ESTABLISHING A LEGACY:
SIX STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING YOUR MENTORING PROGRAM

(TCAM SUSTAINABILITY COURSE)

Sustaining a mentoring program involves more than securing new funding when one grant comes to an end. It may entail integrating key program activities into other existing projects or programs, spinning a program component off as a self-sustaining project, or supporting a program partner to take on mentoring activities as part of its agenda.

Each of the six strategies described below can be used to sustain key mentoring program activities or functions, so that you can continue achieving your mentoring-related outcomes. More information on these strategies and the Sustainability Wheel can be found at EDC’s TCAM website (www.advancementoring.org).

LEADERSHIP

Achieving lasting, systemic change requires leaders with vision, and the ability to identify problems and describe potential solutions in terms that resonate with a broad range of stakeholders. Leaders should be able to guide decision-making as well as day-to-day program implementation. Individuals and coalitions in a leadership role must be able to identify and work toward those systems changes that will contribute to positive, lasting outcomes. Leaders should also articulate a vision for how the project corresponds with other youth-focused in the community.
How can leadership be a sustainability strategy?

- Leaders within your organization can champion policy and procedural changes that are critical to the program’s success (e.g., developing a protocol for mentor training, creating screening procedures for case managers).
- Leaders across the community can communicate the program’s successes to policy-making groups or governmental units with the power to support the program over the long term.

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

Mentoring program staff often need to build their own capacity in one or more areas to ensure positive program outcomes. Staff can often be (EBPs), providing support to mentors and mentees, and working with youth and families in a culturally competent manner. Your program may also focus on building the capacity of staff in partnering organizations to recruit mentors and mentees.

How can capacity building be a sustainability strategy?

- Implementing a successful mentoring program involves building staff capacity to carry out such essential functions as training mentors and supporting mentoring relationships.
- Having more than one staff person participate in a “train the trainer” workshop for an EBP that the program employs contributes to your organization’s capacity to sustain use of the EBP during staff transitions.

**PARTNERSHIPS**

Partnerships or collaborations among organizations are most effective when connections are established early in the life of the mentoring program and cultivated over time. Effective partnerships involve others who are interested in the goals of your program, respected leaders, groups affected by the problems your program addresses, and those who are essential players in your community. Successful partnerships are built on clear roles and articulating how the partners will work together to meet shared goals.

How can partnerships contribute to sustaining your program?

- Identifying youth who will participate in the mentoring program often requires a partnership with schools and/or other organizations (e.g. foster care or juvenile justice agencies). The partners can collaborate to create a referral system that works for all parties and is sustainable.
COMMUNICATIONS

Using communications and marketing strategies to inform others about your program’s mission and successes is an excellent strategy for creating a base of support for the program. Successful marketing and communications efforts engage program participants, key community members, and decision-makers. Their involvement may lead to new partnerships and funding opportunities.

How can communications and marketing promote program sustainability?

- Your program can use communications strategies to meet a variety of objectives, including improved recruitment of mentors and informing and persuading decision makers. When crafting a communications message, consider what motivates your target audience. Are you reaching out to potential mentors who need to understand the rewards of volunteering, to local businesses looking to sustain an educated workforce, or to school administrators concerned about truancy and dropout rates?

- By raising awareness of mentoring as a “win-win” strategy that benefits all involved, your program enhances its ability to be sustained.

EVALUATION

Measuring your program’s effectiveness is crucial to improving the program, keeping it on track, and marketing it to partners and other potential supporters. It’s not sufficient to gather the data and summarize the findings; it’s critical to present evaluation findings to the groups your program serves and those in a position to support the work. And of course, it’s much easier to demonstrate your program’s impact when you have convincing data to help tell the story.

How can evaluation be used for sustainability?

- Share evaluation findings with policymakers and other stakeholders so they’ll understand the significant problems your program addresses as well as the evidence that the program’s approach is working. Help them to appreciate how mentoring can impact the bottom line they’re most concerned with. For example, when speaking with probation officers, emphasize how truancy and suspension rates have decreased among program participants—a program outcome that translates directly into resources saved for the probation department.
- Use quantitative and qualitative evaluation findings to tell your program’s story (e.g., mentors’ reports on positive interactions with mentees, mentees’ reflections on how time spent with a mentor has helped them to progress toward a personal goal or to stay connected at school). These anecdotes and examples give a human face to the program’s positive results.

**FINANCE**

While funding is an essential component in program sustainability, it may be possible to sustain some of your program’s positive impacts with far less funding than the original grant provided. Sustainability planning will enable you to identify which program functions can be carried out without new funding and to determine the resources that are essential to sustaining program outcomes.

How can finance strategies—other than grant funding—help to sustain your program?

- Mentoring programs may find they’re able to develop a revenue stream through local government funding or by creating third-party payment mechanisms for providing a service. Non-profit organizations increasingly use an array of revenue-generating, fundraising strategies to support programs originally supported entirely with grant funds.

- Programs can identify individual donors willing to sponsor mentoring relationships or provide in-kind donations of materials or free activities for mentor-mentee pairs.