

The Illinois After-School Partnership

Peer Mentoring/Networking System

Draft Recommendations from Capacity Building Work Group

General Description

All programs can benefit from interaction with other programs and agencies, but the level of structure and intensity of these interactions may vary with program capacity. To that end, a peer mentoring/networking system would have two main components:

- **Formal Peer-to-Peer Mentoring** between 2 after-school programs, matching programs based on needs.
- **Informal Networking Opportunities** for programs, allowing for general networking time, as well as more structured capacity building (training, activities, etc.)

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring

Mentees: The order of priority for groups to be mentored would be:

- New agencies/programs
- New program directors
- Struggling programs
- Program with identified areas of needed capacity building

Mentors: Programs selected as mentors would need to:

- Be familiar with the Partnership's work, Task Force Report elements and principles
- Be knowledgeable about resources, tools and information about out-of-school-time, including the Partnership's website resources
- Demonstrated experience, knowledge and results in areas needed by those to be mentored

Matching Process

Programs needing mentoring would be able to select from the list of available mentors, based on their areas of need. Information about each mentor would be provided to help mentees determine who would be the best match for them. Some programs may want to be matched with programs with the same characteristics in a certain area and others may want to be matched with a program different from them. Providing mentees with relevant information on possible mentors can help guide their decisions.

Information would be provided in the following areas:

- Geographic location
- Community demographics
- Population Served (Ages, etc.)
- Agency/Program Size
- Program Setting (school based, faith-based, park district, CBO, etc.)
- Number of sites
- Years of Experience
- Agency/Program mission
- Program Focus
- Components Offered
- Organizational/Program achievements/areas of recognition
- Agency/Program budgets
- Licensing/Accreditation status (if applicable)
- Funding Sources

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Peer-to-Peer Mentoring, Continued

Activities

- Mentors would be equipped with a checklist of things to covering over the course of the mentoring relationship. The mentor and mentee could work to develop a plan/outline that covers what the goals are for the mentoring process. Again, this plan would be based on the mentee's needs and the mentor's particular area of expertise. The mentoring pair would determine their frequency of meetings/phone calls etc. as part of their plan.
- An integral part of the mentoring would be that both parties would visit each other sites to observe program activities, demonstrate best practices in operation, identify areas of suggested improvement, meet each others staff, meet collaborating partners, etc., to enhance the learning and information sharing between organizations
- The pair would determine when the mentoring relationship is over based on goals reached in the plan
- An evaluation of the mentoring process could be completed to measure its effectiveness

Networking Opportunities

Networking

Organizations, those involved in the peer mentoring system as well as any organizations who are interested, would be able to come together a few times a year at the regional level. These gatherings would give organizational/program staff the opportunity to meet peers in other agencies and discuss challenges, collaboration opportunities, program ideas, accomplishments, etc. These discussions can be very informal, or could be facilitated conversations. Having all organizations able to participate allows for information flow across all types of programs, and can benefit those who may not be in the formal mentoring program, but could use some information, resources, or general peer support.

Training/Information Exchange

These gatherings also provide an opportunity to conduct some training or capacity building activities. Mentor organizations could present on their areas of expertise, or outside trainers or facilitators could be brought in to use this opportunity to present their workshops or conduct group activities that help build capacity around the core elements of out-of-school-time programs. These can be hosted perhaps at program sites on a rotating basis, or other community facilities. These gatherings can be connected to existing networks where appropriate.

Challenges/Questions

- Organizations may have limited resources (time and money) to travel to mentor sites or to networking opportunities
- Scheduling time to conduct these capacity building activities can be difficult around programming and staff schedules
- What are incentives for mentors? Mentees have the incentive of knowledge and expertise already.
- How are quality mentors assessed and selected? Pre-requisites for mentors could be developed.
- Peer mentoring requires a commitment of time and resources and staff that may prevent organizations from participating, unless built into organizational planning and resources are dedicated to this.
- Some system should be in place to identify, recruit & track available mentors, as well as to collect evaluations of the mentoring activities
- A system of inviting/coordinating the regional gatherings is needed
- How do we build on existing mentoring programs/training resources in existence?
- Would programs be required by state funders to be mentored or strictly voluntary?

The Illinois After-school Partnership is Co-Chaired by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education. The Illinois Center for Violence Prevention serves as the intermediary for the Partnership