

# Section VI.

## How to Structure Effective Program Operations

Now that you have ensured that your program will be well managed, as outlined in Section V, *How to Manage a Program for Success*, it's time to focus on the eight processes identified in the *Elements of Effective Practice* to ensure strong everyday operations:

- Recruit mentors, mentees and other volunteers;
- Screen potential mentors and mentees;
- Orient and train mentors, mentees and parents/caregivers;
- Match mentors and mentees;
- Bring mentors and mentees together for mentoring sessions that fall within the program parameters;
- Provide ongoing support, supervision and monitoring of mentoring relationships;
- Recognize the contributions of all program participants; and
- Help mentors and mentees reach closure.

In a review of studies of 10 youth mentoring programs, *Child Trends* concluded, “Mentoring programs that are driven more by the needs and interests of youth—rather than the expectations of the adult volunteers—are more likely to succeed.”<sup>1</sup> The review found that programs based on a “developmental” mentoring approach—in which mentors got to know mentees better, were flexible in their expectations of the relationships, and took their cues from mentees about activities—tended to last longer and were more satisfying for both mentor and mentee than programs based on the “prescriptive” approach, in which mentors viewed their own goals as paramount.

Mentoring program operations will be effective only when procedures and policies are focused on enhancing the well-being of every mentee. By following the guidelines in this section and making effective use of the tools provided, you'll be well on your way to a

mentoring program that satisfies the needs and goals of all involved.

### **BUILD THE RIGHT STRUCTURE**

The day-to-day operating procedures you establish for your mentoring program will greatly affect your program's quality and sustainability. Strive for consistency, compatibility, support and accountability.

From mentor recruitment to mentor/mentee matching, from orientation to relationship closure, make sure all participants clearly understand what your program expects of them—and what they can expect from your program, in terms of training and support. Frequent and honest communication between staff and participants is key.

Let's explore each of the eight essential functions for program operations in depth.

### **RECRUIT MENTORS, MENTEES AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS**

Recruiting mentors for your mentoring program should be driven by quality over quantity. Your mentor recruitment plan should focus on how well each prospective mentor can relate to the mentees in your program and fit in with your program's goals, structure and general culture. Realistically, not all prospective mentors or mentees will meet your program's requirements for participation. It's important to have procedures in place to notify prospects respectfully if their skills and background do not meet program requirements and, if appropriate, to involve them in your program in another role. If your program isn't able to accept a particular youth into the program, be sure that you can make referrals to other programs. This is another instance that illustrates the importance of building partnerships and collaboration in your community.

## WHO IS WILLING TO MENTOR?

In 2002, the AOL Time Warner Foundation, in partnership with MENTOR, sponsored a National Mentoring Poll of 2,000 adults. The poll found that:

- **57 million adults** would seriously consider mentoring;
- **99 percent of all mentors** already in a formal mentoring relationship would recommend mentoring to others;
- The majority of people **became mentors because they were asked**; 75 percent joined through an affiliated organization;
- **Potential mentors tend to:**
  - be between the ages of 18 and 44;
  - have household incomes of \$50,000 or more;
  - have some college education;
  - have access to the Internet; and
  - have a child in their household.
- **Of these potential mentors,**
  - 88 percent would like to have a choice among mentoring options (depending on their schedule and interests);
  - 84 percent want access to expert help;
  - 84 percent want orientation and training before mentoring;
  - 67 percent would like their employer to provide time off; and
  - 47 percent would be willing to mentor a youth online.

**For more information: [Mentoring.org/poll](http://Mentoring.org/poll)**

## Define Eligibility for Participants including Mentors, Mentees and Parents/Caregivers

The first step in recruiting mentors is to define eligibility for participation:

### Develop and write a mentor position description

Define the qualifications and attributes that mentors should have to successfully create and maintain an effective mentoring relationship. Ask peers and colleagues for feedback. When you're confident that you've identified the right criteria, create a position

description that includes the following:

1. Position title;
2. List of qualifications and required attributes;
3. Clear description of the functions the mentor will perform (including the required training for potential mentors);
4. Specific time commitments required (including frequency and duration of each visit; minimum length of time the mentor is expected to maintain the relationship with the mentee; and time to provide feedback to the mentoring program coordinator about activities and progress); and
5. Location of the mentor/mentee meetings.

Keep in mind that not all people are suited to be mentors or will be compatible with your program's culture and expectations. Use the list of Characteristics of a Successful Mentor and the enclosed tools to help determine the criteria and attributes you'll require of your mentors.

### MENTORING TOOL

See "Mentor Recruitment Plan" and mentor job descriptions in the appendix and on the CD.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR

- Caring
- Good listener
- Stable
- Can provide leadership
- Reliable (e.g., shows up on time)
- Committed
- Nonjudgmental
- Discreet (will keep information confidential)
- Patient
- Likes children
- Has a good sense of humor
- Tolerant
- Outstanding employment record
- Does not attempt to replace parent or guardian

SOURCE: DR. SUSAN G. WEINBERGER, PRESIDENT  
MENTOR CONSULTING GROUP INC.

### Select Sources of Mentors

You don't have to go it alone to recruit mentors and volunteers. Trying to blanket the general community with recruiting promotions can be costly, complex and time-consuming. Instead, partner with local organizations that have established volunteer networks, such as your State or Local *Mentoring Partnership* or Volunteer Center. Also, target organizations that have a large employee base and market the benefits of employee mentoring to their bottom line: 75 percent of employees in a corporate mentoring program reported that mentoring improved their attitude at work<sup>2</sup>. And remember to use your advisory group members—ask them to use their contacts to help you recruit mentors.

Many people get involved in mentoring through their participation in other organizations: employers, community groups, places of worship and so on.<sup>3</sup> The following local organizations can be valuable resources:

- Local business community;
- Civic organizations (Kiwanis, Junior League, Jaycees);
- Minority professional associations;
- Special-interest groups (Retired Senior Volunteer Program, American Association of Retired Persons);
- Universities and schools;
- Fraternities and sororities;
- Council of Churches; and
- Corporate volunteer councils.

### Select Mentors Who Support the Mission of Your Program

Individual motives affect the quality of the mentoring relationship. Good mentors don't view themselves as “rescuers” or as superior to participants. They simply understand that less experienced persons in tough situations need someone who really listens and cares.<sup>4</sup> When you are screening and interviewing mentor



### MENTOR'S VOLUNTEER REFERRAL SYSTEM

Broaden your recruitment efforts: register your mentoring program in MENTOR's Volunteer Referral System at [Mentoring.org/register](http://Mentoring.org/register), enabling prospective mentors who visit [Mentoring.org](http://Mentoring.org) to express an interest in learning more about your program. Registration is free, and all registered mentoring programs must adhere to the *Elements of Effective Practice*.

candidates, try to discern their motives and personal agendas. What do they hope to gain from the experience? What do they think they bring to a mentoring relationship?

### **Use Existing Research to Determine Who Is Likely to Mentor**

Studies by MENTOR,<sup>5</sup> Big Brothers Big Sisters and other groups have identified the kinds of people who are most likely to volunteer for and sustain mentoring relationships. Their findings include the following:

- Women are more likely than men to volunteer as mentors;
- Senior citizens are more likely to volunteer for school-based programs;
- Adults cite lack of time as the biggest barrier to mentoring, followed by the perception that they lack the necessary expertise to help a child;
- Individuals with higher incomes tend to sustain longer commitments than those with lower incomes, most likely because they have adequate resources to overcome barriers such as transportation;
- College students, while likely to volunteer, are more likely to have less stable mentoring relationships because of holiday schedules, exams and so on;
- Married volunteers ages 26 to 30 are more likely to terminate the relationship prematurely, probably because of the demands of their own family situations;
- Corporate, municipal and state employees often prefer school-based mentoring and make sustained commitments because their employers support their involvement; and
- Flexible models—such as “buddy mentoring,” in which two mentors share a mentee—make it easier for employed volunteers to mentor.

### **Emphasize the Benefits of Mentoring**

The benefits of mentoring go both ways.<sup>6</sup> Adult mentors often report that their mentoring experiences improved their lives in tangible ways. Not only do they feel better about themselves for playing a positive role in a child’s life, but they also find that mentoring teaches them more about themselves. Mentoring increases their sense of responsibility and accomplishment, and lays the foundation for better morale at work and better relationships with family, friends and coworkers. In fact, in a national survey of adults who mentored young people, 83 percent said they learned or gained something personally from their mentoring experience. They reported feeling that they had become a better person, developed more patience, developed new friendships, felt more effective and acquired new skills.<sup>7</sup>

#### **MENTORING TOOL**

See “Proven Guidelines to Increase Response to Promotions and Recruitment Campaigns” in the appendix of Section VI.

### **Market the Program**

In Section V, *How to Manage a Program for Success*, we discussed how to establish a public relations/communications effort to market your program to a variety of audiences. Promotion is only one part of an overall strategy to educate the public about your program and its value to the community. Promotion is about building your organization’s image and inspiring people to act. It is key to developing and implementing an effective volunteer recruitment plan.<sup>8</sup> While an overall public relations/communications strategy may include materials such as colorful brochures or video productions, promoting your program to potential mentors, volunteers and even potential partner organizations doesn’t need to be costly. Single-sheet flyers and direct-mail letters can be just as effective if they are well-written and tailored to a specific audience.

Take the following steps to design a consistent message for all your promotion pieces.

- **Create a defining slogan.** Remember, you're selling your program, so your slogan is your 30-second sales pitch. In those 30 seconds, you need to grab the reader's attention while conveying the need, value and benefit of becoming involved. A mentoring program slogan might read something like these:
  1. *"Life's simple pleasures: Gain more from them by spending time with a child who needs a friend. Call XYZ Mentoring Group and spend some time with us."* This kind of approach notes the emotional rewards of mentoring; portrays mentoring as uncomplicated, positive and fun; identifies the organization from the start; and includes a call to action.
  2. *"Enjoy the outdoors? Movies? Ice cream cones? Call ABC Mentoring Group and share them with a child who needs a friend."* Using a direct question draws the reader in immediately. This fun, lighthearted approach—which may also include employing humor—focuses on specific activities that mentors might share with mentees. It's intended for audiences who may balk at the weightiness of more powerful phrases such as "change a child's life" or "invest in our future."
- **Write promotional letters and flyers.** You can write effective direct-mail letters and flyers that appeal to numerous audiences, but you'll also need letters or flyers targeted to specific audiences, such as businesses or schools.

### **Conduct Awareness and Information Sessions for Potential Mentors**

Your recruitment campaign should include opportunities to promote your mentoring program to various groups by conducting mentor information sessions for target audiences. For example, if you are partnering

with a local business, hold information sessions for potential mentors at least twice a year. Many businesses, as well as colleges and universities, hold annual volunteer fairs for their employees or students. These fairs are a great opportunity to increase awareness of your program with potential volunteers.

### **Recruit Mentees**

Recruiting mentees is part of the intake process for involving youth in your mentoring program. If you're building a mentoring program to serve a specific youth population, such as a school-based mentoring program for students seeking academic or career guidance, you know where your potential participants are. If, however, your program is intended to serve a community-wide youth population that may not know about the program, organizations and agencies that work with youth could serve as valuable bridges to participants. The following are some examples:

- Departments of social services or welfare agencies;
- Employment and training agencies;
- Public and private schools;
- After-school programs;
- Community centers;
- Juvenile detention centers/ex-offender programs; and
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers.

As you recruit mentees,<sup>9</sup> remember that it's important that youth decide voluntarily to participate in the program. Also, not all youth can benefit from mentoring, so it's imperative to follow the criteria for participation that you have identified during the steps described in Section IV, How to Design and Plan a Mentoring Program.