESSDA is used effectively, there is a need for coordination between the Mentorship Programme and the work within the various WGs. This also relates to the possibility to have a more flexible, tailor-made Mentorship. In such cases, resources to support one specific need could be allocated to a CESSDA expert from other WGs.

### **Different needs depending on maturity level**

The focus and extent of mentoring varies a lot with the maturity of the organisation. First, partner countries with initial initiatives to establish a DAS mainly request participation from CESSDA MO or SPs in events to raise awareness of the need for a DAS in the country. In 2020 for example, Bulgaria wanted to organise a conference to discuss the experiences of CESSDA members and to present the Bulgarian plans, as well as to hold meetings with Bulgarian stakeholders.

Second, partners with established infrastructures with some services often want support for their workflow for data acquisition/ingest, data curation and data dissemination, usually in connection to hiring new staff.

Third, new CESSDA members often ask for support connected to the requirements in Annex 2 of the CESSDA Statutes.

Needs for support don't depend only on the maturity level, as SPs across all maturity levels are interested in the Mentorship Programme. Currently, only partner and new member SPs

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<sup>10</sup> SSHOC project website: <https://sshopencloud.eu/> [accessed 2022-11-01]

are invited to the Mentorship Programme. More mature member SPs can also benefit from the programme when they introduce a new service that other SPs already have experience with.

## New concept for future Mentorship Programmes

The new concept for the CESSDA Mentorship Programme presented in this section relies on two main aspects. First, previous experiences have made clear that some processes and approaches to the Mentorship could be reviewed (e.g., contextual changes such as a lack of resources or a pandemic). Second, the Mentorship would benefit from continuous funding instead of being run as projects (see the section on Sustainability plan below). Overall, the conditions for future Mentorship Programmes should be flexible and tailor-made for the participating mentees, mentors, and the timeline. **The new concept for the Mentorship Programme is therefore intended to be an asset for CESSDA and all its member and partner SPs, as it facilitates the sharing of general and specialised expertise.**

### Definition and aim

The definition and aim of the CESSDA Mentorship Programme are similar to those established in 2019.<sup>11</sup> The Mentorship Programme offers one-to-one support, where CESSDA experts are matched with interested CESSDA members and partner SPs on institutional level. The aim is to assist mentees in defining and realising their short-term goals. These could be strategic, policy-related, practical, or technical. The Mentorship Programme is a way to ensure that mentees clarify and move towards realistic goals and are closely supported and encouraged.

### Mentees

Contrary to past practice, in the future Mentorship Programme, all CESSDA members and partner SPs can apply to be mentored. Indeed, even established SPs could benefit from another SP's experience and expertise while developing a new service. Every CESSDA member could thus benefit from this activity. This new version of the mentorship therefore strengthens the peer-to-peer experience sharing.

CESSDA members and partner SPs willing to participate in the Mentorship Programme will still have to answer a call for application, which could be open to all topics or focused on specific topics and restricted to some CESSDA member or partner SPs (e.g., set by CESSDA MO based on demands from the WGs or the Service Providers Forum (SPF)). The mentees'

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<sup>11</sup> Bornatici et al. (2020). op. cit.

applications should contain information on their current situation and goals for the Mentorship period in terms of building and developing their services, and a prospective timeline for the activities. Based on these goals, they should mention how mentors could help and what the expected benefits of the Mentorship are. Mentees interested in a site visit should argue why this would be beneficial to them. They should also have the possibility (but no obligation) to propose up to three potential CESSDA member SPs as mentors.

## Mentors

The mentor is responsible for actively accompanying the mentee during the length of the Mentorship Programme and for regular interactions with the mentee. The mentor documents the interactions in periodic reports and regularly informs the Mentorship Coordinator (presented below) about progress and difficulties regarding the mentorship. Depending on the needs and demands, a mentor could have one or more mentees, for example in the case of one mentor for a specific topic.

Only CESSDA member SPs can be mentors. A mentor could also be a mentee during the same Mentorship Programme period. Mentors should be chosen based on mentees' applications to best match expertise with needs. This could be done in different ways. For example, based on mentees' applications, the Mentorship Coordinator could list all the requirements and share them with CESSDA MO, WG leaders and SPs (e.g., through the SPF Basecamp). These bodies could then suggest candidates or, for SPs, volunteer. A central list of specific expertise areas for each SP (e.g., based on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or the monitoring of SPs) would facilitate the search for a matching expert.

## Mentorship Coordinator

The Mentorship Coordinator has a key role in the function of future Mentorship Programmes. Possibly selected by CESSDA MO, the responsible WG leader or some other function, the Mentorship Coordinator:

- defines the call for application with CESSDA MO or responsible WG leader (e.g., based on demands from the WGs or the SPF) and sends out calls for application;
- reviews the mentees' applications and selects them with approval from CESSDA MO;
- finds mentors with help of, for example, CESSDA MO, WG leaders and SPs;
- organises the allocation of resources (PMs) between the mentor and the mentee and sends the Mentorship proposal to CESSDA MO or the responsible WG leader for acceptance;
- is the first point of contact for the mentees and mentors during the Mentorship, for example in case of misunderstandings;

- collects the Mentorship reports from the mentees and the mentors and sends them to CESSDA MO.

## Activities during the Mentorship

Once the mentee–mentor pair has been approved by each stakeholder, the Mentorship’s activities can begin. Mentees and mentors taking part in the Mentorship agree to the following mandatory activities:

- *Regular online meetings*; these are important to get to know each other, to stay active and follow developments, and adapt activities and support to current needs.
- *Mentorship reporting and evaluation*; a report should be written jointly by the mentor and the mentee. The topics covered in the report are:
  - The situation of the mentee at the beginning of the Mentorship; the Mentorship goals and duration;
  - The activities undertaken during the Mentorship, indicating the mentor’s support, progress and difficulties, and the mentee’s situation when the Mentorship ended. This part should also explain how both institutions have collaborated;
  - Reflections on the Mentorship, what went well and what could have been done differently.

The following activity is not compulsory and should be decided on according to the needs of the mentees:

- *Mentorship site visit*: visits by the mentee to the mentor (or vice versa) allows for fruitful discussions with different professions at data archives and on-site presentation of the archiving processes.

## Timeline

Tasks within a Mentorship Programme could be grouped into two different steps: the preparation of the mentorship, which mainly involves the Mentorship Coordinator and the mentees, and the mentorship activities, which mainly involve the mentees and the mentors.

### Step 1 - Preparation of the Mentorship

In previous years, mentors were chosen among the mentorship team members. As explained above, this practice posed a problem because there were times when no mentor had the desired expertise (e.g., regarding Dataverse). To solve this, mentors should be chosen among all CESSDA SPs, based on the mentees’ applications and needs. This has

implications for the planning of the Mentorship. Contrary to what has been done so far, the proposed solution is based on a permanently funded Mentorship Programme.

A call for applications could be set up twice a year, for example with deadlines at the end of January and the end of July. The Mentorship coordinator would then select the mentees and search for matching mentors. The numbers of one-to-one Mentorships will depend on the mentee's needs and the related PM's costs to cover the mentor's participation. The activities could then be focused over a few weeks or for a longer time, beginning right after the approval of the Mentorship, or later.

### **Step 2 - Mentorship activities**

Based on the mentee's application, the first mentorship activity should focus on developing a timeline for the activities needed to reach the milestones and short-term goals for the mentee and the support activities expected from the mentor. This would be the Mentorship roadmap. Regular meetings should be arranged between the mentee and the mentor. If a site meeting had been approved, it should be organised.

Then, mentees and mentors should meet regularly and collaborate during the duration of their one-to-one mentorship.

If needed, the Mentorship Coordinator could organise mentor's meetings to discuss the mentorships and virtual group sessions on specific topics if requested by mentors and/or mentees.

Finally, mentors and mentees should report on the Mentorship Programme and their one-to-one mentorship.

### **Communication and coordination with other pillars**

The Mentorship Programme is a task connected to all activities at CESSDA, and it is therefore important that the communication and coordination with other WGs and their tools and services work well.

The mentorship applications give a good indication of the need for support among SPs. Some needs could be addressed through training events, others could be highlighted in a Data Archiving Guide (DAG) chapter or by reference to already available resources listed in the RD, if any, or by adding new resources that respond to the need.

Moreover, specific topics of interest for the mentees could be targeted in virtual group sessions open to all CESSDA members and partner SPs. These sessions could be organised by the Mentorship Coordinator.



## Sustainability plan

CESSDA now has many years of experience with mentoring, from informal practices as well as formal programmes, to draw upon when considering how to establish a sustainable structure for the future. One key issue was the one-year funding cycle, which created difficulties when selecting, matching, and implementing everything in a single year. This has improved with the two-year cycle under Agenda 21–22. However, two challenges remain 1) successfully matching mentee needs and mentor capacity, when mentors are selected before mentee's needs, and 2) the administrative demands of managing the Mentorship Programme. More generally, a stable funding would afford far greater flexibility to the Mentorship Programme, enabling it to better meet the needs of CESSDA, mentors and mentees.

For these reasons, a more sustainable solution would be to change the Mentorship Programme from an agenda task to a continuous CESSDA activity (with some similarities to the management of CESSDA tools like the CDC or the Vocabulary Service), supported by stable institutional funding. With this approach, the Mentorship Programme would become a regular activity. There would be several benefits from this solution.

As described in the plan above, suitable mentors will be sought after mentorship applications are received. The estimated costs can then be calculated based on the number of successful matches. If the process results in a smaller number of mentorships, lower funding is required for this mentoring period and the surplus can therefore be rolled over for later use.

The amount needed per year largely depends on the duration of the mentorships and possible in-kind contributions. In cases where multiple mentees have similar needs (e.g., regarding data versioning or other technical issues), it may be appropriate to move away from the strict one-to-one mentorship and have one mentor for multiple mentees. All mentoring may not even need funding. Some SPs may just want to use the mentoring service to find a partner to work with. In this way, the mentorship will encourage increased collaboration between SPs.

The role of the Mentorship Coordinator is important, not only for matching mentees and mentors within specific funding. For some needs, which include short-term support for the mentor, the Mentorship Coordinator could suggest in-kind contributions. Similarly, the Mentorship Coordinator may suggest joint mentorships (multiple mentees for one mentor) when multiple mentees have similar needs.

A possible, minimum requirement to begin with for the new Mentorship Programme is 1 PM for the Mentorship Coordinator to manage the programme, and 2 PMs for mentors, with a maximum of 0.5 PM per mentor for a mentorship. This should of course be tested and reviewed.

## Creation of a 'CESSDA SPs Office'

A "CESSDA SPs Office" could host the sustainable Mentorship Programme and other relevant strengthening tools and services.

Through multiple tasks in Agenda 21–22, the interdependencies of several SP-focused activities have grown stronger. The CESSDA Resource Directory (RD) is the central source for SPs and partners who seek to build, develop and improve their services and practices. The Data Management Expert Guide (DMEG) is for researchers, but its Train-the-Trainer (TtT) materials are also key resources for SP staff. DAG's target audience is new SP staff (as well as new data stewards elsewhere), and it now references numerous resources held in the RD. Still to be produced in 2022 is a TtT guide based on DAG. This will be a guide that a SP staff member could refer to when using DAG as a tool to support the onboarding (training) of a newly hired staff member. It is evident that some mentoring activities might draw on these same resources. The ad hoc coordination has been effective, but there is a greater need for institutional support to ensure sustainability.

One possibility might be an Office for SPs. Such a unit would be ideally suited to take on the increasingly urgent task of providing high-level communication and coordination across a number of CESSDA resources that, over time, should be developed and promoted as a coherent suite, not piecemeal components.

This service would be the natural point of contact for partners and members who seek support. In addition to traditional one-to-one support, the service would provide guidance to already existing support within CESSDA, as well as identify areas in need of joint training efforts. Along with the DAG and RD, the service would offer a comprehensive introductory package for partners and new member SPs, as well as for new staff within all SPs.

This would undoubtedly increase the value of CESSDA in the eyes of the SPs, as it would provide a central hub for accessing support and services. Once established, it might also reduce some administrative burdens on CESSDA MO. Many questions remain for such a proposal: where to locate it in the CESSDA structure, specifics of funding, and leadership, but the success of the current suite of resources argues for exploring new options for future sustainability.

## References

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