



# GROUP MENTORING

SUPPLEMENT TO THE

***ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE  
PRACTICE FOR MENTORING***

April 2020



**MENTOR**

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MENTOR is the unifying champion for quality youth mentoring in the United States. Our mission is to expand the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships nationwide. Potential is equally distributed; opportunity is not. A major driver of healthy development and opportunity is who you know and who's in your corner. 30 years ago, MENTOR was created to expand that opportunity for young people by building a youth mentoring field and movement, serving as the expert and go-to resource on quality mentoring. The result is a more than 10-time increase in young people in structured mentoring relationships, from hundreds of thousands to millions. Today, we activate a movement across sectors that is diverse and broad and seeps into every aspect of daily life. We are connecting and fueling opportunity for young people everywhere they are from schools to workplaces and beyond.

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# INTRODUCTION

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**While youth mentoring is most often conceptualized as a one-to-one relationship between a single caring adult and a young person, the reality is that group mentoring models reach as many young people as the more traditional individualized programs.**

A 2016 national survey of mentoring programs<sup>1</sup> found that 35 percent of all mentees were served by group models, slightly more than the 34 percent served exclusively in one-to-one programs. This was in spite of the fact that one-to-one programs accounted for more than half the programs surveyed. Only 19 percent of programs offered a group model, but they served as many youth as all the one-to-one programs combined.

Furthermore, another 12 percent of mentees were served in “blended” models where they were paired with a personal mentor, but participated almost entirely in group activities along with that mentor. A similar study over 20 years ago<sup>2</sup> found that group and blended programs accounted for only 21 percent of all programs—today that number has jumped to 33 percent of all programs, with the accompanying growth in youth served that shift would suggest. In terms of young people served, group mentoring contexts actually represent the majority of the programmatic mentoring youth receive.

In addition to these formal group mentoring programs, there is an almost infinite landscape of mentoring-like group youth work in after-school programs, hobby clubs, sports and recreation programs, and camps. While these may not constitute the types of traditional mentoring

services we often associate with this field, these environments do offer adults and youth the opportunity to engage in mentoring activities and the types of enriching adult-youth interactions we associate with more traditional mentoring. In fact, a 2018 survey by MENTOR<sup>3</sup> found that the majority of adults’ structured mentoring engagements came in these group contexts, with the average mentor nationally reporting working with around eight young people a year. So from the perspective of how young people get their mentoring through programs and institutions at large, group mentoring seems to be the predominant pathway to getting mentoring support.

This growth in group mentoring has happened for a variety of reasons, the most obvious being, as noted above, that these programs reach large volumes of youth and therefore represent an opportunity to scale mentoring relationships without scaling volunteer recruitment (and possibly at a potentially reduced cost per youth served). There is also growing evidence<sup>4</sup> that the group interactions with both peers and adults represent unique opportunities for personal growth, skill-building, and healthy peer support that one-to-one adult-youth programs simply can’t provide. When done well, group mentoring offers a chance to get a wealth of adult mentor support, while also strengthening connections to peers and fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness that would be hard to facilitate through a relationship with just one mentor. So for some youth, group mentoring might be the most effective form of support because it offers a chance to develop socially or build community in ways that meet their needs.

## WHY DEVELOP A SUPPLEMENT ON GROUP MENTORING?

What's interesting about this growth in the popularity and scope of group mentoring is that the practice literature and research has not really kept pace with the reality on the ground. One recent study of a group mentoring program for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention explicitly noted the dearth of implementation materials and practical guidance for group mentoring programs.<sup>5</sup> Further, in spite of the large number of children served in these programs, the vast majority of the available research on youth mentoring focuses on one-to-one models. This has resulted in the practice guidance available to group programs being both limited and separate from much of the research on “what works” in mentoring programs.

Even while developing the fourth edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (EPPM), MENTOR and our research partners recognized that the Benchmarks and Enhancements in that product were not terribly well-aligned with the practical realities of a group model. For example, concepts like making “matches” or “closing” relationships become much more complicated when there are multiple mentors and youth in the mix. Preparing participants for their roles also takes on much more nuance and detail, as mentors need to be trained on not only how to relate to a single mentee, but how to manage a group or even coordinate their role with that of a co-mentor, while young people need to know not only their responsibilities to their mentor but to the other youth in the group, as well. These programs also tend to be very heavy on structured activities and the use of set curriculum, meaning that mentors and youth also need preparation and support to effectively participate

## Defining Group Mentoring

For the purposes of this publication, group mentoring is defined as a mentoring program in which a mentor (or small number of mentors) works with multiple youth in an ongoing, set group. This includes standard group mentoring (one mentor working with a group of youth), co-mentoring (where two to three mentors work with a larger group of youth), and “team” mentoring (where a group of mentors with specific and complementary skill sets work with a group of youth). The definition also takes into consideration “hybrid” models where youth are paired with an individual mentor but participate exclusively in group activities with other pairs. We included programs in our review where dedicated mentors were “incorporated” into an existing program or service with a focus other than mentoring, but where the work of mentors was intended to bolster outcomes for groups of youth.

All of these program types may engage in a variety of activities and mentoring interactions, but what truly defines them is that mentoring relationships are established between the adults and youth, while similarly deep and meaningful relationships are also developed among the peer participants in the groups. Please see later in this section for a breakdown of how these types of group mentoring programs are represented in the research.





in these program components. Group mentoring may reach more youth for a similar cost, but the programming itself is often much more complicated and challenging to implement than a traditional one-to-one program. Yet these programs have the least amount of practice guidance to draw from.

This publication represents an opportunity to change that, to provide practitioners and funders with a clearer set of guidelines to refer to when designing and implementing services. It also expands the usefulness of the EEPM by looking at its core practices through the lens of a group structure that, as noted here, may actually reach more youth than any other mentoring model.

## DEVELOPING THIS PUBLICATION

This product represents the sixth topic in MENTOR's series of Supplements to the EEPM, and for each of these we have followed a similar development process, as detailed below.

### Search and Review of Group Mentoring Literature

We built on a recent literature search<sup>6</sup> by one of the authors of this Supplement and conducted a fresh review for additional relevant literature using several full-text databases, including PsychInfo and PubMed, with some further examining of citations included in the previous search. The review emphasized several key criteria, including prioritizing research studies employing an experimental design, limiting results to programs serving youth from elementary school through young adulthood (roughly ages 5 through 24), and emphasizing programs that employed group activities as a primary or core component. We included some book chapters, reports, and other documents that fell outside of these criteria, but tried as much as possible to prioritize peer-reviewed scientific literature.



## General Process for Supplement Development

1. Literature search and review
2. Synthesis of findings/themes
3. Formation of a Working Group of practitioners (and other research experts)
4. Draft initial recommendations within EEPM framework
5. Obtain several rounds of feedback from the Working Group
6. Create "Practice in Action" snapshots from real-life programs
7. Finalize the recommendations and write the justification
8. Obtain feedback on the justifications and final product
9. Disseminate and develop trainings on the Supplement



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The result was a collection of **129 articles** that we relied on as our core source material, including the following:

- **84 studies reporting on 53 distinct mentoring programs**, including the following:
  - 25 program descriptions, case studies, or studies focused on design, implementation, or program processes
  - 59 empirical outcome studies
- **39 studies providing background information** relevant to group interventions for youth in general (e.g., processes in group psychotherapy, meta-analysis, developmental processes involved in peer relationships)
- **6 studies reported on non-programmatic mentoring** that was embedded in various youth activity settings and contexts

Characteristics of the 53 programs were as follows:

- **Study design** (some studies used two or more methods, or included multiple studies of the same program):
  - 14 experimental research design (randomized control trials)
  - 23 quasi-experimental (nonrandomized) comparison group design
  - 9 nonexperimental (pre-post, correlational)
  - 16 qualitative
- **Mentee population age group** (22 programs served two or more age groups):
  - 10 elementary school
  - 28 middle school
  - 33 high school
  - 10 young adult

- **Mentor population** (five programs employed two or more types of mentors):
  - 44 adults
  - 7 college students
  - 6 cross-age peers
- **Program settings**
  - 23 school-based
  - 21 site-based
  - 4 community or flexible locations/settings
  - 2 online
- **Program goals** (most programs addressed two or more goals)
  - 30 Positive Youth Development/Social-Emotional Learning
  - 17 Academic Achievement
  - 13 Health Risk Behavior
  - 13 Externalizing Behavior Problems (Delinquency, Violence)
  - 10 Physical Health and Development (including sports)
  - 8 Improving Relationships/Social Skills
  - 7 Internalizing Behavior Problems (Anxiety, Depression, PTSD)
  - 7 Career Development
  - Other goals included parenting, disability, and transitions (e.g., aging out of foster care)



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We developed a general typology (see Table 1) that offers a rough overview of the varied models of group mentoring. This typology enabled us to further characterize the range of programs in the review, including the following:

- **44 programs followed a general “One-to-Many” approach** to group mentoring:

- 20 programs employed two or more co-mentors
- 2 used a team approach with differentiated roles for the mentors within each group
- 5 programs were “unmatched” meaning that mentors and mentees were not necessarily in set groups, and/or that membership and attendance were somewhat fluid

- **6 programs used a “hybrid” approach** to group mentoring:

- 2 programs integrated one-to-one and group mentoring by creating groups of one-to-one matches
- 2 multicomponent programs included both one-to-one mentoring and separate group activities (group mentors were not necessarily the same as one-to-one mentors)
- 2 hybrid programs were difficult to classify based on the descriptions

- **3 group mentoring programs were difficult to classify** based on the descriptions.

In addition to group mentoring programs, we identified several instances of mentoring that occurred within the context of existing youth activity settings. We labeled these as “incorporated group mentoring” in that the mentoring that occurred was intentional (e.g., adults received relevant training and encouragement), but was not

necessarily programmatic (e.g., little or no matching or match support) and remained secondary to the goals of the youth program or setting:

- Six incorporated group mentoring examples were identified in the literature.
- Youth settings in which incorporated group mentoring occurred included arts programs, sports teams, after-school programs or clubs, and teacher advisory groups.

## Major Trends from the Research

In addition to the breakdown of study and program characteristics, the team of authors also read and coded each source with relevant keywords, allowing us to identify patterns and trends in the disparate articles we were reading. A few trends are worth noting, that shaped the conclusions and recommendations found in the remainder of this Supplement.

**There is beginning to be a critical mass of rigorous outcome evaluation or implementation studies that can help point to “best” practices, although significant gaps remain.** There is growing evidence that group mentoring can be effective in contributing to a wide range of outcomes. Studies are beginning to look at aspects of design and implementation, although much of the work informing these issues continues to rely on experience and practitioner wisdom, rather than empirical results. Whereas empirical work on approaches that are related to group mentoring — such as group psychotherapy and support groups — offers helpful suggestions, it is not always clear how well those suggestions apply to group mentoring. Some empirical studies offered hints about important topics, such as optimal mentor-to-mentee ratios, and the types of training and skills that are needed, but rigorous research is still lacking. For example, one analysis showed that smaller ratios



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(similar to the one-to-four ratio recommended in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* and reiterated later in this Supplement) were associated with greater youth reports of group cohesion and a sense of closeness with mentors than larger ratios;<sup>7</sup> however, such analysis has not examined the broad range of types of programs identified in this review. But there is clearly a need for more evaluation of local programs that can grow our understanding of group mentoring practices and outcomes. For one example of a group program that is committed to program evaluation, see the “Practice in Action” profile of Soccer for Success in the final section of this resource.

**There is tremendous diversity and creativity in the ways that group mentoring programs are designed and delivered.** We were able to classify most of the programs in our review in one of several categories of “one-to-many” and “hybrid” programs, with variations of each. Still, the diversity of programs made drawing the boundaries defining each of these categories somewhat fuzzy. For example, we classified one sports-based program as a “one-to-many” group program because mentoring was central to the program itself but classified an initiative to train youth sports coaches in youth development and mentoring skills as non-programmatic “incorporated group mentoring.” Along the same lines, it was sometimes difficult to define the boundaries of what did and did not count as a group mentoring program. For example, we agreed that a youth intervention program that followed a highly interactive, manualized curriculum was not an example of group mentoring, whereas another curriculum-driven program that included intentional time and space for more informal group interaction did count as an example of group mentoring.

On a different note, the literature reflects great ideas about ways to capitalize on the positive potential of peer interactions and ways of integrating adult mentor and peer processes. We saw examples of youth discussing personal challenges together, engaging in project-based learning, using the group to normalize traumatic experiences, using role plays to give youth a space to practice new skills, and other creative engagement structures.

**Processes through which group mentoring can facilitate positive gains or personal growth for youth.** One of things that stood out in the review was the idea that group mentoring offers a unique opportunity to integrate the power of the mentoring relationship with positive group and peer processes. Group processes include a sense of belonging and group cohesion, a group identity, a safe space, a context for establishing positive group norms around things like confidentiality and also reinforcing individual and group goals, and an opportunity for young people to experience not just receiving help but being able to provide help to their peers. A rich qualitative literature has begun to document ways that youth are able to observe and to participate directly in interactions between mentors and youth and between youth and their peers; and to show how these layers of relationships, perhaps the most unique feature of group mentoring, can help nurture personal growth for youth (for example, see articles by Dowd et al., 2015;<sup>8</sup> Griffith et al. 2019;<sup>9</sup> and Sanchez et al, 2018<sup>10</sup>).

A few quantitative studies are starting to show that processes like a sense of belonging and perceived group cohesion are potentially important drivers of a broad range of youth development outcomes. On the other hand, there is little evidence that negative group processes, sometimes called “peer contagion”<sup>11</sup> or “deviancy training” are playing a large role in group mentoring. Instead, positive



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interaction between peers often seemed like the main driver of benefits for youth. In some ways, mentors in group programs sometimes take on a different, almost secondary role, and as such, might be more empowering to youth because the adult is offering a less top-down type of relationship.

**Factors that can moderate the impact of group mentoring programs on youth outcomes.** It is clear from our review that group mentoring programs can be effective in contributing to positive outcomes for a wide range of mentee characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, and exposure to risk. Some scholars have argued that group mentoring may be particularly helpful for many youth of color, particularly ones from cultural backgrounds that emphasize interdependence among community members. This is an appealing idea, and there are a few hints that cultural engagement may play a role in whether the group mentoring experience promotes positive outcomes, but research has found no evidence for racial or ethnic differences or of the extent of group cultural diversity in the effectiveness of group mentoring.

Similarly, some scholars have argued that group mentoring may fit the relational orientations of girls. There is some evidence that group mentoring may be more a more effective approach for girls than one-to-one mentoring in some contexts, but no evidence that it is more or less effective for girls than boys. We know very little about the characteristics of mentors that may influence program effectiveness, although many of the implementation challenges noted in the literature suggest that skills in managing conflict and other group dynamics, fostering a safe and inclusive group climate, and maintaining youth interest and commitment to the group are critical skills that mentors should bring. Similarly, we know very little about characteristics of the programs

themselves that make a difference for youth outcomes. One factor to consider is the balance between reliance on a fixed curriculum and more informal group activities or discussions (see the Program Design Considerations in the next section, “Recommendations for Group Mentoring Programs within the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*,” for further discussion).

**Factors that can mediate or facilitate the impact of group mentoring programs on youth outcomes.** Group mentoring programs are often developed with a goal of fostering “hard” outcomes, such as improved academic achievement, reduced delinquent activity, or improved health behavior. These types of outcomes are very much present in our review, and it is equally important to note that these goals are accompanied by a focus on “softer” skills and outcomes. Both types of outcomes are important in their own right, and as with many other approaches that focus on positive youth development, it is often believed that by helping young people with things like gaining a greater sense of connection with peers and the school they attend and gaining a greater sense of confidence in their ability to succeed, group mentoring programs can help set youth on a trajectory toward achieving those “hard” outcomes.

Some research is starting to suggest that group mentoring may be particularly valuable for fostering young people’s ability to access support resources and build their social networks (sometimes called “social capital”), and for building certain types of competencies, particularly those that involve interacting with peers. Although the findings are mixed, there is emerging evidence that gaining these resources and skills through group mentoring can help drive improvements in those hard outcomes.

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All that being said, there is also an additional concern that comes from practitioners who gravitate toward group mentoring: the desire for cost efficiencies. It is not uncommon for service providers to conclude that group approaches may represent an opportunity to serve more youth for similar costs to a one-to-one program. And there is some evidence supporting that conclusion, such as a 2017 MENTOR report detailing that the cost per youth served in group models was generally below that of one-to-one models.<sup>12</sup> But our review of the literature suggests that the “savings” to be found in group mentoring models may be fleeting. Yes, these models serve more children with fewer mentors, but they also require more supervision, more curriculum-driven activities, more off-site outings, more access to physical space and resources, and myriad other considerations that make these programs just as complex and resource-intensive, if not more so, than more traditional one-to-one programs. So anyone coming to group mentoring as a way of increasing volume while cutting costs may be sorely disappointed by the reality of what it takes to run one of these models. Thus, we encourage practitioners to keep the needs of youth in mind — particularly if those youth who could benefit from a group approach — when selecting group models over other forms of mentoring.

### **Forming a Working Group of Practitioners and Other Researchers**

As noted above, the research literature on group mentoring offered some strong hints at effective practices, but was largely absent of direct tests of practices (e.g., was mentor training effective) or comparisons of practices against each other to test effectiveness (e.g., comparing two different mentor recruitment approaches). This leaves us with remaining gaps in our understanding of what makes for an effective group program.

Thus, to augment the information gathered in our literature search, we also formed a Working Group of leading practitioners and organizations that are doing what the authors felt was quality work in the group mentoring space. This group also included technical assistance providers who had done extensive consulting and program development work with clients to build these types of programs. The representatives of this group are detailed below and “Practice in Action” snapshots of their work are included throughout this resource to illustrate how many of the recommendations included here can look like in real-world examples and settings.

This Working Group met a total of five times between November 2019 and February 2020. Their main roles were to share what they felt were key successes and challenges experienced by their programs and to review the iterative drafts of the recommendations ultimately included in this resource. Thus, the recommendations for group mentoring here represent a very intentional blending of the best available research evidence and cutting-edge wisdom from the experiences of leading service providers working in the group mentoring space. The authors thank this Working Group for their incredibly meaningful and insightful contributions to this work.



Gail Breslow and Jen Bourgoin

### **Clubhouse Network**

Since its beginnings more than 25 years ago, The Clubhouse: Where Technology Meets Imagination has been a resource for thousands of young people to explore their own interests, develop skills, and build confidence in themselves through the use of technology. The Clubhouse is simultaneously an inventor’s workshop, design house, sound stage, hackerspace, music studio, and programming lab. At the Clubhouse, underserved youth unleash their creative talents, engage in peer-to-peer learning, and develop a unique voice of their own to express themselves through “STEAM” – STEM and the arts..



Dawn Wiley

### **Girls Inc.**

GIRLS INC. inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold. Our comprehensive approach to whole girl development equips girls to navigate gender, economic, and social barriers to grow up healthy, educated, and independent. These positive outcomes are achieved through three core elements:

PEOPLE: trained staff and volunteers who build lasting, mentoring relationships.

ENVIRONMENT: girls-only, physically and emotionally safe environments, where there is a sisterhood of support, high expectations, and mutual respect.

PROGRAMMING: research-based, hands-on and minds-on programming, which is age-appropriate, and meets the needs of today’s girls.

Informed by girls and their families, we also advocate for legislation and policies to increase opportunities for all girls. Join us at [girlsinc.org](http://girlsinc.org).



Erin Farrell

### **Project Arrive**

The goal of Mentoring for Success (MFS), which is the district wide mentoring initiative that Project Arrive is part of, is to provide students who have multiple barriers to success with a caring adult at school. Its unique school-based model supports school communities with the essential evidence-based ingredients for success. MFS cultivates a collaborative school culture and climate that facilitates school belonging for all students by supporting enhanced professional capacity, individual guidance, transformative mindsets, and high-quality mentoring.





Lisa Lampman

### **Leadership Foundations**

At Leadership Foundations (LF), we believe relationships are always the starting point for creating lasting change. LF is a global network that supports and equips local leaders to transform their cities through the power of relationships. Founded in 1978, LF works in 40 cities, impacting more than 300,000 individuals globally.

Recognizing young people as leaders, and acknowledging their assets and potential, we created a mentoring network to bring transformative relationships into their lives through mentoring. The LF Mentoring Network, formed in 2008, supports group, peer, and one-to-one mentoring matches to more than 1,500 youth annually. One of the LF Network members, Knoxville Leadership Foundation, is highlighted in this supplement.

Knoxville Leadership Foundation (KLF) was founded in 1994 upon the belief that our city has the resources necessary to meet the needs of our communities and the people in them. As a faith-based, entrepreneurial nonprofit, KLF connects human and financial resources to address evolving unmet needs. KLF leads through collaboration, capacity-building, and the creation of programs that focus on mentoring youth, workforce development for at-risk young adults, strengthening nonprofits through collaboration, and improving housing conditions for low-income individuals and families.

Learn more at [www.klf.org](http://www.klf.org) and [www.leadershipfoundations.org](http://www.leadershipfoundations.org).



William Figueroa

### **Los Angeles Team Mentoring**

As pioneers of the team-based mentoring model, Los Angeles Team Mentoring (LATM) connects 1,400 at-risk students with 350 adult mentors each year, providing nearly 100,000 hours of out-of-school intervention. Its proven after-school program, established in 1992, continues to operate exclusively in low-income communities where resources and positive role models are scarce. Through the interactive and goal-based curriculum, youth develop critical skills, gain confidence, and build bridges to a brighter future. To date, LATM has impacted over 28,000 young lives through 2 million hours of service.



Sarah Pickens

### **U.S. Soccer Foundation, Soccer For Success**

Soccer for Success is a free after-school program developed and supported by the U.S. Soccer Foundation. The program is designed to introduce children from kindergarten to eighth grade to the sport of soccer, while also providing them with the tools they need to make healthy lifestyle decisions. Soccer for Success provides a safe and supportive space for children to play and have fun in a structured team environment. The program is designed to help children improve their physical health, increase their knowledge about healthy lifestyles, and improve their self-esteem and behavior.







Darlene Marlin

### **National Urban League**

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment, equality, and social justice. Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the Urban League collaborates at the national and local levels with community leaders, policymakers, and corporate partners to elevate standards of living for African-Americans and other historically underserved groups. With 90 affiliates serving 300 communities in 36 states and the District of Columbia, the Urban League spearheads the development of social programs and authoritative public policy research, and advocates for policies and services that close the equality gap.

Jerry Sherk – Consultant

### **Mentor Management Systems**

Mentor Management Systems (MMS) of Encinitas, California has been providing technical assistance to youth mentoring programs for over two decades. During this time, MMS consultants have worked with hundreds of programs to train staff, mentors and mentees, and to create group mentoring curriculum. In the early 2000's, Jerry Sherk, President of MMS, developed and facilitated a number of group mentoring programs in the San Diego Unified School District and at Barona Indian School. Based on his experiences, Jerry wrote a manual called "Designing and Implementing a Group Mentoring Program," which continues to be widely used in the field today. Jerry Sherk, M.A. has a master's degree in counseling psychology and he is the founder of the consulting firm Mentor Management Systems of Encinitas, California. Over the past 25 years, Jerry has helped hundreds of mentoring organizations to develop or improve their operational systems, and to conduct trainings for staff, mentors and mentees.

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## **TIPS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE**

This Supplement to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* will be most useful to those starting group mentoring programs, as well as to those who are looking to strengthen their existing services. The recommendations included in the next section, from Recruitment through Closure, offer research- and practice-informed recommendations that should help group mentoring programs implement effective services beyond just adhering to the generic practices suggested in the original

EEPM. We encourage those who are building programs from scratch to also focus on the Program Design Considerations provided at the beginning of the next section, as those major themes and considerations were clearly the most prominent factors in program success (or struggle) in both the literature we read and in the opinion of our Working Group of experts.

If you are not familiar with the structure and content of the original *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*, we encourage you to review the baseline

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practices suggested in that resource so that you can better understand the additional recommendations of this resource. The recommendations for group mentoring offered here are slotted into the original framework of the EEPM so that practitioners can clearly see where group models require more attention or different approaches to traditional one-to-one programs. Where possible, we have noted when certain recommendations are more or less applicable to certain group mentoring programs based on their setting, match structure, goals and activities, or other specific features. But in general, the **colored recommendations** will provide critical advice to group mentoring programs of all types.

For those who want to go deeper in their understanding of group mentoring practices, there is a Justification and Discussion section that highlights key themes and associated practices for managing a successful group mentoring program. This section discusses the recommendations in more detail and offers examples from the research and literature reviewed that support the suggested practices.

Programs are encouraged to implement as many of the core Benchmarks and Enhancements of the EEPM as possible. There is always room to improve or strengthen the delivery of any program. But we feel that following the recommendations here will be helpful to any mentoring program that is:

- Matching groups of youth with one or more mentors
- Using a group activity format for the activities of mentor-mentee pairs
- Hoping to use peer-to-peer interactions to supplement the guidance and support offered by adult mentors

MENTOR hopes these recommendations help group mentoring programs improve their services and provide youth with meaningful adult and peer interactions. If there is one thing that stood out from all the research reviewed and conversations about quality group mentoring from our time putting this resource together, it's that these programs have a unique ability to help youth feel a sense of belonging, togetherness, and even "family," which is often fleeting in the institutions they engage in every day. Group mentoring appears to be a powerful way of providing youth with a sense of community, with a cohort of caring peers and adults that they might never have found connections with otherwise. These personal connections can be applied to address myriad needs and challenges — everything from academic struggles to processing trauma to improving interpersonal skills — but what is at the core of all these programs is a sense of belonging and togetherness that often exceeds or expands our common understanding of mentoring as a bidirectional intervention. MENTOR hopes that group mentoring models continue to thrive and that this resource can help define and promote quality programming.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GROUP MENTORING PROGRAMS WITHIN THE EEPM

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The following pages detail the recommendations for group mentoring programs that emerged from the work of this project. Here we include two types of recommendations:

- **Program Design and Development**

**Considerations** – These represent major themes and considerations for program design and implementation. Programs will need to consider these factors in how they develop and structure services in order to increase their effectiveness and avoid common challenges expressed by experienced practitioners.

- **Recommendations for Practice** – These recommendations provide additional guidance and nuance to the standard *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*. These recommendations highlight ways in which group mentoring programs might refine or enhance their day-to-day practice to maximize program success.

As always, these recommendations should be viewed through the lens of the theory of change of the program — the activities, goals, and desired outcomes the program has for youth participants and the specific ways in which the actions of mentors and staff lead to those outcomes. Practitioners looking for one example of a group mentoring theory of change can find a sample version, along with a sample logic model, for a school-based group mentoring program on the National Mentoring Resource Center website at: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/learning-opportunities/logic-models-and-theories-of-change.html>

It should be noted that we expect that all group mentoring programs, even those serving groups of youth with many challenges and needs, will be strengths-based in their focus and will generally adhere to the principles of positive youth development. But beyond those general principles, we expect that group mentoring programs will be very diverse in terms of their desired outcomes, contexts, and capacities. Thus, the recommendations below should be viewed and implemented through the lens of a program's specific local circumstances and objectives.

## PROGRAM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Newly planned group mentoring programs, or those looking to revamp existing services, may want to consider the program design elements noted here. All of these topics were noted research we reviewed and in the conversations with the Working Group about key program features and common challenges.

### Determine the match structure that can best support youth participants.

Most common in group mentoring programs are structures where **one mentor** is matched with a small group (-3-6) of youth or a pair of co-mentors works with a slightly larger group (-8-12). The **co-mentoring** approach offers several advantages, including fewer cancelled meetings when a mentor is unavailable, improved ability to manage the groups, and empowering co-mentors to offer distinct forms of support, but also work together to mutually reinforce key messages or learnings for mentees. Both of these approaches offer a good depth of adult support to the group, but also empower the youth to get to know one another, take on ownership roles, and truly collaborate and bond with one another in the program's activities.

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To see how one program promotes both co-mentorship and mentor-staff collaboration, see the profile of one of the Leadership Foundations' programs in the last section of this resource.

Less common are **hybrid group/one-to-one programs** — but this approach also has tremendous potential. These programs make one-to-one matches between mentors and youth, but those dyads participate almost exclusively in group activities. These programs are often called “family-style” programs as they often involve a communal meal or formal gathering.<sup>1,2</sup> This approach can be helpful for youth who need the personal attention and connection of a one-to-one relationship, but who would also benefit from some robust peer interactions and collective experiences.

**Team mentoring** models are those in which groups of mentors are intentionally selected based on their specific skills, backgrounds, and other criteria. For example, a school-based mentoring program where the mentoring groups are led by a volunteer tutor, a classroom teacher, a counselor, and a youth development specialist working together to provide specific forms of support collaboratively. Other examples could include mentors, teachers, community members, and clinicians working together to offer a “web of support” to a youth recovering from trauma or a mental health crisis, or, to borrow an example from this project’s Working Group, the combination of a teacher, a college student, and a leader from the business community working together with groups of 10–12 middle schoolers in the LA Team Mentoring program (see [page XX](#) for more information on how this program intentionally builds its mentor and youth “teams”). These team programs can offer youth access to targeted forms of support and mentors with specific lived experiences<sup>3</sup> and, when done well, combine mentor strengths into

a comprehensive support structure that can uniquely meet the needs of each youth in the group.

Practitioners will want to think carefully about which group structure is the best fit to meet the needs of their mentees. Youth who need a more personal touch and a simpler group experience may thrive in a small group with one mentor. Co-mentoring may be a safer structure in terms of meeting consistency and group management, but it also requires more recruitment and more support of mentors, who now must work collaboratively with another adult. Hybrid and team models offer really intensive support, but may not allow for the small group bonding and the rich peer-to-peer engagement of more traditional group structures. There is no right answer, but this decision influences everything the program does subsequently and should be carefully considered.

### **Set limits around group size and composition.**

One of the most common questions practitioners ask about group mentoring is around the optimal mentor-youth ratio for the groups these programs make. Our literature search uncovered a wide variety of group sizes and configurations with the most common configurations being one mentor working with 4–10 youth or two mentors working with 8–12 youth. But there was considerable variety, including models where three mentors worked with 12 youth<sup>4</sup>, one mentor (in this case a teacher) working with a group of 15 students,<sup>5</sup> four peer mentors serving a group of 10 youth in a group skills program,<sup>6</sup> and even four mentors working with 50-plus youth in an after-school program<sup>7</sup> that emphasized mentoring interactions. On average, the programs that reported a specific number of mentors and youth in their model averaged out to 6.4 youth per one mentor in the group and an average group size of 12 total youth.



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What remains elusive in terms of that practitioner question is whether there is an “ideal” ratio. While that ideal has not been clearly identified in the research, and likely depends heavily on the goals and activities of the program, there is an emerging sense among researchers and practitioners that somewhere around **four-to-five mentees for every adult mentor** in the group is a bit of a “sweet spot” in terms of a ratio. There are several reasons for this:

- It's easier for mentors to manage the groups in terms of behavior and keeping youth on task during activities
- It allows for more interpersonal interaction among the youth and makes it harder for some youth to “hide” in a larger group.
- It may be easier to build a sense of community and belonging with a smaller “unit.”
- A wide range of activities is likely more accessible as a smaller group that needs fewer resources, physical space, and coordination and logistical planning by adults
- Project-based work may be easier and more efficient with a smaller group

Of course, smaller group “units” have their challenges (e.g., if one member leaves prematurely, it is felt very keenly in a small group). But if the theory of change of the program is mainly driven by the youth participants interacting with one another, bonding with one another, and building a unique experience with the support of their mentor(s), then it logically follows that there is likely volume of support needed to keep the group focused, conflict-free, and empowered to work together. A mentor who has to contain and focus a larger number of youth may struggle with the practical realities of that group size.

This reality also suggests an upper limit on total group size regardless of the number of mentors in the mix — and that might actually be a larger concern here. Large groups, meaning groups of more than a dozen or so youth, can have participation challenges no matter how many adults are there to mentor or support the work. Larger groups allow some youth to check out, for cliques and subgroups to form, and for a variety of other issues to creep into the overall cohesion of the group.

However, there may be some circumstances where a larger group is perfect for the program — for example, a sports-based program where you need to field enough players to form teams and play a match and there is adequate physical space for the larger groups to do their work in. Once again, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to these issues. Programs should carefully consider both overall group size and the adult-youth ratio, as either of these can be misaligned with what the program wants to achieve or the realities of their meeting space.

While this question has not been tested explicitly in the research literature, it's worth noting that secondary analysis<sup>8</sup> from one prominent study<sup>9</sup> of a school-based group mentoring program found that group cohesion began to wane when the group size exceeded the one-to-four or five ratio suggested here. The experience level of mentors and the behavioral issues of the youth in the groups will be important factors to consider when ultimately determining appropriate group size. Clearly there is a range of ratios and configurations that can work in practice — but there is likely a “sweet spot” for the specific work a program wants their groups to do and for maximizing the pool of available mentors.

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## The importance of structured activities, with flexibility.

Group mentoring programs should be built around a robust **activity curriculum** that guides the content and structure of group interactions over the course of the program. In looking through the literature on group mentoring, we did not see any examples of programs where the meetings were completely freeform, although there were programs where groups could choose a la carte from a wide variety of activities at a school or program site. But for the most part, these programs are highly structured and often provide daily or weekly activity options and materials.

The types of activities offered by a program will vary depending on program goals and other factors, but in general, group activities should reflect these characteristics:

- **Emphasize active involvement and interaction for all group participants** – This ensures that each participant is getting the same experience and the same opportunities to learn, reflect, and grow.
- **Build on prior activities or further elaborate a theme related to program goals** – Many programs use a sequential curriculum that allows youth to use new skills or knowledge and move on to increasingly complex interactions and lessons.
- **Offer opportunities for honest reflection and open, safe sharing** – This is what puts the “mentoring” in group mentoring. This work is what allows youth to truly be in a relationship with one another and to open up and share their authentic selves.
- **Role plays or other scenario-based opportunities to practice new skills or behaviors** – A small, trusted group environment — with the support of adult mentors — offers an ideal space for youth to try out something new or practice a new way of acting or being. These activities, and the feedback of peers during them, can ground the lessons of the program in the day-to-day world of the mentees.
- **Facilitate knowledge-acquisition and skill-building** – In addition to mentor and peer support, group mentoring programs can also offer a chance to simply teach content or provide information to youth. We found examples of programs using groups to teach sexual health information, coping skills, and other relevant content to youth in these group mentoring settings, using the mentor to guide discussions, answer group questions, and help mentees clarify values or choose a path of action.
- **Allow youth to lead and take some ownership of the activities** – Activities should be as youth-led as possible so that they are empowered to collaborate with one another, stretch themselves in meaningful ways, and feel an organic sense of ownership and belonging to the group.
- **Promote group cohesion and the development of positive group culture** – This concept might very well be the crux of making group mentoring work. Is the group a true group? Have these youth bonded with one another and their mentors to make something more than the sum of their individual relationships? Is there a sense of community and togetherness? Of shared ownership? The activities a program offers should emphasize the ways in which the mentees build something new together in a collaborative, collective experience.



There is, however, another thread that runs through the literature on group mentoring: the importance of flexibility in how and when that curriculum is delivered. One of the original developers of the Project Arrive program that was part of this project's Working Group emphasized the concept of "curriculum with creativity" for their work.<sup>10</sup> The idea is simple: mentors must be attuned to the needs and moods of their groups from meeting to meeting and realize that there are times when rigidly adhering to the weekly activity is not in the best interests of the group. This can include situations where the group is distracted with an issue at school or in the community, when too many group members are absent from a meeting, or when there is some other pressing concern that indicates that deviating from the curriculum might be the best thing for that particular day. This can also apply to instances where the group is stuck on an issue or problem, the curriculum feels redundant of prior work by the group, or there are events in the mentees' lives that require more immediate attention and support from mentors. This creative deviation from the set activities can also include modifying an activity, in terms of scope or how it's accomplished, in the name of making sure that mentees are able to have a positive engagement.

Obviously, deviating from a set curriculum can sound less than optimal to practitioners, and it's always possible to give groups so much freedom of choice that they fail to complete the full program or avoid more challenging activities that might offer the most potential for growth. But both practitioner wisdom and common sense dictates that there should be some malleability to the programming, which is why group programs are encouraged to build scheduling flexibility and some open time into the flow of their program. This may allow for some "wiggle room" to get activities completed and give

## Strategies for Adding Flexibility to Structured Group Mentoring Programs

- Intentionally schedule group meetings to include both a curricular activity and time for informal interaction.
- Have curricular themes for each session but allow for a menu of activities that mentors/mentees can choose from.
- Plan the program over time so that structured activities/curriculum early in the year give way to greater youth control/decision-making over time. One example could be to choose activities that correspond with Tuckman's stages of group development (e.g., develop listening skills and conflict-resolution skills when a group is in the "storming stage" and goal-setting and team-work skills when in "norming stage," etc.).
- Schedule curriculum-focused days interspersed through the program.
- Set parameters around flexibility/ability to deviate from curriculum — e.g., specify the essential versus optional/adaptable components of a curriculum in order to maintain fidelity to key elements.

the groups some much needed time to innovate, take breaks, or shift focus as needed. Sometimes, deviating just a bit from the rigid structure of a program leads to gains and growth in group cohesion and other areas that make the trade-off worth it. See the sidebar for some of the creative ways we noticed programs trying to offer both



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structured interactions and this needed flexibility. You can also see an example of how the Clubhouse Network’s programs try to find balance between structured time and flexible meetings in the last section of this resource.

### Plan for access to resources, physical space, and supplies.

Because group mentoring programs are so activity-driven — and also tend to be housed at a site like a school, nonprofit center, or other institution — they must emphasize the logistical planning around use of physical space and resources. Among the common challenges noted in both the research and by our Working Group members were the challenges of ensuring a proper physical space, and adequate privacy, for groups to meet and in acquiring access to the equipment and materials needed to do group activities. 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. The bottom line is that mentors and their groups need access to facilities, tools, materials, equipment, and other infrastructure that is needed for conducting program activities.

### Empowering groups to develop their own norms, rituals, and customs.

Given that creating a sense of group ownership and community is one of the main goals of 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 everything from a common greeting or opening icebreaker to their meetings, a set of rules around confidentiality and handling conflict, or even rituals on how they celebrate accomplishments by group members.

Of particular importance are the rules around how the group will make decisions (e.g., unanimous agreement versus taking turns choosing versus majority vote, etc.) and how the group will deal with violations of its agreed-upon rules. Both of these elements will help establish a sense of group identity and will facilitate mentee trust-building with their mentors and their fellow peers. The more these types of elements can be collectively created and agreed on with maximum buy-in, the better.

These types of meeting structures and rituals allow groups to create a positive culture and to work out conflicts productively. Groups are encouraged to work together early in the program cycle to establish these idiosyncratic norms and rituals. These will bring consistency and stronger rapport to the group over time if they are agreed on and adhered to. They can also provide some of the fun and silly moments that make being part of a group so enjoyable.

You can learn more about how the members of our Working Group encourage their mentoring groups to set norms, rituals, and rules in the final section of this resource.

### Anticipate some common group mentoring challenges.

Program developers should give thought to how they will mitigate **common challenges** for group mentoring models, such as:

- **Ensuring that each group has a relatively similar experience** even though each group is somewhat unique and will evolve at their own pace and in idiosyncratic ways. If your groups are having wildly different experiences, it may be challenging to achieve the program’s goals with consistency.

• **Ensuring that all youth get a relatively similar level of engagement, interaction, and participation.** Shy youth or youth who are less comfortable in groups can easily be pushed to the side by more boisterous, confident, or naturally social mentees, and their mentors will need to pay close attention to who is not participating fully and who is dominating the spotlight. Ideally, each member of the group will get the same level of adult and peer support, but this can only really happen if the mentors and staff are encouraging full participation and making sure to check in with every child about their experience in the group. This does not mean that all youth have to participate in every single activity equally — in fact it can be really harmful to shy youth or youth who have experienced trauma if they are forced to share in group conversations if they are not ready. In these situations, mentors should find other ways for youth to be engaged and be part of the group even if they aren't comfortable speaking up in a particular moment. But the main idea here is that the program will struggle to give each youth the mentoring experience they deserve if participation varies considerably and nonparticipation in activities is the norm.

• **Determining how to meet youth's individual needs** while participating in a group experience. Some youth may benefit more from a closer one-to-one mentoring relationship as it can be hard for all youth to get their specific needs addressed in a group format. Think carefully about which youth can get their individual needs met through a group approach. Some youth might be better off being referred to a one-to-one model or other service (see Recommendation 19 below). But in most programs, mentors can provide extra support to youth in their group by offering one-on-one time to talk before or after the group sessions or

at some other time that allows for extra support beyond the group. Some programs also promote good staff-mentor communication in order to determine which youth might need more supports than the mentoring program alone can provide. See the great example of how Project Arrive handles this by using social workers as program coordinators in the last section of this resource.

• **Managing group dynamics.** Mentors will need considerable skills and support to keep groups on task, relatively free of conflict, and functioning well through all of the stages of group development. In fact, Tuckman's stages of group development<sup>11</sup> (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning) may offer a useful framework for thinking about the group over the program cycle. But mentors will always need to be keeping an eye on the interplay between mentees and ensuring strong group cohesion.





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## Emphasize belonging and safety for mentees.

If there were two themes that echoed across the literature on group mentoring, that most spoke to the power of these programs to intervene in the lives of youth and build something positive, it is the twin goals of **belonging** and **safety** above all else. These two characteristics of effective groups — mentees feeling a sense of belonging combined with a sense that this is a safe place for them — are at the heart of almost every example of effective group mentoring programs we examined. These two principles are cited extensively in the research, both as outcomes in their own right and as precursors to other, more distal outcomes (e.g., improved behavior or peer relationships). Other common group traits found in the (mostly qualitative) research on group mentoring include:

- The group as a place that offers *unconditional support* to members
- The group allowing participants to *normalize their experiences* by comparing and contrasting with those of their peers
- The group as a place to *build identity and autonomy*, while also building mutuality and acceptance with others
- The group as a *place to learn*
- The group as *feeling like a family*

There is no cookie-cutter model to building an effective group mentoring program, but programs that attended to the concepts of belonging and participant safety, and the other factors mentioned here, seemed most successful in creating an environment in which the bigger goals of the program could be met. Practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders are encouraged to think through these types of design considerations and then test to see if these types of design features are impactful as part of regular program evaluation.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Note: The structure presented below uses the original language from the Elements of Effective Practice (4th Edition) as the framework for making additional group mentoring recommendations. Readers should be aware that some of that language may need to be modified to reference a group model rather than the implied one-to-one model. Group mentoring programs can find their specific recommendations in the colored, numbered Recommendations throughout the FRAMEWORK BELOW.

## STANDARD 1 – RECRUITMENT

### BENCHMARKS:

#### Mentor Recruitment

B.1.1 Program engages in recruitment strategies that realistically portray the benefits (to society, the company, and to mentees), practices, supports, and challenges of mentoring in the program.

**1. Group Recommendation:** Program recruits mentors who express an interest in developing a supportive, caring relationship and friendship with more than one mentee, as well as the potential for co-mentoring with other adults in programs using that configuration.

**2. Group Recommendation:** Program communicates to prospective mentors that in addition to mentoring one or more youth, they may also be facilitating activities with their mentee(s).

**3. Group Recommendation:** Program describes the extent to which mentors can expect support from their fellow mentors in the program and the extent to which mentors are expected to provide support to one another.

**4. Group Recommendation:** Program communicates to prospective mentors that they will likely have a diverse group of mentees and that establishing a close, supportive relationship may be easier to do with some youth than others.

B.1.2 Program utilizes recruitment strategies that build positive attitudes and emotions about mentoring.

**5. Group Recommendation:** Program uses recruitment messages that communicate to mentors that they have the opportunity to positively impact more lives through being a group mentor than an individual mentor.

B.1.3 Program recruits mentors whose skills, motivations, and backgrounds best match the goals and structure of the program.

**6. Group Recommendation:** Program prioritizes the recruitment of individuals who have education, employment, or training in:

- group facilitation skills with youth
- empathic listening
- strong social skills
- implementing a curriculum with fidelity, when relevant

**7. Group Recommendation:** Program prioritizes recruiting members of nontraditional, underrepresented, and minority groups to match the diversity of youth served and to support program goals around diversity, inclusion, belonging, and safety, as relevant.

**8. Group Recommendation:** If relevant to youth needs and program goals, program may consider using a “team” mentoring model, in which it recruits mentors with specific professional expertise and relevant skill sets and backgrounds who are then grouped with other mentors to serve together as a team working with a mentee or group of mentees.

B.1.4 Program encourages mentors to assist with recruitment efforts by providing them with resources to ask individuals they know, who meet the eligibility criteria of the program, to be a mentor.

B.1.5 Program trains and encourages mentees to identify and recruit appropriate mentors for themselves, when relevant.



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## Mentee and Parent or Guardian Recruitment

B.1.6 Program engages in recruitment strategies that realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports, and challenges of being mentored in the program.

**9. Group Recommendation:** Program conveys benefits of the group experience when recruiting mentees.

**10. Group Recommendation:** Program communicates to parents or caregivers that their child will participate in a group mentoring relationship with one or more mentors as well as one or more peers.

**11. Group Recommendation:** Program communicates to parents or caregivers how mentors and youth group members in the program are screened, matched, and monitored.

**12. Group Recommendation:** Program describes how mentees are expected to participate fully in the program and in their group's relationships, conversations, and activities, so that youth and families can set realistic expectations and assess their fit with the program.

B.1.7 Program recruits mentees whose needs best match the services offered by the program.

**13. Group Recommendation:** Program recruits mentees who express interest in developing a close, supportive relationship with a mentor (or mentors, depending on the program structure) as well as with one or more peers.

**14. Group Recommendation:** Program provides information to referring agencies/institutions so that they are aware of what type of young people will be best served by the program and how they will benefit from the group model.

## ENHANCEMENTS Mentor Recruitment

E.1.1 Program communicates to mentors about how mentoring and volunteering can benefit them.

E.1.2 Program has a publicly available written statement outlining eligibility requirements for mentors in its program.

E.1.3 Program uses multiple strategies to recruit mentors (e.g., direct ask, social media, traditional methods of mass communication, presentations, referrals) on an ongoing basis.

## Mentee and Parent or Guardian Recruitment

E.1.4 Program has a publicly available written statement outlining eligibility requirements for mentees in its program.

E.1.5 Program encourages mentees to recruit other peers to be mentees whose needs match the services offered by the program, when relevant.

## STANDARD 2 – SCREENING

### BENCHMARKS: Mentor Screening

B.2.1 Program has established criteria for accepting mentors into the program as well as criteria for disqualifying mentor applicants.

**15. Group Recommendation:** Program should consider screening prospective mentors for education or training in:

- group facilitation skills with youth
- empathic listening
- strong social skills
- implementing a curriculum with fidelity, when relevant



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**16. Group Recommendation:** Program should consider screening prospective mentors for having positive relationships with diverse colleagues in the workplace, friends, or family members.

B.2.2 Prospective mentors complete a written application that includes questions designed to help assess their safety and suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.3 Program conducts at least one face-to-face interview with each prospective mentor that includes questions designed to help the program assess his or her suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.4 Program conducts a comprehensive criminal background check on prospective adult mentors, including searching a national criminal records database, along with sex offender and child abuse registries and, when relevant, driving records.

B.2.5 Program conducts reference check interviews with multiple adults who know an applicant (ideally, both personal and professional references) that include questions to help assess his or her suitability for mentoring a youth.

B.2.6 Prospective mentors agree in writing to a one-year (calendar or school) minimum commitment for the mentoring relationship, or a minimum time commitment that is required by the mentoring program.

**17. Group Recommendation:** Prospective mentors agree to mentoring more than one mentee.

**18. Group Recommendation:** Program should assess during the screening process whether prospective mentors may have scheduling challenges or conflicts that would hinder their full attendance at group meetings, and screen out those who may be unable to consistently meet with their group of mentees.

B.2.7 Prospective mentors agree in writing to participate in face-to-face meetings with their mentees that average a minimum of once a week and a total of four or more hours per month over the course of the relationship, or at a minimum frequency and amount of hours that are required by their mentoring program.

## **Mentee Screening**

B.2.8 Program has established criteria for accepting youth into the program as well as criteria that would disqualify a potential youth participant.

**19. Group Recommendation:** Program should assess if prospective mentees would benefit specifically from being in a group program with peers or if an exclusively adult mentoring relationship or some other intervention might be a better fit.

**20. Group Recommendation:** Program should specify the criteria for determining that youth have the ability to fully and positively participate in the program's group relationships, activities, and discussions (e.g., behavioral expectations, requisite skills, or circumstances, etc.).



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B.2.9 Parent(s)/guardian(s) complete an application or referral form.

B.2.10 Parent(s)/guardian(s) provide informed permission for their child to participate.

B.2.11 Parent(s)/guardian(s) and mentees agree in writing to a one-year (calendar or school) minimum commitment for the mentoring relationship, or the minimum time commitment that is required by the mentoring program.

B.2.12 Parents(s)/guardian(s) and mentees agree in writing that mentees participate in face-to-face meetings with their mentors that average a minimum of once a week and a total of four or more hours per month over the course of the relationship, or at a minimum frequency and amount of hours that are required by the mentoring program.

## **ENHANCEMENTS**

### **Mentor Screening**

E.2.1 Program utilizes national, fingerprint-based FBI criminal background checks.

E.2.2 Program conducts at least one home visit of each prospective mentor, especially when the match may be meeting in the mentor's home.

E.2.3 Program conducts comprehensive criminal background checks on all adults living in the home of prospective mentors, including searches of a national criminal records database along with sex offender and child abuse registries, when the match may meet in mentors' homes.

E.2.4 School-based programs assess mentors' interest in maintaining contact with their mentees during the summer months (following the close of the academic school year) and offer assistance to matches in maintaining contact.

E.2.5 Programs that utilize adult mentors prioritize accepting mentor applicants who are older than college-age.

E.2.6 Program uses evidence-based screening tools and practices to identify individuals who have attitudes and beliefs that support safe and effective mentoring relationships.

### **Mentee Screening**

E.2.7 Mentees complete an application (either written or verbally).

E.2.8 Mentees provide written assent agreeing to participate in their mentoring program.

## **STANDARD 3 – TRAINING**

### **BENCHMARKS**

#### **Mentor Training**

B.3.1 Program provides a minimum of two hours of pre-match, in-person, mentor training.

**21. Group Recommendation:** Because of the increased training demands on group mentors to learn about group facilitation skills, as well as potentially about how to facilitate activities using a curriculum, pre-match mentor training should extend beyond the minimum of two hours generally recommended. While the exact length of training will vary from program to program, group programs heavy on complex activities and skill-building work may offer upward of four hours of pre-match training to mentors, as an example.



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B.3.2 Program provides pre-match training for mentors on the following topics:

a. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing, being late to meetings, and match termination).

22. Strategies for beginning and ending each group meeting.

b. Mentors' goals and expectations for the mentee, parent or guardian, and the mentoring relationship.

c. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles.

23. If there is more than one mentor in a group, training on group co-facilitation skills, including how the mentors' partnership will work, planning and leading activities together, building relationships individually and together, conflict resolution, sending consistent messages, and developing shared goals and methods.

24. Strategies for sharing power with group members so that the groups are youth-led as much as possible.

25. Rapport and team-building activities and rituals to use at every group meeting to build group cohesiveness.

26. Delivering session content/activities with fidelity and at a high quality, especially in programs that are building specific youth skills or focused on sequential activities.

27. Working with program staff to refer youth to additional programs, services, and supports to address needs beyond what the mentoring program can provide.

28. Clarifying roles and responsibilities of program staff, including which circumstances and situations should be handled by program staff or liaisons and when mentors are empowered to address situations on their own.

d. Relationship development and maintenance.

29. Strategies for treating all mentees equitably and developing close, effective relationships with all group members.

30. Strategies for encouraging all group members to participate in discussions and activities, and feel that they all belong in the group.

31. Strategies for handling negative group dynamics (e.g., cliques, conflicts, scapegoating, nonparticipation, etc.).

32. Strategies for group decision-making, handling disagreements, and handling disruptions to group activities or conversations.

e. Ethical and safety issues that may arise related to the mentoring relationship (see also B.3.3).

f. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship.

33. How to communicate with the group if one mentee leaves the group prematurely.

34. How to communicate about and plan for the ending of the full group.

35. Understanding the potential negative impact of mentors quitting groups prematurely.



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g. Sources of assistance available to support mentors.

h. Opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring specific populations of youth (e.g., children with an incarcerated parent, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth in foster care, high school dropouts), if relevant.

36. The importance of taking a strengths-based approach that emphasizes how the positive peer culture of a group can be used to meet the specific needs and goals of the population served.

37. Group facilitation and management skills, particularly recognizing the potential negative impact of “deviant peer training” and other antisocial behaviors on group members, and strategies for keeping those behaviors in check.

i. Initiating the mentoring relationship.

38. Strategies for initiating the group involving Stages of group process and implications of these group stages for developing close, supportive mentoring relationships.

j. Developing an effective, positive relationship with mentee’s family, if relevant.

B.3.3 Program provides pre-match training for the mentor on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

- a. Appropriate physical contact
- b. Contact with mentoring program (e.g., who to contact, when to contact)
- c. Relationship monitoring requirements (e.g., response time, frequency, schedule)
- d. Approved activities

e. Mandatory reporting requirements associated with suspected child abuse or neglect, and suicidality and homicidality

f. Confidentiality and anonymity

40. Group Recommendation: Program emphasizes the increased complexity of confidentiality in group settings, especially in mentee training, and encourages groups to address confidentiality in their ground rules.

- g. Digital and social media use
- h. Overnight visits and out of town travel
- i. Money spent on mentee and mentoring activities
- j. Transportation
- k. Emergency and crisis situation procedures
- l. Health and medical care
- m. Discipline
- n. Substance use
- o. Firearms and weapons
- p. Inclusion of others in match meetings (e.g., siblings, mentee’s friends)
- q. Photo and image use
- r. Evaluation and use of data
- s. Grievance procedures
- t. Other program relevant topics

B.3.4 Program uses training practices and materials that are informed by empirical research or are themselves empirically evaluated.



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## ENHANCEMENTS

### Mentor Training

E.3.1 Program provides additional pre-match training opportunities beyond the two-hour, in-person minimum for a total of six hours or more.

- 41. Group Recommendation: Program may have new mentors shadow seasoned mentor(s) or meet previous mentors and be able to ask them questions.

E.3.2 Program addresses the following post-match training topics:

- a. How developmental functioning may affect the mentoring relationship
- b. How culture, gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and other demographic characteristics of the mentor and mentee may affect the mentoring relationship

- 42. Cultural factors and how culture might influence the functioning of the group.

- c. Topics tailored to the needs and characteristics of the mentee
- d. Closure procedures

- 43. Group Recommendation: Because mentors will be closing relationships with more than one mentee, additional closure skills training is needed on topics such as how to handle the early departure of individual mentors and mentees, as well as communicating and reinforcing rules around mentor-mentee and mentee-mentee contact outside the program after closure.

- 44. Group Recommendation: During times of transition or closure, the program provides mentees with an opportunity to reflect on and share feelings about their relationships with the other youth in the group and with their mentors.

E.3.3 Program uses training to continue to screen mentors for suitability to be a mentor and develops techniques for early trouble-shooting should problems be identified.

### Mentee Training

E.3.4 Program provides training for the mentee on the following topics:

- a. Purpose of mentoring
- b. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, protocols for missing or being late to meetings, match termination)
- c. Mentees' goals for mentoring
- d. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles
- e. Mentees' obligations and appropriate roles

- 45. Group Recommendation: Mentee training should also include their role 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.

- f. Ethics and safety in mentoring relationships
- g. Initiating the mentoring relationship

- 46. Group Recommendation: Training for mentees should include information that describes the experience of participating in the group, the stages of group development, and the group's rules, goals, and rituals.

- h. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship



E.3.5 Program provides training for the mentee on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

See B.3.3 for the list of policies to address during training.

### Parent or Guardian Training

E.3.6 Program provides training for the parent(s) or guardian(s) (when appropriate) on the following topics:

- a. Purpose of mentoring
- b. Program requirements (e.g., match length, match frequency, duration of visits, and protocols for missing or being late to meetings, match termination)
  47. **Group Recommendation:** Program also clarifies policies and procedures for handling conflicts between mentees and other disciplinary issues, including who, when, and how to contact staff members.
- c. Parents' and mentees' goals for mentoring
- d. Mentors' obligations and appropriate roles
- e. Mentees' obligations and appropriate roles
- f. Ethics and safety in mentoring relationships
- g. Initiating the mentoring relationship
- h. Developing an effective, working relationship with your child's mentor
- i. Effective closure of the mentoring relationship

E.3.7 Program provides training for the parent(s) or guardian(s) on the following risk management policies that are matched to the program model, setting, and population served.

See B.3.3 for the list of policies to address during training.

## STANDARD 4 – MATCHING

### BENCHMARKS

B.4.1 Program considers the characteristics of the mentor and mentee (e.g., interests; proximity; availability; age; gender; race; ethnicity; personality; expressed preferences of mentor, mentee, and parent or guardian; goals; strengths; previous experiences) when making matches.

48. **Group Recommendation:** If the mentees know each other prior to joining the program, staff should consider the youths' prior history together when assigning them to mentoring groups (e.g., check to see if any participants are bullies or victims of bullying, if youth have "enemies" in the group, or if youth are close friends, and avoid placing these pairs together in the same group).
49. **Group Recommendation:** Program should strive for a good blend of youth backgrounds, experiences, and leadership levels in each group and avoid placing too many youth who exhibit aggressive or other negative behaviors, or who are prone to dysregulation due to trauma exposure, into the same group.
50. **Group Recommendation:** If program assigns more than one mentor to a group, program should consider matching mentors who are diverse with respect to characteristics such as age, race, gender, interpersonal skills, and professional background.
51. **Group Recommendation:** Match mentors who have more experience in a helping profession or managing groups containing one or more youth with behavior problems.



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B.4.2 Program arranges and documents an initial meeting between the mentor and mentee as well as, when relevant, with the parent or guardian.

B.4.3 Program staff member should be on site and/or present during the initial match meeting of the mentor and mentee, and, when relevant, parent or guardian.

B.4.4 Mentor, mentee, a program staff member, and, when relevant, the mentee's parent or guardian, meet in person to sign a commitment agreement consenting to the program's rules and requirements (e.g., frequency, intensity and duration of match meetings; roles of each person involved in the mentoring relationship; frequency of contact with program), and risk management policies.

**52. Group Recommendation:** Program should also include an icebreaker activity so that group members can introduce themselves to one another, discuss the topics that were covered in training, explain mentee's roles in the group context, set ground rules, and discuss goals for the group.

**B.4.5 GROUP** Co-mentors should be offered an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss their perspectives and skill sets prior to the initial match meeting with their mentees.

## ENHANCEMENTS

E.4.1 Programs match mentee with a mentor who is at least three years older than the mentee.

E.4.2 Program sponsors a group matching event where prospective mentors and mentees can meet and interact with one another, and provide the program with feedback on match preferences.

E.4.3 Program provides an opportunity for the parent(s) or guardian(s) to provide feedback about the mentor selected by the program, prior to the initiation meeting.

E.4.4 Initial match meeting occurs at the home of the mentee with the program staff member present, if the mentor will be picking up the mentee at the mentee's home for match meetings.

E.4.5 Program staff member prepares mentor for the initial meeting after the match determination has been made (e.g., provide mentor with background information about prospective mentee; remind mentor of confidentiality; discuss potential opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring proposed mentee).

E.4.6 Program staff member prepares mentee and his or her parents or guardians for the initial meeting after the match determination has been made (e.g., provide mentee and parent(s) with background information about selected mentor; discuss any family rules that should be shared with the mentor; discuss what information family members would like to share with the mentor and when).

**E.4.7 GROUP** Program may consider having a brief, announced trial period at the beginning of the program during which mentoring program leaders can observe the groups, obtain feedback from group members, and make adjustments in order to create the optimal group composition of both youth and mentors (while avoiding stigmatizing participants or generating negative feelings).





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## STANDARD 5 – MONITORING AND SUPPORT

### BENCHMARKS

B.5.1 Program contacts mentors and mentees at a minimum frequency of twice per month for the first month of the match and once a month thereafter.

**53. Group Recommendation:** Program staff members should observe each mentor-mentee group periodically, as needed, throughout the program cycle and be prepared to offer substantial support to groups that are struggling with culture or behavioral challenges.

B.5.2 At each mentor monitoring contact, program staff should ask mentors about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentor and mentee using a standardized procedure.

**54. Group Recommendation:** Program staff members should also ask mentors about the stage the group is in, the relationships between mentors who are co-leading a group, and the relationships between mentees in the group.

B.5.3 At each mentee monitoring contact, program should ask mentees about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentee using a standardized procedure.

**55. Group Recommendation:** Program staff members should also ask mentees about their relationships with their mentors and other members of the group.

B.5.4 Program follows evidence-based protocol to elicit more in-depth assessment from mentors and mentees about the quality of their mentoring relationships, and uses scientifically tested relationship assessment tools.

**56. Group Recommendation:** Program periodically assesses group dynamics, co-mentor relationships, mentor-mentee relationships, and mentee-mentee relationships.

B.5.5 Program contacts a responsible adult in each mentee's life (e.g., parent, guardian, or teacher) at a minimum frequency of twice per month for the first month of the match and once a month thereafter.

B.5.6 At each monitoring contact with a responsible adult in the mentee's life, program asks about mentoring activities, mentee outcomes, child safety issues, the quality of the mentoring relationship, and the impact of mentoring on the mentee using a standardized procedure.

B.5.7 Program regularly assesses all matches to determine if they should be closed or encouraged to continue.

B.5.8 Program documents information about each mentor-mentee meeting including, at a minimum, the date, length, and description of activity completed.

**57. Group Recommendation:** Mentors should record the activities that their group completed, especially if the activities differ from a preset curriculum, as well as significant conversations among group members, impressions of group dynamics, and information about group relationships.

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B.5.9 Program provides mentors with access to relevant resources (e.g., expert advice from program staff or others, publications, Web-based resources, experienced mentors) to help mentors address challenges in their mentoring relationships as they arise.

**58. Group Recommendation:** Program staff should also provide mentors with meaningful feedback about group outcomes, group development stages, how peer relationships may be affecting youth outcomes, whether the group is stalled at a stage, and strategies for helping the group advance to a new stage.

**59. Group Recommendation:** Program should have procedures and provide mentors with strategies for integrating new group members after the group has been initiated.

B.5.10 Program provides mentees and parents or guardians with access or referrals to relevant resources (e.g., expert advice from program staff or others, publications, Web-based resources, available social service referrals) to help families address needs and challenges as they arise.

B.5.11 Program provides one or more opportunities per year for post-match mentor training.

B.5.12 Program provides mentors with feedback on a regular basis regarding their mentees' outcomes and the impact of mentoring on their mentees to continuously improve mentee outcomes and encourage mentor retention.

## ENHANCEMENTS

E.5.1 Program conducts a minimum of one in-person monitoring and support meeting per year with mentor, mentee, and when relevant, parent or guardian.

E.5.2 Program hosts one or more group activities for matches and/or offers information about activities that matches might wish to participate in together.

**60. Group Recommendation:** Given the complexity of managing a group in addition to establishing mentoring relationships, programs should provide opportunities for all mentors to meet and talk with each other to provide each other with peer support.

E.5.3 Program hosts one or more group activities for matches and mentees' families.

E.5.4 Program thanks mentors and recognizes their contributions at some point during each year of the mentoring relationship, prior to match closure.

E.5.5 At least once each school or calendar year of the mentoring relationship, program thanks the family or a responsible adult in each mentee's life (e.g., guardian or teacher) and recognizes their contributions in supporting the mentee's engagement in mentoring.

## STANDARD 6 - CLOSURE

### BENCHMARKS

B.6.1 Program has a procedure to manage anticipated closures, when members of the match are willing and able to engage in the closure process.

**61. Group Recommendation:** Program should provide mentors with strategies for closing each meeting with rituals that encourage reflection on the group members' relationships and personal growth and allow each member to say goodbye in ways that mirror the ultimate closure of the group.



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**62. Group Recommendation:** Program should have procedures for managing, and provide mentors with strategies for continuing the group when a mentee or mentor leaves the group prematurely.

**63. Group Recommendation:** Program should build group closure activities into the curriculum or the last several meetings of the group so that closure can be adequately addressed and youth and mentors have time to reflect and process the group's dissolution.

B.6.2 Program has a procedure to manage unanticipated closures, when members of the match are willing and able to engage in the closure process.

**64. Group Recommendation:** Program should provide mentors with strategies and guidelines for discussing any mentee who left the group unexpectedly, with an emphasis on confidentiality and group concerns.

**65. Group Recommendation:** Program should establish policies and procedures for when premature departures of mentors or youth from one or more groups may necessitate the merging or dissolution of groups or other reconfigurations in the middle of the program cycle.

B.6.3 Program has a procedure to manage closure when one member of the match is unable or unwilling to engage in the closure process.

B.6.4 Program conducts exit interview with mentors and mentees, and when relevant, with parents or guardians.

B.6.5 Program has a written policy and procedure, when relevant, for managing rematching.

B.6.6 Program documents that closure procedures were followed.

B.6.7 Regardless of the reason for closure, the mentoring program should have a discussion with mentors that includes the following topics of conversation:

- a. Discussion of mentors' feelings about closure
- b. Discussion of reasons for closure, if relevant
- c. Discussion of positive experiences in the mentoring relationship
- d. Procedure for mentor notifying the mentee and his or her parents, if relevant, far enough in advance of the anticipated closure meeting to provide sufficient time to adequately prepare the mentee for closure
- e. Review of program rules for post-closure contact
- f. Creation of a plan for post-closure contact, if relevant
- g. Creation of a plan for the last match meeting, if possible
- h. Discussion of possible rematching, if relevant

B.6.8 Regardless of the reason for closure, the mentoring program should have a discussion with mentees, and when relevant, with parents or guardians that includes the following topics of conversation:

- a. Discussion of mentees' feelings about closure
- b. Discussion of reasons for closure, if relevant
- c. Discussion of positive experiences in the mentoring relationship
- d. Procedure for notification of mentor, if relevant, about the timing of closure
- e. Review of program rules for post-closure contact
- f. Creation of a plan for post-closure contact, if relevant
- g. Creation of a plan for the last match meeting, if possible
- h. Discussion of possible rematching, if relevant



**66. Group Recommendation:** Program should offer each group an opportunity to acknowledge the personal growth of each mentee, as well as to reflect on the journey of their entire group and celebrate the experience they created together.

B.6.9 Program has a written public statement to parents or guardians, if relevant, as well as to mentors and mentees that outline the terms of match closure and the policies for mentor/mentee contact after a match ends (e.g., including contacts using digital or social media).

## ENHANCEMENTS

E.6.1 At the conclusion of the agreed upon time period of the mentoring relationship, program explores the opportunity with mentors, mentees, and (when relevant) parents or guardians to continue the match for an additional period of time.

E.6.2 Program hosts a final celebration meeting or event for mentors and mentees, when relevant, to mark progress and transition or acknowledge change in the mentoring relationship.

**67. Group Recommendation:** Program invites parents, guardians, or others who are important in the life of the mentees to celebration events.

E.6.3 Program staff provide training and support to mentees and mentors, as well as, when relevant, to parents or guardians, about how mentees can identify and connect with natural mentors in their lives.



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# JUSTIFICATION AND DISCUSSION OF MAIN PRACTICE THEMES

## THEME 1

### Bringing Program Participants Together

The first major theme of this supplement for group mentoring programs are practices relevant to the strategic ways that programs bring participants together who are a good fit for the program and a good match for one another. This theme covers the Recruitment, Screening, and Matching and Initiation Standards of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th Ed.). For the most part, the recommended practices add detail and nuance to the existing Benchmarks; including 14 recommendations for Recruitment, six recommendations for Screening, and five recommendations for Matching and Initiation. In the Matching and Initiation Standard, we have added one new Benchmark and one new Enhancement that represent unique practices for group mentoring programs that are not captured in the existing practices of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th Ed.). These recommendations are derived primarily from descriptions of group mentoring programs in the research literature and input from the Working Group. It is worth noting that none of these individual practices has been rigorously evaluated, but the authors felt strongly that these represent important practices.

#### Recommendations for Participant Recruitment and Screening

Like all mentoring programs, group mentoring programs should strive to recruit the right individuals to participate in the program and screen potential mentors to identify those who best fit the program. The program goals, target mentee population, and desired outcomes will inform who is targeted for recruitment, how they are recruited, and how

individuals are screened. In terms of recruiting mentors, there are several key themes among the practices for group mentoring programs, including establishing expectations and mentor characteristics that should be considered for recruitment and screening.

#### Establishing Expectations During Mentor Recruitment and Screening

The recommended recruitment and screening practices of this supplement highlight several ways in which group mentoring programs can establish realistic expectations for what the group mentoring program experience will be like for mentors. There are three expectations that should be clearly outlined for prospective mentors during recruitment and screening, which are described in greater detail below: expectations relevant to what mentors are committing to do in the program, potential challenges of participating in the program, and supports available to mentors.

**Commitment expectations.** Fundamental to the establishment of realistic expectations is an accurate understanding of what group mentoring looks like in the context of each unique program. Thus, the first benchmark of the Recruitment Standard describes how mentor recruitment strategies and materials should “realistically portray the benefits, practices, supports, and challenges of mentoring in the program.” Following this Benchmark, the first recommendation (**B.1.1 Recommendation 1**) describes the practices of the program and stipulates that mentor recruitment strategies **emphasize that mentors will be working with more than one mentee and may also be co-mentoring** with other mentors. Some individuals, after giving it some thought, may be more interested in working one-on-one with a child, whereas others may feel like mentoring with another adult would be frustrating and would be



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more comfortable working independently with a small group. What is important is that programs clearly spell out what this experience will really be like so that prospective mentors can make a good decision about participating.

Group mentoring programs can further **emphasize the fact that mentors will have the opportunity to work with, and potentially have an impact on, the lives of multiple mentees** as a selling point of participation in the program (**B.1.2 Recommendation 5**). Mentoring programs face stiff competition for volunteers and one effective strategy to attract volunteers is to build positive attitudes and emotions about mentoring. It has been suggested that group mentoring might be more appealing to individuals who come from a culture with a collectivist worldview, in which the group or family is prioritized over the individual and programs might consider how to effectively appeal to these individuals through recruitment materials that emphasize the group experience and potential impact.<sup>1</sup> For mentoring organizations that offer different types of mentoring programs, such as one-to-one and group mentoring, volunteers who are comfortable with the group approach might find this type of mentoring particularly attractive since they have the potential to interact with more than one mentee without any significant additional time commitment

Another practice that is integral to the model of many group mentoring programs is that mentors spend a lot of their time using and delivering structured activities or a curriculum that program participants complete together during their match meetings.<sup>2,3</sup> Mentor recruitment materials should **describe the activities they might facilitate with their group of mentees so they know what to expect (B.1.1 Recommendation 2)**. For example, in the *Young Women Leader's* program, which includes both one-to-one mentoring and structured group activities, mentor-mentee groups work through a curriculum together on issues such

as body image, academics, and participate in group rituals such as sharing good and bad things that happened to them during the week.<sup>4</sup> Some potential mentors might feel more comfortable with the group mentoring experience knowing they will be provided with guidance on the activities they should do with their mentees. In fact, in a study of three group mentoring programs, mentors reported they preferred the group format and structured activities and expressed concerns about the time commitment and perceived greater level of intimacy of one-to-one mentoring relationships.<sup>5</sup> This could give group mentoring programs an advantage in recruiting mentors who are drawn to this type of mentoring experience.

After establishing time commitment requirements in recruitment, mentor screening practices should rigorously **evaluate if mentors are able to make the commitment to mentoring more than one mentee and the time commitment required** to fully participate in the program (**B.2.6 Recommendation 17 and Recommendation 18**). This can be addressed during the mentor application as well as follow-up discussions during the mentor interview. Screening materials should include specific questions of potential mentors about their schedule and availability, such as work and travel schedules, and potential upcoming life changes that might impact their ability to participate in the group. Mentors should be aware that if they are not able to consistently attend group meetings, then they will be disappointing multiple individuals in their group, including their co-mentor, if applicable. For programs that utilize co-mentors, screening should emphasize for mentors their responsibility to be reliable and consistent in attending the mentoring program to support their co-mentor and that they should not view their co-mentor as someone who can fill in for them when they cannot attend the program.

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**Expected challenges.** Inherent in group mentoring is the involvement of multiple individuals who each have their own goals, personal histories, personalities, and schedules who are working together to establish relationships with one another. One potential challenge of group mentoring that mentors should be made aware of during recruitment is the **need to establish and foster close, supportive relationships with multiple mentees** and that it may be easier to do this with some mentees than others based on personality traits, goals, personal histories, interests, etc. **(B.1.1 Recommendation 4)**. For example, mentors in a group mentoring program for adolescent girls to promote healthy lifestyles reported it was challenging to meet the needs of a diverse group of mentees who ranged in age.<sup>6</sup> In a study of three group mentoring programs, mentors reported they had closer relationships with some mentees in their group compared to others but most of the youth did not perceive differences in how the mentors treated group members, suggesting that it is feasible for mentors to have effective relationships with multiple mentees without showing preferences to some mentees over others.<sup>7</sup> However, mentors reported it was challenging to ensure all group members had an equal opportunity to contribute to the group conversations and activities and to find activities of interest to all members of the group.<sup>8</sup> The intent of this recommendation is not to deter volunteers from the group mentoring experience but to lay the groundwork for realistic expectations and describe the training and support that mentors will receive to help them manage this challenge.

**Support expectations.** In addition to pointing out challenges and time commitments of mentoring, programs should also realistically portray the supports offered to mentors during recruitment **(B.1.1 Recommendation 3)**. The provision of support for mentors should be included in mentor recruitment materials to foster self-efficacy and establish realistic

expectations for volunteers. Mentors in group mentoring programs report that the support they receive from other mentors is a valuable component of their participation in the program.<sup>9, 10, 11</sup> For example, in an evaluation of the Mentor Families group mentoring program, which matches mentor and mentee pairs with other mentor-mentee pairs to form mentor families, mentors reported this configuration fostered strong connections with other mentors and mentees in the group.<sup>12</sup> In fact, mentees have better outcomes when their co-mentors have a positive, supportive relationship with one another.<sup>13</sup> Group mentoring programs that specifically expect and foster support and connection between mentors should highlight this in their recruitment materials to foster self-efficacy and establish realistic expectations for volunteers.



### **Mentor Characteristics to Consider When Recruiting and Screening**

Identifying the characteristics of individuals who would make the most effective mentors for a given mentoring program is important work to support the overall effectiveness of the program, promote the development of strong mentoring relationships, and improve efficiency in the recruitment and screening process. When developing recruitment and screening criteria, programs should begin with the goals of the

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program and the target audience who is being served by the program and develop policies and procedures informed by the goals and target mentees. There are several specific recommendations for group mentoring programs to guide their work regarding who to target when recruiting potential mentors and how to screen potential mentors for inclusion in the program.

- To assist group mentoring programs in identifying mentors who might be more successful in establishing close relationships with diverse mentees, it is recommended that programs **screen mentors to identify those who have positive relationships with diverse colleagues in the workplace, friends, or family members (B.2.1 Recommendation 16)**. Knowing that a potential mentor already has positive relationships with diverse individuals could be a good indicator of their ability to establish positive relationships with two or more mentees who may not share their background, experiences, or interests. There are several strategies group mentoring programs can use to assess the relationships of potential mentors such as including questions in the mentor application and interview about their personal relationships. Reference checks conducted with friends, colleagues, and family members can also provide insight into the potential mentor's relationships.
- To support the development of mentee's feelings of belonging and safety in the group, some programs may want to **target potential mentors who match the diversity of the youth served by the program** to support the relevant program goals regarding diversity, inclusion, belonging and safety (**B.1.3 Recommendation 7**). Based on findings from one study of three group mentoring programs from across the United States, these three programs were more likely to specifically target racial and ethnic

minority youth and serve more African-American youth than one-to-one programs.<sup>14</sup> Thus, group mentoring programs must make a concerted effort to recruit potential mentors who share a history, ethnicity, or background with the target mentees of the program to meet the needs of their program, particularly if a goal of the program is to support the identity development of participating mentees. This recommendation is supported by findings from research on several different types of mentoring, although to our knowledge, matching practices have not been evaluated in group mentoring programs. For example, one study evaluating a one-to-one, workplace mentoring reported that when mentees perceive they are similar to their mentor, they report higher satisfaction, greater contact with their mentor and liking their mentor more compared to mentees who do not perceive they are similar to their mentor.<sup>15</sup> Further, mentees in this program who were paired with mentors who were similar in terms of gender and race also reported greater perceived career support and liking their mentor compared to mentees paired with a different race mentor.<sup>16</sup> Efforts to recruit mentors who have similar backgrounds and experiences to the mentees in the program may support greater group cohesion in the group, which is important for the overall success of group mentoring relationships.

- Given the added complexity of group mentoring, programs that use this approach should **prioritize recruiting and screening mentors who have additional education, employment, or training in the skills that will help support the establishment of close relationships among all members of the group (B.1.3 Recommendation 6; B.2.1 Recommendation 15)**. There are four key skills that should be emphasized in recruitment and screening: 1) group facilitation skills with youth, 2) empathic listening skills, 3) social skills, and when



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relevant, 4) skills in implementing a curriculum with fidelity. These skills are recommended to increase the likelihood that mentors will start with a strong foundation in their capacity to foster mentee's feelings of belonging, safety and comfort in the group mentoring program. The importance of these feelings among mentees are emphasized in much of literature on group mentoring as a critical component to achieving the desired outcomes.<sup>17, 18, 19</sup> For example, mentees in a small, high school group mentoring program reported that comfort, nonacademic support, academic support, and safety were the primary benefits of the group mentoring experience.<sup>20</sup> In addition, for programs that include structured activities or a curriculum, it is key for mentors to understand the importance of fidelity and consistency to the planned activities. In one study of a group mentoring program that included a curriculum, implementation fidelity was reported as a significant challenge during the program and in fact the impact of the program on mentee outcomes varied based on the attendance of group members and progression through the curriculum.<sup>21</sup> Mentors do not necessarily have to be experts in these skills to volunteer in a group mentoring program. However, group mentoring programs should consider where they can recruit mentors who are more likely to possess these skills. Programs should also consider what messages to include in their recruitment materials that would highlight the importance of these skills for mentors in the program. When designing screening policies and procedures, group mentoring programs should include questions on application forms and interview procedures to assess these skills. The importance of these skills is described in more detail in the second theme on training mentors.

- Finally, if a group mentoring program has chosen to take a team approach to mentoring, then recruitment strategies should **target potential volunteers who have the professional expertise, relevant skill sets, and backgrounds that are needed to create a complementary team of mentors (B.1.3 Recommendation 8)**. For example, a group mentoring program that has a goal of fostering STEM interests and goals in mentees may determine it is important for the mentoring teams to have a diverse array of STEM professionals and should identify mentor recruitment strategies that will help support the creation of diverse teams. Some recommended strategies include partnering with businesses or other organizations that have a large pool of diverse individuals who could work together as mentor teams.

For programs looking for more guidance around screening of group mentors, please see the tips provided by the National Urban League in the next section.

## Recruitment and Screening of Mentees and Parents

Mentee and parent recruitment in group mentoring programs also requires some additional considerations. To help prepare mentees and parents for the group mentoring experience, the recruitment materials and strategies should **accurately describe the unique benefits of the group mentoring experience** such as the opportunity to benefit from the relationship with one or more mentors as well as developing relationships with peers **(B.1.6 Recommendation 9)**.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup> With multiple people involved in a group mentoring relationship, if a mentee does not have a particularly close relationship with one mentor, they may have formed close relationships with another mentor or other mentees in the group.<sup>25</sup>







One unique approach to mentee recruitment entails recruiting youth based on their interests and the things they would like to learn about or achieve through the mentoring relationships. In these programs, youth essentially establish their goals for the mentoring relationship from the beginning and the program staff then recruit mentors who have expertise or experience in the types of things that the mentees are interested in learning about or achieving.

Obviously, many programs start with some overarching, program-driven goals in mind for participating youth, but this approach to mentee recruitment gets automatic buy-in from youth because they set the agenda for the mentoring groups from the very start. This is one approach to mentee recruitment that might appeal to certain programs.

Recruitment materials should **clearly describe to mentees and parents how the groups are configured (B.1.6 Recommendation 10), how matches are made, how the mentoring relationships are monitored throughout the program so they know what to expect,** and are aware of program rules and procedures **(B.1.6 Recommendation 11)**. For example, if mentees who are already close friends are purposely not matched together in a group, then that should be stated up front to potential program participants to avoid any disappointment or surprises during the

matching process. This can be accomplished through an FAQ document, for example, or documentation on the program website for potential mentees. See the final section of this resource for additional tips that can help set the expectations for youth applicants during recruitment.

Information on **how mentees are expected to participate in the group relationship and which youth would most likely benefit from the group mentoring experience** should also be integrated into the recruitment and screening policies and procedures **(B.1.6 Recommendation 12; B.1.7 Recommendation 13 and Recommendation 14; B.2.8 Recommendation 19; B.2.8 Recommendation 20)**. Some research suggests that group mentoring relationships are not as intense as one-to-one mentoring relationships;<sup>26</sup> however, all members of the group are typically expected to contribute to the group conversations and activities. For mentees who struggle with lower levels of communication and trust or anxiety in group settings, then group mentoring might offer a context for expanding one's peer networks, deepening relationships with existing peers, and promoting self-regulation.<sup>27</sup> Group mentoring can benefit youth who are demonstrating behavioral issues<sup>28, 29</sup> but mentoring programs should ensure they can adequately support the youth who are demonstrating behavioral issues and perhaps refer those they can't support to more appropriate services.<sup>30, 31</sup> Clear criteria for accepting mentees who can best be served by the group mentoring program will support effective and efficient recruitment and screening of mentees. These criteria should also be clearly communicated to any agencies or institutions that refer youth to the program so they are well-positioned to refer the most appropriate youth.





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## Creating Effective Matches

Group mentoring programs have a complex task when it comes to making matches between program participants. In addition to the mentor and mentee characteristics that should be considered for any mentoring relationship, which are outlined in Benchmark B.4.1, group mentoring programs have several additional considerations.

- First, when assigning mentees to a group, the relationship histories and existing connections of all mentees in the group should be assessed and taken into consideration to **avoid grouping together participants with a history of negative interactions (B.4.1 Recommendation 48)**. The concern is that pre-existing negative relationships between program participants could significantly impede the development of positive group dynamics and interfere with the goals of the group mentoring experience. In addition, if a primary goal of the program is to help mentees establish new peer relationships, programs may consider not matching close friends in the same group.
- Another important concern for group mentoring programs is to **minimize matching mentees who have a history of demonstrating aggressive, delinquent, or dysregulated behaviors (B.4.1 Recommendation 49)**. Research from the field of child and adolescent group psychotherapy has documented that groups are less effective when they include only antisocial youth compared to groups with a mix of youth who do and do not have a history of antisocial behavior.<sup>32</sup> This builds on the growing body of literature documenting the benefits of mixing groups of young people who are demonstrating antisocial behaviors with young people who do not display these behaviors to support the development of social skills.<sup>33</sup> For mentoring groups that do include mentees with a

history of antisocial behavior, the program should **prioritize matching these groups with mentors who have more experience with managing groups or working with youth with behavior problems (B.4.1 Recommendation 51)**. For example, individuals who have been previously trained in this topic or who work in a profession that has provided experience working with this population of youth may be more successful in keeping a group with several youth with behavioral challenges on task.

- Finally, in terms of mentor characteristics that should be considered when matching in group programs, if the mentoring relationships include more than one mentor in a group, programs should **strive for mentor diversity** in terms of age, race, gender, interpersonal skills, professional background, experiences, knowledge, skills, etc. **(B.4.1 Recommendation 50)**. This increases the opportunity for mentees in the group to find a mentor that they connect with in terms of shared backgrounds and interests.

## Initiation of Group Mentoring Relationships

Once group mentoring matches are made, then begins the process of introducing all of the group members and officially kicking off the group mentoring experience. The initial meeting between mentoring group members will begin to set the tone for the group and all members should be properly prepared for the initiation of the relationship during orientation and training. If a group mentoring program includes a co-mentoring approach, it is recommended that the program **create an opportunity for co-mentors to meet and get to know one another before their first meeting with mentees (B.4.5 GROUP)**. As described above, youth in mentoring relationships with co-mentors have better outcomes when their co-mentors have a positive, supportive relationship.<sup>34</sup> This new benchmark, unique to group mentoring



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programs, stipulates that group mentoring programs allow co-mentors an opportunity to get to know one another and lay the foundation for a positive working relationship. It can take time for co-mentors to establish this kind of relationship and this arrangement does present its own challenges such as differences in experience, personality, and approach.<sup>35</sup> This meeting could occur during mentor training or after training as a separate meeting that is facilitated by the mentoring program staff. Co-mentors could also be provided with materials by the program to guide their introductions to one another, mutually agree on goals for the group, discuss their relevant skills and perspectives on mentoring with one another.

To facilitate the process of creating group cohesion, familiarity, and comfort, group mentoring programs should **provide guidance for group members leading icebreaker activities to introduce themselves to one another, clarify roles, establish ground rules, and set goals for the group (B.4.4 Recommendation 52)**, allowing all members of the group an opportunity to contribute. These practices create positive rapport among group members and are associated with closer mentoring relationships.<sup>36</sup> Activities that help program participants identify what they have in common can establish important rituals for the group, which can further support group cohesion.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, programs should **consider having a brief trial period at the beginning of the program during which mentoring program leaders can observe the groups, obtain feedback from group members, and adjust for the most optimal group composition (E.4.7 GROUP)**. If programs choose to take this approach, it must be done thoughtfully. Before forming groups, it must be communicated to all program participants that there will be a set amount of time at the beginning of the program that will allow for everyone to get to know one another and that changes to the groups might be

made based on expressed preferences and interests of the participants. Both mentors and mentees should be privately asked about their feelings of comfort with their group and whether their group assignment is meeting their needs and goals. If group assignments are modified at the beginning of the program, program staff must ensure that this is done in a way that is sensitive to the feelings of all the group members in order to avoid feelings of shame at being singled out and moved to a different group, regardless of the reasons for this decision.

## THEME 2

### Preparing Groups for Success

Preparing mentors and mentees in group programs for the experience that awaits them is predicated on effective and tailored training experiences for everyone involved in the group mentoring program, and is considered to be fundamental to successful match and youth outcomes. As in any type of mentoring program, mentors, mentees, and parents or guardians need not only an orientation to the specific requirements of their program, but also robust training on what to expect from a group-based approach to mentoring relationships, which are inherently more complex than the traditional one-to-one forms of mentoring. All of the pre-existing Benchmark practices that are relevant to pre-match preparation that are outlined in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th Ed.) are still relevant to group mentoring. In addition to these Benchmarks, we have added 27 training recommendations for group mentoring programs. These recommendations are specifically tailored to the needs, challenges, and unique aspects of preparing group members to participate in a positive, rewarding, growth-enhancing experience.



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Some consistent themes for pre-match preparation emerged from reviewing the literature; however, there were few empirical studies that directly tested training and preparation experiences. Thus, many recommendations in this section emerged out of discussions with Working Group members or descriptions of group mentoring programs in the literature.

### **The minimum duration of pre-match mentor training needs to be increased.**

The first training benchmark (**B.3.1 Recommendation 21**) addresses the required minimum duration for pre-match training of mentors and defines it as being two hours. However, for group mentors, all Working Group members universally agreed and all the literature we reviewed supported the fact that two hours of pre-match mentor training is insufficient to address all the topics needed for mentors to be prepared and effective in this role. The length of time spent in training mentors was not uniformly mentioned in the articles on group mentoring, and when it was mentioned, we found that it ranged greatly across programs and studies. The wide variety of training lengths found in the literature reflected the wide diversity across programs in their goals, and the knowledge and experience of the mentors they recruited. For example, one evidence-based group mentoring program, Project Arrive, had all mentors attend a four-hour pre-match training.<sup>38</sup> Several other programs, including the Go Girls! Program<sup>39</sup> and a sports-based youth development mentorship after-school program in Hong Kong, China,<sup>40</sup> required mentors to attend a full-day training workshop. In another training model, Campus Corps required 20 hours of training in a service-learning course, as well as one-hour pre- and post-group supervision sessions after each weekly mentoring meeting where college student mentors discussed issues with their mentees that arose during the session and practiced applying

new knowledge they learned in their course (e.g., on topics such as adolescent development, using strength-based approaches) to their mentees and their mentoring relationships.<sup>41</sup>

At the longer end of the spectrum of required training, the Youth Development Program required college mentors to attend one-half day of training plus attend a one-semester course as well as attend weekly supervision during the period of their mentorship,<sup>42</sup> and the Young Women Leaders Program required college mentors to attend a two-semester course as well as regular match support meetings.<sup>43, 44</sup> These few examples of experiential learning college courses that included a practicum experience of serving as a group mentor occurred both pre-match as well as concurrently with their mentoring experience. Thus, no consensus emerged as to the ideal length of time for pre-match group mentor training and it appears that the length is, at least partially, dependent upon the goals, methods, requirements, mentee and mentor characteristics, and desired outcomes of the group mentoring program.

### **Training should reflect that mentors are building relationships with, and impacting, more than one mentee.**



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Although it is obvious, by definition, group mentors will be having an impact on more than one child, and heightening mentor's awareness of this fact is an important topic to include in pre-match training. Traditional pre-match mentor training helps mentors to learn skills for developing a close, positive relationship with a single mentee. In addition to those core skills, group mentors must also learn how to multiply their efforts and expand their skills across more than one mentee to be able to develop close, positive, effective relationships with each of their mentees (**B.3.2.d Recommendation 29**). Mentors have reported that it can be challenging to try to meet the needs of a diverse group of mentees, especially if their mentees vary by age.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, mentors will likely need training on supporting activity completion by mentees who have different levels of ability and background. Thus, training on developmental and individual differences issues related to mentoring may be needed for mentors working with groups of mentees who are different ages and have different levels of experience or ability in a particular topic area.

In addition, mentors need training on the potential pitfalls or issues that may arise when trying to even-handedly pay attention to more than one mentee during a group mentoring session. Some examples of topics noted in group mentoring contexts include mentees or mentors being distracted from meaningful conversations by peers' comments or disruptive behavior, mentees being jealous of one another, or attempts at connecting with one or more mentees and how that might interfere with mentees relationships with one another.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, all pre-match mentor training is expected to include information about the positive impact of mentoring on youth as well as the potentially negative impact of premature closure on youth. In a group program, when a mentor leaves

early, it will impact all of the mentees in the group, not just one mentee, and can make it very challenging, if not impossible, for the group to be re-matched and develop a trusting bond with a new mentor (**B.3.2.f Recommendation 35**). Thus, addressing the need to make a commitment, look ahead at any major life events or travel needs, or anything else that may interfere with fulfilling their commitment should be included in pre-match training.

### **Group mentoring requires learning group facilitation skills.**

The most important recommendations for training potential group mentors have to do with preparing them to facilitate the group meetings while also managing group processes. Successfully accomplishing these multiple, simultaneous, interpersonal demands can be challenging for mentors, who may feel ill-equipped to competently deal with group dynamics such as group decision-making and handling negative interpersonal relationships between group members, while they are also trying to develop close, supportive relationships with each of the mentees in their group. In addition to these skills of developing relationships with multiple mentees, the fact that the mentees are also developing relationships with one another presents an additional layer to managing the group dynamics. Learning how to manage group dynamics is also needed, since most group mentoring programs utilize some type of curriculum or activity plan, and interpersonal dynamics need to be managed to complete the program's activities effectively and with fidelity.<sup>47</sup>

Several attitudes in mentors have been found to be critically important for supporting their ability to develop high-quality mentoring relationships, and these attitudes are helpful even when mentoring very high-risk mentees. For example, when mentors



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believed that their mentoring program provided them with opportunities to build their group facilitation skills (e.g., they can learn skills such as how to resolve conflicts peacefully), they had higher quality mentoring relationships.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, mentors have reported that they valued when their mentoring program helped them develop skills to manage multiple students in a group simultaneously, particularly when the students varied in their ability levels.<sup>49</sup> These studies suggest that it is important for group mentoring programs to communicate well to mentors letting them know that they will provide them with relevant and sufficient levels of training, so that they will learn the skills they need to know in order to be efficacious in their role as a group mentor.

A variety of training topics need to be included in mentor training for mentors to feel prepared and be efficacious in this complex role. Learning group facilitation skills, particularly group leadership skills, is a novel goal in the core mentor training field, but mastering these skills is clearly integral to effectively mentoring a group of mentees. For example, training on both interpersonal (e.g., conflict management, identifying strengths in mentees, meeting facilitation) and intrapersonal (e.g., time management, stress management, emotion regulation, adaptability) skills has been implemented by several STEM group-mentoring programs to support positive outcomes in mentees.<sup>50, 51</sup> In order for mentors to implement this wide array of interpersonal skills well and with consistency, they will need more than pre-match training. They will need ongoing support or supervision<sup>52</sup> — this topic is addressed more thoroughly in the next theme in this section.

## SEVERAL GROUP FACILITATION SKILLS NEEDED BY GROUP MENTORS AS NOTED IN THE LITERATURE ARE STATED BELOW:



### *Encouraging Participation and Creating a Sense of Belonging*

Group mentors must encourage all mentees to participate in discussions and activities, and communicate with group members in a way that helps each person feel like they belong in the group (**B.3.2.d Recommendation 30**). These skills are in the service of trying to establish group cohesion, mutual help, and a positive group climate, while being sensitive to the level of engagement and conflict in the group.<sup>53</sup> Group cohesion and climate have been shown to have many positive effects on mentees including an increased sense of school belonging, higher grades, more involvement at home, greater self-efficacy and self-awareness, and improved peer relationships.<sup>54, 55</sup> <sup>56</sup> Thus, supporting and building group cohesion and a supportive group climate serves as central goals for mentors across the life of their group.



### *Understanding and Utilizing Stages of Group Development*

In order to facilitate a group of youth, mentors would benefit from learning about the common stages of group development. Learning about the prevalent model, Tuckman's stages of group development (i.e., Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning), can help mentors understand what is happening with their group over time and the fact that group cohesion takes time to develop.<sup>57</sup>

Learning about the initial stage, the polite “forming” stage of group development presents opportunities for initiating the relationship, prior to the potentially more tumultuous “storming” stage, when the group may experience some conflict and engage in limit testing with the group's leader (**B.3.2.i**





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**Recommendation 39).** Because the “storming” stage is commonly observed in groups, training could help normalize this experience for group mentors. They can be trained to be comfortable with minor degrees of group conflict that may be experienced after the “forming” stage, and with the fact that some conflict does not necessarily mean that there is something seriously wrong with their group or their group facilitation skills. Furthermore, minor levels of conflict do not mean that specific group members need to be moved to another group. Training can also help mentors to be patient with their group process unfolding over time, to allow enough time to transpire for the group to grow beyond the “storming” stage to enter the next stage, the “norming” stage.

One innovative application of Tuckman’s model to group mentoring found in the literature involved training mentors to develop activities for their groups that matched the group’s stage. In this example, the program staff suggested that during the “performing” stage, mentors lead activities that have the goal of improving the problem-solving skills of mentees.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in addition to training on the stages of development of mentoring relationships with an individual mentee, understanding how to form relationships and manage the group as a whole will be an important topic for pre-match training for group mentors.



### *Sharing Power and Handling Conflict*

Standard pre-match mentor training includes learning about the importance of and strategies for sharing power with a single mentee. This involves sharing a leadership role and having a decision-making process. Training for group mentors needs to extend this training to learning strategies for defining roles and sharing decision-making power among a group of people. Group mentors who are effective in their role

are essentially group members, who join the group in completing activities and having conversations, and are not designated as the group leaders. In fact, this leadership role can be shared among the group members. Thus, mentors need to learn strategies for encouraging mentees to participate in the decision-making process,<sup>59, 60</sup> while remaining flexible over time. Establishing roles for groups members that are fluid across sessions can prevent having one person consistently serve in one role such as the group leader, secretary, or other role, and not having the opportunity to experience and practice being in other roles. For example, Project Arrive brings all the groups together at the end of the school year to do an all-day ropes course together.<sup>61</sup> Mentors participate in the activities along with their mentees, so it is an example of how mentors are group members rather than being in charge of running or facilitating the group meeting.

These are important skills to learn, since mentors may believe that it might be easier and faster to make decisions unilaterally (**B.3.2.c Recommendation 24**), and by making decisions for the group, mentors can undermine their mentees’ self-determination, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and perceived self-efficacy, which are important by-products of caring relationships with supportive adults.<sup>62, 63</sup> Making healthy, collaborative decisions can be disrupted by the group having poor decision-making procedures; thus, mentors would benefit from training on how to support the group by using good decision-making methods, as well as on how to handle disagreements among group members, when they happen (**B.3.2.d Recommendation 32**).



### *Handling Negative Group Dynamics*

Mentors need to learn strategies for handling negative behaviors and interpersonal issues among group members (**B.3.2.d Recommendation 31**). For example,



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groups are at risk for developing cliques or subgroups that can result in excluding one or more group members. This process can result in scapegoating, discrimination, or disengagement, and consequently, low satisfaction with the mentoring experience.<sup>64, 65</sup> In addition, one or more group members may be extremely shy or withdrawn, and this type of mentee could easily avoid participating in group discussion or activities. A mentee exhibiting this type of behavior is at risk for victimization or being ostracized by the group. Helping groups to be harmonious and helping group members to get along with one another may be critical skills for mentors to learn to keep their group from breaking apart or disbanding.



### *Establishing a Positive Peer Culture*

The beginning stages of the group are important for setting the scene for testing and establishing the expectations of group members and the relationships among all parties involved. Training mentors to adopt a strengths-based perspective toward their group members will contribute to establishing a positive peer culture and building assets in mentees (**B.3.2.h Recommendation 36**). One way to facilitate the development of a positive peer culture is to train mentors to be aware of relationally aggressive behaviors such as peer exclusion and negative gossip, that are potentially destructive group processes. In addition to how recognizing when a group member is being excluded or left out is critical, mentors can learn how to enhance inclusion of an ostracized group member. Some specific strategies include purposely and intentionally facilitating, enforcing, and modeling positive peer relationships.<sup>66</sup> In this way, mentors can be trained to turn this type of social situation into a teachable moment, thereby, modeling and creating a safe space and climate for their group members to interact with one another.<sup>67</sup> Other strategies for building a safe space and positive

peer culture is to establish ground rules for the group that include the importance of confidentiality (**B.3.3.f Recommendation 40**) and providing mutual help to one another.



### *Managing Deviant Behavior and Promoting Prosocial Goals*

When group mentoring programs focus recruitment efforts on providing mentoring to primarily at risk youth, mentors and staff need additional, special training on identifying signs that one or more group members may be having a negative effect on their peers.<sup>68</sup> In other words, youth tend to imitate one another, especially if the group rewards the behavior of a member by smiling, laughing, or agreeing with a story or action. Even in a mentoring program that is focused on building prosocial behavior, these “war” stories may be shared and how to respond when they happen is key.<sup>69</sup> When this story or action is unhealthy, risky, or illegal, it can begin a process of deviancy training. In other words, one or more group members can “train” their peers to behave in deviant rather than prosocial ways. The iatrogenic effects of group interventions outside of mentoring that include youth who exhibit antisocial behavior are well-established and managing the negative influence of these behaviors exhibited during group meetings on peers can be very challenging, even for highly supervised and trained mental health clinicians.<sup>70</sup>

Helping mentors to be aware of group processes that reinforce deviant or unhealthy (e.g., delinquent, aggressive, substance using) behaviors, how deviant behavior in the group influences group members, and strategies for managing the group to not imitate those behaviors should be an integral part of pre-match training (**B.3.2.h Recommendation 37**). Mentors can also be trained to directly address antisocial or negative peer relations with a corrective action to deescalate the negative process occurring among



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group members and potentially promote prosocial contagion instead.<sup>71,72</sup> Notably, high levels of structure and supervision in the group not only help to support the creation of a group identity, but also reduce violent and counter-normative behaviors in youth groups.<sup>73</sup>

Another way that negative peer relations is manifested in group meetings is when a group member is disruptive while a peer or mentor is talking, or while the group is participating in an activity together. Training on how to handle these types of situations can serve multiple goals (**B.3.2.d Recommendation 32**). By managing low-level disruptive or opposition behavior as part of general group facilitation skills training, mentors can support the development and maintenance of a positive peer culture, while minimizing the likelihood of deviant peer processes from taking root in the group.

### Co-facilitating a group presents new challenges and training needs.

Many group mentoring programs utilize a model where two or more mentors work together with one group of mentees. Mentors may find this model particularly attractive, because they can share management of the mentees in the group and facilitating activities with one another. Notably, when co-mentors have a supportive working relationship with one another, it is associated with better outcomes in mentees.<sup>74</sup> In addition, mentors report being supported by one another in a peer supervision context, as well as comforted and relieved by having immediate and ongoing access to these additional resources.<sup>75</sup> In fact, some mentors have even reported that they did not want to be a group mentor, because they thought it would be too challenging to manage group dynamics, especially on their own.<sup>76</sup>

Despite many advantages to co-mentoring, it presents its own challenges. In addition to establishing

group identity, meaningful relationships with each mentee, working relationships with the program staff members, and maintaining smooth group processes, mentors who co-facilitate groups also need to establish good working relationships with each other and have sufficient time to do so.<sup>77</sup> Some mentors have reported that it takes months to learn how to co-lead a group with a peer and that participation in weekly post-group processing sessions were helpful to support this process.<sup>78</sup> One suggestion is for co-mentors to have time to get to know one another before launching the program.<sup>79</sup>

Co-mentors need to understand and learn how to develop a partnership, resolve conflict, send consistent messages, and shared goals and methods of co-facilitation (**B.3.2.c Recommendation 23**). As discussed in the Program Planning and Design section, group mentoring has many advantages for the co-mentors themselves, including providing them with expanded opportunities for networking with others and having meaningful conversations with diverse peers.<sup>80</sup> Co-mentoring also has advantages for mentees by being able to experience and see the strengths and weaknesses of more than one mentor.<sup>81</sup>

### Initiating relationships with and among a group of mentees requires special skills.

Mentors can benefit from learning strategies for how to initiate their group (**B.3.2 Recommendation 22**) including beginning to develop a rapport with their mentees, helping their mentees get to know one another, setting the group rules, and beginning to have the group define itself toward building a group identity. Furthermore, for mentees to contribute to the success of the group, they also need training on how they can contribute to establishing the group's rules, goals, and rituals (**E.3.4.h Recommendation 46**). In one example of a group mentoring program serving youth involved in the juvenile justice system,

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mentees contributed to setting group rules in the first session.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the structure, conversations, and activities conducted during the first group meeting can be pivotal for beginning to build a sense of belonging in mentees and connectedness with one another.<sup>83</sup> Notably, in a qualitative study of adolescents' experiences in the Go Girls! program in Canada, most of the girls interviewed talked about a sense of belonging in the group, the building of strong bonds, and feeling that they were building lifelong relationships.<sup>84</sup> One way that group mentors can help to create a welcoming environment is to learn strategies for involving all group members in conversations and activities at the first meeting, so that each member leaves feeling that they are an integral part of the group (**B.3.2.i Recommendation 38**). The first meeting can set the stage for future relationships among mentees; hence, mentors want to be sure that each mentee has a voice at the first as well as at subsequent meetings.

Mentees may be more used to one-to-one types of mentoring or helping relationships with caring adults where they are the center of attention and where their needs take precedence over the needs of peers. The group mentoring context does require mentees to share the limelight with each other, so to speak; but with this reduction in focused attention comes other benefits, such as developing supportive relationships with a diverse group of peers. Because of the unique nature of this model of mentoring, pre-match training for mentees about group mentoring is important to help them understand their role and how they can get the most out of the group mentoring experience (**E.3.4.e Recommendation 45**).

### **Group rituals, rules, and norms help to build a group identity.**

One strategy for building a strong alliance to the group is by building a strong positive, group identity

(**B.3.2.c Recommendation 25**). The building of strong group identity can be facilitated, particularly for youth who are still learning about themselves in relationship to others, through the group being well-defined; the group having clear boundaries; there being shared goals among group members; the members experiencing the same frequency, intensity, and duration of meetings and a common structure; and the social interactions being primarily positive.<sup>85</sup> Notably, trained mentors have reported that learning how to facilitate group meetings with the goal of building relationships among all group members and a group identity is important and required specific training.<sup>86</sup>

Further support for reducing group ambiguity comes from findings suggesting that high levels of clarity and appropriate structure are associated with mentoring relationship quality.<sup>87</sup> In addition, one study found that a key part of building group cohesion was to build collective efficacy; in other words, the group's shared belief in its ability to execute a task or achieve a goal effectively.<sup>88</sup> These findings suggest that believing in the efficacy of the group may be even more important for performing a task together than believing in one's own personal efficacy.

Practically speaking, mentors should be trained in how to establish their group's rules during the first group meeting, as well as how to build group identity and a sense of collective efficacy over time. In addition, mentors could use training and support on how to develop group rituals, such as having an opening exercise and closing activity at each group meeting, which can help youth to know what to expect. Building group identity and cohesiveness are key goals of sustaining mentors' and mentees' commitment to and satisfaction with their relationship.

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## Group mentors should coordinate and collaborate with program staff.

Unlike the involvement of program staff in most one-to-one mentoring programs, the program staff in group mentoring programs are typically present during match meetings and may even participate in match activities. This social context makes training mentors on how to coordinate and collaborate with program staff a greater need **(B.3.2.c Recommendation 28)**. For example, there may be some group situations where the mentoring program would prefer that mentors handle group relations and other situations where the program would prefer that the staff intervene. Mentors need to understand the boundaries between what they should and shouldn't do during group meeting and with their group members. Parents can also benefit from training on this topic, so that if they learn of any conflicts or disagreements among group members from their child, they know who to contact and how to contact staff members **(E.3.6.b Recommendation 47)**.

Mentors play an important role of communicating information about the needs of mentees and their family members, if relevant, to the staff at their mentoring program. Training is needed on how to work with the program staff on the needs of their mentees with respect to potential additional program, services, and supports to address needs beyond what the mentoring program can provide **(B.3.2.c Recommendation 27)**.

## Group models offer unique opportunities for mentors to get mentored.

Most mentoring programs require that mentors attend in-person, instructor-led training workshops and/or complete online, web-based, or mobile training courses; however, group mentoring provides the opportunity to offer a unique supplement to pre-match mentor training, namely, having new mentors

shadow seasoned mentors while they are leading a group **(E.3.1 Recommendation 41)**. One example is the Reading for Life mentoring program where volunteer mentors shadowed experienced mentors for 12 weeks, in addition to receiving extensive training. The lengthy mentor preparation may have been due to the fact that it was a juvenile diversion program for nonviolent offenders requiring mentors to have more advanced skills and knowledge.<sup>89</sup> Many mentoring programs have new mentors meet with previous mentors to be able to hear about their experiences and ask them questions about their concerns. All these methods provide an opportunity to both train mentors and observe them to learn more about their training needs and readiness to begin mentoring, as well as to support the development of mentors having realistic expectations.

## Cultural backgrounds of mentors and mentees can influence group relations.

The standard benchmark recommendations for mentor training include core cultural awareness training, because mentees may come from different cultural, gender, racial, religious, socioeconomic, or other identity relevant backgrounds than the mentor. Basic training on how cultural background may affect relationship development is multiplied within groups, since not only may the mentees differ from their mentors, but they may also differ from each other. Thus, cultural background may influence group dynamics and development<sup>90</sup>, and mentors could benefit from training on how these cultural factors may be influential and how to address them to establish positive group relations **(E.3.2.b Recommendation 42)**. For example, in Project Arrive, during mentor training, pairs of mentors interview each other about their ethnic identity using an interview protocol developed by Jean Phinney. This activity helped mentors learn interviewing skills, learn about each other, and explore and reflect on their



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own ethnic identity.<sup>91</sup> In another example, Pyramid Mentoring, a culturally centered group mentoring model, provides mentors with 20 hours of training related to learning about Afrocentric cultural assets, values, and socialization practices to support healthy identity development in mentees at risk for youth violence.<sup>92</sup> In general, training topics on cultural awareness and identity will vary across programs, based on the goals, strategies, and composition of the group, as well as the goals and design of the program.

### **Mentors need training in how to implement the group's activities with fidelity and flexibility.**

Many group mentoring programs require mentors to lead preplanned activities or co-lead activities with program staff members. Mentors are not trained or expected to be group therapists, guidance counselors, or psychologists, so facilitating group meetings that solely consist of unstructured conversations can be uncomfortable, unproductive, and even potentially harmful.<sup>93</sup> In fact, many group mentoring programs utilize a curriculum that has to be learned and mastered, which can help keep mentees engaged, busy, and learning new skills.

Using a curriculum or preplanned activities can be advantageous to building commitment and engagement in the program, as well as provide the group with structure and direction. It is best done when matches select their activities collaboratively,<sup>94</sup> and when the conversations and activities address the mentees' goals on issues such as their education, career, and financial status.<sup>95</sup> In fact, some mentees, especially female mentees,<sup>96</sup> have reported that engaging in instrumental activities during their group meetings, in addition to more relationship building activities, are important to them and can contribute to positive relationship development in groups.<sup>97, 98</sup> By using a curriculum, it can provide opportunities to

discuss sensitive topics that otherwise might appear awkward or intrusive for a mentor to initiate on their own.<sup>99</sup>

If the curriculum is an important part of the logic model where the knowledge or skills learned in the curriculum are considered fundamental to impacting mentees, then mentors will need specific training in how to implement the curriculum activities with fidelity (**B.3.2.c Recommendation 26**). Mentors should be provided with tools to help them with learning the goals and instructions for implementing activities such as a comprehensive resource manual with detailed instructions for each activity.<sup>100</sup>

Fidelity is important, but so is flexibility. In the Young Women Leaders Program, the curriculum that was used was seen as a valuable resource; however, results from a qualitative study suggest that when it was delivered too rigidly, it was reported to stifle interactions.<sup>101</sup> Either way, training on the faithful implementation of a curriculum is needed as well as training on how and when to be flexible regarding curriculum implementation, and together these skills may be critical for achieving positive mentee outcomes.

There are some types of group mentoring programs, such as STEM mentoring programs, where completing group activities requires technical expertise or following a complex set of instructions, which can take mentors attention away from their mentees and building their mentoring relationships. Thus, having program staff help out by leading activities can be advantageous. For example, in the STEM RAYS program, an after-school science club for elementary school students, elementary school teachers facilitated group meetings and were extensively trained in advance by attending a three-day workshop with scientists, who they subsequently met with once a month in order to continue to develop their

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subject matter expertise.<sup>102</sup> In the STEM Mentoring Supplement,<sup>103</sup> it was noted that some STEM mentoring programs ask their paid staff member to lead activities.<sup>104</sup> When staff take on this role, it frees up mentors to be able to focus their attention on their mentees rather than on the activity and how to complete it. Whether the mentoring program is STEM- or curriculum-focused, having staff play a more active role in leading activities can also help mentors share power, leadership roles, and decision-making with their mentees, since their roles are more equivalent in terms of the group process.

Parallel to the practices of some STEM mentoring programs that require mentors to have specific STEM education, skills, or expertise, there are other group mentoring programs that are designed for youth in clinical populations or who have been exposed to traumatic events or include activities on complex topics. In these types of programs, mentors should receive intense training and/or have advanced or specialized degrees. For example, one group mentoring program for preadolescent children receiving both cognitive-behavioral treatment services and group mentoring recruited highly trained undergrad and masters' student mentors who received 24 hours of training in the use of a cognitive-behavioral curriculum.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, in a mutual aid, group-based intervention with a clinical sample of high school student mentees, mentors who facilitated the group meetings were trained, highly experienced school counselors.<sup>106</sup> In a sexual health promotion group mentoring program in Korea, mentors were nursing students who were enrolled in two related courses on health promotion and health education.<sup>107</sup> In the Fostering Healthy Futures program for 9- to 11-year-old children who were recently placed in foster care because of child maltreatment, skills groups and one-to-one mentoring were led by graduate students in social work, who received

course credit for participating in the project.<sup>108</sup> If a mentoring program is serving a vulnerable or specific population, then they need to think carefully about the skills, backgrounds, and educational context that their mentors need to be successful in serving mentees in their program, as well as the skills that can be developed through training and supervisions, once they are on board.

### **Maintaining confidentiality in group mentoring is important, but can be challenging.**

All mentor training is expected to address the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of their mentee; however, this task can become quite complex when mentoring a group of mentees. Mentees may know each other in school and want to talk about what is happening in the group outside of group meetings. Mentees may be active on social media and may post information about each other, their mentor, or their group activities. Although group members may be peers, or in the same age or grade group, they may not be friends outside of the group. Thus, mentees may not be afforded the same freedom of communication about one another or on social media that they may have with a friend. Training mentors to help their mentees think through issues about confidentiality, and the importance of being sensitive to the feelings and privacy of their peers in the group is important<sup>109</sup> **(B.3.3.f Recommendation 40)**. This topic is important for programs to address during orientation, screening, and enrollment, as well as in their written policy communications; and important for mentors to discuss during the first group meeting as well as regularly thereafter.



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## Relationship closure is a little more complex with a group of mentees.

Just as there are some unique aspects to beginning group mentoring relationships, mentors also need training to close their relationships in supportive, healthy, and positive ways. Closure is challenging for mentors in most one-to-one mentoring relationships; however, with a group mentoring program, these challenges are multiplied by needing to close their mentoring relationship with each mentee, as well as for each mentee to close their relationships with each other.



One way to support the group in preparing for group closure is to train mentors about the value of communicating to the group about when and how the group will end (**B.3.2.f Recommendation 34**). Mentors should talk about it early and often, so that mentees have time to process their feelings about the group ending, as well as have ample time for closure activities and winding things down. This is particularly true for programs that do not follow a school year. Staff and mentors should let everyone know at the beginning of the program when the final date of the program will be. Open communication about closure can prevent mentees from trickling out of the program before the group ends.

Another scenario to cover in training is how to handle the situation when a mentee leaves the group prematurely. In particular, mentors need training on how to communicate with the remaining group members about the group's loss (**B.3.2.f Recommendation 33**).

Programs also need to make policy decisions about how they want to handle communication between mentors and mentees, as well as between mentees with one another, after a group mentoring program ends, and to train mentors in those policies (**E.3.2.d Recommendation 43**).

Traditional training on match closure encourages mentors to reflect with their mentees about their relationship and the impact of mentoring on them. An extension of this practice to group mentoring is a recommendation (**E.3.2.d Recommendation 44**) that mentors give their mentees opportunities to reflect on and share their feelings about their relationships with both their mentors and peers, as well as their impact on them. In a qualitative study, mentees reported that mentors and peers had an impact on different types of outcomes, so that, taken together, having both sources of support proved to have a broader impact than one alone.<sup>10</sup> For example, girls attributed academic changes more to their mentors than to their peers; whereas, girls attributed change in their relationships, such as making friends or helping others, more to their fellow group members than to their mentors. Similarly, in a seminal study of group mentoring, youth who participated in group mentoring programs improved in their relationships with peers as well as in their relationships with other adults, besides their mentor.<sup>11</sup>

Please see the final section of this resource for more tips on how programs can handle recruitment planning, courtesy of Girls Inc.

## THEME 3

### Preparing Groups for Success

The third major theme of this Supplement for group mentoring programs involves a set of practices that are designed to help mentoring programs support mentors and mentees in groups. These recommendations broadly include the Monitoring and Support, and Closure Standards of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th Ed.). There were eight recommendations added to the Monitoring and Support Standard and eight recommendations added to the Closure Standard. The basis for these recommendations came from a few research studies on group mentoring, as well as from descriptions of group mentoring programs and suggestions from the Working Group.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MATCH MONITORING

##### Staff can and should be a “fly on the wall” to observe group mentoring sessions.

Mentoring program staff in group mentoring programs can utilize traditional methods of monitoring, such as having regularly scheduled, monthly telephone calls, emails, or texts with mentors, mentees and parents or guardians of mentees. In addition, they can take advantage of the fact that they are present during group meetings, which is a unique opportunity in the mentoring field, such that they can directly observe each mentoring group in the program (**B.5.1 Recommendation 53**). Furthermore, they can observe the groups on multiple occasions over time to watch the unfolding of group processes, development of relationships, and growth of group members. This type of monitoring can be especially helpful in match support conversations in that program staff will have firsthand information that they can share. Given the

complexities inherent in group relationships, staff need to be vigilant and closely monitor the interactions among group members. Otherwise, they may not be aware of issues that could arise that might challenge the effectiveness and longevity of the group.

One danger of relying on self-reports of group members is that they may be biased, exaggerated, or misconstrued, particularly, if the group member does not have a strong understanding of group process issues. With more objective monitoring by program staff, their observations can provide a useful and potentially positive, balanced perspective on interpretations of group processes. For example, during times of stress in a group, such as during the “storming” stage, intragroup conflict may be occurring in ways that mentors do not see and an observing staff person may be able to help guide the group toward greater group cohesion and help them to enter the “norming” stage.<sup>112</sup> Another example where direct observation by staff may be important is when there is a shy or withdrawn group member who rarely participates during the group.<sup>113</sup> Mentors may be so busy managing group process and interacting with the other group members that they may not be aware that they have a mentee who is really on the periphery of the group. Staff members can be third-party observers who can help identify and ameliorate these types of situations through a close working relationship with mentors in match support meetings.

For some mentoring programs, there is a regular presence of staff on-site during mentoring meetings<sup>114</sup> (e.g., Soccer for Success); however, many programs do not have a standardized observational method or checklist, or even interview protocol that they use to assess and record information about group process. In general, it is not clear how intentional staff members are when they observe group dynamics and processes in most group mentoring programs. It will take training and professional development to help staff members

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become proficient observers of group functioning across groups in their program, as well as accurate recorders for documenting key information.

**Group mentoring programs should assess the relationships among group members and the functioning of the group as a whole.**

Monitoring of mentoring relationships by mentoring programs typically focuses on dyadic relationships; however, group mentoring introduces the need to assess multiple dyadic relationships as well as the overall group process. These additional monitoring needs require the use of special approaches and even specific collection methods and tools that may be unfamiliar to mentoring program staff. In this section, some specific questionnaires used in research are mentioned, which programs can use to formally assess group relationships. (Many of these questionnaires are included in the journal articles or can be located by contacting the authors. In addition, many questionnaires are available in the National Mentoring Resource Center’s Measurement Toolkit.) This review, however, highlights issues to note when observing group meetings and topics to discuss more informally during monitoring meetings.

**Assessing group process may require special measures and approaches.** In addition to monitoring the typical relationship processes found in one-to-one mentoring programs, namely, each mentor-mentee relationship, program staff in group mentoring programs should also assess three additional qualities of matches, including 1) group dynamics, 2) mentee-mentee relationships, and 3) if present, co-mentor relationships (**B.5.2 Recommendation 54 and B.5.4 Recommendation 56**). The assessment of these three additional aspects of programs will involve the use of a new, special set of measures and approaches.

All of the measures that were located were used

primarily in basic research studies rather than found in descriptions of practices used by individual group mentoring programs. Thus, using measures of group relationships for monitoring and support purposes is still an experimental idea and recommendation, and is not yet supported by research.

**Staff need to ask questions on new topics, as part of monitoring group matches.** Three special topics need to be addressed in monitoring, including group dynamics and the group experience, co-mentor relationships, and mentee-mentee relationships.

**1. Group dynamics and the group experience: (B.5.2 Recommendation 54 and B.5.4 Recommendation 56)** Program staff members need to ask mentors about their group climate and relationships, including the stage the group is in (after mentors have been trained in the typical stages of group development); the relationships between mentors who are co-leading a group; and the relationships between mentees in the group.

Despite the voluminous theoretical and clinical therapy literatures on<sup>115</sup> model of group development, the theory has never been validated by independent research<sup>116</sup> and no questionnaires have been located that assessed group stages in the mentoring context. Thus, although we recommend that programs assess group climate, the field does not yet have a well-validated measure to offer for this purpose. One study was located that included a promising measure of group stages,<sup>117</sup> based on the 15-item Group Process questionnaire,<sup>118</sup> but it has only been used for research on adults in a group work context. Future research might involve testing and refining this measure. or developing a new measure for use by group mentoring programs with group members to provide more formal insight into the group’s stage of development.



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In addition to measuring group dynamics, group experiences can also be monitored by talking with mentors and mentees, or using more formal self-report questionnaires. One set of strong questionnaires assess group characteristics such as **autonomy and relatedness** among group members<sup>119</sup> (e.g., 10-item scale) to provide an appraisal of relationship closeness. Similar to ratings of relatedness are ratings of **group cohesion** (such as, “would you ‘hang out’ with members of your group?”) that were shown to improve group performance on specific tasks and can be assessed in a five-item scale.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, program staff may want to measure mentees’ **sense of belonging** in the group. One measure includes group members’ evaluation of their commitment to, engagement in, and connectedness to the group in a 10-item<sup>121</sup> questionnaire or in a briefer, revised five-item measure.<sup>122</sup> Alternatively, there is an 11-item, mentee self-report questionnaire of group climate that includes items on connectedness, belonging, mutual help, and engagement that has been found to be related to mentee school-related outcomes<sup>123</sup> and relationships with peers,<sup>124</sup> as well as grades, participation at home, self-efficacy, and self-awareness.<sup>125</sup> This 11-item Group Cohesion scale, and many other relationship assessment tools, can be found on the National Mentoring Resource Center website: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/learning-opportunities/measurement-guidance-toolkit.html>

**2. Co-mentor relationships:** When more than one mentor is involved in facilitating a group of mentees, the quality of the relationship between the co-mentors is important to assess (**B.5.2. Recommendation 54 and B.5.4 Recommendation 56**). One questionnaire was located that asked mentors to formally rate how much encouragement and respect they received from their peer mentors

on nine items.<sup>126</sup> The more co-mentors felt support from each other, the more their mentees reported that they improved, and the more impact this had on mentees’ self-esteem. A simple method for assessing this important relationship is to ask open-ended questions to mentors about how much encouragement and respect they receive from their co-mentor during match support meetings.

**3. Mentee-mentee relationships:** In addition to the common practice of asking mentees about the relationship with their mentor(s), programs should also ask mentees about their relationships with other mentees in the group (**B.5.3. Recommendation 55**) as well as asking mentors about how the mentees in the group are getting along with one another (**B.5.2. Recommendation 54 and B.5.4 Recommendation 56**). These conversations can be held during match support meetings using open-ended questions about the closeness, support, and conflict between each mentee pair. Unfortunately, for group mentoring programs interested in using a more formal measure of mentee-mentee relationship quality, none were located in the mentoring literature.

The peer relations literature does offer some ideas about ways to assess mentee relationships through using self-report questionnaires of friendship quality that may be applicable in the group mentoring context. For example, the Network of Relationships Inventory,<sup>127</sup> the Friendship Quality Questionnaire,<sup>128</sup> and the Friendship Qualities Scale<sup>129</sup> are all commonly used. All three measures include similar scales on topics such as companionship (spending time and doing fun things together), talking about thoughts and feelings, closeness, and conflict, among others. In addition, mentors can observe how their mentees interact with one another and research suggests that when mentors do spend



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time observing the interactions among their mentees, it provides them with important insights into their mentee's social competence.<sup>130</sup>

The group therapy literature is another source that could be helpful for informing mentoring programs about methods that group leaders (i.e., mentors and program staff members) can use to monitor the climate in their group. These measures include assessing aspects of interpersonal relationships including the group structure, the types of verbal interactions occurring in the group, and the emotional climate of the group.<sup>131, 132</sup> The emotional climate, in particular, is important to assess because the more time people spend in group therapy, the greater their bond with the group; and the greater their alliance to the group, the greater their reduction in symptoms.<sup>133</sup> An example of a group engagement measure for group therapy consists of 21 items and assesses five dimensions of group behavior including contributing to the group either verbally or behaviorally, relating to the group leader and other group members, and working on one's own personal and peers' problems,<sup>134</sup> all of which significantly improve over the life of mutual aid groups.<sup>135</sup> In another study using a 12-item group climate questionnaire<sup>136</sup> that assessed engagement, avoidance, and conflict, engagement increased over time and was related to therapeutic outcomes.<sup>137</sup> Thus, there are several examples in the group therapy literature of the value of assessing group climate, particularly the degree of engagement each member feels toward the other members in their group. Engagement can be more informally assessed by asking mentees questions about things such as how much they enjoy coming to the group and how important it is to them.

### **Mentors need to record information about group activities and processes, in addition to traditional information about their mentoring relationships.**

Mentors need to record the activities that their group completes, especially if the activities differ from a preset curriculum (**B.5.8 Recommendation 57**). In order to track changes in group dynamics, mentors and/or staff members should also record significant conversations among group members, their impressions of group dynamics, and any information about group relationships.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MATCH SUPPORT**

Somewhat surprisingly, almost no program descriptions or research articles wrote about either their methods or results of match support practices. We know that when mentors perceive that they receive high levels of program support and opportunities for learning new skills in their program, they have better quality relationships with their mentees than if they did not receive adequate support and post-match training.<sup>138</sup> Thus, support practices may need to be tailored to the group context to adequately address the unique aspects of group mentors, but the recommendations we have made, for the most part, were derived from logical deductions about the challenges that are faced by group mentors and discussions with the Working Group. Match support is clearly a standard of practice needing attention in terms of ongoing conceptualization and research.

### **Staff need to support mentors regarding several group issues.**

Program staff should provide mentors with meaningful feedback about new topics that are relevant to a group mentoring context (**B.5.9 Recommendation 58**). For example, staff should provide their feedback



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and input regarding how the group members get along with one another; the stage of development that the group may be in and its relevance to group activities and relationships; how the relationships between mentees may be affecting youth outcomes; and strategies for helping the group advance to a new stage. At the most basic level, mentors can use support for building group identity such as how to use rapport-building activities, explicitly talk about the importance of group unity, maintaining high expectations for prosocial behavior, and how to create opportunities for mentees to make testimonials or pledges regarding good behavior.<sup>139</sup>

Group mentors may face other challenges related to the relationships between pairs of mentees or the role of individual mentees in the group, such as someone being the victim of relational aggression (e.g., eye rolling when one peer is talking, selective ignoring, exclusion), some being the victim of overt aggression (e.g., insulting), and disengagement (e.g., clique formation, absent or poor communication).<sup>140</sup> Mentors need strategies and support to learn how to manage their group to converting these complex and negative interactions into fun and supportive relationships, to reengage mentees who have become marginalized or withdrawn, and to deal directly with relational aggression and peer rejection. However, they will also need training on knowing when to contact their program staff for support in managing these types of complex and challenging interpersonal situations that may arise in group mentoring **(B.3.2 Recommendation 28)**.

### **Staff need to support mentors when new mentees enter pre-existing groups.**

Group mentoring programs should have policies and procedures addressing when and how to integrate new mentees into a group after it has already started. Furthermore, staff should also provide mentors with

support and strategies for integrating new members into the group, if they enter after the group has completed their first meeting **(B.5.9 Recommendation 59)**. Adding a new mentee in the middle of the life cycle of the group could disrupt the mentees' roles, balance of power, alliance, stage of group development, relationships and individual time with the mentor(s), and other things. The group therapy literature suggests that therapists need to be sensitive to the impact that a new group member may have on an existing group and how to make the new group member feel welcome.<sup>141</sup> Mentors could use support during this type of transition to ensure it goes as smoothly as possible.

### **Staff need to provide co-mentors with opportunities to provide each other with support.**

Some group mentoring programs assign more than one mentor to work with a group of mentees. Managing a group with a co-mentor can be both an asset and a challenge. Co-mentors need time and support in figuring out their respective roles and responsibilities, and how they will manage their group process. They will need to support each other as well as receive support from the mentoring program staff **(E.5.2 Recommendation 60)**. In fact, having a supportive working relationship between co-mentors can positively impact youth outcomes.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, when mentors brainstormed solutions to group issues together, they found it helpful and it contributed to building strong bonds between them.<sup>143</sup> Program staff can also help mentors to observe how their co-mentors handle different group or dyadic interactions to learn additional strategies for improving their relationships with their mentees.<sup>144</sup>



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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLOSURE

No research specifically on match closure practices were located; however, several recommendations emerged from reading the group mentoring literature and discussions with Working Group members regarding special circumstances related to handling both anticipated and unanticipated closures of group mentoring relationships. The recommendations were primarily due to the need to close multiple relationships simultaneously.

### Premature closures in groups present the need to create unique program practices.

When a mentor or mentee leaves a group prematurely, programs need to have policies and procedures in place for how to manage this transition, as well as suggestions to mentors for strategies for how to continue the group (**B.6.1 Recommendation 62**). In addition, if a mentee drops out of the group unexpectedly, the program needs to provide mentor(s) with strategies and guidelines for how to discuss this absent mentee (**B.6.2 Recommendation 64**). For example, mentees may need to be reminded about the group rules around confidentiality and keeping the missing mentee's identity and disclosures private. They may also see the mentee who left early in school or in the community, and may need to be reminded to not share information about the group or group members with this person, once their former group member has formally resigned. The group may also have concerns about why a peer quit prematurely and worry that it is a negative reflection on them or their group. When a mentor or mentee drops out of the group, it can leave the remaining group members with unresolved feelings of loss for that person and mentors may need support in helping the group to resolve these feelings.<sup>145</sup> Mentees may need reassurance about the value of their group and mentors may need to spend some time on rebuilding

the group identity, rules, and culture after this type of transition.

If there is more than one mentee who leaves the group, it may make the group too small or too unstable to continue in its present form. Furthermore, if the mentor leaves prematurely and there is no co-mentor, then the group will lack a leader. In either case, the group mentoring program should have pre-existing policies and procedures for handling these situations, as well as when and how to merge or dissolve groups in the middle of a program (**B.6.2 Recommendation 65**).

### Staff need to modify their closure policies and procedures for a group mentoring program.

Closure policies and procedures need to reflect the multiple mentoring relationships that simultaneously will close in a mentoring group between each mentor-mentee pair, between each mentee-mentee pair, and potentially also between pairs of mentors.

*Staff need more time to prepare the group for closure.* If group mentoring programs are using a curriculum, they should build closure activities into the curriculum (**B.6.1 Recommendation 63**). Even if no curriculum is being used, staff should coach mentors to include discussions or closure-related activities into the last several meetings of the group, so that closure can be adequately addressed, and mentors and mentees have adequate time to reflect and process the group's dissolution.

*Staff should provide ideas for group closure rituals.* Program staff should provide mentors with strategies for closing each group meeting over the life of the group with rituals that encourage mentees to reflect on the group meeting, how the group members relate to one another, and examples of their personal growth during the group meetings (**B.6.1 Recommendation**



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**61).** These brief closure rituals should also allow each group member, including mentor(s), to say goodbye in ways that mirror the ultimate closure of the group. For example, the Girls Circle reports using a closing activity or ritual such as blowing out candles that were lit during the opening ritual, making positive statements about oneself, or stating hopes or wishes, at the end of their group meetings with the goal supporting attitudes of gratitude and respect in their mentees.<sup>146</sup> In these ways, at the last group meeting, mentors and mentees will be familiar with and comfortable directly saying goodbye to one another in a productive and supportive way.

Group closure events should include some additional activities. Group mentoring programs should incorporate several activities into their final closure meeting. First, mentors should be trained to offer each group an opportunity to acknowledge the personal

growth of each mentee (**B.6.8.h Recommendation 66**). These reflections should also address the journey of their entire group over the life of the program as well as a celebration of the experience they created together. Many mentoring programs have closure celebrations that provide opportunities for group members to reflect on their experience and end with positive memories and feelings about their group mentoring experience.<sup>147</sup>

Second, the program should consider hosting a community gathering inviting parents, guardians, or others who are important in the life of the mentees to a celebratory closure event (**E.6.2 Recommendation 67**).<sup>148</sup> This can also be done as a type of Rite of Passage ceremony that has proven to be valuable and useful in other mentoring programs.<sup>149</sup>





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# PRACTICE IN ACTION SNAPSHOTS

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This section provides examples of how several programs have implemented many of the recommended practices promoted in this Supplement. These “snapshots” of program practice feature the members of the project’s Working Group explaining how they make these practices come to life in their particular models and the value that their program participants find in adhering to these practices. We hope these serve as meaningful examples that will inspire other programs to carefully plan and implement these critical group mentoring components.

## How Soccer for Success Prioritizes Program Evaluation as a Core Program Improvement Practice – U.S. Soccer Foundation

The U.S. Soccer Foundation’s Soccer for Success program uses a variety of evaluation methods to improve and evolve the participant and coach-mentor experience. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted a [study](#) on Soccer for Success in 2015 and determined the program is an effective mentoring program and meets the key benchmarks outlined by MENTOR’s *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*.

In addition to this independent evaluation, Soccer for Success maintains extensive data collection and analysis practices through various staff members, with the primary responsibility vested to the organization’s Program Officer. The program implements pre- and post-testing of health metrics and participant behavioral/knowledge acquisition surveys for each 12-week season and 24-week program year. The program’s coach-mentors are surveyed after their initial seven-hour training and at the end of each season. Each youth participant’s family members are surveyed at the end of each season to assess satisfaction, behavior changes, and program feedback. This data ensures program fidelity and stakeholder satisfaction for sites across the country.

In an effort to gather additional insight, the U.S. Soccer Foundation follows up with implementation partners (i.e., YMCA, Department of Parks and Recreation) when any significant variation of data occurs such as poor retention rates or negative satisfaction surveys. In addition, Soccer for Success uses youth, family, and coach-mentor focus groups and program site visits to gain further understanding into program implementation. Focus groups provide a wonderful feedback loop for curricula, training(s), technical assistance practices, family and community engagement practices, and more. With any new program feature or innovation, such as a new section of training or curriculum, Soccer for Success ensures a review through focus groups of the appropriate stakeholders. Additional data collection and evaluation are considered for any new program feature or innovation as well. Ultimately, the goal is to design and evolve a program that is created and continuously reviewed by community partners to ensure it remains relevant and impactful.



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## Promoting Co-Mentoring and Strong Mentor-Staff Collaboration in a School-Based Group Model – Leadership Foundations

Knoxville Leadership Foundation's Amachi after-school group mentoring program focuses on serving youth impacted by incarceration through one-to-one community-based mentoring. Amachi was asked to develop and test a group mentoring model as a component of the after-school program at Dogwood Elementary School in South Knoxville, Tennessee, in 2015. Dogwood Elementary is a participating school in Knox County's Great Schools Partnership (GSP). GSP — a nonprofit organization that supports Knox County Schools in achieving globally competitive standards — was formed in 2005 to align and coordinate efforts important to local leaders from public and private sectors. As a part of its programming efforts, GSP operates in local schools through an on-site coordinator — this coordinator assists with after-school programming and provides resource referrals to higher need communities of Knoxville. After the initial after-school pilot proved successful, Amachi developed after-school group mentoring programs in eight Knoxville-area schools, serving more than 110 mentees with 28 mentors.

Once Amachi agrees to start an after-school program, the GSP on-site resource coordinator and school staff identify student and school needs, such as underserved age groups or grade levels and activity gaps. Based on the identified needs, Amachi staff and the GSP school coordinator develop themes or focus areas for the groups. Some of the themes include: theater, yoga, nutrition, media and film, outdoor exploration, bike safety, and leadership. Amachi staff members begin to recruit mentors, at least two per mentoring group, who have interests and skills related to the identified themes or mentors who have interests and passions that would be a good fit for the program. Mentors then participate in required training, which is aligned with the Training standard outlined in MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*. The training encourages mentors to see themselves as an adult role model and friend, rather than a formal teacher. The training also includes topics such as: group facilitation, planning group activities, and cultural competence. Once mentors are recruited and trained, school staff and the GSP on-site coordinator identify and recruit students who are good candidates for the groups (i.e., students who are available to participate in a group mentoring program, interested in the selected topics, and willing to engage in a mentoring relationship).

Amachi has found that a co-mentoring model enables mentors to share the responsibility around activities that they are personally passionate about, create lesson plans, and assist with attendance if one mentor is absent. Amachi uses a one-to-five mentor-to-mentee ratio to help mentors feel less overwhelmed and to ensure space and time to be intentional about the mentoring relationships. Amachi staff holds periodic check-ins with the GSP site coordinator to further identify needs of mentors and the school.



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Through the Amachi model, various stakeholders have experienced positive outcomes, including:

- More youth have been reached and served through local schools. Youth are provided with consistent adult role models and have opportunities to build relationships with peers while exposed to new experiences and activities.
- Mentors have options to serve a group of mentees rather than only in one-to-one relationships. The program offers mentors opportunities to build and develop leadership skills and create plans and activities around areas of personal interest and/or experience.
- Parents have shared an increased confidence that their student can remain safe and engaged in a learning community while working on social skills.
- Schools receive additional support to fill program and activity gaps to better serve student needs.

The Amachi after-school group mentoring program helps serve more youth, provide options for mentor engagement with youth, build partnerships with schools, and foster relationships to support mentees in a more holistic manner.



## Emphasizing Strong Group Composition in the LA Team Mentoring Model – LA Team Mentoring

Los Angeles Team Mentoring (LATM) targets three distinct mentor types to fulfill its team mentoring model — a teacher from their middle school, a college student studying at a local institution, and a business professional from the community. The school teacher helps to build the student’s connection to academics, the college student promotes a pathway to higher learning, and the community business professional encourages lifelong skill building. This unique team approach increases the potential impact of each mentor three to four times over the traditional one-to-one mentoring approach, while enhancing the interpersonal skills and mutual respect of participants within the relative comfort of a peer team/group setting. LATM aims to recruit a diverse set of mentors with regard to ethnicity, gender, and background. Additional consideration is given to sensitive and responsible candidates who are interested and willing to mentor multiple youth, respect community norms and culture, and have a genuine desire to work with middle school youth. LATM’s approach to mentoring exposes youth to a vast range of perspectives, opportunities, and experiences. One of the greatest strengths of LATM’s team mentoring model is diversity. Student mentees naturally cluster with peer mentees similar to themselves, which can lead to divisions along racial, economic, and gender lines. Creating identity-diverse teams deliberately seeks to confound this disunion.

**Student** teams consist of 10-12 students per team and are grade-specific in design, meaning there are sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade teams. Grade-specific teams are created to benefit from LATM’s progressive learning curriculum designed to meet the unique developmental needs of each grade level. The central goal when creating student teams is to establish a healthy balance of personality types including positive, outgoing, shy or introverted, “spirited” youth or youth who have a tendency toward trouble. Having each personality type represented on the team allows for distinctive peer-to-peer mentoring experiences between students. Additionally, acute behavioral issues, such as anger, depression, lack of acknowledgment of authority, ADD, etc., as well as the presence of ancillary services (counseling, intervention, and special education), are taken into consideration when matching groups. These additional considerations are given so as to not overwhelm mentors with multiple behavioral challenges on one team.

As previously outlined, **mentor** teams are comprised of three distinct mentor types — a teacher, college student, and business mentor. This combination allows for a four-to-one student-to-mentor ratio, and like student teams, mentor teams are fashioned around personality and leadership style. Additional consideration is given to identity, though leadership style takes priority when forming mentor teams. When it comes to mentors working together, LATM strives for a diverse array of leadership styles and approaches, specifically pairing mentors who are “quiet” with those who are “outgoing.” LATM has observed the combination of the two to have a profound impact on group energy level and youth retention. When well-matched mentors are placed together, students have an enhanced experience and demonstrate investment in group meetings. A healthy balance of leadership styles has a profound effect on the successful communication and facilitation of the LATM curriculum. On a similar note, LATM makes



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a concerted effort to avoid mismatching personalities that will compete for power or vie for the attention of mentees. Conversely, the program avoids matching mentors that are shy and reserved. A mentor pair with competing personalities or exceedingly reserved tendencies can lead to negative dynamics among mentees including boredom and apathy.

Overall, the diverse and carefully designed model and curriculum stimulates enthusiasm and intrigue within mentoring groups. Having an intentional group configuration encourages an ideal learning environment that allows participants to hone how they relate to others, reduce alienation amongst peers, foster discovery, and broaden viewpoints, thoughts, and opinions; it reduces misunderstandings around gender bias, sexual orientation, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.





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## Finding a Balance between Structured Activity and Flexible Time in the Clubhouse Model – Clubhouse Networks

Exploration is at the heart of The Clubhouse Network. When young people enter a Clubhouse, they connect to a world of creative possibility — possibility to produce an album, design clothing, develop a video game, print 3D objects, create jewelry, and so much more. After a structured day at school, the Clubhouse is a place where young people can relax and pursue their interests in their own way and at their own pace. The space is theirs to build, shape, create, and innovate.

Each day when members (The Clubhouse Network’s term for “mentees”) arrive, Clubhouse Coordinators encourage them to follow their passions and experiment with technology — whether it be the 3D printer, recording studio, DJ station, computer software, or another piece of novel tech. There is no set curriculum or structured expectation for how members spend their time. Youth are in the driver’s seat, and mentors serve as partners and peers who learn alongside and collaborate with members. When youth care about what they’re working on, they are willing to work longer and harder, and they learn more in the process.

A member’s interests often evolve as they spend time in the Clubhouse. A member might enter with the desire to create an album, but as they are exposed to more opportunities, the member might create an accompanying music video, album cover, and group T-shirts. Projects can center innovation because members have creative ownership to express themselves. Creations reflect members’ interests and values in a way that is unique to their perspective.

The Clubhouse Network approach leverages novel technologies to support new types of learning experiences and engages young people who have been underserved and, at times, alienated by traditional educational approaches. This exploratory model prompts members to forge their own paths, design a creative process, and make decisions about their project’s execution, allowing for cultivation of meaningful leadership skills. A member can seek guidance as needed, but they’re encouraged to dive into the available technology, try, create, struggle, problem solve, make mistakes, and grow through practice. Members learn immediate success is not as valuable as perseverance, and practice is essential to progress. This approach empowers youth from all backgrounds to become more capable, creative, and confident learners.



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## Creative Ways of Empowering Groups to Set Their Own Norms, Rituals, and Rules across Several of Our Working Group Programs

We asked the Working Group members of this project how they go about empowering mentors and youth to set group-specific rules and rituals in an effort to empower youth and start building group cohesion. Here is what they had to say:

**Project Arrive** facilitates a conversation over the course of two-to-three sessions about group purpose, goals, norms, and agreements. Youth are given ample opportunity to voice their interests for the group and what they need/want from mentors and group peers.

**Los Angeles Team Mentoring** holds three distinctly different orientations for each of its members: the mentees, mentors, and parents. The goal of the mentor and mentee orientations is aligned in their understanding of how the team will function and operate from the start. The parent orientation is essentially facilitated to help with mitigating negative student behavior and garnering parent support when needed. All three orientations are built to ease and transition everyone into a team mindset.

**The Clubhouse Network** encourages sites to develop group norms at a regular, recurring cadence so new members and mentors are always represented. Clubhouse Coordinators typically include both members and mentors in the development of group norms. Involving all program participants in this process increases feelings of investment and ownership in the resulting norms and ensures everyone's voice is heard. In addition to formal group norms, Clubhouses have a "green table" — a community gathering spot where members, mentors, and staff convene and hang out — which serves as a hub for conversation and fosters a sense of culture and informal group norms. Youth are referred to as

"members" instead of "mentees" to express that everyone is an equal member of the community; everyone has a shared opportunity to contribute to the Clubhouse's culture.

Creating group guidelines/agreements/promises is a standard part of all of **Girls Inc.** programming, including mentoring. The group norms creation process is typically held during the first meeting and facilitated by a program staff member who asks mentors/mentees for their suggestions. The facilitator comes with a set of recommended guidelines that are presented to the group at the end for possible inclusion if not already put forth by the mentors/mentees. At the facilitator's discretion, mentors and mentees may sign the flip chart listing the group guidelines to signify their commitment to follow and uphold them. The flip chart (or poster created by the group or a printed laminated poster) is hung and visible during all mentoring sessions. For off-site special programming and field trips, some groups will re-create their guidelines on a white sheet, on an 8 1/2 x 11 laminated paper, or fold the flip chart paper to bring with them.

For our **Knoxville Leadership Foundation (KLF)** group mentoring model, groups are given the autonomy to establish group norms. During mentor training, discussions take place about how to establish a group culture that allows participants to express their individuality but also allows the group to develop a rapport and a sense of belonging. Belonging manifests as the group develops its own values and/or boundaries; this could include respecting the mentors, peers, and the space they meet in; helping the group members who are younger; not interrupting others; not laughing when someone asks a question. KLF emphasizes the importance of establishing norms for safety, group management, as well as a sense of ownership by each mentee. When mentees have a say in developing group norms, they are more likely to



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align themselves and help hold others accountable in the mentoring sessions.

When exploring group norms, **Jerry Sherk** considers a visual exercise called “House Rules.” A mentor draws a simple image of a house on a flip chart and discusses the importance of group rules as a way through which everyone to get along. Anything positive is written inside the house while anything they do not as a norm is written outside the house. If the mentees cannot come up with a full list, the mentor could offer suggestions (e.g., “How about ‘no making fun of others?’”). Near the end of the activity, the mentor adds one last overarching rule that will assist with neutralizing any disruptive behavior.

**National Urban League** requires youth program participants to complete an Individual College and Career Development Plan (ICCDP). The ICCDP includes baseline data on the mentee’s academic performance, as well as their college aspirations and

career interests. Each plan is used during the group matching stage of the relationship. Mentors serve as advisers to students as they prepare for life after high school. The results from the ICCDP also inform the mentoring program activities. Mentors use their expertise to build a healthy and supportive bridge that the mentee is comfortable crossing because they are interested in learning more from the mentor.

At the beginning of each season, **U.S. Soccer Foundation – Soccer for Success** coach-mentors are guided to create a Team Code with their participants. To create a safe space, coach-mentors devote time during the first week to actively involve participants in creating a clear, fair, and manageable Team Code. A Team Code is made up of three-to-four rules or boundaries that are important to the team. When creating a Team Code, avoid “No” and “Never” whenever possible, focusing on a positive description of the behavior(s) or culture.



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## The Value of Having Someone with a Social Work Background Working with Mentors to Meet Individual Youth Needs – Project Arrive

The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) group mentoring program, Project Arrive, serves sixth and ninth grade students who are disengaged from the education system due to systemic inequities, institutional racism, lack of resources/support, and other known factors that negatively impact students' ability to thrive at school. The program seeks to mitigate these factors and to improve attendance, academics, and social engagement during the important transition into middle and high school.

The Project Arrive Mentoring Program was originally developed by School Social Workers to address the challenges related to the transition to high school, especially for students who have early warning indicators for dropping out of school. As a social worker, the program coordinator's training and practical experience in socioemotional learning, therapeutic modalities, and systemic/contextual factors informs a program structure that meets the holistic needs of the students.

A social worker brings a lens of the “whole child” or “person in context”, a perspective that considers how both internal and external factors impact educational engagement and mentoring relationships. A social worker is equipped to develop training and activity curriculum that incorporates assessment, confidentiality, and identity development through a lens that considers trauma/healing, socioemotional skills, and group developmental stages.

The program coordinator regularly consults with Project Arrive facilitators about evidence-based practices around recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring, support, and closure. Further, the social worker advises mentors around co-facilitation strategies, student engagement, relationship-building, retention, and more. Overall, a social worker's background lays a strong foundation to provide intentional resources and support throughout all levels of the program.



## The Importance of Setting Clear Expectations about Group Mentoring When Recruiting Youth Participants – Jerry Sherk

Preparing mentees to understand the expectations of your group mentoring program is critical to the quality of their experience. When recruiting prospective mentees for a group mentoring program, Jerry recommends covering the following in your mentee orientation:

- Ensure the mentees understand the program is voluntary. Mentees should understand their participation is a commitment as well as an investment.
- Explain what a mentor is and isn't, and what behaviors and actions they can expect from mentors specifically, within this program.
- Review the mission/purpose of the program and how it will benefit the mentees. This review may include the development of relationships with peers and mentors, the ability to share receive support, and the opportunity provide support to peers.
- Sharing will be encouraged, but no one will be forced to participate in sharing.
- Mentees should understand what a group looks like — this could include the number of mentors and mentees in each group or that mentors and mentees will consistently meet in the same groups so relationships can flourish over time.
- Mentees should understand expectation around meeting participation including but now limited to meeting times, meeting duration, meeting frequency, number of mentoring cycles, and length of break time in between mentoring cycles.
- An overview of program activities— group goal-setting, guest speaker presentations, descriptions/ previews of the curriculum.
- Ask mentees topics they would like to see covered during their group mentoring experience.
- Include information about program incentives, such as food, school supplies, and field trips.
- Thoroughly review confidentiality guidelines — ensure mentees know what they share in their group stays in their group with the exception of harm or danger to any mentee in the program or any minors.
- Consider asking prospective mentees to fill out an application and interest form to understand more about their interests and desires to participate in the program.
- Encourage mentees to share the program description with their parents/family members/caregivers; parent/family member/guardian; signed permission forms should be returned to the program.
- Provide ample time for mentees to ask any questions or share any concerns they have about the program and their participation; let them know their parents/family members/guardians can call or email program staff with any additional questions or concerns.





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## Comprehensive Screening of Group Mentors – National Urban League

The National Urban League (NUL) Project Ready (PR) Mentor program helps students progress academically and intellectually, benefit from enrichment opportunities, and develop important skills, attitudes, and aptitudes that position them well for success during and after their high school years. The program specifically targets 11- to 18-year-old African-Americans and other urban youth who are particularly vulnerable to disengagement from school, community, and the workforce. NUL's programming helps local communities and institutions across the country to develop the internal resources needed to support youth through robust national and local partnerships, including but not limited to:

- Expanding a pool of well-trained mentors
- Intentionally addressing community violence and stressors
- Creating and sustaining meaningful and supportive relationships between caring adults and youth
- Directing relationships toward reducing behaviors that undermine youth well-being
- Building developmental and educational spaces where youth can explore their interests and identity
- Increasing educational and employment success by connecting youth development specialists, mentors, and members of the criminal justice community via positive relationship-building and constructive dialogue.

Prior to matching mentors with mentees, PR requires their local sites to develop a comprehensive mentor screening and onboarding process. The process begins with an informal pre-screening process where youth and staff from the local site interview prospective mentors to determine academic achievements, social skills, and professional backgrounds. Once passed through this stage, the mentor completes an application, an interest survey, a mentor bio, and background check. After the mentor completes these steps, they are interviewed again by staff and encouraged to prepare to become a mentor in the program.

NUL's mandated mentor training — Building the Foundation — is developed by the behavior sciences research company, Innovation Research & Training. The training builds their knowledge and sets expectations for the role, key mentor competencies, and how to engage mentees with a fun, positive attitude. Once the training is completed, mentors are equipped with a clear understanding of their role in the program.

As a final step of the process, mentors must pass a knowledge test. This test — a research and evidence-based tool called Mentoring Central — serves as a pre-matching indicator of a mentor's information synthesis. NUL believes this standard of mentor screening improves the efficacy of their model and enhances the quality of the mentor/mentee relationship



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## Involving Youth in Planning Meaningful Closing Activities – Girls Inc.

The closing ceremony can be a time for mentees to celebrate their personal experiences and accomplishments and share their talents with parents, program site partners, and community leaders. At Girls Inc., mentees are involved in the shaping and planning of the closing ceremony. While it may be easier and faster for staff to plan closure events, meaningful decisions and leadership opportunities can be offered to mentees when working with them as partners in the closure celebration process.

Mentee leadership development goes beyond selecting snacks, making posters, and hanging decorations. With staff guidance and encouragement, mentees play roles in determining program content, creating the written program, developing the emcee event script, curating a memory video slide deck, and selecting how to show appreciation to their mentors. Mentee creativity has taken various forms including original poetry readings, cheers, hand-crafted gifts, videos, and awards. Each offering recognizes how mentors stepped out of their comfort zone or went above and beyond the expectations of a mentor. Mentees also contribute to the conversations that determine if the closure event will take the shape of a formal ceremony, special event, or field trip.

Girls Inc. staff strive to balance mentees' contributions to the closure process — decision-making, event logistics, and execution — with the need for mentees to participate in closing activities that will provide meaningful closure to the relationships.

Program staff takes into consideration that involving mentees in closing ceremony planning and execution may require working with mentees outside of mentoring sessions. Striking the balance between mentees' involvement in the planning and execution of the closure process and their participation in the closing event is important to the foundation of this approach.

Here are instances that showcase what Girls Inc. program sites have learned from mentee involvement in the closure process:

- Girls Inc. of Greater Los Angeles holds a formal ceremony to which parents are invited. In one instance, mentees requested of staff that their families not be included in the celebration event. The mentees shared they wanted the liberty to celebrate freely with their mentors. Staff listened to this feedback and altered the closing ceremony: the first half was for mentees and mentors only and the second half focused on parent participation.
- Girls Inc. of New Hampshire charged each small mentee group with the planning, budget spending, and final execution of one aspect of the closing ceremony. Staff checked in with each group's progress during their mentoring sessions and provided additional support as needed outside of mentoring sessions.



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- Girls Inc. of Tarrant County combined their closure ceremony with a board-breaking ceremony from their girl-only violence prevention and self-defense programming. Parents were excited to see their daughters participating in something so special to them.
  - At Girls Inc. of Santa Fe, mentees created a presentation for parents, future mentees, and city officials on their community action project – the installation of a crosswalk between their downtown program site and a park.
  - At several sites, mentees requested a special event or field trip as their closing event. Girls Inc. of the Pacific Northwest took mentors and mentees to an amusement park and then hosted a block party for parents upon their return.
  - Girls Inc. of Lynn hosted a family team trivia contest.
  - Girls Inc. of Washington County held a family hands-on STEM challenge. Providing meals and allowing sibling attendance improved parent attendance at closing events.
  - Sites that extend from the school year into the summer chose to hold an end-of-school-year celebration in addition to their final closing celebrations. This was especially effective for sustaining relationships as mentor, mentee, and family schedules evolved. This approach provided an opportunity to highlight program successes to school and other school-year program partners.

While the closing ceremony is a centerpiece of the closure process, mentees worked with their mentors to develop small group closing rituals for each mentoring session. Groups consistently incorporated activities that supported relationship-building and strengthening. Activities consisted of, but were not limited to, celebrating learnings, achievements, risk taking, and attempts; conducting verbal praise circles; writing encouraging notes; and performing a cheer or song the small group created.





**MENTOR**

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