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TOP TIPS FOR MENTORING INITIATIVES

Many aspects of the design and planning for different mentoring initiatives are similar. Other aspects are unique to a certain type of mentoring. To help you think through the unique aspects of your initiative, we asked several mentoring experts to offer tips you can use to plan and design your initiative. If you have additional questions, please contact us at info@gradsoflife.org.

Traditional (One-on-One) Mentoring

Remember that mentoring is a development strategy for a young adult's successful pathway to adulthood that focuses on providing support and guidance around workplace skills and career exploration. In addition, providing general encouragement on life challenges through meetings, activities, and communication are your primary objectives as a mentor. Set aside a certain amount of your budget for unexpected materials and activities. As your initiative gets under way, you can observe the types of activities your mentoring pairs enjoy most (painting, for example) and use the set-aside funds to buy appropriate materials.

Consider the prospective young adult's needs and screen mentees as well as mentors. Sometimes the tendency is to put the most challenging young adults into a traditional one-on-one mentoring initiative. However, some of those young people can't handle an intense relationship with an adult and simply are not ready for traditional mentoring, or in some cases will not benefit from mentoring, owing to issues of trust, resistance to change, etc.

Ensure that your mentor screening is complete, rigorous, intense and documented. And make sure all potential mentors understand, at the outset, that they will undergo intensive screening.

Arrange for mandatory mentor training between six and eight weeks into the mentoring relationship. And plan to hold regular meetings with mentors; offer additional, more in-depth training about youth development issues; and guide mentors to other resources, such as www.mentoring.org.

Clearly define and reinforce ground rules. Because one-on-one relationships are intense, you need to ensure that all participants, including mentors, mentees and parents, understand boundaries in terms of what is allowed and what is not allowed (e.g., spending extra time together or giving gifts) in your initiative.

Provide ongoing support and supervision of the match. Processes for ongoing monitoring and supervision enhance oversight of mentors and mentees as their relationship grows and matures. Both members of the match need someone to consult with as they face new challenges in their lives and relationship.

Group Mentoring

Work with the school (or youth-serving agency where the mentoring takes place) to establish your initiative goals. With group mentoring, the goals are often socialization, academic support, building self-esteem, goal setting, professional development and career exploration and bonding with peers.

Involve only participants who can benefit from this type of mentoring. Recruit mentors who can handle the dynamics of working with groups of young people and young people who can benefit

from a group setting.

Take special care in designing a closure policy. With group mentoring, if a mentor or young person decides to leave the relationship, that decision will affect everyone else in the group.

Offer additional training to help mentors understand group dynamics. An example of a training topic is team building.

Have patience in achieving goals. With group mentoring, it takes time for all members of the group to get to know one another and gain a level of trust. A group will move more slowly, so goals will take more time to achieve.

Team Mentoring

Help participants understand how to work in teams with diverse personalities and styles. One of the main goals of team mentoring is teaching young people how to work together to achieve goals.

Consider setting a wide range of goals. This can include building self-esteem and confidence, helping young people understand their commitment to community, learning to set and achieve goals and developing positive peer relationships.

Try to recruit a diverse set of mentors who are as diverse in background as the young people they are mentoring. With diversity, the chances are greater that young people can find mentors with whom they can relate and have interests in common.

E-Mentoring
Note: E-Mentoring is recommended as an add-on to a mentoring initiative that involves some face-to-face interaction.

Be realistic about what you can achieve. Because there is no face-to-face component to e-mentoring, many relationships do not evolve into the intense relationships characteristic of one-on-one mentoring. Consequently, it's necessary to set goals that seem achievable, such as making sure e-mentoring pairs connect on a regular basis to share ideas, talk about topics of importance to the mentees and give opportunities to mentors to provide guidance to mentees.

Protect participants' confidentiality and privacy. Use tools that provide a safe, secure e-mentoring environment. Also, institute policies that maintain the privacy of mentors' and mentees' e-mail addresses, as well as establish guidelines for using social media, such as Facebook, during the mentoring relationship.

Make sure your e-mentoring initiative is all technology based. Automate everything from the application to the matching process. Develop a database that works with your e-mentoring software.

Partner with an existing web service or corporation for e-mentoring. There are many excellent existing services. If you develop the e-mentoring initiative in-house, you will need a lot of program oversight, financial resources, human resources and time to make your e-mentoring initiative work.

Establish a policy for the frequency that mentors and mentees connect with each other electronically. To build a strong bond, mentor pairs should contact each other regularly.

Offer structured activities that encourage mentees to open up and write more. Because most e-mentors and e-mentees meet through e-mail, they may find it hard to open up, especially if writing is not a young person's strong suit.

Recruit mentors who are technologically savvy and like to work with computers. Such people will be more likely to go the distance.