



Growing a Strengths-Based Approach Throughout Your Mentoring Program

A Self-Assessment Tool for Program Staff

Objective: The purpose of this tool is to assist program staff in incorporating strengths-based approaches throughout each of the 6 Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring as they administer a mentoring program.

How to use the tool:

- Self-reflect on each of the questions. List examples of practices you would like to start using, stop using, or continue using.
 - Engage stakeholders in assessing your program's strengths-based approach, including: youth participants, mentors, caregivers, other staff, community partners, Board members, donors, and other supporters. Incorporate their feedback into your action plan.
 - Create a workplan and revisit this tool at a later date to assess your program's progress.
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Recruitment (mentor, mentee and caregiver)

- Do mentor recruitment materials (verbal presentations and written materials) both engender positive attitudes about mentoring and the young people in the program, while also presenting a realistic portrayal of what the commitment of being a mentor will entail?
- Do mentee or caregiver enrollment materials provide full information about the program structure and objectives to allow mentees and caregivers to make an informed decision about whether the program is a good fit for them?
- In what ways can your program make mentor and mentee recruitment materials more accessible and inclusive to people of diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and availability?
- How can your program incorporate ongoing youth voice in determining the characteristics of mentors to recruit?
- How can your program build on existing strengths and resources, including the community in which the program operates and current program participants, to contribute to ongoing mentor and mentee recruitment?

- Optional: If appropriate for your program model, does the program have practices in place to assist young people in engaging adults already in their life to serve as mentors?*

Screening

- Does your program recognize that it is an ongoing process of continuous improvement to be able to well articulate and utilize criteria for assessing strengths-based abilities in potential mentors? Is your program committed to making a discussion about this value an ongoing part of continuous quality improvement?
- Has your program utilized multiple points during the screening process to assess a potential mentor's ability to adhere to a strengths-based approach, for example, options may include:
 - In an informational session or Q&A with staff
 - In a written application
 - In a verbal interview
 - In the reference letters
- Has your program explicitly discussed with potential mentors their expectations about mentoring a young person and the mentoring relationship? Has your program explored with potential mentors how they will honor their volunteer commitment even if they face challenges in the relationship or realize they had expectations they were not aware of once the relationship begins?
- Have mentees and caregivers been informed of the program's strengths-based approach so they can make an informed decision if that aligns with their values and expectations for the experience?

Training

- Does your program address the recommended training topics in the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* in order to ensure that mentors have an informed understanding of youth development, program policies, and program objectives and values?
- Can you utilize interactive exercises or activities during training to help mentors practice a strengths-based approach in a group learning context (E.g. role plays, games, discussion prompts, etc)
- Do you provide feedback to mentors during or after training?
- How can you explore a mentee's goals during mentee orientation or meeting? How can you use the caregiver orientation or meeting to learn more about the young person's strengths and resources in their life and community?

Matching

- What processes does your program have in place to identify and consider the strengths of mentees and mentors during the matching process?
- How does your program ensure youth voice and choice in identifying a potential mentor who can engage around the young person's self-identified strengths and interests?
- What role can your program staff play in elevating strengths during the match meeting discussion and documentation?
- What steps can your program staff take to help all parties to the match meeting feel informed, valued, and prepared?
- Is your program attending to the privacy and confidentiality of all parties involved in accordance with your program policies so that parties can trust that boundaries and consistency are priorities?

Monitoring and Support

- Do program staff contact matches consistently (i.e. not just when there is a question, problem or concern)?
- Do program staff identify and praise mentors, mentees or caregivers when they demonstrate a strengths-based approach or mindset during match support calls?
- Can your program further assist mentors in identifying activities or topics that will build on a youth's strengths or natural supports in the mentee's life and community?
- Are program staff praising effort and progress as well as outcomes or achievements?
- In what ways can your program staff provide resources and referrals to build on the interests and positive experiences that occur in the relationship, not only to address any challenges or concerns that may arise?
- Does post-match mentor training include educational offerings that help mentors identify and build on strengths, not just address concerns?
- Are program staff prepared to offer coaching and feedback when mentors are struggling to adhere to a strengths-based approach?
- How does your program utilize professional development and a supportive organizational culture to support staff in being able to have conversations with matches, that may sometimes be difficult, to continuously build a strengths-based approach in the program?

Closure

- Is your program prepared to address match closure situations by putting in place the recommendations of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* for different circumstances?
- Does your program center youth voice and choices in the closure process, regardless of the reason for closure?
- How does your program invite and learn from positive experiences, growth, and enrichment that the mentor and mentee experienced during the match relationship?
- In what ways does your program celebrate and recognize the achievements of the mentee, mentor, and caregiver(s) by participating in the program?

- In what ways can your program build on the strength of the mentor, mentee, or caregiver(s)' participation in the program by considering the following, if appropriate and in accordance with your program policies:
 - Re-matching
 - Inviting referrals of other program participants in the social network of the mentor, mentee, or caregiver(s)
 - Planfully considering what post-closure contact would look like
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Reference:

MENTOR National. [*Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring, 4th Ed.*](#)

<https://www.mentoring.org/resource/elements-of-effective-practice-for-mentoring/>