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EVALUATION OF THE YMI CORNERSTONE MENTORING PROGRAM

Strengthening the Mentoring Experience

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Executive Summary

Launched in 2011, the Young Men's Initiative (YMI) Cornerstone Mentoring Program provides group mentoring to middle and high school youth in Cornerstone Community Centers operated by nonprofit provider organizations in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) facilities. In each Center, the mentoring program is supervised by a mentor coordinator who oversees the day-to-day operations of the program, recruits mentors and mentees, and trains and supports mentors. Mentoring activities vary across programs, but typically include group discussions, sports, field trips, meals, academic support, and community service projects.

YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program Overview

During the 2015-16 program year, the program was offered in 34 Cornerstone Centers, including 25 middle school programs that served 5-8th graders and 9 high school programs that served 9-12th graders.*

Each participating Cornerstone Center:

- Receives YMI funding
- Programs serving middle school students receive $32,000
- Programs serving high school students receive $7,000
- Is funded to serve 12 mentees
- Offers at least 1 ½ hours of mentoring each week during the program year
- Implements a group mentor model with a ratio of 1 mentor to every 3-4 youth

YMI focuses on reducing disparities for young men of color; however, it broadly serves both young men and women in the programs it funds.

**Prior to the 2015-16 program year, the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program served youth in grades 5-9. The program expanded to include youth in grades 10-12 during the 2015-16 program year.*

Mentors—typically young, working professionals of color—are central to the success of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program. In spring 2016, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) contracted with Policy Studies Associates to conduct an evaluation exploring the experience of mentors. The graphic on the following page summarizes the recommendations that emerged from surveys and interviews with mentors and mentor coordinators. These recommendations highlight strategies that mentoring programs can strengthen to better engage mentors, so that the mentors, in turn, can maximize their support for youth as they navigate academic and developmental transitions through middle and high school.

Many YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs already implement these strategies, and the examples shared for the evaluation illustrated that the strategies and supports do not require special resources. However, it was also clear that successful implementation of these strategies requires intentional planning, time, and ongoing attention to be responsive to the evolving relationships, challenges, and successes of the mentor-mentee relationship.

How YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs Can Support Mentors

Set Clear Expectations

- Set a vision for what it means to be a mentor in your program
- Be clear about mentor commitment and responsibilities from the onset
- Provide guidance for establishing appropriate relationships with mentees
- Be deliberate in sharing your expectations with mentors who are not employed by the Cornerstone Center

Establish Program Structure and Processes

- Establish a mentoring model that is structured, but flexible enough to take into account the needs of mentees
- Allow for mentor input in program design
- Design group activities with clear objectives that involve all mentees
- Assign mentor-mentee matches within the group mentoring model
- Consider mentee characteristics (such as gender, age, interests, and needs), and group dynamics when making matches

Provide Training and Support

- Provide mentors with concrete resources (e.g., examples of activities, conversation starters, guiding themes, curricula)
- Be a liaison between mentors and other adults in mentees' lives
- Provide a continuum of support for mentors through:
  - Orientations for new mentors
  - Regular debriefing opportuntities and feedback

Build Relationships and Engage Mentors

- Be available to mentors and communicate frequently
- Get to know mentors personally
- Show mentors appreciation and recognize their contributions
- Help mentors feel connected to the broader Cornerstone Center

Contents

Funded through the New York City Young Men's Initiative (YMI), the Cornerstone Mentoring Program is designed to support youth in key life and educational transitions as they progress into middle and high school, through the development of relationships with positive and caring adults. Launched in 2012, the mentoring program is implemented in Cornerstone Community Centers, which are funded and operated by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and operated by nonprofit provider organizations in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) facilities throughout the city. Cornerstone Centers offer a variety of services to both youth and adults, including afterschool programming, recreational activities, and skill-building opportunities. The YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program complements these center-based opportunities by immersing a small number of youth in a more intensive and focused group mentoring experience.

In each Cornerstone Center, the mentoring program is supervised by a mentor coordinator who oversees the day-to-day operations of the program, recruits mentors and mentees, and trains and supports mentors. Mentoring activities vary across programs, but typically include group discussions, sports, field trips, meals, academic support, and community service projects.

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DYCD, which manages the YMI Mentoring Program, has contracted with Policy Studies Associates (PSA) to evaluate the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program since 2014. In 2014 and 2015 the evaluation primarily focused on the conditions and strategies that promote positive youth outcomes.[1] However,

[1] PSA researchers previously identified four "impact levers"—dialogue, role modeling, trips, and academic support—that promote positive outcomes among YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program participants, including improved attitude towards school, engagement in learning, and social emotional learning (Dibner, Woods, & Russell, 2014). The study also identified five structural support features that are vital to achieving the goals of the mentoring program: resources, flexibility to structure programs, passionate and motivated mentors, support for mentoring program staff, and meaningful relationship-building opportunities with mentees.

PSA also studied the approaches used by programs to support mentees' academic success, and the mechanisms used to engage mentees in this process (Russell & Francis, 2018). PSA identified the foundational mindsets (e.g., sense of belonging, self-

DYCD and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, which oversees the implementation, performance monitoring, and evaluation of the majority of YMI programs, recognize that mentors are the driving force of the program and of the program's capacity to ultimately influence the intended youth outcomes. As such, in spring 2016, a PSA evaluation team examined the experiences of YMI Cornerstone mentors, through surveys of mentors (67 percent response rate) and through interviews with 15 mentors and 5 mentor coordinators, to explore how best to support mentors in working with mentees (see Appendix A for more detailed methodology).

Based on evaluation findings about mentors' experience, the goal of this report is to provide recommendations for improving the overall YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program model by strengthening the mentor experience, based on evaluation findings about mentors' experiences. The first section summarizes mentor characteristics, recruitment, and retention strategies. The second section provides details on how the mentors experience the various aspects of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program model, and the third section discusses the training and support received by mentors. The fourth section discusses mentors' perceived impact on mentees development and success. Recommendations for Cornerstone leaders and mentor coordinators on how to better support their mentors are interspersed throughout these sections. Finally, the report concludes with a summary of key findings and recommendations for how DYCD can help programs to better support mentors.

Key Terms and Abbreviations

YMI: The Young Men's Initiative is a cross-sector partnership launched in New York City in 2011 to connect young men of color to opportunities to improve their lives and reduce disparities in education, employment, health, and justice. YMI funds the Cornerstone Mentoring Program.

NYC Opportunity: The New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity oversees several YMI programs and their evaluation, including the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program.

DYCD: The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development funds and monitors Cornerstone Community Centers and manages the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program

Cornerstone Community Centers: Cornerstone Centers are operated by nonprofit organizations and offer year-round programming for youth and adults at New York City

efficacy, high expectations, emotional and physical safety, and exposure to new experiences) and the programmatic conditions for success (e.g., maximizing resources, recruiting qualified mentors, providing ongoing support for mentors, and connecting with parents and families) that are necessary to support mentees' engagement in school and learning and to achieve academic readiness.

Who Are YMI Cornerstone Mentors?

This section provides a profile of characteristics of mentors in the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program, based on demographic and background information that mentors reported in survey responses. Additionally, it provides an overview of the varying strategies used to recruit mentors, the qualities mentor coordinators look for in mentors, and mentors' motivations for volunteering for the program. Finally, this section provides a brief snapshot of the reasons mentors remain engaged in or leave the mentoring program.

Who Is the Typical Cornerstone Mentor?

The typical mentor in the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program is a young, working professional of color. The majority of mentors are men, do not have previous mentoring experience, and typically work in the non-profit sector. Exhibit 1 provides a more detailed profile of the mentors who responded to the survey. Follow-up interviews with a sample of mentors revealed that many of the mentors live in the neighborhood surrounding the Cornerstone Center.

Exhibit 1
Profile of YMI Cornerstone mentors

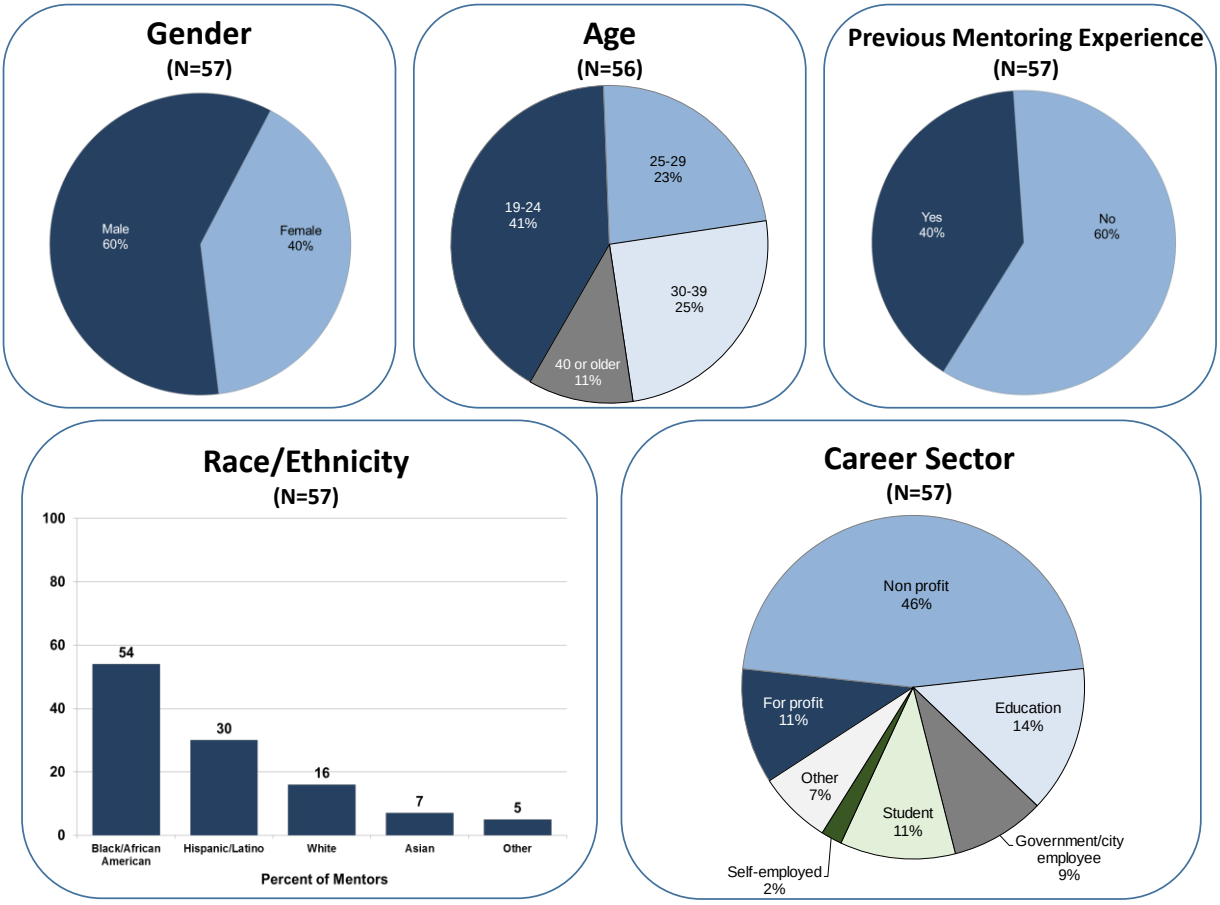


Exhibit reads: Sixty percent of mentors who responded to the survey were men and 40 percent were women.

How Are Mentors Recruited and Why Do They Mentor?

Direct connections to the Cornerstone Center or to Center staff were central to the recruitment of YMI Cornerstone mentors. Almost half of survey respondents (46 percent) reported that they were recruited through the Center's mentor coordinator or through a mentor who was already involved with the program (Exhibit 2). Additionally, about a third (32 percent) of mentors were already staff members at the Cornerstone Center where they mentored.[2]

Exhibit 2
Percent of mentors recruited through various strategies

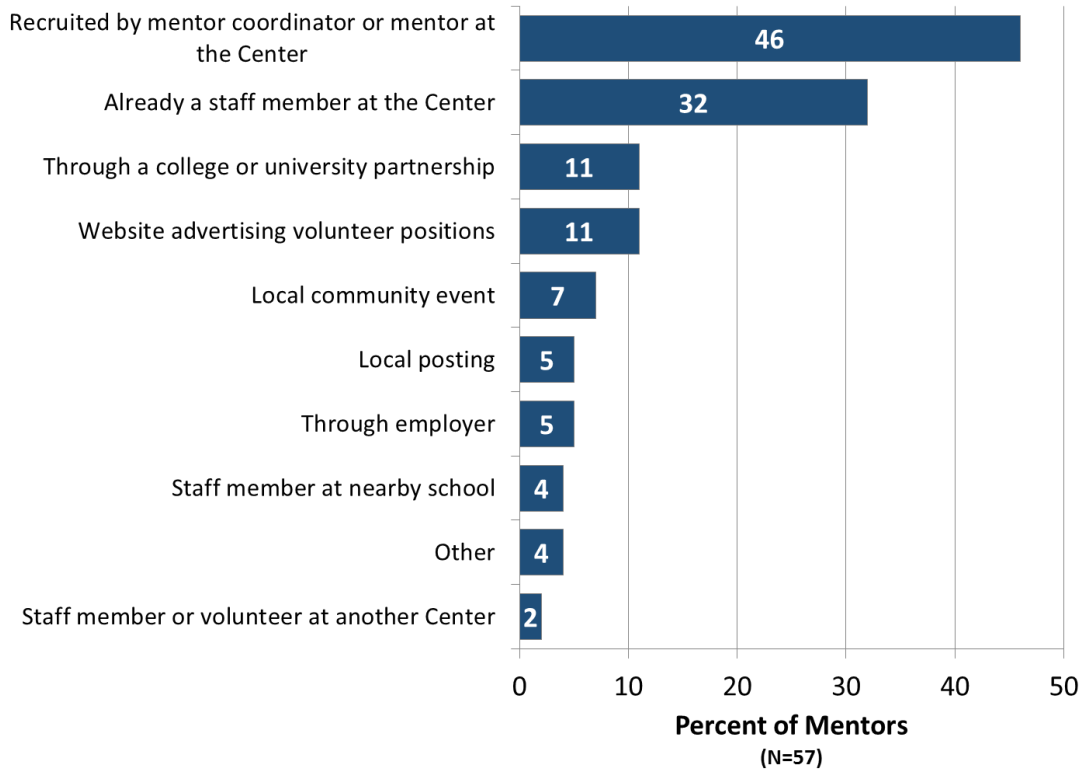


Exhibit reads: Forty-six percent of mentors who responded to the survey reported that they were recruited by the mentor coordinator or mentor at the Center.

Mentor coordinators utilized different strategies to recruit and develop mentors. Mentor coordinators described their recruitment strategies in interviews. One mentor coordinator felt strongly about mentor development. He described the difficulty in finding mentors who could positively interact and support mentees, so he preferred training mentors from within Cornerstone Center programming. He recruited young men ages 18-19 who were participants in an evening program at the Center and had some experience working with youth. Since he recruited mentors from within another program at the Cornerstone Center, he could observe their interactions and get a sense for whether he would be able to develop their skills as a mentor prior to engaging them in the mentoring program. Conversely, another mentor coordinator preferred mentors to volunteer based on positive exposure to the program. He said, "I like mentees to have service projects and for people to see the things that we do and they volunteer

[2] DYCD allows Cornerstone staff to volunteer as mentors, with the condition that staff do not receive pay for the time served as mentors.

and want to be a part of it." Other mentor coordinators described using their social and professional networks to recruit potential mentors. Finally, some former mentors reported that they were recruited through a partnership DYCD had with The New School, which offered a course called "Youth Mentoring in the City" and required a mentoring placement. However, the partnership was no longer in effect during the 2015-16 program year.

Most mentor coordinators liked recruiting mentors who live in the community and could relate to mentees' experiences, but some described wanting a balance of mentors from within and outside the neighborhood to expose mentees to a diversity of backgrounds. In addition, one mentor had difficulty in recruiting from the local neighborhood because he struggled to find good role models from within.

Mentor coordinators valued a set of core qualities in a mentor; most importantly, commitment and consistency. While recruiting strategies varied, there were some core qualities that mentor coordinators particularly valued in mentors, such as patience, an eagerness to learn, and passion for working with youth. Most coordinators sought mentors who were well-educated and professional (i.e., in school or working) and who could serve as positive role models. They also wanted to bring mentors on board who had specific interests or skills that they could teach youth.

While all these qualities were important, mentor coordinators described commitment and consistency as the most important qualities of a mentor. One mentor coordinator said that many of the mentees in the program have abandonment issues with their parents. Since mentors "are everything to those kids," they cannot be inconsistent or uncommitted. He explained that when a person becomes a mentor, they need to know that they are signing up for the "long haul." He doesn't advise anyone who doesn't have the "mentoring spirit" to take on such a commitment, since he is trusting mentors with young people's lives. This coordinator scheduled a week-long mentor training as a process to weed out individuals who were not fully committed.

Mentors were motivated by the opportunity to have a positive impact on youth and to give back to their communities. When asked on the survey to rank the top three reasons they volunteered as a mentor at the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program, mentors ranked the following as the most important reasons, in order (Exhibit 3):

1. To have a positive impact on youth
2. Because they grew up in the community or a similar community and wanted to give back
3. Because mentoring is personally rewarding
4. Because they had a mentor growing up and saw the value of having a positive adult figure

Exhibit 3
Number of mentors who reported the following reasons for mentoring as top three most important

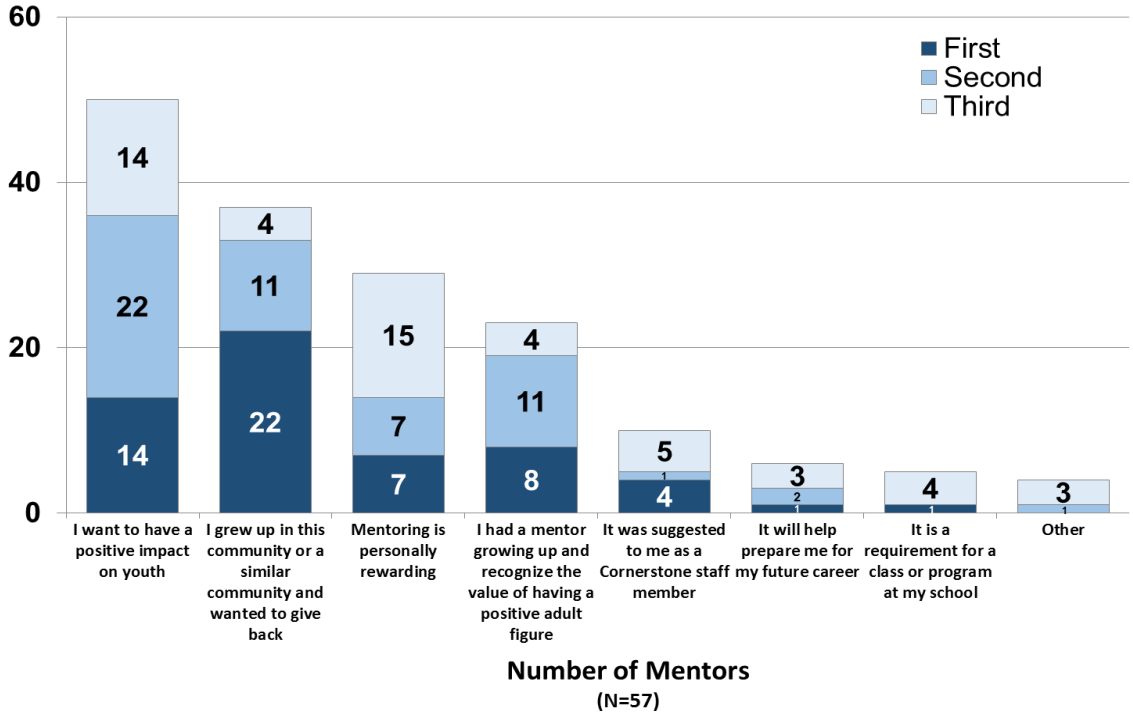


Exhibit reads: Fourteen mentors who responded to the survey reported that wanting to have a positive impact on youth was the top reason they volunteered as a mentor at the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program; 22 respondents ranked it as their second most important reason; 14 respondents ranked it as their third most important reason.

Why Do Mentors Stay or Leave?

Due to the volunteer nature of the program, mentor coordinators described mentors needing to be intrinsically motivated and highly committed. For example, one mentor coordinator described mentoring needing to fit into a mentor's "life work,"–not necessarily just their professional work–to result in a sustained commitment. Most mentor coordinators required mentors to commit to the program for a least a year. The evaluation findings indicated that mentors were highly committed to the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program; most mentors stay with the program unless personal reasons prevent them from continuing.

Mentors reported high levels of commitment. Of those mentoring in 2015-16, 97 percent of mentors planned to continue during the 2016-17 program year if given the opportunity. In interviews, several mentors described their commitment to the program and their desire to continue mentoring for the benefit of their mentees. For example, mentors said:

I don't like the thought of just hanging out with kids and then all of a sudden abandoning them for whatever reason. I think this is long-term…I want to see them on a long-term basis, and that's where you see the most results.

I have a lot of kids that love me and I can't just say that I don't want to do this no more…. I will continue doing this until I can't do it no more…some of these kids don't have fathers, I'm like a father figure, you can't up and go.

Mentors also described personal benefits as reasons for continuing mentoring. One mentor said, "I think being connected to the Cornerstone Center has given me a sense of purpose within the community and a connection I wouldn't have otherwise." Others described wanting to continue mentoring for personal growth, such as gaining leadership experience and learning how to work with youth. One mentor who also served as a staff member at the Cornerstone Center afterschool program believed that mentoring has helped her to form closer bonds with youth, which in turn helps her in her staff role with the afterschool program.

Mentors reported having to stop mentoring for personal reasons. In interviews with mentor coordinators and former mentors, most described personal reasons for why mentors discontinue mentoring, such as going away to college or moving out of New York City. One mentor described getting a job in another part of the city that made it prohibitive for her to stay with the program. Some mentors who were involved with the program through coursework at The New School moved on once the course was complete.

What Program Elements Encourage and Support Mentors?

Each YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program must adhere to several program requirements, which include serving 12 mentees in grades 5-12, offering at least one and a half hours of mentoring each week during the program year, and implementing a group mentoring model with a ratio of one mentor to every three or four mentees. Beyond that, each Cornerstone Center has flexibility to customize the specific design of the program based on the needs of the youth served and the local context. It is the mentor coordinators' responsibility to design the program and, as such, there were variations in program structures and processes, the approach to group mentoring, and expectations and engagement of mentors. It is important to understand the context in which these variations in mentoring models operate to truly understand the mentor experience across Cornerstone Centers.

What Were Mentors' Experiences with Program Structures and Processes?

Mentor coordinators and mentors described different program structures and processes across Centers. Most YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs formally operated one day a week, but some met more frequently, either formally or informally. Some programs were structured for all mentors to work on the same day of the week, while other programs allowed mentors to work different days of the week. Mentor coordinators also described different methods for matching mentors to mentees, and mentors

described an array of program structures with varying degrees of formality and mentor involvement in program design.

Mentor coordinators employed several strategies for matching mentors to mentees, although some mentors were not assigned to mentees. In programs with low enrollment, the process was relatively straightforward; new mentors were automatically assigned to a group of youth lacking a mentor. In other cases, matches were made based on the age, gender, personalities, needs, and interests of youth. Some mentor coordinators allowed for an organic matching process in which mentors and mentees had opportunities to interact with and gravitate towards one another. As an important early step in the matching process, one mentor coordinator described assessing group dynamics and how different personalities mesh together. Once matched, some mentor coordinators kept mentoring groups consistent, while others periodically switched up groups throughout the year for youth to interact with different mentors. One mentor coordinator explained that while he makes matches based on similar backgrounds and interests, he also sees matching as an opportunity for everyone (both mentors and mentees) to expand their horizons and to work with people different from themselves.

Ninety-three percent of mentors agreed or strongly agreed that the mentor-mentee matching process worked well, but only 30 percent of mentors strongly agreed. While there are limited data about the matching process to explain this finding, conversations with mentors revealed that mentees were not always directly assigned to mentors, leaving some mentors to interact solely with the full group of mentees. These mentors without assigned mentees thought forming deeper, more personal relationships with youth would be easier if they were formally assigned mentees.

> ***Recommendation:***
> *Always assign mentors to individual mentees within the group mentoring model.*

Mentors described YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs that varied in their level of formality in structure, with some guided by curricula and themes and others being "mentee-led." Some programs used formal curricula, such as the Trending Curriculum (a series of short stories written by high school students that highlight pertinent issues and have question prompts throughout), the FUN Catalog (activities for mentor and mentees), or Discovering the Possibilities (goal-setting and planning activities). Some programs required that lessons be planned around quarterly or yearly themes, while other programs were less structured and allowed for more informal activities and play. Some programs implemented a "mentee-led" model, in which conversations and activities were determined by youth. One mentor believed this type of model was more beneficial than one in which mentors steer the program too much. One rationale mentors described for keeping the program less structured, or more "free-flowing," was to meet mentees "where they are at." One mentor said:

> *Instead of having a program where we are going to have this structure and the kids have to fit in, it's more of us fitting into the world of the kids, and I think [if] we do it that way, it makes the kids more comfortable and then they open up and then you can kind of feed them that information that you would have done in a more structured setting anyway.*

> ***Recommendation:***
> *Strike an appropriate balance between having a structured program, yet having it be flexible enough so that it is guided by the needs of mentees.*

Mentors appreciated having autonomy to design activities for their mentees, but described the need for more concrete resources. Mentors described an array of program structures with varying mentor roles, responsibilities, and degrees of autonomy, including programs in which mentor coordinators almost exclusively ran activities themselves; programs in which mentors had full autonomy to plan their own activities; and various combinations of the two. Many mentor coordinators encouraged mentors to give input and "bring something to the table," whether an idea, an activity, or a skillset. For example, one mentor said that she was encouraged to share things she liked and already knew how to do. Since she is a personal trainer, she would teach boxing and other fitness activities to mentees. Another mentor is an entertainment lawyer, so he described sharing his knowledge and resources about the music business with mentees. Aside from knowledge and skills, mentors were encouraged to take ownership in shaping the program and designing activities. One mentor coordinator explained, "If you can think it, you can create it." Indeed, after realizing that many people in the community didn't have sneakers, a mentor at that Center created a "Fresh Sneaks for Free" event, in which community members donated their gently used sneakers to the mentoring program; mentors and mentees raised 462 pairs of sneakers, which they cleaned up and donated back to the community. Others engaged youth in social action or service events, such as volunteering at a community garden, planting trees, or advocating for neighborhood parks.

While mentors appreciated the opportunity to put their own "shine" on the program, mentors reported that they could benefit from more concrete resources from their mentor coordinators, such as examples of topics, activities, and conversation starters. Slightly more than a third of mentors (38 percent) reported that their mentor coordinator had connected them to additional resources, which suggests that many mentors may not be receiving this type of support. One example of a useful resource given to a mentor by his mentor coordinator was a list of questions in a variety of topic areas to ask mentees. Another mentor thought that having a "mentor booklet" with suggested topics and curricula could be useful to help mentors stay relevant. Mentors also expressed a desire for more meetings with their mentor coordinator, especially at the beginning of the year, to discuss planning of lessons and activities to make sure they are clear in their understanding of what is expected of them regarding planning and executing activities.

> ***Recommendation:***
> *Provide more concrete resources to mentors, such as examples of topics, activities, conversation starters, guiding themes, or curricula.*

What Were Mentors' Experiences with Group Mentoring?

YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs varied in how they defined and implemented the group mentoring model. Some programs did large-group mentoring, in which all mentors engaged with the full group of mentees for all activities and discussions while maintaining the overall 3:1 or 4:1 mentee-to-mentor ratio. Other programs did small-group mentoring, in which the mentor and their assigned mentees had discussions and did activities together. Most programs provided a combination of the two types of mentoring, in which the full group of mentors and mentees would meet together at the beginning or end of the session for a discussion or activity, but smaller mentor-mentee groups would break off for a portion of the time.

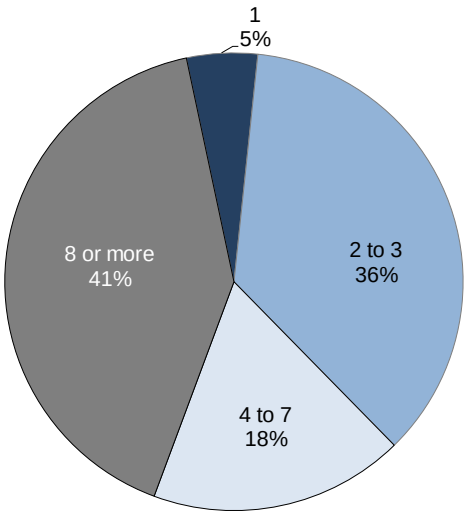
Mentors were asked how many youth they mentored during the 2015-16 program year; the median number of mentees was four, which is in line with the ratio required by YMI and DYCD. However, there was variability in the number of youth that mentors reported mentoring (Exhibit 4). In fact, 41 percent of mentors reported mentoring a total of eight or more youth during the 2015-16 program year. The larger mentor-mentee ratios could be explained by mentors switching mentees during the program year or because several programs relied on a large group mentoring approach.

Most mentors thought that group mentoring was a good strategy, regardless of how many youth they mentored. Despite variations in program approaches to structuring mentor groups, 93 percent of mentors agreed or strongly agreed that their group mentoring model was a good strategy. There was not a significant relationship between the number of youth mentored and mentors' ratings of their program's group-mentoring strategy ($r = .17$, $p = .32$). Mentors believed that group mentoring is beneficial for team-building and growing mentees' leadership skills. One mentor thought that group mentoring, particularly with the full group of mentees, is effective in teaching mentees how to communicate with their peers, manage conflict, and interact with different personality types. She said, "In the group setting, it's kind of more like trying to be a member of something bigger than themselves."

Mentors also described several challenges associated with group mentoring, particularly in large groups, and generally preferred working in smaller groups. While most mentors believed that large-group mentoring was an effective way to engage mentees in discussion because mentees can share mutual experiences and ideas, other mentors–particularly young or first-time mentors– sometimes viewed it as overwhelming. Mentors struggled to engage youth in large groups in dialogue and to make sure all mentees were included and consistently engaged. Mentors described large-group activities working best when structured with clear objectives, specific roles, and tasks that require participation from all mentees.

The large-group model worked well for some programs, but mentors generally preferred working with smaller groups at a time, finding it easier to build relationships with mentees and focus on their individual needs. While it may not always be feasible depending on how many mentors and mentees there are at any given Center, many mentors and mentor coordinators suggested that a smaller ratio, such as two to three mentees to a mentor, would be preferable.

Exhibit 4
Number of youth mentored by mentors



(N=39)

Exhibit reads: Five percent of mentors who responded to the survey reported mentoring one youth during the 2015-16 program year; 36 percent of mentors reported mentoring 2-3 youth; 18 percent of mentors reported mentoring 4-7 youth; and 41 percent of mentors reported mentoring 8 or more youth.

Mentors noted that group dynamics, especially personalities and ages, need to be considered with group mentoring. Mentors noted that group dynamics are determined by the personalities of individuals and the overall group rapport in addition to group size. Regardless of group size, mentors generally cautioned that because strong personalities can often dominate group mentoring, addressing the needs of quieter, more introverted mentees can be challenging. Mentors believed group mentoring worked best when mentors are intentional about finding alternative ways to meet the needs of these quieter mentees, such as pulling mentees aside after group activities for one-on-one time.

Additionally, in 2015-16 the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program expanded its parameters in allowing mentees in grades 5-12 to be served by the program, although programs were funded to serve either middle school students (grades 5-8) or high school students (grades 9-12). However, survey and interview data suggested that some mentors reported that they worked with wide age range of students, even within the middle-school or high-school cohorts. These mentors expressed the difficulty of having youth across ages and developmental stages mixed together for mentoring, describing the need to develop dialogue and conversations that were more age-appropriate and supportive of everyone. For example, one mentor described needing to give older mentees assignments to complete with younger mentees, to prevent the older mentees from dominating the group. As such, mentors described needing to be mindful of mixing age groups. They suggested grouping mentees by age or delegating responsibilities to older mentees so that they take ownership of helping younger mentees.

Recommendation: *Be intentional about the mentee-mentor ratio, taking into account mentee characteristics and group dynamics. Consider keeping younger and older youth in separate groups or carefully delegating responsibilities. Design group activities with clear objectives that will involve and engage all mentees in the group.*

How Engaged Are Mentors in the Program?

Overall, YMI Cornerstone mentors were engaged in the program. Mentor coordinators' expectations for mentors set the tone for mentor commitment and engagement. Most mentors spent more than the time required by YMI and DYCD with their mentees. Additionally, mentors who were Cornerstone Center staff and mentors who lived in the neighborhood tended to spend the most time with mentees.

Mentor coordinators' expectations for mentors, particularly around commitment, varied considerably. Based on interviews with mentor coordinators and mentors, mentor coordinators' expectations of mentors varied from simply expecting mentors to be present and enthusiastic to requiring a deeper level of commitment. Some mentor coordinators simply wanted mentors to show up and have a good time with mentees without the expectation of a long-term commitment. However, most expected mentors to commit for at least a school year and required consistent attendance. While the length of time mentors volunteered for the program varied, most appeared to take the commitment very seriously. At the time of the survey, over half of respondents (56 percent) had mentored with the program for at least one year. Mentor coordinator expectations for the weekly commitment also varied. Though the program formally met once a week for two hours, one mentor coordinator wanted his mentors to be available for up to 10 hours a week for trips and for talking with mentees.

Most mentors were spending more time with mentees than the one and one-half hours required by YMI and DYCD. These differing expectations also created variability in how often mentors and mentees would meet each week, with some meeting just once a week while others met multiple times a week, even if just for informal check-ins. Regardless of these variations, mentors spent a median of three hours with their mentees each week. About one-third of mentors (33 percent) spent the prescribed one to two hours a week with their mentees, 29 percent spent between three to four hours, 20 percent spent between five to nine hours, and 18 percent spent 10 hours or more. Mentors saw value in spending more time with their mentees. One mentor said that the hour and a half a week of formal mentoring worked well if mentors in the program were also able to have other interactions with mentees throughout the week. He said, "I think kids really need to see their mentor on a more regular basis."

Cornerstone staff and neighborhood residents spend the most time with mentees. It is important to note that many mentors had other opportunities to spend time with mentees outside of designated program time, which could account for the additional amount of time mentors reported spending with their mentees each week. There were two main reasons for this:

- The mentor was employed as a staff member or as a subcontractor at the Cornerstone Center.
- The mentor lived in the community and could informally stop by the program or saw mentees around the neighborhood.

Not surprisingly, of mentors who reported spending 10 hours a week or more mentoring, 70 percent were employed at the Cornerstone Center. Mentors who worked at the Center (about a third of mentors surveyed) could continue to build relationships throughout the week and form closer bonds. One said, "Every day is a mentoring workshop." For example, one mentor interviewed was also a subcontractor with the Center as a martial arts teacher, and had multiple opportunities during the week to interact with mentees.

Other mentors who lived in the community described seeing mentees around the neighborhood or on the bus. Mentors living near the Cornerstone Center also reported that proximity was an advantage. A mentor who lives a five-minute walk away from the Cornerstone Center said it makes it easy to get there or stay longer, thus allowing for more opportunities for interaction with mentees.

> ***Recommendation:*** *Maximize mentoring opportunities outside of formal program time, including for mentors who are not employed at the Center.*

What Training and Supports Helped Mentors in Their Role?

DYCD supports trainings for mentor coordinators and mentors provided by Mentor New York (formerly known as the Mentoring Partnership of New York), a nonprofit organization aimed at growing mentoring capacity in New York City. While trainings by Mentor New York are the only formal training required for mentors, some mentor coordinators supplemented these trainings with onsite support in the form of orientations, ongoing guidance and feedback, and serving as a liaison between mentors, mentees, parents, and schools. While these formal and informal supports provide a good starting place, mentors reported that they could benefit from additional training and support.

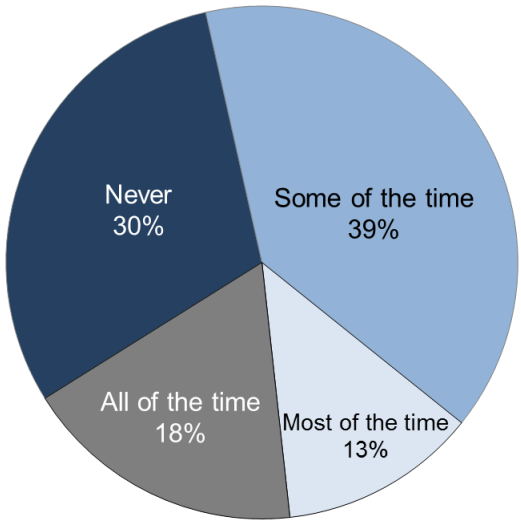
What Were Mentors' Experiences with Formal Training Opportunities?

Formal training opportunities provided by Mentor New York cover a variety of topics designed to help prepare mentors for their role. Three-quarters or more of mentors who attended Mentor New York trainings reported that the following topics were part of the training to a considerable or great extent:

- How to build and sustain positive relationships with youth (87 percent)
- Social-emotional learning (i.e., self-awareness, empathy, decision-making, etc.) (81 percent)
- Social issues (i.e., bullying, peer pressure) (78 percent)
- How to expose youth to new ideas or environments (77 percent)
- Goal-setting and personal accountability (76 percent)

There was no clear pattern of mentors attending formal trainings, and some mentors simply did not know these training opportunities even existed. Despite the wide coverage of topics in Mentor New York trainings, survey findings and interviews indicated that there was no clear pattern of mentors attending Mentor New York trainings consistently or at all. Thirty percent of mentors reported that they had never attended the formal trainings offered by Mentor New York (see Exhibit 5). Interviews with mentors reiterated this theme, with mentors somewhat unsure if they had attended a training(s) or reporting that they did not know training sessions were offered. Mentor coordinators described strongly encouraging mentors to attend these trainings and even making attendance "mandatory," but noted that it was difficult to enforce since mentors were volunteers and working professionals.

Exhibit 5
Frequency of Mentor New York training attendance



(N=56)

Exhibit reads: Thirty percent of mentors who responded to the survey reported that they never attended trainings offered by Mentor New York.

In addition to not knowing about formal training opportunities, scheduling conflicts were the greatest barrier to attendance. Trainings were offered at Mentor New York's office or at DYCD; according to DYCD, trainings were generally scheduled to last two hours, and were offered on evenings and weekends. However, the most frequently reported barrier to attendance were the times the trainings were offered, with 28 percent of mentors selecting this as a barrier to attending a Mentor New York training on the survey. In an interview, one mentor coordinator thought that the barrier to attending these trainings was a combination of the times they were offered and the lack of incentive for participation. Interviews with mentors reiterated a similar theme, with mentors describing scheduling conflicts prohibiting their attendance.

What Were Mentors' Experiences with Support and Guidance from their Cornerstone Mentoring Program?

Each Center has one coordinator and ultimately the day-to-day support and guidance of mentors falls to the mentor coordinator. At some Centers, the mentor coordinator also held other roles such as being the assistant director for the Center, the teen coordinator, or the service learning coordinator.

Whether they have other responsibilities or their sole job is to focus on the mentoring program, mentor coordinators wear many hats. They are not only responsible for the operations and management of the program, but are also responsible for training, supporting, and empowering mentors. As such, mentors described certain qualities and skills that make for an effective mentor coordinator. Mentors described the need for a mentor coordinator who is personable, well-organized, and has strong communication

skills; who can manage the needs of both mentees and mentors; and who exudes passion, energy, and commitment for the work, which in turn motivates others to have the same level of focus.

The most common types of supports that mentors received from mentor coordinators were logistical, informational, and organizational in nature (Exhibit 6); the three most common types of support received included coordinating schedules for when and where to meet mentees (75 percent), providing information about mentees' backgrounds (67 percent), and connecting mentors to field trips (66 percent).

Exhibit 6
Percent of mentors that received various supports from their mentor coordinator

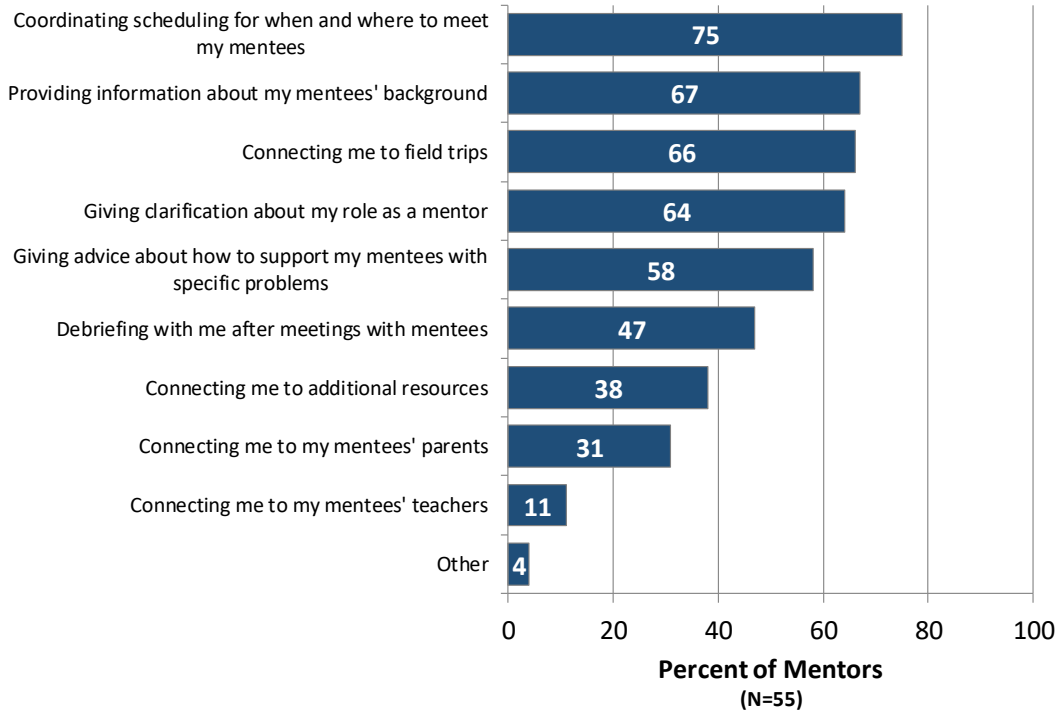


Exhibit reads: Seventy-five percent of mentors who responded to the survey reported that their mentor coordinator coordinates schedules for when and where to meet their mentees.

Mentor coordinators have many opportunities, both formal and informal, to provide mentors with the support and guidance that goes beyond logistical support and management. However, there were three primary ways coordinators trained and supported mentors:

1. **Through mentor orientations.** Orientation is an opportunity for mentor coordinators to communicate goals and objectives of the program to new mentors. Mentor coordinators described needing to be transparent and upfront about the depth of the commitment in the beginning. This is particularly pertinent for mentor coordinators who are looking for a deep level of commitment and expect mentors to be involved long-term. Orientation is also an opportunity to share expectations and to help mentors develop an understanding of what mentorship means at their respective Cornerstone programs. One mentor coordinator's orientation activities included role-playing how to have effective conversations, focused on how

to build trust with the mentees and maintain consistency. Another mentor coordinator had new mentors reflect about themselves in middle school and how they overcame certain issues; he encouraged mentors to see younger versions of themselves in their mentees and put themselves in their mentees' shoes.

2. **Through offering guidance and feedback throughout the year.** This guidance often took the form of helping mentors plan activities and answering mentor questions. More than half of mentors (58 percent) reported that their mentor coordinator provided them with advice for how to support mentees with specific problems. Debriefing with mentors was also an opportunity to offer guidance and feedback; 47 percent of mentors reported that their mentor coordinator took time to debrief with them after mentoring sessions. One mentor thought he could have benefited from more regular debriefings; another mentor suggested that there be a designated time each week for debriefing.

3. **Through serving as a liaison between the mentor, mentee, school, and parents.** Mentor coordinators often have a pulse on what is happening in the lives of mentees, and share relevant information with mentors. Two-thirds (67 percent) of mentors reported that they received information about their mentees' background from their mentor coordinator. In interviews, mentors described coordinators making them aware of issues at school, the Center, home, or in the community that could affect their mentees. Mentors thought it was helpful to know about important context about their mentee's lives, such as having an incarcerated parent. Mentor coordinators often served as a main point of contact to connect adults in mentees' lives, including their mentor, teachers and principals, and parents. This included connecting and introducing mentors to their mentees' parents or to the staff at their mentees' school(s). One mentor gave an example of a young man who having a difficult time talking to his mother about being bullied in school, so the mentor reached out to the mentor coordinator, who then arranged a meeting with the mother, mentor, mentee, and himself; together they had a conversation that helped the mentee to open up and collectively devised a strategy for how to handle the situation.

> ***Recommendation:*** *Mentor coordinators can provide a continuum of support for mentors that goes beyond basic program management, through (1) offering orientations for new mentors, (2) providing regular feedback throughout the year, and (3) serving as liaison among all the adults in mentees' lives.*

What Additional Training and Support Do Mentors Need?

Regardless of whether they had received training and support from Mentor New York or the mentor coordinator at the Cornerstone Center, mentors were forthcoming about areas in which they could use more training and support, including managing behavior, building relationships, designing activities, and mandatory reporting. Mentors expressed an interest in social-emotional learning and teaching their mentees important life skills, such as anger and stress management. Additionally, one mentor thought that mentors could use more training on social media and cyber-bullying to help youth navigate "the realities of today." Other mentors thought they could use training on how to have conversations around LGBTQ issues.

Mentors want to have more meaningful, age-appropriate conversations with mentees. In interviews, mentors described dialogue as one of the most important and commonly used practices for promoting positive outcomes for mentees. However, mentors described wanting to have more effective dialogue with youth. Mentors wanted to learn how to encourage their mentees to open up in conversation and how to create a positive environment to talk about important issues, especially with middle-school youth. One mentor said that he needed training "just, in general, how to talk to the kids better, in a way that you understand them psychologically a little more, emotionally a little more, understand their behavior and just things like that."

Mentors also expressed a desire to feel more confident and comfortable addressing sensitive topics and having difficult conversations with their mentees. For example, a former mentor described a time when there was a shooting at the Center and how it weighed heavily on the youth in the program. While it was an issue that needed to be addressed at the program, it also needed to be approached with care.

Several mentor coordinators agreed that some mentors need help in engaging in effective dialogue. Mentor coordinators believed that mentors need clarity in understanding that the role of a mentor is different from that of being a friend, and guidance in setting boundaries to prevent oversharing. A mentor coordinator gave an example of a mentor who shared "too much" with his mentees from his days as a youth. In his attempt to connect with his mentee, the stories resulted in the mentee emulating similar behavior at school and giving the excuse that "my mentor was like that." On the other hand, another mentor coordinator acknowledged that mentees are exposed to a lot of things that are not necessarily age-appropriate, so mentors need to find a balance between trying to stay age-appropriate while addressing the realities of mentees' lives.

> ***Recommendation:*** *Provide clarity on the mentoring role and guidance on what is considered appropriate and effective dialogue.*

Mentors benefit from mentor coordinators who are well-organized, available, and intentional in their support. The role of the mentor coordinator can significantly affect the mentoring experience. However, not all mentors reported that they had support from their mentor coordinator. One mentor who volunteered as part of a course requirement through The New School explained that the mentor coordinator was rarely present for the mentoring program and provided little guidance. As a result, this mentor felt that she did not have the best mentoring experience compared to other New School classmates who had more organized and intentional support from their mentor coordinators.

Another mentor described her current mentor coordinator as disorganized and non-communicative. However, her previous mentor coordinator had helped execute activities and trips, managed the budget, and asked mentors for ideas and input for figuring out activities for the month; the previous mentor coordinator had also been very good about communicating with mentors, texting and emailing them each week to keep them updated on times and plans. Having had these two drastically different types of mentor coordinators made the mentor realize how necessary strong administrative and communication skills are for supporting mentors in their role.

Mentors could benefit from more opportunities to feel connected and engaged. Mentors described the need for the program to be a comfortable place for mentors. Although many mentors are either Cornerstone afterschool staff or people who live in the community, there are mentors who may

only be able to volunteer with the program once a week. Therefore, some mentors may not feel the same sense of connectedness as do other mentors who work at the program or who live in the neighborhood.

In addition to communicating and keeping mentors informed about the program, some mentor coordinators felt very strongly about getting to know mentors personally and taking an interest in their lives. One mentor coordinator described the importance of treating mentors like family and creating a sense of community, since mentors need to be "strong and whole" to do their job effectively. Several mentor coordinators created digital communities through social media or group texts as a venue for mentors to communicate and chat, both formally and informally. One mentor coordinator said that he would sometimes meet up offsite with mentors.

Additionally, mentor coordinators believed that there should be more appreciation shown to mentors. While it is not feasible for mentors to be paid or receive a stipend for their services, mentor coordinators believed that small incentives could be provided, such as metro cards that could compensate for the money mentors spend to travel to the program, or gift cards or movie tickets. Other suggestions included having dinners or other celebrations for mentors, a mentor retreat, and a mentee-nominated "Mentor of the Month" to recognize mentors' work.

DYCD encourages providers to plan appreciation events at the centers during National Mentoring Month in January. Additionally, at the end of the 2015-16 program year, DYCD hosted a "Field Day" to celebrate the end of the program year and recognize the valuable contributions that mentors provided to the mentoring program. This event also honored a "Mentor of the Year" with an award for their commitment.

> ***Recommendation:*** *Connect and engage with mentors by getting to know them personally, introducing them to other Cornerstone staff, keeping them well-informed, and showing appreciation.*

Mentors' Perceived Impact

Survey and interviews found that mentors wanted to have a positive impact on mentees. PSA's previous evaluation of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program (Dibner, Woods & Russell, 2014), identified four main practices–or programmatic levers–that are used to promote positive outcomes for mentees: role modeling, dialogue, academic supports, and trips.. In the survey, mentors were asked to think about the importance of each of those practices in their role as a mentor and rank their importance. Mentors identified role modeling and dialogue as the top two most important practices of the four (Exhibit 7). However, in interviews with mentors, all the practices were seen as inter-related and not necessarily mutually exclusive. For instance, having effective dialogue could open up a mentor's ability to impact other areas, and being a positive role model could help build the trust necessary for more effective dialogue.

Exhibit 7
Mentor rankings of importance programmatic levers

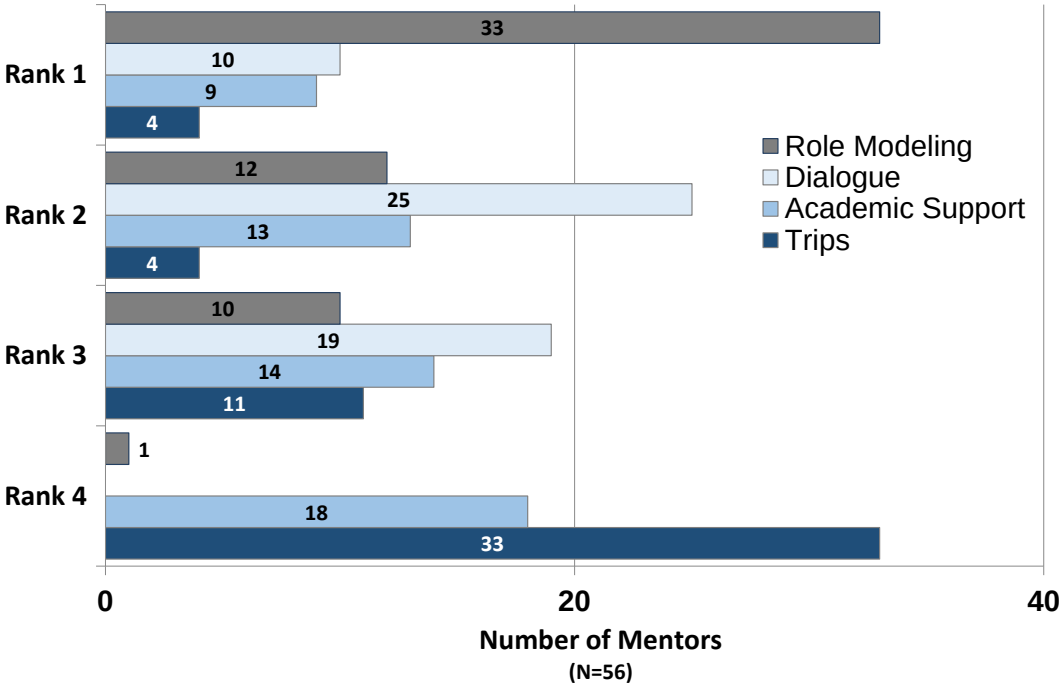


Exhibit reads: Thirty-three mentors who responded to the survey ranked role modeling as the most important practice in their role as a mentor; 10 ranked dialogue as the most important practice in their role as a mentor; 9 ranked academic support as the most important practice in their role as a mentor; 4 ranked trips as the most important practice in their role as a mentor.

When asked to what extent mentors believed their involvement in the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program has helped mentees to make progress in a variety of areas, mentors reported having the greatest impact in their mentees' social emotional skills and relationships (Exhibit 8). Mentors considered mentees simply becoming comfortable with developing a relationship with an older, caring adult a success. One mentor said, "I feel like building relationships with adults as a child/preteen helps you to be confident enough to do that [to reach out/ask questions to adults] …say, like OK, adults listen to me and they will help me." In turn, some mentors also saw a difference in mentees' interactions with others.

Exhibit 8
Mentor involvement and perceived impact

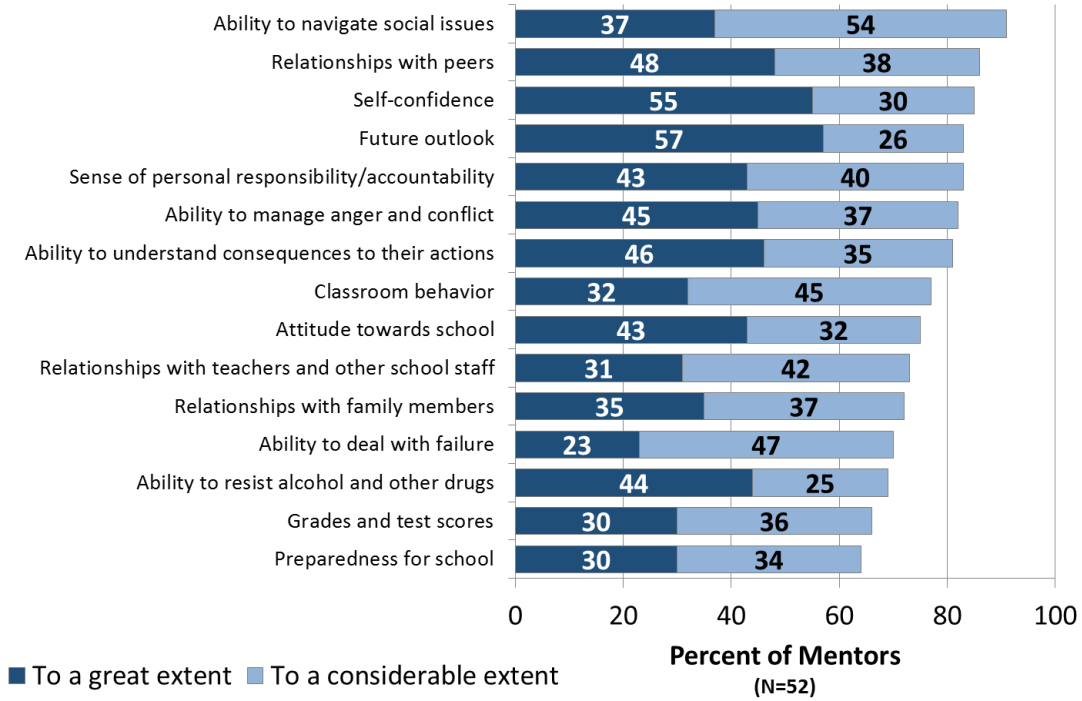


Exhibit reads: Thirty-seven percent of mentors who responded to the survey believed that their involvement in the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program helped their mentees to make progress in their ability to navigate social issues to a great extent; another 54 percent said it helped to a considerable extent.

While most mentor coordinators and mentors thought that academic support was important, it was not a major focus area. Most programs did not provide much in the way of academic support either because there simply wasn't enough programming time to make it a priority, or because it was provided in the general Cornerstone afterschool program, which is also available to YMI mentoring participants. While mentor coordinators would often look at student report cards or progress reports and inform mentors about how mentees were doing in school, academic support was not formally built into most program structures. One mentor coordinator believed that the mentoring program allowed mentees to see themselves as successful in other ways beyond academics.

However, many mentors described making a difference in having mentees think about their futures and explore various careers. Mentors described talking about the importance of education with mentees. One mentor said, "Having kids plug into their future, which is letting them sort of see a peek of what they can be versus what they've been able to see up until this point." A mentor who was an entertainment lawyer taught mentees about different types of law careers. Another mentor exposed a mentee to a potential career option as a video game designer.

Conclusions

While each YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program must adhere to several program requirements, each program has slightly different program structures and processes, approaches to group mentoring, and mentor engagement. Mentor coordinators take different approaches to matching mentors to mentees, programs differ in their level of formality, and mentors have varying roles and degrees of autonomy in program design. Additionally, program sites vary in how they define their group mentoring model, and there are benefits and challenges in implementing each model successfully. Finally, expectations for mentors vary, and while most mentors are engaged in the program, there are several conditions that may enhance engagement, including working at the Center and/or living in the community. Therefore, mentors described an array of different experiences with these various aspects of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program model.

Additionally, there were two main sources of training and support for mentors through the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: (1) formal trainings provided by Mentor New York and (2) onsite training and support from their mentor coordinator. However, there was no clear pattern of mentors attending Mentor New York trainings. Simply not knowing about Mentor New York training opportunities was arguably the greatest barrier to attendance. There were three main ways mentor coordinators trained and supported mentors that went beyond logistical support and management: (1) through mentor orientations, (2) through offering guidance and feedback throughout the year, and (3) through liaising with mentors, mentees, schools, and parents. Mentors reported that they could benefit from additional training in many areas, but most notably in having meaningful, age-appropriate conversations with mentees; mentors also reported that they could benefit from support from their mentor coordinator that made them feel comfortable, connected, and engaged.

By gaining a thorough understanding of the mentor experience, the recommendations interspersed throughout this report are aimed at informing and strengthening the overall YMI Cornerstone mentoring model. It is important to remember that all YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs are structured and operate slightly differently from each other, so not every recommendation will apply to all programs. Despite variations and flexibility across Centers, however, the authors hope that these recommendations can contribute to ongoing improvements to the quality and implementation of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program in order to strengthen the mentor experience.

How Can DYCD Help?

Although most evaluation findings focused on what YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs can do to better support mentors, a few key points emerged regarding what DYCD can do to help support Cornerstone Centers in implementing the mentoring program.

Mentor coordinators. The findings from this report highlighted the need for mentor coordinators who have the vision, time, energy, and passion to support mentors. Above all, mentor coordinators need to be available, well-organized, and intentional in the support they provide. As such, DYCD can provide additional guidance to the nonprofit organizations operating Cornerstone Centers about this role and its requirements, to ensure that mentor coordinators with are hired with the necessary skills to support mentors.

DYCD can also be more intentional about the ongoing support provided to mentor coordinators. Mentor coordinators need support in the operations and management of the program (e.g., budget, planning), but also in supporting mentors and mentees. Mentor New York provides formal trainings on the effective practices for mentoring programs, which helps them to design and develop their programs. However, there should be ongoing trainings that focus on coaching mentor coordinators to help them perform "on-the-job" training for mentors. Additionally, DYCD can assist mentor coordinators in providing resources to mentors by developing a shared resource library across YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs.

Mentor training. Aside from providing support to mentor coordinators, both DYCD and Mentor New York should work to limit barriers that hinder mentors' ability to participle in formal training opportunities. DYCD and Mentor New York could require mandatory training and offer an array of additional trainings, although attendance would still be an issue. Therefore, DYCD and Mentor New York should consider alternate modes of delivery. Particularly, the partnership should find ways to create alternative ways to access mandatory and recommended training. For example, training could be offered on multiple days and times throughout the year. Another more flexible option is to offer training sessions through an online course or webinar, with all materials available to mentors to review on their own time.

Mentor appreciation. Finally, mentor coordinators thought that more appreciation should be shown to mentors. While there were some things that Centers can do to show their appreciation, and foster a sense of community among mentors and some actions taken by DYCD, there are other small steps DYCD may be able to take. For instance, mentor coordinators suggested that small incentives could be provided, such as metro cards, that could compensate for the money mentors spend to travel to the program. Gift cards or movie tickets were also suggested. DYCD could also sponsor cross-program celebrations and other activities that might develop programs' capacity to show appreciation to mentors. In addition, DYCD may want to consider ways to offer course credit or professional development credit to incentivize participation.

Recommendation for DYCD:

- *Provide guidance for the hiring of mentor coordinators with management and interpersonal skills who have the vision, time, energy, and passion to support the role of the mentor.*
- *Continue to support mentor coordinators in their role by providing ongoing training, guidance, and resources.*
- *Offer multiple options and alternative ways for mentors to access Mentor New York trainings.*
- *Offer incentives to mentors to show appreciation.*

References

Dibner, K.A., Woods, Y., and Russell, C.A. (2014). *Evaluation of the DYCD YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

Russell, C.A., and Francis, Y. (2016). *Evaluation of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program: Role in Supporting Engagement in School and Learning.* Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

Appendix A: Research Questions and Methodology

Research Questions

Aimed at informing and strengthening the mentoring model through the lens of mentor experiences, the PSA evaluation explored the following questions:

1. To what extent do mentors feel prepared to implement each of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program levers previously identified through evaluation, including: dialogue, role modeling, trips, and academic supports? What trainings or supports are effective in helping mentors to implement these levers? What barriers or challenges do mentors face in implementing these levers? What additional training opportunities or supports could mentors benefit from?

2. To what extent do mentors feel successful in supporting mentees in each of the outcome areas prioritized by the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program, including improved attitudes towards school, adjusting to new school environments, engagement in learning, and academic supports? What impact do mentors believe the YMI Mentoring Program has on their mentees, academic or otherwise? What barriers or challenges do mentors face in supporting mentees?

3. What factors encourage engagement and retention of mentors in the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program? What strategies do YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Programs use to recruit, retain, and engage mentors? How do YMI mentor coordinators/supervisors provide support to mentors?

4. What elements or structures of the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program model facilitate the effectiveness of the mentor? What additional structures or guidance from the model would further strengthen the effectiveness of the mentors?

Study Methods

The PSA evaluation team collected data through surveys and interviews with mentors. PSA researchers also interviewed several mentor coordinators for context.

- **Survey of mentors.** PSA administered an online survey to 85 current and past mentors from 18 Cornerstone Centers for which DYCD provided mentor contact information. A total of 53 mentors completed the survey and an additional four partially completed it, for a 67 percent response rate. Of those respondents, 72 percent were currently serving as a mentor with the YMI Cornerstone Mentoring Program at the time of the survey. The survey asked mentors to report on their initial recruitment and motivations to become a mentor, the training and support they received from Mentor New York and their Center, program structure and their

roles as a mentor, the importance of different elements of the model, their perceived impact and satisfaction, challenges they have encountered, and demographics.

- **Mentor interviews.** Mentors were asked on the survey to indicate their willingness to participate in an additional telephone interview for an incentive. Of those interested, PSA selected 15 mentors from across Cornerstone Centers. In order to best capture the full scope of mentor experiences, PSA took into consideration program location, mentor recruitment strategies, and other mentor characteristics. PSA conducted 45-minute telephone interviews with the 15 selected mentors to capture in-depth information on the topics explored on the survey.

- **Mentor coordinator interviews.** PSA interviewed five mentor coordinators to provide additional context about the structures used to recruit, support, and retain mentors. One mentor coordinator was selected randomly from each borough.