Mentoring: Benchmarks for Effective and Responsible Mentoring Programs

In June 2000, Mentoring Australia, the national association for mentors and mentoring programs, convened a representative group of mentoring practitioners, all of whom had significant experience in the development and management of mentoring programs. The workshop was supported by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, and endorsed by the Career Education Association of Victoria and VETNETwork.

The aim of the meeting was to develop a set of principles which would guide the development, management and funding of quality mentoring programs in Australia.

The principle aim of these 'benchmarks' is to enhance the rigour of mentoring programs by setting standards for responsible mentoring. The benchmarks are also recommended as a platform for government and other bodies to determine eligibility for funding support to mentoring programs.

This document outlines a core set of principles which is recommend for use in establishing and managing effective mentoring programs and is designed for use by mentors, managers, and government and other funding agencies.

This document is available to any individual or organization with an interest in promoting responsible mentoring. On behalf of Mentoring Australia, you are invited to share these principles with your colleagues.

Mentoring Australia
July, 2000

What is mentoring?

For the purposes of this document 'mentoring' is defined as "a mutually beneficial relationship which involves a more experienced person helping a less experienced person to identify and achieve their goals".

Effective mentoring
♦ Is a relationship that focuses on the needs of the mentee
♦ Fosters caring and supportive relationships
♦ Encourages all mentees to develop to their fullest potential
♦ Is a strategy to develop active community partnerships

While, in the main, mentoring occurs on a one-to-one basis, elements of mentoring may be present in group situations where, under certain circumstances, a one-to-one relationship emerges as an important vehicle for growth and development for mentees. The one-to-one relationship is the key to effectiveness in mentoring.

While most mentors undertake the mentoring role as volunteers, there are circumstances where paid staff take on mentoring responsibilities. Whether paid or volunteer staff become mentors, the role extends beyond a 'mere' employment responsibility.

Good mentoring programs

A responsible mentoring program requires:
♦ A well-defined mission statement and established operating principles
♦ Regular, consistent contact between mentor and mentee
♦ Establishment under the auspices of a recognised organisation
♦ Paid or volunteer staff with appropriate skills
♦ Written role statements for all staff and volunteer positions
♦ Adherence to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements
♦ Inclusiveness in relation to ethnicity, culture, socio-economic background, gender and sexuality as appropriate to the program
♦ Adequate ongoing financial and in-kind resources
♦ Written administrative and program procedures
♦ Documented criteria which define eligibility for participation in the program
♦ Program evaluation and ongoing assessment
♦ A program plan that has input from stakeholders
♦ Risk management and confidentiality policies
♦ Use of generally accepted accounting practices
♦ A rationale for staffing arrangements based on the needs of all parties

A Quality Checklist for Mentoring Programs

The following elements are recommended as a checklist for evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring programs.

1. A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

A statement of purpose developed in consultation with the stakeholders and participants which includes:
- A Mission statement for the program
- A clear statement of the values and philosophies underpinning the program

2. A PROGRAM PLAN

A realistic, attainable, and easy-to-understand operational plan that includes:
- A description of activities and profile of all participants and stakeholders
- An assessment of need
- Goals, objectives, and timelines, for all aspects of the program
- Funding and resource development requirements

3. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Written policies and procedures which address:
- Rights and responsibilities
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Legal issues
- Insurances (including volunteer insurance)
- Duty of care
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Protection against harassment
- Grievance issues
- Ethical issues
- 'Get out' clauses
- Arrangements for future contacts between mentor and mentee

4. A RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS

A recruitment plan for both mentors and mentees that includes:
- Strategies that outline realistic expectations and benefits for those involved in the program
- Ongoing marketing and public relations
- Targeting mentees on the basis of their needs

Eligibility screening for mentors and mentees that includes:
- A formal application process for mentors and mentees
- An initial assessment of the mentee's needs & suitability
- Eligibility criteria for mentors and mentees that relate to the program statement of purpose and needs of the target population
- A personal interview for mentors
- Appropriate screening for mentors, which may include character references, child abuse registry check, and criminal record checks
- Assessment of each mentor's willingness to participate in training and/or orientation

5. MENTOR PREPARATION

An orientation program for mentors and/or mentees that includes:
- An overview of the Program
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Description of eligibility, screening process, and suitability requirements
- Clarification of the level of commitment expected (time, energy, flexibility)
- Confidentiality and liability information
- Do's and don'ts of relationship management
- Boundaries and limitations for the mentor's contact with the mentee
- Identification of the benefits and recognition available to mentors from involvement in the program
- A summary of program policies, procedures and guidelines

A training program for mentors and /or mentees that includes:
- Skilled and experienced staff trainers
- Cultural and social sensitivity, and acceptance of individual differences
- Guidelines on how to get the most out of the mentoring relationship
- Crisis management and problem solving
- Communication skills
- Referral points for other support services
- Ongoing skills development as appropriate

6. *A MENTOR/MENTEE MATCHING AND MONITORING STRATEGY*

A matching strategy that includes:
- A link with the program's statement of purpose and the program's eligibility criteria
- A rationale for selection
- A statement of understanding detailing the conditions of the mentoring relationship

Value-Added components may include:
- *Pre-match social activities between mentors and mentees*
- *Team building activities to reduce the anxiety of the first meeting*

A monitoring process that includes:
- Consistent, scheduled meetings with staff, mentors, and mentees
- A framework for ongoing feedback
- Written records
- Input from community partners and significant others
- A process for managing grievances, recognition, re-matching, interpersonal problem solving, and premature termination of the mentoring relationship

7. *MENTOR/MENTEE SUPPORT*

Support to Mentors which includes:
- Regular debriefing
- Troubleshooting
- Recognition of the mentor's contribution - especially for volunteers

Value-Added components may include:
- *Opportunities for involvement in other voluntary services*
- *A formal launch event*
- *Ongoing peer support groups for volunteers, mentees, and others*
- *Ongoing training and development*
- *Opportunities for discussion of relevant issues, and information dissemination as appropriate*
- *Networking with appropriate organizations*
- *Social gatherings of different groups as needed*
- *An Annual recognition and appreciation event*
- *Newsletters or other mailings to mentees, mentors, supporters, and sponsors*

8. A CLOSURE POLICY

Formal closure steps that include:
- Clear procedures for exiting the program
- Clearly stated policy for future contacts

Value Added components may include:
- *Assistance for mentees in defining the next steps to continue achieve personal goals*

9. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

An evaluation process based on:
- Ongoing consultation with stakeholders
- Continuous improvement linked to the program's strategic plan
- Program criteria and statement of purpose

Benchmark contributors

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Comments on the document are welcome, please forward any comments to Lesley Tobin at Dusseldorp Skills Forum (email: lesley@dsf.org.au telephone: 02 9212 5800).