



Mentoring Program Design

► Quick guide to mentoring program design



mentoring e-guide

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Designing an Effective Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs require some love and a bit of attention to keep them on track. Organisations that leave out a stage of their program or fail to execute them effectively end up coming to us for help.

In this eGuide, we are sharing our top tips for the 7 stages of your Mentoring program life cycle:

1. Pre-Evaluation & Research
2. Getting Ready
3. Design
4. Recruiting
5. Matching
6. Training & Support
7. Evaluation

Stage 1: Pre-Evaluation & Research

Doing some research before designing your program is a key factor in the success of any mentoring initiative. The program manager needs to ensure that their organisation understands what mentoring is and how it might solve a particular problem, or contribute to a particular business outcome. For companies, the purpose is often to support high performers and improve engagement. For membership organisations, it's used as a member retention strategy, or to develop emerging leaders in the profession or industry.

Surveys or discussion groups are a great way to start the conversation about who will value it the most, where the program is most needed and what problem it will help solve.

Hold on to any material you find along the way about mentoring design and how to run a mentoring program. Start benchmarking against similar programs and find best practices you think will apply to your needs. Sometimes your industry already has a mentoring program on offer. Check your local associations to see if there are any ideas you can get from there.

Some good places to look for material are:

- [Professor David Clutterbuck](#)
- [Mentoring.org](#)
- [International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment](#)
- [Horizons Unlimited](#)

Once you have a good idea of why you want to introduce mentoring, you need to check that your organisation is ready and determine how you will introduce the mentoring program.

Stage 2: Getting Ready

Preparing your organisation for a mentoring program is simple if you have the right tools, a clearly defined purpose and your stakeholders on-board.

a) Stakeholders

The support of your manager or executive team is important before pressing ahead with the design process.

b) Purpose

A clear purpose for the mentoring program is essential. Is it to empower women in the workforce, hand over knowledge from an ageing workforce, increase employee/member retention by offering career development or is it reverse mentoring with the younger generation?

c) Goals and Objectives

Having a clear purpose provides the criteria to measure success. What does success look like? What would the feedback need to be to deem the program a success? How can you measure the outcomes?

d) Resources

A poorly executed mentoring program can be more damaging to your reputation than if it wasn't launched at all. Determine the time and budget required to run a program like this. Don't underestimate the administration time required to handle applications and answer enquiries, plus troubleshoot mentoring partner relationships if required. Key cost areas are administration and resources.

Use the resources that are accessible and available to you - don't try to come up with your own.

Stage 3: Design

Design is setting up solid foundations for your program. If the previous steps have been done sufficiently, you should know what you can and must do.

You will have asked questions already such as, is it important to have a formal or informal program? How much structure is required? Should it be administrator-matched or self matching? Should I run a pilot program to test the waters? Where will my funding come from? And, what resources are required to develop a successful mentoring program?

It's a good idea to put all your questions in a document and answer them. You can use this as a reference document for stakeholders and any decisions you make about the program.

Here's a cool infographic to help put it into perspective.



So, you've done your homework, you are clear on your program purpose and design. All ready to go. Now you need people to get involved!

Stage 4: Recruiting

It's important to design the marketing and recruitment process with the utmost care as this is the stage that may push the program over the edge. If you already have an email database of employees or members then your job is significantly easier but you will want to have some type of application form and a marketing message attempting to attract both mentees and mentors to the cause.

The application form should cover the essentials as well as the selection criteria, defined during the design phase. Only include the information you need for matching – it can be tempting to ask lots of questions that won't necessarily help the matching process. We generally suggest no more than 3 matching criteria as long applications can become tedious, yielding poor quality information.

Accompany your form with Terms and Conditions. This way you can make sure that the mentor or mentee agrees to the terms of the program and is aware of the expectations placed upon them. Be sure to indicate payment details and time periods.

Try to outline the benefits each party will get from joining the program and integrate this into your marketing message. For example, "Mentees will be matched with experienced mentors who can help guide them towards the career they dream of". Or "Mentors will be matched with young eager mentees who aim to learn and succeed. Giving back feels good but it can also give a fresh perspective." Mentors get more from participating than people realise, so don't forget to include 'what's in it for the mentor' in your marketing.

Previous participant testimonials are great to use in marketing materials to convince people to join a mentoring program. To strengthen your marketing message, be sure to include written testimonials or better yet, video clips. Alternatively invite past participants to share their stories at an information session for new program participants.

Stage 5: Matching

Now that you have mentoring program participants, you need to decide how they'll be paired. It can be tempting to go the 'self-serve' route where mentees choose their own mentors as this is the easiest and least work intensive way for the organisers. However, mentees may not know how to choose and may prefer someone to guide their selection. If your program design calls for administrator matching, then we can offer some tips.

Depending on the number of mentees you have, how well defined your selection criteria is and the technology you have at your fingertips, matching can either be laborious or a fairly simple process.

We have seen many ways to match pairs - from printed sheets of paper on pin up boards, to Excel Spreadsheets automatically populated from online application forms, to mentoring program software that use matching algorithms to produce instant matching. The latter is the quickest form of matching.

For groups of over 20 pairs, we never recommend the first method. It's boring and very hard to get right. If you are going to go down this route, make sure the with participant's profile details (age, location, etc.), selection criteria details (years of experience, specialisation, position, etc.) and eligibility criteria (membership, employee number, etc.) are kept short.

Excel spreadsheets work and have been used for many programs effectively but they still take time. To put it into perspective, a group of 20 pairs can take up to half a day to match. This may sound like a lot for 40 participants but it really is a push and pull process until you have the right balance.

Stage 6: Training & Support

So, everyone is now matched – they can just get on with mentoring now, right? Well, actually, it is not quite so simple.

Failure to deliver a successful relationship even some of the time will have an impact on your member's/employee's impression of your brand, especially if a member has paid for their participation.

A common trap in mentoring program design is to overlook mentor and mentee training. Professor David Clutterbuck's research has found that only about 1 in 3 mentoring relationships actually work if there is no training, whereas 2 in 3 will work if the mentor is trained. Training both the mentor and mentee should yield a 90%+ success rate.

Make sure your mentors understand their role as a mentor and what is expected of them from the mentee and your organisation. A balance of instruction and role playing of mentoring scenarios is usually appreciated by first-time mentors.

Mentees need guidance in how to prepare for their mentoring experience and how to get the most out of the time they have with a mentor. We find that mentees are often unclear about their own goals for the program and need some guidance to help them focus.

Giving support can often be difficult and depends on the workplace. Some groups may want less support in the form of materials and process; others may need to be guided through the whole process. A pilot program will help you determine your group's preferences while milestones and touch points will ensure the relationship has started, hasn't fallen over and wraps up neatly.

Stage 7: Evaluation

A mentoring program coordinator may think their program is running very smoothly only to be surprised by the results of a final program evaluation showing that 1 in 3 participants were dissatisfied with the mentoring experience. If you don't run surveys, introduction & closure events or courtesy phone calls during the program, you run the risk of reputation damage or program failure.

Aside from risk avoidance, a mentoring program is so much more satisfying when it's running effectively and your mentees are telling you it is life changing. And you need to try to hear from everyone – just a few anecdotes from a couple of happy participants that contact you, can be very misleading.

Check on participant progress at least once or twice during the program, then do a complete and thorough evaluation at the end. This means a full participant survey and an internal re-think of your program design. Get the final mix right and reap the rewards of reaching your objectives or goals and boosting your reputation as value adding.

Are you suited to the role of mentoring program manager?

Mentoring program managers need to be well-connected, good communicators and organisers, with strong project management skills. This is a demanding role and not one for the faint-hearted!

Your key roles and responsibilities will be to:

- Promote the concept of mentoring and ensure commitment from the company or association -- especially from champions and internal and external sponsors
- Define the objectives and success criteria for the program
- Oversee all aspects of implementation and quality management
- Create policies and procedures – especially for participant success
- Ensure information gathered as part of the mentoring program is secure
- Give honest and constructive feedback to mentees and mentors
- Manage expectations of all stakeholders
- Provide appropriate resources for supporting participants
- Evaluate and measure
- Keep all stakeholders well informed
- Maintain financial control over the program
- Set up and maintain administrative records
- Be the first port of call for troubleshooting
- Ensure that there is a succession plan, so that the program continues without interruption when you move on

What's in it for you and your organisation?

We think mentoring is such a worthwhile experience – everyone can benefit from having several mentors! Mentoring programs give people access to mentors they might not otherwise reach out to. Benefits for mentees range from a simple boost in self-confidence to profound and long-lasting life impacts. Benefits for organisations can include member/employee engagement and retention, career progression, development of leadership capability and breaking down of cross-company silos.

As a program manager, it is so rewarding when you receive this kind of feedback:

"I was awarded the manager of the year in my company last Friday night. This is after only being there 18months. I must admit, the turning point for me was meeting my mentor and mentoring turned me around from being lost/confused and somewhat disengaged but keen to make a difference, (as I have done before) to turning my career around.

I wanted to once again thank you for the mentoring program. It made such a difference in my life and I will be forever grateful." (Real mentee feedback after participation in a membership organisation program)

The ripple effect in mentoring is huge. Mentees often go on to become mentors to others later, paying back many times over the benefits they derived.

Want to know more?

We are committed to supporting excellence in mentoring, because we know quality mentoring makes a difference.

For a full list of tools and resources for mentoring program managers, mentors and mentees, visit us at www.artofmentoring.net