

Mentoring Programs

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Mentoring is one proven way of developing leaders. Many successful people in a variety of fields point to mentors as an important influence in their development as leaders. Traditionally, mentorships have often developed informally, through personal contact with older, successful people. For some groups, such as Latinos, an extensive network through which emerging leaders can meet potential mentors, be exposed to the experiences of established leaders, and develop under their guidance does not exist.¹ Formal mentoring programs compensate for this lack of informal network by providing the opportunity for an emerging leader, whether youth or adult, to be paired with an older, more established person in order to receive support and guidance.

A successful mentoring program can be greatly rewarding for both the emerging leaders, or protegés, and their mentors. A mentor serves as a role model, imparting insight and knowledge to the protegé or mentee, and exposing the protegé to new experiences. By establishing a stable, positive relationship, the mentor supports the protegé in his/her growth. For protegés, results of a good mentoring exchange may include increased self-confidence, motivation to succeed at school or work, and the acquisition of new skills. Effective mentoring leads to personal development in many areas. For mentors, the mentoring experience provides the opportunity to share their wisdom and experience with younger persons, and to do their part for the development of future leaders.

Establishing a mentoring program may seem simple — finding willing mentors to volunteer their time to spend with the emerging leaders, and letting the pairs meet on their own. But effective mentoring is not as simple as it seems, and conducting a mentoring program is not a small task. Research has shown that an effective

mentoring program requires serious planning and a strong infrastructure.² Otherwise, developing a good mentorship from a match of two individuals is left to sheer luck. If the program includes mentoring youth, it can be particularly challenging. Even with a well-trained and dedicated staff, achieving positive results, particularly in young people, is a difficult process. Less than one half of mentoring matchups with youth actually make a significant impact on the protegés' lives.³ For these reasons, an organization must plan when developing a mentoring program, and carefully consider what is the purpose or objective of the program, and consequently, who is the target population, whether youth, emerging leaders, or others.

An effective mentoring program should include structured processes for: recruiting and screening mentors, matching mentors with protegés, training and preparing both the mentor and the protegé, providing structured activities and support mechanisms for the pair, and for documenting and evaluating the program. This issue of the NCLR *Leadership Bulletin* provides information and ideas about conducting effective mentoring programs.

Recruitment

Recruitment of both protegés and mentors involves careful planning. Once a specific target population for the mentoring program has been identified — youth,

Find and select mentors who are prepared to invest in mentoring.

emerging community activists, women, college students — decide on the number of protegés and mentors desired for the program. A pilot or test project will probably



include a small number of participants for demonstration purposes, but ongoing programs will need to demonstrate wider outreach and impact, particularly since funding sources look at cost effectiveness. Also, in designing a program, the ratio of mentor to protégé must be carefully considered.

Recruiting mentors can be a time-consuming process, yet it is a necessary step. It may be hard to attract qualified and cooperative mentors who are appropriate role models for the group. Role models with particular characteristics may not be part of a known network, and therefore will require special outreach efforts. For example, a community organization creating a program for gang youth may not have contact with many adults who are knowledgeable about and interested in working with gang members, so it would need to do special outreach to find candidates. This brings up a more fundamental question to consider. In planning the program, it must be decided whether or not the mentors need to come from the community itself. There are advantages to seeking native mentors. For example, they already have a familiarity and insight about the community, and therefore about the protégés' situation. At the same time, recruiting mentors who are not from the particular community opens up the field to many more potential mentors. In attracting mentors, weigh the advantages and disadvantages before deciding on a particular type of mentor.

Selection

The project design should be clear about the criteria for protégé and mentor selection and screening. For example, will the selection be based solely on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, age, neighborhood,

Screen out potential mentors who have overcommitted their time.

involvement with a particular community agency, or some other criteria? Also consider what application tools — such as interviews and/or biographical sketches — will be used to determine protégé and mentor selection.

A careful screening process is essential in selecting mentors. A person's social or professional status is not

sufficient. It must be clear that the mentor has the necessary responsibility and dedication to the program. S/he must be mature and trustworthy, and in a position to provide consistent guidance, in addition to acting as a role model for the protégé.

In addition to capacity, the potential mentor must have the *desire* to guide the protégé. A person who is in a successful professional position, and is a mature, responsible role model may seem an excellent candidate, but will not be if the person cannot devote enough time to the relationship. Spending a fair amount of quality time is essential to forming a significant relationship between the mentor and protégé. Consider setting a minimum amount of time to be spent together, usually about two hours per week. In addition, the relationship must last for a certain period of time in order to be significant. Generally, at least a one-year commitment should be requested.

Other factors may also affect the search for available mentors. Recruiting and selecting qualified and willing mentors may require unique and creative incentives. For example, a program involving low-income mentors must take into account financial constraints on the mentors, and may therefore choose to provide stipends, or provide mentors with vouchers for free services in exchange for their time and contributions.

Matching

The process for matching pairs of mentors and protégés is one which should be well formulated. Correlating the pair's personalities, interests, and backgrounds as much as possible is useful in improving chances for a significant contact between the two people. Target group factors, such as having mentors of the same gender or race/ethnicity as the protégés may be helpful, but are not necessary, except where one of the goals is an increased awareness of and pride for the group's role in society. For example, a Latino-focused program may seek Latino mentors to serve as role models for the protégés, emphasizing Latino culture in the program to increase cultural awareness and appreciation.⁴ Or, the needs and desires of the protégé may require a specific type of mentor, as in the case of some youth/adult programs, in which protégés are matched on the basis of their lack of strong male or female role models.⁵ If the mentor and protégé are different in cultural and economic backgrounds, the mentor must be sensitive to those differences. This point is significant in preventing a negative experience on the part of either person. The two must know at least the

Match participants whose backgrounds complement each other.

basic elements of each other's lives before they attempt to establish a relationship.

Consider the ratio of mentors to protégés in matching. More than one protégé per mentor is not recommended. If needs require a mentor to be paired with more than one protégé, it is important to make sure that the minimum time, generally two hours per week, is spent in a one-on-one environment with each protégé. Time spent in a small group, consisting of a mentor and more than one protégé can be productive, but it cannot supplant the individualized relationship.

Preparation

Since there is no guarantee that a mentoring pair will work together successfully, the organization should take as many steps as possible to establish a foundation for a positive connection between the two people. Training is needed to equip the mentor with the right tools for a positive interaction. It is often assumed that a person who is successful in his/her career will have the skills to share his/her expertise with another person. This is not always true. A person who is a skilled community activist may not be able to impart an activist's skills and knowledge to a protégé. Certain didactic techniques (e.g., positive reinforcement) should be explained to the mentor to make the process of mentoring work. Similarly, protégés may benefit from training in certain skills for the mentoring experience (e.g., interacting with a specific mentor population). For example, programs with elderly/youth matches may find it useful to provide mentors and protégés with information and techniques for working with each other.

Also, the protégé group may have a certain type of experience which the mentors are not familiar with, for example, past legal offenses. In order to prevent these factors from becoming barriers, the mentoring program must be designed to incorporate training for the mentor not only about topics related to the mentoring process, such as communication skills and problem-solving techniques, but also about issues like cultural sensitivity, juvenile corrections, and gang involvement. For example, a program which works with teenage mothers

should provide training for its mentors on teen pregnancy-related issues.⁶ In planning the training, it may be advisable to use experts in the field, such as psychologists or health care providers. Logistical factors must be considered in scheduling the length and frequency of sessions and the duration of the training period, so that mentors are aware of the commitment needed for preparation, and are able to attend.

Another aspect which provides stability for the mentoring process is a preliminary gauge of expectations, and discussion about this with both parties to

Provide mentors and protégés with an orientation about expectations and skills which can help them succeed in the relationship.

assure that both mentor and protégé are aware of each other's responsibilities. Program staff should speak with the mentors about what they hope to accomplish through the mentoring program, and what they will ask of the protégé. Protégés should be prepared for the relationships as well. The mentoring program should provide the potential protégés with an orientation where they are asked what they desire to learn, and what they expect from the mentors.⁷ It is useful to incorporate the topic of each person's expectations into the first meeting between the mentors and their protégés so that they can mutually agree. A structured initial needs assessment conducted by the pair at the beginning of the relationship helps to clarify for both parties what their needs and desires are and how to address them. Through this first meeting, potential problems with the match can also be discovered and corrected or, if necessary, the matches can be reassigned.

Structure

Structure is integral to the effectiveness of the program. From the outset, it should be clear to both mentors and protégés how much time they are expected to spend together, how often the mentors and protégés will meet individually with program staff for progress reports and feedback, and if and when mentors will get together as a group, with the same for protégés. The organization should lay out for participants what resources it has available for them, and should explain how these elements can support the mentoring process.

Provide structured activities for participants which complement general agency services.

Structured activities are especially useful at the beginning of the relationship. Providing planned activities for the mentoring pair to participate in together may be an excellent way for the pair to “break the ice.” For example, a mixer is a good setting for the initial meeting. A program for youth can involve parents and other family members by inviting them as well, providing them the opportunity to meet the mentors. The organization may also want to identify events and activities that are available in the local area to provide the pairs options for meeting elsewhere in addition to the conventionally structured discussion meeting.

Support

General program support should be provided to both mentors and protégés throughout the program. Mentors can participate in support groups with other mentors in order to process and deal with issues that come up concerning protégés. For example, mentors could meet every other week in order to help each other continue to develop their relationship with protégés and to better understand their own development as leaders.⁸ A similar

Provide consistent supervision and support for mentor-protégé relationship through personal contact with both.

arrangement can be made with protégés, scheduling weekly meetings for them as a group, and planning individual appointments with program staff as well. Mentors and protégés should also have resources to access in case they should need advice or assistance on how to deal with a particular situation. In fact, all participants should know when and how they can reach staff. In addition, sustained staff contact with the mentors may increase the chances of a prolonged mentoring relationship. Research indicates that mentors without support and encouragement sometimes do not follow up and discontinue the mentoring relationship.⁹ Ongoing

dialogue with both mentor and protégé by program staff or other designated persons is vital to the process.

A way to maintain protégé participation in the program is through involving other people in the process to endorse it.¹⁰ When possible, connect mentors with other professionals and/or entities working with protégés. For example, establishing an agreement or contract with the employers or schools, and particularly the parents in the case of youth, wherein they agree to support the mentoring process and encourage the protégé’s growth, may create a stronger link between the mentor and the protégé.

The incorporation of support systems provides for greater longevity in the relationship, and can set the foundation for an even longer-lasting relationship than the program envisioned. For this reason, it is useful to consider what arrangements will be possible for mentors and protégés to continue their relationship once the official program ends. Part of this process involves identifying sources of support for the mentoring pair, either through the sponsoring organization or other agencies.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a necessary step which provides both documentation and analysis for continued and improved success. Thorough evaluation of the mentoring program should include analyzing the process, content, and impact of the program — measuring not only the success of the mentoring relationship, but also the effectiveness and efficiency of the program design.¹¹ To accomplish this, it is essential to develop an evaluation system or process at the outset which will measure each objective of the program. There are various tools such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and client forms which can be used for this purpose.

The methods and tools used should be tailored to the participants of the program — for example, consider the needs of low-literacy audiences, and the fact that some techniques such as games and role plays might be more appropriate for certain age groups. The evaluation process should monitor elements such as whether training sessions and activities are carried out. The content aspect should determine how useful the program was for participants, and the quality of the relationship established. The impact aspect should document factors such as how participants use the experience (e.g., how many youth improve their grades in school, or how many emerging leaders join the Boards of community organizations).

Once the program is completed, or the mentoring relationship ends, the program should try to maintain contact with the protegés to determine what long-term

Evaluate the process, content, and impact of the program.

effects the program has on them. This tracking helps to further evaluate the program by showing longer range results than exit opinions and ideas. Also, it facilitates the continuation of the program, because former protegés can eventually return as mentors, or support the program in other ways.

Effective mentoring programs require forethought and planning. Program staff must be able to select and match participants, train, prepare, and provide support to both mentors and protegés, and monitor, document, and evaluate the program. Mentoring programs require a structure which facilitates communication between participants, and meets all of their support needs. At the same time, they must have mechanisms which allow for change and improvement in the programs themselves, and track the subsequent development of the participants.

Considering all of the above-mentioned factors greatly increases the possibility of success for a mentoring program. When developed thoroughly, a mentoring program can have significant effects on protegés and mentors. Providing role models while aiding in the development of leaders is a crucial factor in the future of Latino communities.

Join the NCLR Leadership Network

The *Leadership Bulletin* and other resources for leadership development programs serving Hispanics are sent free to members of the NCLR Leadership Network. Membership is free; members provide information on their leadership efforts and agree to share information with NCLR and other network members.

To join the network, or for more information about the Leadership Initiative, contact:

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Endnotes

1. Gray, W.A., "Components For Developing a Successful Formalized Mentoring Program in Business, the Professions, Education, and Other Settings," in *Mentoring: Aid To Excellence*. Vancouver, Canada: International Association for Mentoring, 1986.
2. *News*, Public/Private Ventures, Winter 1992.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Interview with Angie Rivera Malpiede, Field Executive for the Girl Scouts-Mile Hi Council, Denver, Colorado, April 12, 1994.
5. Mecartney, Crystal A. et al, *Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Public/Private Ventures, 1994.
6. Interview with Norma Seledon-Tellez, Latina Leadership Program Coordinator for Mujeres Latinas En Accion, Chicago, Illinois, May 3, 1994.
7. *Linkletter*, Center for Intergenerational Learning, Temple University, Fall 1993.
8. Interview with Norma Seledon-Tellez.
9. *Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System, op. cit.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Hints for Developing Effective Training Designs*, National Council of La Raza, 1991; and Interview with Angie Rivera Malpiede.

Steps for Implementing Effective Mentoring Programs*

These guidelines should be adapted to meet the specific needs of each program's targeted population.

Recruitment and Selection

- ◆ Find and select mentors who are prepared to invest in mentorship. Be selective in choosing role models.
- ◆ Recruit mentors that can commit themselves to proteges for 2-6 hours per week for at least one year.

Matching

- ◆ Find mentors and proteges whose backgrounds complement each other. Be sure that both mentor and protege have a basic understanding of each other's position.

Preparation

- ◆ Give mentors extensive pre-service training on mentoring, communication skills, problem solving techniques, and specific topics which are relevant.
- ◆ Orient proteges about requirements for participation, and when necessary, train in skills for interaction with mentors.
- ◆ Have mentors and proteges mutually agree to the general purposes of their relationship in terms that are understandable, acceptable, and consistent with the goals of the program.
- ◆ Procure consent forms signed by all elder mentors, proteges, and their parents or legal guardians when the protege is under 18 years stating that they agree to participate in all program and research activities.

Structure and Support

- ◆ Establish minimum time for one-to-one contact between mentor and protege per week (usually 2-6 hours).
- ◆ Establish mentoring activities which complement general agency services.
- ◆ Insure that specific mentoring activities are determined by individual mentor-protege pairs and are driven by the specific needs of the protege.
- ◆ Provide ongoing support of the mentor-protege relationship through personal contact with mentor and protege, regularly-scheduled mentor inservice training, protege group meetings, and large group mentor-protege activities, as well as interaction with other professionals who relate to the participants.

Evaluation

- ◆ Evaluate the process, content, and impact of the program.
- ◆ Gather opinions from mentors and proteges about their development and the program itself throughout it as well as afterwords.
- ◆ Monitor subsequent development of proteges.

* This list was written with the use of *Linkletter*, Center for Intergenerational Learning, Temple University, Fall 1993.

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