Creating a Quality, Community-Based Mentoring Program: Key steps to develop a Program and related Tools*

The following document and associated tools have been developed with the kind and generous support of BBBS-Calgary, BBBS-Edmonton, BBBS-Innisfail, the AMP Mentor Resource Centre, Full Circle Mentoring Program in Wood Buffalo, and Resiliency Initiatives. The tools reflect the combined expertise of mentoring programs across Alberta, Canada and the United States. Where appropriate, a primary citation is contained within the tool. In other cases, the tool is an adaptation/combination of resources currently used in mentoring programs in Alberta and across North America.

Introduction

Quality mentoring is mentoring that produces significant, lasting, positive outcomes for mentees. It is responsible, ethical, effective mentoring. Mentoring programs come in all shapes and sizes but there are some key components that help to ensure quality and that the needs of the mentee, volunteer mentor, organization and community are fulfilled.

Below are key steps to support the development and implementation of a community-based mentoring program. These steps are largely generic and are intended to support a range of different kinds of programs. Each of the steps has a tool(s) attached to it to help you move forward in your design and implementation efforts.

If you are working with a unique or diverse community please supplement these steps with the tools and resources included under the Customized Tools tab on the AMP Website. These additional tools have been developed to support mentoring programs with immigrant, refugee, Aboriginal youth and youth in care.

Step 1: Identifying Program Population: Who do you want to serve?

Quality mentoring can take many forms: traditional mentoring (one adult to one young person); group mentoring (several adults working with small groups of young people); peer mentoring (caring youth mentoring other youth); and, a combination of the above.

Deciding what type of mentoring program is best for your children and youth depends on the kinds of young people you intend to serve. Research has shown that Aboriginal youth and their families are often more comfortable in a group setting. In some cases, kids from immigrant communities may also benefit from a group setting that eventually leads to one-to-one matches. It is important to spend some time thinking about who you are trying to serve, considering what resources you have available and then exploring some of the different types of mentoring that might work best to meet your needs. Use the tools attached to begin to think about what mentoring model or combination of models might work best for you.

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* Much of the information presented in is taken from Building Blocks of Quality Mentoring Programs, prepared by Mentoring Canada. A complete version of this guide can be found on the AMP website at http://www.mentoringcanada.ca/training/Mentors/index.html. Additional information, tools and resources have been adapted from www.mentoring.org.
Step 2: Strengths and Needs Assessment – Does your community need this program?

Connect with the community and other agencies working in the community to assess community strengths and need for a mentoring program. Many communities would benefit from a mentoring program but it will be important to be clear about the nature and extent of the need. In larger communities a full blown strengths and needs assessment may be required. Otherwise, consider bringing community partners together to explore the following assessment questions. The answers to these questions will help you begin to design your program.

- What formal and informal mentoring resources does the community currently have?
- How would the community benefit from a mentoring program?
- Is there really a need for this program? …To what extent? … How do we know?
- Who are the targeted mentees? … How many are there? … How old are they?
- Who do we need to work with to recruit and maintain these potential mentees?
- Who else is working with these youth? How can we work with them? (more on this important point in Step 3 below)

Step 3: Identifying Program Partners

One of the main challenges for groups and organizations trying to establish mentoring programs in smaller and rural communities is limited human and financial resources. Collaboration is important in any setting, but it may be essential to program success in a small community.

- Ask questions among friends and colleagues about who is providing and supporting formal and informal mentoring in the community
- Check with AMP about known resources in or near the community and additional resources and materials available
- Check with your local schools
- Check with the local Child and Family Services office
- Check with the YMCA or YWCA
- Check with churches, mosques, synagogues in your community

If you find that no one is actively implementing a mentoring project work to bring people from the organizations listed above together to talk about the possibilities.

For ideas about how to work successfully with other community partners see the following sections:
- Tools to Support Collaboration
- Framework for Developing Mentoring Relationships in Schools
**Step 4: Defining your Program**

What does your program look like? You will need to create a working group or an advisory group comprised of interested parties who come together to begin to jointly design the program. It is through this exercise that you come to an agreement about what it is you are trying to achieve and the principles that will guide your program.

Right click the link to the left for some guidelines to develop a high level outline of your program.

**Mentoring Program Outline: Key Components**

**Purpose and Objectives of the Program**

This section should be written by a working group and should explain the purpose of the mentoring program. What is the program trying to accomplish (academic, cultural, social/emotional growth, life skills, career planning with the participants)?

**Overview of the program**

This is the area where you give an overview of the program. Ideas include:

- Description of the children and youth you want to serve
- Description of the type of program (one-to-one, group, peer, community-based or in-school mentoring. Revisit the tips from experts document reviewed in Step 1)
- Site for the program – where will it take place?
- Community involvement – is the community involved in the program? If yes, how?
- A list of partners

**Program Description**

Provide more specific information about the program. This section will help your agency or the partners to clearly articulate what the program actually looks like. Ideas include:

- Number and composition of matches
- Referral process. How will mentors and mentees sign up for the program? Who is responsible for this?
- How often will the matches/group meet?
- What will they do when they meet? Describe program activities
- Who oversees the program?
- How long will the program last?
- How long will the matches last?
- How are families involved in the program?
- What outside resources will be required to deliver the program?
Benefits

• Describe the benefits that you hope participants will experience as a result of their participation in the program (improved self-esteem, greater cultural awareness, increased capacity to be successful in the community, better attendance at school, higher grades, etc.)

Contact Information

• Who is the program’s key contact person

Use the template in this link to work with your partners to define your program. This high level outline will help you with all of the remaining steps – preparing a program budget, deciding on staff and developing job descriptions, recruitment of mentors and mentees, and engaging the community.

Step 5: Creating a Budget

What will it cost to run your program? Developing a program budget with your partners is the next step in the process. It is important to create a “real” budget – that is, a budget that reflects the real costs of your program rather than one that fits with a particular amount of funding that is available. It is also important to estimate the cost of in-kind contributions from partners as reflecting these may be important to some funding agencies. The first tool attached below is a list of typical items that a community-based mentoring program will need to budget. All programs are different and you will need to add, and perhaps take away from, this list to create your program budget. The second tool is an excel spreadsheet that can be downloaded and used to create a budget. It includes the list of potential expenses. You can fill in the columns with your estimated costs to create a preliminary budget. As you continue to refine your program design you will need to amend this document. If you are planning on creating some sort of steering or advisory committee for your program (see Tools for Collaboration) it will be important to try to include a committee member who has some financial management/accounting capacity to support budgeting and accountability.

Step 6: Insurance

All mentoring programs undertake substantial risk simply due to the nature of the services being provided. A program has a duty of care to its participants, and could be held liable if harm comes to a child, youth or volunteer as a result of accident, injury or abuse. As such, every mentoring program requires some sort of liability insurance. In many cases, one of the partners working to deliver the program will have a comprehensive policy that covers the risks associated with that program.

Things to consider in your insurance coverage:

• Transporting mentees
• What activities are covered?
• Are volunteers covered?
• How are employees insured?
• How is fundraising covered? Does it require separate coverage
• Is the board or advisory group covered? Consider Directors and Officers liability coverage
• Consider coverage for crime, property damage, wrongful dismissal, tenants liability coverage
Depending on your partners and the scope and nature of your program, you may want to carry a comprehensive insurance policy that minimizes liability for the organization as a whole, board members, staff, volunteers, and clients. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to minimize risks through screening, training, and ongoing supervision and to seek legal or professional advice about sufficient coverage before you begin to implement your program. Call a reputable insurance agency to explore your insurance needs.

**Step 7: Staffing**

Who do you need to run your program? The size of your staff will depend on the size and scope of your program. At the very least, you will need a program coordinator (larger programs may need more than one coordinator). Some programs have one paid staff person and designate other program responsibilities to a team of committed volunteers, advisory committee members, or, in the case of school-based or supported programs, a teacher, guidance counselor, or liaison worker. You will want to choose a coordinator who has strong leadership and organizational skills as well as experience working with young people from a strengths-based perspective. If your program is targeted for a unique group of young people, you may want to try to find a coordinator with specific skills to serve that group (e.g., diversity training, experience working with Aboriginal or immigrant children, experience working with kids in care). The tool attached below is a generic description of a program coordinator's role and responsibilities. This document can be used as the basis for a job posting and a job description. Amend the content to reflect the specific needs of your program.

**Step 8: Recruitment Strategies**

(Mentors & Mentees)

How will you attract appropriate and dedicated adults and suitable young people to take part in your program? Recruiting the right mentors and mentees is key to program success. As such, it is worth spending some time on the development of a recruitment plan with specific strategies. This does not need to be an elaborate plan, but it should clearly set out who will do what in terms of recruitment. The link to the left includes some basic guidelines to consider for recruitment. If you are working to serve diverse or harder to reach young people, it will be important to connect with members of their community and/or to work through partners who have an established relationship of trust. If this is the case, please refer to Tools to Support Programming for Diverse Populations on the AMP website.

**Step 9: Screening: Mentors and Mentees**

Effective screening of mentors is perhaps the most important factor in determining the success and safety of your program. Comprehensive screening of all potential volunteers is an essential part of any responsible mentoring program, whether that program is a traditional community-based program with one-to-one matches or a site-based, group program that is supervised. This process is onerous and time-consuming on the front end but will help to mitigate risks and issues as the program unfolds.

Setting criteria and screening your mentees is also important. Your program should be intentional about the children and youth it wants to serve, and should do what it can to ensure
the right kids are taking part. With a school or club-based program you may be able to rely on referrals from teachers, counsellors or agency staff. These partners need a clear set of criteria for the selection of mentees in order to aid in the screening process. Referral forms should be created that include basic information but protect the child and family’s right to privacy.

The tools to the left are meant to support mentoring programs to coordinate and complete the application and screening processes for all of its participants. Samples of referral and consent forms are included but will need to be adapted for the specifics of your program. Your final consent form should be reviewed by a lawyer to ensure it releases the program of any liability. These tools are meant to help you protect your participants and create successful matches. Additional tools to support the application and screening process can be found at: http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/elements_and_toolkits/tool_kit/operations

**Step 10: Training: Mentors and Mentees**

Supporting our volunteers to effectively mentor the young people in your program begins with an initial and on-going training. To support organizations and community collaborators to provide quality, standardized training, AMP has developed an online training program for mentors and an online guide to child safety. It is essential that your mentors and mentees participate in these trainings before they are matched or your program begins. Additional in-person and/or program specific training may be required. These trainings provide a foundation of knowledge that can be built upon by your program staff.

**Step 11: Goal Setting**

Goal setting is an essential part of any type of mentoring program and it is the responsibility of the program partners or the coordinator to support matches or groups to develop appropriate and meaningful goals. Mentors should be provided with training and tools to support both short and long term goal setting with their mentees. Goal setting is included as part of AMP’s Online Mentor Training and the tools attached below will help coordinators to support their matches to engage in this important process.

**Step 12: Match Supervision & Monitoring**

A quality mentoring program puts enormous time and effort into recruiting, screening, training and matching new program participants. But the work is not done once a match is made. Match supervision or monitoring is essential to the success of your program. It is the program's responsibility to support its matches to evolve into healthy and productive relationships that support the child or youth to achieve his/her potential. Further, one match gone bad is not only damaging to the child involved but can create a negative impression of the entire program, making it harder to recruit new participants and garner community support.

The the tools attached provide guidelines and templates to support your monitoring efforts. You can download and adapt these tools to meet the particular needs of your program.
Step 13 Tools

Tool A: Evaluation Process Guidelines
Tool B: Sample Logic Model and Data Collection framework

For additional evaluation tools check
www.oregonmentors.org/library/evaluationtools/

Step 13: Evaluation – Measuring the Difference You Make

Evaluation is an essential part of program success and sustainability and a good evaluation process will help you and your partners to:

• Effectively plan program activities to support success
• Identify, document and help to replicate strengths and effective strategies
• Identify challenges, problems or weaknesses early enough to address them
• Provide objective feedback to staff, the board and/or advisory group about whether the program is meeting its objectives
• Gather evidence to demonstrate that your program is having a positive effect on its participants
• Be accountable and effectively report to funders
• Build your credibility in the community

The evaluation process should start at the beginning of the program, not at the end. To effectively demonstrate that your program is having a positive impact you must identify the desired impact early on and build program activities to contribute to, and monitoring processes to track, those changes. The tools attached to the left are meant to help you begin to articulate appropriate outcomes for your program and build a plan to track program activities and key indicators so that you can measure progress towards these outcomes. Ultimately, this process will help you to build a better program and communicate the difference you are making in your community.