

Key Steps for Creating a Mentoring Program

Determine need and capacity.

- If you've decided to start a mentoring program in your organization, you probably suspect that the need exists. Now you should seek out the information to support your case. Informal conversations with your colleagues and potential participants will provide you with the numbers and facts that justify your initiative, including:
 - 1) Number and type of employees who want to build relationships and learn from senior management.
 - 2) Long-term career goals of employees that can be nurtured by a mentor.
 - 3) Specific opportunities where mentoring will benefit both employees and the organization.
- Determine your organization's capacity for launching a mentoring program.
 - 1) Is senior management supportive of a potential mentoring program?
 - 2) Will the organization allot staff time to coordinate the program?
 - 3) Is the organization willing to give staff members the time needed to develop their mentor-mentee relationship?

Define the population to be served.

- Who will be served by the mentoring program? Junior professionals, specific affinity groups, middle managers, high-potential professionals? Before designing a program, identify the kinds of participants you want to involve.

Determine the type of mentoring program that fits your organization.

- When most people think of mentoring, they envision the traditional, one-on-one mentoring model. One-on-one mentoring can be an extremely gratifying process for the participants, but there may not be enough mentors to match everyone in your organization who would like to be

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involved. Fortunately, other mentoring options exist; for example, mentoring circles and e-mentoring have increased in popularity and may meet the needs of your organization better than the traditional model. Please see the “Alternative Models of Mentoring” addendum for more information.

Draft the time frame for the mentoring program.

- As you plan your mentoring program, link your goals to a defined time frame. Most mentoring programs will need a minimum of eighteen months to be successful. What resources will your organization need to support a program of this length?

Build organizational support.

- It is important to present a clear business case to justify the need for a mentoring initiative. Don't assume that everyone in your organization will be supportive. Once you have determined the need, draft an internal marketing plan to champion and promote the program. Your internal marketing plan should include:
 - 1) An organizational rationale
 - 2) Expected outcomes
 - 3) Required staff
 - 4) Budget
 - 5) Action steps and timeline
 - 6) Method for evaluation

Decide how mentors and mentees will be chosen.

- The matching process can make all the difference to your mentoring program, whether you are assembling mentor-mentee pairs or mentoring circles. How will mentors be chosen? Do not assume that a senior-level title is the only criterion. Mentors should be motivated by a strong desire to see the next generation achieve its leadership potential. They must be willing to make a time commitment to their mentee. How will mentees apply or be selected? Mentees must show willingness to take direction and to be exposed to new opportunities. Mentees also must have the maturity to manage the mentoring relationship, by respecting their mentor's time and professional responsibilities.

If a one-on-one program is chosen, determine how to pair mentors and mentees.

- Ask participants to prepare biographies with their educational and professional history, career objectives, strengths and weaknesses and expectations for the program. This information will guide the matching process.
- Keys to a Perfect Match- by Shirley Peddy, Ph.D., author of The Art of Mentoring (used with permission.)
 - 1) An ability to communicate on both sides. If people are unable to find anything to talk about, mentor sessions will become a dreaded event.
 - 2) A commitment to reciprocity. A relationship that is not rewarding will not last.
 - 3) A genuine desire by both parties to participate. Nobody should be dragged into the relationship and neither should be asked to give beyond what they desire.
 - 4) A willingness to be honest. This involves both parties being vulnerable at times, sharing both successes and failures in a safe environment.
 - 5) Perfect matching is not about pairing similar people. This is a natural tendency, but by doing so an organization loses an important opportunity; heightening awareness on diversity issues while bridging the gap between racial, gender and education differences.

Decide when and where the mentoring will take place.

- The organization can suggest a general timetable that can be used as a guideline, but it is best to let the mentor pairs determine a schedule that meets both of their needs. Remind the pair of their commitment to the program, but let them decide how much time they are willing to devote to the relationship.

Conduct an orientation program for participants on effective mentoring.

- For a successful mentoring program, orientation is critical, both to state the program's goals and to clarify expectations. Some organizations find that separate orientations for mentors and mentees work well, allowing each set of participants to express their hopes and concerns freely.

Encourage mentors and mentees to collaborate on an annual plan.

- Following separate orientations, mentoring pairs can be brought together for a joint training session. Mentees can be asked to define their goals for the mentoring program. Mentors can respond by projecting how they might facilitate the learning of their mentee. Understanding each other's goals and expectations will make it easier to move the relationship forward.

Monitor the Program.

- Establish a system for monitoring your mentoring program. Contact your mentoring pairs (or mentoring circle) on a regular basis to find out how the relationship is progressing. Offer guidance and support as needed, and should a conflict arise, address the issue immediately.

Evaluate the program.

- After the program's completion, ask the program participants to evaluate their experience. Did the program meet their goals? What worked well? What could have worked better? What recommendations would they make for future mentoring initiatives?
- The organization also should play a role in assessing the success of the mentoring program. How have the mentees progressed in the organization; for example, by increasing their visibility, skill development and whether they are promoted to senior positions faster than their colleagues who did not participate in the program.

Alternative Mentoring Models

The traditional one-on-one mentoring relationship offers many rewards. However, not every organization is in a position to create these relationships. If you are looking for alternatives to the traditional model, several other options are available, including peer-mentoring groups, mentoring circles and e-mentoring.

Peer mentoring and mentoring circles leverages the strengths and skills of many people while offering a positive group experience for the individual. In addition to formal “mentoring meetings,” these groups often get together for meals or social events to get to know each other on a more personal level.

Single Leader- Mentoring Circle: In this type of mentoring program, a single person provides advice and guidance to a group. This is a good option when there are a limited number of mentors within an organization. A mentoring circle is a great way to capitalize on the time and skills of one individual and to maximize the number of people for whom she can provide support.

Terry Meyerhoff Rubenstein, a volunteer leader in Baltimore, created a single leader-mentoring circle in 2004. Terry gathered a group of up-and-coming professional women who work at the Associated: The Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore. Terry meets with the group at her home on a regular basis and works with participants to plan each program cycle. Group members say that, as a result of the program, they feel an increased loyalty to the organization, more meaningful relationships with colleagues and an increased sense of professional worth.

Mixed Level-Mentoring Circle: This kind of mentoring circle involves a mixed group of mentors and mentees. A mixed level-mentoring circle might include participants from different departments in your organization. This type of group provides access to more senior professionals than a participant might otherwise have, as well as a broader range of people with diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Peer- Mentoring: In a peer-mentoring group, the members provide knowledge and guidance to each other. A peer-mentoring group may form around a single issue that needs to be addressed, or as a way to support a group with similar interests. A peer-mentoring group is a simple, low cost tool for improving employee relationships and morale.

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At Sidley Austin Brown & Wood LLP, peer-mentoring circles have proven to be quite successful. Each circle includes staff members from a cross-section of practice areas and levels at the firm. The mentoring circle provides people with easy access to a variety of colleagues they would not normally have the opportunity to meet. The circles meet based on their individual needs, some monthly, some only several times a year.

E-mentoring may be an option if you seek to expand the reach of your program to participants in different locations. Using phone and e-mail, participants develop relationships with mentors that they may not have the opportunity to interact with in person.

As in any mentoring relationship, groups should set clear goals and expectations for their mentoring initiative. What follows are some questions that a group needs to consider when forming:

From Larry Ambrose, [A Mentor's Companion](#) (used with permission)

- What outcomes do you expect from the mentoring group experience?
- What three things do you want the mentoring group to be known for?
- What professional growth and development issues do you want the mentoring group to focus on?
- What do you believe could get in the way of the mentoring group's effectiveness?
- When it comes to facilitating ideas in a group, where are you the strongest? Where are you the least effective?
- What do you expect of other participants in your group?
- How will you know if the mentoring group is working? What will indicate success?

Evaluation is a key component of any mentoring program. Were the goals and objectives of the group met? What worked well and what could work better in the future? This documentation is critical for the formation of future mentoring programs in your organization!

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