

Stronger Firms, Lasting Partnerships

Inside the ACEC Indiana Mentor–Protégé Program

The ACEC Indiana Mentor–Protégé Program helps strengthen the engineering profession by connecting established firms with developing member firms through one-on-one partnerships. The program gives participants an opportunity to share best practices, discuss business challenges, exchange technical and operational knowledge, and build lasting professional relationships.

For this edition, we spoke with **Jim Trachtman** of **Hanson Professional Services**, who served as a mentor, and **Rachel Doba** of **DB Engineering**, who participated as a protégé. Their experiences show how the Mentor–Protégé Program helps firms learn from one another, build stronger partnerships, and create relationships that continue long after the program ends.

Why Participate?

Jim Trachtman Mentor · Hanson Professional Services

Why did your firm want to participate as a mentor in the Mentor–Protégé Program?

“It was really just a way of giving back to ACEC and our profession. We've gained so much from being a member that it only seemed right to pay it back a bit.”

What did you hope your firm and the protégé firm would gain from this experience?

“My expectation was that it would be interesting and helpful for us to see the challenges that a smaller firm faced, and it was.”

Rachel Doba Protégé · DB Engineering

What were your primary goals when your firm entered the Mentor–Protégé Program?

“Our goals were to expand our service lines and strengthen resource materials such as contract language and HR policies. We also hadn't worked much with Hanson before, so we were excited to learn more about their work and the people behind it.”

Sharing Experience and Knowledge

Jim Trachtman

What experiences prepared your firm to mentor a developing engineering firm?

“Interestingly, it really came down to having best practices that have been developed over many years by many people. With about 550 employees across the country, we need robust systems in HR, marketing, legal, finance, and other areas. Those systems became our preparation.”

Rachel Doba

What aspect of the mentoring relationship was most beneficial?

“There were so many benefits. We learned about INDOT opportunities we weren't previously aware of, gained a better understanding of the INDOT process, expanded discussions with our staff, and explored teaming partnerships. We also gained a wealth of HR knowledge. As a small firm, we face many of the same HR challenges as larger firms, so having access to Hanson's resources was incredibly valuable.”

How does this program compare to other professional development opportunities?

“The one-on-one nature of the program creates a level of trust and confidentiality that you don't often find in other programs. It also provides the flexibility to shape the experience in a way that best fits both firms.”

Unexpected Benefits

Jim Trachtman

What was the most rewarding aspect of serving as a mentor?

“I really enjoyed introducing Rachel and her team to some of our staff, and we ended up teaming on some pursuits as a result. Our firms knew each other before embarking on this relationship, but the structure of the program enhanced that relationship.”

What did your firm learn from the protégé that you did not expect?

“That's a good question. Throughout the process, I was reminded of the resource management challenges we all face and that they're even more challenging for a smaller firm.”

Rachel Doba

How did your goals evolve throughout the mentoring relationship?

“COVID was in full swing during our time in the program, and it caused us to pivot. Beyond utilizing virtual meetings, the sharing of COVID-related HR materials and procedures became extremely helpful. It created another level of partnership during a very difficult time.”

Were there any unexpected outcomes or benefits from participating?

“COVID was definitely an unexpected challenge during the program. Having a trusted partner to discuss PPP loans, work-from-home policies, and employee health concerns was invaluable. It helped us remain balanced during a very challenging period.”

Lasting Partnerships

Rachel Doba

Has your relationship with your mentor continued after the program ended?

“Fortunately, yes. We’ve not only developed work-related partnerships, but we’ve also developed trust that has grown into both professional and personal relationships.”

Jim Trachtman

Have you continued to collaborate since completing the program?

“Yes. We periodically team on projects and stay in contact.”

Advice for Future Participants

Rachel Doba

What would you tell another small firm considering participation in the program?

“Definitely participate and enter the program with an open mind and flexibility. While you may begin with one goal, you’ll likely discover many more opportunities to pursue and build an even stronger long-term relationship.”

What advice would you offer future mentor–protégé pairs?

“Have a game plan but leave all options on the table. Being open to new opportunities throughout the program allows you to maximize its benefits.”

Jim Trachtman

How has this experience influenced your firm's approach to mentoring or collaboration?

“I don't think it changed our approach all that much. We've always tried to be good partners and, when appropriate, a good mentor.”

What advice would you offer future mentor–protégé pairs?

“Go into it with a wide-open attitude. It's important to trust one another and confidentially share information.”

Looking Ahead

The experiences of Hanson Professional Services and DB Engineering demonstrate the value of the ACEC Indiana Mentor–Protégé Program. While firms may join the program with specific goals, they often gain something even more valuable: strong professional relationships.

Through sharing knowledge, building trust, and learning from each other, mentor and protégé firms grow stronger together. The program helps ACEC Indiana members collaborate and strengthen the engineering community across the state.