ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

A Guide for Program Development and Improvement

5TH EDITION | 2025

MENTOR

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INTRODUCTION

A Celebration of Mentoring Relationships and Mentoring Programs

There is perhaps no action that better symbolizes and honors our collective humanity and our obligation to one another over time than when one person offers a mentoring relationship to another, especially to a young person who is in the early stages of their life journey. From elders ensuring that wisdom, values, and culture are passed down to subsequent generations, to a coworker "showing the ropes" to a new hire, to a teacher taking a struggling student under their wing and offering more than a lesson plan, the act of mentoring is one that helps each human being reach their potential, learn valuable wisdom, have amazing new experiences, and thrive in the face of life's ups and downs. Mentoring relationships enable young people to build on their strengths and take advantage of opportunities—they also enrich the lives of mentors, who often get as much personal growth (and valuable memories) from the experience as the young person. Mentoring matters, not just to individuals, but to entire communities and societies. (See sidebar for our definition of mentoring.)

Young people today find mentors through many pathways: through aunts, uncles, and extended kin who offer love and wisdom beyond what parents or other caregivers can provide; through faith leaders and spiritual institutions; through coaches, counselors, teachers, and other professionals who dedicate their careers to helping young people grow and thrive; and through neighbors, family friends, and other caring people who happen to be in a young person's orbit and decide to offer more help than might have been expected. These naturally

> ### DEFINING MENTORING
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> **For the purposes of this resource, we have adapted the definition of mentoring proposed by Drs. David DuBois and Michael Karcher in *The Handbook of Youth Mentoring, 2nd edition*:**
>
> ***Mentoring is a series of collaborative activities and conversations between young people and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a helping capacity to provide support that benefits one or more areas of the young person's development.***
>
> **See the Glossary in Appendix A for an expanded definition and clarifications of other terminology.**

found mentoring connections are invaluable — often life-changing — and serve as shining examples of our human commitment to one another.

Young people also find mentoring relationships through programs and services that are designed to facilitate these connections between youth who could benefit from a helping hand on their journey and adults who want to join them and offer support along the way. In some ways, mentoring programs aim to intentionally create relationships that, under different circumstances, would form naturally in our communities. A mentoring program is a purposeful attempt to bring new and different types of people into the life of a young person to supplement the web of support that already surrounds them and provide them with opportunities and guidance

they may not have experienced otherwise. These mentoring programs play an important role in our society — they represent a deliberate and focused attempt by a community of caring adults to step up and offer additional support to young people. A mentoring program can also be an invaluable and life-changing thing, and the relationships it creates bring more joy, love, and meaning to the lives of young people and the adults around them.

This resource is a celebration of these mentoring programs, as well as an attempt to strengthen them and better support the tens of thousands of individuals who design and deliver these services to youth across America. Much in the same way mentors offer guidance and wisdom to young people, this resource offers those who develop and implement mentoring services meaningful guidance on the programmatic practices that contribute to a high-quality mentoring experience for young people. This resource reflects the collective wisdom of our field, drawing on both the experiences of mentoring professionals who do this work, day in and day out, and research evidence that highlights the most effective ways to build and implement a mentoring program.

... mentoring programs aim to intentionally create relationships that, under different circumstances, would form naturally in our communities.

In the pages that follow, we will explain more about who this resource is for, the many considerations that go into designing and delivering meaningful programmatic mentoring experiences for young people, and specific practices we believe will make mentoring programs more effective, enjoyable, and sustainable now and in the future. We also hope you see this resource as a way of honoring and celebrating the mentoring work already happening across this nation, as the guidance offered here builds on decades of programming and research, and the efforts of millions of program staff, mentors, young people, and their families and communities. We hope this resource is a meaningful summation of what we have learned about the mentoring that can happen in program contexts, while also empowering leaders to build the mentoring programs of the future so that youth can adapt to an ever-changing world.

Who this Resource Is For

Mentoring programs come in all shapes and sizes, differing in their setting, the characteristics of the youth served, the focus, frequency, and duration of the mentoring support, and many other factors. It can be quite challenging to develop one resource that speaks to all those variations perfectly.

Yet the value for our field of a resource like the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™ (EEPM)* lies mainly in providing some common starting points that almost all mentoring programs share. Every program needs to determine how they will find participants and get them engaged in their services, how and when mentors and youth will meet and what they might do together, and how these relationships will be supported and eventually dissolved. And while the resources programs need to operate and grow will vary considerably, just about every mentoring program will need to engage in fundraising, staff development and retention, communicating with stakeholders, and other practices that support running and sustaining a healthy program.

Thus, the recommendations included here will apply to *most* readers in their programmatic context and should serve as a starting point for what constitutes running a solid mentoring program. Your program may not implement every practice in this resource. In fact, depending on your setting and circumstance, there may be many practices discussed that are not applicable to your work or are not applicable in the ways described here. That should not be a cause for concern. What matters is that you, the reader, think carefully about these practices and how and when they apply to your work, and understand where and when it makes sense for your work to look different.

Formal Mentoring Programs for Youth

The practices recommended in this resource will be *most* applicable to **mentoring programs** that:

- Offer mentoring as a formalized service, either as a standalone support (e.g., a Big Brothers Big Sisters or similar nonprofit) or as one component of a multi-intervention youth-serving organization (e.g., a youth development organization that offers a mentoring program in addition to academic, job training, mental health counseling, or other services).

- Serve youth 18 years of age or younger, although the majority of the guidance here is perfectly applicable to mentoring models for older young people (e.g., up to age 24).

- Involve mentors who are community volunteers or paid mentoring staff. Although many of the practices described here assume the program's mentors are adults, much of the advice is applicable to peer-to-peer mentoring models, as well.

- Purposefully match youth with mentors in mentoring relationships, either one-to-one or in groups of several youth working with one or more adult mentors.

However, we know that mentoring programs come in all shapes and sizes and that they will differ across many characteristics (see below for more information). We encourage those planning or implementing different configurations of mentoring services to reflect on how the advice offered here aligns with, or perhaps differs from, the services they are planning or already offering. Each chapter provides advice for a variety of program models and contexts.

Youth Development Organizations and Settings

We recognize that many readers will represent a broad variety of **youth development organizations**, likely falling into one of two categories: 1) The aforementioned youth development organizations that intentionally operate a formal mentoring program, using volunteers or staff member mentors, alongside many other distinct services (mentoring programs embedded in a larger organization); or 2) Those that offer *informal* mentoring, typically via staff members, as an enhancement to their typical work with youth (mentoring is happening, but there is no formal program). It is increasingly common for after-school programs, camps and recreation programs, sports teams and clubs, and other youth development providers to build this kind of informal mentoring role into the general work of staff members. Both of these approaches — embedded programs or informal staff mentoring — can be beneficial to young people.

This resource is most applicable to those who are offering a mentoring program with a level of purposefulness, structure, and formality...

However, for those in youth development organizations, the practices highlighted in this resource will be most helpful if the organization is offering mentoring as a *formal service* in which there is structure, common approach, staff planning, implementation, and oversight to how mentoring is provided. Many youth development organizations may choose not to implement that kind of formal mentoring service, instead taking the less formal approach and asking staff to "switch hats" on occasion and mentor youth in the program more organically. These organizations can also find value in this resource, especially in considering how practices such as training or caregiver engagement can improve those less-structured mentoring experiences. (See MENTOR's *Becoming a Better Mentor* [Herrera & Garringer, 2022] for more information about how any staff member or caring adult in a community can build their mentoring skills.)

In general, while mentoring services do come in all shapes and sizes, **this resource is most applicable to those who are offering a mentoring program** with a level of purposefulness, structure, and formality in how services are delivered. For these programs, the practices here can increase the odds that the youth you serve will benefit from meaningful mentoring experiences.

Applicability to Funders and Policymakers

The other audiences that will find value in this publication include those who help fund the development of mentoring programs, both in the public and private sectors. We encourage these audiences to approach the practices here with the following in mind:

These practices can promote more impactful investments in mentoring. The recommendations here draw on both research evidence and practitioner wisdom suggesting they make a difference in the quality and sustainability of a mentoring program. Those who are starting mentoring initiatives or providing funds to existing programs may wish to ask service providers how they plan to meet the EEPM recommendations, as they represent a solid base for building quality services.

These practices are not part of a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter model, and programs will need adaptation and innovation to thrive in their unique context. One of the truisms of youth-serving programs of all types is that what works in one school, community, or organizational setting may not work perfectly in another, especially when considering the unique contributions of staff members, the differences across communities in the mentors, youth, and families served, and myriad other factors that make programs unique. The EEPM was not created to identify inherently "good" or "bad" programs, but rather to give practitioners, funders, and policymakers access to the strongest evidence we have around programmatic practices and decisions that are linked with positive mentoring outcomes. While the EEPM offers a strong starting point for defining what a quality mentoring program looks like, please remember that all programs will do things slightly differently and that local adaptations and nuances are to be encouraged and

celebrated. It can be helpful to remember that most "innovations" in mentoring over the last 30 years have been the result of local mentoring professionals trying something new or implementing a practice "incorrectly" to better meet the needs of their youth and community. It is only later when they, or external researchers, realized that their approach was actually an improvement, that these new ways of doing something became codified as a "best practice." So, encourage your programs to strive for the practices listed here, but also encourage them to go above and beyond and do things differently if their youth, mentors, or communities need something that looks a little different.

Evaluate your investments in mentoring. While the practices recommended in this resource will certainly give your programs a strong foundation, they are no guarantee of success or meaningful impact. Much in the way that having a mentor is no guarantee that a young person will reach all their goals, engaging in all the practices described here will not automatically lead to perfect results — although research strongly suggests these practices matter a great deal (DuBois et al., 2002; Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Keller et al., 2023). Thus, we encourage funders and policymakers to support robust evaluation activities (see Element 16) that include not only examining outcomes, but also tracking how well the program's practices are being implemented on the ground, in day-to-day reality. No collection of "best practices" matters if programs aren't actually implementing them. Evaluation also contributes to our understanding of how mentoring programs can improve — much of the advice in this resource comes from studies that asked, "Is what this program doing working? And if so, how is it working?" These are the questions you should consider when you invest in mentoring.

How to Use This Resource

As noted, mentoring programs are almost as varied as the youth they serve, differing tremendously across many characteristics and service delivery options. Because we take a "big tent" view of mentoring, we have tried to ensure that most mentoring programs will find meaning and value in the practices recommended in the chapters that follow. And while not every practice noted here will be relevant to their unique context, we want every reader to feel empowered to reflect on the information in this resource and build the programming that your youth and community need. It may look remarkably similar to what we suggest here; it may not. ***What matters is that you and your staff and other stakeholders build the services that will work for the youth, mentors, and community you support.*** Recognize that while we have provided a road map for your services, you are in charge of the journey of your program. We hope this resource makes that journey easier and more impactful.

Considering Characteristics of Programs that Influence Practices

Variations in several characteristics of mentoring programs may influence how you, the reader, engage with the recommended practices detailed in the chapters that follow. These characteristics represent the many ways programs differ and decision points or considerations that will influence how and why staff implement mentoring services the way they do.

As you read through this resource and reflect on the recommended practices, we encourage you to think about the context of your program and where it sits in relation to characteristics such as:

- **Programs that are starting up, or those that are well established.** Service providers will relate to these recommendations differently based on whether they are just getting started or have been running for years with entrenched ways of doing things.

- **Programs that serve youth with a wide range of characteristics, or programs that are focused on specific groups of youth.** Some programs are designed to serve wide ranges of youth and their varying needs, while others are much more focused on specific groups and their more focused goals.

- **Programs that emphasize a strong, caring mentoring relationship as the main goal of the program, or those that see the relationship as a context for more focused interventions.** While all mentoring programs hope for meaningful relationships, in some models that deeply supportive relationship is the main goal, an end or outcome unto itself, while in others the relationship is viewed more as a context to deliver other, more specific interventions (e.g., transition planning or mental health supports). (See Cavell et al., 2021, as well as Karcher & Nakkula, 2011 for more information about the distinctions between these types of approaches.)

- **Programs that let mentors and youth choose their activities, or those that prescribe activities.** As noted above, some programs are highly focused and purposeful, while others let the young person and mentor figure out their activities with minimal guidance.

- **Standalone mentoring services or mentoring embedded in a broader organizational suite of discrete services.** In many instances, an organization will offer only mentoring, while in other organizations mentoring will be one of many services and supports offered, which means that mentoring needs to fit in alongside those other activities.

- **Group approaches or one-to-one models (and variations in between).** Research suggests that group mentoring models (in which groups of youth are mentored by one or more mentors) actually serve as many young people in the United States as more traditional one-to-one models (Garringer et al., 2017). While both approaches can be successful, as can "hybrid" approaches, they will obviously differ in how the staff facilitates those interactions.

- **Volunteer mentors or paid staff as mentors.** As noted, we have created this resource primarily for programs using volunteers in the mentoring role, but we also recognize that, for many programs, paid staff provide the mentoring. That circumstance will inherently influence the nature of some of the practices recommended here.

- **Delivering mentoring in-person or online.** Online mentoring experiences are growing in popularity, but they also inherently require some differences in how the staff implements those services.

- **Site-based models or community-based models.** Mentoring programs that allow mentors and youth to meet unsupervised in the community will require different practices in many instances than those where all mentoring activities take place at a set location, such as a school, Boys & Girls Club, or summer camp.

- **Adults as mentors or other youth people as mentors.** Peer-to-peer mentoring models take advantage of the strong connections youth can form with one another, but placing young people themselves in the role of a mentor requires some additional and distinct work on the part of the adults running the program.

- **Formally matched mentoring relationships, or more informal "opt-in" mentoring relationships.** Lastly, we note that most mentoring programs create formal "matches" between youth and adults, either one-to-one or in small groups. But in many youth-serving organizations, mentoring is an optional and informal support provided by staff members or volunteers. That distinction will also influence how mentoring experiences are provided.

There is no "right" or "wrong" place for your program to be based on the characteristics noted above, but they will all influence how your program implements the practices recommended in this resource. We provide considerable guidance in the chapters that follow, which will help you make informed decisions about what works for your unique context.

Considering Who You Serve

In addition to the program characteristics noted above, it should also be stressed that **the characteristics and voices of the youth and families you hope to serve** are perhaps the most critical inputs into designing and delivering good mentoring. There will be unique configurations of young people in every mentoring program — some the result of geography or neighborhood demographics, some based on need, some the result of focused recruitment of specific individuals. Regardless of that composition, all mentoring programs should engage with and listen to the youth, families, and community that surround them and build a meaningful program together. Programs should also pay attention to the diversity within the youth and families they serve. There will be many types of young people in a mentoring program. Staff should understand how their services can be delivered safely and inclusively to all. (See the sidebar for additional information about how mentoring programs can create a sense of inclusion and belonging for all youth, as well as Element 1 for further discussion of program values such as youth voice and inclusive practices.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EMPHASIS ON YOUTH BELONGING

When authoring this resource, we were asked by many stakeholders if MENTOR would be recommending specific outcomes that mentoring programs should emphasize. For the most part, we have avoided doing that as the outcomes a program strives for should be determined in partnership with the youth and community served (see Element 2 for much more on developing a program's theory of change and desired outcomes).

That being said, there is one outcome that we hope all mentoring programs, regardless of their specific focus, can support: a sense of belonging. One of the unfortunate realities about modern life is that people tend to be somewhat isolated from one another, for myriad reasons. Some youth in America experience far more marginalization than others, but it is true that all young people can experience periods where they feel like they don't belong, don't fit in, aren't welcome, or are marginalized because of who they are, where they are from, or what they look like.

Mentoring programs combat this marginalization. A mentor is someone who is there for you, a lifeline not only to wisdom and opportunities for personal growth, but to community, to additional supports, to acceptance, to love. When our mentoring programs connect youth and mentors from the community, they open the door to a world of possibility in which a young person might not only figure out who they are, but find like minds and connections to others who make them feel valued and cared for.

Regardless of the specific outcomes your program hopes to achieve, you are unlikely to reach them if you are not helping all young people feel welcome, valued, and safe. Your program can be the space in which they first feel "I belong in this world." All young people need to feel that, and your work can help make that happen.

So, if you are looking for one ultimate outcome to justify the work of your program, and guide how you do it, we encourage you to consider a sense of belonging for all youth as that outcome. All the other things we want youth to achieve will flow from that state of being. Throughout this resource you will find practices that support inclusion and will help you create spaces for youth where they feel seen, safe, and community. Lean into that aspect of the work — it may be the greatest gift your staff and mentors can ever give a young person.

Applying These Practice Recommendations in Your Work

When examining the practices and program building blocks recommended in this resource, we encourage readers to consider contextual factors that will help you determine how your program should develop and deliver aspects of your mentoring services. Answering questions such as these can be helpful:

- Does this practice seem relevant to our organizational context? Is there something about our program that suggests we *wouldn't* need to implement a particular practice or activity?

- Do we have the resources to implement these practices? Do we have the staffing or funding needed to do them adequately?

- If we already implement these practices, how well are we implementing them? Are we doing them only minimally? Are there certain practices for which we are doing exceptional work?

- In what ways are we generally strong or weak in these practices? Can we use the description of these Elements as a self-assessment tool that tells us what we can improve or what we are already doing well?

Organization of this Resource

This resource is organized into three major sections:

SECTION 1
Foundations of Quality Mentoring Programs

This section covers the importance of strong foundational values and program design as cornerstones of any successful mentoring effort.

SECTION 2
Elements of Effective Mentoring Services

This section covers the practices that help participants build meaningful mentoring experiences and guide their time in your program.

SECTION 3
Practices to Support Organizational Health

This section addresses practices in aspects of organizational development and management that build capacity and enable a program to grow, improve, and thrive over time.

Within each of these sections, you will find chapters focused on each Element of effective practice, meaning the major categories of activities and tasks that lead to a high-quality program. Within each Element, you will find the following information:

■ **A standard of practice** definition that lets readers know what they are ultimately expected to have in place.

■ **A list of the specific practices** that support getting to that standard, with brief descriptions for each.

■ **Suggestions for adapting the practices** for several common types of mentoring models and settings: group mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring, e-mentoring, school- and other formal site-based models, and informal mentoring in youth development programs.

■ **A discussion section** that highlights the relevant research and practice wisdom explaining why these practices are important to consider.

■ **A list of questions** practitioners should be able to answer as they figure out how to meet the standard of practice for an Element.

■ **Tips for incorporating** youth or community voices into the delivery of the practices.

■ **Recommended metrics** that programs may wish to track to see if they are implementing their practices well.

■ **A list of recommended resources** and readings that can help programs implement these practices.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION?

Readers familiar with prior iterations of the EEPM should note that there are new practices and recommendations throughout all the sections of this fifth edition. However, the following sections offer the most significant new additions:

ELEMENT 1
Program Values

ELEMENT 2
Strong Program Design and Theory of Change

ELEMENT 10
Ongoing Caregiver Engagement

ELEMENT 13
Program Leadership and Staffing

ELEMENT 14
Community Engagement

ELEMENT 15
Program Infrastructure and Sustainability

ELEMENT 16
Program Evaluation

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you read through the rest of this resource, please keep a few things in mind:

Remember that mentoring, especially provided through a formalized program that facilitates and shapes the experience, is hard work. We often think of mentoring relationships (and by extension services that provide it) as being these simple, joyful experiences that enhance our lives. And they often are! But like all human relationships, they require effort and intentionality to maintain, and they often come with ups and downs and moments of synchronicity and disconnection. The responsibility of providing a youth with a mentor is not to be taken lightly. A mentoring program is something that is, by definition, attempting to intervene in the trajectory and outcomes of someone's life — and perhaps the lives of multiple people when you include mentors and caregivers in that equation. It is important that the work is done with extreme humility, attention to detail, and application of strong ethical values and principles. This is why the very first Element in the pages that follow focuses on asking programs to define the values, beliefs, and principles that will inform their work. It's also why we emphasize evaluation so strongly throughout. It is imperative that your program knows how well it is doing this work and understands how it is changing people's lives, in both subtle and obvious ways. We encourage you to start small, learn about how participants are experiencing the program, and adjust accordingly.

As said several times in this introduction, it is normal that your program will want to vary from the recommendations in this book to better meet the needs of your community or to maximize the resources you have at your disposal. Innovations and different approaches are fine! Just make sure that you are evaluating how those choices work out so

that you can be assured your program is genuinely helping people and giving good returns on the investment that many people have made in your work.

Remember that help is available! One of the strengths of the mentoring field is that there are many sources of support for your work, especially in helping mentoring professionals learn new skills and try new approaches in their programs. A few options you can turn to if you get stuck using the information in this resource include:

- MENTOR Affiliates – MENTOR offers localized support, training, coaching, convenings, and other forms of support through a network of Affiliate organizations at the state or regional level across America. These organizations are your best source of local support and direct help in improving and growing your mentoring program.

- The National Mentoring Resource Center – This national training and technical assistance initiative is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and operated by MENTOR. This initiative offers free technical assistance and program improvement support to any mentoring program in America that is primarily serving youth under the age of 18. This is an excellent source of support for mentoring programs that are outside the footprint of MENTOR's network and can connect any mentoring program to high-quality coaching and information regardless of where they are located.

We hope the remaining sections of this resource help your program be the best it can be and that your work brings love, joy, health, hope, achievement, and meaningful change to the communities you care about.

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 1

PROGRAM VALUES

Standard of Practice: All mentoring programs should consider the values, principles, and ethics that inform their program design and delivery, and codify them into the program's mission statement and a formal values statement, as well as in program policy.

PROGRAM VALUES

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STANDARD OF PRACTICE

All mentoring programs should consider the values, principles, and ethics that inform their program design and delivery, and codify them into the program's mission statement and a formal values statement, as well as in program policy.

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PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ The program crafts a values statement that describes the core values, principles, and ethical viewpoints informing the program's design and delivery. Programs should spend time reflecting on, and naming, the values, beliefs, mindsets, and ethical considerations that inform their work at all levels and codifying them into a values statement, either as a standalone document or as part of a broader mission and vision statement. Although these values may differ slightly for every mentoring program, we strongly encourage programs to consider the following values as a starting point (see the discussion for more information on each):

- An ethical standard of "do no harm"
- A commitment to inclusive practices that recognize the diverse identities of young people and facilitate their sense of belonging
- Honoring youth voice and agency
- Honoring the voices of caregivers and the broader community
- Adopting a strengths-based view of young people
- Establishing, and not exceeding, indicators of program capacity and a maximum number of youth served
- Embracing a continuous improvement mindset

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations may help clarify important values that could be woven into a values statement or program policies.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

There are several ways group mentoring programs can clarify or build on the general program values noted above, including:

- Emphasizing the diversity and inclusion of youth of all types within the groups formed and fostering new connections among youth who might not interact outside of the group setting.
- Giving youth meaningful roles in crafting, leading, and evaluating the activities the groups engage in.
- Implementing a group approach primarily because it is the best model for achieving program outcomes, not due to over enrollment or an inability to make one-to-one matches.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring programs can build on the general program values noted above by emphasizing values such as:

- Offering peer mentors meaningful roles in designing, developing, and leading program activities, and encouraging mentored youth to return to the program later as mentors themselves.
- Recruiting a variety of peer mentors, including youth who have faced challenges or need extra support themselves. Offering these young people a leadership role may be especially impactful.
- Designing the program (e.g., staffing, support) in a way that gives staff the time they need to supervise young mentors well. Peer mentoring programs may require additional supervision to yield strong program benefits (Herrera et al., 2008). Thus, it is important to ensure that the number of matches in these programs is small enough to allow staff enough time to provide strong supervision.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Values related to program capacity may be especially important in online programs. There is a temptation in e-mentoring models to serve large numbers of matches because technology-based program delivery may offer efficiencies that in-person programming does not. However, in

some ways,running a high-quality e-mentoring program can require more staff time and effort, as participants may need multiple reminders to stay in touch and additional support to overcome the inherent distance between participants. Staff may also need to review written interactions as part of their supervision and support. Thus, we encourage e-mentoring programs to carefully consider these factors as they determine the number of matches they can serve well.

E-mentoring programs may also be uniquely positioned to adopt continuous improvement mindsets, as they may collect considerable information about the mentoring experience and have access to details about mentor-youth interactions that are not available to community-based programs. Given how relatively new e-mentoring models are, we encourage these programs to emphasize continuous improvement mindsets by utilizing their unique data and opportunities for tracking participants.

SCHOOL AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

Programs set in schools or other site-based locations (e.g., youth development programs) will need to ensure that the mentoring values are aligned with the values of the larger organization or institution in which they are housed. This is especially true in instances in which an external program is being embedded into the site. Taking time to understand shared (or misaligned) values is a critical first step. There are also some additional ways school- and site-based programs can build on the general recommendations above:

- **Ensuring that the school or site understands, and leadership is aligned with, the mentoring program's goals.** Some schools or youth-serving organizations may want to use mentoring as a Band-Aid to help alleviate challenges the site is facing. While mentoring can certainly be used to strengthen and bolster the experience of young people in a school or other context, the mentoring program cannot address a youth's every need. Clarifying the goals — and clearly outlining the limitations — of the mentoring program is important.
- **Because schools and other youth-serving organizations have a "captive audience" in the youth who are already part of their day-to-day operations, it can be tempting to scale programs quickly without carefully considering how staff capacity, roles, and responsibilities are affected by that growth**. We encourage school-based and other site-specific programs to start small and make sure they are not overextending their capacity to do the work well.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

We encourage youth development programs to be thoughtful in how they add informal mentoring to their existing services. While it can be helpful to ask staff to take on mentoring roles when young people need additional support, it is important to make sure that staff are prepared for that experience, that youth understand the nature and limits of the mentoring staff can provide, and that there is some effort to make sure that the experiences are positive for all involved. Mentoring should be a value-add to the program, not an additional action promised to impress a funder or take on more than staff can reasonably handle.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

A mentoring program, by definition, is a service designed to offer support and guidance to a young person they may not have received otherwise. It is an attempt to change aspects of each mentee's life — sometimes in small ways or related to temporary challenges, but often in service of altering the trajectory of a young person's future for the better. For this reason, it is morally imperative that your program ground its work in core values and beliefs that will help ensure its services are a positive contribution to the lives of youth, caregivers, mentors, program staff, and those in the broader community.

Although the values that inform a program's work will be somewhat idiosyncratic to its specific location, community context, and goals, there are some universal values and ethics that MENTOR strongly encourages mentoring programs to consider and codify in writing. Below we highlight our recommendations on values and principles that offer a starting point. We encourage programs to discuss these topics, clarify what they mean for the program using their own language and phrasing, and then ensure that these values are shared with others in the form of a values statement, either as a standalone document or as part of the program's broader mission or vision statements. These values should be used to inform all aspects of program operations, including program rules, policies, and procedures (see Element 2 for further discussion of practices related to mission statements and policy and procedure manuals).

All mentoring programs, regardless of setting, participants served, or goals, are encouraged to consider the following values and principles:

An ethical standard of "do no harm."

Much in the way that doctors, social workers, and others in the helping professions commit to doing no harm, those working in the mentoring field also must have a foundational commitment to minimize the risk of harm to participating youth (Rhodes et al., 2009). While a commitment to keeping youth safe from harm will result in some obvious actions and practices — for example, screening mentors before they can work with youth or removing staff who engage in inappropriate behavior — this ethos can also inform more subtle considerations, such as when to close a mentoring relationship that is struggling or how to handle a mentor who is engaging in microaggressions that may be rooted in bigotry or intolerance. It can even include examining the types of activities mentors and youth engage in and the types of conversations the program supports. We encourage programs to think about the many ways a young person, their family, or a mentor may have a negative experience in the program and what program staff can do to mitigate those risks. We know from research that when youth have a negative experience with a mentor — for example, if their mentor is inconsistent or their relationship ending is premature or handled poorly — they can be harmed by their participation, experiencing a decrease in self-esteem or other setbacks (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005; Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Thus, programs must make every effort to ensure that no young person leaves their services faring worse than when they started.

A commitment to inclusive practice that recognizes the diverse identities of young people and their need for belonging.

Because mentoring programs inherently bring people together who might never have formed these relationships otherwise, it is important that

programs seek out the full diversity of individuals in a community and support their participation through inclusive practices that help youth, families, and mentors feel a sense of belonging and community in the program. Ensuring that community members from all walks of life can participate in your services has many benefits, such as increasing community interest in the program, creating a culture that is welcoming and accepting, and ensuring that youth have access to mentors who can speak to their unique needs and goals. The concept of diversity goes far beyond race and ethnicity, and includes dimensions such as gender and gender expression, age, disability, socioeconomic class, religious beliefs (or lack thereof), educational attainment, and lived experience (among many others). Many of these types of diversity are unseen, but inclusive practice means getting to know them as full people as your program engages them and creating spaces where they feel welcome and valued and where they can be their authentic selves. This is how mentoring programs can begin fostering a sense of belonging in the young people and communities they serve.

The concept of diversity goes far beyond race and ethnicity...

Of course, mentoring programs may focus their services on specific groups of youth or require mentors to have certain backgrounds or skills — all programs have some criteria on who they allow to participate. But those criteria should not be grounded in discrimination, bias, hate, or behaviors that violate the rights of others. We encourage programs to think about how diversity, equity, and

inclusion can strengthen the work it does and how it can ensure that all participants feel welcome, accepted, affirmed, and encouraged to contribute their unique gifts.

Honoring youth voice and agency.

One challenge the youth mentoring movement has historically faced is an overemphasis on adult perspectives, about both young people's challenges and how to respond to them. This has often led to mentoring experiences that are frustrating for youth at best and actively harmful at worst. One of the major shifts in the field over the last decade has been a growing emphasis on listening to young people about what they are struggling with, in what areas they want the support of mentors, and how they want those mentoring experiences to play out. Providing such opportunities for youth voice has been linked with more positive, effective mentoring relationships (Grossman & Johnson, 1999; Morrow & Styles, 1995). There has also been a call (more broadly) for increased youth involvement in developing and shaping the programs that serve them (Sprague Martinez et al., 2018). Studies suggest that providing youth with this kind of voice and leadership can enhance their program

A Quick Note about the Critical Importance of Fostering Belonging for Young People through Inclusive Practices

As noted in the Introduction, this edition of the EEPM emphasizes many practices that can support inclusion and belonging for program participants — strategies for doing this are woven into every chapter in this resource. But we also wanted to note the broader context around concepts related to inclusion taking place in America. There has been considerable progress in recent years to ensure that all people are valued, respected, and provided with equal opportunity to thrive and build meaningful lives. But there has also been backlash against that progress, and even efforts to limit or ban what might be considered inclusive practices. That resistance to full inclusion and acceptance for all young people is antithetical to our country's commitment to honor the foundational values of "liberty and justice for all."

To be clear, MENTOR views mentoring programs and the relationships they facilitate as central to the goal of providing youth with a sense of belonging and ultimately, creating a more just, caring, cohesive, and equitable society. Mentoring programs connect community members to one another in ways that few other organizations do. These programs create bridges between people who may have never met otherwise and in doing so they create shared understanding, shared values, and a shared sense of community and togetherness. Those are the elements that facilitate a sense of belonging and possibility in young people. Regardless of program goals or who is participating in their day-to-day work, mentoring programs build help everyday citizens contribute to a greater good — mentoring young people is about shedding an imperfect past and building something new and better, together.

Unfortunately, there may be individuals in your community who disapprove of your program's efforts to recognize the humanity and individuality of all young people and help them find that sense of belonging. Those people find comfort in the marginalization of others and work to limit the feelings of belonging for some young people.

We encourage all mentoring practitioners to remember that this work is grounded in love, understanding, empathy, and respect for others. There may be times when those values come into direct conflict with stakeholders in your program, from funders and partners to the community members you engage and serve. But we encourage you to remain strong in the face of unfounded criticism and to keep fighting for a better future for all young people. That won't happen if we allow others to dictate who we care for or who is truly included and fully supported in this work. Your program can be a beacon of light for those who need it the most if you stay true to your values and reject those who insist that belonging is only something available to some Americans and not others.

Please remember who you are, who this work is for, and why it is so needed at this moment in time as you build and grow your services. Help every young person find the network of support they need through your services. Spread joy and belonging in your work, and know that doing so is critical to the thriving of the generations that follow.

experience and increase program benefits (Hansen & Larson, 2007; Serido et al., 2011). Providing meaningful opportunities for youth voice can also foster youth belonging, self-confidence, empowerment, and connection (see Serido et al., 2011).

Programs should give youth considerable say in what the mentoring experience looks like...

We, thus, encourage mentoring programs to build youth voice into as many aspects of the program as possible, from its initial design to the activities youth engage in with their mentors, to how the program evaluates its success. And we mean truly authentic power, not token efforts to make it seem like youth have a voice while adults still dictate every aspect of the program. Throughout the Elements discussed in this resource, we have included tips for how meaningful youth voices could be woven into recommended practices. Readers must remember that each young person's journey is theirs, not the program's and not the mentor's. As such, programs should give youth considerable say in what the mentoring experience looks like and the focus of their relationship and program activities. Clearly, some programs may have a structured experience and proscribed work that they expect mentors and youth to engage in. However, that experience and the program model you are implementing should be informed by their voices and honor their agency.

If you find that you are leaning heavily on youth to contribute their voices, time, and energy into shaping the work of the program, you may wish to compensate them for their efforts. This does not

have to be extravagant compensation, but small financial incentives and gifts can make them feel even more valued by your program.

Honoring the voices of caregivers and the broader community.

As with the youth participants in your program, there are others whose opinions, values, and preferences around program services should be considered, such as caregivers, mentors, and the broader community in which your program is based (i.e., an entire town or neighborhood, or smaller units, such as a school or other institution). Mentoring programs are often funded by organizations or individuals who are not part of the community being served and differ in their backgrounds and lived experiences, and the values and beliefs those experiences confer. One of the easiest ways for a mentoring program to miss the mark is to make assumptions about what the community wants or needs, or how mentoring would best fit their values and cultural practices. Programs are strongly encouraged to listen to a variety of perspectives about how mentoring should be conceptualized and delivered — not just those of young people but also those who are within, and aligned with, the broader community the program serves. However, we also remind practitioners that some members of a community may have negative views of particular youth or families and their values may be in direct conflict with your own. Think carefully about the voices you decide to let influence your work and reject those grounded in prejudice or hate. As noted above for youth, some small compensation for caregivers and others may be appropriate if they are contributing meaningfully to the development and growth of the program.

Adopting a strengths-based view of young people.

While it is true that many young people come to mentoring programs out of a desire to address a problem or overcome a challenge, it is important to remember that youth and their families are much more than just a collection of needs. Every young person brings their unique strengths, abilities, and gifts to your program, sharing them with your mentors and staff and building on those strengths to achieve and thrive with your support. Similarly, their families and communities offer a wealth of supports and strengths that can enhance the mentoring experience. Encouraging program staff and mentors to take a strengths-based approach by focusing on skill building and strengthening resources in youth's lives rather than "fixing" problems (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), honors and builds on youth strengths, and can help achieve program goals (see Zimmerman, 2013). Too often, the mentoring field adopts sentiments of "saviorism" (e.g., "helping youth escape poverty," which implies their community and family are inadequate, or "giving youth a chance at success," which suggests they inherently have none) or other inappropriate framing of the mentoring experience. As a result, mentors and staff may take on deficit views of youth and their families (e.g., labelling people as "at-risk" or "delinquent"), which can damage mentoring participants and their relationships (Spencer et al., 2022). In efforts to help every young person be the best they can be and fulfill their potential, we cannot label youth or assume their challenges are the sum of their human experience. A strengths-based approach will help ensure that you do not portray youth or their community as flawed or helpless and will prevent your mentors from taking on roles that are inappropriate or condescending to the youth and families you work with.

Establishing, and not exceeding, indicators of program capacity and a maximum number of youth served.

A core value for all mentoring programs should be to serve youth well, rather than to serve as many youth as possible. The goals of serving very large numbers of youth and serving youth at a high level of quality may be at odds with each other without staffing to reflect these numbers and can be difficult to balance when responding to funder or community needs. However, we encourage your program to thoughtfully determine ideal and maximum caseload sizes that reflect your program's design and goals — and to do everything possible to support, and strictly enforce, those caseload sizes. Keep in mind that with manageable caseloads, staff can spend more time reaching out to participants, finding and providing resources to matches, and helping to address challenges when they arise — all of which can help participants feel more supported in their journey and foster the outcomes your program aims for. These decisions can also affect (and be affected by) other aspects of your

program. For example, Munro (2011) describes how manageable caseload size is a key ingredient in fostering strong outcomes in social work. Central to keeping caseloads manageable is training and supporting strong staff who can work with a variety of client needs. This is linked with high staff member self-esteem, satisfaction, and personal responsibility, which in turn decreases staff absences and turnover, enabling staff to keep caseloads small (Munro, 2011). Similarly, McQuillin et al. (2022) argue that smaller caseloads would help retain both staff and mentors, which would decrease the cost of staff and mentor recruitment, which may, in turn, allow programs to hire more staff to support matches. Although these theories haven't been tested in mentoring, studies support some of these ideas. For example, one study found that smaller caseloads were linked with program completion (Theodos et al., 2017). Interviews of paid mentors who serve more than one youth similarly highlight the stress experienced when caseloads are too high and the negative effects caseload size can have on attending to the needs of their mentees (Lakind et al., 2014).

There is always more [mentors] can be learning and working on around their skills...

Embracing a continuous improvement mindset.

Even if your program has found tremendous success, there are always aspects of your services that could be improved. We know from research (e.g., Keller et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2012) that a continuous improvement approach to program development and delivery can strengthen program quality, support sustainability, and help a program adapt to changes in the community and shifts in what young people and volunteers want from their program experience. Many practices discussed in this resource, such as seeking the input of an advisory committee, tracking implementation data, and engaging trainers and technical assistance providers, can help facilitate improvements in the program over time. But none of that happens without program leaders and stakeholders having a desire to improve, to bolster the quality of the program experience, and to provide high-quality mentoring to as many young people as possible. We hope your program thinks carefully about what continuous improvement might look like for you, how you will identify opportunities to improve, and who you might partner with to do the hard work of continuously revising and strengthening your program over time.

You may also wish to infuse this continuous improvement mindset into your mentors. There is always more they can be learning and working on around their skills and ability to "show up" for young

people. If your program is able to embrace this value, encourage it in your staff, infuse it into your practices, and share it with all stakeholders, you may find that an improvement mindset will naturally extend down to your mentors and youth.

There may be other dimensions for you to consider in the values your program emphasizes, such as:

- religious or spiritual beliefs;
- cultural values;
- community or national challenges; and
- values inherent in the program setting, such as those within a host school or other institution.

Regardless of the specific values and perspectives that inform your work, we encourage all programs to reflect on these considerations and continually revisit these values over time. The world around us is constantly changing, and your program's values and principles may also change over time. What is most important is that your program is aware of those shifts and continually thinking about how services can be improved so your mentoring work provides the community with what it wants and needs.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Who decides what our organization's values are? How can we balance differences in perspectives? How can we ensure that power dynamics don't interfere with the establishment of meaningful values and beliefs about our work?**

- **How do youth and families from different backgrounds think about mentoring? What role do they want our program to play in their lives and how does that role align with their values?**

- **How can we raise our awareness of the diversity of the community we operate within?**

- **How does our staff think about young people and their families? Have we examined our own perceptions and biases?**

- **What can we do to minimize the risk of harm to youth who may already be facing adversity based on their identity or background? How might our work inadvertently harm them and what measures can we take to guard against that?**

- **How can we demonstrate our commitment to being the best mentoring program we can be over time?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Identify the values, beliefs, ethical principles, and ways of knowing that are important to youth, their caregivers, and the broader organization or community you serve. Create opportunities for these groups to share their thoughts and spend time reflecting on how their ideas align (or don't) with those of your staff, board, and funders.**

- **Form an Inclusion and Belonging Committee or other ad hoc group tasked with examining how well the program is living up to its values and honoring the identities inherent in youth, families, and the community.**

- **Proactively involve youth, caregivers, and volunteers from diverse backgrounds in crafting inclusive policies or ethical guidelines.**

- **Frequently ask participants about their experience in the program, keeping track of that feedback and using it to continuously improve the program experience.**

- **Have youth or other stakeholders review program materials to identify instances where youth or the community are described in ways that are overly negative or ignore strengths.**

- **Remove barriers that limit the participation of some individuals in the program (e.g., transportation challenges, inconvenient program locations or meeting times, power dynamics that limit how or when others can use their voice).**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• The frequency with which the program's values statement is reviewed and revised.

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide. Weiston-Serdan, T., Routledge.
This book introduces the concept of critical mentoring, presenting its theoretical and empirical foundations, and providing telling examples of what it looks like in practice, and what it can achieve.

First Do No Harm: Ethical Principles for Youth Mentoring Relationships. Rhodes, J., Liang, B., and Spencer, R., Professional Psychology: Research and Practice. Based on the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, this resource presents a set of ethical principles to guide mentors and programs in their work with mentees.

"Honoring Youth Voice and Building Power" from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Santiago, E., and Chen, M., MENTOR. This chapter discusses the importance of youth voice in mentoring.

"How Mentors and Mentoring Programs Can Support Mentees' Ethnic/Racial Identity."
Sánchez, B., The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring. This blog post provides tips for programs/organizations and mentors on how to help youth of color develop a healthy ethnic/racial identity. It also explains why a healthy ethnic/racial identity is important for youth of color.

"Practicing Cultural Humility" from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Sánchez, B., MENTOR. This chapter discusses how mentors can practice cultural humility in their work with youth.

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 2

STRONG PROGRAM DESIGN

Standard of Practice: All mentoring programs should design their services based on careful consideration of youth strengths, needs, available resources, and a theory of change that describes how the program's mentoring experiences can help youth achieve meaningful progress on relevant outcomes. This program design should be codified through written documents that include a mission statement, a vision statement, a logic model and theory of change, and a policy and procedures manual.

STRONG PROGRAM DESIGN

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

All mentoring programs should design their services based on careful consideration of youth strengths, needs, available resources, and a theory of change that describes how the program's mentoring experiences can help youth achieve meaningful progress on relevant outcomes. This program design should be codified through written documents that include a mission statement, a vision statement, a logic model and theory of change, and a policy and procedures manual.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has written mission and vision statements that detail the purpose of the program and its vision for participating young people and, as relevant, the broader community.* A vision statement offers an aspirational view of the type of world/community the program hopes to contribute to, while the mission statement articulates how the program will do that. Both should reflect the program's values as identified in Element 1.

■ *The program has a logic model that broadly illustrates how program resources, activities, and inputs lead to key outputs that are connected to meaningful short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes for participating youth and, as relevant, the community.* The logic model should be made available to funders, program participants, and other stakeholders who can benefit from seeing how the program is structured and the many factors that go into program operations and supporting mentees. See the Discussion for more information.

■ *The program has a theory of change that describes in detail how a youth's program experiences are designed to lead them toward the outcomes prioritized by the program.* Although a logic model and theory of change share many similarities (for example, both are often rendered as one-page graphics), a theory of change is more tightly focused on the journey a young person is expected to go on while they are being mentored in the program. Specifically, it describes how the activities a mentor and youth engage in are designed to lead the young person toward meaningful achievements or goals. See the Discussion section for more details.

■ *The program has a written policy and procedures manual that clearly articulates program rules and official policies, as well as the procedures that implement those policies in day-to-day operations.* Common content for this manual includes policies related to program staff (e.g., hiring practices, staff roles, professional development), volunteer management (e.g., mentor eligibility, screening protocols, training delivery, match support), youth and caregiver engagement (e.g., initial recruitment, matching practices, match closure and celebration practices), and other important program tasks, including match monitoring, data collection, and fundraising activities.

■ *The program reviews and updates program design materials on a regular basis to ensure that continuous improvement is possible.* Mentoring programs are, ideally, constantly evolving as the needs of youth change over time and as key resources such as funding or staffing come and go. Programs are encouraged to review their policies and procedures on an annual basis, at a minimum, to update their operations with fresh thinking and improved processes.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations may help design more effective services in certain models or spaces and should influence the theory of change as to how mentoring "works."

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

There are many important considerations when designing group mentoring programs. We recommend considering the following design elements:

Careful consideration of the structure and composition of groups, including the mentor-youth ratio and group size. Group mentoring programs are typically structured with either one mentor matched with a small group of youth (3–6) or several co-mentors working with a slightly larger group (8–12). The co-mentoring approach offers several advantages, including fewer canceled meetings when one mentor is unavailable, improved ability to manage the groups, and empowering co-mentors to offer distinct forms of support and work together to mutually reinforce key messages or learnings for mentees. Both approaches can offer strong adult support to the group and enable youth to get to know one another, take on leadership roles, and truly collaborate and bond with one another in the program's activities. While an ideal mentor-youth ratio has not been clearly identified in research and likely depends heavily on the goals and activities of the program, there is an emerging sense among researchers and practitioners that a ratio of about *four to five mentees for every adult mentor* in the group is a "sweet spot" as it allows for both adequate mentor supervision and facilitation and youth ownership and leadership of the group's activities (Kupersmidt, et al., 2020b). Large groups (e.g., over 12 youth) can experience challenges regardless of how many mentors are there to support the work. For example, larger groups allow some youth to become disengaged, for cliques and subgroups to form, and for a variety of other issues to creep into the overall cohesion of the group (Kuperminc, 2022). Programs will need to consider these factors carefully.

Programs will also need to consider when a group may need to be merged into another group if its membership drops below a minimum threshold due to attrition or other factors. See Element 12 for more guidance on managing changes in group size or composition.

Providing structured, yet flexible, activities. Group mentoring programs should be built around a robust curriculum of lessons and/or activities that guide the content and structure of group interactions. However, programs should also recognize that groups may move at their own pace or decide to focus on other meaningful activities or conversations in light of new needs or circumstances youth are facing, thus there is a need for some flexibility in how curricular lessons or activities are implemented. The types of activities offered will vary depending on program goals, but in general, group activities should:

- Emphasize active involvement and interaction for all group participants.
- Build on prior activities or further elaborate a theme related to program goals.
- Offer opportunities for honest reflection and open, safe sharing.
- Emphasize role plays or other scenario-based opportunities to practice new skills or behaviors.
- Facilitate knowledge acquisition and skill-building.
- Allow youth to lead and take some ownership of the activities.
- Promote group cohesion and the development of positive group culture.

Ensuring access to resources, physical space, and supplies. Because group mentoring programs are very activity-driven and tend to be housed at a site like a school, recreation center, or other organization they must be clear about their physical space and resource needs with site leadership and coordinate with others who may also need to access these assets. If the program is housed in a "host" site like a school, a Memorandum of Understanding or other binding document can help clarify agreements around access to space and resources.

Empowering groups to develop their own norms, rituals, and customs. Given that creating a sense of group ownership and community is a key component of strong group mentoring programs, practitioners are encouraged to think about how they can encourage groups to develop their own customs, rituals, and group rules. This can include a common greeting or opening icebreaker to each meeting, a set of rules around confidentiality and handling conflict, or even rituals on how they celebrate accomplishments by group members or welcome new members to the group.

Emphasizing belonging and safety for mentees. Both research and practice highlight these two characteristics — mentees feeling a sense of belonging combined with a sense that the group is a safe place for them — as being at the heart of effective group mentoring programs (see Kupersmidt et al., 2020b). Consider how these conditions can be achieved through specific activities, rituals, and agreements, as well as establishing understanding with group participants of what they should do if they do not feel safe or included in the group.

Developing components of the theory of change to account for potential impacts related to peer interactions. A key strength of group mentoring approaches is their ability to benefit youth both through mentor-youth interactions and the peer-to-peer interactions and relationships they foster. When developing a group mentoring theory of change, be sure to incorporate both sets of pathways when outlining how youth outcomes are fostered through the program.

Group programs are encouraged to review MENTOR's 2020 group mentoring supplement to the fourth edition of the EEPM (Kupersmidt et al., 2020b) for deeper discussion of these design elements.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring programs, particularly cross-age peer programs in which older peers mentor youth who are several years younger, have several special considerations in how they design and deliver their services. We recommend these programs pay particular attention to the following principles:

Prioritize forming and facilitating meaningful relationships, which can be more challenging when both participants are young people. Almost all peer mentoring programs use some kind of planned curriculum or suggested set of activities that are intended to produce specific outcomes in both mentees and mentors, such as knowledge about a topic, skill-building, or reflection. But these activities are too often used to define the entire experience, de-emphasizing the establishment of meaningful relationships between the younger mentees and their older peer mentors. The role of peer mentors should not be simply delivering curriculum content or leading prescribed activities. Their most important job should be to form a mutually rewarding friendship with another student or group of students. Strategies to assist matches in achieving this goal include:

- Engaging them in activities that are simply about the building of their relationship and nothing else.
- Ensuring they have time throughout the program cycle dedicated to getting to know each other and sharing important events in their lives.
- Encouraging them to name and reflect on the qualities of their relationship.

Emphasize the potential for positive outcomes for both mentors and mentees. Because peer mentors are also youth themselves, cross-age peer mentoring programs should structure their services to provide *mentors* with ample opportunities to develop and grow. These programs are excellent contexts for building leadership skills and helping older youth "come out of their shell" — fostering their confidence through meaningful contribution, enhancing their self-esteem, building communication skills, and supporting their positive identity development. A program's theory of change and logic model should articulate clear and measurable outcomes for both the mentees and their peer mentors, explaining how serving in this role can support mentors' development.

Avoid common participation challenges. There are several challenges to note, particularly in school contexts. These include:

- Mentors having scheduling conflicts (e.g., inability to attend consistently given the timing of after-school programs) or being overly busy with extracurricular activities.
- Challenges accessing adequate physica l space or resources for program activities.
- Transportation challenges in models where mentors travel to a different school or site for program activities.
- Mentors focusing more on interactions with their fellow mentors than with their mentees. This is a natural tendency in youth that programs will need to curb through observation and redirection.

Provide peer mentors with adequate training and support. We often associate the mentor role with adult skills and wisdom, but mentors in these programs are still young people themselves. Thus, they will need more instruction on clarifying the mentor role, understanding how to work with the adults running the program, their role in leading activities with their mentee, and how to build communication skills, like giving positive feedback, active listening, and nonverbal communication. Role-playing

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and other training activities that allow peer mentors to practice handling specific scenarios may be particularly impactful in training peer mentors. They also need, and can benefit from, increased levels of program support and adult supervision relative to that required for adult mentors. Because peer mentors may not know how to handle a variety of challenges or may make mistakes in how they interact with their mentees, it is important that at least one staff member can observe all matches and offer support and corrective instruction as needed.

Peer programs are encouraged to review MENTOR's 2020 cross-age peer mentoring supplement to the fourth edition of the EEPM for deeper discussion of these design elements (Kupersmidt et al., 2020a).

E-MENTORING MODELS

There are several considerations that e-mentoring programs should emphasize in their program design:

Selecting the appropriate technology to facilitate meaningful interactions. Some programs develop sophisticated software platforms with embedded activities, multiple modalities for communication, and robust staff oversight and monitoring. Others simply get by with Zoom meetings, emails, phone calls, or "bulletin board" style platforms. Regardless of the technology selected, programs should ensure that it is safe, accessible to participants, a tool they feel comfortable using, and appropriate for the types of interactions that will lead to positive program outcomes.

There are also accessibility considerations when selecting program software or hardware. Programs are encouraged to think carefully about accommodations and alternative communication methods for participants with disabilities. E-mentoring programs often exclude youth or mentors in unintended ways when they make assumptions about technology access and ignore the practical realities of those with disabilities.

Offering meaningful training and support for participants. This includes both training on technology use (and the tech support that will be needed) and training designed to build the digital communication skills of mentors and youth. Programs should assume wide variance in the technology skills and online communication abilities of mentors and youth. Logging challenges mentors and youth report as they progress through the program can help refine training topics for future cohorts.

Providing meaningful activity prompts, reminders, and virtual support. Mentors and youth will need more recommendations on things to do together than they would in an in-person program because they will lack the ability to explore their community together and find meaningful activities out in the "real world." Programs should not assume that e-mentoring programs require less daily maintenance and match support. In fact, these models likely require more support from staff, as the lack of in-person interaction can lead to gaps in communication and misunderstandings that can feel hurtful to both youth and mentors.

E-mentoring programs are encouraged to review MENTOR's 2019 e-mentoring supplement to the fourth edition of the EEPM (Garringer et al., 2019) for deeper discussion of these design elements.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School- and site-based models will benefit from adhering to both the general practices in this Element and many of those discussed above for group and peer models, which are often set at schools or within youth serving organizations. Broadly speaking, school- and site-based programs need to build theories of change that articulate how the mentoring services complement or supplement the overall goals of the organization or institution and how mentoring aligns with other services and supports that youth may be participating in.

Those designing mentoring programs for schools or other site-based locations are encouraged to:

Recognize site leadership and engagement as key to success. One of the most common challenges faced by site-based mentoring programs, particularly school-based programs, is the need for consistent engagement of site leaders or school liaisons. These programs need champions—adults in the school (or other) system who can secure buy-in from decision-makers and generate access to facilities and resources that enable the program to thrive. The need for strong site engagement with the program also trickles down to the school counselors and teachers (or other frontline staff in nonschool contexts) who are often directly responsible for implementing the program. These staffs need flexibility in their schedules and adequate time to prepare, help facilitate, and observe program activities.

Create clear program guidelines that reflect school or site policies. Ensure that the program understands school or site policies and create program policies with them in mind. For example, work with the site to understand when and how mentors will be informed of mentee absences (e.g., school absences, testing, field trips), whether and to what extent mentors can communicate with school staff and teachers, and what spaces and resources mentors can and can't have access to.

Think carefully about the importance of consistency in the program theory of change. In school- and site-based mentoring, there will be inevitable challenges to ensuring perfect attendance. Planning around program design should take careful consideration of the realistic schedules of participants and how that may influence their mentoring experience and eventual outcomes. For example, mentoring delivered as part of an after-school program may face challenges in delivering a consistent program experience if youth are not attending every day of the week or are being picked up by caregivers at different times.

Negotiate adequate space and resources for mentoring activities. Because space is at a premium in most schools and other site-based program locations, the mentoring staff will need to work with others to ensure that matches can meet in areas that are conducive to achieving program goals. Mentors and youth may need some level of privacy for meaningful conversations, and they may need access to resources such as the library, art studios, or recreation equipment to engage in some mentoring activities. Ideally, the site environment will not be a distraction or barrier when mentors and youth are together.

Consider the influence of the broader program site on mentoring outcomes. When developing a theory of change, consider ways that the site itself could contribute to, or hinder, outcomes. For example, simply by meeting with a mentor in the school context, youth may be seen in a more positive light by their peers (Cavell & Henrie, 2010). The mutual reinforcement of their changed peer dynamics may contribute to mentee outcomes as much as the work of the mentor. Programs should also consider how the timing of the mentoring meetings could influence outcomes and build this into the theory of change — for example, pulling academically vulnerable youth out of class for mentoring may not be as beneficial as serving these youth after school or during lunch, when they are not missing valuable instruction time (Schwartz et al., 2012).

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Youth development organizations offering informal mentoring through existing staff should clearly articulate how the mentoring support will complement or supplement the overall goals of the organization and the delivery of other services and supports youth may be participating in. Mentoring should be integrated into the overall theory of change for the organization and its contribution to broader outcomes should be clearly articulated.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

The specific practices discussed in this section work alongside the values and principles discussed in Element 1 to form the foundation of your mentoring services. No mentoring program can find long-term sustainability and success if they cannot articulate and codify what they do, why they do it, and the rules and policies that govern how staff members, volunteers, youth, and caregivers participate in the program. Mentoring programs, especially new programs that are developing their services for the first time, should think through their program model and ensure they are offering the right mentoring experience to help young people get where they want to be.

All programs should have mission and vision statements that clearly describe what the program does and what it hopes to accomplish. A vision statement provides an aspirational statement of the type of world/community the program hopes to contribute to. The mission statement describes how the program will do that — through what types of services and for what types of populations — laying a strong foundation for all the activities that contribute to running your mentoring program. This statement is your opportunity to succinctly and clearly state your program's values, how it addresses an unmet community need, and how it sets itself apart from other community services.

We also strongly encourage programs to invest considerable time and energy in writing up their policies and procedures. A policy and procedures manual is one of the most valuable resources for mentoring programs and dictates what the program does to deliver its services and the policies that ensure those procedures are followed consistently.

It includes general rules and guidelines for program delivery, as well as risk management policies, and can be instrumental in not only ensuring that program activities are implemented in standardized and efficient ways, but also guarding against the loss of institutional knowledge that often results from staff departures. When developing and reviewing your policies and procedures, be sure to weave program values like inclusiveness throughout those policies and ensure that all policies clearly reflect your stated program values.

The two other practices in this Element are the development of a **logic model and theory of change.** Both require in-depth consideration of your program and the services it provides and will be most effective and helpful when developed with the input of key stakeholders. Developing these models of how your program works can be difficult for those unfamiliar with the process. We have suggested some resources below that can help programs get started. This is also an area where a consultant or evaluator can be helpful in not

only building the model with your staff, but also in determining key metrics and performance indicators that facilitate accountability and performance management. These metrics can provide evidence that staff are performing in a way that delivers the outputs needed to achieve program outcomes (i.e., that the model is working as intended).

Basic Components of a Logic Model

We recommend starting with developing the logic model. A logic model is typically a one-page graphic that broadly describes the mechanics of the program — that is, the program resources that contribute to staff and volunteer activities which lead to quantifiable outputs and ultimately outcomes for youth. A detailed logic model can help ensure your program stays in touch with community needs and implements the activities you believe are needed to achieve your goals for youth. Creating the logic model requires taking a step back from your program to think about:

1. **Needs:** The community/youth challenges your program is designed to address.

2. **Inputs:** All the resources needed to run your program (e.g., funds, community partners, volunteers, space).

3. **Activities:** The things your program does to create mentoring relationships (e.g., training program staff, mentor recruitment and screening, match support).

4. **Outputs:** The metrics that will enable you to assess whether, and how well, these activities are happening (e.g., hours of staff training

implemented, number of volunteers recruited and screened, percentage of mentors receiving match support as intended).

5. **Outcomes:** The youth outcomes that are expected from these activities. These can include short-term outcomes (e.g., improved study skills) as well as intermediate or longer-term outcomes (e.g., college enrollment). They represent aspirations for all participating youth, and achieving them is often the primary reason for the program's existence. Ideally, they should reflect goals that youth, caregivers, and the community have expressed as priorities.

Once you have developed your logic model, the broad structure of your program will help you think through your theory of change. Unlike the logic model that requires you to take a bird's-eye view of your program and all the ingredients that contribute to its functioning, developing a theory of change requires you to "zoom in" on the specifics of what is happening on the ground in the mentoring relationship and how this may catalyze the youth benefits outlined in your logic model. In other words, the theory of change articulates how specific program experiences shape the pathways youth take — for example, in their behavior or attitudes — to arrive at the outcomes your program hopes to achieve. For instance, a mentor's consistent meetings with a young person may improve their self-esteem, which may in turn boost their hopefulness about their future, which may motivate them to put more effort into studying, which ultimately increases their school performance and odds of graduating. A strong theory of change will explain exactly how mentoring changes their attitudes and behaviors, in alignment with the activities they engage in while participating in the program.

Like the logic model, this conceptual model should detail critical program practices that contribute to developing and supporting mentoring relationships. But it goes into more detail on what happens within these relationships and how those activities lead to short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for youth. Also, unlike the logic model, it doesn't contain standard components that flow in one "direction" (e.g., from inputs to activities to outputs). Thus, your program's theory of change and how different activities are related to each other may be fairly unique. Developing a theory of change is helpful in determining what mentor behaviors and match activities may be key to achieving your desired outcomes, what outcomes are and are not in line with your structure and mentoring activities, and what outcomes may be important to measure.

An important first step in developing a strong theory of change is to determine the nature of the program's mentoring relationships at a very fundamental level (see Cavell et al., 2021; Karcher & Nakkula, 2011). What is the function of mentoring relationships in your program? Are the relationships primarily meant to:

- *Provide youth with a loving, supportive, friendship-oriented experience that helps build their self-esteem, social emotional skills, sense of identity and belonging, and other benefits related to connectedness to others?*

OR

- *Help youth overcome a specific problem, circumstance, or period of transition in their lives?*

These functions are not mutually exclusive (Karcher & Nakkula, 2011). For example, a mentor who is supporting the youth's transition to college may be loving and supportive, much in the way a caring,

...it is important for mentoring programs to determine which end of that continuum their services trend toward...

relationship-oriented mentor will often help youth overcome specific challenges in their lives. But it is important for mentoring programs to determine which end of that continuum their services trend toward, as that will be instrumental in determining what all the other practices discussed in this resource should look like to be most effective. As a simple example, programs emphasizing the relationship as "an end unto itself" may choose to highlight conversational skills, expressing empathy, and strategies to address challenging discussion topics during mentor training and support. Such a program might also choose to have matches meet for extended periods of time to foster deeper and more kinship-like connections between mentors and youth. Alternatively, programs in which mentoring relationships are simply a means to deliver other information or supports to the youth ("a means to an end") may choose to employ a curriculum and set of activities that guides mentor-mentee interactions and more purposefully moves the youth toward the desired goal. Such a program might emphasize activity facilitation and problem-solving in mentor training and support to ensure that all youth get a similar, structured, and targeted program experience. These programs might also place less emphasis on longer-term mentoring relationships, because the focus on a narrower, targeted set of outcomes might be achievable in a shorter time frame.

Where a program lands on the continuum from "the relationship is the point" to "the relationship is the conduit" will also dictate other aspects of the service delivery model. A program whose theory of change hinges on mentors helping youth build stronger peer relationships might choose a group model to provide youth with experience building new relationships with peers and may de-emphasize mentor-youth relationship strength in favor of focusing on facilitating strong relationships among the youth themselves. A mentoring program designed to use mentors to build a sense of science identity in adolescents might choose to have mentors and youth engage in science experiments that build lab skills and a sense of belonging in science, while de-emphasizing deep, emotional connections between mentors and youth. A program serving youth who have been abused and placed in the child welfare system will likely emphasize the socioemotional skills of mentors and focus on one-to-one matches that promote safety, belonging, and feelings of acceptance over longer periods of time. Regardless of whether the mentoring activities you encourage and support are more in line with a targeted or relational focus, those activities and the short- and longer-term outcomes they foster should be outlined in a theory of change. (See the sidebar What Types of Activities Are Most Effective? for further information about determining what mentors and youth should do to meet program goals.)

These simple examples highlight the importance of building a theory of change that explains how youth get from initial enrollment in the program to the lofty outcomes we hope for. This theory of change will inform details about program structure, mentor-mentee interactions, and the use of curriculum or guided activities that can get the job done. Simply put, if your theory of change can't explain why your program is configured the way it is, and the actions that staff, mentors, youth, and caregivers take and why, then it likely needs more work. See the Resources section below for additional tools that can help your program develop a strong theory of change and an accompanying logic model that illustrates how the program functions accordingly.

All these materials should be reviewed and updated at least annually. The written documents discussed in this Element — mission statements, logic models, theories of change, policy, and procedures manuals — should be living documents that evolve as programs find more efficient ways of delivering their services or as circumstances change. An annual review can help ensure that your program continues to meet the needs of your community and that your program materials accurately reflect the growth of your program as it evolves over time.

What Types of Mentoring Activities Are Most Effective?

In determining whether to take a more targeted or relational-focused approach, programs may ask, "Which approach is more effective?" A recent meta-analysis of 48 mentoring evaluations found that "targeted," skills-based programs yielded much larger impacts than more nonspecific relationship-based programs (Christensen et al., 2020). However, it is important to keep in mind that evaluations of targeted programs (and the programs they study) likely focus on very specific, targeted outcomes (e.g., academic, emotional well-being), whereas relationship-based programs typically focus on achieving a larger number of outcomes across more domains — and their evaluations likely report on their average impact in all these areas. Thus, although a targeted program may achieve larger impacts in the specific areas they are focused on, friendship-based programs may achieve impacts — albeit smaller, on average — in a much wider range of areas.

Although the activities your program encourages and supports should reflect your specific program goals, research has outlined several broad types of activities that may contribute to stronger outcomes. For example, programs that support a teaching or advocacy role for mentors yield stronger impacts than those that don't (DuBois et al., 2011), and mentors who are trained and supported in these roles, are more likely to take on these roles during their interactions with and for youth, and ultimately yield stronger impacts than those who aren't (Jarjoura et al., 2018). In one study, engaging in "balanced activities" that combined a range of conversations and engagement in creative and sports activities was linked with the development of stronger matches for high academic performers than focusing more exclusively on instructional activities (Kanchewa et al., 2021). Yet, even when specific activities are highlighted as strengthening outcomes, the quality of the relationship may still be important. A study by Lyons et al. (2019), for example, highlights the value of goal-setting and feedback-oriented activities in fostering outcomes in school-based mentoring programs, but these activities were most powerful in the context of "close" relationships. Austin and her colleagues (Austin et al., 2020) similarly found that mentors who connect their mentees with programs and people in their community and create a close bond with them yield particularly strong impacts (e.g., in extracurricular activity involvement, help-seeking, and parent-child relationship quality). Other work suggests that it is not so much the activity type, but rather the frequency of engaging in these activities that is linked with youth perceptions of mentor support and relationship quality (Larose et al., 2015).

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **What are the primary goals we have for the youth in our program? Who developed those goals? Did we solicit the input of youth, caregivers, and the broader community when developing these goals and program outcomes?**

- **How have our values and principles (Element 1) informed our program goals and youth outcomes?**

- **How do we label youth "needs" in our theory of change? Is our language affirming and strengths-based? Are we inadvertently devaluing or excluding certain groups of youth?**

- **How does the mentoring experience we provide change young people and their attitudes and behaviors? Do our services change others beyond the youth in positive ways? Do our services, over time, have the potential to even change the community or site (e.g., school) our program serves?**

- **Are our program goals realistic? Do they seem like the types of outcomes a mentoring relationship could reasonably foster for most of our young people? What else might determine how impactful our mentoring is?**

- **What do our mentors and young people do when they are together? Why do they do these things? What evidence do we have that those activities will lead to our desired outcomes?**

- **How are we ensuring that our program activities are inclusive of the diversity of our community?**

- **How can we measure whether our activities are putting young people on the path toward the goals highlighted in our theory of change? How would we know they are moving along that pathway?**

- **Where does the institutional knowledge of our program live? Have we written down our policies, rules, and step-by-step processes for getting our work done?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Ask a diverse cross-section of youth, caregivers, and members of the community to share their thoughts about what outcomes or benefits they would hope for from their mentoring experience. Asking mentors to share the benefits they themselves hope to gain (or already have gained) from their participation can also be valuable.**

■ **Have young people design your logic model and theory of change graphics. They can use both their artistic talents and perspectives on, and experiences in, mentoring to help these visualizations come to life.**

■ **Ask youth to periodically review your policies and procedures and recommend improvements in language or implementation. This should be done on a regular basis and programs should consider special committees to provide focused review and input (e.g., an LGBTQIA2S+ ally group reviewing the inclusiveness of program policies, or a disability committee looking specifically at areas of improvement related to inclusive practice for participants with disabilities).**

■ **Ask youth, caregivers, and mentors to craft your program's mission statement. Allow them to sum up the work of the program and the vision you collectively have for young people.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **Completion of an annual review of policies and procedures.**

- **Number of policies or procedures updated annually or in response to scaled program growth (i.e., regional or state expansion).**

- **Number of policies or procedures updated based on feedback from program participants.**

- **Number of downloads or other dissemination of the program's design materials (e.g., logic model, theory of change, mission/vision statement**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

9 Characteristics of a Mission Statement. BoardSource. This 1-page infographic provides recommendations for developing a compelling mission statement.

The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development. Anderson, A., Aspen Institute. This guide provides a basic overview of the major concepts that define theories of change along with guidance and a resource toolbox to support development of theories of change.

Developing a Theory of Change and Logic Model. MENTOR Canada and the Ontario Mentoring Coalition. A 2-page introductory guide to developing a theory of change and logic model at a glance.

Developmental Relationships: Relationships to Help Young People Thrive. Search Institute. This Search Institute resource describes how all adults can step up to help groups of young people grow in developmentally appropriate ways. This information can be used to develop or enhance mentoring services and theories of change.

Example Logic Models and Theories of Change for Youth Mentoring Programs. National Mentoring Resource Center. This set of resources provides sample theories of change and logic models for a variety of different youth mentoring program models.

Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual. Ballasy, L., Fullop, M., and Garringer, M., Education Northwest. This resource provides a template for programs to create a customized manual to guide policies and day-to-day services.

Introduction from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Garringer, M., and Herrera, C., MENTOR. This chapter provides an overview of basic principles and concepts of quality mentoring and can help inform designing services.

Logic Model Development Guide. W.K. Kellogg Foundation. A resource for designing and using a strong program logic model.

Measurement Guidance Toolkit. National Mentoring Resource Center. This resource provides recommended instruments for measuring key youth outcomes and risk and protective factors that may be relevant to program outcomes.

Starting a Mentoring Program. MENTOR. A self-paced tutorial on how to conceptualize and develop a mentoring program. https://www.mentoring.org/resource/starting-a-youth-mentoring-program/

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 3

RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Standard of Practice: Program recruits an appropriate number of eligible youth by implementing a formal recruitment plan.

RECRUITMENT OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Program recruits an appropriate number of eligible youth by implementing a formal recruitment plan.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has a written recruitment plan with multiple strategies for recruiting mentees.* This plan should include:

- Information about eligibility criteria for youth and families to help ensure the program reaches the youth who can benefit most from program services.
- Where those individuals might be most easily reached.
- A target goal for the number of youth recruited to ensure the program does not exceed its capacity.
- Messaging designed to get a diverse and representative array of prospective mentees (and their caregivers, when appropriate) interested in the program.
- Multiple recruitment strategies and activities, including a blend of in-person, online, and media-based methods that will reach youth and their families.
- Procedural information about who conducts recruitment activities, when and where those activities occur, and how progress will be tracked.

■ *The program uses recruitment messages that realistically portray program expectations, benefits to youth (and caregivers when appropriate), and the supports youth and mentors will receive throughout program participation.* Recruitment efforts can help set reasonable expectations for youth and families about the experience by accurately describing what to expect from the mentoring relationship and the program, clarifying the types of benefits youth may experience, and highlighting how mentors will be screened and supported in their role.

■ *The program has publicly available eligibility criteria and participation requirements for youth.* Programs are encouraged to develop guidelines that detail the youth's role in the relationship, eligibility criteria, expectations around participation, and important program rules so that prospective mentees and caregivers can gauge their fit for the program. Making these criteria available to partner organizations can help ensure that they refer youth who could benefit the most from the services.

■ *Recruitment messages take a strengths-based approach, represent the full diversity of the community being served, and ensure that eligible individuals from all walks of life feel welcomed and accepted in the program.* Recruitment materials, both in print and online, should be fully representative of the community served and portray youth and families in positive ways that honor their strengths and goals. Materials should be offered in the primary languages of youth and caregivers being recruited, and programs should have staff who can converse with youth and families in their primary language.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *As needed, the program encourages mentees and/or caregivers to assist in recruiting other youth and families whose needs match the services being offered by the program.* Programs may also want to enlist the support of program alumni to support recruitment efforts — a youth/alumni advisory committee can be helpful in ensuring that recruitment messages and activities are on point.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations may help certain programs reach youth and their families more effectively.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group programs should consider these additional strategies and communication points when recruiting youth to participate in the program:

- Recruitment messaging and materials should clearly highlight the benefits of participating in a group experience and how the group format can lead to the positive outcomes the program is striving for.
- Youth (and caregivers where relevant) may have questions about how the group functions (e.g., how groups are formed) and safety concerns (e.g., how other youth are determined to be safe and appropriate for the program). Recruitment messaging and materials should anticipate these questions and provide information that can increase comfort with the group format for prospective participants.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring programs will generally want to follow the practices recommended above. In addition, youth (and caregivers where relevant) may have questions or concerns about how the mentors will be determined to be safe and appropriate for working with someone younger and why a peer approach is a good fit for the youth's needs and overall program goals. Recruitment messages should anticipate such questions and provide information that builds interest in a peer-to-peer mentoring experience.

E-MENTORING MODELS

E-mentoring programs have several additional considerations that may influence the recruitment of youth participants:

- Youth may have questions about the technology used for communication in the program that can be clarified in recruitment messages. For example, programs can provide information about exactly how mentors and youth communicate and the technology support provided by the program. If specific software or hardware is required for participation, details should be provided during recruitment so that prospective participants can determine if the experience will be a good fit.
- Youth (and caregivers where relevant) may also have concerns about online safety and program risk management practices, making it particularly important to address such concerns proactively in recruitment messages.
- Recruitment messages and materials should also convey the benefits of an e-mentoring relationship, specifically. The use of technology can have many advantages and recruitment messages should highlight these benefits and why a virtual mentoring experience might be a good fit for a young person.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School- and site-based programs should consider leveraging the site's existing connections with youth and families. For youth already participating in the broader services of the organization, mentoring can be presented as a new option for all or offered to those who have expressed or demonstrated a need for extra support. Parents and caregivers may need to be approached differently, as they may only be at the school or site for brief pickups and drop-offs. Site-based programs can also incorporate recruitment messages to communication materials the site is already using, such as a newsletter or general website. For external partners who are bringing a program into an existing setting, it can also be helpful to obtain a letter of support from the host site that can be shared with youth and families to highlight the partnership and explain why mentoring is being added. School- and site-based programs should also address the following additional considerations:

- Providing information about how the mentoring program activities fit in with the rest of the school schedule or the other activities happening at the site.
- Explaining how the work of the program supports or complements the overall goals of the school or organization.
- Providing additional information about how mentors are determined to be safe and appropriate before working at the school or site.
- If youth are referred to the program by teachers, counselors, or other site staff, those individuals should be provided with information that can help them make appropriate referrals of eligible youth.
- Potential participants may also need information about why they are being approached about the mentoring opportunity, reiterating that this is being offered to bolster the young person's experience and not for remedial or punitive reasons. As with the program vision, such language should be presented from a strengths-based perspective.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

As noted above for site-based models, youth development organizations that are offering informal mentoring via staff will need to consider how the opportunity for optional mentoring will be presented to youth participants and their caregivers. Caregivers, in particular, may wonder why their child is being approached for additional support or a different type of relationship with staff. If staff are serving as mentors in addition to other roles, youth and caregivers may need information on how the program prepares them for this additional responsibility and how it ensures safety and a positive relationship experience.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

The specific practices recommended here for recruiting youth largely parallel those outlined for recruiting mentors (Element 4). However, unlike the research base for volunteer recruitment, which has been growing in recent years, few studies have delved into youth recruitment or the efforts to encourage caregivers to engage youth in the program. Thus, the following suggestions are primarily based on practice wisdom and a handful of studies examining related topics.

As is the case for volunteer recruitment, **all mentoring programs should create a written recruitment plan for recruiting the young people described in the program's theory of change.** The recruitment plan should include the number of youth targeted for recruitment for each program cycle. This target number should prioritize quality over quantity — that is, your target should reflect the number of staff you will have to provide strong, consistent support for every match throughout their engagement with the program. Ideally, the plan should also outline multiple methods and modalities to reach those individuals (e.g., print, internet, social media, word of mouth). These methods will depend on the context of your program and the youth you are trying to reach. Community-based programs, for example, typically target caregivers and thus should be framed with caregivers in mind, whereas site-based recruitment efforts may focus more directly on youth outreach.

Word-of-mouth strategies can be particularly effective, regardless of context — for example, encouraging youth participants and their caregivers to share their positive experiences with others in their social circles (Garringer & Benning,

2018). Programs should ensure that mentees and caregivers feel positive about their participation before making this ask and that youth and families understand that declining this request will in no way affect their continued participation in the program. Those who support recruitment efforts in this way will benefit from being provided with talking points, scripts, handouts, fliers, and other materials that can help them spur the interest of other community members.

Programs should ensure that mentees and caregivers feel positive about their participation...

Materials should reflect your program's values (e.g., a commitment to inclusivity), take a strengths-based approach, and ensure that all eligible individuals feel welcomed. This means paying attention to not only gender, racial, and ethnic identities, but also representation of people with disabilities, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and those with different expressions of faith, among others. Also, portraying young people or their families as unidimensional and in some way lacking and in need of your assistance (e.g., "single-parent families," "high-risk youth," "youth lacking positive role models") implies that this is the *only* way your program sees the young people you are serving. These terms not only suggest youth have only one characteristic that defines them, but also hint at values informing your program that might be offensive to the very people you are trying to support (e.g., dual-parent families are a norm to aspire to; youth and their families are responsible for their circumstances; there is something that needs to be "fixed" in their lives; Hillman, 2016).

Programs should make every effort to assess how youth and community members see and experience their recruitment materials and to modify them accordingly.

Recruitment materials should also be tailored to youth (and caregivers of those youth, where relevant) who fit the goals and structure of the program. Even if your program focuses its services on a specific group of youth, all young people come to programs from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of interests, identities, personalities, and needs. Making efforts to understand the needs and interests of the youth you are hoping to serve will help ensure your services are properly focused and that your recruitment materials accurately portray and speak to who youth are and what they want from the experience.

Understanding the motivations for mentoring of the families in your community is also helpful in developing these materials, in that youth and their caregivers will be more attracted to your program if they see it as helpful and relevant to their lives.

Research focused on the caregivers of mentored youth has helped illuminate the motivations that bring families to mentoring programs. In one study, caregivers of girls reported they wanted mentors to provide their daughters with guidance and companionship, support their child's academic progress, and help their child access other resources and opportunities (Keller et al., 2018). Caregivers in another study hoped their child's mentor would serve as an additional positive adult role model and confidant for their child, and to offer their child new experiences that could broaden their sense of self and future possibilities (Spencer et al., 2011). These motivations likely differ across communities and contexts and may shift over time. For example, caregivers in community-based mentoring programs often want new experiences for their child, whereas many in school-based programs specifically want academic support for their child (Sourk et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to regularly check the pulse of individuals in the communities you serve to understand what motivates families and the extent to which your recruitment materials (and program mission) align with these motivations.

Across all programs, regardless of focus, recruitment materials should highlight aspects of the mentoring experience relevant to all youth and address concerns or fears that may be preventing people from getting involved. For example, in addition to the suggestions noted above, materials should:

1. Describe the logistics of your program like how to get involved, the contexts in which mentoring occurs, and the types of activities mentors and their mentees do and do not engage in.

2. **Include a publicly available list of eligibility criteria and requirements to ensure you are inviting the youth most likely to benefit from**

your services. Making this available to all prospective participants can increase the odds that applicants are a good fit for the program. In addition to being publicly available, these criteria should be shared with partner organizations so they know exactly who is and is not a good fit for the program and can refer youth who could benefit the most from your services.

3. Describe how the program supports youth and screens, prepares, and supports its volunteers to help ensure youth are kept safe.

4. Highlight potential benefits for the youth involved, focusing on those in your theory of change and thus, most likely to be experienced by your program participants (see also DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019 for information on mentoring program benefits).

5. **Realistically portray the program's goals and objectives to help ensure that expectations are in line with the experience participants will ultimately have in the program**. Many caregivers, for example, may bring their child to a mentoring program hoping for services that a volunteer mentor may not be well-suited to deliver, or for immediate outcomes that may be unrealistic. When these expectations are not met, caregivers may feel disappointed and prematurely end their child's program participation. In fact, in one study, caregiver dissatisfaction with whether their goals for the program had been met was a significant predictor of match closure even after accounting for youth and mentor satisfaction with their time together (Shamblen et al., 2020). Ensuring that youth have realistic expectations for their involvement is also important; when those expectations are not met, the match may flounder (Spencer, 2007).

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Who can we best serve with our program model? Are our services designed for broad or more focused groups of young people?**

- **Where in our community can we reach the types of prospective mentees we are looking for? Are there places (including online) where we can find them most easily? Are there partnerships we could create with community organizations that could strengthen our recruitment efforts?**

- **What are the right messages to entice prospective mentees and their caregivers? How do we describe the goals of the program and the experience of the mentoring relationship? How do we talk about our program, our mentors, and the ways we support them?**

- **Do we describe our program using a strengths-based, multifaceted view of the young people and families we work with?**

- **Are recruitment materials inclusive of the full community we serve? Do our materials show diverse representation? Who might be missing? How do we talk about inclusivity in our recruitment messaging?**

- **What languages do our materials need to be translated into?**

- **How are we gathering the perspectives of youth and their families in our framing of recruitment materials and in how we are reaching out to community members?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Create opportunities for youth participants to share their thoughts about the types of framing and messages they think would appeal to their peers and make them more likely to join the program. You can even ask them to design and implement a campaign to recruit other young people — this can build their leadership skills and help you tap into social groups and settings where adults have less influence.**

■ **Similarly, ask caregivers to review or craft recruitment messages that would appeal to other parents, guardians, or other caring adults in the lives of youth. They can help identify barriers to involvement your staff might overlook. In fact, asking currently participating caregivers to actively participate in the recruitment of other families might help bridge cultural or class gaps and present the program in a different light than if it were only your staff offering this mentoring experience.**

■ **Ask youth to review your current youth recruitment materials to make sure they are comfortable with how they are portrayed and how the mentoring experience is described.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **Total number of potential mentees reached with specific recruitment messages or presentations.**

• **Total number of applicants in a given time period.**

• **Total number of youth waitlisted (i.e., not being able to be immediately served) in a given time period, if relevant.**

• **Total number of youth referred from each referral source.**

• **The percentage of applicants who meet eligibility criteria.**

• **The sources that led to each participant's application (where they learned about the experience).**

• **The percentage of all recruited youth who end up getting matched with a mentor (or group).**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Finding Mentors, Finding Success. YouthBuild U.S.A., National Mentoring Resource Center. This guide can be used to help prospective mentees understand and define their role in a mentoring relationship and will be especially helpful for youth initiating mentoring relationships in their community.

Preparing For Your Mentoring Relationship as a Mentee. National Mentoring Resource Center. Developed by the NMRC's Youth Advisory Council, this one-page guide can be shared with prospective mentees to answer questions about what mentoring is and how to prepare for a mentoring relationship.

Youth Mentee Guide: Grow Your Mentor Relationships. National Mentoring Resource Center. A guide that can help explain what mentoring is and what to expect from a mentor to prospective mentees. It includes tips and recommendations from young people, for young people, on how to make the most of mentoring.

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 4

RECRUITMENT OF MENTORS

Standard of Practice: Program recruits a diverse pool of appropriate mentors (either volunteers or paid staff mentors), in sufficient numbers, by implementing a formal recruitment plan.

RECRUITMENT OF MENTORS

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Program recruits a diverse pool of appropriate mentors (either volunteers or paid staff mentors), in sufficient numbers, by implementing a formal recruitment plan.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has a written recruitment plan with multiple strategies for attracting mentors.*
This plan should include:

- a target goal for the number of mentors to recruit;
- information about the types of individuals the program is seeking and where they might most easily be reached;
- messaging designed to attract qualified mentors;
- ideally, multiple strategies and activities to present the opportunity to potential mentors; and
- procedural information about who conducts recruitment, when and where it occurs, and how progress is tracked.

■ *The program uses recruitment messages that realistically portray the mentoring experience, the program's expectations, benefits to youth and mentors, and the supports mentors receive.*
Recruitment efforts can help set reasonable expectations for mentors by accurately describing the mentor's role and the program supports they can expect to receive.

■ *The program recruits mentors whose skills, values, motivations, and backgrounds best match the program's services and goals, as well as the characteristics and needs of the youth being served.*
Depending on the goals of the program and the backgrounds and needs of the youth being served, programs may be looking for individuals with particular skills or lived experience to step into the mentoring role.

■ *The program has publicly available eligibility criteria and requirements for mentors.* Programs are encouraged to develop a mentor "job description" that details the mentor's role, the contexts in which they will be mentoring, eligibility criteria, behavioral and participation expectations, and important program rules so that prospective mentors can gauge their fit for the program. Making these criteria available to partner organizations can help ensure that they refer mentors who would be a good fit for the program.

■ *Recruitment messages and materials represent the full diversity of the community being served and ensure that eligible individuals from all walks of life feel welcomed and accepted in the program.* Even if the mentoring program is looking for a fairly specific group of mentors (e.g., women who work in STEM fields), it is important to make sure all recruitment materials are fully representative of the community served, as there are other markers of diversity that may matter.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *The program encourages current and former mentors to assist in recruiting new mentors by providing them with resources to recruit individuals they know.* One of the best ways to recruit mentors is to have current mentors reach out to friends, family, and coworkers who may also be interested in the experience. Programs should make sure to provide mentors with talking points, fliers, or other materials that can help them spur the interest of people in their social networks. Testimonials about the program and mentoring experience from current participants can pique interest and answer key questions for those considering getting involved.

■ *As appropriate, the program supports young people in recruiting their mentors from their existing social network using a "youth-initiated mentoring" approach.* This approach may be particularly meaningful for programs looking for mentors who have specific lived experience, who are from the youth's community and thus can provide more frequent or consistent support, or who can support youth as they transition from the program. These mentors will still need screening, training, and formal acceptance into the program, but youth can nominate individuals with whom they have some prior engagement.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations may help ensure the right individuals hear about and respond to the opportunity to mentor in the program.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group programs should consider these additional strategies when developing mentor recruitment messages and materials:

• Highlighting mentor skills and experiences that lend themselves to working successfully with groups, such as group facilitation skills, prior experience working with youth, strong social skills, and experience implementing a curriculum or leading activities in a group setting. The program may also want to describe training that would be provided on these topics so that mentors without prior experience feel comfortable joining the program.

• Describing the experience of mentoring in a group setting and why it might be a good fit for the applicant (e.g., reaching more young people, leading fun activities, having the support of other mentors, strengthening group facilitation skills). Describing how co-mentors collaborate in team models may also be useful in spurring interest.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Programs recruiting older youth to serve as mentors will need to carefully describe the mentor role and the expectations for participation, as young people may have less familiarity with what it means to be a dependable mentor and might not fully understand the opportunities they have for their own growth from the experience. Additionally, peer programs may consider:

- Recruiting youth with a wide variety of backgrounds to serve as mentors. While it may seem logical to solely focus on recruiting high achieving youth to fill the mentoring role, they may have less to gain from the experience than others. They may also be engaged in more extracurricular activities than the average student, making consistent participation a challenge. The truth is many types of young people can serve as reliable and relatable mentors and program outreach should reach a diverse pool of peer mentors.
- Recruiting youth who exhibit strong (or emerging) social skills and leadership qualities in other settings.
- Seeking out youth who were prior mentees in the program to serve as mentors when they are older.

E-MENTORING MODELS

When recruiting individuals to serve as virtual mentors, programs are encouraged to:

- Describe any software or hardware requirements for participation, as well as the technical support offered by the program to prevent the technology from being a barrier to program engagement.
- Provide information about the mentoring experience and how e-mentoring offers many advantages to developing a mentoring relationship with a young person (e.g., ease and flexibility of communication, time to be thoughtful in responses). Online programs should provide information explaining that virtual mentoring relationships can be as rewarding and in-depth as those that take place in person —testimonials from current mentors may be especially impactful. Programs are encouraged to anticipate mentor questions about the experience and provide information proactively in recruitment messages and materials.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

Programs operating at a school or other site-based location may consider the following in their recruitment messages and materials:

- Providing information about what the mentoring experience looks like within the organizational setting. Some prospective applicants may be anxious about coming into in a school or other institutional location and recruitment messages can alleviate concerns by describing where and how the mentoring takes place and the support offered by site staff to facilitate the experience of being "on-site." If mentors are expected to partner or communicate with other school or site personnel, a brief but positive description of that collaboration may also be helpful in recruitment messages.

- Explaining how the activities of the program support or complement the overall goals of the site/school that houses the program.
- For school-based programs that have an academic focus, emphasizing the recruitment of individuals who can support youths' academic skill development and progress, including those who have prior experience teaching or working with youth or who have mastery of an academic subject. While school-based mentors are not tutors in the formal sense, they can support educational progress (e.g., Herrera et al., 2007; McQuillin & McDaniel, 2021). Programs located at other sites may emphasize different skills or lived experiences of applications as needed in recruitment messages.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

If staff will be serving as informal mentors, the organization may decide to "recruit" a variety of staff to fill that role. Prospective staff mentors should be provided with information about how this role differs from, or complements, their other duties; how the mentoring is intended to supplement or enhance the overall program experience and outcomes for youth; and the training and support they will receive for taking on this role.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

One commonality across all mentoring programs is the critical importance of recruiting enough adults to serve the young people the program wishes to reach. Ensuring these mentors are appropriate to serve youth well is just as important. Research and practice wisdom provide insights into achieving both goals.

Creating a Strong Recruitment Plan

To start, programs need a formal recruitment plan outlining who the program wants to serve and the individuals best positioned to serve them well and achieve the outcomes outlined in the program's theory of change. Recruitment plans should include a target goal for mentor recruitment. Programs may be tempted to recruit as many mentors as possible — and you will need to recruit beyond the number you will ultimately need given "drop-off" at various points in recruitment and enrollment. But, if recruiting youth is challenging for your program, mentors may get frustrated waiting to be matched, and move to another opportunity. Considering staff capacity is also key in determining this target number; your target number of mentors (and matches) should reflect the number of staff available to provide strong, consistent support for every match you make throughout their engagement with the program.

When developing your recruitment plan, you may wish to conduct a landscape analysis that gathers information about the community, potentially lucrative recruitment locations, partnerships, or methods, and messaging that may resonate with potential mentors. The plan ideally should outline multiple methods and modalities to reach mentors (e.g., in-person, print, internet, social media, word of mouth). This will increase both the number reached and the diversity of those individuals.

Recruitment materials should be created with this plan in mind and reflect program branding and messaging. Materials should be tailored to individuals who fit the goals and structure of the program and whose skills and backgrounds match the characteristics and needs of the young people the program hopes to serve. This kind of tailoring can make a difference in fostering youth benefits. DuBois et al. (2011), for example, a meta-analysis of 73 studies found that programs in which there was a good fit between the educational or occupational backgrounds of the mentors and the goals of the program yielded larger youth benefits than programs lacking that fit.

> *To ensure programs can create strong matches for a diverse group of youth, a broad and diverse pool of mentors is ideal.*

Recruiting a Diverse Group of Mentors

Recruiting a broad, diverse pool of mentors is also important. Youth come to programs from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of interests, identities, personalities, and needs. It is important that your program considers the full range of those characteristics when building your pool of program mentors. Recent research has examined the similarities that predict stronger mentoring relationships, finding that often the strongest relationships result from pairs that do not necessarily match each other on demographic

similarities like gender or race, but do so on characteristics such as interests, hobbies, values, or personalities (Deng et al., 2022; De Wit et al., 2020; Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021; Hernandez et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2023; Powers et al., 2015; Raposa et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2019). To ensure programs can create strong matches for a diverse group of youth, a broad and diverse pool of mentors is ideal. This increases the chances that young people will find relevant role models and examples of their own adult futures.

Highlighting the diversity of the youth you serve (e.g., in interests, identities, etc.) in mentor recruitment materials may help attract a diverse group of mentors who may not immediately connect with a unidimensional description of youth (e.g., "needing academic support"). Creating diversity in your mentor pool means paying attention to not only gender, racial, and ethnic identities, but also representation of people with disabilities, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, and those with different expressions of faith, among many other characteristics. In addition to contributing to stronger matches, diversity in characteristics like these brings diverse perspectives to your mentoring community and helps ensure that your program truly represents your broader community.

Youth also come to programs with a variety of lived experiences. However, research suggests that mentors often do not have personal experiences that mirror some of the challenges commonly experienced by the young people they serve (e.g., poverty, family struggles, school challenges; Herrera et al., 2013). Yet, meeting with a mentor who shares their lived experiences can contribute to stronger relationships (Eby et al., 2013). "Credible messenger" programs — for example, programs matching young people who have been involved

with the juvenile justice system with mentors who have had similar experiences — make these lived experiences central in their matching strategies and have yielded promising evidence of benefits for youth participants (e.g., Cramer et al., 2018; Lynch et al., 2018; Skogan et al., 2008). Programs are encouraged to think about the lived experience that would be relevant to their youth.

Developing Effective Recruitment Strategies

Tailoring recruitment messages to individuals whose values and motivations match those of the program is important in finding the right mentors; it is also important in dissuading individuals who aren't a good fit. That is, programs should try to steer clear of inappropriate mentors who lack the time or capacity to commit to a young person in the ways the program requires. To further this aim, program requirements and values (e.g., a commitment to inclusivity) should be made very clear to

prospective mentors (Garringer & Benning, 2018) and realistically portray the program's expectations. Requirements and eligibility criteria should be publicly available, highlighting nonnegotiables and explaining to prospective mentors why these criteria are in place — noting that they are designed to find the right mentors to meet youth needs and help ensure youth safety. Eligibility criteria should include the time commitment required, as mentors who do not meet that requirement can actually harm youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Karcher, 2005).

Clarity in outlining the program's requirements is key in ensuring that mentors' expectations are in line with the experience they will ultimately have...

Having this information available to all prospective mentors and to any partnering referral organizations can help increase the odds that your applicants are a good fit for the program. Clarity in outlining the program's requirements is also key in ensuring that mentors' expectations are in line with the experience they will ultimately have in the program. Many mentors start programs with unrealistic expectations about the ease with which their relationship will be forged and the benefits they will be able to see in their mentees. When these expectations are not met, mentors may feel disappointed or ashamed and prematurely end their match (Corley, 2020; Spencer, 2007).

To attract potential mentors, recruitment efforts and materials should highlight aspects of the mentoring experience that may serve as strong motivators or address concerns or fears that may be preventing individuals from getting involved. Recruitment materials should:

1. Note how to get involved and, where relevant, any flexibility in meeting times and the types of activities mentors and their mentees engage in (Garringer & Benning, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2015). For example, some mentors may prefer structured activities; this may be important to highlight if your program provides this for matches.

2. **Highlight the many benefits of mentoring for the youth involved** as well as the broader community — this is a key motivator for many individuals (Garringer & Benning, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2015; Larsson et al., 2016).

3. **Describe how the program prepares and supports mentors.** Studies suggest that many adults are concerned about not being adequately prepared to mentor a child. Highlighting the training and supports mentors will receive can help alleviate these fears (Garringer & Benning, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2015).

4. **Describe potential benefits of mentoring *for the mentor.*** Although not necessarily a major motivation for many mentors, the benefits they are likely to receive from their involvement can be helpful to highlight (Bufali et al., 2023; Williams, 2015). For example, studies note benefits in: psychological well-being (Anderson et al., 2023); empathy and perspective-taking skills (Haddock et al., 2013); learning about careers, clarifying professional goals, and preparing for a career (Haddock et al., 2013; Newman & Hernandez, 2011; Reddick et al., 2011; Schmidt et al., 2004; Slaughter-Defoe & English-Clarke, 2010; Taussig et al., 2010); sensitivity to, and awareness of,

cultural and socioeconomic differences (Duron et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2015); generativity (i.e., a concern for and engaging in behaviors that promote the wellbeing of younger generations (Gruenewald et al., 2016; Hastings et al., 2015); and even physical health (Seeman et al., 2020). Women, in particular, may be attracted to the psychological benefits of mentoring (Shier et al., 2020) as well as the opportunity to increase their understanding and widen their perspective (Teye & Peaslee, 2020).

5. Relay the organization's mission, values, and orientation toward community service and activities. People are more attracted to mentoring opportunities when they have values in line with the general mission of the organization (Hawkins et al., 2015; Teye & Peaslee, 2020).

Word of mouth strategies can also be powerful, for example, encouraging existing mentors to assist in recruitment. Hearing about mentoring from someone you know and trust can be very effective in recruitment (Garringer & Benning, 2018). For instance, the program might encourage mentors to share stories of their mentoring activities with their networks on social media and could offer incentives for mentors who are able to recruit friends and family to participate (Williams, 2015). Programs should ensure that mentors feel positive about their participation before making this ask and provide them with talking points, scripts, handouts, fliers, or other materials that can help them spur the interest of other adults (or peer mentors) in the community.

Note that different groups of mentors may have distinct motivations and concerns. For example, in addition to those issues noted above, when targeting men, in particular, a recent large-scale study of male recruitment suggests that it may be helpful to highlight several additional aspects of the

program (Hawkins et al., 2015), including:

1. The low costs of getting involved: Some men in the study were concerned about having to pay for mentoring activities out of pocket (Hawkins et al., 2015). Thus, highlighting any efforts the program makes to provide ideas for low- or no-cost activities would be helpful.

2. Men in the study (particularly those with a college education or higher) were also concerned about potential cultural or racial differences with their mentees (Hawkins et al., 2015). Thus, it may be important to highlight the fact that adults from a wide variety of backgrounds have something unique and valuable to offer a young person (Garringer & Benning, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2015). This can help attract mentors who think their backgrounds may exclude them from mentoring — and, at the same time, increase the diversity of your mentor pool.

3. The authors also suggest helping potential individuals identify qualities that would make them be effective mentors for youth (e.g., being responsible, committed, accepting, willing to learn). This can help increase mentors' self-efficacy and ultimate likelihood of getting involved (Hawkins et al., 2015).

Programs targeting women, in particular, should consider highlighting the chance for mentors to share experiences and improve the lives of young women (Larsson, et al., 2016). And programs recruiting older adults may want to highlight opportunities for social interaction and meaningfulness imparted by the program (Sellon, 2014). Transportation issues also loom large for this age group, so noting distances involved or options for involvement that require limited transportation (e.g., site-based programs) may be particularly attractive for older mentors.

A relatively new focus in the field has been on **training young people to recruit their own mentors** from their social networks. In youth-initiated mentoring (YIM), young people (and often their caregivers) help identify caring adults (or older peers) from their existing networks who might

be able to step into a more formal mentoring role through the program. Youth-initiated mentoring can be included as part of a broader multi-component program (e.g., National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program), or as a component of a mentoring program that wants to support youth as they age out of the program. The approach has shown promise when working with particularly vulnerable groups of youth such as those aging out of foster care (Spencer et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2019), youth involved with the juvenile justice system (Spencer et al., 2019), and youth who have dropped out or been expelled from school (Schwartz et al., 2013). While a full YIM approach may not be appropriate for your program, most programs can benefit from having youth and their caregivers suggest potential mentors for the program.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

■ **Who are we serving, and what are the outcomes we want them to achieve? How does that influence the types of people we are trying to recruit?**

■ **Who is the "perfect" mentor for our program? How do the biases of our own staff members influence who we view as the "perfect" mentor? Are we limiting our consideration of some individuals for reasons that don't matter or are grounded in biases?**

■ **Have we asked our youth who they would want as mentors?**

■ **What motivations or mindsets are we looking for in our mentors?**

■ **How does our recruitment messaging invite mentors who share our program's values of inclusion? How do we invite mentors and help other potential volunteers opt out if they do not share our agency's values and commitment to serving all young people in our community?**

■ **What kinds of lived experience, education, or backgrounds will be helpful in serving as a mentor in our program? Are certain skills (e.g., teaching, advocacy, group facilitation) or characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, neighborhood, disability, gender identity, etc.) must-haves or nice-to-haves for our program?**

■ **Where are the places in our community where we can reach the types of prospective mentors we are looking for? Are there places (including online) where we can find them most easily?**

■ **What are the right messages to entice prospective mentors? How do we describe the goals of the program and the experience of being a mentor? How do we talk about our young people? Do we offer a strengths-based, multifaceted picture of the young people we work with? Do these messages accurately reflect our values?**

■ **Are our recruitment materials inclusive of the full community we serve? Do our materials show diverse representation? Who might be missing? How do we talk about our inclusivity in our recruitment messaging?**

■ **Would youth-initiated mentoring (YIM) be a good fit for our youth and program goals? What would the pros and cons of such an approach be?**

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Ask young people in your program what characteristics they are looking for in their mentors as they enroll in the program. This can help both in finding them a suitable mentor from your candidates, as well as in building a picture, over time, of who your young people generally want as mentors. This can inform your recruitment focus and descriptions of the mentor role.**

- **As appropriate, ask youth to identify potential mentors, either for themselves (YIM) or for other program participants. Youth and caregivers often have networks of other caring adults who may be looking for a way to give back, and a personal ask from your participating families might be very effective in building interest in your program in the community.**

- **Similarly, ask mentors to support the recruitment of other mentors. They can help refine your messaging and where you are concentrating your efforts in the community. They might also be able to directly tap into their networks of friends, family, and coworkers to help bolster your recruitment efforts.**

- **Ask youth to review (or even develop) your mentor recruitment materials. Make sure they are comfortable with how they are portrayed and how the mentoring experience is described to those who will be signing up to work with them.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **Total number of potential mentors reached with specific recruitment messages or presentations.**

- **Total number of applicants in a given time period.**

- **Total number of recruited mentors waitlisted in a given time period, if relevant.**

- **Total number of mentors referred from each referral source.**

- **The percentage of applicants who meet eligibility, diversity needs, and other criteria.**

- **The sources that led to each mentor's application (where they learned about the experience).**

- **The percentage of all recruited individuals who end up mentoring in the program.**
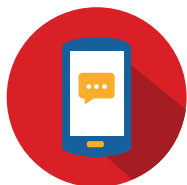
RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Effective Mentor Recruitment: Getting Organized, Getting Results. Garringer, M., Mentoring Resource Center. A how-to book on mentor recruitment.

Messaging for Male Mentor Recruitment: A Brief Introduction. MENTOR Michigan and Michigan Community Service Commission. A brief guide that offers a collection of talking points, targeted messages, and strategies for recruiting male mentors.

Tips for Recruiting and Retaining Mentors. MENTOR New York. A set of documents including tips for recruiting mentors, a list of documents to include in a recruitment package for mentees and mentors, and a sample mentor recruitment plan.

Youth-Initiated Mentoring (YIM) Practice Review. National Mentoring Resource Center. This review provides an overview of the evidence base for YIM including evaluation outcomes and guidance for implementing this practice.

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 5

YOUTH ENROLLMENT

Standard of Practice: Programs should have processes for welcoming youth into the program that ensure prospective participants are eligible and a good fit in terms of their goals and commitment to engage in the mentoring relationship and program activities.

YOUTH ENROLLMENT

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Programs should have processes for welcoming youth into the program that ensure prospective participants are eligible and a good fit in terms of their goals and commitment to engage in the mentoring relationship and program activities.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ ***The program has established policies and procedures for confirming youth eligibility and their compatibility with, and interest in, the services offered, and for accepting or not accepting them into the program.*** All mentoring programs need a standardized set of policies and accompanying procedures that manage the process of determining eligibility and accepting new mentees into the program, including ensuring that participants understand both the benefits of participation and their roles and responsibilities and that they are interested in, and committed to, being a part of the program.

■ ***The program provides youth (and caregivers, as needed) with a formal application that is completed as part of the enrollment process.*** The questions in the application can help programs collect information on youth's strengths, areas for growth, goals for the mentoring experience, desired traits in a mentor, and important personal characteristics (such as their background, special needs, hobbies, and interests) that can help programs find the right mentor (or group) to maximize the impact of their participation. This information must be stored securely and managed with confidentiality, and staff should be equipped to respond appropriately when sensitive information is shared (e.g., LGBTQIA2S+ status, disability-related information).

■ ***Youth (and their caregivers, as needed) formally consent to participate in the program and commit to following program expectations and rules upon their acceptance into the program.*** This commitment should include understanding and agreeing to program policies, particularly regarding safety, as well as details around the frequency of mentoring meetings and the duration of the mentoring relationship. For many programs, this will be roughly once a week for the duration of a school or calendar year, although that will depend on the program's design and theory of change. As part of the consent process, the program should also provide an estimated timeline for when the mentee will be matched with a mentor.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *As appropriate, the program asks caregivers to provide additional information, beyond the application, that will help determine eligibility and fit and identify an appropriate mentor (or mentoring group) for the young person.* Additional information can be gathered in several ways, for example, through interviews, conversations, or additional forms. This practice can also identify other adults, beyond the youth's caregiver, who can support their involvement in the program or who may need to inform decisions about the relationship.

■ *The program refers youth who have needs or circumstances beyond the program's scope to other services and supports in the community, especially when youth are ineligible to participate in the program.* Programs should have a list of referral partners — both other mentoring programs as well as other types of service providers — for youth and families who are not accepted into the program.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, we also offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for the following program models and contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help navigate the nuances of the early stages of working with mentees and those supporting their mentoring experience.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

In addition to the general practices noted above, group mentoring programs may need to consider whether all enrollment needs to happen in a predetermined timeframe so that there are enough participants available to form groups. This will facilitate forming groups that will have membership stability from the beginning and will not need to add new members sporadically throughout the year. The application and other enrollment activities should also gather information about peer relationships with other youth in the program to avoid placing those with negative prior histories in the same group.

Group models will also need to consider whether a group experience is the right fit for a particular young person. Some youth may simply benefit more from a deeper one-to-one relationship with a mentor, while others may have personality traits (e.g., extreme shyness) or behavioral challenges that may be problematic in a group setting. Youth who are not the right fit can be referred to other programs or services as needed.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Given that many cross-age peer mentoring programs serve relatively young mentees (i.e., elementary school age) there may be a need to engage caregivers more in the application and enrollment processes to solicit information about the youth and why participation in the program may be beneficial. Programs may also need to explain the goals of the program and what participation will be like for younger mentees.

E-MENTORING MODELS

E-mentoring programs face some additional challenges enrolling youth due to the virtual nature of the communication between program staff and youth and their caregivers. These programs should prioritize online applications and other easy-to-use digital forms, supplemented with face-to-face conversations using virtual meeting technology so that details about the program can be explained and questions and concerns can be addressed in real time.

The enrollment process is also an ideal time to assess the youth's technology access, comfort, and skill in using technology, and developmental suitability to communicate using virtual platforms (especially for very young children). Some youth may lack the requisite technology access or comfort to participate meaningfully in the program. If the program will make technology available to participants, that should also be explained during the enrollment process.

It is also important to share policies and other information about program safety, privacy, confidentiality, and data management with young people (and caregivers, as relevant) as they enroll in the program. They should understand what program staff can access about their mentoring interactions and other monitoring policies or practices. Programs may also clarify expectations for privacy for online mentoring conversations, including whether caregivers or others (e.g., siblings) are allowed or encouraged to join or overhear mentoring conversations.

E-mentoring programs should also get consent from caregivers around the collection of electronic data about the youth's participation (e.g., accessing chat or emails sent to the mentor, tracking engagement in an online mentoring platform, monitoring for risk management concerns, etc.). Youth should also understand exactly what components of their interactions are shared with program staff and how that information will be used. See the *E-Mentoring Supplement to the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, fourth edition, for more information about youth data privacy, consent, and legal obligations regarding youth participation in online programs (Garringer et al. 2019).

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

Schools and other youth-serving organizations may already have policies and procedures in place for how youth sign up for specific supports, such as mentoring or tutoring. The program's enrollment process should align with any existing site procedures. The enrollment process is also an ideal time to assess any scheduling conflicts (e.g., conflicts with class schedules or other school activities) that may impact youth's participation in mentoring activities.

Enrollment is also an ideal time to ensure that youth understand the purpose of the mentoring program and how it is distinct from other services they may have access to.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Informal mentoring, almost by definition, implies that youth aren't formally being accepted into a mentoring program. However, there may still be "eligibility" criteria for consideration. For example, in a program serving high school age youth, informal mentoring may be prioritized for those graduating high school in the next year to support their transitions into college or career paths. Informal mentoring can still have some focused outreach if staff capacity is limited.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

Youth enrollment processes will likely differ across program models and contexts. For example, community-based programs will likely involve caregivers in these processes to a much greater extent than site-based programs. However, **all programs, regardless of program model, should have written policies and procedures in place to guide the entire youth enrollment process. Enrollment should include:**

- assessing youth eligibility, interest in, and compatibility with the services offered;
- discussing the youth's (and when relevant, their caregiver's) motivations and goals for participating;
- gathering information about the youth that can be used to find a suitable mentor (and group, if relevant) and support them in their mentoring experience;
- highlighting expectations and requirements for participants;
- documenting their agreement to these expectations;
- formally accepting, or not accepting, each young person into the program, including formal consent by the youth and caregiver; and
- referring youth to other services when needed.

These processes should help ensure that participants understand both the benefits of participation and their responsibilities in contributing to the mentoring relationship and confirm their interest and commitment to being part of the program. These procedures should be streamlined and completed in a timely manner to avoid potential participants losing interest.

Collecting Key Information

One of the most important aspects of offering a young person the right mentoring support is gathering relevant information about them (and their family, when pertinent) during program enrollment. **The program should collect this information through a formal application.** The application should include questions about the youth's demographics, including race, gender identity, primary language, and other aspects of their background (all of which can help your program document who you are reaching), why they want to participate in the program, and their goals for involvement. It may be important to also identify other adults in the young person's life who may need to be involved in facilitating the relationship or engaged in program communications (e.g., extended kin, legal guardians, other "champions" in their life). Programs are also encouraged, as appropriate, to ask caregivers or other referring individuals to provide additional information about why the youth might benefit from mentoring and special considerations staff and mentors should be aware of.

Setting expectations around how long it may take to get matched and the chances of not finding an appropriate mentor for the child is also important...

In addition, **the program should gather information about characteristics of the youth that can be helpful in finding a suitable mentor.** Especially relevant is information about special needs, hobbies, interests, strengths, and areas for growth, including the goals they may have for the relationship and a
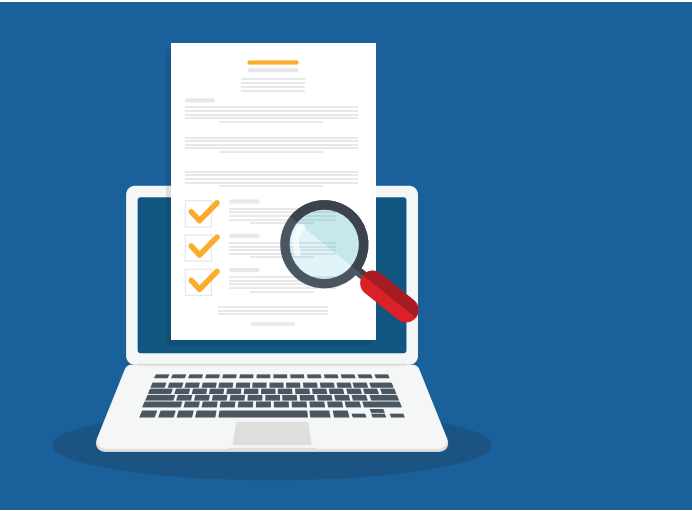
mentor's support. This information can be gathered through the application or through interviews, conversations, or additional forms, and can help you find the best mentor for each youth. Although some studies suggest that matching on characteristics like race, gender, or disability status can be beneficial (see for example, Lyons & Edwards, 2022; Heppe et al., 2020; Oberoi, 2016; Raposa et al., 2019), other studies do not support these associations (e.g., Heppe et al., 2021; Kanchewa et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2019). Research is more consistent on the value of matching based on characteristics like shared interests, attitudes, values, beliefs, hobbies, talents, identities, and personality (see Deng et al., 2022). Thus, collecting information on these characteristics during enrollment can help you make strong, effective matches. (For more discussion on matching, see Element 9.)

Because the relevance of specific youth characteristics and experiences will differ across programs, it is important to think about your theory of change and what kinds of matches would be most likely to yield the outcomes of interest to your program — and to craft your application and other procedures to collect and document this information. Once collected, this information can be

helpful in creating a "profile" of participating youth that can provide their prospective mentor with a rich, strengths-based description of the person with whom they will be developing a relationship.

Information gathered in the application and other enrollment activities must be managed with confidentiality, and staff should be equipped to respond appropriately when sensitive information is shared (e.g., LGBTQIA2S+ status, disability-related information). In some cases, staff may need to consider legal requirements in their state around how such information is managed and who they may be required to share it with. (See Element 15 for more details on information management and privacy.) In fact, programs may decide to omit some questions from their applications or data from participant records if they are required to share information that could place youth in harm's way, due to recent changes in state or local laws (e.g., laws around the legality of gender-affirming care). This is an area where the program's ethical values should guide policy and practice.

Ensuring that All Are on the Same Page

Because caregivers complete the application for many programs, an additional conversation with the young person can be helpful to ensure that youth see value in the program and want to participate. Youth who are excited about the program and how a mentor can support them are more likely to sustain the match and benefit from the relationship. Thus, If the program is voluntary and the mentee was referred by a caregiver, the program should directly ask the young person to confirm their interest in receiving a mentor. This should be done with the caregiver's permission and can be as brief as asking them to confirm that they understand what a mentor is and that they are interested. These

conversations can also help ensure that caregiver and youth goals for the experience are aligned and that youth understand program requirements and expectations.

Creating this shared understanding from the beginning is an important step in starting a meaningful mentoring experience. Unmet expectations for program involvement can lead caregivers to end the mentoring relationship prematurely (Shamblen et al., 2020). Making sure youth also have realistic expectations for their involvement is similarly important; when youth expectations are not met, the match may also struggle (Spencer, 2007). Setting expectations around how long it may take to get matched and the chances of not finding an appropriate mentor for the child is also important. This timeline can be broad, but programs are encouraged to "under-promise and over-deliver" to prevent disappointment and should provide an update if the timeline needs to be extended. Youth who are not matched, or who are not matched as quickly as expected, may see this as indicating something negative about themselves. In fact, recent research suggests not matching a child who expects to get matched can be associated with setbacks in the very outcomes the program may be trying to foster (Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2022).

Signing a Formal Agreement
A formal consent form should be signed by the young person and their legal guardian to show they agree to participate in the program and understand its requirements. When youth join your program, it is important that they formally commit to the program's expectations for participation and the rules that govern participant behavior. Families should understand program rules — for example where, when, and how often matches

are allowed to meet, and should commit to those rules in writing. Using the enrollment process to explain program rules and how they support a safe, effective mentoring relationship can help ensure

> *...programs are encouraged to "under-promise and over-deliver" to prevent disappointment...*

they are upheld. As noted, it is especially important that youth consent to the experience. Ideally, this commitment to follow program rules and expectations will be documented in writing once they are officially accepted into the program.

Determining Who Is <u>Not</u> a Good Fit for Your Program
Collecting detailed information about youth and their family can also highlight ways they might not be a good candidate for your program or may have needs that are beyond what your mentors can reasonably address. In some cases, youth are simply ineligible because they are too young or old for the program or they don't live in the program's service area. Other criteria can be more challenging to determine. For example, a program may determine that a youth's lack of enthusiasm for the program leaves them unlikely to have a positive experience, or that the needs their family is hoping mentoring can alleviate are beyond the scope and capacity of the program to address adequately (e.g., serious mental health or behavioral challenges). Yet, this decision is a critical step in the enrollment process. Determining who is "out of scope" for your program can help your staff target your services to those youth who could benefit the most and, at the same time, ensure mentors are not faced with situations they feel ill-equipped to handle.

Research to date has not indicated that any particular youth characteristics or experiences are important to "screen out" — this determination is very much dependent on your program's mission and theory of change. But research has begun to outline the types of youth experiences and behaviors associated with matches that may struggle. Importantly, it also highlights the interplay between youth characteristics, mentor characteristics and program supports. For example, one study (Raposa et al., 2016) found that youth who had experienced more significant environmental stressors (e.g., parental incarceration, losing someone of import to the child, a recent parent separation) had shorter matches than those experiencing fewer; whereas youth with more behavioral challenges (i.e., misconduct, substance use, academic struggles) had lower relationship quality than youth with fewer. However, mentors' level of involvement with youth prior to mentoring buffered both these associations, indicating that the program could support youth with more serious challenges provided they had the right mentors in place. Another study (Weiler et al., 2019) found similar associations between exposure to environmental stressors and relationship quality. These associations, however, were lessened when mentors had positive program experiences including

perceptions of adequate program structure, supportive program relationships, and opportunities for skill building. These studies highlight the importance of considering your programmatic context — the mentors you are engaging and the supports you have in place — to determine which youth might and might not be a good fit for your program.

Once you have determined that a young person is not a good fit for your program, the youth (and caregiver when relevant) should be notified of your decision using a method of communication that reflects how you have interacted with them throughout the enrollment process (e.g., in writing if you have only communicated in writing; in writing and by phone if you have met them in person, etc.). This communication should explain why they were not a good fit for the program in ways that avoid blame or judgment. **We also recommend putting mechanisms in place to refer them to other services.** Mechanisms for these referrals include establishing and fostering community partnerships, documenting eligibility requirements for these organizations, and creating a regularly updated list of these organizations that is accessible to enrollment staff.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

■ **What information do we need to collect to get to know and best serve our youth and families?**

■ **Do we ask about youth strengths, goals, and dreams in addition to asking about needs or difficult circumstances? Are we building on assets and strengths or focusing only on challenges?**

■ **How will we ensure that youth (and caregivers) commit to the expectations for program participation that we set? Are there certain levels of participation that we will require?**

■ **What might disqualify a youth from being accepted into our program? Are there needs or circumstances we feel are beyond our mentors' ability to address? Do we have clear criteria for making these determinations?**

■ **Where can we refer youth and families in our community when they are ineligible or not a good fit for what we offer?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth and caregivers may have feedback on the enrollment process, including their ease and comfort level completing application forms and other required paperwork, and can share their perceptions of enrollment activities, such as conversations with staff and the overall timeline and flow of the enrollment process.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **The percentage of youth applicants that are accepted into the program, not accepted, or quit the enrollment process (with analysis of the demographic composition of each group and the reasons for disengagement or not being accepted).**

- **The average length of time it takes an applicant to get accepted into the program.**

- **The percentage of applicants that completed all enrollment procedures.**

- **The number and nature of referrals to other service providers for youth who are not accepted into the program.**

- **The number and nature of community partnerships supporting those referrals.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring: Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities. Garringer, M., MacRae, P., National Mentoring Center and The Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence. This guidebook for program development offers research-informed guidance, tools, and resources to support quality mentoring services.

"Mentee Readiness" Module from Shining Light on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Toolkit to Build Understanding. Youth Collaboratory. This module, 1 of 19, discusses the importance of assessing mentee readiness in preparing them to begin a mentoring relationship.

Risk Management and Youth Safety Components for Mentoring and Youth-Serving Programs. MENTOR, National Mentoring Resource Center. This brief discusses risk management for mentoring programs including screening of both mentors and mentees.

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 6

MENTOR SCREENING AND ENROLLMENT

Standard of Practice: Programs should implement a mentor screening and enrollment process that determines all mentors are both safe and suitable for the program experience prior to being formally accepted and placed in a mentoring role.

MENTOR SCREENING AND ENROLLMENT

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Programs should implement a mentor screening and enrollment process that determines all mentors are both safe and suitable for the program experience prior to being formally accepted and placed in a mentoring role.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

- *The program has written policies and procedures for assessing the safety and suitability of prospective mentors, and for accepting or not accepting them into the program.* It is important that programs think holistically about youth safety — an emphasis on criminal history, while important, can obscure other serious issues related to the mentor's suitability. Mentor screening practices should also assess prospective mentors' motivations, harmful beliefs, or discriminatory behaviors that could negatively impact the young people they work with.

- *The program provides prospective mentors with a formal application that is completed as part of the enrollment process.* This written (or online) application should gather information about the prospective mentor that will aid in assessing their safety to work with young people and help programs make strong relationships between mentors and youth by building on common interests, backgrounds, and other relevant factors.

- *The program conducts an in-person or online face-to-face interview with prospective mentors using a standardized protocol.* An interview with a prospective mentor is an excellent way to learn more about their motivations to mentor, personality, attitudes about youth, lived experiences and background, and other information that can help determine how well they might provide the mentoring experience youth are hoping to receive.

- *The program conducts a criminal history records check, as well as checks of other records that may be relevant for identifying safety concerns and determining the eligibility of a mentor.* Ideally, criminal history checks would include a national-level FBI fingerprint check, although the availability of this method varies greatly from state to state. At a minimum, programs should consider running state-level checks in all places where a prospective mentor has lived in the last 10 years, although access to states' records also varies considerably, as does the cost associated with this service. The program should share their approach and standards related to criminal history checks with potential mentors, including if any criminal history would disqualify mentors and why. Programs should consider the youth they serve in determining the most important safety standards such as severity, type, recency, and frequency of any offense.

- *The program conducts reference checks with at least two references provided by the prospective mentor using a standardized protocol.* These, ideally, will include both personal and professional references who can speak to the behavior, values, temperament, and skills of the potential mentor.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

■ *Prospective mentors formally commit to participating in the program and commit to following program expectations and rules upon their acceptance into the program*. As with youth participants, the screening and enrollment process should end with mentors providing their written consent to participate in the program, including adhering to expectations around their engagement with youth and following all program policies.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *The program engages in additional screening practices that are relevant to their services and program model, which may include:*

- For community-based programs in which mentoring could potentially take place in the mentor's home, this may include: a) having program staff conduct a home visit; or b) conducting criminal history checks on partners, spouses, or others in the mentor's home who may spend time with the mentee.
- Checking applicant's social media accounts for content or behaviors that might be red flags in the screening process.

■ *The program re-screens mentors periodically to ensure ongoing safety and suitability.* Programs may consider reengaging mentors in some subset of these practices on an ongoing basis, especially if they are serving youth in the program for many years (e.g., reexamining criminal history every three years).

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs will need to carefully consider the criteria that would make a prospective mentor a good fit for the mentoring experience offered, including prior experience working with youth (especially in groups), training or skills in group facilitation, and strong social and collaboration skills. If groups will be led by one mentor, it is also vital that the program considers potential scheduling conflicts that may interfere with their attendance.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring programs will have additional considerations for determining that peer mentors are safe and suitable for the program. Criteria for consideration include:

- Peer mentors' opinions about the behaviors and attitudes of other young people in their community (negative views of their peers may be linked with lower-quality matches; Karcher et al., 2010).
- Their comfort in building rapport and having conversations with a younger peer.
- Their motivations and incentives for serving (e.g., getting school credit for participation has been linked with shorter matches; Herrera et al., 2008).
- Scheduling conflicts or other obligations that might present a barrier to their participation.
- The risk for negative role modeling or inappropriate behaviors.
- Their comfort in seeking support from program staff as needed.

Youth serving as mentors may not understand the importance of consistency in their participation, so it may be especially important to use the enrollment period to highlight its importance and clarify whether the student has conflicts with class schedules or other school-related activities that would hinder their participation in the program.

Given that peer mentors who are minors will not have known criminal histories (these records are sealed for minors), it may be important for the program to rely more on references from adults who know the young person (e.g., their caregivers, teachers, other school staff or administrators, coaches).

E-MENTORING MODELS

E-mentoring programs should use the screening process to assess mentors' access to, and comfort with, technology, particularly in communicating well with young people via the technology used by the program. The program should also review prospective mentors' public social media accounts, as these spaces may become relevant as the mentor and youth interact online. Reviewing these sites can give insight into how the applicant communicates online and the appropriateness of their online presence in the context of working with young people.

E-mentoring programs will also likely need to conduct screening interviews using virtual meeting technology. This not only provides insight into the applicant's digital literacy and communication style, but also the home environment or background that would be visible to the youth if they are meeting using similar technology.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School- and site-based mentoring programs working with volunteers are almost always operating in organizations with established policies and procedures regarding other types of volunteers (e.g., classroom aides, tutors, coaches). Mentoring providers will need to ensure that they comply with any existing policies or eligibility criteria that may limit who can serve as a mentor on site, especially when using volunteer mentors. Additionally, programs in these settings may need to prioritize criteria such

as a volunteer mentor's schedule compatibility or whether they have specific skills or backgrounds relevant to the goals of the program or the needs of youth.

Paid staff mentors in other site-based programs should be assessed for their skills and "fit" to serve in the mentoring role. For existing staff adding or transitioning into a mentoring role, organizations should avoid implementing redundant screening steps (e.g., conducting a second criminal history check on an already-hired employee), but may wish to emphasize other steps, such as:

- Using an interview to determine the staff member's motivation for wanting to mentor, how they will balance the mentoring role with other job responsibilities, the skills they may bring to this role (e.g., facilitating curriculum-based activities, working with groups), and their fit for the goals of the mentoring programming (e.g., comfort working with the targeted age of mentees).
* Checking with new or additional references that can speak to the staff members' disposition and ability to serve in a mentoring role.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Youth development organizations that offer informal mentoring via their staff may ask similar questions in an interview as those noted above for formal site-based programs. Additional reference checks relevant to the mentoring role may also be warranted.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

One of the most important sets of practices in mentoring programs are those designed to help your staff determine, to the extent possible, that the mentors you recruit are going to be consistent, caring, and committed to keeping the young people you serve safe from harm (Rhodes et al., 2009). For that reason, this Element includes several "must-have" practices, mainly focused on safeguarding the child's physical and emotional wellbeing. Just as screening out an adult who is likely to harm a young person physically is a critical practice for all programs, a person who has harmful, discriminatory beliefs, or values or engages in behaviors that are antithetical to fostering a caring, respectful, judgment-free relationship with a young person should not be allowed to mentor in your program. Similarly, individuals who have an exclusively "deficit" mindset about the young people they would be serving and their family and community (e.g., focusing on limitations and negative stereotypes as opposed to strengths and capabilities) will probably not approach their mentoring relationship in a way that would be

beneficial to the young people you serve. Questions to assess all these aspects of child safety should be included throughout your enrollment process.

To ensure that mentor screening is done systematically across your staff and over time, **all programs should have written policies and procedures in place to guide the entire screening and enrollment process which includes:**

- assessing eligibility and compatibility with the services offered;
- discussing the mentor's motivations for getting involved;
- gathering information that can be used to match the mentor with a young person or group and, in "team" programs (e.g., those in which two or more mentors engage youth), with other adult co-mentors;
- assessing whether the mentor may hold disqualifying discriminatory beliefs, values, or behaviors that could potentially harm a young person in the program;
- highlighting expectations, rules, and requirements;
- documenting their agreement with these expectations; and
- admitting, or not admitting, the mentor into the program.

These processes should provide enough information to enable the program to determine the prospective mentor's acceptance into, or rejection from, the program and, if accepted, help the program decide which young person the mentor would be best suited to meet with. These processes should be followed rigorously and efficiently so that applicants do not disengage or become frustrated with the program experience early on and should be completed well before applicants begin their mentoring relationships.

The Written Application

The program should first collect information about the mentor through a formal, written application. The application should include questions that assess eligibility requirements that are relevant for your program. Programs are encouraged to establish eligibility criteria that are meaningful to their services and program model and are driven by their theory of change. This means that, in some cases, a program may consider accepting some applicants that other programs might not if those individuals bring meaningful strengths.

The application should also ask about:

- Demographics, including age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and background (e.g., prior locations lived, references, self-reported criminal history), to help the program document who it is reaching with recruitment efforts.
- Experiences and skills they bring to a mentoring relationship, as well as their interests, passions, hobbies, and personality — which can be invaluable information in forming strong mentoring relationships (see below).
- Additional personal information, such as allegations of abuse or neglect, history of substance misuse, and other pertinent safety considerations, which may not appear in a criminal record check. Programs should set clear parameters about how this information will be used to inform a mentor's eligibility and ensure mentors are not unfairly disqualified (e.g., substance misuse 15 years ago may have no bearing on their ability to be safe with a mentee, but current misuse may).
- How they heard about the program, to help document the helpfulness of referral sources and where specific types of volunteers are coming from.

The Face-to-Face Interview

Programs should augment the application with a standardized in-person or online face-to-face interview. The interview can collect more detailed information about the applicant's attitudes, personality, lived experiences, and other information that can help you determine how well they might provide the mentoring experience you are hoping youth receive. This information can also help clarify which youth they might be best suited to mentor, as well as whether the mentor understands, and has attitudes aligned with, the intent and values of your program. It is important that this interview is done for all applicants and follows a similar set of questions and actions each time. This helps fairly assess each individual's acceptability for the program, can reduce potential bias or exclusion, and supports consistent implementation of the program's interview processes.

...empathy, cultural humility, perspective-taking skills, and a youth-centered mindset can benefit all relationships...

The questions you ultimately include in your application and interview depend on your theory of change and the types of mentors who would (and would not) be ideal for achieving the goals you set out for your program. Although these characteristics will differ across programs, there are many traits, skills, and approaches — for example, empathy, cultural humility, perspective-taking skills, and a youth-centered mindset — that can benefit all relationships (see Herrera & Garringer, 2022), while other characteristics or attitudes, for example, negative perceptions of young people more broadly,

can weaken program benefits (Karcher et al., 2010). Other attitudes, experiences, or skills might be more important for specific types of programs, for example, group facilitation skills in group mentoring programs (Kuperminc, 2022) or industry knowledge in programs focused on career exploration of specific fields. Even if a prospective mentor doesn't naturally have all these characteristics, programs can train and support mentors in ways that foster their growth (see Element 8, "Mentor Preparation and Training" and Element 11, "Supporting Mentoring Relationships" for more information on building mentor skills).

Research supports additional information you might consider collecting in your application and interview:

Interests, identities, and life experiences: Gathering information about these types of characteristics can be helpful in matching the mentor with a young person. Although some studies suggest that matching on characteristics like race, gender or disability status can be beneficial (see for example, Heppe et al., 2020; Lyons & Edwards, 2020; Oberoi, 2016; Raposa et al., 2019), other studies do not support these associations (e.g., Heppe et al., 2021; Kanchewa et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2019). Research is more consistent on the value of matching on characteristics like shared interests, attitudes, values, beliefs, hobbies, talents, life experiences, identities, or personality (see Deng et al., 2022). Thus, collecting information on these characteristics during the screening and enrollment process can help you make strong, effective matches. (For more discussion on matching, see Element 9.)

Mentor motivations: Learning about why a mentor is interested in developing a relationship with a young person in your program can be helpful in assessing how realistic their motivations are given

your program parameters. Research has also linked specific motivations with other important mentor and relationship characteristics. For example, altruistic motivations have been linked with higher levels of ethnocultural empathy (i.e., understanding the feelings of people who are ethnically or culturally different from oneself; Miranda-Diaz et al., 2020), whereas motivations of self-enhancement are associated with less positive perceptions of relationship quality (Karcher et al., 2005). In addition, when motivations match mentors' perceived benefits, mentors tend to be more satisfied with their mentoring experience (Caldarella et al., 2010). Understanding motivations can, thus, help you anticipate where mentors may struggle going forward and how to support them.

Mentor expectations: Mentors who have unrealistic expectations — for example, in the needs of the young person they will work with, how quickly their relationship will develop, or how the child and their family will respond to their efforts — may become discouraged and end the relationship prematurely when these expectations aren't met (Spencer, 2007), which can ultimately harm youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). One study, for example, noted

that female mentors often came to their mentoring relationship expecting a close bond to develop with their mentee, while their female mentees simply wanted to have fun (Spencer et al., 2018). This mismatch in expectations didn't happen as often in male matches (both the mentors and mentees had expectations of having fun) and seemed to have negatively affected relationship quality for the female matches (Spencer et al., 2018). Understanding these expectations and realigning them when needed, can promote stronger mentoring relationships.

The interview is also a time to discuss program rules, expectations, and requirements — for example where, when, and how often matches are allowed to meet, as well as how long the match should continue meeting. The mentor's requested time commitment will depend on your program model. Many relationship-centered programs set expectations around a one-year or school-year commitment, with matches meeting once a week. Research studying these mentoring models suggested that shorter relationships were associated with less impactful relationships (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2007). Yet, other more targeted mentoring program models with shorter time frames have shown promise (e.g., Lynch et al., 2018; McQuillin & McDaniel, 2021; Seroczynski et al., 2016; Taussig et al., 2019). A key component in these findings is likely expectations: A mentee's experience of a relationship ending after five months in a program built around the value of a five-month relationship is likely very different from their experience of a five-month relationship in a program whose theory of change is built on the foundation of a long-term friendship, and in which the child expected (and hoped) the relationship would last much longer. Thus, ensuring that mentors adhere to the time frame outlined in your theory of change is what is key.

Clarifying all program expectations up front can help screen out mentors who are unsuitable for your program. Mentors also benefit from this clarity. One study, for example, found that mentors who perceived clearer program expectations reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and in turn higher levels of commitment to their match, than those who perceived less clear program expectations (Drew et al., 2020).

In addition to discussing these important topics, the interview also provides an opportunity to observe the mentor's behavior. The behavioral indicators you focus on can be limited to those that are key to your theory of change. For example, if consistency of meetings is important, a mentor who misses or needs to reschedule their interview several times may have time-management challenges that would also cause them to miss or frequently reschedule meetings with their mentee, and thus may not be a good fit for your program. Behavioral indicators and tone also can provide key information when screening. For example, a cis-gender mentor may say they are open to mentoring a young person who is transgender, but during the interview, rolls their

eyes when asked for their pronouns.

Records and Reference Checks

In addition to collecting information directly from potential mentors, programs should also use other sources, including:

Record checks: It is a privilege, not a right, to mentor a young person in a program, and service providers have an ethical duty to determine, to the best of their ability, that the mentors who represent a program are safe and capable of working effectively with young people. A large component in making that determination is the use of criminal history record checks that can reveal prior behavior that would indicate the person is not a good fit to work with a potentially vulnerable young person. Ideally, criminal record checks would include an FBI fingerprint check. If not available in your state, consider conducting state-level checks in all states where a prospective mentor has lived in the last 10 years, as well as examining child abuse registries in the relevant jurisdictions. If you are a community-based program in which driving is included in mentor activities, checking driving records is also important. The program should share its approach and standards with potential mentors, including if any criminal history would disqualify mentors and why.

This practice should be considered carefully alongside your program values and theory of change. In fact, your program may elect to allow adults with some criminal history to serve as mentors. For example, programs serving young people who have been involved with the juvenile justice system may benefit from engaging mentors who have had similar lived experiences. Studies on these types of "credible messenger" programs have yielded promising evidence of benefits for youth participants (e.g., Cramer et al., 2018; Lynch et al., 2018; Skogan et al., 2008). Nevertheless,

regardless of your program model, programs are strongly encouraged to reject all applicants who have histories that include crimes against children, recent or repeated violence toward others, or sexual crimes. **Repeating these checks regularly (e.g., every three years) for mentors in long-term programs** can also be helpful, as the program will want to be aware of new behaviors that raise safety or suitability concerns.

Reference checks: While your screening procedures

...programs serving young people who have been involved with the juvenile justice system may benefit from engaging mentors who have had similar lived experiences.

should give you a sense of the safety and suitability of the applicant, it is also helpful to hear from others who know them well. Programs should conduct reference checks with at least two people, using a standardized set of questions with, ideally, both personal and professional references to learn more about the mentors' suitability for working with a child in the program. As with interviews, the use of a standardized set of questions can reduce bias and ensure consistent information is gathered for this important step.

Programs are encouraged to conduct additional checks on a potential mentor's background where relevant. For example, programs may conduct a visit of the mentor's home to ensure that it is safe for youth, check their social media accounts to look for indications of inappropriate behavior, conduct criminal records checks of others in the mentor's home, or use validated tools to assess mentor

attitudes and beliefs that would be relevant to their role.

It is worth noting that using more stringent screening criteria has been linked with the creation of stronger matches. In one large-scale study, community-based mentors from programs using the most screening techniques (i.e., four of the most common screening techniques — written application, interview, reference check, and criminal record check — plus additional procedures) reported the closest relationships, while those from programs using fewer than three of the most common procedures had the least close relationships (Herrera et al., 2000).

Making a Formal Commitment to the Program

For those applicants who the program has determined are a good fit for the program, a final step in the application and enrollment process is **having the mentor sign a formal commitment to show they agree to participate in the program and understand all program rules, requirements, and expectations.** This commitment should include details around the frequency and duration of the mentoring commitment. Once mentors have formally committed to the program, they can move to subsequent steps, such as initial training and the establishment of their mentoring relationships.

Those applicants who are not a good fit for the program should be informed of the program's decision, ideally in writing and by phone. Applicants should be told why they were not a good fit for the program and asked whether they might be interested in helping the program in some other way.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

■ **How will we assess our prospective mentors' ability to offer the mentoring experience we hope for our young people? What skills, personality traits, and experiences would enable them to do the kind of mentoring we require? How can our theory of change help us outline these characteristics? What kinds of role-play scenarios or other opportunities can we provide to demonstrate their ability to do this work well? How else might we gather this information as they move through our enrollment process?**

■ **How are we ensuring that our staff members are treating all applicants with respect and appreciation? Where might we have biases? How can we honor the desire to get involved even from people we do not accept? Can they contribute to our work in other ways? Where else might we refer them for other opportunities to give back in the community?**

■ **How can our current mentors help us improve our screening process? Do we know how they experienced this stage of their entry into our program?**

■ **How can we assess prospective mentors' safety for working with young people? What kinds of criminal history checks are available to us? What other types of checks would be relevant for our work? What kinds of criteria would we consider disqualifying? How can our values inform those guidelines and decisions?**

■ **How do we define "safe" mentoring experiences? Does that definition include instances where a mentor (or staff) may treat a child or their family in a way that could inflict emotional harm? How can we improve our assessment of applicants to include this critical aspect of safety?**

■ **What questions should we ask mentors during their interview? What should we ask their references? And how do we weigh that information with other things learned in our enrollment process?**

■ **What is our process for making a final determination to accept or reject an applicant. Who makes the final call? And how do we handle those rejections with confidentiality and respect for the applicant?**

■ **How long does it take for a mentor to get through our enrollment and screening process? Are there efficiencies we can bring to this process without sacrificing thoroughness or validity?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth and caregivers can help refine mentor eligibility criteria by clarifying the types of individuals they are hoping are accepted as mentors and the types of characteristics and histories they would find to be either beneficial or disqualifying for a prospective mentor. Diverse perspectives are critical when gathering this information.**

■ **Programs may wish to involve youth or caregivers in interviewing prospective mentors or calling references to give their perspectives on a mentor's "fit" with the program (this should only be done in situations where they are helping determine the fit of a mentor who will not be their own).**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **The percentages of mentor applicants that are accepted, not accepted, or quit the enrollment process (with analysis of the demographic composition of each group and the reasons for disengagement or not being accepted).**

• **The average length of time it takes for prospective mentors to go from application to formal acceptance into the program (benchmarks may vary, but more than a few months may lead to disengagement of many mentors).**

• **The percentage of applicants that complete all screening steps/procedures.**

• **The percentage of all screening procedures that staff implement as intended.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Background Checks. MENTOR. This webpage offers an overview on the importance of these checks in a mentor screening process and several downloadable tips sheets on conducting background checks.

Mentor Screening – Fostering Progress. Silver Lining Mentoring. This webinar reviews the key components of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™, fourth edition*, Screening Standard and explains how to use scenarios in the interview stage to assess how a candidate would approach the mentoring role.

Promoting Screening Practices for Safety and Suitability of Mentors. National Mentoring Resource Center. This webinar discusses best practices in mentor screening.

Risk Management and Youth Safety Components for Mentoring and Youth-Serving Programs. MENTOR, National Mentoring Resource Center. This brief discusses risk management for mentoring programs including screening of both mentors and mentees.

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ELEMENT 7
YOUTH (AND CAREGIVER) PREPARATION AND TRAINING

Standard of Practice: The mentoring program offers youth (and their caregivers, as relevant) a robust preparation experience, typically centered around a mandatory orientation or training prior to starting mentoring relationships that builds their skills and knowledge for participating effectively in the program, as well as offering ongoing training throughout their relationship.

YOUTH (AND CAREGIVER) PREPARATION AND TRAINING

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

The mentoring program offers youth (and their caregivers, as relevant) a robust preparation experience, typically centered around a mandatory orientation or training prior to starting mentoring relationships that builds their skills and knowledge for participating effectively in the program, as well as offering ongoing training throughout their relationship.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program requires all youth participants to attend a pre-match orientation, training, or "preparation" event that sufficiently prepares them for their role as a mentee prior to meeting with a mentor.* While the specific content of this training will vary in content and intensity across programs reflecting their theory of change, we recommend programs address the following topics using the delivery methods described below:

Program-related topics
- Program values, beliefs, and ethical principles (see Element 1).
- Program requirements, rules, and expectations for participation.
- Participating in program activities and using program materials (e.g., use of a standardized curriculum or completing specific tasks using program materials).
- Seeking help with the mentoring relationship, the role of program staff in supporting their experience, and the youth's responsibility for participating in check-ins with program staff.

Mentoring relationship topics
- Description of the typical range of mentoring activities and experiences.
- Tips for initiating and maintaining mentoring relationships.
- Setting realistic expectations for their relationship with the mentor, including information about the types of support mentors are (and are not) expected to provide and how they can maximize that support.
- Staying safe in the relationship and information around mandatory reporting of suspected abuse.
- Program processes for transitioning out of a mentoring relationship.

Training delivery
- Training lasts a minimum of one hour, or as long as required to sufficiently cover all the information the program has deemed relevant for youth to know before they begin their mentoring relationship.
- Training is delivered in person, ideally, or virtually (live, instructor-led) using technology (e.g., web-conferencing software).
- Training includes role-plays, mentoring scenarios, or other opportunities for youth to apply newly learned concepts or skills.
- Training information is presented in multiple formats (e.g., verbally, in print, using infographics) to appeal to as wide a variety of learning styles as possible.
- Training information is accessible for youth with disabilities.
- The training is evaluated for effectiveness and areas of improvement by soliciting feedback from participating youth.

■ ***The program offers ongoing training to youth on topics relevant to the program model and to common challenges in mentoring relationships.*** While the topics that are relevant to a program will be somewhat unique to its circumstances, we recommend offering periodic training for youth participants on topics such as:
- transitions in the mentoring relationship (e.g., in anticipation of match closure or re-commitment);
- setting and pursuing goals with a mentor's help;
- broaching difficult topics with the mentor; and
- finding future mentors.

■ ***When relevant, the program orients caregivers (or other important adults) to the program's rules, expectations for their and the youth's participation, and ways they can support the mentoring relationship.*** The degree to which caregivers are involved in pre-match orientation and training will vary considerably from program to program. But in most mentoring programs, caregivers play an important role in making the mentoring experience functional and impactful. Their orientation and pre-match preparation should emphasize the following:

Program-related topics
- program values, beliefs, and ethical principles (see Element 1); and
- program requirements, rules, and expectations for participation (e.g., frequency and duration of mentoring interactions, rules for mentor and youth behavior, relevant policies, and procedures.

Mentoring relationship topics
- the mentor's role and the typical range of mentoring activities and experiences;
- their role in facilitating mentoring interactions and working effectively with mentors and program staff;
- setting realistic expectations for their child's involvement and expected impact of the experience;
- how to form a strong, collaborative relationship with their child's mentor;
- youth safety, red flags, and mandatory reporting of suspected abuse; and
- seeking help with the mentoring relationship and the role of program staff in supporting their experience.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help prepare youth and caregivers for participation in some common types of programs and settings.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs may need to cover additional training topics for youth participants, including:

- The youths' roles in helping to establish and maintain group rules, helping to create a group culture, and how to get the most out of a group mentoring experience.
- Information that describes the experience of participating in the group, the stages of group development, and the group's existing or initial rules, goals, and rituals.
- How to effectively handle group conflict or disagreement.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring models may need to provide additional or more thorough training for younger mentees on topics such as:

- Setting boundaries, maintaining confidentiality, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, relationship-building strategies, and other topics that support healthy peer interactions.
- Helping their peer mentors navigate the program location (e.g., community or recreation center, school building) and related transportation.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Because the mentoring in these programs will take place online, younger mentees will need additional training on:

- Use of the communication technology or software used for mentor-youth communication and mentoring activities.
- Technical support offered by the program for technology issues.
- Frequency of communication and response time expectations.
- Skills for virtual communication including building rapport when not meeting in person, tips for being personable online, understanding online etiquette, and nuances of online discourse (e.g., text slang, memes, emojis, gifs).
- Icebreakers, conversation prompts, and recommended (or required) activities.
- Online safety and security.
- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy online.
- Rules about additional contact outside of the program's preferred methods, including in-person contact and connecting on social media or through other online tools.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

The general practices recommended at the beginning of this Element should be sufficient for youth participating in formal school- or site-based programs, although these models may wish to spend more time in mentee training explaining how the mentor role differs from that of other adults or peers in the program setting — for example, how volunteer mentors differ from volunteer tutors or the dual role a staff member mentor might have if they are also coordinating other activities or leading non-mentoring services. Schools or sites offering group or peer-led mentoring will want to consult those sections above.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

When staff in youth development programs are providing informal mentoring, youth may need information that explains how mentoring support differs from, or complements, the other work of the organization. We recommend that when informal mentoring is available, youth-serving organizations should emphasize:

- The procedures for requesting mentoring support or approaching a staff member or volunteer to provide mentoring.
- The role mentoring plays in relation to the other services the program offers and the mentoring-specific outcomes the program hopes youth participants will achieve.
- Confidentiality, setting boundaries, and limits of the mentor's role in the context of the program and in relation to other staff members.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

While most programs emphasize *mentor* training, they often neglect to offer youth and their caregivers similar information and skill-building opportunities. Youth and caregiver training/ orientation provide the program with invaluable opportunities to share details about what youth will experience in the program and ensure that youth and their caregivers approach the experience in ways that foster success. These sessions, in most cases, can be briefer than your mentor training, but — given the critical role that both the young person and (in many cases) their caregiver play in the success of the mentoring relationship — they are no less important.

Youth Training/Preparation

Pre-match training. Preparing youth before they begin their match can not only help them get the most out of the program and minimize program risk, but also teach them valuable skills they can apply to other relationships in their lives. Thus, **we recommend programs require all youth to attend a pre-match orientation or training event.** Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted on the value of mentee training, although one study (Kasprisin et al., 2008) hints at its potential value for the mentoring relationship. In this study, college-age mentees were assigned to either a group that had optional mentee training or one in which mentees had mandatory training. The study found positive differences in the mentors of mentees who had been trained (relative to those who hadn't) in both their involvement and satisfaction in the program as well as their perceptions of their mentees.

Like mentor training, your youth training should flow from your theory of change to reflect the ways youth may contribute to receiving benefits outlined in the model — for example, how they might contribute to safe, supportive, and sustained relationships with their mentors. Thus, your training will be unique to reflect the characteristics of the youth you serve, the goals you are trying to achieve, and the program you're delivering. However, there are several training topics we encourage programs to include as they are likely of value to all young people beginning a program-based mentoring relationship. Very little research has been done to support the inclusion of these specific training topics, but practitioner experience highlights their importance in fostering safer, more positive experiences for both mentors and mentees. These topics cover two broad areas:

1. PROGRAM-RELATED TOPICS

- **Program values, beliefs, and ethical principles** should be reflected in all your program's materials and supports, including mentee training. This may include your commitment to supporting the diverse young people in the community, implementing practices to keep youth safe, ensuring that youth have a voice in how your program is delivered, and your broader commitment to diversity and celebrating differences in the youth you serve.

- **Program requirements, rules, and expectations for participation** should also be discussed. For example, youth should understand program expectations for the frequency and duration of mentoring interactions, rules for mentoring activities and mentor and youth behavior, and other relevant policies and procedures.

- If the program includes more structured activities or program materials, youth should be introduced to these materials and, when relevant, **the curriculum they would be exposed to.**

- Youth should also leave training understanding **the important role of program staff in supporting their experience and how they can get help with their relationship if needed.** In addition, youth should understand **their responsibility for participating in relationship check-ins with program staff.** That is, it is important for youth to respond to staff efforts to reach them and to be honest about how things are going so that staff can support them in having a positive experience.

2. MENTORING RELATIONSHIP TOPICS

- Youth should be given **a description of the types of mentoring activities and experiences** they are likely to engage in while in the program. Youth should start the mentoring relationship with a good understanding of what that experience may look like, the potential benefits they could gain from participation, and how they may be able to shape that experience by sharing their unique interests and goals with their mentors. Sharing your program's overarching goal of finding a great mentor for the child is also important, as is setting expectations around how long it may take to find that mentor and the possibility that you may not find an appropriate mentor for the child. Children who are not matched, or matched as quickly as expected, may see this as reflecting in some way on themselves. In fact, recent research suggests not matching a child who expects to get matched can be associated with setbacks in the very outcomes the program may be trying to foster (Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2022).

- Youth benefit from a sense of agency and control. Thus, it is important to help them understand how they can contribute to and shape the relationship and ensure that it moves in a direction they are comfortable with. Beginning a new mentoring relationship can be especially challenging and awkward for both youth and mentors. Thus, training should also provide youth with **tips for initiating and maintaining their mentoring relationship,** which can reduce any anxiety youth may have, especially about their first meeting.

- Youth come into mentoring programs with various expectations. It is important to **ensure that these expectations are realistic**, including outlining **the types of support mentors are (and are not) expected to provide** and how youth can maximize that support. This can help ensure that youth expectations are met — an important ingredient in successful mentoring relationships (Spencer, 2007). Some youth may not have thought about their expectations and the types of supports that are reasonable to expect from a mentor. Discussing them in training and setting goals for the relationship is a great way to get them thinking about their upcoming relationship and recalibrate their expectations when necessary.

• **Staying safe in the relationship and information around mandatory reporting of suspected abuse.** Youth should know that their safety is your program's first priority. Thus, many of your discussions with them throughout their relationship will be aimed at ensuring that the relationship is safe for them both physically and emotionally. Youth should know what types of activities and behaviors by mentors are and are not safe, and what they need to discuss with their caregiver and/or your staff. Training should also share with youth what is confidential in their conversations with staff and their mentor and what may need to be shared (e.g., mandatory reporting of suspected abuse).

• Just as mentors need to understand **the critical importance of positive closure experiences,** youth will also benefit from a discussion of how important it is (for both the mentor and the youth) to say goodbye to each other in a way that celebrates the relationship.

Ongoing training. In addition to pre-match training, we also recommend that **the program offers ongoing training to youth** on topics relevant to the program model. Youth may benefit from additional learning opportunities after their relationships have started. For example, they may need ongoing information from your staff about how to engage in important program activities, how to handle challenges that may have come up with their mentor, or how to add even more mentors to their networks of support. Potential topics for ongoing youth training include:

• **Transitions in the mentoring relationship.** As youth approach important transitions in your program (e.g., summer breaks or match end points), they may benefit from further discussion of what to expect from these transitions and how to approach them.

• **Setting and pursuing goals with a mentor's help**. All youth can benefit from help in how to set and pursue goals that matter to them. Ongoing training could help youth begin to brainstorm the goals they would like help with, as well as teach them how they can use a mentor as a key resource in setting and reaching those goals (see Bowers, 2022).

• **Broaching difficult topics with the mentor.** It can be hard for mentees to start conversations with their mentors on topics that concern them. Training mentees on how to do this and the value these conversations can have for the growth of their relationship can both strengthen their relationship and enable the mentor to support youth in important areas of their lives.

• **Finding future mentors**. Learning how to find potential mentors in their everyday lives can be invaluable for all youth, particularly older mentees (e.g., adolescents, young adults). Studies on youth-initiated mentoring suggest that youth can be trained to find adults in their social circles who can serve as mentors and that when these relationships endure, they may foster key youth outcomes (Schwartz et al, 2013; Spencer et al., 2016). For example, one study found that college students who participated in an intervention aimed at improving their connection with adults in college demonstrated improved help-seeking attitudes and behaviors, stronger relationships with their instructors, and higher GPAs than a group of similar students who did not participate in the initiative (Schwartz et al., 2017).

TRAINING DELIVERY

To help ensure that youth training (both pre-match and ongoing) is delivered in a way that helps youth understand, reflect on, and ultimately act on the concepts being discussed, we recommend the following:

• **Training should last a minimum of one hour,** or as long as required to cover all the information the program has deemed relevant for youth to know before they begin their mentoring relationship. Youths' attention span is often shorter than that of adults. Thus, if possible, youth may benefit from dividing up training into more than one session.

• We recommend **training is delivered in person, ideally, or virtually (live, instructor led)** with more than one youth present, if possible, to allow youth to participate in **role plays, mentoring scenarios, or other interactive opportunities** in which youth can apply newly learned concepts or skills. This will provide youth with a chance to interact with and learn from their peers. It also provides the

...more active engagement and "group work" in place of more didactic instruction have been linked with higher gains...

program with an opportunity to more directly coach youth on valuable relationship skills that can improve their mentoring experience. Youth may also benefit from breaking up more didactic, "teaching" components with chances for youth to engage, share their thoughts, and interact with their peers. These types of more active engagement and "group work" in place of more didactic instruction have been linked with higher gains in student learning and better understanding of content (Knight & Wood, 2005).

• **Training information should be presented in multiple formats** (e.g., verbally, in print, using infographics) to appeal to as wide a variety of learning styles as possible and **should be accessible for youth with disabilities.**

• Programs might consider training that engages both youth and their mentors together. Mentors and youth can learn side-by-side and engage in fun activities that can help them get to know each other and strengthen their relationship. Mentors in one study noted that they would actually be more likely to attend ongoing training if it involved their mentees as well (Courser et al., 2014).

• Finally, it is important to **evaluate all trainings for effectiveness and potential areas for improvement** by soliciting feedback from participating youth. Ideally, this should be done immediately following training to collect youth's "on-the-spot" reflections and ensure you hear from the majority of youth trainees.

Caregiver Training/Orientation

For programs in which caregivers play a role in service delivery (e.g., community-based mentoring programs serving youth under 18 in which mentors interact directly with caregivers), we recommend **the program shares with caregivers the program's rules, expectations for their and the youth's participation, and ways they can support the mentoring relationship in a formal orientation**. In some programs, other adults beyond the caregiver may also be involved in the relationship. Examples include school-based programs in which teachers or counselors help facilitate mentoring engagement or clinically focused mentoring experiences where mentors work collaboratively with other service providers. In these cases, these other adults should receive similar training so they can effectively support and supervise the mentoring relationship. This orientation should emphasize the following:

1. PROGRAM-RELATED TOPICS

- **Program values, beliefs, and ethical principles (see Element 1)** should be included in all trainings and supports for program participants. This may include the program's commitment to diversity, the central importance of youth physical and emotional safety in all program practices, and the value the program places on caregiver input and satisfaction.

- **Program requirements, rules, and expectations for participation** should also be covered, for example, how often and how long mentoring interactions should be, rules for mentor and youth behavior, and relevant policies and procedures.

Caregivers should leave orientation understanding what roles are appropriate (and inappropriate) for the mentor, the types of activities they may (and should not) engage in with their child, and how the relationship may progress over time.

2. MENTORING RELATIONSHIP TOPICS

- **The mentor's role and the types of activities youth may be involved in.** Caregivers should leave orientation understanding what roles are appropriate (and inappropriate) for the mentor, the types of activities they may (and should not) engage in with their child, and how the relationship may progress over time. Different caregivers want their child's mentor to play different roles in their lives; some of these roles may be unrealistic or inappropriate for a mentor, especially one who is a volunteer. Understanding which of these roles is likely and which may be inappropriate or unrealistic can help caregivers develop **realistic expectations for their child's involvement.** Information on how to communicate their expectations and hopes to the mentor can also be important in ensuring mentors and caregivers are on the same page. Setting expectations around how long it may take for their child to receive a mentor and the chances of not finding an appropriate mentor for the child is also important to highlight, as noted above.

- **Their role in facilitating mentoring interactions and working effectively with mentors.** Orientation should help caregivers understand how invaluable their role will be in fostering a strong relationship between a mentor and their child. Caregivers don't just provide access to their child, they can also provide information about the youth's background and strengths, help the mentor know how to approach the youth, help the youth work through any conflicts they may have with the mentor, and share with the mentor how the youth may be benefiting from their meetings. Several studies support the value of these critical roles (Basualdo-Delmonico, & Spencer, 2016; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). In fact, greater caregiver involvement in the relationship has been linked with higher-quality and longer-lasting matches (Parnes et al., 2023), and parent dissatisfaction with the relationship has been linked with match closure (Shamblen et al., 2020).

- Ensuring that caregivers have **realistic expectations for the potential impact of the experience** is equally important. Caregivers may have unrealistic expectations for how their child might benefit and how quickly these benefits might unfold, and unmet expectations can lead caregivers to end the mentoring relationship prematurely (Shamblen et al., 2020).

- **How to form a strong, collaborative relationship with their child's mentor.** It is important for caregivers to understand how their relationship with the mentor can also support the development of their child's mentoring relationship. Positive caregiver-mentor relationships are associated with mentor satisfaction (Suffrin et al., 2016), mentoring relationship quality (De Wit et al., 2020), and mentors going "above and beyond" for their mentees (Ellison et al., 2020). And disruptions in this relationship are linked with match endings (Spencer et al., 2020).

- **Youth safety, red flags, and mandatory reporting of suspected abuse.** Safety rules and guidelines should be provided to caregivers in writing in addition to being discussed in orientation. Discussing red flags that caregivers should be aware of can help relieve anxiety and empower caregivers to spot potential challenges early on.

- **How to seek help with the mentoring relationship and the role of program staff in supporting their experience.** Orientation should also highlight the importance of caregiver responsiveness to staff outreach and how valuable their input is, even when things are going well in the relationship.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **How long does our pre-match youth training need to be? What would it take to reasonably cover essential content for which we need everyone to be on the same page?**

- **What can we do to make our training engaging, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate for young people?**

- **What role(s) do caregivers play in our program? What would be helpful for caregivers to know, given this role?**

- **What topics need to be covered in our training? Have we listed all the things that need addressing? And have we developed easy-to-understand information to guide youth and caregivers?**

- **What are the goals of our training? How can we use training to ensure youth and caregivers:**
  - **have a strong understanding of the program's values and ethical principles;**
  - **know how to engage effectively in the activities of the program;**
  - **know how to handle certain situations (both crises and smaller challenges) that will come up;**
  - **can work effectively with mentors; and**
  - **can follow program rules and procedures?**

- **How often, and on what topics, might we want to offer ongoing training? How can we increase the likelihood that youth (and/or their caregivers) will attend?**

- **In what format(s) might we offer training(s) to ensure youth attend and get the most out of their participation?**

- **How can we utilize program alumni in designing and delivering training?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **If your program is based in a larger organization or institution, ask young people what mentoring might add to the overall experience of participating in the organization's services. They will likely have good thoughts about the value-add of mentoring. Similarly, soliciting the input of caregivers can provide great insight as to what they hope mentoring can offer young people in alignment with other organizational services and supports.**

■ **Ask program alumni or currently participating youth with prior mentoring experience to help develop and deliver the orientation and training that newer mentees receive. They can also support ongoing training as issues and topics arise.**

■ **Ask mentor-youth dyads to script or film a role-play on how they might overcome a specific challenge or obstacle in their match to share in youth training.**

■ **Youth can also play a role in evaluating the training they receive, offering feedback that will strengthen the training in the future and capturing the knowledge gained from the orientation and training they participated in.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **The percentage of youth who complete their full pre-match training.**

• **Youth ratings of training quality and satisfaction.**

• **Pre-post assessment of knowledge gained in relation to learning objectives.**

• **The percentage of caregivers who attend pre-match orientation and training.**

• **Caregiver ratings of training quality and satisfaction.**

• **The number and percentage of youth and caregivers who attend ongoing training opportunities.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

For Parents with Children in Mentoring Programs: Guidelines and Ground Rules. The Resource Center via MENTOR and the National Recreation and Park Association. A brief guide that includes examples of policies that can be shared with caregivers and families to help prepare them for the mentoring relationship.

Training New Mentees: A Manual for Preparing Youth in Mentoring Programs. Taylor, J. S., National Mentoring Center. This guide discusses best practices and tips on preparing mentees for their mentoring relationship.

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ELEMENT 8

MENTOR PREPARATION AND TRAINING

Standard of Practice: The mentoring program offers robust preparation for mentors — most often in the form of a mandatory multi-hour training event — prior to any mentor beginning work with a young person, with additional training offered over the course of their relationship. This training should provide mentors with information critical to their success in the role while also building their confidence for the experience and a sense of collaboration with staff around fulfilling their role.

MENTOR PREPARATION AND TRAINING

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ ***The program requires a multi-hour <u>pre-match</u> training that prepares mentors for their role prior to beginning any work with youth.*** The specific content of pre-match mentor training will vary depending on the population of youth served and the program's theory of change. The following topics and delivery methods are recommended:

Program-related topics
- Program values, beliefs, and ethical principles (see Element 1).
- The program's theory of change, including intended program outcomes and the relationship processes contributing to those outcomes (Element 2).
- Program requirements, rules, and expectations for participation (e.g., the expected frequency and duration of mentoring interactions, rules for mentor and youth behavior, relevant policies and procedures, check-ins with staff and reporting on mentoring activities, etc.).
- Engaging in program activities and using program materials (e.g., use of an activity curriculum or completing specific tasks using program materials).
- Information about the youth the program serves, their caregivers and families, and their community context, as relevant to the work mentors will engage in.
- Youth safety, red flags, and mandatory reporting of suspected abuse.
- Seeking help with the mentoring relationship, the role of program staff in supporting their experience, and the mentor's responsibility for participating in relationship check-ins

Mentoring relationship topics
- Description of the mentor role and the typical range of mentoring activities and experiences.
- Setting realistic expectations for their relationship with youth.
- Common challenges in mentoring relationships and how to establish appropriate mentor roles and boundaries.
- How to initiate, maintain, and transition out of mentoring relationships including the critical importance of positive closure experiences.
- Working effectively with caregivers and other adults in the youth's life.
- Improving mentors' cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness.
- Key mentoring skills, such as active listening, expressing empathy, growing social capital, advocacy, supporting youth goal setting and pursuit, or other relevant forms of mentor support.

Training delivery
- Training lasts a minimum of two hours or as long as needed to sufficiently cover all the information the program has deemed necessary for mentors to know before they start mentoring.
- Training is delivered in person or using a blended learning approach (i.e., in person and online).
- Training information is presented in multiple formats (e.g., verbally, in print, using infographics) to appeal to a wide variety of learning styles.
- Training information is accessible for mentors with disabilities.
- Training includes role-plays, mentoring scenarios, or other opportunities for mentors to practice and apply newly learned concepts or skills.
- Training includes learning checks and an assessment of mentor knowledge or skills to gauge the effectiveness of the training and help improve it over time.
- The training is evaluated for effectiveness and areas of improvement by soliciting feedback from participating mentors.

■ *The program uses training as an additional opportunity to assess prospective mentors' suitability for participating in the program, screening out mentors who do not seem capable of adhering to the program's behavioral expectations or values* While mentors may have been formally "accepted" into the program prior to receiving training, practitioners should view pre-match training as an additional screening opportunity that can identify mentors who may not be able to follow program rules or whose behaviors might lead to harm for youth participants, their caregivers, or even staff.

■ *The program requires* <u>*ongoing*</u> *training for mentors on topics relevant to the program model or to address common challenges in mentoring relationships.* It is recommended that programs offer ongoing mentor training at multiple points during the mentor's commitment to the program. The frequency of these trainings will differ among programs based on need. These trainings should be required of all mentors, and programs should have practices in place to ensure that all mentors participate (e.g., offering recordings of the trainings, holding the same training at multiple times), with policies stipulating the potential consequences for not completing the required training. While the content of ongoing training will differ across programs, the following topics are suggested for these learning opportunities:
- supporting youth through upcoming times of transition in the mentoring relationship (e.g., in anticipation of match closure or re-commitment);
- supporting youth in transitions in their lives (e.g., matriculating to high school, leaving the child welfare system, preparing for a first job); and
- having difficult mentor-youth conversations about behavior change, traumas recently experienced, or community or societal issues.

Note that the training delivery recommendations for pre-match training also apply to ongoing training events, although programs may choose to offer some ongoing training in a self-paced, recorded format.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help prepare both volunteer and staff mentors for their role and participation in the program.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Mentors in group programs may need more robust pre-match training that covers topics such as group management, supporting healthy group dynamics and, when relevant, facilitating sequenced activities and conversations using the program's curriculum. Because of these additional topics, mentor training should extend beyond the minimum of two hours generally recommended. While the exact length of training will vary from program to program, those reliant on complex group activities or skill-building work may offer half, full, or even multiday pre-match training to mentors, depending on the volume and nature of the content covered. Additional training topics for group mentors may also include:

- Collaboration and co-facilitation with other mentors (for team models in which multiple mentors work with a group).
- Strategies for developing close, effective relationships with all group members and treating all mentees equitably;
- Strategies for encouraging group members to participate in activities, building group norms and rituals, and generating feelings of belonging in the group.
- Guidance for when scheduled or sequenced activities can be deviated from while still maintaining the fidelity of the program model and mandated activities.
- Strategies for handling negative group dynamics (e.g., cliques, conflicts, scapegoating, nonparticipation).
- Strategies for group decision-making, and handling disagreements and disruptions to group activities or conversations.
- Confidentiality in a group setting.
- Handling times of transition and closure (e.g., departures and additions of group members).

Group mentors may also need more frequent ongoing training, especially in alignment with upcoming

activities they are expected to design or facilitate.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Because the mentors in a peer or near-peer model are youth themselves, there may be a need for additional pre-match training beyond the minimum recommended two hours. However, because youth may have more limited attention spans than adults, programs might consider breaking up lengthy trainings into smaller units delivered over several days. Factors such as the age of the peer mentors and their prior experience in related positions will influence the amount and focus of training, but it is expected that peer mentors may need focused or expanded training on topics such as:

- Understanding the mentoring role and providing positive role modeling.
- Facilitating program activities using provided materials or curriculum.
- Setting boundaries, maintaining confidentiality, appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, relationship-building strategies, and other topics that support healthy peer interactions.
- How to ask for support when the relationship or an activity is not going well.
- Programs that send peer mentors to external sites should train mentors in how to check in when arriving and rules governing visitors at the site or campus, as well as any transportation rules or procedures.

Peer mentors may also need more frequent ongoing training, especially in alignment with upcoming activities they are expected to design or facilitate.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Programs in which mentors and youth communicate primarily through online or virtual methods have several additional recommended training topics that may add to the amount or duration of their pre-match or ongoing training. These programs may gain some efficiencies by training mentors, at least in part, using the same technology they would use to communicate with the young people they mentor (e.g., via web-conferencing software or in a virtual mentoring platform the program has developed). Additional recommended topics include:

- Use of the communication technology or software used for mentor-youth communication and mentoring engagements.
- Technical support offered by the program for technology issues.
- Frequency of mentor-mentee communication and response time expectations.
- Skills for virtual communication including building rapport when not in person, tips for being personable online, understanding online etiquette, and nuances of online discourse (e.g., text slang, memes, emojis, gifs).
- Icebreakers, conversation prompts, and recommended (or required) activities.
- Online safety and security.
- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy online.

- Rules about additional contact outside of the program's preferred methods, including in-person contact and connecting on social media or through other online tools.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

Formal programs set in schools, youth development organizations, or other institutional sites will likely have many training needs that are unique to their setting and context. It should be noted that scheduling of training can be complicated for these sites, as staff often have limited time to train or be trained while the program is operating, and youth are being served. Bringing in volunteers for training during these times can also be challenging. This may mean offering training during times when the organization is closed or on weekends (which can create logistical challenges) or offering training asynchronously using video or online teaching tools. Regardless of how their preparation gets completed, site-based programs must ensure that all mentors get thorough pre-relationship training. Recommended topics for school- and site-based programs include:

- Procedures for checking in when arriving and rules and policies governing visitors at the site or campus.
- Navigating the site and where to access resources used in the program.
- Interacting with school or program staff and who to contact on the staff for various needs (e.g., relationship advice, help with an activity).
- Facilitating program activities using provided materials or curriculum.
- How the mentor role differs from that of other adults or peers in the program setting — for example, how volunteer mentors differ from volunteer tutors in that context or the dual role a mentor might have if they are also staff at the site.
- Rules for communicating with youth outside of program time.
- Appropriate engagement with other students — both with other program participants and other students not participating in the program.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

For youth development programs offering informal mentoring via staff members, most of the topics recommended for mentors in formal programs will also apply. For staff members who may informally mentor, recommended training topics include:

- Differentiating the mentoring role from their other duties and responsibilities in the organization.
- The role mentoring plays in relation to the other services and supports the organization offers and the mentoring-specific outcomes hoped for mentored youth.
- Confidentiality, setting boundaries, and limits of the mentoring role in the context of the organization.
- Using program resources (e.g., financial, physical space, equipment, supplies) for mentoring activities.
- Policies and procedures around the scheduling and location of mentoring activities, including off-site activities and transportation, as relevant.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

It is critical that programs thoroughly prepare all mentors for the experience by teaching them valuable skills for working with young people and the importance of adhering to program rules and expectations. **This information should be delivered in training — both pre-match (before the mentor and youth meet) and ongoing (after the mentoring relationship has begun)** to continue to support the mentor as the relationship develops.

Pre-match Training

Research in the mentoring field has supported the value of pre-match training for mentors and mentoring relationships. For example, mentors who report receiving pre-match training have longer, higher-quality, and more frequently meeting matches (Herrera et al., 2007; Herrera et al., 2013). Yet in these studies and many others examining how the amount of training received is associated with relationship and youth outcomes, it is difficult to tease apart effects of the training from the effects of mentor engagement (e.g., mentors who are more engaged in their relationship may be more likely to take advantage of offered training) and from the effects of other mentoring program practices such as monitoring and support that may vary with training (e.g., programs that offer strong mentor training may also provide strong support). Thus, associations between the receipt of training and relationship outcomes may reveal more about the mentor or other aspects of the program than the training itself. More compelling evidence comes from a recent study involving 45 mentoring agencies. Programs in this study that reported implementing practices in line with the training standard from the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™*, fourth edition (i.e., a minimum of two hours of pre-match training including at least seven research-based topics), had longer matches than those that did not adhere to these standards (Kupersmidt, Stump, Stelter, & Rhodes, 2017). Other studies suggest that pre-match training varies in its effectiveness. For example, in a randomized controlled trial examining the impact of a four-hour, pre-match, asynchronous, online mentor training program, mentors who were assigned to complete the online program were more knowledgeable about mentoring and felt better prepared to begin mentoring than mentors who were randomly assigned to a control group that was offered "training as usual" from their program (i.e., either received no training or the program's standard pre-match training during the study period; Kupersmidt, Stelter, Rhodes, & Stump, 2017).

...mentors who report receiving pre-match training have longer, higher-quality, and more frequently meeting matches...

In addition to fostering key knowledge and skills in mentors that may contribute to longer, higher-quality relationships, **pre-match training also can be used as an additional opportunity to assess prospective mentors' suitability for program participation.** It is not uncommon for training to reveal attitudes or beliefs that were not apparent during the screening process, especially when prospective mentors are asked to role play their response to realistic mentoring scenarios. During training (and in all your interactions with mentors), it is particularly important to pay attention to mentor behaviors that may indicate bias or opinions that

could be harmful to youth, as well as behaviors that might suggest challenges adhering to program rules or procedures. In addition, mentors who fail to complete the pre-match training requirements could also have difficulty fulfilling other program requirements such as those around the frequency of meetings and relationship duration. In this way, training completion can provide an important piece of information for screening prospective mentors for their availability and commitment to the program.

Pre-match Training Content

Training should be an integral part of both your theory of change and your logic model, and the content of your training should reflect the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors you want to see in your mentors to help ensure the outcomes outlined in your theory of change have the best chance of coming to fruition (see Kupersmidt & Rhodes, 2014). In this way, your training will be unique to your program and community. If training on a particular topic is essential for all mentoring relationships in your program, then it should be required before mentors start their work, because the likelihood of mentors attending training after the relationship has started, even if it is required, is much lower than before their relationship begins (e.g., Jarjoura et al., 2018).

In addition to any unique elements included in your mentor training, all mentors can benefit from pre-match training that covers several basic elements. These components will help mentors leave your training with confidence to begin a relationship with youth, which can put them on the right track to creating a successful mentoring relationship (Karcher et al., 2005; Parra et al., 2002). Although recommended for pre-match training, these topics are not "one-stop" topics that can be taught before the match begins and checked off as completed — they

should be encouraged and supported over the entire course of the relationships fostered by your program.

With some notable exceptions described below, very few studies have rigorously tested whether training on these topics makes a measurable difference in mentoring relationship quality or outcomes. However, several studies support the inclusion of specific training topics, because they find evidence that mentors with these skill sets, attitudes or knowledge create stronger or more beneficial relationships with youth. Two categories of topics are recommended for inclusion in pre-match mentor training:

1. PROGRAM-RELATED TOPICS

- **Your program's values, beliefs, and ethical principles** should be woven into all your materials and supports, including mentor training (see Element 1).

- **Program requirements, rules, and expectations** for participation should be discussed, including if relevant, **how to effectively use program curricula, engage youth in program-related activities,** and interact with site-based staff and resources. When program expectations are clear, mentors are more satisfied with their relationship and more committed than when mentors report less clear expectations (Drew et al., 2020).

- **Information about the youth the program serves, their caregivers and families, and their community context** is important for all programs, especially those that serve youth with unique challenges — for example, youth in foster care, youth in the juvenile justice system, or immigrant children. These youth may have experienced separation from family members and trauma, and may have difficulties trusting and developing a relationship with an adult outside of their

family. Thus, mentors in these programs may need additional training on some of the common issues that may arise when working with youth who have faced such challenges. Even in programs that don't focus their efforts on specific groups of youth, mentors often start their relationship knowing very little about the young person they will work with, and in most cases, they don't share similar backgrounds and experiences with their mentees (Herrera et al., 2013). This can contribute to deficit-based views of youth and their families (Spencer et al., 2022; Spencer, Gowdy, et al., 2020), which can harm the mentor's relationship with both the youth and their caregiver. The typically distinct socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of mentors and the youth they serve supports the inclusion of training on structural oppression and social class bias, as well as cultural humility (see below).

- Like program values, **youth safety** — both physical and emotional — and a principle of doing no harm to the young people in your program should be integrated into all training and supports throughout the life of the mentoring relationship (Rhodes et al., 2009). Safety rules and guidelines should be provided to mentors in writing in addition to being discussed in training. Red flags that mentors should be aware of and their responsibility to report any abuse they suspect should also be included.

- Training should also discuss **the program's theory of change,** including the youth outcomes the program hopes to achieve and the relationship processes contributing to those outcomes.

- Training should highlight not only **the critical role staff play in supporting the mentoring relationship,** but also the importance of talking with staff regularly and being responsive to their outreach, even when things are going well.

2. MENTORING RELATIONSHIP TOPICS

- Mentors should leave training understanding **the mentor role, the types of activities and experiences they will engage in, and what to expect in terms of their relationship with youth** — how it is likely to progress over time, **common challenges including those around relationship boundaries,** and how to establish appropriate mentor roles and boundaries. Mentors whose expectations are met (for example, for their role and what their relationship will be like) have both higher-quality and longer-lasting matches (Madia & Lutz, 2004; Spencer, 2007).

- Like all relationships, mentoring relationships have a beginning, middle, and end, and mentors' roles may shift as the young person develops (see Herrera & Garringer, 2022; Keller, 2005). Relationship endings are particularly important. Yet many programs do not have strong closure procedures woven into their practices (see Element 12; Spencer et al., 2021; Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Thus, training mentors on **how to start, maintain, and end the relationship,** even before they begin their mentoring journey is vitally important, as is supporting them throughout the relationship on **the critical importance of positive closure experiences** (Spencer et al., 2017).

- Mentor training should include a discussion of **how mentors can positively engage with caregivers** and leverage that relationship to support and strengthen the match (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). Caregivers are an invaluable resource for mentors. In addition to providing access to their child, they can provide information about the youth's history, facilitate match activities, help the mentor know how to approach and "read" the young person, and share how their child may be benefiting from

their meetings. Several studies support the value of these critical roles (Basualdo-Delmonico, & Spencer, 2016; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). In fact, greater caregiver involvement in the relationship has been linked with higher-quality and longer-lasting matches (Parnes et al., 2023), and parent dissatisfaction with the relationship has been linked with match closure (Shamblen et al., 2020). The mentor-parent relationship itself is also key. Positive relationships with the youth's family are associated with mentor satisfaction (Suffrin et al., 2016), mentoring relationship quality (De Wit et al., 2020), and mentors going "above and beyond" for their mentees (Ellison et al., 2020). Disruptions in this relationship are linked with match endings (Spencer, Gowdy, et al., 2020).

- All programs should try to strengthen **mentors' cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness.** For many reasons, a majority of mentors in the nation's mentoring programs are White (Garringer et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2017), while the majority of youth served are youth of color (Garringer et al., 2017). Relationships that bring together mentors and youth of different racial or socioeconomic backgrounds can be valuable to both the child and the mentor (Jones et al., 2023a; Liao &

Relationships that bring together mentors and youth of different racial or socioeconomic backgrounds can be valuable to both the child and the mentor...

Sanchez, 2015; Simpson et al., 2023), but they can also raise unique challenges (Lindwall, 2017). Some mentors who work with youth of color have negative assumptions and stereotypes about them (Hughes et al., 2009; Priest et al., 2018) which may affect their expectations and the types of support they provide, or fail to provide, to their mentees. This can be especially true for White mentors (see Simpson et al., 2023). Training should prepare mentors of all backgrounds to celebrate the many identities of the young person they will meet with, regardless of whether they are in a mixed- or same-race relationship. Mentors' negative attitudes about race, ethnicity, or culture can harm their relationship with youth of color (see Sanchez et al., 2021), while their support for the ethnic/racial identity of their mentee is associated with increases in relationship quality, and (for girls of color with White mentors), increases in the mentee's exploration of ethnic identity (Sanchez et al., 2019). Other related areas include mentors' ethnocultural empathy and ethnic identity exploration/commitment — both of which have been linked with the mentee's willingness to explore their own ethnic identities (Peifer et al., 2016). Importantly, training in cultural humility has been linked in a rigorous study with increases in mentor's self-efficacy to provide racial/ethnic support (Anderson & Sanchez, 2022). Other studies, reviews, and more preliminary

research also support the value of training on cultural competence and how to work with youth of color and immigrant youth (e.g., Jones et al., 2023a; Jones et al., 2023b; Lindwall, 2017; Oberoi, 2016; Suffrin et al., 2016). Researchers note in this context that, in addition to including these topics in training, it is important to consider how to successfully implement training on this topic (e.g., ensuring facilitators represent diverse racial backgrounds and that they have both mentoring and cultural humility facilitation experience; see Anderson et al., 2022).

- It is also recommended that programs include training on **key mentoring skills, such as active listening, expressing empathy, growing social capital, and advocacy.** Recent research supports the value of including some of these important topics in mentor training. For example, one study found that efforts to connect mentees with other people and resources in their communities (helping to grow their social capital) was an important ingredient in fostering program benefits (Austin et al., 2020). There is also some support for including a focus on teaching and advocacy in training. A meta-analysis of 73 evaluations of mentoring programs found that programs that were structured to support the mentor in taking on teaching or advocacy roles with their mentees yielded stronger benefits than programs without this structure (DuBois et al., 2011). Mentor attunement (i.e., a set of communication strategies to foster connection and create a sense that mentees feel "heard and seen," Pryce et al., 2022) is another key ingredient in successful mentoring relationships (see Pryce, 2012; Pryce et al., 2022). Attunement includes flexibility, youth centeredness, active listening, perspective-taking, and responsiveness — all important contributors to positive relationships. In one study, mentor

attunement was linked with stronger academic outcomes in mentees (Weiler et al., 2019). Another found that mentor misattunement was the most powerful characteristic distinguishing high- and low-satisfaction matches (Varga & Deutsch, 2016). Qualitative work also links mentor empathy and flexibility with mentor satisfaction and match retention (Spencer et al., 2023; Spencer, Gowdy, et al., 2020; Spencer, Pryce, et al., 2020). Training in attunement-related topics has shown promise in improving mentor attitudes, mentoring relationship quality and youth outcomes. For example, mentors who received training in mindfulness (relative to a group who did not get this added component) experienced higher satisfaction, greater increases in empathy, and a shift toward a more youth-centered approach (Foukal et al., 2016). Teachers who received training in social perspective-taking (relative to teachers randomly assigned to a group who did not receive this training) had more positive relationships with students they had previously had difficulty with, put more effort into understanding them, and these students performed better academically (Gehlbach et al., 2023). Other more preliminary work has added an attunement component to staff training with positive results (i.e., significant increases in empathy as well as self-reports of increased attunement, listening ability, and collaboration in the supervisory relationship; Pryce et al., 2018).

Ongoing Training

While pre-match training should help mentors step into their role with confidence, there will inevitably be challenges that arise in their relationships, or skills and behaviors that will take on increased relevance as their relationships mature and change over time (Keller, 2005). In fact, mentors tend to decline in their perceived self-efficacy over the course of the relationship (Peaslee & Teye, 2015),

and self-efficacy is an important ingredient in mentor satisfaction (Martin & Sifers, 2012) and successful mentoring relationships (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher et al., 2005; Parra et al., 2002). For this reason, **programs should offer (and require) ongoing mentor training at several points in the program cycle.** Given developmental changes in the relationship over time (and in the youth being mentored), it is important to consider when in the relationship different topics may matter most (Courser et al., 2014).

… mentors with access to training modules had longer matches than those without access.

Research evidence for the value of ongoing training includes more preliminary work noting links between attending ongoing training and relationship length and quality (Herrera et al., 2013; see also Herrera et al., 2007) as well as a meta-analysis involving 55 evaluations of mentoring programs which found evidence for larger program effects in those programs that offered ongoing training relative to those that didn't (DuBois et al., 2002). Peaslee & Teye (2015) randomly assigned mentors to have access to a set of ongoing online training modules or simply have training as usual without the added modules. Those mentors with access to the training modules had longer matches than those without access. McQuillin et al.'s (2015) study further supports the value of ongoing training for mentors in school-based mentoring. Their training was on goal setting and how to end or continue the relationship beyond the semester — both topics mentors had previously noted wanting extra support

in. When administering the program with these booster trainings (relative to the same program without these additional trainings), mentors reported receiving more program support, ascribed a higher value to their training, and were more likely to plan to continue mentoring, which in turn contributed to greater relationship satisfaction.

Ongoing Training Content

Matches with different types of youth (e.g., youth of different age groups, youth with varying needs) and different types of relationships (e.g., one-to-one, group) may need very different types of training and support. Thus, the topics covered in ongoing training should be responsive to the needs of your mentors as their relationship progresses. For that reason, we have fewer recommended topics and encourage programs to develop these topics based on mentor needs and change them over time as needed. The following broad topics are a good place to start for most programs:

- **Transitions in the mentoring relationship.** Reiterating the importance of a positive relationship ending is crucial throughout the relationship. Other transitions that your program incorporates in the mentoring life cycle may be similarly important to guide mentors through.

- **Supporting youth goal setting and pursuit.** McQuillin et al.'s (2015) study which assessed the value of ongoing training on goal setting and relationship transitions supports the value of training on these important topics; participation in ongoing training was linked with mentor perceptions of program support, training value, plans to continue mentoring, and relationship satisfaction. Also see Bowers (2022) for more discussion on goal setting.

- **Having difficult conversations about behavior change or societal issues.** Many mentors will be faced with situations in which they'd like to help their mentee with some behavioral challenge. These conversations can be risky to the relationship but, when approached with key strategies in mind, can also help mentees set and achieve their own personal behavioral goals (see McQuillin, 2022). Building critical consciousness and supporting youth in developing their own voice and using it to effect change in their community are also invaluable training topics (see Weiston-Serdan, 2022).

Training Delivery (both Pre-match and Ongoing)

We also recommend attending to several aspects of the delivery of your mentor training:

- **Pre-match training should last a minimum of two hours** or as long as needed to cover all the information your program has deemed necessary for mentors to know before they begin mentoring. The length of your training depends on the goals of your program and the specific skills your mentors need to implement your program well. Thus, research guidance on training duration should be interpreted with this caveat in mind. Nevertheless, many studies suggest that receiving more training is better than less. For example,

the receipt of more training is linked with higher mentor efficacy, stronger relationship quality, and continuation of school-based matches into a second school year (Herrera et al., 2007). Two studies further found that receiving less than two hours of training is associated with lower-quality, shorter relationships (Herrera et al., 2000; Herrera et al., 2008). Drew et al. (2020) reported that receiving more pre-match training was linked with higher levels of mentor investment in the relationship and, in turn, stronger commitment to the relationship.

- **Training (particularly pre-match) should be delivered in person or using a blended approach that combines in-person and virtual delivery.** In-person training allows for conversation and community building (Anderson et al., 2022) as well as role-playing, peer learning, and an opportunity for the program to observe the mentor (which can contribute to screening decisions). Thus, we recommend training includes a face-to-face component. Online training (either asynchronous or "live") also has benefits. For example, asynchronous online training — which can be attended at the mentor's convenience — can provide flexibility for mentors in when they attend and how they learn. Online and face-to-face training can also be combined to create a "blended" approach, which has several additional benefits. For example, asynchronous online

Matches with different types of youth and different types of relationships may need very different types of training...

training can provide mentors with an introduction to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to be an effective mentor and provide opportunities to practice problem-solving real-world scenarios commonly encountered in mentoring relationships. This foundational training can then enable mentors to arrive at their face-to-face training with a common vocabulary and understanding of their role, allowing face-to-face time to be used more efficiently to practice and role-play more advanced skills.

Very few studies of mentoring programs have compared the effects of training using different modalities (e.g., face-to-face, online, blended), and findings from related areas (e.g., higher education) have been mixed. For example, one meta-analysis examined studies on learning more broadly (e.g., classroom learning) and reported improved learning outcomes for both blended and online-alone learning relative to only face-to-face instruction (Means et al., 2013). However, because many of the reviewed studies did not try to equate factors like curriculum content and time spent learning across the different learning modalities, these findings may reflect differences other than simply the "mode" of learning. Also, a similar meta-analysis focusing on a more recent set of studies examining classroom versus online learning in higher education did not find the same differences (Müller, & Mildenberger, 2021). Despite limitations in the studies that have been conducted to date, it is clear that offering training in multiple ways and multiple times will increase the chances that you involve more mentors (especially for ongoing training; Courser et al., 2014). In fact, for ongoing training, volunteers often prefer more self-directed learning based on their individual needs, such as online trainings and peer mentoring (Homan et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2020).

- **Training information should be presented in several formats** (e.g., verbally, in print, infographics, animations, problem-solving activities) to appeal to a wide variety of learning styles **and should be accessible for mentors with disabilities.**

- **Training should include role-plays, mentoring scenarios, or other opportunities for mentors to practice and apply new skills.** Mentors enjoy learning from each other and opportunities to share experiences with their peers (Anderson et al., 2022; Kok et al., 2020). Engaging in more targeted role-plays and mentoring scenarios also provides mentors valuable opportunities to practice and enables the program to observe their interactions and provide feedback as needed.

- **Trainings should include an assessment of mentor knowledge or skills to gauge their effectiveness and should be evaluated for potential areas of improvement** by soliciting feedback from participating mentors. Mentor perceptions of quality matter, so it is important to track quality and improve training when needed. Goldner & Golan (2017), for example, found that perceived quality of training was related to alumni mentor reports that the mentoring experience contributed to their personal growth which was in turn associated with current civic engagement attitudes and activism. Allen et al. (2006) in their study of workplace mentoring further found that mentor reports of higher training quality predicted stronger program understanding (e.g., of the program's purpose and expectations) and higher levels of perceived program effectiveness. Others have found links between perceived training quality and relationship quality (Herrera et al., 2008; Martin & Sifers, 2012) and match duration (Herrera et al., 2008).

• Programs might consider offering training that engages both youth and their mentors. Matches can engage in fun activities that can strengthen their relationship, and mentors may be more likely to attend if training involves their mentees (Courser et al., 2014).

• Finally, it is important to help mentors understand the value of training and implement clear policies for when training is not completed, particularly for ongoing training. Training attendance is a challenge in mentoring programs (Anderson et al., 2022; Courser et al., 2014; Jarjoura et al., 2018; Peaslee & Teye, 2015), and studies suggest that the mentors who don't attend may be the ones who need training the most (Anderson & Sanchez, 2022; Kulik et al., 2007). Mentors in one study shared they would be more likely to attend training if they believed not participating could harm their match (Courser et al., 2014). The authors suggested that programs could share evaluation results with mentors showing that training participation is linked with a reduced likelihood of premature closure or lower-quality relationships — which would help mentors understand that training would be a good investment of their time (Courser et al., 2014).

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

■ **How long does our pre-match training need to be to cover the issues that are central to our program model? What would it take to reasonably cover the content for which we need everyone to be on the same page?**

■ **What topics need to be covered in our training? Does our training content support key components in our theory of change? And have we developed easy-to-understand materials (e.g., tip sheets, handouts, mentor handbooks, etc.) to guide mentors?**

■ **What are the goals of our mentor training? How can we use training to ensure that mentors:**
  - **have a strong understanding of the program's values and ethical principles;**
  - **know how to engage effectively in the activities of the program;**
  - **know how to handle challenges (both crises and smaller obstacles) that may come up;**
  - **can work effectively with both youth and their caregivers; and**
  - **can follow program rules and procedures?**

■ **How does our program prepare and support our mentors to work with young people from different backgrounds, including youth of color, LGBTQIA2S+ youth, and youth with disabilities?**

■ **How often, and on what topics, might we want to offer ongoing training?**

■ **How will we ensure that mentors attend our trainings and get the skills we hope to instill in them? What barriers might prevent mentors from attending trainings? How can we enforce that required trainings are attended by all?**

■ **How can we utilize program alumni (both mentors and youth) in designing and delivering training?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Ask your program's mentors what they wish they had known before they started mentoring. Solicit their input on training topics and best methods for delivery.

- Engage current mentors or program alumni to help deliver training to new mentors.

- Ask young people (and their caregivers, as appropriate) about the skills, temperaments, and knowledge that they wish their mentors had or things they feel their mentors have struggled with. Their perspectives on what they want in a mentor are invaluable in designing the right training for future mentors.

- Ask subject matter experts from other community organizations to contribute to the development or delivery of mentor training, especially if they have expertise lacking in your staff.

- Mentors, youth, and caregivers can be excellent sources of topics for ongoing training, especially if they are experiencing common challenges that additional learning could alleviate.

- Ask mentor-youth dyads to script or film a role-play on how they might overcome a specific challenge or obstacle in their match to share in mentor training.

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **The duration of each training offered.**

- **The percentage of mentors who complete pre-match training prior to beginning their match.**

- **If offering more than one modality of training (e.g., in-person, online), the percentage of mentors completing training in each modality.**

- **Ratings of training quality and satisfaction.**

- **Pre-post assessment of knowledge gained in relation to learning objectives.**

- **The number and percentage of mentors who attend each ongoing training opportunity.**

- **The number of ongoing trainings offered during a given program cycle and the topics included.**

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. MENTOR. This resource includes chapters on several topics recommended for inclusion in mentor training.

Developmental Assets Framework. Search Institute. Defines the internal and external skills and supports all young people need to thrive. Available for download in multiple languages. https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/developmental-assets-framework/

Mentor Training–Fostering Progress. Silver Lining Mentoring. This webinar discusses how to assess learning during mentor training and how mentor screening and training influences ongoing match support.

Ongoing Training for Mentors: Twelve Interactive Sessions for U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Programs. National Mentoring Resource Center. This training guide provides 12 ready-to-use training activities designed to enhance mentors' skills and support their relationships with youth over time. Topics covered include setting boundaries with youth, exploring culture and identity, effective communication, and working with the mentee's family.

Peer Mentor Handbook. Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania. A training guide designed for younger peer mentors that provides guidance for starting the mentoring relationship.

Trauma Training Facilitator's Toolkit. Communities In Schools. A guide developed for educators that can help design trauma-informed training for mentors.

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ELEMENT 9

ESTABLISHING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Standard of Practice: Mentoring programs create new mentoring relationships, whether between individuals or between mentors and groups of youth, using a standardized procedure and set criteria that increase the likelihood of a successful mentoring experience for participants.

ESTABLISHING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

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STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Mentoring programs create new mentoring relationships, whether between individuals or between mentors and groups of youth, using a standardized procedure and set criteria that increase the likelihood of a successful mentoring experience for participants.

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PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has established criteria and a process for determining the compatibility and potential "fit" between youth participants and mentors.* We encourage programs to consider the following factors, weighed in accordance with their program model and the youth they serve:

- Shared backgrounds, identities, or lived experience(s);
- Shared interests or hobbies;
- Compatibility of preferred meeting times and locations;
- Compatible values, personality traits, and communication styles; and
- Mentor characteristics that could support the youth's pursuit of their specific goals or developmental needs (i.e., skills or professional experiences that are aligned with the youth's goals or needs).

■ *The program matches youth with mentors using a standardized procedure that includes:*

- **Sharing information with all participants about their potential mentoring "match" prior to their first mentoring interaction.** Before having mentors and youth meet for the first time, programs should share with all parties (including caregivers where relevant) information about the individual (or group) the participant will be matched with. Care should be taken in disclosing potentially sensitive information (e.g., LGBTQIA2S+ status), and participant preferences for disclosing such information should be honored.

- **Consideration of participant preference and feedback before moving forward with a proposed mentoring match.** There will be instances where the sharing of information with participants about their prospective match may generate more concerns and questions than enthusiasm. It is recommended that programs accommodate these requests and not move toward officially starting a match if it goes against the preferences of any participant (see below for information on the option of starting relationships on a "trial" period, as an alternative way to address this concern).

- **Arrangement and facilitation of an initial meeting between mentor and youth in which mentoring roles, participant expectations, and program values are reiterated.** Programs should consider helping the new mentoring relationship get off to a good start by having staff arrange and facilitate (i.e., setting up and participating in) a first meeting.

Having all participants (including caregivers where relevant) sign a match commitment form or similar document that details expectations around the frequency and duration of mentoring activities, areas of focus for the relationship (e.g., goals), how the participants will communicate between mentoring activities, and other details that help clarify expectations for each participant around the mentoring experience. Although participants will have agreed to follow program rules as part of their formal commitment to the program during the enrollment and screening processes, programs may also want participants to commit to each other using a "match commitment" form that outlines key details of the new relationship.

Additional Practices for Consideration

- ■ *The program provides an opportunity for youth and mentors to get to know potential mentoring partners and offer their preferences for who they would like to work with.* While many programs will choose to have staff suggest potential good "fits" for new mentoring relationships (e.g., by reviewing information about each participant or observing interactions of the potential match), some programs may wish to give participants more direct involvement in deciding who they will develop a relationship with (e.g., a chance for youth to interact individually with mentors and rank their preference, a "meet and greet" activity that enables youth and mentors to interact and note their preferences for who they might work with).

- ■ *The program offers new mentoring relationships a trial period to see if the relationship is progressing as intended or if participants would benefit from a change.* Even when programs invest considerable effort and careful consideration into forming new mentoring relationships, there will be occasional instances of incompatibility or other challenges that suggest the relationship is unlikely to succeed for the long term. Thus, programs may consider starting new mentoring relationships (or a subset of them when there are initial concerns) on a brief trial period before participants fully commit to the relationship.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help form successful mentoring pairs or groups in a variety of common program types and contexts.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

There are several ways that the formation of mentoring groups differs from the creation of one-to-one relationships. Not only are programs trying to find compatibility among the youth selected for a group, but for programs where multiple mentors work collaboratively with a larger group of young people (i.e., team models) — there is a need to ensure mentor-to-mentor "fit" as well. Offering these newly formed groups a trial period that allows group members to interact and see how well they mesh before finalizing the makeup of the group may be especially helpful to group models, as it allows for some final tinkering with group membership before fully committing to group assignments (clearly, programs that offer only one group do not have this flexibility).

Group programs are also encouraged to think about mentor-to-youth ratios and total group size when forming groups. Research suggests that a ratio of 3–6 youth per mentor and a maximum total group size in the 12–15 range may create groups that are both cohesive and manageable. See Element 2 for additional information about group size and structure.

Group programs may benefit from these additional recommended practices:

Create groups being mindful about compatibility, diversity of personalities, strengths, and sensitivity to clustering youth with similar needs, challenges, or behavioral issues. Shared lived experiences can be an asset that helps groups build trust quickly and creates a safe space for youth to challenge one another without fear of judgment. Yet part of what makes group mentoring so impactful is mentees' exposure to a variety of peers, which can help participants build new friendships, expand their social circles, reflect on biases and prior misconceptions of other youth, and hear new perspectives and points of view. This doesn't happen if the program has clustered very similar youth into a group or simply recreated existing friendship groups. Creating diverse groups also makes it easier for mentors and staff to manage behavioral challenges and mitigate negative role modeling among peer participants. Both approaches can contribute to strong — or challenging — groups, and programs should consider their approach based on the purpose and goals of the program.

Consider youths' prior histories with one another when creating groups and avoid grouping youth who have a history of conflict or disagreement with one another. While programs should strive for diverse groups, in most settings some of the youth will likely have prior histories with one another, both good and bad. Avoid placing youth with a history of disagreements, fighting, or bullying together when possible. Every participant deserves to be in a group that is free of prior interpersonal conflict and other history that would negatively influence their participation. Seeking feedback on group composition from others who know the young people well (e.g., teachers, caregivers, other organization staff) can help identify potentially problematic group dynamics.

Provide co-mentors who will be working with a group of youth collaboratively with opportunities to spend time together and learn about one another prior to finalizing their assignment to a group. Programs may find that mentors can have incompatible styles or differences in how they want to lead the group. Good pre-match training can help with this, but in some cases, the program may choose to change group assignments to avoid mentor incompatibility.

Assign mentors with prior experience or more developed group facilitation skills to groups in which one or more youth have behavioral or other challenges. Even when programs put a lot of thought into the composition of groups, there will still be variability, and some may include youth with behavioral challenges or needs that could disrupt mentoring activities. Programs should assign experienced mentors to these groups, as the skills and prior knowledge they bring can help them keep the group on track.

Provide newly formed groups with icebreakers, conversation starters, and instruction on how to create their own group culture, norms, rules, and processes. Group mentoring offers an excellent space for young people to create something meaningful together through the norms and traditions they establish with the help of their mentors. But the early stages of a group can be awkward and intimidating. Providing an initial set of conversation starters and processes for establishing the group will help participants overcome any early trepidation and get them collaborating on building their shared "space" together. Initial meetings may be more complicated in group programs where group members may join and leave the group after the group has already started meeting. It is thus important for group programs to outline how they plan to manage these "first meetings" for new group members in established groups in a way that signals an inclusive entry point into established group norms, rules, and culture.

Ensure groups have adequate space, access to resources, and privacy to engage in meaningful activities together. One of the often-overlooked aspects of group mentoring is how the groups will engage with the facilities and with each other. This can be especially challenging in school- or site-based programs where rooms, materials, and other resources are limited or being used by others simultaneously. Privacy for group discussion may be a particularly pressing concern, as group members may not feel comfortable having open conversations that could be overheard by other groups. Simply having too many groups in the same space at the same time can create loud, chaotic environments that get in the way of sharing and bonding. Group programs should consider how they can give each group room to "breathe" within the physical space where mentoring activities happen.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Most of the general practices recommended above will be meaningful for peer mentoring models, especially those related to matching participants based on shared interests and backgrounds and allowing participants to suggest a potential mentoring "fit" after a meet-and-greet activity where mentors and younger mentees can interact and find connection with one another. In addition, peer mentoring programs should:

Consider youths' prior histories with one another and avoid matching youth with a history of conflict or disagreement. While most peer mentoring programs pair youth who have considerable age differences, some models create relationships between youth in the same school — even youth in the same grade. These young people will likely have some history of interaction, and programs should avoid creating a new mentoring relationship with youth who have a negative history with one another.

When scheduling mentoring activities, make sure that there is adequate space and access to resources and materials. As noted above for group programs, peer mentoring programs, especially those operating at schools or other sites with limited meeting space, can suffer from chaotic environments and behavioral distractions that make it difficult for individual mentor-youth pairs to work together. In one peer mentoring study (Herrera et al., 2008), mentee ratings of youth-centeredness were lower for matches meeting in the same space as other matches (versus those meeting more independently in different locations), perhaps reflecting the observed tendency for some high school mentors to focus significant attention on friends who were also there mentoring. An emphasis on creative scheduling and use of multiple mentoring spaces can alleviate these challenges. To the degree possible, peer programs should provide a variety of places for youth to meet with their mentors and avoid having too many participants clustered together in a small space, especially those with behavioral challenges. (It is worth noting that peer programs may also find value in group activities that allow for mentoring pairs to engage with one another alongside other pairs. But if the theory of change is focused on the benefits of one-to-one interactions, adequate space must be provided.)

E-MENTORING MODELS

Virtual mentoring models can almost certainly benefit from many of the general practices recommended above, but they may also wish to consider the following additional practices:

When considering mentor-youth compatibility, e-mentoring programs should access online compatibility as well. This includes experience communicating online (e.g., one is an experienced user while the other is new to digital communication), online "personality" and conversational style (e.g., one loves memes and using humor while the other prefers more formal interaction), and even compatibility of online availability and device accessibility (e.g., the youth's family places limits on screen time that would limit communication during prime times for communicating with their mentor).

Consider how the platform aligns with the comfort and skill level of the youth. How much writing will the platform require? Will there be videos or content that requires a lot of reading? Youth who experience a great deal of online instruction in school may prefer mostly conversational social interactions with their mentor, and less "learning" content or rigidly structured activity.

The initial meeting instructions should clearly outline expectations around who initiates contact and reiterate expectations around asynchronous communication (e.g., timeframe to reply, expectations around word count or other markers of meaningful engagement). In e-mentoring programs where participants communicate asynchronously using technology, programs should clarify who is responsible for getting the interactions started and expectations around the promptness and completeness of responses. In almost all cases, this responsibility should lie with the mentors — that is, they should be primarily responsible for initiating and maintaining interactions, at least in the early stages of the relationship. Programs are encouraged to offer conversation starters and emphasize expectations around how it defines high-quality virtual communication as the relationship begins.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School-based and site-based programs will also find the general practices recommended above for this Element to be relevant to their work, but may benefit from considering these additional factors when forming relationships between mentors and youth:

- mentors' and youths' schedules and availability during the operation of the program (e.g., the school day);
- mentors' knowledge of particular academic subjects, or relevant aspects of their lived experience, and how those traits fit with the needs, interests, and backgrounds of potential mentees; and
- mentors' availability outside of standard program hours (if the program allows such contact).

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

In youth development settings where staff offer informal mentoring, it can be unclear when the relationship between a staff member and a youth participant has actually blossomed into something more — an actual mentoring relationship. By definition, these organizational contexts are not making formal "matches" between youth and staff (or volunteers). When the relationship between a staff member and a youth is trending in a mentoring direction, it may be worth having them discuss the deepening relationship, especially if it is resulting in additional time spent together, either during or outside of normal service hours. This can help clarify expectations about the types of support the mentor can offer, when and how they might interact beyond other organizational activities, and the limits of what they can provide in the mentoring role. Caregivers should also be made aware of the new mentoring nature of the relationship. As these informal mentoring relationships take root, it can be helpful to make other staff members aware and ask for their help in supporting the mentoring relationship.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

The formation of new mentoring relationships benefits considerably from **established criteria and a process that helps program staff determine the compatibility of participants** to work with one another. These policies should include the factors that would lead the program to dissolve a match at any point in time, as well as when the opportunity to be matched in a new relationship would be considered (see Element 12 for more information on potential re-matching of participants after their first relationship has come to an end). Information from these policies should be shared with all participants as part of the intake process and reiterated at this stage when relationships are formed.

Collecting as much information as possible on a range of participants' interests, identities, and characteristics — and what is most important to them in a partner — can thus be very helpful in creating strong matches for the young people in your program.

Several recent studies have assessed the extent to which "matching" youth and mentors on a wide range of characteristics is associated with stronger relationships and outcomes. Although their findings can help you determine which youth and mentor characteristics you might consider, the most important factors should come from your own theory of change. For example, matching on shared interests has been supported as a key practice in several studies and meta-analyses (e.g., DuBois et al., 2011), but for a curriculum-based program focused on STEM activities, perhaps shared values aren't as relevant as the "fit" between a mentor's approach and the youth's learning style. These factors also likely differ across youth within a program — with some youth emphasizing, for example, the importance of matching based on gender identity, while others may highlight the need for a mentor who shares a specific identity, personality trait, or interest. Collecting as much information as possible on a range of participants' interests, identities, and characteristics — and what is most important to them in a partner — can thus be very helpful in creating strong matches for the young people in your program.

Research has been mixed about the value of matching mentors and youth on some characteristics. For example, one of the most frequently studied questions is whether matches made based on shared race are stronger or more effective than matches in which youth and mentors do not share the same race. Two recent large-scale studies find that same-race matches are sustained longer than mixed-race matches (Lyons & Edwards, 2022; Raposa et al., 2019). Two other studies of adult-youth relationships in other contexts (i.e., a classroom setting and a positive youth development program respectively) also support the importance of matching on both race and gender, with the most positive outcomes reported for youth who were matched on both with their teacher/staff (Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Riciputi et al., 2020). Yet other studies have not found strong differences (Hernandez et al., 2017; Herrera et al., 2000; Kern et al., 2019; Park et al., 2016), reported mixed findings (Champion et al., 2021), or even found that cross-race/culture

matches can be beneficial to both the youth (Liao & Sanchez, 2015) and their mentors (e.g., in the cultivation of social awareness, the recognition of their own privileges, and exposure to different values, interests or hobbies; Glømmen et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2023; Simpson et al., 2023). Readers should note that shared race and ethnicity may take on greater importance for programs in which racial identity development or similar outcomes are prominent. It is also worth noting that most studies have categorized participants' race in ways that may not capture the subtle differences within broad categories (e.g., Black, Latino).

Studies assessing gender matching also report mixed results, although readers should note that in many programs cross-gender matches are only considered for male youth. This research is further complicated by a lack of attention paid to the nuances of gender, for example most studies conflate gender with sex assigned at birth. Those issues aside, some studies have found that relationship processes and quality are similar for same- and mixed-gender matches for male youth (e.g., Kanchewa et al., 2014; Kern et al., 2019), whereas one study hints at the vulnerabilities of same-gender female matches relative to same-

gender male matches and cross-gender matches for males (Park et al., 2017). Yet for some youth (e.g., immigrant youth; Oberoi, 2016), gender matching may be important given cultural norms. Thus, considering the specific groups of young people your program is serving and the cultural norms that may be important to their families can help you understand what matching criteria may be critical (or not so important) to the youth and their caregivers.

Unlike the mixed findings for demographic characteristics, research has fairly consistently supported the value of matching on many other characteristics (for one-to-one matches), as outlined below (also see Deng et al., 2022; De Wit et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2023; Reed et al., 2019). We, thus, encourage programs to consider the following factors, weighed in accordance with their program model:

Compatibility of preferred meeting times and locations. Logistics may be one of the most crucial factors to consider when matching mentors and mentees; if a mentor cannot meet regularly with a young person due to their location or available times, then a consistent, sustained relationship is unlikely.

Shared backgrounds, identities, or lived experience. A meta-analysis of 165 evaluations (most of which were of workplace mentoring) assessed the importance of different match characteristics in predicting relationship quality (Eby et al., 2013). The researchers found that shared lived experience — which, in this review, included such factors as educational level and background, job tenure, and geographic location — was an important predictor of relationship outcomes. Yet matching on the shared experience of disability status has not been as clearly related to outcomes, with one study

reporting stronger outcomes when matching on visual impairment (Heppe et al., 2020) and another reporting weaker outcomes (i.e., more premature match endings when both mentor and mentee were visually impaired; Heppe et al., 2019). Other studies have failed to find differences across matches that were or were not matched on disability (Heppe et al., 2021; Powers et al., 2015).

Shared interests or hobbies. Both a meta-analysis and review of several evaluations of mentoring programs support the importance of matching on shared interests (DuBois et al., 2011; Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). Interestingly, one study further found that a shared dislike of activities was more important in predicting match length than shared interests (Raposa et al., 2019).

Shared values, outlook, personality, or communication style. Eby et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis of 165 mentoring evaluations (primarily of workplace mentoring) found that positive relationship quality was most strongly associated with similarity in attitudes, values, beliefs, and personality. Similar links between shared values/outlook and relationship quality were reported in a study of natural mentoring (Hernandez et al., 2017). Another STEM mentoring program evaluation supported the importance of common interests and personality compatibility (e.g., being outgoing, sharing a sense of humor) in successful matches (Powers et al., 2015). Note that sometimes "matching" may not mean pairing mentors and mentees who share these types of characteristics, but rather ensuring that both do not share the same characteristic (see Goldner, 2017). Another study suggested that pairing well-adjusted young children with children who had behavioral problems in a highly structured peer mentoring program can potentially benefit both mentors and

mentees (Hektner et al., 2017). This same kind of "mismatching" may be important when considering group mentoring programs in which it is important to avoid placing a large number of youth with behavioral difficulties in the same group to avoid "peer contagion" effects (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011).

Mentor characteristics that could support the youth's pursuit of mentees' specific goals or developmental needs. Depending on the goals of your program, you may recruit mentors with very specific skills to support youth in achieving those goals. This may also be considered at the match level — that is, considering individual youth's specific goals and how a potential mentor may be able to help them achieve that goal. For example, a youth for whom the program wants to foster more positive academic attitudes or skills may want to match them with a mentor who is skilled in this area. In another example, caregivers vary in the roles they hope the mentor will play in their child's life — selecting the mentor with these roles in mind can help ensure mentors and caregivers are on the same page (Keller et al., 2018). It may also be important to consider mentor skills and experiences more broadly and how they might interact with youth experiences or characteristics. For example, in one study, youth who had experienced high levels of environmental stress had poorer relationship outcomes than those with lower levels; however, when matched with mentors with specific characteristics (i.e., greater self-efficacy and more previous involvement with youth), these associations were mitigated (Raposa et al., 2016).

Getting Relationships Started

We further recommend engaging all participants in the relationship creation process. **Sharing information with all participants about a potential mentoring match prior to their first interaction** is important to ensure that all participants are on the same page. This information should include the rationale for suggesting the match, details that can help participants build an initial rapport with each other, and answers to any questions or concerns they have about their potential match. It may also include providing written profiles to mentees and mentors to help them learn about the person they may be building a new relationship with (see Kim et al., 2021). Helping mentors know what to expect in terms of the characteristics and experiences of the youth can help them prepare to start the match. In one study, several mentors noted that they could have approached their relationship more effectively had they known more about the specific needs of their mentee prior to being matched (Herrera et al., 2013). When sharing this information, programs should be cautious about disclosing sensitive information (e.g., disability status, LGBTQIA2S+ identity, etc.) and honor participant preferences for how and with whom such information is shared. Ideally, the information shared in these conversations will generate excitement and buy-in for the relationship, but they can also uncover preferences that were not clear in initial discussions. During this meeting, programs can also get information from the caregiver (when relevant) about any specific rules they have for their child and other information about their child or family they would like the new mentor to know.

Importantly, **all participants should have a chance to provide their preferences and feedback prior to moving forward with a proposed mentoring relationship.** In some cases, a mentor, youth, or the

youth's caregiver may express serious concerns about the potential relationship and request to be matched with another participant (or group, in the case of group programs). Input by all participants is key (see Deng et al., 2022). One study found that mentees who had input into choosing their mentor had greater satisfaction with their relationship (Viator, 1999). Studies of youth-initiated mentoring (YIM) in which youth are trained to find a mentor in their own social networks, have also shown promise (Schwartz et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2019). In one YIM study, relationships were most likely to endure when youth chose their mentors on their own (rather than receiving help from their caregiver or program staff; Schwartz et al., 2013). Similarly, other studies of community-based mentoring have found that caregivers' and youths' less favorable perceptions of the matching process (e.g., not having enough input in the selection of the mentor) were linked both with lower relationship quality (DeWit et al., 2020) and, in the case of youth reports of the matching process, early closures (DeWit et al., 2016). Considering mentor preferences is also important and linked with relationship quality (Drew et al., 2020). Another study on workplace mentoring found that both mentor and mentee reports of having input into

the matching process were related to perceived program effectiveness through associations with mentor commitment and mentor/mentee program understanding (Allen et al., 2006).

In fact, **some programs may want to provide a more formal opportunity for youth and mentors to get to know potential mentoring partners and suggest their preferences.** Programs may offer a get-to-know-you group event that enables youth and mentors to become familiar with each other and note their preferences for who they would like to work with (Karcher, 2007). Programs may also consider using an online process to collect mentee preferences for potential mentors (Cornelius et al., 2016). If you offer this input to participants, it is important to let them know they may not get their top preference, but that staff will consider this input with other relevant criteria and honor their preferences as much as possible. It can be common for many young people to nominate a single or small number of "cool" program staff members or volunteers as their potential mentors, and programs may wish to ask youth to nominate multiple potential mentors to avoid widespread disappointment when they are matched with someone else.

Other programs may want to **offer participants a "trial period" to see if the relationship is progressing as intended or if participants would benefit from a change.** Programs should be careful in how this "trial period" is presented, however, as youth should not be made to feel as if their mentor is evaluating them for compatibility, which can trigger fears of abandonment or feelings of inadequacy. However, it is important that youth, caregivers, and mentors know that the program will be responsive if a relationship (or a group) is not working well. This type of trial period can be

especially beneficial in group mentoring programs where there are many layers of interpersonal dynamics among all participants that might lead to conflict or reduced cohesiveness for the group. It can also be helpful in programs serving youth with extensive trauma histories or trust issues, as it may take several attempts to find a mentor they trust and can work effectively with.

Once a match has been proposed, **the program should arrange, facilitate, and attend an initial meeting between mentor and youth in which mentoring roles, participant expectations, and program values are reiterated.** This can alleviate some of the awkwardness when bringing people together to start a new mentoring relationship and provide an opportunity to reiterate program values, rules, and behavioral expectations. These initial meetings can also involve facilitated get-to-know-you activities that can help participants relax, have fun, and start bonding early in the mentoring experience. As part of these initial meetings, **all participants (including caregivers when relevant) should be asked to sign a match commitment form** that details expectations around the frequency and duration of mentoring activities, areas of growth or opportunity the mentor will support, how the participants will communicate between mentoring activities, and other details that help clarify expectations for each participant around the mentoring experience.

...it is important that youth, caregivers, and mentors know that the program will be responsive if a relationship is not working well.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **What information do we need to share with mentors, youth, and caregivers prior to their relationship starting? How do we share that information? Do we contextualize it for them?**

- **How do we invite and respond to feedback on potential youth-mentor pairings? From whom do we gather this feedback and how might that feedback be influenced by the modalities and settings from which we collect the information? How can we ensure all participants have a voice in the creation of the mentor-youth relationship?**

- **To what extent are we considering the many identities youth may bring with them to the program when we pair them with mentors? Which identities may be most relevant for the communities we serve?**

- **What processes do we have in place to learn about these identities? How and when are we collecting this information? How are we keeping this information safe and confidential?**

- **How are we structuring the initial meeting between mentors and young people to help the relationship get off to a good start?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **The main way programs can build youth and caregiver engagement into the formation of new matches is to follow the guidance for sharing information about prospective pairings or groupings, honoring youth and caregiver perspectives about who they would like to be matched with in a relationship, and answering questions and addressing concerns before the mentoring relationship is underway.**

■ **Ask your participants to share what was most difficult or awkward for them about the matching process and how your program might be able to make this easier for new matches. What components did they find helpful?**

■ **Ask your mentors and young people what questions could be added to your application process that could help in creating strong relationships? What do mentors wish they knew about their mentee before their match started that could have helped jump-start the relationship? And what do mentees wish they had known about their mentors?**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **The percentage of proposed relationships that are accepted and formalized.**
- **The percentage of matches not accepted for a given reason or by a given participant (e.g., mentor, youth, caregiver).**
- **The number of youth waiting for a mentor in any given month.**
- **Number or percentage of youth on the waitlist who participate in special activities offered to them.**
- **Average time youth spend waiting to be assigned to a new relationship.**
- **Average time mentors spend waiting to be assigned to a new relationship.**
- **The percentage of matches made using a given criteria (e.g., shared interests, shared race).**
- **Percentage of youth/mentors/caregivers who report satisfaction with the matching process.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

"Goal Setting and Support" from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Bowers, E., MENTOR. This chapter can help mentors and mentoring program staff think about how goal setting can be woven into the work mentors and youth do together.

Mentoring Fact Sheet: Overcoming Relationship Pitfalls. Mentoring Resource Center, U.S. Department of Education. A brief guide that can help mentors and program staff plan for, and overcome, common challenges that arise throughout a mentoring relationship.

Starting Relationships Right: Topics and Questions to Align Participant Expectations in Youth Mentoring Programs. National Mentoring Resource Center. This set of pre-match questions can help clarify expectations for the mentoring experience before mentoring begins.

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ELEMENT 10

ONGOING CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

Standard of Practice: Programs should implement, as relevant to the population served and program model, several strategies for meaningfully engaging caregivers (or others who are directly supporting the mentoring relationship) in program activities and in the mentoring experience of the youth.

ONGOING CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Programs should implement, as relevant to the population served and program model, several strategies for meaningfully engaging caregivers (or others who are directly supporting the mentoring relationship) in program activities and in the mentoring experience of the youth.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has a written caregiver engagement plan that outlines how it will engage and support parents, guardians, and others in creating and fostering the mentoring relationship.* This plan should include how the program will obtain the caregivers' input on several processes, including selection of the mentor, supporting the relationship, and celebrating the relationship when it ends. It should also detail how often the program will check in with the caregiver (see Element 11), how the program will engage them in the mentoring relationship, and how it will support both caregivers and mentors in forging collaborative partnerships to support mentees.

■ *The program provides information to caregivers throughout the mentoring relationship detailing the youth's achievements in the program, changes in program policies or procedures, upcoming program activities, and tips for how they can support the mentoring relationship.* This information should be provided through multiple channels (and in multiple languages, as needed) throughout their involvement in the program, including, but not limited to:
   • print or e-newsletters;
   • phone calls, emails, or texts;
   • dedicated parent sections of the program website;
   • handouts and flyers youth share with caregivers;
   • frequent solicitation of caregiver feedback and input on program design and delivery; and
   • caregiver advisory groups or alumni associations.

■ *The program involves caregivers in special program activities and events to foster engagement and enthusiasm for the youth's mentoring experience* For example, many programs offer "parent/caregiver nights," monthly "family picnics," or special celebrations around holidays or the end of the program cycle.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *If it has the capacity, the program offers learning opportunities or additional services or supports to caregivers to enhance program impact* Some mentoring programs may wish to offer additional, direct forms of support to caregivers. This may include:
   • classes, learning opportunities, or support groups on relevant topics;
   • establishing a referral network to other service providers that can be used when caregivers express needs beyond what the program can directly address; and
   • offering ongoing training on how caregivers can support the youth's mentoring experience, find the youth's next mentors, or even create new mentoring experiences for themselves.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations may help certain programs collaborate more effectively with caregivers and other "champions" of a young person's mentoring relationship.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Because group mentoring programs are often located in schools or other sites where caregivers may not spend much time, there may be an increased need to be creative in how they are informed about and involved in the mentoring the young person is experiencing. Many of the core recommended practices, such as program newsletters, special caregiver events, and end-of-year celebrations, can help caregivers feel more engaged, even if they aren't directly facilitating their youth's participation. Messages from the group's mentor(s) about the work of the group and their perceptions of how the experience is supporting their child might also be particularly meaningful for caregivers in these programs.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer mentoring programs have additional considerations around caregiver engagement given the simple fact that the mentors are also young people, doubling the number of caregivers who will need information and opportunities for engagement. Caregivers of mentors in these programs might especially benefit from information about and opportunities to celebrate the work their child is doing — serving as a peer mentor may be bringing out a side of the young person they haven't seen before, and they may have questions about program activities or benefits. Bringing the caregivers and families of mentors together with those of younger mentees at special events throughout the year can be a great way of connecting families and building community through the program.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Caregiver engagement in virtually delivered mentoring programs is a challenge because of the technology barrier inherent in the way mentors and youth communicate. This complicates not only the relationship support practices detailed in Element 11, but also other engagement practices. E-mentoring programs may consider strategies such as:

- holding virtual special events or end-of-year celebrations that bring caregivers together using virtual meeting technology (e.g., web-conferencing software);
- establishing special caregiver virtual newsletters or sending caregivers written quotes or recorded content of staff or mentors discussing the progress youth are making in the program; and
- offering skill-building workshops or other online learning opportunities to caregivers.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

As discussed above with respect to group models, school- and site-based programs can struggle to engage caregivers when they are not spending much time at the program site. Special events that get caregivers on campus or to the program site can help build familiarity with program staff and mentors and provide a window into what the mentoring experience is like for their youth. These programs can also benefit from asking site staff to connect with caregivers about the mentoring experience, for example having counselors, teachers, or other school personnel discuss the mentoring program during events such as parent-teacher conferences or back-to-school nights. This will help caregivers feel like the mentoring is woven into the fabric of the school or site and help them understand its importance to their child. Because caregivers can have such a limited connection to the relationship in site-based programs, sending updates on how youth are progressing, activities they are engaging in, and program milestones is particularly important and valuable to caregivers in these programs.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Youth development programs that offer informal mentoring support may already be doing several things to engage caregivers in the services being offered. It can be helpful to share information about the mentoring youth are experiencing at events involving caregivers. This not only helps caregivers understand how mentoring is supporting the overall program experience but can also build interest in caregivers and youth who have not yet explored a mentoring relationship with program staff.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

Most mentoring programs for youth will want to involve caregivers as key partners in their mentoring relationships. Although caregivers may have very limited engagement in programs serving older youth or young adults, those mentees may still benefit from someone in their corner who can help them with the mentoring experience. Thus, these programs may want to engage individuals other than caregivers using practices aligned with those discussed here.

Research has outlined the invaluable contributions caregivers can make in creating and sustaining strong mentoring relationships (Basualdo-Delmonico, & Spencer, 2016; Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). In addition to facilitating match activities, they can provide information about the youth's history and challenges they may be facing, share how their child may be benefiting from the mentoring relationship, and provide a "bridge" between the mentor and youth when they have conflicts or misunderstandings (Spencer et al., 2011). In fact, greater caregiver involvement in, and support of, the relationship has been linked with higher-quality and longer-lasting matches (Parnes et al., 2023; De Wit et al., 2016), while parent dissatisfaction with the relationship is associated with match closure (Shamblen et al., 2020). The quality of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee's family/caregiver is also important — stronger relationships are associated with higher levels of mentor satisfaction (Suffrin et al., 2016) and higher-quality mentoring relationships (De Wit et al., 2020), and disruptions in the caregiver-mentor relationship have been linked with match closures (Spencer et al., 2020) — highlighting the

need for both caregiver and mentor training and support in this important realm (see Elements 7, 8, and 11). As noted in several other Elements in this resource, caregivers can also play an important role in bringing new people and resources into the program. They are often the gateway to deeper and more authentic community engagement.

How your program frames caregiver involvement should reflect your program values. Programs often emphasize (e.g., in mentor training) the importance of strict boundaries between the mentor and caregiver without also highlighting how mentors can partner with this invaluable resource to support their mentee (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). This emphasis can shape how mentors approach their mentee's family from the start — as a collaborative partner or as a potential obstacle. Program expectations for caregiver involvement also reflect your program's values. In one study, programs generally expected caregivers to conform

to *their* expectations for program involvement; and when those expectations weren't met, staff often attributed this to a lack of capacity on the caregiver's part, rather than an indication that the program should rethink these expectations to ensure they reflect what families in their community value and can fit into their lives (Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016). Of course, there may be instances where a caregiver's values may not be aligned with program values, such as differing views of inclusion. These situations can be challenging for programs to navigate, as they must also consider the potential impact of these values and related behaviors on mentors and young people. But generally, caregivers should be viewed as partners in making mentoring work and key informants in how the program can be optimally delivered.

Forming a truly collaborative relationship with caregivers starts with valuing them as experts on their child and weaving efforts *throughout* your practices that reflect this approach. **These efforts should be outlined in a written caregiver engagement plan** and include: 1) getting their perspective and insights—from sharing information about their child during enrollment and helping select the mentor before the relationship starts to providing feedback on how the relationship is progressing and helping determine how the match is celebrated when it ends; 2) engaging them in the mentoring relationship and the program; and 3) coaching them and mentors on developing positive, constructive partnerships (Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico, 2014). These efforts can help show caregivers that the program cares about what they have to say and help to foster their investment in the program. Importantly, a collaborative relationship also means engaging caregivers in ways that reflect and respect the realities of their lives. These efforts

can strengthen program impacts. A meta-analysis of 55 mentoring evaluations found that programs that included a parent involvement or support component had stronger youth impacts than those that didn't (DuBois et al., 2002). In another study, the average level of mentor-family relationship quality across the entire program predicted "above and beyond" efforts by the mentor with their mentees, over and above individual mentor reports of mentor-family relationship quality (Ellison et al., 2020). The authors conclude that these program-level effects on the mentor's willingness to go the "extra mile" for their mentee may reflect an organizational culture of the importance of strong mentor-family relationships, which then fosters mentors' willingness to go beyond their expected role to benefit their mentees (Ellison et al., 2020).

One way to foster caregiver engagement is to **ensure they are informed about program activities and understand how they can help foster a stronger mentoring relationship for their child.** Sharing consistent updates demonstrates that the program values their involvement and sees them as important partners in making mentoring work. Programs can keep caregivers informed throughout the mentoring relationship by sharing general information and updates on the program — for example, changes in policies or procedures, new partnerships in the community, or upcoming program activities and events. Monthly or quarterly newsletters can be a great way to share this information. Programs might also consider providing specific information about the child's progress in the program — acknowledging and celebrating key milestones and achievements, activities they are engaging in, or brief progress reports after each meeting, as these efforts are highly valued by caregivers (see Haddock et al., 2017; Kaye & Smith, 2014). These types of updates may be especially

It is recommended that programs offer caregivers opportunities to take part in special program activities and events to foster enthusiasm for the youth's mentoring experience.

helpful for caregivers in site-based programs, where they typically have very little direct exposure to the mentoring relationship and how it is going for their child.

Tips for strengthening the mentoring relationship can also be helpful, for example, how to keep the lines of communication open, partner with the mentor on the child's efforts to set and achieve goals or help the youth work through disagreements or conflicts with the mentor. This information should be provided through multiple channels (and in multiple languages, as needed), such as print, email, phone calls, e-newsletters, a dedicated section in the program website or handouts. To understand what kinds of information are most valued by families in your community, the best way for them to receive this information, and the ways they would like to be involved in the program more broadly, it is important to solicit their feedback on these and other aspects of program design and delivery through regular surveys, brief interviews, or caregiver advisory groups.

It is also recommended that programs offer caregivers **opportunities to take part in special program activities and events** to foster enthusiasm for the youth's mentoring experience. These may include special events and other in-person or online engagements that can deepen their participation

in the work of the program. For example, many programs offer "parent nights," holiday gatherings, or celebrations of milestones in the program or the end of the program cycle. These events provide a wonderful opportunity to bring mentors, youth, and their families together to bond and have fun, while also celebrating the hard work that all participants and staff have invested in creating meaningful mentoring experiences.

If your program has the capacity, you may also consider **offering learning opportunities or additional supports to caregivers.** When young people are involved in mentoring programs, benefits can extend beyond the child, to their caregivers and broader family (DuBois et al., 2022; Erdem et al., 2024). By strengthening supports and opportunities for caregivers, programs may enhance such benefits and, in this way, strengthen benefits for the youth themselves (see Parker, 2015; Osborn, 2020 for preliminary work in this area). Additional supports may include:

Offering learning opportunities or support groups on relevant topics. These topics will vary depending on your community and should be driven by caregiver interests and the goals of your program. One study evaluated program efforts to provide caregivers with targeted training and support on using strategies related to cognitive-behavioral therapy in their interactions with their youth (focused on helping youth use more adaptive patterns of thinking). Caregiver receipt of these program enhancements was associated with their own use of these strategies during interactions with their child, and through these behaviors, improvements in youth outcomes (Jarjoura et al., 2023).

Establishing a referral network to other service providers that can be used when caregivers express needs beyond what your program can directly address. These can include referrals for services for the caregivers themselves (e.g., educational programs, mental health care, job training, food assistance programs, legal help; see Osborn, 2020) as well as local programs and providers that can address youth's interests and needs. Partnering with community agencies like these can be a powerful way to connect caregivers and youth to needed services.

Offering ongoing training on how caregivers can support the youth's mentoring experience, find the youth's next mentors, or create new mentoring experiences for themselves. Potential topics could include helping youth connect with supportive adults at school, getting the mentor's support in managing challenging youth behaviors, or how to support the child in managing transitions in the mentoring relationship.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Is our program meeting caregivers where they are at? Or are we expecting them to accommodate to our program's working hours, procedures, and viewpoints?**

- **What are common barriers that prevent caregivers in our community from being more engaged in program activities? How have we tried to address these barriers? If those efforts have failed, have we adequately held ourselves accountable?**

- **What are the best methods for engaging caregivers in our community (e.g., in-person, online, group, one-to-one)? What times of day or locations seem to work best?**

- **Do we provide program information to our caregivers in multiple ways to ensure it has the best chance of reaching all caregivers?**

- **How and when do we share our program values with caregivers? How do we handle situations when caregiver's values are misaligned with those of our program? How can we prioritize youth and mentor well-being and safety in those situations?**

- **What kinds of additional supports might caregivers in our community benefit from? What is our capacity to extend our services to them?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Ask caregivers, especially those whose youth have been in the program for a while, to plan and execute special events designed to engage other caregivers. They may have critical understanding of what other caregivers may want to learn or fun ways of celebrating the success of their youth. Programs may wish to consider compensating caregivers for this type of meaningful program support.**

■ **Young people should also contribute to caregiver engagement opportunities. They may have a keen understanding of what their parents/guardians are curious about or activities those adults would find engaging. Having youth plan and lead caregiver engagement events is a great way to get caregivers interested and attending, as they will not want to miss an event their youth helped put on. As noted above for caregivers, programs may wish to compensate youth for their additional role in supporting the program in these ways.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **Number of newsletters or other caregiver-directed communications sent in a program cycle, metrics related to downloads or views, and number of caregivers reporting receiving/reading these communications.**

• **Number of caregiver trainings or other learning opportunities offered, number (or percentage) attending each, and number attending at least one over the course of a program cycle (e.g., school year).**

• **Number of events, support groups or other special gatherings held during a program; number (or percentage) attending each; and number attending at least one over the course of a program cycle.**

• **Caregiver ratings of satisfaction with and helpfulness of engagement events.**

• **Number of community referrals made for caregivers.**

• **Number of community referrals made for youth.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

"Practicing Cultural Humility" from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Sánchez, B., MENTOR. This chapter defines cultural humility, discusses what it looks like in practice, and highlights the importance of learning about mentees' identity and cultural experiences.

Reducing Barriers to Family Engagement. Panorama Education. A school-focused resource that offers helpful insights, tips, and other resources relevant for mentoring programs to address barriers and enhance family involvement.

"Working with Others in the Mentoring Relationship System" from Becoming a Better Mentor: Strategies to Be There for Young People. Keller, T. E., MENTOR. This chapter discusses the value of partnering and working collaboratively with caregivers and other important people in mentees' lives.

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ELEMENT 11
SUPPORTING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Standard of Practice: Programs should require ongoing, consistent check-ins and support opportunities to mentoring participants to minimize risk and maximize the positive impact of the mentoring relationships.

SUPPORTING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Programs should require ongoing, consistent check-ins and support opportunities to mentoring participants to minimize risk and maximize the positive impact of the mentoring relationships.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program checks in with participating mentors and youth (ideally with the same staff member supporting both) on key topics at an established and regular frequency to foster high-quality mentoring and program participant relationships.* It is recommended that programs offer both quick "touch-point" check-ins (e.g., emails, texts, communication through social media, written activity logs, brief interactions offering support as needed) and lengthier in-depth support meetings (i.e., deeper synchronous discussions that involve staff sharing resources, suggesting relevant activities, and troubleshooting challenges). The frequency of these check-ins and meetings should reflect the program model and intensity of the work happening between mentors and youth (see Discussion).

Topics for check-ins:

- Assess whether their expectations for program participation are being met.
- Celebrate milestones.
- Monitor for risk management concerns.
- Note relationship growth and progress toward goals.
- Address challenges as they arise.
- Inquire about changes in participants' life circumstances.
- Gather data relevant to program reporting and evaluation efforts, including feedback on program practices.
- Share appreciation for their participation.

Recommended frequency of check-ins:

- **Quick check-ins** at least once a month, with each relationship participant, for the first year.
- **In-depth support meetings** every month for the first quarter of the relationship and then at least once a quarter for the rest of the program year/cycle

Once the mentoring relationship is more established, programs can reduce this frequency as needed. However, we strongly encourage programs to keep check-ins to at least once per quarter. (See Discussion for additional guidance on the frequency of check-ins based on the program model.)

■ *The program checks in with the caregivers of youth participants (ideally with the same staff member supporting the mentor and youth) at an established and regular frequency covering the same topics included in mentor and youth check ins.* For young adults, this person may be determined to be someone other than the youth's primary caregiver. Our recommendations for the timing and format of these check-ins are the same as those for mentors and youth. Note that this practice may be considered less important for site-based programs or those serving youth over

18 years of age, but it is especially important in programs serving younger mentees.

■ ***The program uses a standardized protocol for each in-depth check-in so that consistent information is gathered and appropriate support is offered to every participant.*** The content of questions in the check-in protocol should reflect the program's theory of change (see Element 2) and the progress staff would like to see relationships making, in addition to addressing the typical challenges that may arise for participants in the program.

■ ***The program documents each check-in with participants, including the information gathered and support given at each instance.*** This information can contribute to the creation of a record of the history of the mentoring relationship and ensure that the program can track the nature and content of the support they are providing to participants. Programs should document each outreach attempt to participants (e.g., emails sent, phone calls placed) so that they have a record of their efforts.

■ ***The program has a policy governing the frequency of participant check-ins and how to bridge support during staff transitions, as well as a process for tracking the quality and consistency with which staff complete these tasks.*** Support can range in quality, particularly when staff leave the program and new staff take over support. To ensure that all matches have access to consistent, high-quality support, the program should have policies in place that govern these key practices.

■ ***The program uses the information gathered during participant check-ins to assess the quality of the mentoring relationship at least twice a year and determine whether it is healthy and active or should be considered for a planned ending.*** It is equally important to respond quickly if the relationship is no longer a positive or consistent experience for participants. Letting relationships linger in an unhappy limbo may be harmful to youth participants, their caregivers, or mentors.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ ***The program offers additional support or learning opportunities to mentors and youth.***
In addition to the ongoing training opportunities recommended for youth and mentors in Elements 7 and 8, programs are encouraged to offer additional supports (e.g., mentor support groups, online discussion forums, special events, etc.) to participants to increase satisfaction

and deepen program engagement.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can support and strengthen mentoring relationships in a variety of contexts.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs will need to provide relationship support in some ways that differ from one-to-one models, given the complexity of the relationships involved and the importance of structured activities in most group programs. We recommend that check-ins with group participants happen one-to-one when possible to help youth and mentors feel comfortable expressing any concerns they have. If one-to-one check-ins are impractical due to the number of youth served, meeting with youth and mentors in groups separately to check on progress is an alternative approach. We also recommend the following additional practices for group mentoring programs:

Program staff should directly observe mentoring groups in action at several points throughout the program cycle to ensure that mentors are delivering activities as expected and the group is developing as intended. The frequency of these observations will vary depending on many factors (e.g., overall length of program, group meeting locations), but these observations can give staff tremendous insight into how the group experience is unfolding, the skill level of mentors in managing the group, and the relationships that are forming among participants. This kind of observation can also be helpful in programs in which groups are working on complex tasks or activities — staff can answer questions or help to keep the group focused.

In programs in which multiple mentors work collaboratively with a group of youth, program staff should inquire about the relationships between co-mentors when checking in. In "team mentoring" models where two or more mentors are working together with a group, there is an extra layer of relationships that needs attention: the relationships between the mentors themselves. Co-mentors are unlikely to be effective if they are not getting along or are having points of friction or disagreement. Programs are encouraged to ask questions that get at how well mentors are collaborating (e.g., Do you feel there is an appropriate distribution of "work" across your team? Do you feel like your skills complement each other? Does the way you set up task sharing allow both of you to develop relationships with group participants?).

Check-ins with youth in group programs should inquire about the relationships formed with other youth in the group, not only their mentors. This is a layer of complexity that group models should pay attention to during check-ins: the relationships formed between youth group members. While young people will certainly benefit from the wisdom and support of their mentors in a group program, they

also benefit from the bonds formed with their peers — an important "active ingredient" that can drive program outcomes.

Mentor check-ins should include a review of the activities the group has completed and the participation level and engagement of individual group members to monitor fidelity to the structure of the program. Group mentoring programs often rely heavily on structured activities and conversations that keep the group on track toward achieving program goals and outcomes. But it can be challenging to ensure that each group, and each youth in those groups, is getting the program experience they should if participation in, and completion of, group activities is not being tracked. Mentors should be encouraged to collect and share information with staff about participation by group members (e.g., attendance as well as engagement) and their progress through recommended or required activities. This will allow staff and mentors to "course correct" throughout the program cycle to ensure that youth within and across groups have similar program experiences.

Programs should consider assessing the cohesion of mentoring groups at least once in the program cycle. Group models are most impactful when the group itself becomes more than the sum of the individual experiences of participants. Program staff can get a better sense of how a group is forming and developing if they assess the group experience using a survey or other data collection tool that captures feelings of group belonging, perceptions of trust and connection, and disruptions to a group's "cohesion" and togetherness. Collecting this type of information once the group has been established allows the program to step in and address problems before they negatively impact the program experience for the entire group.

Programs should offer additional support in integrating new members into established groups. It can be disruptive and challenging to integrate new youth or mentors into the group. Program staff should work with mentors and youth to understand the dynamics of the group and determine the best ways to integrate new participants into established groups.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

The support of mentoring relationships in peer models takes on increased importance for the simple reason that the mentors themselves are less experienced young people who may not know how to handle challenging situations or ask for help when it's needed. The heavy use of structured activities in many of these programs also can create a need for tracking activity participation and progress through required activities, as it does in group models, discussed above. For these reasons, we recommend that peer mentoring models engage in the following additional practices:

Observe peer mentoring interactions in real-time, not only to assess the overall health and functioning of the relationship, but also to offer in-the-moment help if mentors are struggling to implement an activity or have questions. Ideally, the program will have two staff members available to observe and support peer mentoring activities at any given time: one to lead the activity or get mentors and youth working together and another to problem-solve and provide real-time support.

Use check-ins with peer mentors to solicit feedback on completed program activities and prepare them for upcoming tasks and activities. Peer mentors can provide invaluable feedback about what's working or not in a program's activities. Check-in times provide an opportunity to get this input (with

an eye on continuous improvement for future program cycles), as well as to go over instructions and responsibilities for upcoming activities or projects. This gives peer mentors a sense of ownership of the program and builds leadership and communication skills.

Peer mentor check-ins should include a review of the activities they have completed with their mentee to track fidelity to the program's suggested or required activities. Peer mentoring relationships may deviate from planned activities more often than adult-youth relationships. Thus, it is important to track the progress of peer relationships through any activity curriculum to ensure a consistent mentoring experience for all youth. Make sure peer mentors know how and where to log this information, as well as who to turn to for help (e.g., staff or experienced mentors who could troubleshoot) if they fall behind or need to deviate from a planned activity.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Mentoring services delivered virtually will require a few additional practices by program staff to make sure participants are having a positive experience. We recommend the following:

Use participant check-ins to ask about any technology-related challenges that may have hindered their participation. This can include internet connectivity issues, bugs or glitches in program software or platforms, or other challenges related to hardware or software. Integrating these kinds of tech-support questions into relationship check-ins can identify issues that may be impacting not only individual relationships but also participants more broadly.

Ask about challenges in their online communication. Even when technology is working perfectly, the online setting can lead to communication misunderstandings and challenges. Virtual communications may come across differently than intended, and these missteps can be detrimental to a mentoring relationship. Asking about how mentors and youth are perceiving their interactions with one another can help identify topics for ongoing training on virtual communication or the need to clarify program rules and expectations.

Review required upcoming activities, important dates and deadlines, and suggestions for optional mentor-youth activities during participant check-ins—this is strongly encouraged. Even for the strongest mentor-youth relationships, the virtual setting can make it easy to forget to respond or engage more deeply in mentoring conversations and activities. Unfortunately, "out of sight, out of mind" can influence the development of a strong mentoring connection. To mitigate this potential issue, program staff are encouraged to review upcoming activities that mentors and youth should be engaging in, as well as offer suggestions for optional activities and conversation starters for when participants are unsure of what to do or talk about. In addition to these prompts, staff should offer reminders of important dates, deadlines, and events, as these can be more easily overlooked in a virtual program experience.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

For the most part, many of the additional practices noted under group and peer models above will also apply to school- or site-based programs: the need to observe and support mentors and mentees while they are meeting, the importance of tracking activity participation and completion, and the gathering

of feedback on completed activities (and preparation for those that are upcoming) are all relevant to formal site-based programs. It is also important to note that even when program staff are present for all match interactions, brief individual check-ins in a private space are still warranted to ensure that mentors and youth have the opportunity to voice concerns and address challenges — which may not be as easily done with other participants present. We further recommend that school- or site-based programs also support participants in the following ways:

Inquire about challenges related to the site itself, such as transportation challenges, issues with other site staff or faculty, or barriers to the use of site resources for mentoring activities. Essentially, use check-ins to ensure that participants aren't navigating challenges with the program location or non-mentoring personnel on their own.

Reiterate upcoming milestones, events, and dates of site closures. This is especially important in school-based programs where frequent school closures and breaks may negatively impact relationship development or frustrate participants.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Even when mentoring is offered as an informal support by staff members in a youth development organization or setting, it can be helpful to offer support to those relationships, even if they are being offered in the absence of a formalized mentoring program. Site directors or supervisors can help problem-solve challenges and ensure that youth are having a positive experience. They can also make sure that the mentoring role is working for staff and that they have access to information or training that can help them build their mentoring skills. The following recommendations can help these programs support mentoring that's happening less formally:

Ensure that all staff members who are mentoring know who they can turn to for support and guidance. Essentially, don't leave staff unsupported if they take on a mentoring role in addition to their other job duties. Build in support of mentoring as a key supervision activity and make sure site leaders are knowledgeable about good mentoring practice, including red flags to look for that might indicate a negative mentoring experience for youth or staff.

Ask a non-mentoring staff member to check in with youth participants about how their relationships are progressing. When mentoring is an optional and informal form of support, it can be easy to assume that things are playing out smoothly. But, like all relationships, informal mentoring relationships will have inevitable ups and downs. Make sure a staff member, other than the mentor, is checking in with youth and caregivers (as relevant) about the mentoring experience.

Consider tracking mentoring engagement and participation. This can be important from both a risk management perspective (e.g., knowing when and where youth and mentors met) and for outlining how the mentoring experience complements the other services and supports offered by the organization. This information can also help focus mentoring activities and provide insight into the optimal staffing levels needed to provide the mentoring at a high level of quality, even if informally.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

One of the most important ways mentoring programs can foster the success of a mentoring relationship is to **check in with youth, mentors, and caregivers at regular, established intervals** to monitor safety, support the development of high-quality relationships, share encouragement and appreciation for participation, and gather relevant data. Ideally the same staff person should support all participants related to a given match (i.e., youth, mentors, and caregivers) to enable the staff person to obtain an understanding of the relationship that is as complete as possible. In addition to helping ensure that matches are safe and engaged in appropriate activities, these contacts can help overcome challenges in the relationship and provide programs with valuable information on program impact and potential opportunities for improvement. They also are critical in developing collaborative partnerships with mentors, youth, and caregivers. At a very basic level, these contacts help ensure that programs honor their commitment to support mentors and youth, just as those participants are expected to commit to the program's expectations. And when touch points drop below the promised frequency or level of quality that the program has set, it can leave mentors and youth feeling neglected, allow problems in the match to worsen, and create a risk management void that increases the chances of participants experiencing harm.

Programs should have a written policy regarding the frequency and content of these support contacts. This should include answers to important questions such as: How much effort should be expended for each outreach attempt? And how many months without contact would indicate the need to end a match? This policy should also include how this information is documented (see Documentation of Support section) and how the program manages the transition of staff who leave the program, as turnover is frequent in mentoring organizations and can be very disruptive for relationships (Kaye & Smith, 2014; McMorris et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2020).

Reflecting the central importance of this practice, "match support" has been studied in several evaluations of mentoring programs. Yet, most have examined naturally occurring variations in support, and this practice is, in many ways, a two-way street. That is, even if program staff work hard to provide support, participants may or may not be responsive to their efforts, and mentors who take advantage of support are often those who are most invested in the relationship or experiencing the most challenges. This is important to keep in mind as we discuss the research evidence supporting different aspects of support.

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Frequency and Duration

The amount, frequency, timing, and content of your support should reflect your program model and theory of change and thus will vary across programs. Consider the key reasons you are providing support to mentors. Is it to foster skills, strengthen relationships, or perhaps check

alignment of activities with a specific curriculum or suite of lessons mentors are expected to follow? How often do mentors need that type of support to be effective at achieving program goals? What training content is critical enough that it should be reinforced regularly through ongoing support contacts?

In general, we recommend using both in-depth support meetings (i.e., synchronous discussions sharing resources, suggesting relevant activities, and troubleshooting challenges) as well as more frequent **"touch-point" check-ins** (e.g., emails, texts, written activity logs, brief interactions offering

support, if needed). We suggest implementing brief check-ins at least once a month for the first year of the relationship and substituting them with **in-depth support contacts** every month for the first quarter of the relationship and then at least quarterly for the rest of the program year/cycle. For more intensive programs, such as those serving particularly vulnerable young people (e.g., children of incarcerated parents; Merenstein et al., 2011; Stump et al., 2018), or matches that are struggling, these in-depth support meetings should be more frequent. Conversely, in site-based programs in which staff regularly observe the match interacting, they may be less frequent. Once the mentoring relationship is more established, programs can reduce this frequency as needed. However, we strongly encourage programs to keep support meetings to at least once a quarter regardless of how long the mentoring relationship has been together.

Most studies suggest that "frequent is better" when it comes to support. One study involving mentors from a large sample of school- and community-based mentoring programs found that mentors who received more ongoing training and support (at least once a month) tended to spend more hours per month with their mentees and had higher-quality relationships (Herrera et al., 2000). McQuillin & Lyons (2021) assessed support at the program level (a stronger test of whether the practice itself matters because it doesn't reflect mentor behaviors that may influence receipt). Using survey data from 1,451 youth mentoring programs, they found that of all program practices tested, the strongest (and only statistically significant) predictor of the program's premature match closure rate was the frequency of ongoing training and support contacts offered per month; the lowest closure rates were reported for programs with between three and four monthly contacts, whereas higher closure rates

were noted for those with fewer contacts (those with more frequent contacts also had higher closure rates, likely due to a high percentage of struggling relationships). In another study, youth matched with high-school-age mentors in programs with relatively frequent communication with staff benefited more than their non-mentored peers in several outcomes, and many of these benefits were significantly larger than those received by youth in programs with less staff communication (Herrera et al., 2008).

However, as noted, having a policy guiding frequency of offered support is different from actual receipt, and one of the most common challenges in delivering mentoring services is the consistent delivery of check-ins with program participants. In one study, only 61 percent of mentors, 48 percent of parents, and 34 percent of youth received support at least 70 percent of the months the relationship was together (Herrera et al., 2013). Importantly, this rate of support (for all participants) was associated with the frequency with which the match met; mentor receipt of support in at least 70 percent of the match's months together was further linked with having a longer match.

In general, support contacts do not tend to be very long and are often more like the "check-in" contacts we recommend for more established matches — but their duration matters. In a study by Keller et al. (2020), over half of mentors across a wide range of programs reported that the typical duration of their contacts was either five minutes or less (26 percent) or six to ten minutes (31 percent) — thus, perhaps functioning mainly to assess safety and convey the presence of support (even if not needed) and accountability; with more than ten minutes reported by only 32 percent of mentors (see also Herrera et al., 2013). Keller et al. (2020) further found that longer support contacts (more than five minutes)

were associated with mentor reports of higher-quality supervision, organizational culture, and service experience.

We recommend that support continues even after the relationship is established. Relationships go through their own developmental progression (Keller, 2005), and even established relationships may struggle or face new obstacles. Jones et al. (2023), for example, highlighted the importance of continued mentor support when matching White mentors with youth of color. Discussions about race and social issues may be more common as youth get older, so support around these types of conversations may take on added importance over time. At a minimum, continued support contacts can encourage, acknowledge, and show appreciation for mentor efforts to help sustain their mentoring efficacy, which can decrease over time (Peaslee & Teye, 2015) and is an important ingredient in mentor satisfaction (Martin & Sifers, 2012) and successful mentoring relationships (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher et al., 2005; Parra et al., 2002).

Quality of Support

When it comes to support, quality may be even more important than quantity. For this reason, **the program should have a process for tracking not only the consistency but also the quality with which staff provide support.** Several studies point to the importance of providing high-quality support. For example, more positive perceptions of the quality of support and/or positive relationships with program staff have been linked with the development of high-quality mentoring relationships (Aresi et al., 2021; Herrera et al., 2007; Herrera et al., 2008; Keller et al., 2023; Marshall et al., 2016; Mc Morris et al., 2018; Weiler et al., 2019), longer matches (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher et al., 2023; Spencer et al., 2020), and relative improvements

in mentor's psychological well-being over time (Anderson et al., 2023). Studies have also begun to outline how these associations are fostered. Karcher et al. (2023), for example, found that mentor-reported match support quality was not only directly associated with match length, but also indirectly through improvements in relationship quality. Keller et al. (2023) further found that greater exposure to program practices (e.g., orientation, regular check-ins) was associated with relationship quality through the strength of the "working alliance" mentors experienced with their case manager (i.e., the working partnership between the mentor and staff). Another qualitative study of 36 mentoring matches that had ended within their first 18 months found that in almost half of these cases, mentors had a negative experience in the relationship with their case manager (e.g., inconsistent or insufficient monitoring; Spencer et al., 2020).

It is important that each contact is handled consistently, using a standardized set of questions to ensure that every participant is getting the support they are entitled to.

The mentor's relationship with the organization (e.g., through strong support) may be particularly important for relationship quality when the relationship with the family is weak (Suffrin et al., 2016), when working with youth who have experienced environmental stressors or trauma (Weiler et al., 2019), or when youth are serving as mentors (Herrera et al., 2008). For example,

Herrera et al. (2008) found that higher-quality staff support was associated with longer match length for the high-school-age mentors but had virtually no association with match length for the adult volunteers in their study. Weiler et al. (2019) further found that youth environmental stressors were negatively associated with relationship quality. However, mentor's experiences of supportive relationships with program staff and opportunities for skill building attenuated these associations.

Content of Support

All in-depth support contacts should use a standardized protocol. It is important that each contact is handled consistently, using a standardized set of questions to ensure that every participant is getting the support they are entitled to. In fact, regular check-ins with the caregiver are especially important for younger mentees as they may be able to give you more details about how the mentoring relationship is progressing for their child. Questions included in check-ins with youth should be appropriate to their age and developmental stage. Keep in mind that support contacts are also an invaluable opportunity to build relationships with program participants, so ensuring that these discussions feel "natural" and conversational to participants is also important.

Several descriptive or qualitative studies support practice wisdom suggesting that certain approaches and content areas can increase participant satisfaction, strengthen matches, and sustain mentoring relationships. More specifically, support should:

• Foster a sense of belonging to the organization (Weiler et al., 2019), reflect a sense of partnership with the mentor in their work with the child, and let mentors know they are not alone (Larsson et al., 2016).

- Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the mentor (Larsson et al., 2016), youth, and caregiver.

- Affirm the mentor's good work to help sustain their efficacy, which, as noted, can contribute to successful mentoring relationships (Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher et al., 2005; Parra et al., 2002).

- Be nonjudgmental (Larsson et al., 2016).

- Provide flexible support that responds to the participant's individual needs and isn't "robotic" or simply checking off a list of questions (Spencer et al., 2020; also see Larsson et al., 2016; MacCallum et al., 2017). Although we recommend that programs standardize support check-ins by including the same questions and topics in each contact, additional questions and topics should be added in response to participants' unique needs or developmental stage (e.g., new questions might be added as youth get older or the match surpasses a given transition point), and staff should try to ensure that participants feel support is responsive to their needs. This will make it more likely that participants will find value in these interactions and respond to staff's efforts to connect with them.

- Provide practical advice (Larsson et al., 2016; MacCallum et al., 2017) and feedback on ways to improve the relationship (Spencer et al., 2023).

- Provide information on developmental norms to help mentors know what to expect at different ages (Spencer et al., 2023).

- Share common feelings, concerns, and experiences to let mentors know they aren't alone in their experiences (Spencer et al., 2023).

- Encourage direct communication between mentors and families to resolve any conflicts or issues that arise (Spencer et al., 2023).

Very few studies have examined specific content and how it is associated with match outcomes. One large-scale study (Keller & DuBois, 2021) found links between the content and style of match support (i.e., emphasis on adherence to program guidelines and absence of a nondirective approach) and more positive youth-reported relationship quality. In fact, these aspects of support were more frequently associated with relationship quality than most of the individual-level mentor and mentee variables examined in the study (e.g., demographics, background). Two other large-scale studies further suggest that specific support content may be linked with mentor (and caregiver) behavior and, through that behavior, youth outcomes. Jarjoura et al. (2018), for example, studied efforts to train and support mentors in taking on teaching and advocacy roles with their mentees. Mentors who reported that program staff talked to them during their support contacts about taking on these roles were more likely to report incorporating these functions into their role and in their meetings and discussions with their mentees. These mentor behaviors were then associated with stronger youth outcomes. In fact, among the program enhancements tested in this study, staff support around the teaching and advocacy functions was most strongly linked with

shaping mentor behaviors. Another study (Jarjoura et al., 2023) explored the implementation of an increased focus on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) strategies in training and support. Similar to Jarjoura et al. (2018), the content of staff support (e.g., how often they talked about CBT strategies in their support calls) was associated with mentors' use of those strategies during their interactions with youth and ultimately match length, relationship quality, and youth outcomes. In addition, the caregiver's receipt of program enhancements, (i.e., receiving a workbook on CBT concepts, talking more often with staff about CBT, and talking with staff about youth goals) was associated with their own use of CBT strategies during interactions with their child and ultimately youth outcomes.

Documentation of Support

Despite the value of consistent, strong support, programs often struggle with implementation of these practices (Herrera et al., 2013; Jarjoura et al., 2018; Peaslee & Teye, 2015), highlighting the need for both creative strategies to reach participants and clear policies around documentation and outreach. **Each contact attempt and all information gathered in each contact, as well as staff's response to questions or requests, should be documented** to track the consistency, quality, and content of support, as well as the progress of the relationship. Documentation is critical for risk management and can help provide smoother transitions for matches when staff leave the agency; good documentation enables new staff to see the development of the relationship and dive in more seamlessly to support participants.

Documentation of each support contact should include the date, the length of the contact, and information that was discussed in the contact, for example, descriptions and dates of each mentor outing, any challenges faced, child safety issues, perceptions of relationship quality, perceived benefits of the relationship, the mentor's relationship with the family (if relevant), any changes in the lives or circumstances of the mentor and youth, and resources or other services that could be helpful. **The program should use this information to assess the quality of the mentoring relationship at least twice a year.** Importantly, staff should also use the information collected during check-ins to **formally assess whether the relationship is still functional and, if not, take quick steps to assess whether an ending is needed**. In addition to documenting the successes of each mentoring relationship and the development of the relationship over time, program check-ins can also unearth a history of participant

conflict, infrequent mentoring interactions, and other markers that the relationship is trending in a poor direction. In some cases, it can simply be difficult to contact participants and determine whether the relationship is continuing at all. Ending a relationship that is no longer productive or positive can help avoid participant harm and reduce the risk exposure of the program. In short, programs should never allow negative relationships or relationships that are not meeting program expectations to continue indefinitely.

Programs are also encouraged to **offer additional supports and learning opportunities to participants** to bolster satisfaction, strengthen program engagement and belonging, and provide participants with a variety of ways to learn and engage, for example:

Mentor "support groups" where they can gather and discuss their experience with their peers. Mentors enjoy learning from their peers, and programs can ask seasoned mentors to lead discussions or share experiences and wisdom with other mentors (Anderson et al., 2022; Kok et al., 2020). In fact, in one study, peer support/coaching was helpful in sustaining matches (Peaslee & Teye, 2015). When offering these types of groups, be sure to attend to confidentiality and privacy considerations, which are always important when mentors share information about their mentee in public spaces.

Online discussion forums or social media spaces where participants can interact and share information with one another. Volunteers often prefer this kind of self-directed learning based on their individual needs and may be more likely to attend if their peers are also engaged (Homan et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2020). When setting up these discussions, it is important to ensure that staff can

moderate the interactions to provide guidance if needed and ensure that program values, rules, and policies are being upheld.
Again, issues of confidentiality and privacy should also be kept in mind.

Social activities that allow participants to have fun, get to know each other and staff, and build connection to the program. Jarjoura et al. (2018) reported that mentors in the evaluation found program-sponsored match activities helpful in strengthening their relationship and, in fact, attendance was related to more teaching and advocacy behavior by the mentors and through that behavior, with stronger youth outcomes. A meta-analysis involving 55 mentoring evaluations further found larger youth impacts for programs that included structured mentor-youth activities relative to those that did not (DuBois et al., 2002).

Special recognition events where staff, caregivers, or other stakeholders celebrate and honor the valuable contributions and achievements of mentors and youth. The efforts of program participants, particularly mentors, should be acknowledged and recognized throughout their program involvement (Larsson et al., 2016). It is also important to formalize this recognition through special events, for example, at the end of a program cycle or after milestones are reached, or even through regular newsletters that recognize mentor efforts or celebrate match achievements.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **How can we ensure that young people from all backgrounds have the experience with our services they need and deserve? What structures do we need to have in place to check in with youth regularly and support their engagement?**

- **In what areas are our mentors likely to face challenges? Are there aspects of their role for which they may need additional support or coaching? How can we assess this at the start of program cycles so that we aren't caught off-guard by their needs?**

- **How can we handle situations in which young people or mentors are not participating as intended? What problem-solving structures might we create so that we can address issues as they arise? How can we shift gears if they tell us the relationship is not working?**

- **Who is responsible for checking in with mentors and youth? How can we ensure that this critical practice is done consistently by staff even when staff leave our program?**

- **What are the relevant questions to ask when we check in with youth, caregivers, and mentors? How might these questions and check-ins change as matches and youth develop over time? And where will this information be stored after we check in?**

- **How does our program support critical moments in our young people as they learn more about themselves during the course of their relationships and as a result of their stages of development? How do we keep meeting them "where they are" in our relationship check-ins and supports?**

- **How do we celebrate the successes of the young people in our program? Of our mentors? Whether it's individual achievement or a successful group action, what ideas do we have to ensure that the growth and accomplishment of our mentoring family is honored along the way, not just at the end of the year?**

- **What are the barriers to providing support to our mentoring relationships? How can we remove those barriers and create efficiencies around ongoing support?**

- **What policies can we put in place to end matches that we are unable to reach?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Ask mentors and youth to provide feedback on program activities so that they can be refined over time.**

- **See if mentors or caregivers can help coordinate and deliver "support session" type activities that provide those who have been in the program a while an opportunity to support newer participants.**

- **Have mentors, youth, and caregivers (or alumni from these groups) inform the questions that staff ask during relationship check-ins. What would they have wanted to have been asked along the way in their mentoring journey?**

- **Ask experienced "expert" mentors to lead an online discussion group on a particular topic they developed expertise in through their relationship.**

- **Ask a mentor and alumni youth to help you create a "blog" to share with other matches or use in training, about how they were able to overcome specific challenges in their relationships.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **The average length of time spent on participant check-ins (both attempts to contact and actual check-ins).**

- **The percentage of participants who receive check-ins at the required frequency.**

- **The percentage of check-ins in which all required information is gathered and entered into program records.**

- **The percentage of required activities participants report completing.**

- **The average frequency and duration of mentor-youth meetings reported in check-ins.**

- **The topics of ongoing support and guidance requested by mentors, youth, and caregivers.**

- **Mentor, youth, and caregiver ratings of the quality and utility of support provided.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Sample Check-In Form for Mentees. Little Lights Mentoring Program via MENTOR Virginia. Sample questions that can be used during staff check-ins with mentees.

Sample Check-In Forms for Mentors and Parents/Guardians. Story Mentoring Program, MENTOR Virginia. Sample questions that can be used during staff check-ins with mentors and parents/guardians.

Tips and Tools for Supporting Healthy Matches. MENTOR. This webinar provides an overview of strategies and tools for supporting matches to be healthy and successful.

Tools to Strengthen Match Support and Closure. National Mentoring Resource Center. This includes a guide to help assess different dimensions of mentoring relationship health and strategies to enhance match support. https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/tools-to-strengthen-match-support-and-closure/

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 12

RELATIONSHIP CELEBRATION AND PROGRAM EXIT

Standard of Practice: Programs should facilitate a relationship celebration and program exit process that ends the mentoring experience on a positive note and provides an opportunity for participants to express gratitude, share feedback, and process the experience of being part of the program.

RELATIONSHIP CELEBRATION AND PROGRAM EXIT

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

Programs should facilitate a relationship celebration and program exit process that ends the mentoring experience on a positive note and provides an opportunity for participants to express gratitude, share feedback, and process the experience of being part of the program.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ *The program has written policies and procedures for addressing various mentoring relationship closure scenarios, including, but not limited to, closures that are the result of typical program cycles (e.g., end of the school year) and those that result from unexpected circumstances (e.g., mentor or youth move away, instances of inappropriate behavior by a participant, a mentor or child being unreachable).* A program's policies and procedures around relationship closure should include responses to a wide range of potential scenarios, especially those that may be sudden or negative and risk harming the youth or mentor, as well as steps to ensure the activities noted below are completed

■ *Regardless of why a mentoring relationship is ending, the program should prepare participants for the closure of their relationship and facilitate a series of closure activities, including, but not limited to:*

- **Coaching participants on how to properly celebrate their relationship and say goodbye.** Programs are encouraged to talk about relationship endings with participants as early as pre-match training so that all participants understand how important it is to celebrate the relationship and have a planned exit from the program. Once it becomes clear that a mentoring relationship is going to be coming to an end, the program should check in with all participants and offer guidance on how to handle the final activities and dissolution of the relationship.

- **Arranging a final meeting between mentors and youth.** If possible, the participants in a mentoring relationship should be given the opportunity to have a final meeting together. In programs where matches end at a known time (e.g., end of the school year, after a transition point) there may even be several planned activities designed to facilitate a positive end to the experience. If this is not possible, we recommend the debrief practice noted below.

- **Offering each participant an opportunity to debrief the mentoring experience with program staff.** Regardless of how or when the mentoring relationship is ending, all participants should be offered a debrief meeting or "exit interview," either together or separately, with program staff in which the reasons for the end of their relationship are clarified, participants are given a chance to reflect on the relationship, and all parties can provide feedback on how the program can improve its services. These meetings may also provide an opportunity to discuss being matched with a new mentor or youth in the program.

- **Getting written confirmation that participants agree to follow the program's policies and rules around post-participation contact.** All participants should sign a form acknowledging that they understand and agree to follow the program's policies and rules around future contact. In many programs, mentors and youth are encouraged to continue their positive journey together for years to come after they exit the program; in others, it is important that participants truly end the relationship and avoid future contact for liability and other reasons.

- **Offering referrals to other services and supports that may be helpful, including referrals to other mentoring programs.** The end of a mentoring relationship can be a challenging time for both youth and mentors. Both can have feelings of sadness or self-doubt and youth may need additional supports and services now that the mentoring experience the program provided is coming to an end.

■ *The program has criteria for determining, and a process for assigning, new relationships to youth and mentors who are still eligible after their initial mentoring relationship has ended.* While programs may choose to re-assign youth or mentors to new relationships, they should only do so when participants are deemed a good fit for a new relationship based on established criteria related to how their initial relationship was received, the factors that led to its dissolution, and the potential for doing harm if an additional mentoring experience ends on a bad note. See the discussion section of this Element for more information on this nuanced need to weigh opportunity and risk when rematching participants.

■ *The program holds a celebration event in each program cycle to celebrate the relationships and achievements of program participants.* For mentoring relationships that are continuing on to the next cycle, this is a nice way to honor their efforts; for those that are ending, these events can serve as a capstone to the experience and can easily be integrated into the other program exit practices detailed above.

Additional Practices for Consideration

■ *The program supports youth and caregivers in finding subsequent mentors in the community.* Formal mentoring programs can provide a young person with a valuable relationship that they may not have been able to find on their own, but they can also teach them skills and offer support in identifying their next mentors. Programs may consider referrals to other mentoring programs in the community or offer some guidance in identifying adults who could mentor them in their existing networks of support.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can align relationship ending and program exit activities in a number of common mentoring programs and contexts.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs may need to supplement the general practices above by also engaging in the following practices:

The program provides groups with closure rituals or activities that can help youth and mentors reflect on the experience and honor each other's contributions and growth, as well as the achievements of the group as a whole. Groups may need several meetings to properly reflect on and celebrate the experiences they have had together. Programs are encouraged to offer suggested discussion starters, games, or ceremonial activities that help youth say goodbye to one another and their mentors.

The program provides groups with rituals or activities for when one youth or mentor leaves the group prematurely or when a new member is added. Because group programs attempt to create cohesive groups that have a sense of togetherness, it can be challenging when one youth or mentor leaves a group that will carry on. Programs should provide activities and conversation starters that help participants say goodbye to a departing group member or welcome a new addition to the group. This can help navigate these changes without losing the momentum and togetherness of the group. These activities also provide an opportunity to reiterate program rules around confidentiality, both for the remaining members and those departing.

The program sets minimum standards for the composition of groups, as well as the circumstances that would lead to a group being dissolved or merged into other groups. While there is no "magic size" for an effective group model, there may be occasions where a group has experienced enough attrition that it no longer makes sense to keep the group together (e.g., a group of five youth losing three members in a short time). In some instances, it may make sense to add youth from other groups to fill those gaps; in others, it might be more logical to dissolve the group and send members to other groups. Programs are encouraged to think proactively about these scenarios and to have policies to guide their decisions if the need arises.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

Peer programs are encouraged to give mentors and their younger mentees additional time to engage in many of the closure practices noted above. Additionally, because peers in a program are likely to see each other outside of program contexts, closure activities should emphasize the rules around confidentiality and stress the importance of adhering to them in social situations after their time in the program has ended.

E-MENTORING MODELS

The virtual context of e-mentoring programs requires some adaptations to the general practices noted above, namely:

Provide closure activities and conversation starters that lend themselves to the virtual environment. Unfortunately, mentors and youth in virtual programs rarely have the opportunity for a meaningful goodbye in-person, which can complicate the process and exacerbate feelings of loss for participants. Thus, e-mentoring programs are encouraged to provide plenty of activity suggestions, tailored to the virtual environment, that can provide opportunities for participants to celebrate their time together and reflect on their experience.

Reiterate rules around social media and other online contact, especially those that participants are expected to observe after their formal time in the program is over. Many programs allow youth and mentors to stay in contact on their own via social media if they desire. However, others may prohibit that contact and will need to make those expectations clear.

Staff debriefs with participants via the technology used by the program. The virtual context also makes it challenging for staff to connect directly with participants as their program experience ends. But activities like preparing participants for their final interactions, or their "exit interviews" with program staff, can often be conducted using the same technology (e.g., web-conferencing software) used for mentor-youth communication.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

For school and site-based programs, the general relationship closure and celebration practices noted at the beginning of this Element will likely be sufficient. However, the end of school years (or program cycles in other organizations) are often hectic and filled with many competing tasks and priorities. Thus, we recommend that school- and site-based models start the celebration and closure processes early, ideally closing matches before the very end of the year so that these celebrations and reflections are not rushed or skipped altogether.

We also encourage school- or site-based programs to recognize the site-based staff who have supported the work of the mentoring program over the course of the year (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrative staff). These individuals often provide critical support to the functioning of the mentoring program and honoring their contributions during celebration events is also important.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Given that informal relationships between staff mentors and youth participants start of organically and without formal matching, it makes sense that the ending stages of these relationships will also look differently than in more formalized programs. In many cases, saying goodbye to a staff mentor can be challenging for a young person who is leaving the broader youth development organization — it may feel like an additional loss given the potentially close relationship they may have formed. For organizations that offer informal mentoring, we encourage practices such as:

- Clarifying with youth and mentors that their mentoring relationship is ending and providing an opportunity to debrief the experience.
- Teaching youth how to find additional mentors, either with other staff at the site or through other individuals or services in the community.
- Informing caregivers, as needed, about the shift in the youth's mentoring engagement.
- Reminding all participants in the relationships about rules governing confidentiality and ongoing communication or contact, especially if youth are continuing to participate in the broader services offered.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

Mentoring relationships come to an end for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they end because the match successfully reaches the end point outlined by the program, while others end after several years of positive interactions. Still others end suddenly before reaching the expected duration of the relationship — for example, because participants move away or encounter unplanned challenges, or because one or more participants are dissatisfied with the mentoring experience. Regardless of why or when the relationship ends, programs should formalize the ending in a way that leaves all participants feeling positive about the relationship and their program experience.

Mentoring relationships are important to participants. Many even serve as secondary attachment relationships for youth (Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017); and losing an attachment figure is a significant, often emotional, event for a young person (see Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Youth who have experienced previous losses, for example, due to parental separation or incarceration of a family member (which characterize a significant proportion of youth participating in mentoring programs; Garringer et al., 2017; Herrera et al., 2013), may find losing their mentor particularly difficult. When relationship endings are not well planned or thought through, youth and their caregivers can be left disappointed, angry, or frustrated (Spencer et al., 2017). At the same time, positive, constructive relationship endings can help children feel valued and teach them skills they can use when experiencing stress and other losses in their life (Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Thus, ending mentoring relationships well — with celebration,

acknowledgment, and care — can be incredibly important for both youth and mentors, and help prevent harm.

While the reasons for match endings are often beyond a program's control, how they are handled is not. Programs have a responsibility to anticipate and have planned responses to a variety of situations. In fact, **all programs should have written policies and procedures for program exits and how to handle a range of scenarios,** especially those that may be sudden or negative and risk harming the youth or mentor, and including what to do when one or more of the participants is unavailable or unwilling to participate in these activities.

Despite the importance of positive program exits, good program-run closures are rare. One study documented the closures of 151 matches across four programs and described many match endings as "messy" — with unclear expectations and confusion (Spencer et al., 2021). In almost three quarters of cases in this study, there was no direct goodbye between participants, and in at least half, the program did not play a role in the closure process at all (Spencer et al., 2021). In fact, in some matches, participants exited the relationship by simply "disappearing." Another study of seven community-based programs (Herrera et al., 2013)

reported similar findings. Only 31 percent of mentors in closing matches reported meeting with program staff to facilitate their match ending; a little under half (48 percent) reported that staff offered ideas to help them deal with the closure; and only 41 percent noted that staff gave them ideas to help the youth deal with the end of the match. Those findings suggest that programs should place more emphasis on their engagement in closure experiences for youth and mentors.

For those matches that reach the endpoint of the program, or surpass expectations for the length of their relationship, **programs are encouraged to consider holding a celebration event at the end of each program cycle** to celebrate the achievements and relationships of participants. Mentoring programs should be thanking and celebrating the efforts of youth, caregivers, and mentors throughout the program cycle, but it may be especially impactful to have that celebration culminate in a special event or ceremony that allows all program participants and staff to reflect on their achievements and express the joy created through their mentoring experience. Most programs operate on a school- or calendar-year cycle, and the end of these periods may be the perfect time to bring participants together to celebrate.

Yet many relationships don't make it to the end of the program cycle. Lower-quality relationships and those that meet less regularly are more likely to end prematurely than higher-quality, consistently meeting matches (De Wit et al., 2016b). Weaker relationships are also those most likely to bypass a formal closure process (Spencer et al., 2017). These early endings are not uncommon. In one large-scale study of community-based mentoring programs, almost half (47 percent) of the matches ended before the end of the program cycle (Herrera et al.,

2013). Others have reported similar (43 percent; Spencer et al., 2017) or slightly lower (34 percent; De Wit et al., 2016b) rates of premature closure in their studies. Premature closures can be difficult for both mentors and youth and are linked with fewer program benefits (Grossman et al., 2012; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002) or even setbacks in youth — that is, youth whose matches end early are often worse off than if they hadn't had a mentor at all (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Youth at relatively high risk for premature closures include older youth (Kupersmidt et al., 2017; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), girls (De Wit et al., 2016b; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), youth in foster care (Stelter et al., 2018), youth who had previously experienced abuse (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002), more stress or risk factors (Grossman et al., 2012; Kupersmidt et al., 2017), and youth with behavioral difficulties (De Wit et al., 2016b).

... programs should be thanking and celebrating the efforts of youth, caregivers, and mentors throughout the program cycle...

Given their prevalence, programs need to be prepared to help matches get through premature endings. Yet, because they can be sudden, the program may not have time to prepare participants. Thus, all participants need to be coached on the importance of closure from the get-go (e.g., in orientation and pre-match training) and agree formally to the termination process (Spencer et al., 2017; see Elements 5 and 6). This will help ensure that the closure of the relationship is seen by all participants as a natural — and valuable — part of the relationship that should be treated with as much care as the relationship's initiation.

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between a relationship that is simply going through a natural "bump in the road" and a relationship that is no longer beneficial for the child. Yet it is important to keep in mind that continuing a match that is unproductive or meeting inconsistently can be harmful to the young person (Karcher, 2005). Thus, we encourage programs to take steps to help struggling relationships (for example, increasing support and resources for these matches; see Element 11), but at the same time, be clear and conservative in policies regarding when to continue to support a struggling relationship and when to end it (see Element 11). When it is clear to staff that a match should be ended, programs have a responsibility to **coach all participants on how to get through the closure process** in a way that celebrates the relationship, shows appreciation for the efforts of all participants, and leaves all feeling positive. This should be done in separate discussions with the family and mentor, prior to any formal joint meeting, and is important for all participants — not only the mentor — who is most often the recipient of this kind of coaching (Spencer et al., 2021).

Programs should **arrange for mentors and youth to have a final meeting** in person, if possible. In some cases, the end of the relationship may be sudden, and there can be considerable challenges in arranging a final chance to say goodbye to each other. In fact, in some cases, a final meeting as a match will not be possible, in which case we recommend holding one-to-one exit interviews or "debriefs" (described below). What is important is that, whenever possible, youth and mentors (and caregivers, as appropriate) have a chance to meet and exchange their thoughts and feelings, and perhaps a small gift or token of gratitude, if program rules allow. Programs may choose to have staff be part of these final meetings or allow mentors and youth to handle their final interactions on their own terms. However, all participants should be prepared for this final meeting and reminded of expectations around their behavior and other program rules.

A **formal debrief meeting or exit interview with staff should also be offered to all participants.** These meetings can either involve all participants or, ideally be one-to-one discussions. In this meeting, staff should discuss with participants the reasons for the end of their relationship, participants are given a chance to reflect on the relationship, and all parties can provide feedback on how the program can improve its services. Depending on the circumstances for the closure, if both mentor and youth are present, programs may even consider adding a more structured, fun activity that helps participants think about what they appreciate about their relationship and how much they learned and grew from their experience together.

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As part of these discussions with youth and parents, **the program should offer referrals to other services and supports that may be helpful.** The end of a mentoring relationship can be a challenging time for both youth and mentors, and youth may need additional supports and services. As noted in Element 5, having a referral network of other service providers can help youth, their families, and even mentors transition more easily out of their time in your program. In fact, one of the most meaningful things a program can do for a young person is **help them find their next mentors,** through another program or in their own social circles, who can help them on the next leg of their journey and build on the valuable experience you provided.

These meetings may also provide an opportunity to discuss being matched with a new mentor or youth. Programs should have **criteria for determining whether a new match is warranted, and a process for assigning new relationships to youth and mentors who are still eligible after their initial mentoring relationship has ended.** Programs should rematch only when participants are a good fit for a new relationship based on established criteria related to how their initial relationship was experienced, why it ended, and the potential for doing harm if another mentoring experience ends on a bad note. Research supports the importance of very thoughtfully considering these issues before offering a child another mentor. In one study, rematched girls had better outcomes than those who had never been mentored, however on some outcomes, rematched boys experienced setbacks relative to boys who had not been mentored (e.g., in peer self-esteem; De Wit et al., 2016a). Similarly, Grossman et al. (2012) found that relative to controls, youth in intact school-based mentoring relationships improved in their academic performance. But those who had been

rematched with a new mentor did worse than youth who hadn't been matched at all. This was not the case for youth whose first mentoring relationships had simply ended and had not been rematched. In follow-up analyses with the same sample, Bayer et al. (2015) found that impacts for rematched youth in "close" relationships were fairly similar to those of youth who had remained in their first mentoring relationships; negative effects were mainly for those rematched youth who did not have a positive experience in their second match (i.e., had two "failed" relationships in a row). Thus, holding off on matching until you have very strong potential for success in the second match, and supporting that match in every way possible, is imperative.

At some point in all programs, mentors and youth will no longer be formally participating in the program and that fact needs to be well documented. As part of the program exit process, programs should get **written confirmation that participants agree to follow the program's rules around post-participation contact.** Even if the program allows participants to continue meeting after their program relationship ends, from a risk management perspective, it is imperative that the program gathers written acknowledgement from all participants that the program is no longer responsible for their relationship or interactions.

The end of a mentoring relationship can be a challenging time for both youth and mentors.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

■ **Are we prepared for the different ways a mentoring relationship can end? Do we have contingency plans in place for different types of unanticipated closures?**

■ **How can we ensure that every program participant gets a meaningful and complete closure experience? How can we avoid having participants who linger in limbo or who just stop participating without an opportunity for reflection and closure?**

■ **How common is it for a relationship to get a proper goodbye in our program? What can our staff do better to facilitate closure activities? Have we adequately staffed this set of tasks?**

■ **What are the main reasons our matches close prematurely? Do we capture this information or look for trends or patterns in the data? Who tends to experience early relationship endings, and do we understand why? Are there steps we can take to improve mentoring experiences for those youth?**

■ **When would we consider matching a youth or mentor into a new mentoring relationship after their first one ends? What are the criteria that would lead us to conclude that we shouldn't rematch a participant into a new relationship?**

■ **What would our mentors, youth, and caregivers like to celebrate about their mentoring work? What themes or accomplishments would they want to make sure are honored and celebrated?**

■ **How can we help youth reflect on the meaning of their mentoring relationship as it comes to a close? What types of conversations should we be having with them? How do we want them to feel as this experience winds down?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth and mentors can help plan closure ceremonies and other celebration moments at the end of program cycles.**

■ **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can all contribute ideas to how the program handles different relationship closure scenarios and the types of questions that get asked during exit interviews or other feedback points.**

■ **Program stakeholders from the broader community (e.g., program funders, families of mentors, teachers and coaches, etc.) can be involved in the planning of celebration events and should be invited to attend so that they can see the impact of the program and celebrate the positive growth of participants. However, it is important that youth, caregivers, and mentors feel an authentic ownership of celebration events and ceremonies and do not feel tokenized by their participation.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **Percentage of mentors and youth successfully completing closure activities or processes.**

• **Percentage of mentors or youth who agree to continue their relationships for another program cycle.**

• **Percentage of mentors who sign up to mentor a new youth after their current relationship ends.**

• **Percentage or total number of youth, caregivers, or mentors taking part in a final program celebration event or ceremony.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Finding Mentors, Finding Success. YouthBuild U.S.A., National Mentoring Resource Center. This guide can be used to support youth with finding their next mentor and incorporated into closure practices.

Match Closure–Fostering Progress. Silver Lining Mentoring, This webinar explores match closure as a critical consideration when mentoring programs serve youth involved in the child welfare system.

"They Always Come, and Never Say Goodbye": Healthy Closure in Mentoring. National Mentoring Resource Center. This webinar provides an overview of research on closure, types of relationship endings, when and how to facilitate closure, and approaches to closure across programs and settings.

Tools to Strengthen Match Support and Closure. National Mentoring Resource Center. Includes tools developed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Massachusetts Bay to support closure practices. https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/tools-to-strengthen-match-support-and-closure/

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 13
PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

Standard of Practice: The program has adequate leadership and staffing to implement services with fidelity to the program model and ensures that all staff have relevant experience, knowledge, and professional development needed to implement essential functions of their roles, and that they reflect the full diversity of the community being served.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

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PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

- **The program has a board of directors or advisory committee that provides adequate governance, decision-making, oversight, and resource development support to the program.** This group should:
  - have clear roles and responsibilities and meet on a regular basis;
  - reflect the diversity of the community being served, and regularly assess its composition to ensure adequate representation in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and other relevant characteristics; and
  - ideally, include youth, caregiver, and volunteer representatives who can share their perspectives.

- **The program should be adequately staffed by individuals with relevant backgrounds and education to implement key functions of the program.** The program should have enough full-time-equivalent staff to implement the program model as intended for the desired number of participants. Key staff should have experience and/or education in youth development programming, child psychology, education, social work, or other relevant fields.

- **The program's staffing reflects the diversity of the community being served, with strategies in place to recruit and retain such individuals over time.** Program staff should reflect the diversity of the community in not only race/ethnicity but also age, gender identity, and other important characteristics and identities.

- **The program has policies and procedures in place to address discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender identity, sexuality, national origin, disability, and/or age.** These policies should be shared with staff at regular intervals and be readily accessible for reference. Programs may consider requiring all staff to complete training that provides information about their antidiscrimination policies, applicable state and national laws, as well as procedures for reporting discrimination.

■ *The program supports all staff members by providing adequate compensation, job-specific onboarding and training, meaningful supervision and support, and opportunities for ongoing professional development and recognition outlined in a formal staff development plan.*

To ensure that program staff have the right skills and competencies, programs should have a formal plan (with dedicated resources) for staff professional development and training. For programs where staff are paid employees, programs should provide adequate compensation, high-quality supervision and coaching, and meaningful staff recognition opportunities. Potential training topics for staff may include:

- how to implement the mentoring program with fidelity;
- best practices for supervision of program participants;
- issues related to supporting program participants, including honoring diversity and fostering inclusion and belonging; cultural responsiveness; attunement to the needs of participants; and other skills related to serving vulnerable populations; and
- other topics specific to the mentoring program model and intended outcomes (e.g., substance use prevention, goal setting and attainment, STEM career paths).

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help clarify staffing needs and support program staff in implementing mentoring models in certain settings.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs have some additional considerations when it comes to building and maintaining adequate program leadership and staffing, including:

- **Hiring staff with experience working with or managing groups of youth.** The skills needed to effectively manage a group setting differ considerably from those needed for one-to-one focused work, and youth workers with experience in group settings can be invaluable in teaching those skills to mentors and managing the physical spaces where mentors and youth meet.

- **Training staff in group dynamics and group management.** Not all staff will come with these skills, but it is important that all are provided with training in how to not only manage groups of youth, but also ensure that each participant feels welcome and engaged in program activities.

- **Scheduling adequate staff to supervise and support group activities, including working directly with groups that may be struggling.** Mentors who are working with a group of youth are juggling many responsibilities and may not be able to leave the group unattended if they need to ask for help or are faced with a situation they cannot manage themselves. Programs are encouraged to make staff available while groups are meeting and to provide real-time supervision and support as needed.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

As with group mentoring models, staff in peer-to-peer programs need to be available to offer support when matches are meeting, as older youth may not know how to handle situations that arise with their younger mentee or may need assistance in completing activities.

Because peer-to-peer mentoring programs also tend to emphasize activities that are youth developed and led, these programs may wish to hire staff who have prior experience co-creating or implementing curriculum or activities collaboratively with youth in other settings.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Given the virtual nature of e-mentoring models, it can be helpful to hire staff who have above-average levels of understanding of software and hardware, online communication skills, and virtual training delivery.

These models are also encouraged to think even more carefully about staffing levels and the amount of effort required to promote online engagement of mentors and youth. In our experience, virtual programs require much more activity guidance for matches, more prompting to get participants to engage, and more support for both relationship challenges and technical support needs. While technology may make some aspects of the mentoring experience easier for participants, the work in building and maintaining such programs is no less than needed for in-person models.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School- and site-based models have many of the same considerations noted above for group and peer programs, including the need to have adequate staff on hand to support matches while they meet on site and the need to prioritize staff skills in working with and managing groups of students. Additionally, school- and site-based programs should prioritize:

Ensuring that the program has dedicated staffing that is focused primarily on the delivery of the mentoring services. Too often, site-based models rely on faculty or staff who have many other roles and responsibilities to take on the development and implementation of a formal mentoring program. Programs in these broader organizations should ensure that those implementing the program have the availability, capacity, and skills to lead the mentoring services and that they are not unduly pulled away for other responsibilities, which can diminish the quality of the mentoring work. Managing a mentoring program is hard work, and those tasked with the responsibility should be provided with clear roles, professional development that allows them to fill the roles adequately, and additional compensation and recognition, as needed.

Creating an advisory committee with representatives and champions from the school or site. Not only can this group of champions help situate the program within all the other activities happening at the school or site, they can, ideally, have meaningful influence over the allocation of space and financial resources so that the program is not an afterthought in the larger decisions made by school or site leadership.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Youth development programs that are offering informal mentoring via staff may want to consider many of the previous recommended practices, including ensuring that mentoring activities do not stretch staffing for other services too thin and providing professional development on mentoring skills and approaches for staff who are expected to mentor as part of their role (see Element 8).

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

The staff who run your mentoring program are the most important ingredient in making your desired program a reality and creating the beneficial mentoring relationships you hope for. Thus, selecting those staff members, preparing them to do their work well, and supporting them in their efforts, are some of the most important practices you can implement to run a strong mentoring program. A recent study found that over half of mentoring programs in the U.S. (59 percent) have fewer than three full-time staff members providing their services (including volunteers); and in about half of all programs, only one paid staff member supported their services (Garringer et al., 2017). Thus, in most programs, having a staff member who is unprepared or overwhelmed — or losing a staff member — can significantly affect program operations and be "felt" by a majority of participants.

Selecting Staff

When selecting staff to run your program, it is important to select people who can do the work required to make the components of your logic model come to life. **Staff should, first, have backgrounds, perspectives, or knowledge that reflect the diversity of the community being served,** and the program should have strategies in place to recruit and retain such individuals over time. Staff who share the background and perspectives of your participants can help your program understand how to best recruit and support your mentoring relationships. They may also be more likely to relate to the experiences of participating families and approach them in ways that are respectful, understanding, and not reflecting deficit-based assumptions (see Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016).

These individuals should be adequately prepared to take on the roles you are asking of them with backgrounds that support the implementation of the program functions they will be responsible for. For example, those working directly with participants should have experience or education in youth development programming, child psychology, education, social work, or other relevant fields. Very few mentoring studies have explored which specific experiences or backgrounds may be particularly important. However, in related work, Herrera & Pepper (2003) examined the program practices that contributed to the survival (or demise) of 787 volunteer-based programs. They found that programs hiring directors with experience in training and supervision were more likely to implement at least quarterly supervision of volunteers and require pretraining of their volunteers, which led to stronger volunteer retention and recruitment (respectively), both of which predicted program survival. Hiring a director with experience in voluntary caregiving (the focus of these programs) was similarly important.

Preparing Staff

To orient staff to the specific values and skills needed to run your unique program, and keep them up to date on these skills, programs should ensure that **all staff are provided with onboarding and ongoing training and opportunities for professional development.** Programs should have a formal staff development plan that describes these opportunities and dedicated resources to support them. Participating in training opportunities can help ensure consistent service delivery for mentees, families, and volunteers. These opportunities can also promote self-efficacy in the skills that are critical to their work (e.g., Anderson & Sanchez, 2022; Kennedy et al., 2022) and help staff feel valued and appreciated — all of which can contribute to staff retention.

The content of your staff training will depend on your specific program goals, the populations you serve, and the challenges you anticipate with your particular program model. Potential topics may include, for example:

- Your theory of change and logic model and how staff should implement key practices with fidelity.

- Best practices for the supervision and support of program participants.

- Attunement to the needs of program participants (preliminary research supports potential benefits of staff training in this area for both staff and mentors; Pryce et al., 2018; Pryce et al., 2022).

- Issues related to diversity, belonging, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness and humility. Anderson & Sanchez (2022) found that mentors trained in related areas increased in their self-efficacy to provide racial/ethnic support to their mentees (see Element 8 for more discussion of this important training topic).

- Understanding the stressors associated with living in poverty or marginalized communities (notably lacking in some staff members; Spencer et al., 2020).

- Other topics specific to your mentoring program model and intended outcomes.

Supporting and Retaining Staff

Once staff are on board, programs should make every effort to support their work: providing regular supervision, recognizing their efforts, providing them with opportunities to voice their ideas and concerns, and ensuring they are not overwhelmed with responsibilities. Staff should be **adequately compensated for their important, often life-changing work** and given the tools and resources needed to do their work well. Ensuring that staff are prepared and are positively engaged in the

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program can help ensure high-quality delivery of your services and ultimately affect the experience of program participants. For example, one study found that the mentor-youth relationships of case managers who were more engaged in their work were higher quality than those of case managers who were less engaged (Keller & DuBois, 2021).

Strong support of your staff may also be key to retaining them. This is important, as one of the biggest challenges in mentoring programs (and youth-serving organizations more broadly) is turnover (see Kaye & Smith, 2014; Spencer et al., 2020). Turnover is not only expensive for organizations (e.g., in recruiting, retraining, and onboarding staff) but can also be harmful for mentoring relationships. Both mentors and families need consistent support — breaks in this support can affect program satisfaction as well as the development of the mentoring relationship (McMorris et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2020).

To prevent turnover and promote staff engagement and satisfaction, programs should make every effort to ensure that their staff are not overwhelmed with responsibilities and that **they have allocated time to provide strong, consistent support to every match** (see Element 11). A large component of this is determining the ideal and maximum "caseload" size for staff in your program. If your program has very few staff (as is true for most programs), then it is important to adjust the number of youth you are serving to reflect this constraint (see Element 1).

Munro (2011) describes a theoretical model of how strong staff combined with manageable caseloads are key ingredients in fostering positive outcomes in social work. Namely, training and supporting strong staff who can work with a variety of client needs is linked with their having high self-esteem, satisfaction, and personal responsibility in their work, which decreases staff absences and turnover, enabling staff to keep caseloads small, which then allows them to spend more time with participants, develop stronger relationships with them, and ultimately yield stronger benefits (Munro, 2011). Although studies have not yet tested this set of hypotheses in mentoring, one study found that smaller caseloads in a career-focused internship and mentoring program were, in fact, linked with program completion (Theodos et al., 2017; see Element 1 for more on the importance of caseload size).

Programs should also ensure that staff have formal opportunities and forums to express their thoughts and any concerns they have with their experiences in the program. This includes **having written policies and procedures in place to address discrimination.** These policies should be easily accessible and shared with staff regularly. We also encourage programs to consider requiring staff to complete training that provides information about your antidiscrimination policies, relevant state and national laws, and procedures for reporting discrimination.

Creating a High-Quality Board of Directors or Advisory Committee

To support your program and ensure that its mission and practices stay on track, **all mentoring programs should have an engaged board of directors or advisory committee that oversees the program and weighs in on critical decisions.** This group should have clear roles and responsibilities and meet on a regular basis. Its members should truly represent your community — both the broader neighborhoods or regions you serve and, ideally, your actual constituents (e.g., alumni youth and caregiver representatives). Youth, caregivers, and mentors can all provide valuable perspective and input. When involving young people on the board or advisory committee, it may be helpful to prepare other members to ensure they can interact with youth in developmentally appropriate and positive ways. The composition of this group should be assessed regularly to ensure that it continues to be representative.

Although the specific characteristics of these oversight groups have not been carefully studied in mentoring organizations to date, related work has explored some of these characteristics. For example, Herrera and Pepper (2003; as previously discussed) studied the survival of a large group of volunteer caregiving programs and found that having a board of directors that met at least quarterly was linked with that board helping the program raise funds, which in turn predicted the program having three or more funding sources and funds to replace their original funding grant, which then predicted program survival.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Do we have a history of retaining staff members over time? What actions have we taken to address barriers to retaining staff?**

- **Do we have adequate staffing to appropriately support the number of mentoring relationships being served?**

- **Is a lack of adequate staffing preventing us from implementing services consistently and with fidelity?**

- **Does our board or advisory committee provide adequate resources and governance to support the program?**

- **What are some of the identities that are central to our program model (e.g., disability, STEM interest, LGBTQIA2S+ status)? Who represents these identities on our staff? Which identities are not represented? Will prospective youth, caregivers, and mentors see themselves reflected in our staff?**

- **What opportunities do our staff have to voice concerns about their role or the program in general?**

- **What do we do to recognize our staff and show our appreciation?**

- **How diverse is our board or advisory committee? Do they reflect the community being served? How can we add missing voices to our program leadership and governance? Does the composition of, and beliefs held by, this group reflect our stated program values?**

- **Do we fund professional development adequately? What training or growth opportunities for staff would strengthen our program?**

- **Who has a say in important decisions in our program? Do we hear enough from the people impacted by those decisions?**

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth and/or caregivers can serve on the program's board or advisory committee and provide input into program leadership and decision-making such as:**

- **interviewing potential staff hires;**

- **identifying content for, and contributing to, professional development training for staff;**

- **sharing diverse perspectives about what is working and areas for improvement; and**

- **recruiting additional community members as potential staff or board members.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **The percentage of staff retained for at least one program cycle (or year) and across years.**

- **The staff-to-youth-served ratio (setting a benchmark for a minimum threshold may be especially important).**

- **The number of matches in an average staff member caseload.**

- **The percentage of staff who represent BIPOC communities, LGBTQIA2S+ communities, those with disabilities, or other relevant factors based on the communities served.**

- **The percentage of staff attending onboarding training.**

- **The percentage of staff attending ongoing training opportunities.**

- **The number of professional development opportunities offered to staff within a given year.**

- **The percentage of board or advisory committee members who represent BIPOC communities, LGBTQIA2S+ communities, those with disabilities or other relevant factors based on the communities served.**

- **Number of youth, caregivers, and community representatives serving on the board or advisory committee.**
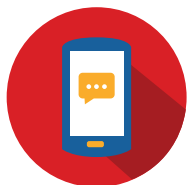
RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

BoardSource. Repository of resources including guides and tools for oversight and accountability, composition and recruitment, executive evaluation and compensation, and assessing board performance. Of particular interest for mentoring programs are:
Advisory Councils: Nine Keys to Success
Board Chair and Chief Executive Responsibilities
Taking Action on Board Diversity: Five Questions to Get You Started

Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making.
Martin, S., Pittman, K., Ferber, T., and McMahon, A., The Forum for Youth Investment.
This guide provides an overview of how to engage youth in policy-making and advocacy efforts through the creation of youth advisory councils.

Nonprofit Human Resources Best Practices. Taproot Foundation and Warner Bros.
A toolkit, informed by nonprofits for nonprofits, that provides recommendations for performance management, recruitment, hiring and retention, staffing, and professional development.

Staffing Calculator for Match Support-User Manual. National Mentoring Resource Center.
Uses an Excel workbook to account for staff time needed to support matches. https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/research-tools/tools-to-strengthen-match-support-and-closure/

ELEMENT 13 REFERENCES

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 14
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Standard of Practice: Programs should forge meaningful community partnerships and participate in other engagements to inform key program development and implementation activities and ensure the program is embedded in the historical and social context of the community and the individuals they serve.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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STANDARD OF PRACTICE

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PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

■ ***The program engages with other mentoring organizations, youth-serving programs, and service providers, and establishes formal partnerships as needed.*** This practice can involve both informal relationships with other organizations and youth-serving professionals (e.g., professional networking, attending community events) as well as more formal partnerships in which service providers work together collaboratively (e.g., formal referrals of youth and families to other providers, conducting a conference or volunteer fair with other local organizations). Formal partnerships should be governed by a Memorandum of Understanding that details the roles and responsibilities of each party.

■ ***The program implements strategies to learn about the community it serves and incorporate its history and lived experience into its organizational values and programmatic decision-making.*** Meaningful partnerships and collaborations with individuals and community groups, especially those who historically or currently experience marginalization or trauma, can offer important insights that will inform relevant and culturally responsive programming. Programs should regularly seek input from these individuals and organizations, and work to integrate this feedback into program operations whenever possible.

■ ***The program engages in activities that promote mentoring in the public and private sectors and builds long-term community awareness and interest in supporting young people.*** Mentoring professionals, particularly program leadership, should be involved in activities that build awareness of mentoring at a community or regional level. These activities can help secure adequate resources from public and private sources for both the program and other mentoring providers, creating a healthy ecosystem of mentoring options for the community.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work.

Generally, the practices noted at the beginning of this Element will be relevant and sufficient for most types of mentoring programs, including **group** and **peer** models, **school- and site-based** programs, and **informal** mentoring offered through youth development organizations. It is worth noting that for programs embedded in broader youth-serving settings (e.g., schools, youth development organizations, juvenile justice settings), the notion of "community" exists at two levels: the community within the institution or organization itself, as well as the broader community (e.g., neighborhood, city, school district). In these program settings, it will be important for mentoring program staff to promote and advocate for the program within the organizations or institutions where they are housed. This can involve sharing progress and achievements with site staff, advocating for meaningful input into resource development and budgetary processes and decisions, and contributing meaningfully to the organization's broader evaluation efforts. Mentoring professionals in these settings should also engage in collaborative and promotional work outside of the organization, but their first priority should be sharing information with and engaging their colleagues within the organization where the program is housed.

E-mentoring programs will likely have a different definition of "community" due to the virtual nature of their services. While they may still engage in practices that engage and recruit mentors in "the real world," the main communities they will engage in are likely to be online ones that they have cultivated over time.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

One of the oft-overlooked aspects of running a high-quality mentoring program is the participation of the program and its staff in the broader ecosystem of mentoring and other programs and services that exist in a community. This work can happen informally, through networking and peer learning by your staff, or more formally through partnerships, collaborations, and joint activities alongside other organizations. There are many benefits to engaging the broader community in these ways:

• Community engagement **grounds a program in the people and place where its work happens.** No program can deliver services that truly meet the needs of the community if they are apart from it and indifferent to its history and the challenges it may be contending with.

• This work **supports diversity and inclusion**, as it can help the community feel connected to the work of your program and make it more attractive to community members who could serve as staff or mentors. Drawing in community members to these roles helps ensure that your work is relevant and rooted in community needs and perspectives.

• Developing strong relationships and partnerships with other community organizations **provides an opportunity for sharing knowledge and resources** that can strengthen your work. These connections can also foster community support for your program, which can ultimately contribute to your program's survival. Herrera & Pepper (2003) examined factors contributing to the survival (or demise) of 787 volunteer-based programs funded through a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

grant program. Gaining community awareness and support was cited as critical to survival by 34 percent of those programs that were still operational at the time of their survey; whereas a lack of community awareness and support was cited as key in causing the program's closure by 42 percent of those that had closed.

• These partnerships can **result in a referral network to direct youth, families, and even mentors to other community services** for needs not supported by the mentoring program. While your program may serve dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of young people, the reality is that it might not be a great fit for every youth's needs or may not have the resources to serve all the youth

who could benefit from your services. Having good relationships with community partners that youth and families can be referred to when they age out of your services, or when they present needs that are beyond your ability or resources to address, can help provide youth with more holistic support and perhaps extend the impact of your work by ensuring that youth and families get the additional help they need to thrive even when no longer served by your program.

- Knowing other professionals in mentoring, more specifically, can **create pathways for information sharing, collaborative action, shared advocacy, or even formal partnership agreements.** Being able to network with, and learn from, other professionals is also a major contributor to job satisfaction, growth as a professional, and long-term commitment to mentoring work as a career path (i.e., retention).

- It helps **strengthen the investments a community makes in mentoring** more broadly. While we encourage programs to maximize their own resource development and capacity (see Element 15), that work can be easier when collaborating with other providers to advocate for mentoring broadly and to build strong public awareness of mentoring and the needs of youth. No one program can do that effectively in isolation.

It is an unfortunate cliché that many programs are led by individuals who reside outside of the community being served.

Strategies for Community Engagement

In the previously listed practices, we recommend several specific strategies for engaging the community effectively. The first addresses the **engagement of, and partnerships with, other mentoring and youth-serving organizations** in the community. This engagement can start at the individual level with program staff networking with other youth-serving professionals at events and conferences, through participation in roundtables or community coalitions, or through professional development and peer learning opportunities. There is no right or wrong way to engage with other providers in your community, but in our experience, no program can do its work well in isolation and your program reputation may suffer if others view your program as apart from, rather than actively engaged in, the broader fabric of your community.

Beyond the engagement of your staff members, programs are encouraged to explore reciprocal partnerships and formal agreements when helpful. For example, when mentoring services are embedded within partnering institutions (e.g., schools, nonprofit organizations, businesses), more formalized agreements (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding) with those institutions may be beneficial, especially if precious program resources or staffing is needed to make the collaboration function as intended. Roles, responsibilities, timelines, and limitations of partnerships can all be clarified in these formal partnership agreements. These formal partnerships also need regular touchpoints to ensure that staff at both organizations are following through on their roles and responsibilities and to troubleshoot aspects of the partnership that are not working as intended.

In addition to connecting to the ecosystem of providers in a region, mentoring programs are

strongly encouraged to build connections that help them understand the history of a place and how that history plays out today in the needs of youth and families. It is an unfortunate cliché of the mentoring field that many programs are created and led by individuals who reside outside (sometimes far outside) of the community that is being served. These programs can potentially court resentment by the very people they intend to serve by misunderstanding the needs of the community, the history of prior attempts to help, and projecting a deficit-based attitude about youth and the community as a whole (see Basualdo-Delmonico & Spencer, 2016).

Thus, we suggest programs use a variety of strategies to **learn about the people and places that situate their work, and to use what they learn to frame their organizational values and inform the work of the program** (see Element 1 for more information about the intersection between a program's values and its work). Programs should strive to understand how race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, and age (among other intersecting identities) influence the conditions mentees, families, and communities are forced to navigate. Effective mentoring services must also consider the significant impact that access, or lack thereof, to resources for safe housing, food, physical and mental health, advanced education, economic opportunities, transportation, public safety, etc., has on mentees, families, and the community. Programs should bring a deep understanding of historical trauma, marginalization, and systemic barriers to the work. While the program may not be able to address all these historic and present contexts in its mentoring work, it is unlikely to do that mentoring work well if it ignores these factors. While mentoring services are most often intended to benefit an

individual mentee, this work is also part of a larger movement to bring more togetherness, fairness, and justice to our communities and broader society. That work begins with knowledge and understanding.

There are many ways programs can build that knowledge and understanding, for example, by involving youth, families, mentors, and other community members in advisory committees or boards of directors. Information gathering activities (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews) may also prove illuminating, as can opportunities to dialogue with, and learn from, other service providers in the community. Perhaps the easiest way to build this understanding is simply to be present in the community at social events, public gatherings, and other venues where the broader community comes together to work or simply have fun. Nothing builds connections between program and community like being present and visible and showing people that your program is of the community, not a service imposing an external "solution."

Lastly, we encourage programs, within the rules and laws that govern their actions, to **participate in advocacy efforts that can strengthen the financial and other support that mentoring work receives** in the community. Program leadership should be informed about emerging trends, collaborative opportunities, legislation, and research projects at the local, state, regional, and national levels and participate in advocacy campaigns to the extent possible. Programs should follow all regulations that govern allowable advocacy activities and avoid conflicts of interest. Advocacy is always best done collaboratively with others for maximum impact, and other providers will certainly appreciate your participation in collective action to grow the resources that all programs need to do their best work.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Is our program a trusted partner in the community? Why or why not?**

- **What do we know about the communities in which we operate? Where are our knowledge gaps and how can we fill them? Who on our staff can build bridges to segments of our broader community?**

- **What activities do we engage in to encourage individuals in the community to learn about our work or to join our program as staff or mentors?**

- **Who on our staff can coordinate our involvement at community events? Do we have a calendar of upcoming events where we should have a presence?**

- **What activities, information, or resources does our program need to create meaningful community partnerships?**

- **How do we network with other mentoring programs and providers? What support does our staff need to enable them to do more outreach and engagement?**

- **What opportunities do we have to engage in advocacy efforts? Do we understand the ethical and legal guidelines that we'd need to follow if we got more involved?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can help build connections to other community organizations and suggest events where the program may wish to engage in outreach.**

■ **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can provide oral histories or community background that can help inform program design, particularly in avoiding prior mistakes made by other providers.**

■ **Community partners, elders, or leaders can be invited to support activities such as strategic planning, public awareness campaigns, or staff development trainings.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **Number of community outreach events or engagements participated in.**

• **Number and composition of formal agreements with other providers or organizations.**

• **Number of referrals made to other providers or organizations.**

• **Number of youth and mentor referrals received from other providers or organizations.**

• **Number and type of advocacy actions taken.**

• **Number of staff whose backgrounds represent the community served by the program.**

• **Number of mentors whose backgrounds represent the community served by the program.**

• **Number of formal opportunities for community partners and stakeholders to provide input into our work (e.g., surveys, forums, etc.).**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Community Toolbox. The University of Kansas. Find a variety of step-by-step guidance, resources, and tools for community-building. https://ctb.ku.edu/en

How to Create a (c)(3) Advocacy Plan. Alliance for Justice via MENTOR Virginia. Fact sheet for nonprofits with a sample advocacy plan.

MENTOR Advocacy Resources. A variety of tools and resources to help advocates stay informed about issues impacting mentoring, how to identify and apply for federal funding, training opportunities, and more.

• Advocacy Action Center

• Grassroots advocacy resources and training opportunities

• Issue-Specific Advocacy Resources – topics include education, mental health, workforce, and violence prevention

• Legislation Platform – to learn more about MENTOR's priority legislation, policy agenda, and legislative principles

• Tracking and Accessing Federal Funds for Mentoring

ELEMENT 14 REFERENCES

Basualdo-Delmonico, A. M., & Spencer, R. (2016). A parent's place: Parents', mentors' and program staff members' expectations for and experiences of parental involvement in community-based youth mentoring relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 61, 6–14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.11.021

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ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE FOR MENTORING™

ELEMENT 15

PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Standard of Practice: To ensure sustainable service delivery and organizational health, programs should employ multiple management policies and practices, including, but not limited to, resource development and financial management, marketing and communications, information management, and liability insurance.

PROGRAM INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

STANDARD OF PRACTICE

To ensure sustainable service delivery and organizational health, programs should employ multiple management policies and practices, including, but not limited to, resource development and financial management, marketing and communications, information management, and liability insurance.

PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

Resource Development and Financial Management

■ *The program has a detailed annual program budget and formal accounting system.* The written budget for the current fiscal year (and future year projections) should:

- Include sufficient funds to: 1) see current matches through the completion of the program's initial commitment; 2) support adequate staffing for monitoring and support of mentoring relationships; and 3) support other needed functions (e.g., program activities, special events, communication materials).
- Reflect the program's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, it includes dedicated resources to provide accommodations and enhance accessibility and designates funds to support match activities when cost may be prohibitive for mentors to fund them.
- Include adequate compensation for paid staff and resources to support their professional development and ongoing training.
- (For programs embedded in larger organizations) Earmark dedicated funds to support mentoring staff and mentoring program activities.
- Be approved by the board of directors or advisory committee.

■ *The program has a resource development plan that details how operating funds will be sourced and maintained over time.* This plan should articulate how the program will secure diversified ongoing funding to ensure sustainability. For programs embedded in larger organizations or institutions, the plan should specify which funds will support mentoring staff and activities and how mentoring services will be supported by future fundraising efforts. These plans should:

- Detail multiple potential funding streams, competitive grants, and prospective donors or partners who can provide the program with key financial and in-kind resources.
- Specify guidelines that govern fundraising efforts to ensure they are ethical and in line with your program values (e.g., the kinds of organizations you would not accept funding from and why).
- Clearly denote staff roles and responsibilities for resource development, including the role of the board of directors or advisory committee.
- Be approved by the board of directors or advisory committee.

Marketing and Communications

■ ***The program has a communications and marketing plan that educates and engages the community and potential participants about its work.*** This plan should:

- Determine how services are marketed to prospective participants (e.g., key messages, imagery, program branding) and strategies for working with local media.
- Clarify who is responsible for marketing and communication activities, and how the efficacy of the strategies will be tracked.
- Articulate how and when to engage in public relations efforts and other strategies for garnering publicity for the program.
- Be reviewed and updated annually and revised as needed to document successful/unsuccessful strategies.
- (For programs embedded in larger organizations) Include a clear explanation of how the organization's marketing and communication efforts will directly support the mentoring services.

■ ***Communication materials accurately portray the population of youth served and their communities using strengths-based language.*** All program materials, including the program website and social media content, recruitment materials, and staff or donor communications, should be free of notions of saviorism or other language that portrays youth or communities as just a collection of problems or challenges (see Elements 3 and 4 for more information on avoiding this in recruitment materials, specifically).

Information Management

■ ***The program has written policies and procedures for storing and managing participant information and records, as well as other key program information, such as staff files, financial reports, and proprietary documents.*** Policies should identify the types of information that will need to be collected from participants and other sources, how confidential information (both electronic and paper) will be stored and retrieved, and which staff members can access this information, especially the personal information of program participants, financial information, and staff personnel records. Policies should also outline how often stored information is reviewed, how long it is retained, and when (and how) it is to be destroyed.

■ ***The program has a database or other software for compiling and managing information about program participants, their mentoring relationships, and their program experience*** Information management systems (i.e., databases) should prioritize participant confidentiality and data security, as well as allowing staff to access the information quickly to make decisions and ensure strong program implementation.

Liability Insurance

■ ***The program has active liability insurance coverage that is aligned with the activities of the program and its staff and the nature of mentor-youth activities.*** Adequate insurance coverage limits program risk and can help shape mentoring activities in light of safety considerations.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can help build the long-term infrastructure and capacity of mentoring programs and approaches in certain contexts.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs may wish to address these additional considerations related to program infrastructure:

Consider the number of groups the budget can support, not just number of youth. When budgeting services for a given program cycle, programs should focus on the number of groups they can reasonably support with the available staffing and resources. Adding more groups may require additional purchases of equipment or supplies, strain available meeting space, or cause other logistical challenges. Adding one or two more youth may seem inconsequential, but depending on the flexibility of the model, doing so may necessitate forming an entirely new group, with all the associated budget implications.

Factor in the costs of curriculum and activity materials. Because group programs are often heavily dependent on specific activities, equipment, and curriculum (e.g., discussion guides, collaborative games), these costs can add up. These budget line items may be higher than in other programs where mentors and youth bear the costs of activities out in the community.

The data management system should capture information both at the individual and group levels. Group-level information and metrics include group structure (e.g., who is leading the group, which participants are in the group), attendance at the group level (e.g., an average 50 percent attendance rate for the group each week), activity completion at the group level (e.g., completion of 70 percent of planned group activities in a program cycle), and group-level outcomes (e.g., average reports of group cohesion and belonging across group members within a given group).

PEER MENTORING MODELS

As with group programs, peer mentoring programs are encouraged to pay attention to curriculum and activity costs, as these can represent large expenditures for these programs. Additionally, peer programs are encouraged to:

Ensure adequate funding is earmarked for the program if part of larger school or organizational budget. Programs that are embedded in schools or other institutions often run the risk of being "lost in the shuffle" of an often-chaotic budgeting process with many competing services and staff vying to secure needed resources. Funding for peer mentoring programs should be clearly spelled out in both staffing budgets and other line items so that the funds are clearly directed to the program and not elsewhere.

If the program is housed in a school setting, ensure that program data systems comply with school or district policies around data storage and access. This is another area where embedded programs are often required to comply with institutional policies and procedures, including limited software options.

E-MENTORING MODELS

Online mentoring programs may expect to incur some costs that differ from other mentoring models and may need to focus more on budgeting and marketing considerations, such as:

Emphasizing data security and storage. Most, if not all, of a virtual mentoring program's records will be managed electronically, and there may be additional costs associated with data security or maintenance of the program's communication platforms. While these programs may have reduced costs for physical space and in-person infrastructure, the costs of technology may be far greater than for other programs.

Considering digital marketing strategies. E-mentoring programs that serve multiple communities may have reduced opportunities for marketing their services and engaging the community at in-person events or in local media. Online strategies such as search engine optimization, online ad campaigns, email-based outreach, or e-newsletter campaigns may have increased relevance for online programs. These can reach potential participants more effectively but may come with additional costs.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

As noted above for group and peer programs, school- and site-based programs have a number of additional considerations when building their infrastructure and capacity, such as:

- Factoring in the costs of curriculum and activity materials when developing budgets.
- Ensuring that data systems comply with school or district policies around data storage and access.
- Ensuring that funding is earmarked for the program when it is part of a larger school or organizational budget.

Additionally, school- and site-based programs may see some efficiencies in marketing and communication activities if they can use platforms and technologies already used in the broader organization, rather than building these tools from scratch. They may also benefit from the support of school or organization communications staff, who can greatly improve the quality and professionalism of program communications.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Youth development programs with informal mentoring should also consider many of the nuances noted above for group, school-based, and site-based programs, including:

- Ensuring that funding is earmarked for the program in the larger organizational budget.
- Ensuring that data systems comply with broader organizational policies around data storage and access.
- Using communication platforms and technologies already used in the broader organization.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

While most mentoring professionals focus intently on the design and delivery of their program models — and with good reason, as that is the mechanism through which young people will experience program benefits — there are other important practices that help ensure a mentoring program has the resources, tools, and community awareness it needs to thrive long-term. This Element covers four critical aspects of program infrastructure that each play a significant role in helping mentoring programs grow and sustain their services over time: resource development, marketing and communications, information management (including technology infrastructure and data security), and liability insurance.

Failure to secure adequate funds can result in sudden program closures that hurt young people and the broader community...

These areas represent common challenges and pain points for mentoring programs. In a 2016 national survey of mentoring programs, 44 percent indicated that fundraising/grant writing was a major challenge, and 29 percent noted that sustainability or program growth were serious concerns (Garringer et al., 2017). In that same survey, 87 percent of programs indicated that the number of youth they served had grown in the last year, but only 26 percent reported that their staffing had also grown to accommodate this need. In fact, 11 percent of all mentoring programs reported that their staffing levels had recently declined.

This paints a picture of a field that is increasingly doing more with the same (or fewer) resources and in need of both increased resources and efficient tools to optimize its work. Failure to secure adequate funds can result in sudden program closures that hurt young people and the broader community, as meaningful mentoring relationships are thrown into limbo or ended prematurely. Insufficient marketing of the program can leave well-resourced programs scrambling to find participants. Programs without adequate technology infrastructure can struggle to implement the program as intended and often lack actionable data to help make key decisions. And mentoring programs that do not have adequate insurance can face devastating consequences when accidents happen or when mentor or youth engage in harmful behaviors.

However, we also know that these are areas where programs often have limited staffing and expertise. Most mentoring professionals went into this line of work hoping to help youth and their communities, not to manage financial spreadsheets or dream up marketing campaigns. And most mentoring programs have three or fewer staff, so finding the time for these activities can be hard even if there is expertise available. But as noted above,

these are aspects of a program that can have dire consequences if not attended to adequately and we hope that even very small programs can build on the advice here to shore up their long-term sustainability. Below we expand on the practices in these critical areas.

Resource Development and Financial Management

All mentoring programs need adequate funding to deliver their services over the course of a program cycle. Ideally, the program should aspire to fundraising at levels that allow for several cycles of operation, although we recognize that few programs, especially nonprofits, get to that high level of fundraising stability. Regardless, all programs will need a long-term budget that tracks current financial assets, expenses over time, and future gaps that need to be filled with additional fundraising efforts. While the specific practices associated with good budgeting and financial management are beyond the scope of this publication (see the Resources section), we recommend mentoring programs keep the following in mind when developing program budgets:

> ## ...almost all mentoring relationships, regardless of the program model or setting, need significant support...

Be sure to adequately staff match support and supervision activities. It can be tempting to think of mentoring relationships as being somewhat self-sustaining entities after they have started on their journey and that program staff can turn their attention to recruiting the next group of participants once a mentoring relationship is underway. But in our experience, almost all mentoring relationships, regardless of the program model or setting, need significant support (see Element 11). There will be challenges that arise, misunderstandings or disagreements that need addressing, or moments of disconnection in which a staff member may need to offer youth, mentors, or caregivers additional coaching or support. In the absence of that support, research suggests that many mentoring relationships will end prematurely, often under negative circumstances and frustrations (McQuillin & Lyons, 2021; Spencer et al., 2020). In our experience, mentoring programs often underestimate the amount of support matches will need and the sheer volume of hours needed to adequately check in with participants and determine the help they need. Program leaders should closely examine the budget for staffing match support and supervision activities to ensure that all mentoring relationships get the attention and care they deserve.

Fund professional development for staff. Chances are most of your staff members will be somewhat new to the world of mentoring, having come from prior positions in related fields, such as education, youth development, social work, child psychology, and after-school programs. Although they may bring considerable experience working with youth, they may not be familiar with the nuances of mentoring relationships, managing volunteers, or tasks such as data collection or training delivery. They may also need to learn more about the youth your program serves, and training on working with groups such as Native American youth, LQBTQIA2S+ youth, immigrant or refugee youth, or youth with disabilities may round out their skills further. Programs are encouraged to assess the competencies and knowledge gaps of their staff and fund professional development experiences accordingly. Attendance at professional conferences and networking events also builds staff skills (see Element 13) and helps their efforts at community engagement (see Element 14).

Set aside dedicated funds for disability accommodations and other DEI needs. One of the most critical practices in offering a mentoring program that is truly inclusive is ensuring that resources are available to support accommodations for participants with disabilities. Youth serving organizations often assume that accommodations can be covered under the general program budget, only to find that those funds get used up quickly and that staff actually cannot accommodate a disability-related requests when needed. This can leave disabled youth, volunteers, and staff feeling ignored, unwelcome, and undervalued. There is a misconception that accommodations are often expensive or impossible to deliver. This is not true; and if your program is unable to attempt to make reasonable accommodations because it didn't think to set aside funds for that purpose, it sends a poor message about what and whom the program values. This is one place where it is easy for a program to "walk their talk."

> Similarly, programs should set aside some funds to support the participation of volunteer mentors who may have limited means to cover things like the cost of mentoring activities, transportation to and from mentoring sessions, or other barriers to their involvement. Programs are encouraged to think about the typical expenses that mentors may incur in the program, who might be excluded from participating due to those expenses, and how the program could alleviate those needs to get a more diverse pool of mentors into the program.

Beyond annual budgetary decisions, programs also have a need to engage in proactive resource development that can secure a consistent and sustainable future for the program. **Resource development plans** should:

Diversify fundraising activities so that the program is not solely dependent on one source. While many mentoring programs rely on one or a handful of large funding sources (competitive grants, private donations, etc.) year to year, it can be risky to have a funding mix that is overly reliant on a small number of sources. In those instances, a change in the commitment of one funder, or the loss of a competitive grant that the program assumed would renew, can be catastrophic and result in the type of sudden closures that programs should avoid at all costs. In fact, one study examined the survival (or demise) of a large group of volunteer caregiving programs that were funded through a specific grant program and found that having three or more funding sources and funds to replace their original funding grant was a key predictor in program survival (Herrera & Pepper, 2003). While the perfect mix of funding sources will vary greatly from program to program, we encourage programs to maximize the contributions from competitive grant proposals, donations from large private or corporate philanthropies, individual donations, funds contributed by partner schools or other organizations, and in-kind donations of goods and services that can supplement program activities and mentor-youth outings. Similarly, resource development efforts should not focus solely on one big make-or-break fundraising event, but instead be spread throughout the year so that there are multiple opportunities for those who care about your work to contribute their money and resources.

Remember your program values and ethical principles. In the pursuit of these important resources, it can be easy for programs to stray from some of their central values and ethical principles. Most commonly, programs overcommit to the number of youth they can serve — the full costs of which may not be covered by the grant or donation.

While there is nothing wrong with growing and expanding a program, we encourage mentoring professionals to not overpromise in exchange for needed funds. In Element 1, we encouraged programs to serve only the number of youth to whom they could reasonably offer a strong program experience. Serving more youth and mentors than you have the funding to adequately support is risking cutting corners on program quality and risks facilitating mentoring relationships that are not only ineffective but could be harmful to participants.

Similarly, programs can also encounter challenges when they alter the program to take on different forms or goals in mentoring just to secure new funds. Programs can sometimes find themselves radically reinventing their services just to be a better "fit" for a new grant. In our experience, that kind of "chasing the money" is rarely sustainable and may take the program away from the more core mentoring that they actually do well.

Programs may also think carefully about the ethical considerations related to the types of funders they accept support from. Many youth-serving organizations do not accept funding from a variety of companies or individuals who are viewed as having contributed to the negative circumstances in a community or among young people. While it is up to each program to determine where their ethical boundaries lie, a program that is not considering the ethics of their funding sources runs the risk of offending or alienating the community they serve. Remember that your program's reputation is only as strong as the funders and stakeholders it associates with.

Marketing and Communications

The marketing needs of mentoring programs vary considerably. A peer-to-peer mentoring model in an elementary school may have little need to communicate about or promote the program outside of school walls (other than to caregivers), whereas a community-based nonprofit serving dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of youth and families will have a critical need to market their services broadly and draw the interest of volunteers, caregivers, youth, and potential funders and donors. We assume here that all mentoring programs will have some need to communicate with stakeholders and potential program participants.

Central to this work is the development and implementation of a **marketing and communication plan.** These plans should specify the actions the program will take to promote its services, the types of messages that will be appealing to prospective participants and donors, and information about the activities of the program and the outcomes youth, volunteers, and the community are experiencing.

As noted in Elements 3 and 4, it is critical that your marketing and communications materials **portray the youth and community served by the program in a positive strengths-based light.** In an effort to spur individuals to take action on behalf of the program, it can be easy for marketing messages to lapse into saviorism or portray youth as a collection of "problems" to be "solved." While it is true that every mentoring program, at some level, works to bring about positive change in the face of the challenges youth face, it is also true that mentoring is a universal need of all people and that every human being needs mentor-like individuals in their lives to maximize their potential and happiness. We encourage mentoring programs to adopt strengths-based messaging in their marketing materials and to critically review their messaging to ensure it doesn't paint an inaccurate picture of those you serve or the community you work in. Involving youth, caregivers, mentors, and others from the community in reviewing program messaging can help avoid these pitfalls.

While the specific communication platforms and media a program uses will vary widely, we encourage programs to maximize tools and strategies such as:

- **A program website,** or a clearly defined section about the program within a larger website for programs that are embedded at a school or other youth-serving organization — many of the mission and values statements we've recommended elsewhere in this resource should be easily found on the program website.

- **Print or e-newsletters,** which can be great for sharing information about upcoming events and activities.

- **Email lists** — while youth may not be heavy users of email, most adults still prefer to get important information through email.

- **Social media platforms** (e.g., Facebook, Instagram,

X [formerly known as Twitter], etc.); although note that membership in these platforms is not universal and many caregivers may not be active participants in social media.

- **Advertisements** in local publications or digital media.
- **Earned media,** such as opinion pieces or letters to the editor, proactively pitching mentoring story ideas to local news.
- **Displays/booths at local events,** which can be an excellent form of community engagement (see Element 14).
- **Annual banquets or awards events** — many programs combine an annual celebration of matches with a fundraising opportunity to create a powerful event that highlights the good work of the past and spurs investment in the program's future.
- **Annual reports** or evaluation reports that detail the program's work and outcomes.
- **Word-of-mouth recruitment** or awareness campaigns — these can be especially powerful if youth, caregivers, and mentors engage their social circles in learning more about the program through their own testimonials.

While programs will have varying constituencies that need to be communicated with, most marketing and communication plans have dedicated activities focused on reaching:

- the general public;
- current and potential program funders;
- current and potential program participants (mentors, youth, families);
- community leaders and/or elected officials; and
- current and potential partner organizations.

Information Management

When the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™* was first released in 1991, it was almost unheard of for mentoring programs to use computerized databases to manage their information and keep track of their participants.

Clearly, the landscape of program technology and data management has changed considerably in the decades since, and we assume here that most mentoring programs use some form of software database or electronic file management system to keep track of their work, the activities of mentors and youth, and the data related to program evaluation and outcome tracking. Some programs use sophisticated cloud-based platforms, such as customized Salesforce builds or other high-end volunteer management systems; others may get by with Microsoft Office or Google forms and spreadsheets. Regardless of the complexity of a program's information management systems, we suggest the following guidelines:

- Programs should have **strong policies and procedures around the access to, and use of, program information,** especially that related to program participants or sensitive proprietary information (e.g., budgets, human resource files). These policies should limit which staff can access sensitive information and limitations on the use, or sharing, of that information. Such policies may also identify procedures for entering into data sharing agreements with partner organizations, schools, or external evaluators, if applicable.

- It is especially important that these policies **protect youth, families, and mentors from misuse of their private and confidential information.** The records kept about an individual participant and their mentoring relationship likely contain sensitive information that they would not like divulged to others, including in some cases, their own caregivers or their mentor or mentee. Programs are encouraged to keep sensitive participant information on a "need-to-know" basis and to honor participant requests for privacy as thoroughly as possible. In some

instances (e.g., criminal investigations, mandatory reporting of suspected abuse), programs may have a legal responsibility to share information externally. In other instances, external requests for sensitive information may place the youth or families you serve at risk, and we encourage programs to strongly consider their values and ethical principles in this respect and to very carefully consider the divulging information (e.g., immigration status, identification as LGBTQIA2S+) that could be used to harm young people or the community.

- As part of maintaining privacy and confidentiality, programs should also establish **policies around the archiving or purging of records** over time. While there can be benefits to holding on to program data over a long period (for example, to support program evaluation or tracking of program alumni), it can become burdensome to maintain a large volume of information. And holding onto information indefinitely increases the likelihood that it can be breached. Programs should establish policies and procedures for how to safely archive information (e.g., using IDs instead of names) and destroy personal information that is no longer needed. Legal counsel can help establish the right cadence of record archiving and purging, especially as laws regarding these records may vary from state to state.

- Programs should also determine **procedures for notifying staff or participants of any data breach** which may comprise the security or privacy of their confidential information.

Liability Insurance

Lastly, all mentoring programs should maintain adequate insurance coverage that protects the organization in legal matters or crisis situations. While the practices detailed throughout this resource will minimize risk and help ensure that participants are safe while engaging in program activities, the reality is that accidents can occur and that there are rare instances of mistreatment or abuse in mentoring services. While it can be challenging to find affordable coverage given the nature of most mentoring activities (e.g., often unsupervised in community-based programs), it is still an important aspect of risk management and a valuable asset in protecting the program's future should unforeseen circumstances occur. Programs are encouraged to explore local options for adequate coverage and to have clearly documented screening and risk management procedures so that insurance carriers can appropriately assess the level of risk in the program and offer affordable coverage options.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- **Do we have adequate staffing to put the necessary time into resource development and financial management, marketing and communications, and information management in addition to the other aspects of running our program (recruitment, training, match support, evaluation, etc.)? Do we understand the time and energy these things will take in addition to all the work we do for youth, families, and mentors?**

- **How solid is our short- and long-term financial situation? Do we see major gaps coming in the years ahead? How can we set aside funds to weather a sudden shift in our financial situation?**

- **When deciding which organizations we would accept funding from, what are our nonnegotiables?**

- **How are our values represented in our marketing materials? How are our materials "seen" by the people we are trying to reach in our community?**

- **Are we spending adequate time marketing the program? Have we staffed those tasks appropriately?**

- **Do we know how our participants find out about us? Or what messages resonated with them to spur their involvement in our program?**

- **Do we have the right tools and resources to do our work to the best of our ability?**

- **Are we doing everything possible to protect the privacy of the information we collect from and about our participants?**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can inform and review the communications plan and marketing materials to ensure the messaging is effective and the community is represented positively.**

- **Program participants (e.g., youth, families, mentors) can participate in implementing marketing strategies and may be among the best ambassadors your program can deploy.**

- **Participants can help connect the program to investors or sources of in-kind supports. Use their networks to support the program's funding diversity.**

- **Youth and mentors can tell the stories of their relationships to share with potential funders (blogs, videos, etc.; make sure to get permission to release photos or testimonials).**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

- **Annual revenue projections.**

- **Proportion of the budget needed/spent in different practice or program areas (e.g., training, support, recruitment, marketing).**

- **Number of distinct funding sources.**

- **Number of years current funding could sustain the program.**

- **Cost per youth served, per mentoring relationship/group, and/or for one slot in the program (i.e., for participation in one full program cycle).**

- **Number of ad campaigns or marketing activities implemented.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) Resources. Federal Trade Commission.
• Children's Online Privacy Protection Act a brief explanation of this law and its implications
• Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA) includes a rule summary and related documents
• Complying with COPPA: Frequently Asked Questions

Data Policies Your Nonprofit Needs. NTEN. This report provides an overview of policies to consider and recommended resources for information management security.

Ethical Storytelling Pledge. Ethical Storytelling. A guide of ethical standards for doing resource development and social impact work. https://ethicalstorytelling.com/pledge/

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). U.S. Department of Education. A summary of the law, answers to frequently asked questions, and guidance to assist with compliance. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html

Marketing and Communications Resource Library. National Council of Nonprofits. Find tips and resources to support marketing and communication activities like effective storytelling and improving accessibility. https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/resources/marketing-and-communications

Nonprofit Hub. Free guides, courses, and webinars for nonprofit management.
• Building a Grants Calendar Guide
• The Ultimate Budget Guide

Propel Nonprofits. Federally certified community development financial institution (CDFI) providing access to services and resources to support nonprofits including tools and guides to enhance organizational operations.
• Balance Sheet Cheat Sheet
• Budgeting: A 10-Step Checklist
• Financial Policy Guidelines and Example

Summary of the HIPAA Privacy Rule. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Key elements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, including who is covered, what information is protected, and how protected health information can be used and disclosed. https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html

ELEMENT 15 REFERENCES

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Herrera, C., & Pepper, S. K. (2003). *Faith in Action: Using interfaith coalitions to support voluntary caregiving efforts.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. https://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/faith-in-action-using-interfaith-coalitions-to-support-voluntary-caregiving-efforts.html

McQuillin, S. D., & Lyons, M. D. (2021). A national study of mentoring program characteristics and premature match closure: The role of program training and ongoing support. *Prevention Science,* 22, 334–344. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11121-020-01200-9

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ELEMENT 16
PROGRAM EVALUATION

Standard of Practice: The mentoring program creates and implements a formal evaluation and data collection plan that addresses tracking of implementation fidelity, mentoring relationship quality, relevant participant outcomes, and program costs.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

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STANDARD OF PRACTICE

The mentoring program creates and implements a formal evaluation and data collection plan that addresses tracking of implementation fidelity, mentoring relationship quality, relevant participant outcomes, and program costs.

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PRACTICES SUPPORTING THIS STANDARD

- ***The program has a written evaluation plan.*** This plan will look different in a variety of program models and settings, but it is important that every program create a written plan that outlines efforts they will take to better understand their adherence to policies and procedures, the quality and consistency with which mentoring services are delivered, the costs of those services, and the relationships and outcomes experienced as part of the program. Effective evaluation plans include information on:

  - **What** important questions the program is trying to answer, such as testing key aspects of the theory of change (see Element 2) and measuring short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes, implementation fidelity, mentoring relationship quality, and program costs.
  - **Who** will provide information to address those questions.
  - **When** each piece of information will be collected.
  - **How** information will be collected, both in terms of method (e.g., survey, focus group) and process (e.g., which staff members are responsible and how they will implement data collection processes, such as preparing participants and generating buy-in for data collection, obtaining consent from respondents, and scheduling survey administration).
  - **How** the program plans to analyze and secure the data, for example, who will be responsible, what types of resources will be needed, and how the evaluation will address each question.
  - **How** the program will share findings with stakeholders (e.g., funders, community partners, board members) and participants.
  - **How** staff will obtain feedback on those findings and integrate it into program operations.
  - Information about any **data sharing agreements** needed for accessing data from external sources (e.g., academic records, juvenile justice data).

- ***The program engages in consistent, ongoing data collection and analysis to address the questions outlined in its evaluation plan.*** The program should use the evaluation plan to guide its collection, analysis, and sharing of data on an established timeline. To accomplish this, programs will need to dedicate resources to data collection and analysis, including training and supporting staff as needed.

- ***The program shares evaluation findings with stakeholders*** This includes program participants, staff, board members, funders, and other community partners. When sharing findings, programs should consider:

  - generating a formal report that is accessible to all stakeholders;
  - creating other summaries of the results or infographics that can be shared broadly; and
  - creating a process for program participants and staff to reflect on the findings and offer suggestions for program improvements.

■ *The program uses findings to make improvements in its services on a regular basis.*
Programs should determine how findings and feedback from key stakeholders will be used to improve the program and more effectively meet client expectations and needs. Ideally these research-to-practice improvement efforts will be led by the program's advisory committee or other ad hoc group with authority to recommend program changes to leadership. Regular and consistent reviews of new data collected should be implemented to ensure the responsiveness of program improvement efforts.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMON PROGRAM MODELS AND SETTINGS

Because there is tremendous diversity in how and where mentoring is delivered to young people, here we offer additional practices and recommendations related to this Element for some common mentoring contexts. Readers should note that there may be overlap in the following categories below (e.g., a peer mentoring program in a school or a Boys & Girls Club offering a group mentoring program on-site) and read all that may be relevant to their work. The next recommendations can support program evaluation and continuous improvement efforts for some typical mentoring models and settings.

GROUP MENTORING MODELS

Group mentoring programs should largely follow the previously noted evaluation practices, but there are a few nuances they may wish to consider when building their evaluation strategy:

Measure group-related concepts. It will likely be important to measure group concepts, such as group cohesion and belonging, that may be drivers of outcomes. If part of the program's theory of change is that youth will benefit from being welcomed into a new and positive peer context, measuring their feelings of belonging and perceptions of group functioning and support may be important inputs into understanding whether the program is working as intended.

Consider observational methods as part of data collection. Group programs may benefit from including observational activities in their evaluation. This involves having someone from the program or evaluation team observe the groups in action, looking for signs of healthy group interaction and noting the situations or circumstances in which groups tend to struggle. Important group dynamics and insights into groups' overall functioning may be well captured through this approach and highlight implementation successes and challenges.

Examine the quality of the relationship between co-mentors. If programs are using a team approach, in which multiple mentors work collaboratively with a group of youth, they should measure the quality of their mentor-mentor interactions and relationships. If a team of mentors is having conflict, chances are their work with the group will be negatively impacted in some way.

Measure completion of the program's required activities. Because group mentoring programs tend to emphasize the use of structured activities or a prescribed curriculum to guide group discussions, these programs will want to measure the completion of these activities or progression through the required curriculum. Completion of certain activities may be essential to the program's theory of change and the progress of each group may be a predictor of the benefits youth ultimately experience.

PEER MENTORING MODELS

As noted above for group models, peer-to-peer mentoring models will likely want to track the completion of program activities or curriculum as part of their evaluations. Additionally, peer programs are encouraged to:

Examine outcomes for mentors. While potentially meaningful in any program, the outcomes experienced by mentors take on increased relevance in programs such as these where the mentors are also young people. The program's theory of change should highlight the benefits for the older peer mentors, as well as those for their younger mentees. Peer mentors may grow in areas such as their leadership skills, confidence in helping others, or their sense of identity and self-esteem.

Use evaluation instruments that are age appropriate for peer mentors. Surveys asking peer mentors about their experiences should be simplified for an appropriate reading level and specifically framed around collecting the unique perspectives of a young person in the mentoring role. Questions about their personal growth, or the growth they have seen in their mentee, should be simple and easy for them to understand conceptually.

Consider asking teachers, counselors, caregivers, or others to share perspectives on the impact of the program on participating youth and their peer mentors. While the perspectives of others outside the mentor-youth dyad can be helpful in any program evaluation, it may be especially important in peer programs where other school staff are directly involved in the relationships. It can be difficult for both peer mentors and young mentees to express their perceptions of how the mentoring experience is affecting them. Those changes might be seen and reported more easily by others who know the youth participating in the program. Their reports of positive change can make meaningful contributions to demonstrating program impact.

E-MENTORING MODELS

E-mentoring models are another example of programs in which participants' progression through a set of prescribed activities can be an important marker of engagement and a likely driver of program outcomes. In fact, online mentoring programs should **emphasize several markers of participation in their data collection and analysis.** Data points such as the number of logins or messages sent, the average word count of messages, the frequency of interactions between mentors and youth, the average response time between participants, and the total time spent engaged in the program platform may all be important predictors of how impactful the program is for participants. Additionally, e-mentoring programs may wish to:

Integrate evaluation tools into mentoring interactions in which participants are already engaged (e.g., texts with links to brief surveys that note, "After your next interaction, click on this link."). This can make data collection an integrated part of the experience of engaging in an activity and takes advantage of their time in the platform where they communicate.

Assess technology-related communication barriers and how technology has enhanced or hindered the development of the mentoring relationship. It can be frustrating for participants if technological glitches, bugs, connection issues, or other software or hardware barriers are hindering their communication. They may also have feedback about how the communication methods used by the program are helping or could help their mentoring experience (e.g., may prefer video calls to email correspondence).

Consider conducting focus groups, individual interviews, or other ways of gathering qualitative data that are not reliant on typing. These approaches can be helpful in any mentoring program but may take on increased importance for purely virtual mentoring models where so much of the interaction and participation is typing or text based. Using alternative data collection methods that allow for verbal responses can help accommodate many individuals with physical or learning disabilities. In fact, it can be difficult for any young person to provide a lot of information via typing. Video interviews, focus group chats, phone calls, and other methods where participants can verbally share their thoughts can be helpful in generating richer, more complete data.

SCHOOL- AND OTHER FORMAL SITE-BASED MODELS

School- and site-based models are also encouraged, as noted above for group, peer, and e-mentoring programs, to track participant completion of key activities related to the program's theory of change. And as noted for peer programs, teachers, counselors, caregivers, and other faculty or site staff may be important sources of information about program impact.

When set in broader youth-serving organizations and institutions, formal school- and site-based mentoring programs are additionally encouraged to:

Get feedback and "sign off" on all relevant aspects of your evaluation plan from site leaders (e.g., principals in school-based programs). School districts, in particular, may have a formal process for vetting and approving any data collection involving students and district evaluation staff or institutional review boards (IRBs) may need to examine the plan before evaluation activities can begin.

Time data collection efforts to take advantage of other school evaluation activities and avoid collecting data at times that conflict with other site activities (e.g., close to other major tests or right before long breaks when some students may be absent). Noting the other evaluation activities happening at the site can also help avoid redundant data collection.

Ensure that school or site personnel can adequately support data collection (e.g., provide staff with a quiet, private place to conduct interviews or administer surveys).

Collect data on implementation fidelity and quality from school/site staff in addition to other program participants and stakeholders. Others in the organization may have unique insights into how well the program is functioning in the broader context.

Consider collecting records data from schools or school districts as part of program evaluation, including obtaining information on a similar group of students to use as a comparison group. Schools may have a particular advantage here, as they have access to information about other youth that most nonprofit providers do not. This information can be invaluable in helping illustrate the value that the program is bringing to mentored students, compared to a similar group not participating in the program.

INFORMAL MENTORING MODELS

Organizations that are offering informal mentoring via staff may choose not to evaluate mentoring separately, given that mentoring relationships may not be experienced by all youth and the connection to other organization services or outcomes may be less clear. But, when possible, youth and caregivers should be asked about their mentoring experiences (if any) as part of the overall evaluation of the organization's services. Programs can ask about their mentoring experiences, the benefits they received, and how the presence of mentoring may have bolstered or enhanced their overall experience in the organization.

DISCUSSION OF THIS ELEMENT

One of the most important activities mentoring programs can do to increase the odds that they are having their desired impact is to engage in regular, sustained evaluation activities. These activities can help ensure that a program's logic model and theory of change are working as intended (see Element 2) and provide information the program can use to "course correct" program components that may need to be strengthened. Evaluation efforts can help programs better understand their adherence to policies and procedures, outline the quality and consistency with which program practices are being implemented, and assess the outcomes experienced by youth and others, such as mentors, caregivers, or staff. They can also contribute to stronger program impacts: A meta-analysis of 55 mentoring program evaluations found that programs that included systematic monitoring and evaluation procedures had larger impacts than those lacking these practices (DuBois et al., 2002). Although an in-depth discussion of mentoring program evaluation methodologies is beyond the scope of this chapter, other resources provide excellent information (see DuBois, 2014; Grossman, 2005).

Before we delve into the specific practices that go into program evaluation, it is worth noting that mentoring programs may find value in adopting what are called "participatory" forms of evaluating the program. These approaches are commonly known as participatory action research or, when led by mentees themselves, youth participatory action research (YPAR). In these approaches, program participants take the lead or have a meaningful role in designing, implementing, and reporting program evaluation tasks and findings. It

builds on the idea that no one knows more about the experience and impact of mentoring than the people *in these relationships* and that they should play a major role in capturing and defining their own experience. Participatory methods can include other stakeholders, such as mentors or caregivers, but they all emphasize that program staff and external evaluators should share the evaluation process with its subjects. While this approach may not be a perfect fit for every context, it is important to remember that participants in the program have a vested interest in how the story of their relationships gets shared with others.

The first step in any evaluation effort is to develop a **written evaluation plan.** This plan should align with your theory of change and logic model, reflect your program's capacity and budget, and be informed by input from youth, caregivers, mentors, staff, and other key stakeholders. It should also reflect key ethical standards — for example, completion of surveys by participants should be voluntary, and participants should be informed of who will and will not be able to see their responses and any risks associated with survey completion (see DuBois, 2014). Although these plans will be somewhat unique across programs, all should include answers to the following questions:

■ **What are your evaluation questions, based on your theory of change and logic model?** Programs will vary in the specific questions that are most critical to assess in their evaluation, but most will want to address the following broad sets of questions:

Is the program being implemented as intended (i.e., with "fidelity")? This is perhaps the most important set of questions to address in your evaluation efforts, because if your program isn't being implemented well, it will be difficult to yield the types of outcomes your theory of change outlines. This is particularly true if your program is being developed or just starting out (see DuBois et al., 2006). These questions should include all key practices and can include the relevant metrics outlined for each Element in this manual. Dane and Schneider (1998) discuss five key areas of fidelity to examine when assessing program implementation:

1. **Adherence:** Is the practice being delivered as intended (e.g., have pre-match trainings included all planned components)?

2. **Exposure:** How often is the practice being implemented (e.g., is the program delivering pre-match training as often as planned)?

3. **Quality of delivery:** How well is the practice being delivered (e.g., are staff delivering the training materials in an engaging way; are they prepared and responsive to mentor questions)?

4. **Differentiation:** To what extent is the program/practice distinguishable from others (e.g., to what extent is a new set of pre-match training components different from existing training components)?

5. **Responsiveness:** How are participants experiencing the practice (e.g., are mentors finding pre-match training helpful to their work; have they gained the knowledge and skills the training was meant to foster)? Included in responsiveness is **satisfaction**. Information on satisfaction should be collected at least once during each program cycle from all key participants, partners, and stakeholders. Your plan should include thresholds and goals for each aspect of satisfaction (e.g., "Ninety percent of our mentors will strongly agree that they are satisfied with the support they have received through our program").

Participants and stakeholders also should be offered a forum (e.g., a question in a survey, a feedback box for anonymous written feedback, participation in a focus group) for sharing constructive feedback on how the program could be improved. Dosage is another important aspect of fidelity to consider (see DuBois, 2014; Steckler & Linnan, 2002): To what extent are participants actually receiving the practice as intended (e.g., are all mentors attending all pre-match training components before starting their mentoring relationship)?

How much mentoring are youth getting and what is the quality of their relationship? The dimensions of the mentoring relationship that you measure may be somewhat unique to your program, depending on which aspects of the relationship you believe are key to fostering the youth outcomes outlined in your theory of change. They may include, for example, one or more factors that studies have linked with program benefits, such as relationship duration (Grossman et al., 2012; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002),

consistency of meetings (Karcher, 2005), the extent to which mentors target their interactions on fostering particular skills in their mentees (see Christensen et al., 2020), perceived closeness (Austin et al., 2020; Bayer et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2019), or other aspects of relationship quality. It is particularly important to collect this information often (as discussed next). Your plan should include thresholds and guidance on what a "strong" relationship is, and what steps you will take to offer additional support or, if warranted, end the relationship, for those reporting low-quality or harmful mentoring experiences.

Are youth receiving the benefits outlined in your theory of change? These outcomes should include "proximal" or short-term outcomes that all youth in your program should receive (e.g., having an important adult outside of their family in their life, spending more time engaging in the types of activities your program provides) as well as intermediate and more aspirational, longer-term outcomes — for example, improvements in self-esteem or better grades, or even more distal goals, such as transition into college or career. If your long-term outcomes are several years out from program participation or are simply unrealistic to measure, then you will want to focus on short- and intermediate-term outcomes that are more closely related to the mentoring experience. Your plan should outline how each outcome will be measured and your threshold for a program benefit (e.g., a statistically significant increase in GPA from baseline to follow-up; a significant improvement in GPA relative to that experienced by a comparison group; at least a one-letter-grade improvement in math; etc.). In some program models, for example, peer-to-peer programs, benefits to the mentors are also critically important. They should also be examined

in programs where those are articulated in the theory of change.

Your plan should include thresholds and guidance on what a "strong" relationship is...

What are the costs of program participation? To raise funds for your program and report back on expenditures, programs often must calculate the costs of serving youth in the program (see Foster, 2014). These analyses can range from fairly simple calculations — for example, noting the program's budget for a given program cycle divided by the number of children served during that time — to sophisticated benefit-cost analyses that reflect the value of the program's benefits to youth per dollar spent (see Yates, 2005; Foster, 2014). To be prepared to calculate program costs, programs should track the value of all funds coming into the program — both cash and in-kind donations, and the costs of providing their services (e.g., staff time, transportation, space) — as well as very carefully tracking the number of youth served and length of time each is served. Tracking the amount of time contributing to each program practice by asking staff to track this information for broad categories of practices can also be informative as it can help programs (and their funders) understand the costs of each of their practices.

■ **Who will provide information about their experiences?** Who provides information depends on which questions you are answering. For example, questions about the mentee's school behavior might be answered by the youth, their teacher, or through school records, whereas questions about program satisfaction might be answered by a much broader group of stakeholders. The participants you are focused on will help determine what types of forums you will use to collect the information, the types and number of questions you ask, how you will ask those questions, and whether you might need to consider adding an incentive for providing you with this feedback. Very young children, for example, may not be able to respond to survey items as well as older youth, and you may instead opt for collecting outcome information from their caregivers or teachers. Programs are encouraged to maximize their response rates through strategies such generating buy-in by educating participants about the importance of data collection and telling the program's story, utilizing data collection instruments that are as short and simple as possible, offering multiple ways of completing data collection (e.g., online or paper-and-pencil), and providing reminders and incentives (e.g., a small gift card for on-time completion of a survey or participating in an interview).

■ **When will each piece of information be collected?** Most information should be collected at least once per program cycle to provide all participants at least one opportunity to provide feedback and help you address questions of interest. For some measures, for example, relationship quality, you may want to collect information more frequently — such as informally during each support call and through a more

formal survey every three or six months. If your program is a school-based program operating each school year, for example, you might want to collect youth outcome data before the program year starts (to get a "baseline" of youth attitudes or behavior prior to engaging in the program) and then again at the end of the school year; you could partner with the school to provide grades or other records data for participating youth, such as the number of principal's office visits or suspensions they experience over that time; you might collect information on activity engagement each week (e.g., in a mentor log); and you might consider collecting surveys on relationship quality and program satisfaction from mentors and youth in the middle of the program cycle (to troubleshoot if there are problems that can be addressed), and again at the end of each school year.

■ **How will information be collected from participants or partners?** For example, which staff members are responsible for collecting this information, and how should they approach the data collection process (e.g., getting consent from participants, administering surveys to youth in a way that yields the most accurate responses, offering incentives if relevant)? We encourage programs to consider using both qualitative (verbal/written) data collection methods (e.g.,

interviews, focus groups, "open-ended" questions in surveys), as well as quantitative measurement tools (e.g., surveys, records data). If using quantitative measures, we further encourage programs to:

• Make every effort to collect information from as many respondents as possible (whether they continue in the program or not) to ensure you are not only collecting information from those who benefit the most or are most satisfied. A response rate of 70 percent is often considered a reasonable threshold, although striving for 80 percent or higher is recommended.

• Ensure that participants can provide program feedback in an anonymous way (e.g., with IDs instead of names) so they can feel comfortable expressing any concerns.

• Make every effort to ensure that all participants (i.e., mentors, caregivers, youth) are not asked to provide their responses directly to staff or in a way that staff can view or influence their responses. Youth are particularly vulnerable to wanting to respond in the "right" way.

When measuring outcomes:

• Collect baseline data before youth engage in the program and at the end of the program cycle to allow you to assess change over time in their attitudes and behavior.

• Use a comparison group that is very similar to your mentees in characteristics or experiences that might be related to your outcomes (e.g., when assessing academic outcomes, this group should be similar in age, school attended, grades, academic engagement, and school misbehavior, prior to program involvement, and other potentially related variables) to help demonstrate that the mentoring services are driving outcomes. For example, in school-based programs, schools may be open to having a similar group of students respond to your surveys or to sharing records for a similar group of students.

• Use valid and reliable scales to measure outcomes (see Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2011).

• Some programs may consider randomized controlled trials using an experimental research design. This design is the "gold standard" when measuring outcomes (see Grossman, 2005). However, these studies are expensive and difficult to implement. In general, they should only be considered by programs that have already established some evidence of strong implementation fidelity and potential program benefits and have the resources to invest in a "next-level" evaluation effort.

■ **How do you plan to enter, "clean," store, analyze, and secure the data you collect?** For example, who will be responsible (e.g., staff, external evaluator), what types of resources will you need (e.g., database for data storage, data analysis programs/tools), and how will you ensure that confidential information stays secure (e.g., use of IDs rather than names, replacing names with pseudonyms in qualitative responses)? When conducting analyses, we encourage programs to examine participant responses through an intersectional lens (i.e., how services may be experienced by different participants depending on their intersecting identities such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, and socioeconomic status). These types of analyses can illustrate how different groups are experiencing the program and benefiting in distinct ways and can help programs understand when their services are not being experienced equitably by participants. For

mentoring programs that are embedded in larger programs or organizations, we further encourage programs to consider methodologies that can identify the unique outcomes of the mentoring experience and the contribution of mentoring to overall organizational outcomes.

- **How will you share findings with stakeholders (e.g., funders, community partners, board members) and participants?** Programs might consider holding formal meetings after the end of each program cycle where they can share findings. Remember to protect participant confidentiality when sharing findings verbally or in writing. For example, only share quotes when participants have been told you will use them, use pseudonyms when quoting, and use caution when describing subgroups of participants when there are only a handful of individuals within each group (e.g., You should not share the finding: "Older Latina mentors reported particularly low levels of satisfaction" when you only have two individuals in this group).

- **How will you obtain feedback on those findings and integrate findings and feedback into program operations?** This could include gathering written and/or verbal feedback through individual discussions, surveys, or group forums.

- **What types of data sharing agreements, if any, will you need if using data from external sources (e.g., academic records, juvenile justice data)?** If you plan on collecting information from partnering agencies like schools or juvenile justice agencies, you will likely need to develop a plan to obtain those records as well as data sharing agreements that include the information you hope to collect, the permission you have for obtaining it, how you will use that information, and how you will secure it (see the Measurement

Guidance Toolkit for a more detailed discussion of using school attendance, school discipline, and juvenile offending records data).

The next step is to put this plan into action by **engaging in consistent, ongoing data collection**. The program should use the evaluation plan to guide its collection and analysis of data and sharing of findings yielded from that process. To accomplish this, programs will need to dedicate resources to data collection and analysis including training and supporting staff as needed and ensuring resources are in place to support these efforts (e.g., a database that can store the data, a statistical analysis package, a word processing program that can be used to depict findings for stakeholders). Programs might also consider partnering with universities or professional evaluators who can help them answer key questions. Such partners may be able to contribute funding to support these efforts and may be able to share data collection tools developed as part of their work that programs can use going forward. Having an external evaluator may also be seen favorably by funders in that their work is considered less biased than if they had a stake in the evaluation's findings. Importantly, programs grow and change over time — and their youth and mentors, as well as the staff who deliver the programs often change. Thus, it is important that evaluation isn't seen as a one-time activity; these activities should be ongoing and an integrated part of a program's operations.

The program should commit to sharing evaluation findings with stakeholders regularly — even if the findings are not yet as strong or positive as you would hope. Program participants, staff, board members, funders, and other community partners share an interest in the program's evaluation work. Thus, it is important to share findings with these

stakeholders on a regular basis. When sharing findings, programs should consider: creating a formal brief report to share with stakeholders; creating briefer summaries of results that can be shared on social media, a program website, a newsletter, or other venues; and developing a process for stakeholders to reflect on the findings and offer suggestions for program improvements based on those findings. Findings should be presented in a comprehensive way (e.g., not only sharing positive results) and provide appropriate qualifications and potential alternative explanations, potential limitations (e.g., if you did not include a comparison group, explain how that might affect your findings), and any next steps you plan to take based on those findings (see DuBois, 2014).

This feedback and the findings from evaluation efforts should be used on a regular basis to inform program improvements. Evaluation findings are most helpful if they can contribute to an ongoing process of program improvement. Programs should determine how evaluation findings — and feedback

from key stakeholders related to those findings — will be used to improve the program and more effectively meet client expectations and needs. This may include revisiting the program's theory of change to add or change components that aren't working as you originally thought they would or that are playing a role you had not anticipated. It may be helpful to set a regular schedule for review of recently collected data, as this can shorten the gap between data collection and responding to aspects of the program that are not working as intended. Rather than thinking of evaluation as a one-time, annual (or less frequent) activity, this positions real-time data collection, reflection, and improvement as an ongoing, consistent activity.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM STAFF TO CONSIDER

- Why do we want to evaluate our program? What questions do we have and why are they relevant? What value will the answers bring to our work or to the community we serve?

- What metrics would indicate that we are implementing our program as intended? What could we measure to demonstrate that our program is functioning as intended?

- What is the story we'd like to tell about our program? What story do our participants want to tell? And how can we best tell it? What methods or activities can best show the hard work and outcomes of our program and participants?

- How can youth, caregivers, and mentors help us design our evaluation and collect meaningful data?

- How can we create buy-in and ownership of this evaluation among those who need to provide data? How can we incentivize their participation to make sure we have a good response rate?

- What questions do we have about how our participants experience the program? What would we like to know that we don't already?

- How can we ensure that information is collected consistently and with as little bias as possible?

- What outcomes are reasonable for us to examine based on our theory of change? How can we ensure that we are measuring the right things and not being overly ambitious (or focusing too narrowly)?

- What types of data collection tools (e.g., surveys, records, interviews) can provide evidence that is most convincing/valued by our funders and stakeholders?

- How will our evaluation approach reflect our core values as a program?

- How will we handle results that are surprising, unexpected, or disappointing? How will we explain surprising successes? How can we share disappointing results with an emphasis on how we will build on them as part of continuous improvement?

- What steps will we take to make our evaluation findings actionable? Who on our staff can assess what's working and lead course corrections in practices that are not?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

■ **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can help design the evaluation plan, helping you understand what might engage other participants in sharing their experiences, how you might frame questions to those groups, how you could generate buy-in, and how best to share your evaluation findings with those participant groups. A participatory action research approach can maximize their engagement in evaluation activities.**

■ **If there are certain groups of participants who reported relatively low levels of satisfaction with a given practice or their broader program experience, you might consider holding a listening session or individual interviews with participants in those groups to elicit ideas for program changes that could improve their experiences.**

■ **Participants can support program staff in making important changes based on feedback (e.g., helping to revamp mentor training to better address challenges in communication with youth revealed in the evaluation findings), especially through the work of a formal advisory committee or ad hoc group of stakeholders tasked with translating evaluation results into actionable program improvement efforts.**

■ **Youth, caregivers, and mentors can help share findings with key stakeholders by sharing their own mentoring stories and providing rich examples of what the findings mean in their own relationship.**

Potential Metrics to Track

Programs may want to set benchmarks and track progress around metrics such as:

• **Response rate on evaluation surveys (and whether those responses are coming from a broad representation of your participants).**

• **Proportion of data collection strategies implemented as planned in a program cycle.**

• **Dissemination metrics of evaluation report/infographics.**

RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP

A Brief Primer on Youth Participatory Action Research for Mentoring Programs. National Mentoring Resource Center. This brief primer provides an overview of youth participatory action research (YPAR). YPAR is a promising approach for elevating youth voices in mentoring programs to create positive change.

The Community Builder's Approach to Theory of Change: A Practical Guide to Theory Development. Anderson, A., Aspen Institute. This guide provides a basic overview of the major concepts that define theories of change along with guidance and a resource toolbox to support development of theories of change.

Measurement Guidance Toolkit. National Mentoring Resource Center. A mentoring-focused collection of measurement tools for examining participant outcomes. Includes a Selected Reading and Resources page that contains several valuable resources on general evaluation, survey design, and data sharing.

From Soft Skills to Hard Data: Measuring Youth Program Outcomes. Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Yohalem, N., DuBois, D., & Ji, P., The Forum for Youth Investment. This compendium describes scales in a wide range of areas used to measure youth outcomes.

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APPENDICES

A. Glossary of Terms

B. Development Process and Project Working Group

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

Because mentoring can be offered to young people in a variety of ways, programs may define key terms differently. This glossary presents how the authors, for the purposes of this resource, define key terms so that readers can better understand the practices, services, participants, and actions being described.

Caregiver – The individual(s) in a young person's life who are assuming primary responsibility for their care and well-being. In most cases this will be a legal parent or guardian, but we also recognize that many young people are cared for by extended family or others, such as foster parents. Caregivers are referenced in this resource as the individuals who provide consent for the young person's participation in the program (assuming the young person is under 18 years of age) and support their experience in the mentoring relationship and program activities.

Curriculum – Refers to both the training materials staff use to prepare participants for the mentoring experience and build their knowledge and skills, as well as a set of prescribed mentoring activities that mentors and youth in some programs are expected to follow (e.g., an "activity curriculum" that guides them through important mentoring conversations or tasks).

Element – In this resource, a major component of running a high-quality mentoring service for young people. Much like the elements in the natural world, the Elements referred to here add up to a unified whole — in this case, a high-quality mentoring program. Within each Element are several specific practices that outline the work that goes into that component of the program (e.g., the discrete practices that contribute to fully screening potential mentors).

E-mentoring or "virtual" mentoring – Mentoring services that are primarily delivered using technology, such as online messaging services, virtual meeting software, electronic bulletin boards, custom-built mentoring platforms or other technology that facilitates remote mentor-youth interactions. While many mentoring programs allow for some technology-facilitated contact between mentors and youth who primarily meet in person, "e-mentoring" assumes that virtual contact is the primary way mentoring is provided to youth.

Evaluation – Activities that tell the story of a mentoring program's functioning or achievement. Evaluation can be formative (focused on how well the program is functioning) or summative (focused on outcomes and achievements). While most evaluation relies on quantitative measures (e.g., surveys, records), qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, observations) can best capture stories and the "whys" and "hows" of the mentoring experience. The results of evaluation activities are often shared with program participants and community partners to build their understanding of what was achieved and how.

Group mentoring – Mentoring services in which a group of youth is provided with mentoring together,

either by one or several mentors working collaboratively. This type of mentoring is defined by consistent membership in a group, ongoing interaction with the same mentor or mentors, and activities that are designed to produce a collective, rather than completely individualized, relationship experience.

Match/Matching – The steps a program takes to connect mentors and youth and formalize their mentoring relationship in some way. "Match" can also refer to the actual mentoring dyad or group. While some mentoring providers do not make formal matches between participants (instead allowing participants to form new relationships as an optional activity), most mentoring programs intentionally create mentoring pairs or groups to facilitate the mentoring experience.

Match closure and program exit – The time period and associated program practices that signal the end of a participant's time in a specific mentoring relationship and, often, in the program entirely (assuming they do not continue in the program in other relationships). These terms cover a range of activities designed to help participants end their mentoring relationship together and, when appropriate, formally end their participation in the program.

Mentor – An individual who provides a young person with the activities, conversations, and experiences commonly associated with mentoring relationships (i.e., providing support in one or more areas of the young person's development). A mentor is most often an adult but can also be a slightly older "near" peer. Mentors are commonly volunteers in a program context, although paid program staff can also serve as mentors, either in one-to-one relationships or in mentoring groups. A mentor can offer their relationship as part of a formal program experience (the focus of this resource) or by having a naturally formed connection with a young person develop into an informal mentoring relationship over time.

Mentoring – A series of collaborative activities and conversations between young people and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a helping capacity to provide support in one or more areas of the young person's development. Mentoring can be provided formally through a structured mentoring program or informally when young people and youth-serving professionals form a deeper connection (e.g., a teacher mentoring a student after school or a camp counselor being a role model to a youth participant).

Mentoring program – A program that emphasizes the establishment and facilitation of mentoring relationships as a core service provided intentionally to young people, either as a stand-alone program or in conjunction with other services. While mentoring relationships can form naturally in almost any setting where youth and potential mentors come together, a mentoring program will engage in specific activities and practices (such as preparing and connecting participants) with the intention of ensuring consistent mentoring support for young people.

Mentoring relationship – A relationship in which mentoring activities and conversations occur over a period of time, most often between a single mentor and a young person or between one or more mentors and a group of young people. While programs can facilitate or establish these relationships, they can ultimately only be defined or understood as mentoring relationships by the individuals participating in them.

Metrics – Numerical representations of a mentoring program's work and achievements. These are the data points that a program can track over time and are often benchmarked against a target goal or historical precedent. Metrics can be volume based (e.g., 500 youth served) or expressed as a percentage (e.g., 50 percent of mentoring relationships last a minimum of two years). They often measure the consistency, quality, or level of participation in key program activities or relevant program outcomes.

Naturally formed, informal, or "everyday" mentoring – Mentoring relationships that form organically between young people and older, more experienced individuals, without the assistance of a formal program facilitating the experience. These "everyday" mentoring relationships can form in educational, youth development, or other institutional contexts where adults and youth interact, as well as broader community contexts, for example, with extended family or neighbors. Most mentoring relationships start this way, with more formal mentoring programs often supplementing the web of "everyday" mentors young people may already have.

Participatory Action Research (Youth-led) – An approach to program evaluation in which young people take the lead or have a meaningful role in designing, implementing, and reporting evaluation tasks and findings. It builds on the idea that no one knows more about the experience and impact of mentoring than the young people in these relationships and that they should play a major role in capturing and defining their own experience. Participatory methods can include other stakeholders, such as mentors or caregivers, but they all emphasize that program staff should share the evaluation process with its subjects. Participatory approaches can also be used when initially conceptualizing a program's focus, allowing participants to decide what the mentoring will emphasize or result in, and then collecting data to tell that story.

Peer mentoring – Mentoring that is delivered primarily by other young people, most often older peers.

Practices – The tasks and activities program staff do to develop and implement the day-to-day services of a mentoring program, as well as those that support long-term organizational sustainability. They are tasks or sets of action that need to happen to support a high-quality mentoring experience for program participants. They will inherently have variation from program to program. This publication offers a framework of practices to build from.

Program staff/Staff – The individuals who develop and implement mentoring services. They will most often be paid staff members, although many programs use volunteers to lead program services. These staff members can be focused on many different program-related tasks and, in some instances, may even serve as mentors themselves.

Recruitment – The act of promoting an opportunity to participate in a mentoring program to prospective mentors, youth, and caregivers; a set of activities that get potential participants interested in formally applying to participate.

Screening – A series of practices that determine whether prospective participants are eligible, safe, and suitable for participation in the program. While the emphasis here is often on safety considerations, we encourage programs to think more holistically about who participates in the program and why.

Standard of practice – The expectations that a mentoring program should have for the quality and consistency of their services. Because each chapter of this resource focuses on a cluster of related practices, the Standard can be thought of as the marker of quality that would be achieved if the program were doing that work at an optimal level.

Theory of change/Logic model – Descriptions and graphical representations of how a mentoring program functions. Each describes inputs, such as resources, people, or infrastructure, as well as the actions of mentors and youth and the outcomes those activities are expected to result in. Logic models tend to focus on the structural elements of a program (e.g., resources, activities, outputs), whereas theories of change focus more on how the mentoring experiences influence the attitudes, behaviors, and achievements of participants over time. The theory of change explains how a program's mentoring relationships lead to positive benefits for youth; and the logic model explains how the program makes those relationships happen and all the inputs into that programmatic experience.

Youth or young people – Individuals up to the age of 24 (although, as noted previously, this resource is primarily intended for programs serving minors). However, it is rare for youth to have program-assigned mentors at very young ages. Thus, practically speaking, the young people discussed in this resource are assumed to be those of elementary, middle school, high school, and post-secondary ages.

Youth voice/youth engagement – Young people having a meaningful say in how mentoring programs are designed, implemented, promoted, and evaluated. While adults may ultimately implement the program, the perspectives and contributions of young people can strengthen almost every aspect of a program and ensure that the services are aligned with what young people want and expect from a mentoring experience. "Engagement" refers to deliberate actions by program staff to solicit the input and support of young people in key plans or decisions.

Appendix B – Development Process and Project Working Group

History of the EEPM

This is the fifth edition of the EEPM in the last 25 years. Its origins began in 1989 when a coalition of youth-serving organizations convened by MENTOR and United Way of America, came together to discuss their services and emerging "best practices" in the rapidly expanding field of youth mentoring programs. These organizations, while offering mentoring in different ways, shared a common and pressing concern: How to ensure mentoring programs offered their services in a high-quality and responsible way — one that met the needs of both youth and mentors, while also ensuring participant safety and fostering positive outcomes for young people and communities. The initial edition of the EEPM created by these organizations consisted primarily of helpful-but-brief bulleted lists of the staff activities that seemed to promote safety and good programming. The second edition years later expanded these recommendations but was still limited, taking the form of a tri-fold brochure.

With the third and fourth editions, a more conscious effort was made to integrate both research and a wider lens on practitioner perspectives. The fourth edition, for example, involved reviewing more than 400 peer-reviewed journal articles and research reports, as well as gathering the real-life experience and input of over 200 practitioners from mentoring organizations.

How This Resource Was Developed

As helpful as these prior iterations were, mentoring is a constantly evolving field, and it became clear over the last several years that mentoring programs had evolved to increase their emphasis on some very important practices, such as honoring youth voice; integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into program practices; and connecting mentoring more explicitly to social justice, community improvement, and systemic reform efforts. As noted throughout this edition, the mentoring movement has also seen a wave of new mentoring research that has further illuminated both general program practices and those specific to certain program models, such as group mentoring, those offering e-mentoring, or mentoring combined with other youth services.

Our Process

Starting in the spring of 2023, MENTOR staff engaged in a series of focus groups with more than 30 staff members from both large- and small-scale mentoring programs around the country to see what they thought should be added to or changed in a new EEPM. We also held focus groups with researchers who study mentoring programs and with members of MENTOR's board of directors and staff at our many local Affiliates around the country to get their perceptions of trends and innovations to be aware of. In addition, we engaged in many discussions with our colleagues at MENTOR Canada, who have done incredibly meaningful work around program quality and the factors programs should consider when designing and delivering mentoring. All these conversations were informative and helped point the MENTOR team in the right direction.

In addition, our team conducted a literature review and synthesis of more than 100 peer-reviewed articles on youth mentoring published between the development of the fourth edition of the EEPM in 2014 and today. We also formed a Project Working Group consisting of representatives from a variety of mentoring programs, MENTOR leadership, and the research community (see below). This group was instrumental in helping us revise the structure of the EEPM, reviewing drafts of the publication, and infusing the final text with wisdom and nuance that no one author could have provided. Thus, this publication truly is representative of the perspectives of a broad swath of our mentoring field, and we thank everyone who contributed ideas, research, lived experience, and unique perspectives to this publication.

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