

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: HOW TO START AN E-MENTORING PROGRAM

Source: Juliann Schaffer, MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA, Alma College 2004-2005

Issue(s) Being Addressed:

Many people have the desire to become mentors, but busy schedules often do not allow time for traditional mentoring. E-mentoring technology allows mentoring to occur any time or place and opens the door for both mentors and mentees to be engaged in a unique way.

Overview:

E-mentoring is a new way to mentor school aged children throughout the country. This modern twist on mentoring shares the same goals as traditional face-to-face mentoring: “establishing a trusting, nurturing, positive relationship between the mentor and a young person” (www.mentoring.org), with the added dimension of e-mail technology. E-mentoring allows mentors to communicate with mentees via email or web-based programming that is secure and provides an archive of all exchanges. This allows for quality volunteers to mentor without constraints such as time, geographical distance or irregular schedules. The National Mentoring Partnership promotes the use of The E-Mentoring Tool Kit (www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/index.php).

Actions to Consider:

Define the youth population that will be served: To identify the mentee population, look for places where youth are plenty, such as schools or faith based organizations. There likely exists a population in need of extra support, such as students involved in an after school program or those who are referred by the school staff. All participants must have access to e-mail. A partnership must be formed with community partners to confirm they are willing to refer youth and provide program support throughout the mentoring process.

Identify those to be recruited as mentors: Since mentoring programs are not a new concept, experience shows that it is best to start with a small program and build gradually over time. On a college or university campus, consider starting a pilot program with a small group of college faculty, staff, and administrators. It will be easier to monitor the progress of a small program and then, in future years, open it up to service-learning classes, other campus groups, or sports teams, gradually building to the wider college student population.

Policies and Procedures: Once you have established that there is a need in the community and mentors committed to helping run a quality mentoring program, it is time to begin program planning.

Create parameters for the program:

- Develop recruitment procedures for mentors and mentees.
- Define what mentoring will consist of (solely for academic, career, social, personal goals, or a combination).
- Determine desired program outcomes for both mentors and mentees.
- Define how often mentors should be in contact and how long the matches will exist (one academic school year, 2 years, etc).
- Decide how to evaluate program success.

After creating program parameters, create a policy and procedure manual outlining the mentoring program.

Suggested topics include:

- Screening of mentors through a background investigation
- Training and expectation policy
- Record-keeping policy
- Confidentiality
- Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect
- Unacceptable behavior policy
- Evaluation policy

Templates of mentoring policy and procedure manuals are located at:

www.nwrel.org/mentoring/policy_manual.html. Although these are general templates, they are formatted to be revised and reproduced for different programs. For more information on how to develop mentoring programs, please visit www.mentoring.org.