

MENTORING

Mentoring is a trusting relationship, formalized into a program of structured activities, which brings people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence of the mentee. Mentors do not confront, exercise authority, control or moralize. These are the basic premises of mentoring programs:

- Builds employee morale, thereby improving program morale
- Develops similar skills needed for successful and effective program delivery
- Enhances the image of the projects
- Allows for participation of all directors
- Recognizes the competence of seasoned project directors
- Prepares all project directors to take on greater responsibilities

While mentoring takes many forms, there are four common characteristics around which mentoring programs should be organized:

- Mentors and mentees should make a long-term commitment (generally, at least a year)
- Mentors should focus on building trust and respect with their mentees
- Mentees and mentors should set high, clear and fair expectations for themselves and the mentoring partner
- Mentors and mentees should meet or communicate with enough regularity to develop a strong relationship
- At a minimum, mentors and mentees should meet at regular intervals for at least 4 hours per month for at least a year
- For e-mentoring, 30-45 minutes of online time each week for at least one school year is recommended

Relative guideposts for mentoring programs are: high expectations of mentee and mentor; equality of opportunity; and full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision-making. The goal is to use the mentor's experience and knowledge to influence the mentee in a positive way via:

- Traditional one-on-one
- Peer-share support and advice
- Group-one or more leaders mentor others in a structured setting
- E-mentoring-generally emails are exchanged and there are occasional face-to-face meetings to provide a personal connection

Overall, success in individual mentoring relationships depends on many factors, including compatibility, availability, and willingness of the partners to enter into a give-and-take relationship.

While mentoring relates most directly to connecting, it plays a major role in supporting. The following is an overview of developmental competencies and suggestions regarding the types of activities that mentoring programs can provide:

- Working-positive attitudes, skills and behavior characterize this area of development
- Learning-positive basic and applied attitudes, skills and behaviors characterize this area of development
- Thriving-attitudes, skills and behaviors that are attained to contribute to program longevity
- Connecting-learning how to build and maintain varied and community relationships. This includes money, technology and transportation.
- Leading the development of positive skills, attitudes and behaviors around civic involvement and personal goal setting

In any mentoring program, it is useful for everyone involved to have clear, written goals and expectations that set boundaries and responsibilities for all activities related to the relationship. Written goals and objectives can help maintain focus on mentees' needs and allow for evaluation and follow-up. Business-based peer mentoring consists of formal or informal activities that help the mentee gain experience both doing a job and having social success in work settings.

Peer mentors serve as natural supports that help an individual adjust to a new work situation.

These mentors:

- Explain an organization's goals and discuss the achievement of such
- Help the project director understand her job responsibilities, including respectful communication and cooperation with colleagues
- Assist in identifying and developing specific occupational and technical skills
- Provide guidance in work-related decision making, goal setting, prioritizing and scheduling
- Provide feedback necessary for directors to provide effectively and informally evaluate work performance
- Coach in order to help the new director continuously improve work performance and encourage ongoing self-assessment
- Make suggestions concerning appropriate work assignments, training and supervising staff
- Encourage the directors to continue educational, personal and professional development
- Increase the director's awareness of career resources, networking opportunities and professional associations
- Model behaviors that lead to local and statewide project success

Group mentoring is common. In this model, an experienced director is matched with two or more new employees and activities are conducted in small groups. The ratios of mentors to mentees may range from 1:2 to 1:15; ratios of 1:4 are more successful than larger groups. Unlike one-to-one mentoring, many group mentoring relationships focus more on peer interaction, with the mentor acting as a facilitator. Consequently, fewer group mentoring relationships result in a deep connection between mentor and mentee than one-to-one mentoring relationships.

Some dynamics of group mentoring include: diversity, geography, personalities, peer influence and the cost of the activities.

Team mentoring allows mentors to work together or separately, depending on the circumstances. If mentors work separately, they should communicate regularly to share information, progress, circumstances, and ideas. Ratios in team mentoring are similar to group mentoring. With strong mentoring skills and sufficient training, a team can work with a group of mentees for a specific period of time. When contacting mentors, find out what their comfort zone is; some are comfortable with one-on-one but have difficulty with a larger group.

In workplace mentoring, direct supervision is usually not part of the mentor's role. Mentoring is a management strategy to ensure that new employees acclimate positively to the workplace/position. In some cases, if the position is unique and difficult to fill such as NC/NO project directors, mentoring will reduce attrition.

E-mentoring uses email as the primary communication vehicle. While e-mentoring is not the preferred delivery system since it limits the depth of relationships, it offers advantages in terms of time commitments, cost and flexibility. E-mentoring can be a situation in which various mentors provide guidance to a group of people, one-on-one, project based in which mentors/mentees work together to complete a project, or an unstructured interaction in which the relationship unfolds in keeping with common interests.

Research shows that mentoring programs that have incorporated the following five foundations are likely to have long-term success:

1. **Strong Agency Capacity**

- A written statement of purpose and a long-range plan
- Consistent support from the parent agency and board
- A shared understanding of roles and responsibilities with partner organizations
- Qualified and trained staff
- Agency reflects diversity of the community
- Written policy and procedures manual that reflects recognized quality assurance standards
- Access to training and technical assistance services
- Community awareness of the agency and program
- Written long-term funding and sustainability plans
- Use of evaluation data for agency purposes

2. **Proven Program Design** to recruit, screen, and train mentors.

Mentor training is an important but often overlooked part of the mentoring process. Because of time and access, many program administrators hurry past training in an attempt to connect the mentor with the mentee so they can begin spending time together. The mentor/mentee training program should include an overview of the program; clarification of roles, responsibilities and expectations; discussion of how to handle a variety of situations; and concepts and strategies to help build the relationship between the mentor and mentees.

3. **Effective Community Partnerships**

It is crucial that mentoring programs develop partnerships with the public, private or government entities that are involved in workforce development. Promote mentoring as an integral service strategy and get involved with other mentoring organizations and networks that complement programming. Building partnerships requires time and attention on the part of the program lead staff and others supporting the program. Persistence and a consistent presence on the part of these individuals are required for partnerships to thrive, but the payoff can be substantial.

Programs focused on career preparation mentoring must become familiar with the culture of the employer community. Building relationships is a key factor in developing effective partnerships with corporations and the groundwork for building these relationships can be accomplished by doing a little research. Learn what kinds of issues the corporation is involved in. Learn how the corporation's efforts are organized.

4. **Sustainable Resource Development**

Develop a Resource Plan. In order to develop a resource strategy related to career preparation, an organization will need to answer the following questions:

- What are your dedicated funding streams?
- Are there local, state, and national affiliations to support program efforts?
- What criteria are they using in their promotional material that could assist with sustainability efforts?
- Who are your local partners?
- Are you connecting with CareerLinks, employers, disability-related organizations, OVR, temporary-employment agencies, etc.

5. **Useful Program Evaluation**

This includes the design and implementation of an evaluation plan and the use of evaluation data for program enhancement. Program evaluation can ensure that the program will operate more efficiently, gain increased marketability and produce more positive outcomes.

Recently, funders have placed an increased emphasis on research-validated practice leading to program improvement. Agencies and organization that seek funding from federal, state, and non-governmental sources will find that these sources will be more willing to fund programs that have strong evaluation components in place. The underlying intent for all accountability efforts should be to provide good information to help administrator, policy makers, and practitioners do the following:

- Make better decisions regarding resource needs and allocations
- Improve practice
- Identify training needs
- Inform programmatic improvement
- Evaluation to help sustain programs by providing validation of the impact the initiative
- Effective practices can be disseminated or replicated as needed.

There are four components of an effective evaluation system:

1. Organizational commitment and evaluation infrastructure,
2. Setting and measuring goals,
3. Collection of data, and
4. Synthesizing and reporting results.

1. Organizational Commitment and Evaluation Infrastructure

Before designing an evaluation plan, an organization's governing body and staff leadership need to make a commitment to collect and use evaluation for continuous improvement. Effective evaluation policies should be embedded within an organization's core operating principles. Developing an evaluation that is approved by the organization's board and reviewed at pre-determined intervals provides a good foundation upon which to build program evaluation. Ideally, these policies should be in place during the planning and early implementation stages of a mentoring program.

Develop a plan to measure the program process. Elements of a successful evaluation system:

- Select indicators of program implementation viability and fidelity such as hours, quality and quantity of meetings, frequency, and relationship duration
- Develop a system for collecting and managing specified data
- Develop a plan to measure expected outcomes
- Specify outcomes
- Select appropriate instruments to measure outcomes, such as questionnaires, surveys and interviews
- Select and implement an evaluation design
- Create a process to reflect on and disseminate evaluation findings
- Refine the program design and operations based on the findings
- Develop and deliver reports to program constituents, funders and the media as applicable each quarter or at least annually.

For many small organizations, the idea of obtaining an external evaluation is immediately rejected because of cost. However, the cost of an external evaluation need not be prohibitive. Some cost-efficient ways to involve a professional evaluator include, but are not limited to, linking with evaluation experts from local organizations involved in mentoring research.

2. Setting and measuring goals: Evaluations help tell your success stories and also help guide and internal, continuous improvement process. Setting and measuring goals requires an understanding of the purpose of the evaluation, articulating the overarching evaluation questions, and determining the method(s) for collecting information and measuring outcomes. Setting program goals that can objectively measure progress or improvement is the second step in the evaluation process. Achievement goals can be measured through two broad types of program evaluation: formative and summative. Formative evaluation is an ongoing data collection process that helps to describe, shape, and fine-tune program implementation throughout a program's existence. Summative evaluation sums up what happens periodically. It helps to determine objectively the benefits, costs, and necessary conditions to reach program foals and objectives. Used together, formative and summative evaluations provide a rich body of evidence that will help program operators and funders understand information in response to questions you or your funders may have about your program's success in achieving pre-determined goals and objectives.

Evaluation data will also help to identify problem areas and determine appropriate action for the improvement of program effectiveness.

3. Developing a system for collecting and managing evaluation data. Evaluation should include the use of technology to build a management information system designed to meet the needs of the organization. It need not be complex, but a well-designed MIS will meet the growing accountability and reporting requirements of funding sources. Regardless of the size of the organization, an effective MIS can improve internal program management by preventing overlap of tasks, limit duplication of data collection, and improve reporting capacity. As a result of recent changes in technology, including rapid expansion of web-based systems, information management is becoming more flexible and user-friendly. Although the initial design may require a substantial amount of work and expertise, once established, the system should be easy for line staff to use and should provide a wide range of reporting options.

Collecting Data:

- What information needs to be collected? Examples:
 - What happened to mentors and mentees during the course of the program and outcomes?
 - How often did the mentors/mentees meet/communicate?
 - What types of activities did they participate in together?
 - What was the duration of the mentoring relationship?
 - Do mentors believe they helped mentees succeed in achieving their pre-determined goals?
 - How do mentees believe they benefited from having a mentor? What activities were the most helpful? What suggestions does each have for program improvement?
- How should the data be collected?
- What are the sources of data collection?

4. Evaluation:

- How well is the program working and achieving its expected goals? Compare and contrast results regarding: satisfaction, challenges to effective implementation and recommendations for improvement.
- Where are participants in regard to understanding all facets of career exploration, optimal training programs, and employment opportunities?
- What was the cost of operating the activity?
- What is the impact of the mentor/mentee program on employment outcomes for participants?
- What input did mentors and mentees have on the mentoring curriculum?

Marketing a Mentoring Program—4 steps:

1. Analyze the situation: hiring and environment.
2. Define goals and objectives: overall changes one expects to make.
3. Identify what is most important to impact: i.e.; recruiting, advisory board, nontrad, etc.
4. Develop and implement a plan: goals and objectives, time, budget and benchmarks and evaluation.

