

Creating Mentorship Community*

“The fundamental task of the mentor is a liberatory task. It is not to encourage the mentor’s goals and aspirations and dreams to be reproduced in the mentees, but to give rise to the possibility that the [mentees] become the owners of their own history.”

--Paulo Freire, Mentoring the Mentor

Structure:

What structural elements lead to successful mentor programming?

- Formal commitment from all participants to community goals, values and structures.
- A written work-plan including expectations for each participant, developed in collaboration with facilitators/leadership.
- Discussing what types of motivation techniques work for participants.
- Dedicated coordinator/s for the program
- Training (especially for mentors working with younger participants, high school and younger)
- Clear expectations.
- Defining the time commitment for each participant (ie: each participant is expected to commit for a year)
- Develop and adopt a community philosophy that includes goals for the program/group. These can be drafted beforehand by facilitators/leaders and refined by participants. Participants should feel as if their voice is heard and valued, and that their talents and skill sets are being properly utilized.
- Community agreements. These are a set of guidelines that supports a well-functioning, productive group that allows everyone to contribute in a safe space. Options include, “Assume best intentions”; “Step forward, step back” (if you take up a lot of space, let others talk), “there are no right answers”, “try new things”.
- Be prepared to adapt to different learning styles, and don’t judge. Some people primarily learn hands on, some learn through storytelling, some absorb information through reading, some read slowly or don’t read much.
- Participants have clear ideas of the personal benefit they receive from participation.

What contributes to successful mentorship?

- Have both mentors and mentees define what “mentorship” is, as different people have different definitions. Discuss these differences and attempt to create a working definition that works for a Hanford mentoring community.
- A good mentor has both technical and historical knowledge, good people/listening skills, humility, and humor. And is okay asking others when they don’t know the answer to a question.
- “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”
- A mentor is a knowledgeable and experienced guide, a trusted ally and advocate, and a caring role model. An effective mentor is respectful, reliable, patient, trustworthy and a good listener.
- Mentors tell their real life stories and experiences. These stories can offer valuable and unforgettable insights. They can also build rapport with mentees.

Community Building:

What helps build community?

- Weekly or bi-weekly mentorship check-ins (by phone or in person) builds trust, makes space to share progress and problem-solve, and keeps people involved.
- Articulate the value of participant efforts and experience.
- Take time and invest in participants - the process of trust-building can be slow, taking months or even years, depending on the context and history of relationships.
- Make space for participants to share personal stories to build trust and understanding, share knowledge, humanize leadership, develop active listening skills, and help bridge gaps in cultural, age, gender, race, economic and education status, differing career trajectories, etc.
- Work to establish a trusting space for communication.
- Acknowledge how power plays out in the group.
- Establish an ethic of gratitude. Create a practice/group tradition wherein participants publically acknowledge the contributions of one another and give thanks.
- Explore ways to honor the knowledge of both mentors and of mentees
- Each participant makes two lists: (1) the things they care about related to Hanford and (2) what they bring to the table. These lists are compiled to master lists so everyone can see what they as a group care about, as well as the community asset toolbox they have to face those issues.

Sharing Information:

What are some successful techniques to share information?

- Varied learning formats contribute to higher retention
- One-one-one exchanges
- Small group conversations
- Storytelling
- Examples and lots of patience
- Reading the same books
- Films followed by discussion
- Checking for understanding
- Making it a practice to ask questions, if you don't know, you are probably not alone
- Attending meeting and other events together.

What are successful ways to develop leadership skills?

- Spend time defining what leadership is.
- Be as transparent as possible.
- Establish forums for back and forth discussions.
- Discuss power. Leaders need to be facilitators as well; put egos aside and let others step forward.
- Discuss the concept of interdependence.
- Create a Board or Steering Committee of young people. Make sure they have power to make changes.
- Roles should evolve. Both mentors and mentees should feel personal growth. Mentees could be invited to eventually be mentors.
- Make space for mentees to take on leadership roles in the group.

Recruitment and Sustainability:

What makes participants show up?

- Dwell on positives. Negative messages rarely create sustained lifelong passion. Don't make the process feel burdensome.
- Fun. Be playful and positive, tell jokes, play games, serve ice cream or beer. This keeps people coming back. Make it feel fun and not like school.
- Learn the 'language' of specific groups, and learn to translate between groups.
- A shared desire to learn, a commitment to purpose, caring for and about others.
- Focus on marketing and outreach efforts.
- Individualized attention.
- Food and beverages.

What keeps participants involved over time?

- Connect actions to concrete outcomes: participants need to "see change happen", that what they are doing makes a difference.
- Personal connections. True friendship keeps people involved and motivated.
- Have regular group activities, monthly, weekly, quarterly. (BBQs, happy hours, readings, movies nights, etc.)
- Follow through. Don't be flakey. When people don't show up, communicate with them that they are missed.
- Focus primarily on trust-building.
- The program should evolve and not remain stagnant. The mentorship program should be periodically reviewed, as well as requesting feedback from stakeholders. The curriculum should be adjusted accordingly.
- Create committees of supporters that have measurable goals – for example, parade float committee, concert booth committee, design committee, program review committee, party planning committee, etc.

What are some recruitment tools that work well?

- Share mentors' stories via social media. Also share the experiences of mentees when possible.
- Brainstorm and reach out to existing groups as potential allies.
- Ask people you think might make good mentors. They can always say no, but you may find that people are willing and excited to do things when asked.
- Participants should invite friends and coworkers, when applicable.
- Practice talking about the program. Personal conversations go a long way with recruitment.
- Consider having program participants interview each other and write brief biographies to be shared and posted on the Mentorship website.
- Create a vibrant social network and general web presence. Consider how to portray the group online with a strong human personality that people can connect with. Super successful groups on this front are the Service Board and the Washington Bus.
- Produce high quality printed materials. Design the program's identity.

** In an effort to learn from organizations focused on mentorship in preparation for developing a Hanford mentorship community, Hanford Challenge staff completed interviews in August and September with employees and volunteers from mentorship non-profits, UW programs, and conducted an online survey. This is the compilation of what we learned. Many thanks to everyone who contributed.*

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