

Issues for consideration when planning and designing a formal mentoring program

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Mentoring has been defined here as:

a personal, helping relationship between a mentor (i.e. an experienced staff member) and a mentee (i.e. a new or less experienced staff member) that includes professional development and growth and varying degrees of support. It is a two-way, reciprocal process where both parties stand to benefit from the relationship.

When planning and designing a **formal** mentoring program, the following issues and decisions should be considered.

Appointment of a coordinator / coordinating committee

- Set the scope, direction and focus of the mentoring program consistent with the goals and vision of the organisation
- Communicate with mentors and mentees on a regular basis throughout the life of mentoring program
- Publicise/promote and raise awareness of the mentoring program in the organisation
- Manage any grievance process
- Oversee and monitor the mentoring program

Articulation of goals / objectives / purposes

- Goals, objectives and the purpose of the scheme should be articulated and documented
- Program should be linked to an organisational system (eg induction program or professional development plan)
- Goals and objectives should be identified for the mentor, mentee and the organisation

Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations

- Role statements should be provided for staff involved
- Expectations in terms of contact between mentor and mentees should be set out
- Responsibilities of mentors, mentees should be identified and discussed
- Contract or written agreement for mentors and mentees can be used
- Preliminary meeting between mentor and mentee would assist with defining specific goals and expectations
- Rules (dos and don'ts) could be developed

Timeline

- A timeline needs to be set which identifies the duration of the mentoring relationship and/or program

Training

- In some systems, it is compulsory for mentors to attend training. This is important particularly at the beginning of the program to help mentors understand their roles, responsibilities and expectations

Selection

- Who will participate in a mentoring program is an important question to consider
- In some systems, experienced officers (mentors) in the organisation volunteer or are strongly encouraged by management to participate. Mentees can be nominated by their supervisors or volunteer to participate

Matching

- In some organisations, a coordinator or coordinating committee matches mentors and mentees by considering short personal statements prepared by mentors and mentees
- In other cases, pre-matching social activities are planned

Monitoring / Evaluating

- Ongoing monitoring by the Coordinator / Committee is critical to the success of a mentoring program
- Meetings for mentors only and meetings for mentees only are seen as helpful
- A 'Get out clause' – could be part of the agreement or contract
- Mentoring programs should be evaluated (i.e. formal evaluations via surveys, focus groups, interviews to determine vital feedback about the program)

Resources

- Research has shown that lack of time is one of the major obstacles that inhibit successful mentoring programs. For this reason, it is vital that adequate resources (e.g. time) be provided to ensure that mentors and mentees have the time required to carry out the mentoring process.

Support from Senior Management

- The program should be communicated to all staff and made visible
- Support in terms of time allocated to those who are directly involved in mentoring should be given
- Support should also be forthcoming in terms of kudos and acknowledgement of those involved
- A supportive organisational culture is necessary

Grievance Procedures

- Grievances regarding any aspect of the mentoring program should be taken, in the first instance, to the Coordinator / Coordinating Committee