

Develop an Employee Mentor Program

Mentor programs can benefit employee engagement, skills development, and retention. Maybe you've wanted to start a mentor program at your nonprofit, but wondered where to begin. Here's a checklist that will help you create a great mentor program to fit your nonprofit's needs.

Define the program's goals.

Do you want to help a batch of new hires learn the organization and develop important skills? Do you want to give longtime employees new challenges and responsibilities as a retention tool? Shape your program around your needs, knowing they might change. Set objectives—how will you know if the program is working? Create an interview or survey corresponding to your goals that will help you gauge the effectiveness of your program. For example:

Program Goal	Survey Question
Expose mentees to career pathways and opportunities	As a participant in the mentor program, have you been exposed to new career pathways and opportunities at this organization? Absolutely Somewhat No, not at all
Improve employee engagement	How engaged are you in your work now, compared to before you joined the mentor program? I am a lot more engaged My level of engagement is the same I am less engaged now than before I joined the program
Provide learning opportunities	Rate your satisfaction with the learning aspect of the mentor program. Highly Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Not Satisfied

Outline expectations and responsibilities.

How will mentees express interest? Who will select mentors and mentees? How long will the mentor pairings last and how often will participants meet?

Choose potential participants.

Make sure you have a diverse pool of potential mentors and mentees. Interview potential mentors about skills they hope to share and find out what potential mentees want to learn.

Pair mentors and mentees.

Once you've narrowed down the potential participants, you may want to let participants make the final selection. Share profiles of three candidates you've chosen as potential matches for a mentor or mentee, and let them make the decision. This can increase their connection to the program.





Train mentors.

Coach your mentors on the types of support they are expected to provide. Discuss how the relationship should benefit both parties and the frequency and format you expect.

Think creatively about what mentorship means.

The most common image of mentoring might be an experienced employee training a new one. That's a valuable endeavor. So is having a new hire with a unique skill in data analysis or community engagement train a longtime employee who wants to grow in those areas. Or having a junior employee share their perspective on the changing wants and needs of young clients or participants with a seasoned leader. There are many ways your team members can learn from each other. A great mentor program makes room for that.

Allow flexibility.

What if only one person on your staff expresses interest in having a mentor? That's OK. What if your program surges when a lot of new hires express interest, and goes dormant for awhile as people reach longer tenures? That's OK, too. If you've set goals for your mentor program, you'll be able to determine whether a change indicates a potential issue, or is just part of your organization's natural ebbs and flows.

Celebrate.

Craft an appropriate way for your nonprofit to acknowledge and applaud the work of mentors and mentees. That might look like a reception at the end of a mentoring cohort, a chance for a mentor-mentee pair to share what they've learned at a staff meeting, or a shout-out in an employee newsletter.

Iterate.

As your program grows and you accumulate feedback, use it to make general improvements to mentorship, or to evolve the program in new directions along with the needs of your organization.



Helpful Resources.

[Creating a Workplace Mentoring Program: Key Steps and Tips](#) - Indeed

[Effective Employee Mentoring for Today's Workplace: 9 Simple Steps](#) - Insperity

[More Than a Matter of Trust: Managing the Risk of Mentoring](#) - Nonprofit Risk Management Center