

# SHORE

Empower students as the agents of change

SCALING OCEAN LITERACY

## Lessons learned from 3 Open Calls of the SHORE mentorship program



PART OF THE  
**EU MISSIONS**  
RESTORE OUR OCEAN & WATERS

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## A consolidated framework for mentoring blue schools

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# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

### The SHORE mentorship vision

SHORE aims to boost ocean literacy by involving students and teachers through hands-on activities and collaborative school projects. In this project, partners developed training programs and educational resources aligned with blue curricula for schools situated near the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Danube River, and Rhine River.

Participating schools received grants to help implement their blue projects. The most exceptional school projects were honored with the title of "Ocean Ambassador of the Year". In addition to providing grants, SHORE acted as a central resource hub and a connection point between researchers, local stakeholders, and schools in the regional areas.

It aimed to facilitate the implementation of school projects, increase awareness within local communities about ocean-related issues, and empower students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to serve as catalysts for positive change. To accomplish this goal, SHORE established a network of 7 country hubs.

They offered mentoring services to the selected schools, guiding them on the integration of blue curricula into their educational systems and ensuring the high-quality implementation of their blue projects. Additionally, the country hubs disseminated ocean literacy practices, advocated for Ocean Schooling initiatives, organized community engagement activities, and provided support for the application process to join the European Network of Blue Schools.



The success of the SHORE initiative relied not only on funding but on the human infrastructure that supported it. Within the context of scaling ocean literacy, the role of mentorship was paramount.

It served as the bridge between project goals and tangible, community-based results.

In the SHORE vision, mentorship was defined as a dynamic relationship designed to facilitate learning, improve performance, and foster both the personal and professional development of people. It was not merely an administrative oversight role; it was a partnership dedicated to continued development.





#EU4Ocean  
#Youth4Ocean  
#EUBlueSchools

### “Blue Schools”

A European Blue School is an educational institution, whether primary, secondary, or vocational, that integrates ocean literacy and sustainability into its teaching.

A Blue School brings this vision to life by **making the ocean part of everyday learning.**

#### How to become a European Blue School?

Any school within the European Union can become a European Blue School. The process begins by developing and implementing a project that connects students with the ocean. Once the project is underway, the school can submit its application to the Network of European Blue Schools to be officially recognized.



### The infrastructure of expertise: Country Hubs

The operational backbone of the SHORE mentorship program was its network of Country Hubs. Mentors were not recruited at random; they were drawn from these specific regional centers and partners of SHORE. This structure ensured that every school received guidance that was culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and geographically specific.

These hubs provided the essential infrastructure (local expertise, mentorship, and educational resources) needed to scale ocean literacy across Europe’s major water basins. Acting as the central node of this ecosystem, Mare Nostrum NGO (Romania) served as the coordinator of the mentorship network. Beyond their regional duties, they were responsible for synchronizing the efforts of all hubs, ensuring a unified standard of mentorship across the continent.

### Guidance over policing

The primary vision for a SHORE mentor was to act as a support system rather than an auditor. This distinction was vital in financial and resource management. Schools were awarded grants as a lump sum. Consequently, the mentor’s role was not to police the budget line-by-line but to offer guidance upon request. While mentors acted as guides, the schools were responsible for adhering to national financial regulations and ensuring the entire grant was utilized within the 6-month implementation period.

To translate the SHORE vision into reality, the program required a robust human infrastructure capable of handling scale without sacrificing the quality of individual support.

The SHORE mentorship network was structured to ensure that “mentorship” remained a personal relationship rather than an administrative checkbox. Across each of the three SHORE Open Calls, the network mobilized up to 21 mentors.

Crucially, to protect the integrity of the guidance process, a strict workload cap was implemented, and each mentor oversaw a maximum of two blue projects per Open Call. By intentionally limiting the cohort size, we ensured mentors could fully dedicate themselves to the program’s requirements. This included managing monthly meetings, submitting detailed progress reports, and providing the specific support needed for **European Blue School** accreditation.

By capping the mentor-to-mentee ratio, SHORE prioritized depth of engagement, ensuring that every school received focused attention, timely feedback, and a dedicated partner in their journey toward ocean literacy.

Each Country Hub brought a **unique specialization to the network**, offering schools a diverse range of support mechanisms:

### Mare Nostrum NGO

#### Romania

*Role:* As the network coordinator and a veteran organization with almost 32 years of experience, Mare Nostrum anchored the program in the Black Sea and Danube regions while supporting the wider network. They were key players in biodiversity conservation, waste management, and citizen science, providing mentors with deep experience in education for sustainable development.

### Yildiz Technical University – YTÜ

#### Türkiye

*Role:* Covering the Black Sea and Mediterranean, YTÜ acted as a bridge between academia and the public. They focused on high-impact public outreach through seminars and workshops. Notably, YTÜ spearheaded the development of the Ocean Literacy Action Center, a permanent resource for the region.

### Global Skills Network – GSNE

#### Estonia

*Role:* GSNE served as the pedagogical engine for the Baltic region. Their mentors specialized in connecting schools with the “real world”, facilitating links between students, scientists, policymakers, and the general public.

### WSB University – WSB Akademia

#### Poland

*Role:* The WSB focused on the practical mechanics of project execution. Their mentors were experts in logistics, economics, management, and social innovation. They played a critical role in helping students assess project feasibility and manage their budgets effectively, ensuring ideas survived the transition to reality.

### Vienna University Children’s Office – KUW

#### Austria

*Role:* Operating West of Vienna, KUW specialized in the intersection of science and society. Renowned for their flagship “Children’s University” initiative, their mentors brought expertise in early STEM engagement, democracy literacy, and climate change education, helping schools craft age-appropriate, engaging narratives.

### Budapest University of Technology and Economics – BME

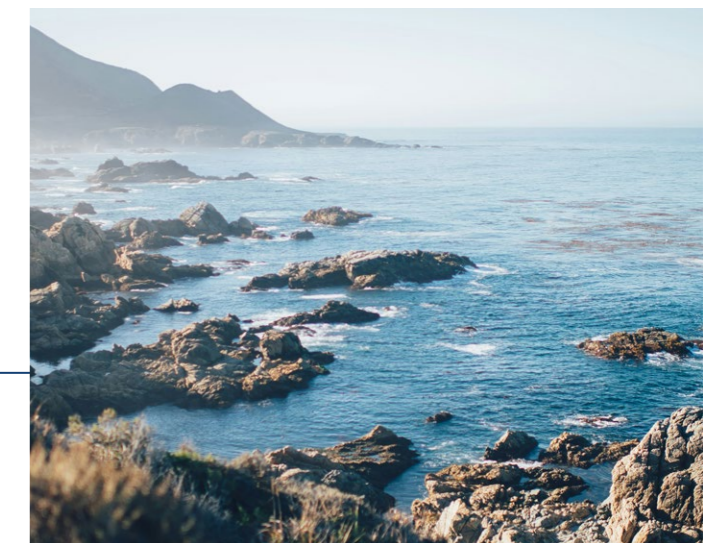
#### Hungary

*Role:* BME leveraged its status as a massive technical institution to support schools in the Rhine and Danube area. Utilizing their background in water R&D and facility protection, they organized large-scale natural science events, helping mentors guide students through the technical aspects of water protection.

### University of Padua – UniPD

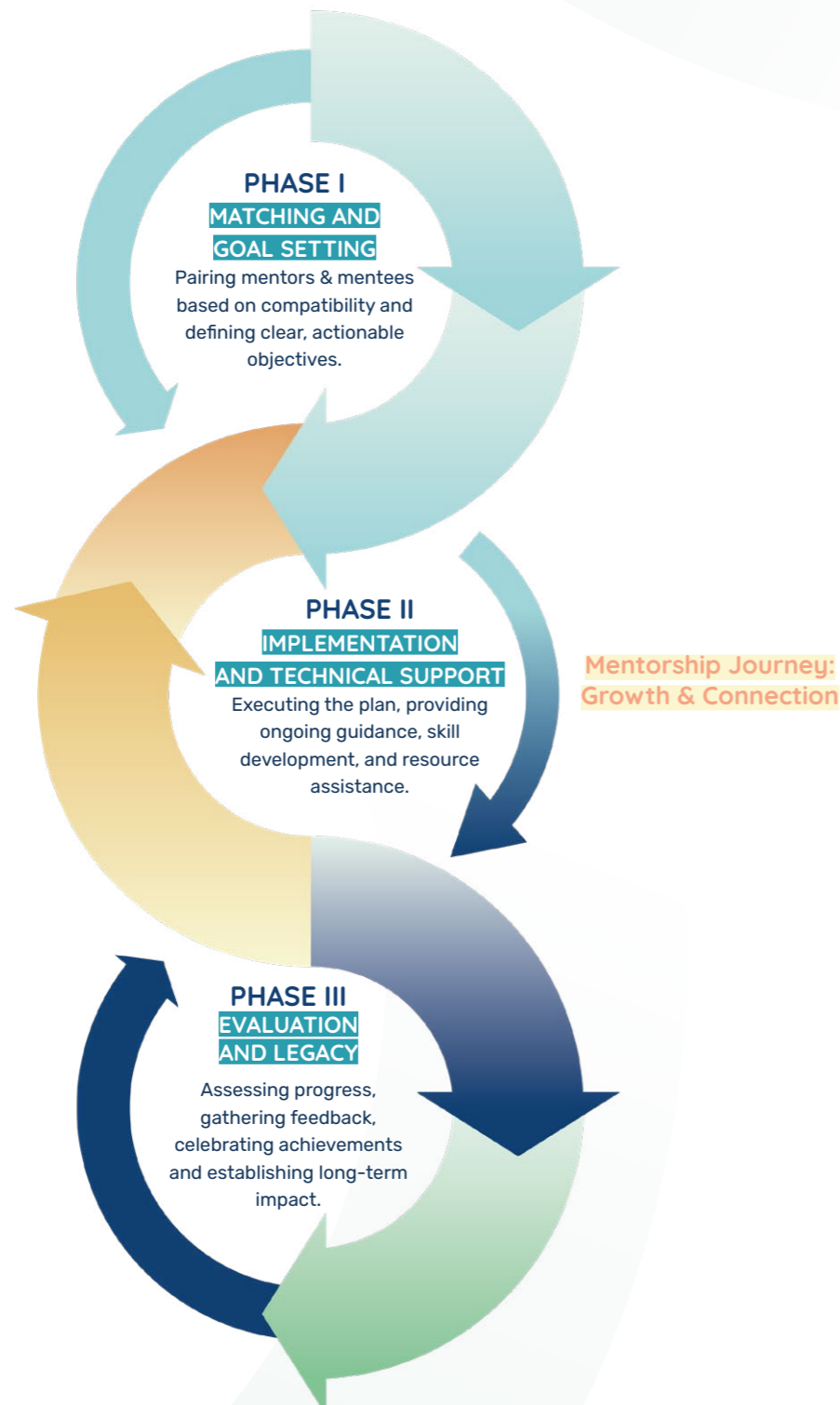
#### Italy

*Role:* Uniquely positioned near the Venice lagoon and the Po River delta, UniPD offered mentors deeply versed in the biological and geographic complexities of the Mediterranean basin. Their primary focus was supporting schools in the accreditation process, guiding them through the requirements to join the European Network of Blue Schools.



## The 3-phase cycle

To ensure that the “blue projects” achieve their potential, the mentorship vision was built upon a unique motto: **clarity, consistency, and reciprocity**.



### PHASE I: CLARITY

## Matching and goal setting

The mentorship journey begins not with execution, but **with alignment**. This phase is the foundational stage where the mentor-mentee relationship is established (matching) and the project trajectory is defined (goal setting).

### The matching process

With a network of up to **21 mentors** available per call, the matching process was **designed to pair schools with mentors best suited to their specific area and subjects**. This ensured that the guidance provided was not just administrative, but technically relevant.

Once the connection was made, success relied on the creation of a **shared roadmap**. At the very outset of the program, mentors collaborated closely with projects, leading to translating the school’s initial proposal into a concrete action plan. The priority here was to establish objectives that were specific, tangible, and time bound. This rigorous definition phase was not bureaucratic; it was strategic. By looking at these details early, the mentorship team ensured three critical outcomes:

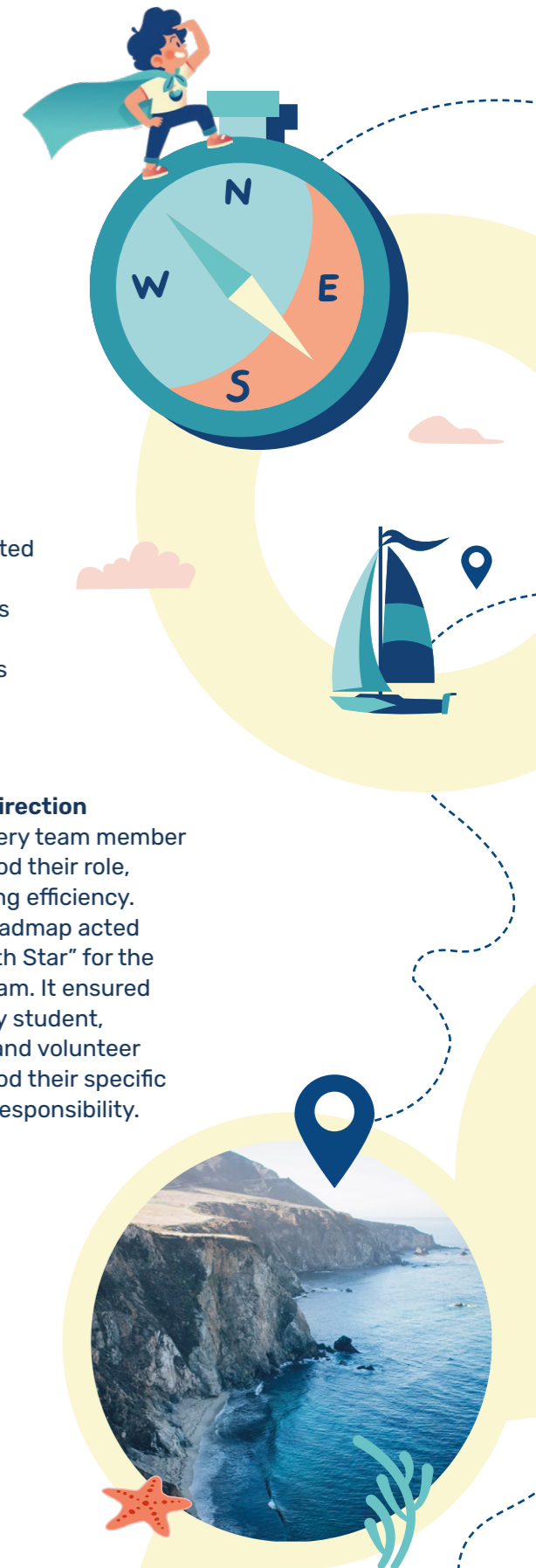
**Continuous monitoring**  
clear objectives created a baseline. Without them, “progress” was subjective. With them, mentors could objectively measure how far a team had come and what milestones remained.

**Strategic agility**  
when objectives were clear, the path to reaching them could be flexible. If a team encountered an obstacle, the mentor could help them adjust their strategy in real-time without losing sight of the goal.

**Unified direction**  
where every team member understood their role, maximizing efficiency. A clear roadmap acted as a “North Star” for the school team. It ensured that every student, teacher, and volunteer understood their specific role and responsibility.

**This alignment prevented effort duplication and maximized the efficiency of the 6-month implementation window.**

Regarding the first phase, mentors identified a lack of time as the primary challenge, while some noted a lack of background knowledge on the assigned projects or reported that the goal-setting process proceeded without issues.



## PHASE II: CONSISTENCY

## Implementation and technical support

The SHORE mentorship vision was predicated on the belief that **meaningful ocean literacy was built through sustained effort, not sporadic bursts of activity**. To ensure that excitement translated into execution, the mentorship model relied on a strict operational rhythm designed to maintain momentum over the 6-month period.

### The operational pulse: regular meetings

Regular interaction was the heartbeat of the SHORE mentorship program. Mentors were required to hold meetings ideally on a monthly basis to:

- Assess achievements.
- Proactively spot bottlenecks before they become critical failures.
- Ensure the project remains aligned with its original objectives and budget constraints.

In terms of technical requirements, mentors indicated that project management was the area necessitating the most support, followed closely by scientific methodology. Because mentors were limited to a maximum of two projects, these meetings allowed for deep, substantive engagement rather than superficial updates.

### The project record: monthly progress reports

To formalize the discussions held during meetings, mentors prepared a summary report after every session. This documentation served as the project's navigational log. By recording observations of challenges faced and documenting recommendations for future directions, mentors created an evidence base for the project's evolution. This practice allowed for careful performance monitoring and provided the data necessary to adjust mentoring strategies if a specific approach didn't yield results.

### The growth mechanism: continuous feedback

Communication during phase II was defined by the quality of feedback.

To ensure the positive and sustainable development of the entire project, SHORE mentors employed a "two-fold" feedback strategy:

- **Positive reinforcement**, which was essential for morale, mentors actively highlight strengths and achievements to keep the school teams motivated and engaged.
- **Constructive guidance** was given, as identifying a problem was only half the job. Mentors provided specific, concrete suggestions for improvement, helping teams develop effective strategies to overcome obstacles.

By balancing motivation with accountability, mentors contributed significantly to the skill development of the team members and the overall success of the blue project.

## PHASE III: RECIPROCITY

## Evaluation and legacy

The final phase of the SHORE mentorship cycle moved beyond the immediate **execution of tasks to focus on the long-term impact of the project**. This phase was defined by **reciprocity** and **legacy**—ensuring that the project left a mark not just on the ocean, but on the school institution and the wider community.

A successful mentorship is strictly defined as a two-way street. While phase II focused on mentors guiding teams, phase III emphasized the reverse: assessing feedback from the school project team.

- **Empowerment** by systematically collecting, analyzing, and acting upon the team's input, mentors signaled that the school's experience is valued. This created a supportive environment where team members felt empowered rather than micromanaged.
- **Organizational health** as this reciprocal approach strengthened team cohesion and morale. It transformed the relationship from a hierarchical one into a genuine partnership, which was essential for the project's success and the school's willingness to engage in future initiatives.

The ultimate vision of the SHORE mentorship program was to contribute to a more ocean-literate society. Therefore, the mentor's scope extended beyond the classroom walls. Mentors acted as quality assurance

officers for the project's external image. Mentors ensured that every blue project maintained an active profile on the SHORE Community Platform. This platform served a dual purpose:

- **Transparency** allowed for real-time progress tracking during the implementation.
- **Showcase**, it acted as the permanent repository for the final report. This included project highlights, challenges faced, and a visual gallery of activities.

Effective dissemination was a key requirement. Mentors were responsible for ensuring teams utilize the specific communication guidelines and templates provided by the SHORE communication team. By strictly monitoring communication outputs, mentors guaranteed that the valuable lessons learned were shared widely, inspiring further action across the network.

The SHORE mentorship aimed for permanence. The grant money was temporary, but the school's commitment to the ocean will be lasting. A critical component of this vision was the **Network of European Blue Schools**. For the schools that entered the SHORE program without this accreditation, the mentor served as the primary guide. They demystified the application process and ensured administrative hurdles did not block educational progress. By securing this accreditation, the mentor helped solidify the school's long-term commitment to ocean literacy, ensuring that the "blue project" was not just a one-off event, but the beginning of a permanent institutional identity.



## 3.

## WHAT MADE IT WORK

## Success factors

The success of the SHORE initiative relied not merely on the conceptual framework of the project but on the specific human dynamics that drove its execution. When mentors were asked to identify the decisive elements that facilitated positive outcomes, the feedback overwhelmingly pointed toward personal commitment, institutional alignment, and structural adaptability.

#### 1. MENTOR AVAILABILITY & ENGAGEMENT (THE HUMAN FACTOR)

Constant presence and responsiveness created a foundation of trust. An “open door” policy fostered psychological safety for swift query resolution.

#### 2. INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN & INTERNAL SUPPORT

Active administration support and strong teacher engagement were critical. Internal alignment smoothed bureaucratic hurdles.

#### 3. OPERATIONAL RHYTHM & CONTINUOUS MONITORING

Regular meetings and ongoing qualitative communication ensured real-time progress tracking and quick conflict intervention.



#### 4. CULTURAL & REGIONAL ALIGNMENT (COUNTRY HUBS)

Utilizing Country Hubs ensured shared language and cultural background, providing locally relevant advice and eliminating barriers.

#### 5. ADAPTABILITY & STUDENT AGENCY

Flexible frameworks allowed strategies to pivot. Empowering student-driven initiatives sustained enthusiasm and energy.

#### 6. LOW-FRICTION IMPLEMENTATION & CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

Effective initial matching and shared ecological commitments led to a remarkably smooth experience with minimal interpersonal friction.

## Consolidated results of the mentorship program

The true measure of the SHORE mentorship program lies not in the administrative completion of tasks, but in the tangible transformation of school communities. By synthesizing data across three Open Calls and the feedback from the Country Hubs, the results demonstrate that the mentorship model successfully scaled ocean literacy from an abstract concept into a lived reality for students across Europe.

The most **immediate result** of the program was the successful operationalization of funding.

The mentorship structure proved decisive in ensuring that financial grants were converted into high-quality educational outputs. Unlike traditional grant schemes where support ends at the transaction, the active presence of mentors ensured that 100% of the selected blue projects had the guidance necessary to navigate the 6-month implementation period.

- **Feasibility assurance** as through the “reality check” provided in phase I, mentors helped schools refine ambitious ideas into executable plans, drastically reducing the risk of project failure due to logistical overreach.
- **Budget optimization** with mentors from hubs providing economic expertise, schools were able to maximize the impact of their lump-sum grants, directing funds toward high-value educational resources rather than administrative overhead.

A significant **achievement of the program** was the ability to maintain a unified standard of quality while respecting deep regional diversity.

- **Cross-regional consistency** despite the vast geographical spread—from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean and the Danube—the centralized coordination ensured that a school in Estonia received the same caliber of structural support as a school in Türkiye.
- **Local relevance**, the Country Hub model allowed results to be deeply localized. Projects were not generic “ocean” studies but were specific to their local water basins, whether it was the facility protection focus on the Rhine/Danube area or the biodiversity focus in the Baltic Sea. This duality of global standards and local action resulted in projects that were both scientifically rigorous and culturally resonant.



The program succeeded in moving schools from temporary engagement to permanent institutional change.

The mentorship focused on the **European Network of Blue Schools** accreditation produced a legacy.

- **Legacy creation** by guiding schools through the complex accreditation process, mentors ensured that the “blue project” was not a one-off event. Many participating schools transitioned from having zero formal ocean literacy curriculum to becoming accredited members of a Europe-wide network.
- **Capacity building** as the transfer of knowledge from mentors to teachers—particularly in areas like scientific methodology and project management—permanently upskilled the teaching staff. Schools are now equipped with the internal capacity to run future STEM and citizen science initiatives without requiring the same level of external support.

Perhaps the most critical qualitative result was the validation of the “human-first” approach.

- ◆ **Conflict mitigation** as the incredibly low incidence of significant conflict or friction, as reported by mentors, demonstrates that the matching process and the “guide-not-police” philosophy were highly effective. The program successfully created a psychological safe space for educators to experiment and learn.
- ◆ **Student empowerment** by encouraging a shift from teacher-led to student-driven initiatives (Phase III), the program resulted in higher student agency. Feedback indicates that when students were treated as active agents of change rather than passive recipients of knowledge, engagement levels rose, and the educational impact was deepened.

In conclusion, the SHORE mentorship program did not just fund blue school projects; it **built a resilient infrastructure for ocean literacy**. By combining financial support with rigorous, expert-led human guidance, the program ensured that every euro spent translated into meaningful, long-term educational value for European students.

## Checklist for future mentors

The legacy of the SHORE mentorship program is not limited to the projects completed, but also includes the operational wisdom gained by the mentors themselves. When asked to look back on their experience and provide guidance for future cohorts, the mentors offered a blueprint for success rooted in preparation, clear boundaries, and active engagement.



### Preparation and frameworks

Success began long before the first meeting. When asked to identify the one essential tool for success, mentors overwhelmingly pointed to the need for structural clarity. Respondents emphasized the importance of having a “clear mentorship framework outlining roles and expectations” or a written “mentor guide” that they could reference whenever doubts arise. This structural support provided the safety net necessary for mentors to operate with confidence. Furthermore, mentors noted that the intangible resources were just as vital as the physical ones; “patience and time for collaboration” were cited as non-negotiable assets. Without securing adequate time in their schedules, the technical tools were of little use.



### Advice for starting right

The consensus among experienced mentors was that the trajectory of the mentorship was determined in the very first interactions. The primary advice given to new mentors is “to read the application form before the first meeting”. Arriving prepared signalled respect and allowed the first session to focus on strategy rather than basic information gathering. Mentors also advised focusing immediately on “establishing clear expectations” and “building trust” through “active listening”. This human-centric approach laid the groundwork for “facilitating mentee autonomy”, ensuring that the school felt supported rather than directed. Finally, from a logistical standpoint, the advice was simple but critical: “secure time for the involvement” to ensure consistency.



### Boundaries and attitude

Equally important to what to do was what not to do. Mentors offered candid warnings about the specific behaviours that could undermine the relationship. A major logistical red flag was the blurring of professional boundaries; new mentors were explicitly warned against “giving their personal phone number to the schools”. On a relational level, mentors cautioned against “being distant” or “shy”, noting that a mentor must be able to “participate in online meetings without hesitation”. Conversely, they warned against being too dominant. A critical mistake to avoid was “imposing on the school the mentor’s individual approach”. The project belongs to the school, not the mentor. Finally, communication breakdowns were often traced back to assumptions; mentors were advised to “avoid assuming a shared understanding of goals and terminology without explicit discussion”.

### The SHORE mentor checklist

Based on this collective experience, the following checklist serves as the final operational guide for future ocean and water literacy mentors:

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT

##### Secure your time

Ensure you have blocked out adequate hours for the 6-month period.

##### Do your homework

Read the school’s project application thoroughly before the first meeting.

##### Review the guide

Familiarize yourself with the written mentor guide and framework.

#### DURING IMPLEMENTATION

##### Set boundaries

Use official communication channels only; do not share personal phone numbers.

##### Define vocabulary

Do not assume you speak the same technical language; explicitly discuss goals and terminology.

##### Be present

Participate actively in meetings without being shy or distant.

##### Listen first

Practice active listening to build trust and facilitate the school’s autonomy.

##### Monitor the “burn rate”

Keep an eye on budget utilization without micromanaging. Ensure the school isn’t saving all their funds for the final month, which endangers the project’s quality.

##### Celebrate “small wins”

use the “two-fold” feedback strategy. Actively highlight small achievements in every meeting to maintain morale during the difficult middle months of implementation.

#### MINDSET CHECK

##### Facilitate, don’t dictate

Adapt to the school’s needs rather than imposing your own rigid approach.

##### Be patient

Recognize that collaboration takes time and that schools may face bureaucratic hurdles.

##### Be open to learning

Approach the relationship as a two-way exchange. Acknowledge that while you bring technical expertise, the school brings local knowledge and pedagogical experience.

##### Value process over perfection

Accept that school-led projects may look “messier” than other ones. Prioritize the learning journey over a perfectly polished final product.

##### Practice empathy

Remember that teachers are often balancing this project on top of a full workload. Acknowledge their effort and constraints before critiquing their output to maintain a positive working relationship.

##### Think beyond the grant

Constantly frame the project not just as a 6-month task to be finished, but as the seed for a permanent “blue” identity for the school.

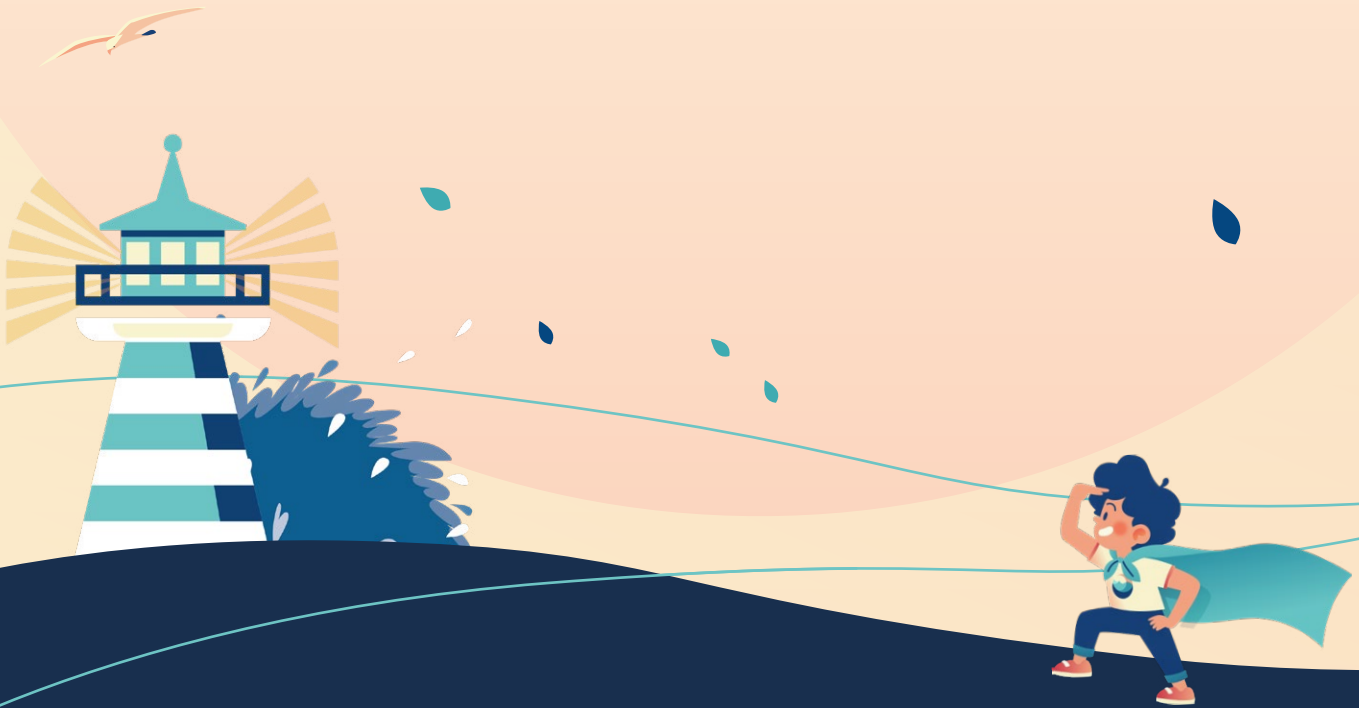
“Build trust, inspire and create connection”





# SHORE

Empower students as the agents of change



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