



# Our Way Forward

*Round 7*

JANUARY - JUNE 2027

Mentorship curated for women of colour

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# About Empower'em

Empower'em was founded in 2013 by Nayaelah Siddiqui, who had a simple but powerful idea: young women of colour (WOC) need safe spaces where they feel seen, heard, and supported. What started as a small circle of friends quickly grew into a vibrant community of women coming together from all walks of life to share experiences, build connections, and celebrate diversity.

*From the beginning, we've embraced a "by the community, for the community" approach.*

## WHAT WE KEEP SEEING

### Talent isn't what's scarce. Being seen is.

In every cohort, we meet women holding together teams, households, and entire networks of care, often without anyone noticing. They already know what they're capable of. What changes things is someone willing to vouch for them, open the door, and put them forward for the role, the platform, the seat, before anyone else was going to.

If you've ever been the most capable person in the room and no one noticed, you're in the right place.

**The power is already yours. We're here to make sure the rest of the world sees it too.**

Since 2021, **Our Way Forward**, our flagship mentorship program, has run six cohorts.

**68**  
PAIRS

**3,696+**  
HOURS

**28**  
LANGUAGES

## Our Vision

A future where women of colour have what they need to thrive. What they once needed, they're proud to pass forward.

## Our Mission

We mentor, connect, and stand behind women of colour as they grow into their power, personally, professionally, and together.

# The Team



**Nayaelah Siddiqui**

Founder,  
Executive Director



**Shaza Asif**

Program & Mentorship  
Delivery Lead



**Fariba Sharmin**

Events, Community  
& Inclusion Lead



**Hiba Chikhaoui**

Operations & Program  
Coordinator



**Morgan McKeen**

Social Media  
Coordinator



**Kathy Fu**

Advisor

# About the Program

## 24 weeks. One match. A community behind you.

Our Way Forward is a free, 24-week virtual mentorship program for women of colour 18 and over. You're matched by lived experience, not just industry: your cultural background, what you're navigating, and language, where it matters to you.

Bring the work stuff and the life stuff: career, business, school, family and cultural expectations, identity. **You don't have to navigate this alone.**

### WHO IT'S FOR

#### Women of colour

anyone who identifies as a woman of colour

#### 18 and over

students, newcomers and career changers welcome

#### Free

no cost to take part

#### Mentees

living in Ontario

#### Mentors

anywhere in Canada, no set title or industry needed

#### January to June

able to join the core sessions

## How it Works



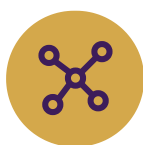
### ENGAGE

in one-on-one mentorship sessions tailored to your goals



### DESIGN

a personalized action plan to navigate specific challenges



### CONNECT

with other participants to share experiences, build support, and grow your network!

# Application Process



**OCT  
8**

## Info Session · 7 to 8pm ET

Have questions before you apply? RSVP on our website to save your spot.

**RSVP** →

*\*Dates may shift if the team needs to adjust anything. We will let you know as early as we can.*

*\*Various application formats will be accepted.*



# Why become a mentee?

- 1 **Be matched by what actually matters.** A mentor chosen for shared lived experience and identity, not just a job title.
- 2 **Get clear, then get moving.** Name your strengths and goals, and leave with an action plan for career, school, business or life.
- 3 **Speak up for yourself.** Build the confidence to advocate for yourself and handle barriers, inside and out.
- 4 **Grow your network.** Meet people and opportunities that support where you're headed.
- 5 **Feel confident about money.** Make informed financial decisions and work toward independence.
- 6 **Belong somewhere.** A space where you can be yourself and share without explaining from scratch. It doesn't end at 24 weeks: you're part of the Empower'em community for life.

## WHERE THIS CAN LEAD



**Azreen** joined as a mentee in Cohort 4. She came back as a mentor in Cohorts 5 and 6.

# What can you expect to receive as a mentee?

## Mentorship Sessions

6 sessions · about 1 hour each

Explore your challenge, learn about the mentor's lived experience, and work with your mentor to build an action plan through one-on-one sessions

## Peer Support Sessions

Build strong, sustained relationships with other mentees and mentors in small group settings

## Workshops

4 workshops · about 2 hours each

Engage in skill and confidence-building trainings on personal and professional development. The last workshop is a skill share, led by participants.

## Community Meetups

3 meetups · about 2 hours each

Connect with a supportive community that will inspire you to pursue your personal and professional goals



[APPLY HERE TO BECOME A MENTEE](#) →

# Why become a mentor?

- 1 Be the person you needed.** Pass forward what you once needed to a woman of colour going through what you've been through.
- 2 Learn as much as you give.** Our mentors say they learn just as much from their mentees and each other.
- 3 Sharpen your skills.** Build your mentoring, coaching and communication skills with support and resources from our team.
- 4 Find your people.** Join a network of women of colour across Canada who show up for each other, during the program and after.
- 5 Get recognized.** Receive an honorarium and a letter of recommendation for future opportunities.

## YOUR TIME AS A MENTOR

About 1 hour a week, about 20 hours over 24 weeks

**6 × 1 hr**

one-on-one sessions

**3 × 2 hrs**

community meetups

**4 × 2 hrs**

workshops

**Optional**

socials & peer support

## Here are some areas in which you could mentor:



## What can you expect to receive as a mentor?

### Mentorship Sessions

6 sessions · about 1 hour each

Explore mentee's challenge, share your own lived experience, and work with your mentee to build an action plan in one-on-one sessions

### Peer Support Sessions

Build strong, sustained relationships with other mentors and mentees in small group settings

### Workshops

4 workshops · about 2 hours each

Engage in skill and confidence-building trainings on personal and professional development. The last workshop is a skill share, led by participants.

### Community Meetups

3 meetups · about 2 hours each

Connect with other participants and learn from each other's experiences

### Honorarium & Letter of Recommendation

Receive an honorarium in recognition of your contribution and a letter of recommendation for future opportunities

[APPLY HERE TO BECOME A MENTOR](#) →

# What this can look like

A few examples of what you could help with. If you've been through it, you can help someone else through it.

## Health & Wellness

- Managing burnout while building a career
- Setting boundaries at work and at home
- Finding care and support that feels culturally safe

## Financial Literacy

- Building a first budget or savings plan
- Understanding RRSPs, TFSA's and FHSAs
- Talking about money with family

## Political Literacy

- Understanding how government decisions affect your community
- Getting involved on local boards or campaigns
- Building a career in the public service

## Educational Guidance

- Deciding between grad school and work
- Applying for scholarships and funding
- Going back to school mid-career

## Career Development

- Landing a first Canadian job
- Negotiating a raise
- Stepping into management

## Confidence Building

- Speaking up in meetings
- Working through imposter syndrome
- Owning your accomplishments in interviews

## Relationships

- Setting boundaries with family and friends
- Building community in a new city
- Navigating relationships across cultures

## Navigating Identity as a Minority

- Being the only one in the room
- Deciding how much of yourself to bring to work
- Reconnecting with your culture or language

## Entrepreneurship & Business

- Testing a business idea
- Finding your first clients
- Pricing your work with confidence

## Family & Cultural Expectations

- Making career choices your family does not understand
- Balancing caregiving with your own goals
- Living between two cultures

# Program Timeline

24-WEEK PROGRAM: JANUARY - JUNE 2027

The Our Way Forward mentorship program will kick-off with an orientation session on January 9!

JAN  
9

Most sessions run on Saturdays. Some socials are held in the evening.

## MENTEES & MENTORS

### 3 Community Meetups & Peer Support Sessions

About 2 hours each

- January 23
- March 27
- June 5

## MENTEES & MENTORS

### 6 One-on-One Sessions

About 1 hour each

- January 24 – February 13
- February 14 – March 6
- March 7 – March 27
- March 28 – April 17
- April 18 – May 8
- May 9 – May 29

## MENTEES & MENTORS

### 4 Workshops

About 2 hours each

- February 6
- March 6
- April 10
- May 8

**Workshop 4 is a skill share**, where participants teach each other something they're good at.

## MENTEES · OPTIONAL FOR MENTORS

### 4 Social & Networking Events

- January 30
- February 25
- April 24
- May 22

\*1-on-1 Mentorship sessions should be scheduled based on both the mentee and mentor's availability and needs.

\*Dates may shift if the team needs to adjust anything. We will let you know as early as we can.

# Application Links

MENTEE DEADLINE: **OCTOBER 31, 2026**

MENTOR APPLICATIONS: **OPEN ALL YEAR** · FOR COHORT 7, APPLY BY **NOVEMBER 13**

APPLY HERE TO BECOME A  
MENTEE →

APPLY HERE TO BECOME A  
MENTOR →

*\*A confirmation email will be sent to all applicants from the Empower'em team.  
Please email at [info@empowerem.ca](mailto:info@empowerem.ca) for any questions and/or concerns!*

NEW THIS YEAR

**Your member space.** When you apply, you get access to the Empower'em member portal to check your application status, update your profile and see upcoming events. More opens up once you're matched.

Applied → Interviewing → Finding Your Match → Matching →  
Matched



Check out our website and follow us for program updates and information at:

 **INSTAGRAM**

 **FACEBOOK**

 **WEBSITE**

 **LINKEDIN**

# Program Impact

Empower'em has run six cohorts of the Our Way Forward mentorship program since 2021, and we're excited to share the impact it has created!



## DOES IT WORK?

**91%** **match satisfaction.** 51 of 56 participants surveyed in Cohorts 1 to 4 were happy with their match.

## In Cohort 6, participants grew on all 12 things we measure.

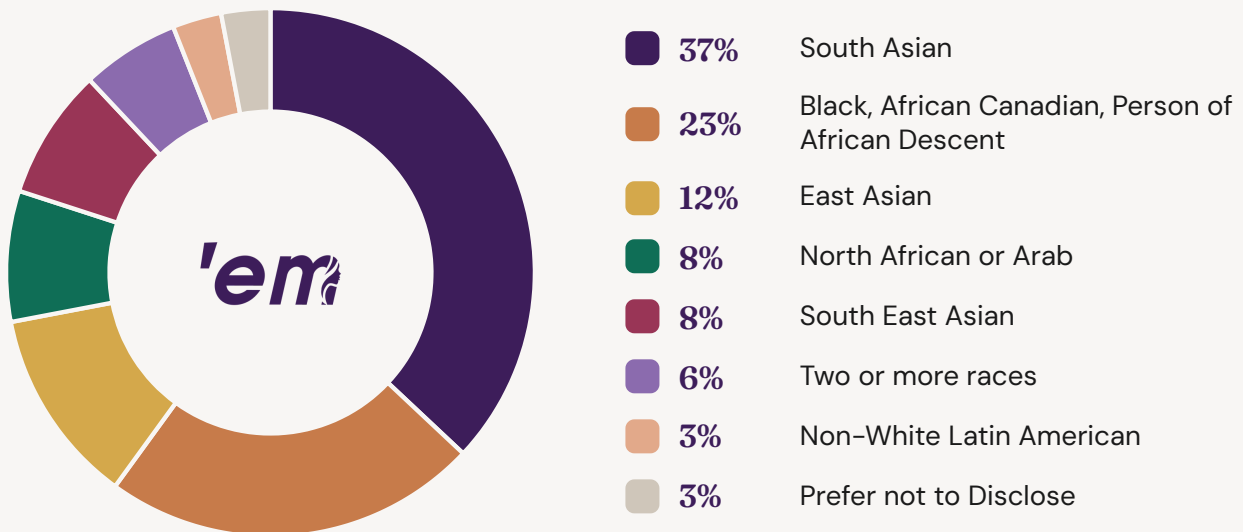
Average rating at the start and end of the program, on a scale of 1 to 5. Here are four of the biggest shifts.



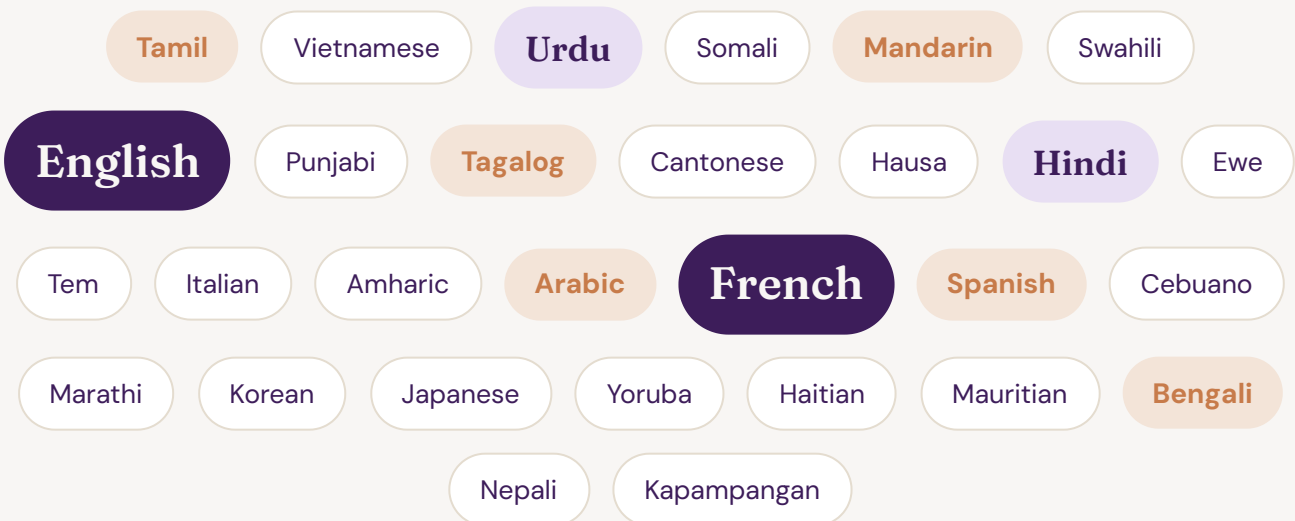
*\*Based on the 12 Cohort 6 participants who completed both the start and end surveys (2026).*

## Our participants come from diverse racial & ethnic groups

*\*Based on participant data from Our Way Forward Cohorts 1 to 5.*



## Our participants speak 28 different languages



# Testimonials

“

I feel I've seen a huge transition between what I thought I could do vs the skies the limit mindset I have now.

- Anonymous mentee

“

My mentor helped me overcome some challenges and gain confidence... I feel more empowered now compared to the beginning of the program.

- Haruka, mentee

“

I felt very seen, safe, and heard by my mentor which allowed me to be vulnerable with her and create the foundation I needed to begin doing the work.

- Azreen, mentee (now a mentor)

“

Being part of Our Way Forward's mentorship program by Empower'em has been a rewarding experience for me. Unlike previous mentorship programs I've been involved in, this program is uniquely tailored for women of color, by women of color. The mentorship I received went beyond professional advice; it provided me with a sense of belonging and affirmation.

- Anonymous mentee

“

I didn't know how much I needed [community] until I became a part of it.

- Aska, mentee (now a mentor)

## From our mentors



“

I had the privilege of participating in the Empower'em program as a mentor and was matched with a wonderful mentee that had similar lived experiences and interests as me. Throughout the program, the Empower'em team did a great job curating helpful tips and content to guide us through the mentoring relationship. Programs like this are so important for women of colour to feel seen and heard – I particularly appreciated the opportunity to connect and learn from other brilliant women of colour and I look forward to continuing to foster these relationships in the months to come.

– **Adrienne, mentor**

“

Empower'em matched me to my mentee so particularly well – we got along so beautifully and I really enjoyed the time I had with my mentee. They did such a great job with the social events, and the resources that were given to us are exceptional to get you into the right mindset as a mentor. I would love to do this again!

– **Julien, mentor**



“

This was a fantastic experience where we as WOC were able to come together and create a community and experience that was led by us. Having individuals who have shared experiences and being able to share and learn from one another created a beautiful space of learning, growth, and joy. It's a powerful feeling of validation having someone else be able to articulate something that you're also feeling when it comes to navigating this world as a WOC.

– **Aimen, mentor**



“

I wish that I had had someone to walk with me in this way when I needed support.

– **Nayla, mentor**

# FAQs

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1

## What is the OWF mentorship program about?

Our mission: we mentor, connect, and stand behind women of colour as they grow into their power, personally, professionally, and together. The Our Way Forward Mentorship Program brings this mission to life by connecting WOC with mentors who have lived experience in their area of interest. Mentors provide guidance, advice, and insights to help mentees access the knowledge, resources, and networks they need to pursue their goals and thrive.

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2

## What results can I expect by the end of the program?

By the end of the program, participants can expect to have received effective and impactful guidance and advice in their area of interest for growth, as well as membership to the Empower'em community and the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships with other community members.

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3

## Who can apply to the program?

Anyone who self-identifies as a woman of colour over the age of 18. Mentees must live in Ontario. Mentors can live anywhere in Canada. Students, newcomers and career changers are welcome. We ask that you are able to join the core sessions from January to June.

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4

## Is this program only open to residents of Ottawa (the unceded Algonquin Anishinabe Territory)?

No, we are accepting applications from anywhere in Ontario for mentees and anywhere in Canada for mentors.

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5

## Can I apply as both a mentee and mentor?

Yes, you can apply to the program to be matched as either a mentee or a mentor, but you are required to fill out both applications in order to be considered for either position.

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## Where will the program take place?

All mandatory components of the program will be held virtually by Empower'em on Zoom (at Eastern Standard Time). These include the interviews, community meetups, workshops, and peer support sessions.

One-on-one sessions scheduled between mentor and mentee may use any virtual application that is accessible to them. You will need a device and an internet connection to join. If access is a barrier, tell us and we will work with you.

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### How many hours will I be expected to invest in this program?

**Mentees:** The community meetups, workshops, peer support sessions, and one-on-one sessions (all of which are mandatory), plus socials, will require approx. 35–40 hours over 24 weeks (~1.5 hours/week).

**Mentors:** Plan for about 1 hour per week, about 20 hours over 24 weeks. This covers your 6 one-on-one sessions (about 1 hour each), 3 community meetups and 4 workshops (about 2 hours each). Socials and peer support sessions are optional.

Both mentees and mentors should expect to invest a few additional hours planning and/or preparing for meetings as well as reflecting and implementing the action plan as required.

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### How can Empower'em guarantee that these sessions will be a safe and non-judgemental space?

Because safe spaces can be different for different people, we cannot always guarantee a safe space. However, we strive to create safer spaces for individuals by vetting all candidates, hosting regular check-ins, and ensuring that the Empower'em Community Guidelines on safety and privacy are understood and observed by all participants.

9

### How will I be matched with a mentor/mentee?

Mentees will help select their potential mentor match. After receiving applications, a roster of mentor profiles will be created and made available to mentees. Mentees will then select their top 3 mentors, based on shared lived experiences and desired outcomes from the mentorship program. The Empower'em team will then try their best to finalize the pairings based on the mentee's top 3 choices. Despite our efforts, we cannot guarantee that a mentee will be paired with their top mentor choice.

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### What is the selection criteria for mentees?

Applications will be reviewed using the following criteria:

- Completeness and thoughtfulness of responses
- Clear, specific goals you hope to work toward through the program
- A detailed description of what you are seeking in a mentor
- Unique identities, perspectives, and lived experiences that contribute to the diversity of our community
- Most importantly, a genuine commitment to and enthusiasm for participating in this program

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### What is the selection criteria for mentors?

You don't need a specific title, industry or years of experience. What matters is lived experience you can share. Applications will be reviewed using the following criteria:

- Completeness and thoughtfulness of responses
- Clear, specific examples of the tangible ways you can support a mentee
- Demonstration of skills, experience, and understanding of what makes a good mentor
- Unique identities, perspectives, and lived experiences that contribute to the diversity of our community
- Most importantly, a genuine commitment to and enthusiasm for being part of this program

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### **What happens if I am not matched in this round?**

Every match is built on shared lived experience. If we can't find a mentor whose lived experience fits what you're looking for this round, we won't place you in a match that isn't right for you. Instead, you'll stay on our waitlist for the next cohort, get access to the member portal when it opens, and be invited to our public events.

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### **What happens if I don't feel well-matched with my mentor/mentee?**

Matches are made based on the mutual interest and lived experience of mentees and potential mentors. We will match participants based on our judgment of a pair's ability to benefit from their relationship with each other. We would encourage all participants to engage in the process even if they do not believe they are well-matched, but to alert the team of any issues or conflicts of interest that may interfere with their ability to engage meaningfully with the program. We will discuss these issues on a case by case basis.

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### **I need the application in another format. Who do I speak to?**

You can email us at [info@empowerem.ca](mailto:info@empowerem.ca) and we will do our best to provide a version of the application in your required format.

15

### **Is the program only offered in English?**

The program overall is offered in English. If you and your mentor share another language, your one-on-one sessions can happen in that language.

16

### **What is the cost of the program?**

Currently, there is no cost to the program, as we believe that personal and professional growth should be accessible to all women of colour.

17

### **Can I get accommodations?**

Yes. Tell us what you need in your application or email [info@empowerem.ca](mailto:info@empowerem.ca), and we will work with you. To date, we have offered the application in other formats, closed captioning, accessible Zoom setups, and flexible scheduling.

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### **How is my information protected?**

Identity questions on the application are always optional, with a "prefer not to say" option. What you share is encrypted, kept private, and only used to find you a good match.

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### **Can past participants apply again?**

Past mentees are welcome to come back as mentors, and many do. Returning mentors don't need to submit a new application. Just let us know you'd like to join again.

**empower'em**

# You don't have to navigate this alone.

*With care,  
The Empower'em Team*

APPLY NOW →

INFO@EMPOWEREM.CA →

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work happens on the traditional, unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, in what is now called Ottawa. Read our full acknowledgement at [empowerem.ca/about](https://empowerem.ca/about).

## MADE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPORT FROM



Our Way Forward is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Government of Ontario. Britannia Woods Community Services is Empower'em's fiscal sponsor.

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