

# **CDOT Emerging Small Business (ESB) Mentor-Protégé (MPP) Program Guidance & Expectations**

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## **CDOT's ESB Mentor-Protege Program Purpose**

### **Vision**

Establish an interconnected statewide community that supports the long-term dynamic growth of ESB-certified firms in the transportation design and construction industry.

### **Mission**

CDOT's ESB MPP is an integral component of the agency's commitment to advancing small business growth and participation in the transportation industry. The program equips protégés with the tools, skills, and knowledge needed to compete effectively for CDOT work through intentional collaboration, peer mentorship, and guidance from CDOT staff. By fostering capacity building, the program empowers protégés to strengthen their business operations, enhance competitiveness, and overcome challenges, while creating pathways for long-term growth and partnership opportunities within Colorado's transportation sector.

### **Expectations**

The ESB MPP is largely a self-paced program where outcomes reflect the level of commitment from both mentors and protégés. By the end of the second year, most Mentor-Protégé teams will have:

- Established a strong “zipper approach” working relationship at appropriate levels of each company and built on accountability and measurable progress.
- Demonstrated tangible capacity growth of the protégé firm, such as expanded service offerings, improved internal systems, stronger financial management, or enhanced ability to pursue and manage CDOT contracts.
- Participated in targeted business development initiatives with tracked goals and documented milestones.
- Gained a deeper understanding of CDOT processes, procedures, and requirements through workshops, industry events, and collaboration with both CDOT staff and transportation firms.

Graduates of the program will leave better positioned to compete for CDOT work, with increased confidence, stronger capacity, and a clear roadmap for continued growth.

### **Program Structure**

The ESB Mentor-Protege Program capacity is set at 10 teams total.

### **Role of the Mentor**

An established professional services consultant or general contractor focused primarily on the public construction and/or professional design industry. The mentor firm must bring demonstrated experience working with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), including familiarity with CDOT's contracting processes,

standards, and project delivery methods. This experience enables the mentor to provide valuable, real-world guidance to the protégé. In addition, the firm must be willing to invest time and resources to teach critical business skills and agency engagement strategies and tactics to a protégé that is a certified Emerging Small Business (ESB) with CDOT.

### Role of the Protégé

A professional services consultant or contractor focused primarily on the public construction and/or professional design industry. The firm must be a certified Emerging Small Business (ESB) with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and be willing to invest a sizable amount of time and resources to increase their business skills and/or expand their knowledge and understanding of doing business with CDOT. This includes dedicating time from the owner and/or company employees to learn business or CDOT processes, meet with the Mentor regularly, and work toward pre-identified business goals.

### Teaming

CDOT's ESB MPP requires teams to self-select one another; meaning that CDOT does not pair Mentor and Protégé firms together. Successful teams often have an existing relationship prior to entering the program, and CDOT recommends Protégés look to their existing networks for qualified Mentors.

When forming a team, firms should consider not only the degree to which their services are complementary, but also how their partnership can foster long-term business growth. This includes strengthening and improving business models, leveraging modern business platforms and technologies to enhance operations, and intentionally focusing on employee development to build organizational capacity. The ability to pursue mutually beneficial work opportunities is a significant asset, but equally important is creating strategies that position both firms for sustained growth beyond the program.

Teams often engage multiple company representatives who are actively involved in and familiar with the ESB MPP. This inclusive approach ensures that employees gain exposure to CDOT processes, expand their professional skills, and contribute to the evolution of their firms' business practices.

### Tenure

Teams commit to staying in the Program for up to **two calendar years**, provided the team remains in good standing (see CDOT [CDOT Expectations Good Standing Requirements](#)). Teams may voluntarily withdraw from the program at any time. However, a team that voluntarily withdraws from the program will forfeit any benefits available to Past Participants.

ONLY teams that completed two years of the program in good standing will be eligible for the additional year of benefits available to Past Participants after program completion.

## Program Eligibility

### Proteges

- Active CDOT ESB certification at the following levels
  - Construction: Levels 1, 2, and SBE
  - Professional Services: Levels 1 and 2 (SBE consultants are not eligible to be Proteges in the ESB Mentor-Protege program)
- In business at least two full years
- Must be seeking business growth and expansion opportunities
- Professional services firms must have an active Master Pricing Agreement with CDOT (note: this does not apply to Construction firms)

### Mentors

- Be actively prequalified with CDOT (Master Pricing Agreement/technical prequal for consultants; B2GNow approved prequalification for contractors)
- DBE and ESB certified firms may be Mentors
- Past ESB MPP Proteges may be Mentors

### Past Participants

- Mentor-Protege Teams who have remained in [good standing](#) and have completed their two-year commitment in the program are eligible to receive program benefits for up to one calendar year after completion.

## Program Benefits

Teams that remain in good standing in the ESB MPP will avail themselves to several benefits related to working with CDOT, and CDOT is continuously seeking opportunities to improve the value of time spent by Teams in the program.

Upon program completion, teams come away with two years of hands-on experience with CDOT project staff and specialty units, as well as a community of contacts and resources from cohort members. This experience not only strengthens each firm's understanding of CDOT processes and requirements but also builds lasting **organizational capacity and operational competitiveness**, directly impacting both the quality and the bottom line of infrastructure for Colorado taxpayers.

Cohort members gain access to an impressive peer group of contractors and consultants that is collegial in nature and provides both networking and professional development insights. This group serves as a **community of practice** rather than one of competition, allowing firms to benchmark strategies, share best practices, and sharpen their business models. The result is stronger firms that emerge from the program better positioned to compete effectively in the transportation industry, pursue larger and more complex contracts, and sustain long-term growth beyond the program's completion.

### ESB MPP Participants (Active and Past Participants)

- Exclusive access to CDOT Chats and feedback opportunities
- Digital badge for use in marketing materials

- Web presence and recognition on CDOT's website: [www.codot.gov](http://www.codot.gov)

### Active Teams

- Profile on CDOT's website ([www.codot.gov/mp](http://www.codot.gov/mp))
- Recognition in the Connect2DOT newsletter (5,000+ subscribers)
- Unique opportunities to meet CDOT leadership, CDOT project staff, and Colorado Transportation Commissioners (when possible)
- Exclusive invitation to spotlight companies at CDOT small business events throughout the year.
- **MENTORS ONLY:** Annual stipend for reimbursement (up to \$2,500):
  - Billability offset/time reimbursement
  - Career & Technical Education (CTE) credit reimbursement

### Active Teams & Past Participants (Consultants)

- One scoring point for the inclusion of any protege (past or present) that is ESB certified on the proposing team
- Two scoring points if the Prime Consultant is an active or one-year graduate participant in the CDOT Small Business Mentor/Protégé Program as a Mentor and uses an ESB Protégé still holding a certification (past cohort or present cohort).

## Application Process

During the summer months, CDOT sends out a communication providing specific information regarding application timelines as well as selection committee representatives. New applications will be available on an annual basis around mid September and will be due back in early November, giving potential teams ample time to solidify their relationships and complete the required information.

### Cohort Application - Anticipated Timeline

- September - Applications available
- Early October - Matchmaking Event
- Early November - Applications due
- Early/Mid December - Selections communicated
- Early December - Past year recognitions
- Mid January/February - New Year kick-off

### Application Scoring & Team Selection

A committee of various CDOT staff will review and score applications. The composition of this committee may change each year, and CDOT will make an effort to ensure equitable representation across disciplines and interests.

#### CDOT

- TBD

#### Team Liaison

- Helga Grunerud

## Key Events - Calendar year

### Q1: Kickoff (*Active Teams*)

To set the stage for the new teams, CDOT staff from various regions, residencies, and specialties will give short presentations about how their work units are structured and what type of work they typically contract out. The new teams will introduce themselves and their goals for their time in the ESB MPP. Graduating teams may be recognized for their accomplishments at this time.

The Team Liaison will also reach out to teams during this quarter for an introductory meeting and to record the goals set by each team.

### Q2: Active Team Event

The content for this event will be determined based on the needs of the active teams. Structure may include open discussion, panel discussions, short presentations, and/or networking opportunities, as best fits the subject matter of the event.

### Q3: Annual MPP Stakeholder Meeting (*Active Teams & Past Participants*)

Each year CDOT will set aside time to receive feedback from current and former teams about how to improve the program. This session is intended to be an open dialogue between Mentors, Proteges, and CDOT staff, with the intent of identifying areas in need of further consideration and those that are key to the program's ongoing success.

### Q4: Active Team End of Year Event

The content for this event will be determined based on the needs of the active teams. Structure may include open discussion, panel discussions, short presentations, and/or networking opportunities, as best fits the subject matter of the event.

### Other Events

Each year, CDOT will host a variety of events for the Mentor-Protege Cohort. These include informal networking opportunities and virtual introductions to CDOT Region Staff. Event calendars will be provided with more information at the beginning of the year.

### CDOT Chats (*Active Teams & Past Participants*)

Depending on cohort interest, CDOT will host quarterly CDOT Chats (quarters 2 - 4) that are available to all active program participants and alumni. These sessions will include process clarification and training opportunities from CDOT specialty units.

CDOT Chats will be virtual to allow all participants an opportunity to be involved, regardless of location. Teams will be notified of any CDOT Chats a month in advance.

## CDOT Expectations (Good Standing Requirements)

### Team Commitment

Teams are expected to participate in the CDOT ESB MPP for **two calendar years**. Both the mentor and protégé will be expected to intentionally commit time to one another and submit quarterly goals and/or status updates toward goal achievement. CDOT will monitor progress against these goals on a quarterly basis, recognizing that some goals may take longer than one quarter to complete. Teams must collaborate with each other and CDOT, including the ESB MPP Team Liaison, and demonstrate progress toward achieving their set goals. If there is an issue, team members should work with the Team Liaison and/or CDOT toward resolving the matter.

This program is intended for mentors and protégés to strategically develop and genuinely foster a relationship that will lead to long-term success and opportunity. CDOT reserves the right to terminate participation of mentor-protégé teams for lack of commitment, non-responsiveness, non-attendance and/or any other good cause that affects the integrity and mission of the program. Teams may voluntarily withdraw from the program at any time with no penalty, though only teams completing two years in good standing will be eligible for the additional year of benefits after program completion.

### **Attendance, Reporting & Program Engagement**

#### Quarterly Team Reporting

Teams are required to meet with the Team Liaison once each quarter. In addition, mentors and protégés should meet as often as necessary to ensure progress toward their goals and be ready to report at these quarterly check-ins:

- **Q1 (Jan-Mar):** Liaison meeting in April
- **Q2 (Apr-Jun):** Liaison meeting in July
- **Q3 (Jul-Sep):** Liaison meeting in October
- **Q4 (Oct-Dec):** Liaison meeting in January 2026

Each one-hour meeting with the Team Liaison will jointly update the quarterly report. Teams will share progress, successes, challenges, and may adjust/add or eliminate goals without penalty to accommodate the changing needs of the team. The Team Liaison will record notes and prepare a status report for the CDOT Program Coordinator.

Typical discussion topics include:

- Progress toward goals
- Urgent needs
- Engagement with CDOT
- Mentor's technical or management assistance
- Resources provided or summaries of training

During Quarter 4 of each year in the program, the teams must provide feedback via a program survey generated by CDOT and the Team Liaison.



As part of the ESB MPP cohort community, both Mentor and the Protege firm representatives are required to attend a minimum of three (3) Annual Program Events, when possible. Firms may send proxies that are engaged and familiar with the program. To help maintain an interconnected community, a portion of cohort events may take place outside of CDOT Region 1 (Denver Metro Area). More details about Cohort Events can be found in the [Annual Program Event Calendar](#) section of this document.

### Year End Team Reporting Form

To indicate their intent to continue in the program for another year, Teams must complete the Year End Team reporting form by midnight on December 31.

### Failure to Remain in Good Standing

CDOT may elect to terminate a Team's participation in the program under the following circumstances:

1. If either Mentor or Protege no longer meet eligibility requirements
  - a. Assessed at the start of the calendar year
2. If either Mentor or Protege fail to remain in good standing
  - a. CDOT will make a concerted effort to assist Proteges whose Mentors do not remain in good standing
3. If either Mentor or Protege demonstrate conduct not in-line with CDOT values or the stated purposes of the ESB Program and the ESB Mentor-Protege Program
  - a. This shall be at CDOT's discretion

The Program Coordinator will notify the Team in writing of the intent to terminate should any of these constraints be breached. The Team may request a meeting with the Program Coordinator to discuss the reasons for termination or appeal the decision within 30 calendar days. Termination for cause will not result in adverse consequences for the Team; however, they will forfeit all program benefits effective 31 days after the notification of termination is issued.

Teams whose participation was terminated due to failure to remain in good standing will not be eligible for any of the benefits available to past program participants.



## Program Oversight

The ESB MPP is under the purview of the Transportation Commission, funded by state dollars, and administered by the CDOT Office Environmental Justice and Equity (EJE). Key administrative roles currently include a CDOT Program Coordinator, a Team Liaison, and a Team Selection/Program Advisory Committee.

### Administrative Roles & Responsibilities

**Program Coordinator:** Administrative authority for the program and as such does not participate in application evaluation; however, the Program Coordinator will retain primary oversight of the requirements to remain in good standing. The Program Coordinator will prioritize any and all opportunities to find mutually beneficial ways to leverage the ESB MPP for both CDOT and the industry's gain, and the program is designed to flex with the shifting priorities of the agency.

**Team Liaison:** Provides an objective point of contact for mentors, proteges, and teams to troubleshoot any barriers they encounter while in the ESB MPP. The Team Liaison will periodically check in with teams to ensure that the relationship is working smoothly and will assist in identifying resources as needed by participants. The team liaison will also compile quarterly reporting jointly completed with the Teams.

**Selection Committee:** Provides objective assessment of a Team's appropriateness for the ESB MPP by evaluating key criteria determined each year by CDOT. Certain members of the Selection Committee may also participate in program activities and provide programmatic insights as available to the CDOT EJE and Program Coordinator.