

# **Mentoring Made Easy**

## **A practical guide**

NSW Government Publication

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# INTRODUCTION

Mentoring provides an opportunity to build the potential of employees. It fosters professional relationships where parties have the opportunity to collaborate and share insights. It provides a forum to offer constructive and frank advice to support the career development of the mentee. It is particularly effective in fostering the career development of members of equal employment opportunity (EEO) groups such as women, people with a disability, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and members of racial, ethnic, and ethno-religious minority groups.

Mentoring offers managers and executives a cost-effective way of assisting groups of employees to acquire the knowledge and skills to operate within a changing environment. This booklet simplifies the process, and showcases the experiences of a number of NSW Public Sector agencies.

This booklet will also be useful to people who wish to establish a mentoring relationship outside a formal agency-sponsored program.

I commend mentoring as a powerful strategy.

*Chris Raper  
Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment*

# WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is a relationship which gives people the opportunity to share their professional and personal skills and experiences, and to grow and develop in the process.

Typically, it is a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced and a less experienced employee. It is based upon encouragement, constructive comments, openness, mutual trust, respect and a willingness to learn and share.

'It is a relationship, not just a procedure or activity, where one person professionally assists the career development of another, outside the normal manager/subordinate relationship.'

(S Mind, 'Business Mentoring and Coaching', *Training and Development*, April 1993, p 26)

'A deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the less experienced person grow and develop specific competencies.'

(M Murray and M Owen, *Beyond the Myths of Mentoring: How to Facilitate an Effective Mentoring Program*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1991, p xiv)

# WHY A MENTORING PROGRAM?

Mentoring is an effective strategy which can contribute significantly to the career development of employees.

The introduction of formal mentoring programs in the workplace is relatively new. However, the process of the more experienced offering support, advice and assistance to the younger and less experienced group members has a long history. It is found in the effective elder system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, for example, and has also existed in western societies, particularly among men in middle and senior management.

It provides a cost-effective work-based learning strategy to achieve career development outcomes for individual employees. It has particular benefits to EEO groups who historically have not had equitable access to developmental opportunities.

There are good reasons to consider a mentoring program:

- the Premier's Memorandum to Ministers No 95/50 directed all Public Sector agencies to introduce measures to improve significantly the distribution and representation of women in key positions
- Public Sector reform initiatives require all organisations to improve their people management skills and to make greater use of the diversity of their workforces
- mentoring is an easy to administer strategy which can improve the self-confidence and job competitiveness of women and other EEO group members
- mentoring is an effective method for the transference of professional, technical and management skills
- mentoring focuses on developing employees' skills and potential, and can thus enhance the diversity of the workforce to reflect the agency's client groups
- mentoring benefits all concerned — the agency, the mentees, mentors and other employees — by increasing the skills, flexibility and knowledge of all participating employees, enhancing morale and regenerating enthusiasm, and
- in line with current trends in staff development, mentoring is conducted in-house and so can meet the particular needs of the agency.

# THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING PROGRAMS

Structured mentoring programs provide a more transparent selection process to match mentors and mentees. They provide career development opportunities to employees that can be linked to meeting clear objectives for the agency, the mentee and mentor. They can offer the following benefits to mentees, mentors and agencies.

## BENEFITS TO THE MENTEE

- increased skills and knowledge
- increased potential for career mobility and promotion
- improved understanding of their roles in the organisation
- insights into the culture and unwritten rules of the organisation
- a supportive environment in which successes and failures can be evaluated in a non-confrontational manner
- a smoother transition through management levels
- a powerful learning tool to acquire competencies and professional experience
- potential for increased visibility
- networking opportunities
- development of professional skills and self-confidence
- recognition and satisfaction
- empowerment
- encourages different perspectives and attitudes to one's work, and
- develops greater appreciation of the complexities of decision-making within the organisational framework.

## BENEFITS TO THE MENTOR

- opportunities to test new ideas
- enhanced knowledge of other areas of the agency
- renewed enthusiasm for their role as an experienced employee
- higher level recognition of their worth and skills through encouragement to take on a mentoring role
- challenging discussions with people who have fresh perspectives and who are not already part of the organisational thinking
- raising awareness and responsiveness to EEO group issues in a non-threatening/non-compulsory process
- satisfaction from contributing to the mentee's development
- opportunities to reflect upon and articulate their role

- cultural awareness — improved understanding of employment equity management principles
- develop deeper awareness of their own behaviour
- improved inter-personal skills in counselling, listening, modelling and leading, and
- improved ability to share experience and knowledge.

## **BENEFITS TO THE AGENCY**

- improved delivery of services through more informed and skilled staff
- application of knowledge gained from mentoring
- reduced recruitment and selection costs as a result of higher employee retention
- progress towards diversity and equal opportunity in the workplace
- improved communication between separate areas of the agency
- support networks for employees in times of organisational change
- managers with enhanced people management skills
- successful mentees often become mentors and better people managers
- promotes the concept of a learning environment where employees are encouraged to be developed
- more committed and productive staff
- can contribute to succession planning, employment equity planning, and
- transmitting of cultural values and norms that can contribute to a change in workplace culture.

# **STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAM**

## **1 OBTAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Obtaining the visible support and endorsement of the Chief Executive Officer, not only to initiate the program but throughout its duration, is the first important step.

This will be valuable in gaining commitment from mentees, potential mentors within senior management and managers with staff participating in the program.

## **2 DETERMINE AIMS AND DESIRED OUTCOMES**

Give thought to your reasons for undertaking a mentoring program, including:

- why your agency is introducing a mentoring program
- what are the desired outcomes of your program
- should the mentoring program form part of your strategy to increase opportunities, inclusiveness and retention for EEO groups
- how does the program link to your agency's business and corporate goals
- which groups of staff will be invited to participate in the pilot program and which in subsequent programs?

It is important to determine the performance indicators at the beginning, a task that your facilitator can assist you with. Some examples are:

- mentees as a group are gaining more promotions and career opportunities
- mentees know more about the agency's functions and directions
- managers report that mentees are working more effectively
- mentees are more confident in their career planning skills, which they are applying
- mentors report benefits from the relationship — new insights into their decision-making and management style, better people management or a fresh perspective on the organisation, and
- the agency reports improved outcomes for EEO groups.

It is also important to identify the resources and costs required to implement and manage the program and gain approval to proceed.

## **3 APPOINT KEY STAFF**

### **Facilitator**

Your mentoring program will need a facilitator who is widely experienced in conducting mentoring programs. If this experience is not available within the agency, you may decide to engage an external facilitator.

The facilitator, whether internal or external, needs to be involved at the beginning of the program, be part of the program planning, and remain in at least an advisory capacity throughout the duration of the program.

The facilitator:

- advises on the shape, size and content of the program
- presents general information sessions
- conducts training sessions for mentees and mentors ensuring employment equity and cultural awareness components are included
- advises and counsels mentees and mentors during the program, and
- provides feedback on the progress of the program to the agency executive.

### Internal coordinator

Whether your facilitator is internal or external, you will also need a coordinator to deal with the administrative aspects of the program.

The coordinator should be an employee with:

- a good understanding of the agency
- staff development skills
- adult learning skills
- a good understanding of employment equity principles, and
- the ability to coordinate, implement and evaluate programs.

The coordinator administers the program by:

- assisting in the planning
- establishing and handling the budget
- obtaining any necessary approvals
- organising venues
- organising attendances at training sessions
- promoting the program within the agency
- organising applications and any necessary selection process
- supporting the mentee/mentor pairs
- supporting the facilitator, and
- reporting on the progress and outcomes of the program.

## 4 PLAN AND OBTAIN APPROVALS

With the assistance of your facilitator and coordinator, draw up a plan for your mentoring program that includes:

- the aims
- the desired outcomes
- how many mentee/mentor pairs will be in the program
- the level of training and support to be given to mentees and mentors

- how long the program will run (usually nine to 12 months)
- a timeline which allows for planning preparation, in-house publicity, conducting information sessions, selection and training of participants
- the cost of running the program, including the facilitator's fee, hiring of training rooms, printing of documents etc
- any additional resources which will be needed for the program, eg ongoing access to administrative support, and
- performance indicators for evaluating the program (see Step 2).

## **5 ANNOUNCE AND PUBLICISE**

Publicise the proposed program by using existing communication channels — newsletters, noticeboards, team meetings, circulars and e-mails. Ensure that all eligible staff are informed.

In all information releases:

- include the endorsement of the Chief Executive Officer
- outline the reasons for the program
- list the benefits to mentees, mentors and the agency
- set out the eligibility criteria for the pilot program
- invite written expressions of interest from potential mentees and mentors, which should include the expectations of both groups, the specific needs of mentees and the career details, skills, knowledge and interests of the mentors
- include a deadline for registering interest, and
- include details of information sessions (see Step 6). Make it clear that as mentoring is a valuable tool for managers, all managers are particularly encouraged to attend.

If the initial program is targeted to women or EEO group members you may wish to demonstrate outcomes in your employment equity program. You may also wish to make a commitment to broaden eligibility in future.

## **6 CONDUCT INFORMATION SESSIONS**

Hold information sessions for all interested employees, including people not in the initial program. These sessions should be presented by the program facilitator.

Employees who are potential mentors or mentees should be particularly encouraged to attend. Attendance at a session should ideally be a requirement for entry into the program. All supervisors should be encouraged to attend.

The sessions should:

- outline the aims and benefits of the program
- include information about the duration of the program and the training and support to be given
- explain the roles and responsibilities of the mentee, mentor, coordinator and/or facilitator
- explain that mentoring is a staff development activity and does not conflict with the merit principle, and
- describe how the program interacts with day-to-day supervision and the agency's performance management system and how it links to the corporate and business plan.

## **7 SELECT PARTICIPANTS**

Sometimes, mentees and mentors independently form pairs. Usually, however, the participants will need assistance to form pairs.

A successful strategy is to hold a meeting at which all parties outline their needs and expectations. Subsequently, either the mentees only or all participants confidentially indicate their first and second preferences for their partner. This process can be facilitated by previous distribution of the career details, strengths and preferences of the mentors to mentees.

Criteria for successful mentor selection may be found at p 20.

Much has been said and written about male/female pairs. In general, the attributes of the potential mentor are more important than her/his gender. The effectiveness of the mentoring relationship is the crucial issue.

Where the pair includes partners of diverse backgrounds (ethnicity, age, disability) both have potential for even greater benefit from new insights.

## **8 PROVIDE TRAINING**

Public Sector experience to date suggests that the most successful training approach is one which has both separate and combined sessions for mentees and mentors. Some agencies have also invited the mentees' managers to the mentor sessions to make them familiar with the process and encourage their cooperation with the program.

It is well to acknowledge that not all those selected to be mentors are totally confident in the role. A mentors' support network can provide a recognised forum for discussion and mutual support.

It is recommended that appropriate EEO group awareness training is also integrated to maximise equitable outcomes for all employees.

## **9 DEVELOP MENTORING AGREEMENTS**

Mentee and mentor pairs should be encouraged to draw up a mentoring agreement to help clarify their respective roles and expectations (see model opposite). The agreement, while not binding, determines the framework of the relationship. The agreement must allow for a no-fault dissolution of the relationship. For more details on the roles of mentees and mentors, see p 21.

## MENTORING AGREEMENT

We are voluntarily entering into a mutually beneficial relationship. It is intended this relationship will be a rewarding experience and that our time together will be spent in personal and professional development activities. Features of our mentoring relationship will include:

Commencement date .....

Duration of the mentoring program .....

Likely frequency of meetings .....

Maximum length of each meeting .....

Mentoring activities .....

.....

We have discussed the basic principles underlying our mentoring relationship as a developmental opportunity. We agree to a no-fault conclusion of this relationship if necessary.

Mentee \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **10 MONITOR, SUPPORT AND EVALUATE**

Support should be offered by both the facilitator and the coordinator, particularly in the first two months. However, care must be taken to avoid intruding into the establishment of the mentoring relationships. For that reason, email or phone contacts are often most appropriate.

Expect your program to develop and change as the agency gains more mentoring experience. Programs need to be fluid and flexible to meet the changing attributes and needs of the participants and the agency. They also need to take into account the results of performance measures (see p 12).

All development programs can become more effective with experience and evaluation, but recognise the successes of the program, particularly when communicating results to the rest of the agency.

With experience, the internal coordinator and other staff will be able to take on more responsibility for the planning and presentation of the program, with the facilitator and others being used only as keynote speakers.

## **11 NETWORKING**

Establishing networks with other members of the group also provides an opportunity to share ideas and collaboratively solve potential or common problems and issues. The network group could meet face to face or organise an online electronic network to share ideas and information.

A mentoring network provides a forum for:

- sharing mentoring stories and significant learning milestones
- opportunities to establish an ongoing support group after the formal mentoring program has been completed
- opportunities to get together to identify common areas of interest or key topics that would be beneficial to cover in information sessions
- promoting the cross-fertilisation of ideas, and evaluating and reviewing the effectiveness of the program.

# CHOOSING A MENTOR

When a potential mentee sets out to identify and approach a potential mentor, the following factors need to be considered:

- the mentor should be a person with greater experience and knowledge
- the mentor should have a flexible and progressive management style, particularly in people management
- the mentee must trust the mentor, and know that their confidence will be kept
- the mentor needs to be a person who will enjoy helping the mentee develop skills and knowledge, and be able to share knowledge and experience openly and honestly
- the mentor acts as the mentee's confidante, consultant and coach. While friendship may evolve, it is not the primary goal of the relationship
- it is recommended that the mentor be someone other than the mentee's immediate manager, in order for the mentee to expand networks, and to avoid potentially conflicting roles. It is important, however, that the manager be involved in the process and kept informed, so that she/he can contribute to the process
- mentoring requires good inter-personal skills. The mentor may require training to support them in their role, and
- the mentor needs to be a person who is aware of their employment equity responsibilities in supporting staff.

# ROLES AND ATTRIBUTES OF THE MENTEE AND MENTOR

If a mentoring program is to be successful, all parties must understand their part in the process.

The mentee:

- sets out to achieve new skills and knowledge to apply to their career
- seeks guidance and advice in their professional development
- accepts responsibility for their own decisions and actions, and maintains confidentiality
- acts on expert and objective advice
- carries out tasks and projects by agreed times
- maintains mutual trust and respect, and
- attends all scheduled meetings.

The mentor:

- facilitates the mentee's professional growth
- provides information, guidance and constructive comments
- assists in the evaluation of the mentee's plans and decisions
- supports and encourages and, when necessary, highlights shortfalls in agreed performance
- maintains confidentiality
- provides constructive feedback at all times
- maintains mutual trust and respect
- attends all scheduled meetings with the mentee
- introduces the mentee to the corporate structure, its politics and players, and
- leads by example.

Discussion with successful mentoring pairs identified the following essential attributes, many of which were applicable to both mentees and mentors:

- ability to listen, openness and commitment
- time management and self-management skills
- assertiveness, realism and discretion
- knowledgeable or able to find out
- challenging, analytical and evaluating, and
- ability to change/accept change.

Additional attributes thought necessary for mentors were:

- motivating and able to demonstrate leadership
- able to identify opportunities, and
- honest and able to give constructive advice.

To these could be added the ability to act as a role model.

There is no formula for how often a mentee/mentor pair makes contact. The parties may choose to meet regularly, or they may prefer to meet when there is the need to focus on a particular issue (for example, a course assignment, a special project or a new position). For formal programs, timetable-specific meetings are useful for getting both parties together. The parties may agree on a set time for each meeting, or they may be more comfortable with a less formal arrangement. These and other issues must be worked out by the individual mentee/mentor pairs.

Judgment of the success of mentoring should focus on the quality of outcomes. However, a problem sometimes arises where mentees are unable to access mentors who, while eager to be involved, are unavoidably over-committed to their primary work tasks.

Any decision as to whether the particular relationship will continue must be made by the mentoring pairs.

# MENTORING FOR EEO GROUPS

Mentoring is a particularly powerful tool in the personal and professional development of equal employment opportunity (EEO) group members — currently women, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, members of racial, ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups, and people with a disability.

Informal mentoring relationships tend to be established independently where there is a genuine commitment between the parties for the relationships to work. Formal mentoring programs provide transparent selection and have the capacity to provide more equitable access for targeted EEO groups.

Members of these groups can gain:

- increased confidence and self-esteem
- enhanced knowledge of how their employing agencies function
- greater visibility for their competencies
- broader networks
- new job skills and knowledge, and
- the opportunity to demonstrate that people with different approaches to analysis and decision-making can provide valuable insights and solutions.

When mentors for EEO group members are being chosen it is particularly important that they are selected for their ability to teach, guide, coach and share, rather than on the basis of their position alone. In some instances peer mentoring may be a preferred option. It is also important that the mentor is able to model a flexible, people-oriented management style.

Mentors can value and learn from other people's different perspectives and cultural identities and gain increased cultural awareness.

Mentors may gain insights into diversity issues and greater understanding of the needs of EEO groups. They can create developmental relationships with people outside their normal groups.

# **OTHER WAYS OF MENTORING**

This booklet addresses the most common form of mentoring — a one-to-one relationship in which the more experienced person assists the less experienced in regular face-to-face meetings. This section deals with variations, which may arise from circumstances or preferences.

## **MORE THAN ONE MENTEE**

In some agencies there may be a shortage of suitable mentors. If the parties are willing, a mentor may have two or three mentees, meeting with them separately or, where appropriate, as a group. The group situation can allow the mentees to benefit from one another's experience and opinions, as well as from those of the mentor.

## **GROUP MENTORING**

Provides the opportunity to mentor a wider pool of employees. It can foster joint learning across the whole organisation. The objective is to place a small group of between four to six mentees with an experienced mentor. An example could be Spokeswomen where a group of Spokeswomen get together with a senior member of staff to be mentored. This group would identify issues and receive guidance and feedback from the mentor as a group. It also provides the opportunity to network and learn from other colleagues.

The mentor acts as the facilitator, guide and catalyst for sharing personal experiences and insights and to create a forum for discussion and learning.

## **PEER MENTORING**

In small and isolated work locations the best solution could be colleagues mentoring one another, with the emphasis on mutual support, cooperation in researching areas of common interest and setting timescales and goals for ongoing work and projects. Peer mentoring can also work well for those within equity groups.

## **ON-LINE MENTORING**

There are examples of successful online mentoring, in which the parties, knowing each other or having had one intensive face-to-face meeting, have agreed to conduct their mentoring relationship primarily at a distance — by phone, fax, e-mail, with meetings whenever circumstances allow. This is particularly suitable for people working in remote areas.

It provides an opportunity to gain exposure to a wider level of information and resources. Information can effectively be shared through email. For formal mentoring programs an electronic network also provides opportunities for mentees to network and share experiences with their peers.

For online professional development to be effective it will need to be supported by the facilitator and/or coordinator. Technology needs to be supplemented with face-to-face contact to motivate, encourage and sustain the mentoring relationship. For formal mentoring arrangements it is important to organise workshops or meetings that both the mentee and mentor can attend together.

# **MENTORING WITHOUT A PROGRAM**

Not all Public Sector agencies have a formal mentoring program. It is therefore important to realise that, while agency-sponsored programs are desirable, one of the great advantages of mentoring is that it can take place outside a structured program.

A successful mentoring relationship can be established and maintained if information about the process is available, and the active support of internal agency people in areas such as employment equity and staff development is offered.

The responsibility is on the potential mentee to identify and approach the possible mentor. The mentoring pairs will also need to gain a shared knowledge of mentoring and how it may assist the mentee's career planning within the agency. The criteria for mentor selection may be found on p 20.

# CASE STUDIES

## DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

### A Group Mentoring Process

The group mentoring program formed part of the Environment Protection Authority's (now Department of Environment and Conservation) management development program. The mentoring program was established as a long-term career development strategy. It aimed to support, enhance and extend the knowledge and skill development of its employees.

It provided an opportunity for senior managers to share their knowledge and personal experiences with potential leaders of the future. It was agreed to take a group approach, to ensure a broader pool of employees had access to the insights, knowledge and information of the mentors.

### The Program

The Authority used an external coordinator to develop the program and facilitate the information and training sessions for mentors and mentees.

The mentoring program ran over a six-month period and participants met on a monthly basis. Twelve mentees were placed across three groups based on their personal development needs.

Initial training consisted of a three-hour training program for the mentees which combined the last hour with participation from mentors.

Each group identified the structure, content and framework for the mentoring meetings as well as the mentor's role in the process. The agenda of the meetings incorporated the individual and broader development needs required from each specific group.

### Outcomes

The expectations of the program were met. The gains identified by mentees included:

- an increase in knowledge and self-confidence
- higher job satisfaction
- better understanding of the culture and values of the agency
- better perception of career prospects
- a valuable opportunity to gain an understanding of the roles across various business units, and
- the opportunity to establish valuable networks within a supportive environment.

The group networks have continued beyond the formal six month period and continue to provide benefits to all parties.

The program has gained a strong commitment from senior management. It has now been expanded and is planned to be offered to other employees.

Mentors identified that the program provided a positive forum to discuss critical work issues across the groups. It enhanced their interpersonal skills and provided an opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise within a challenging and confidential environment.

## Advice to Others

- keep managers/supervisors of each mentee informed about the program
- provide opportunities to ensure the networks established can continue after completion of the program.

## ATTORNEY GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

The aim of the program was to support employees to gain access to the management skills and styles of senior managers in the Department. The program had the support of the Director General.

### The Program

A 12-month Pilot Management Mentoring Program was conducted and managed by the Corporate Development and Training Unit. The program was open to staff from a non-English speaking backgrounds and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to women in Grade 7/8 positions and above.

The program was advertised widely throughout the organisation.

The group consisted of 18 mentee-mentor pairs. Participants represented a diverse pool of applicants and included representatives from EEO groups and rural areas.

Mentors lodged an expression of interest to participate in the program. The mentees were selected by a panel and their applications were considered based on the following factors:

- ability to meet the stated eligibility criteria
- the spread of applicants across various business centres
- representation from country and city
- all mentees were required to attend the initial training day
- the application being endorsed and signed by the manager of the applicant.

The program manager provided an opportunity for the pairs to organise their meetings and mentoring arrangements based on individual needs and availability. Most mentees received their first choice of mentor.

With the assistance of an external facilitator, a mentoring training day was held for all mentors and mentees.

A career development workshop was conducted for the mentees. A series of structured meetings and briefings were also organised by the program manager to provide opportunities for the mentees to network and develop broader objectives. These included lunchtime meetings with managers, who outlined their career development and what helped them reach the role they now have. The Director General also met informally with the mentees and discussed his career, what assisted him and what advice he would give in developing career potential. Mentees also completed a 360 degree feedback instrument, and a work profile instrument. Regular meetings were also organised for the mentees to support each other, share ideas and develop networks. A communication/image consultant also briefed the mentees on communication promoters and inhibitors.

### Outcomes

The evaluation revealed the participants were very pleased with the content and outcomes of the mentoring program. The opportunity to form networks with other participants and the workshops conducted to support the program were found to be valuable.

All participants appreciated the opportunity to focus formally on their careers and gain insights from more senior members of staff from different work areas.

Overall, the participants rated the program as very worthwhile and of great value. It provided insights into the wider organisational culture of the Attorney General's Department and gave them a stronger commitment to the values inherent in providing public service.

Mentors said that they improved their interpersonal and communication skills. They identified the rewards from establishing a professional relationship with colleagues where they had the opportunity to share their experience and insights as well as learn from the mentees.

The support provided by the program manager in coordinating the training and networking sessions and workshops/meetings proved to be invaluable for both mentors and mentees.

## **NSW PREMIER'S DEPARTMENT**

**Principal Project Manager,  
Aboriginal Service Delivery Strategy Service Delivery Improvement  
Directorate**

It is important for Public Sector employees to value, support and understand cultural issues impacting on Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders employed across the Sector. Many people from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background will seek out informal mentoring arrangements which provide a supportive relationship that is based on mutual trust.

Informal mentoring arrangements have been supported and managed by the Principal Project Manager, Aboriginal Service Delivery Strategy. This has predominately resulted from individuals from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background approaching her directly to act as their mentor. She is currently mentoring approximately 20 mentees employed across the NSW Public Sector.

As a senior Public Sector employee from an Aboriginal cultural background she is a role model and is called upon to champion more inclusive and culturally sensitive workplaces.

**Keys to successful informal mentoring arrangements:**

- be clear on what the mentee requires
- assess whether you are the most suitable mentor for a particular individual. If not, refer the mentee to a suitable mentor
- the level of involvement for each individual must be established, clearly understood and communicated prior to agreeing to act as a mentor
- provide honest and open feedback and constructive advice
- be clear what the person is doing and what they need to do to progress their career and personal development
- ensure you remain actively committed to supporting your mentees
- plan ahead and ensure you organise your work priorities to make contact with your mentees
- send and email articles and information of interest to your mentees
- actively encourage your mentees to participate in suitable courses, workshops and other career development initiatives
- actively support your mentees to apply for appropriate jobs
- encourage your mentees to consider different perspectives on work

- provide opportunities for self-reflection
- be aware of the culture of the agencies where the mentees are working
- if acting as an advocate on behalf of a mentee, be sure to get the perspectives from the key parties involved
- challenge others' perceptions of cultural beliefs
- involve and support the mentees' managers
- when dealing with workplace issues, deal with the person on a one-to-one level. Foster collaborative problem solving, decision-making, team work and cultural awareness.

### **Benefits gained from informal mentoring**

As a mentor, the Principal Project Manager has greatly increased and enhanced her interpersonal communication skills, particularly in providing frank advice. She has also liaised with individual mentees' managers to enhance their understanding of cultural issues.

Gains reported by people being mentored by her are an increase in skills, knowledge and self-confidence, better work and family balance, higher job satisfaction, better understanding of the Public Sector work environment, better perception of career prospects and opportunities to discuss career planning in a supportive environment.

### **Advice to others**

If you are going to act as a person's mentor you need to take this commitment seriously as it will take time and should remain an ongoing priority.

When mentoring people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background it may be necessary to mediate differing insights from other work colleagues. When dealing with people, be constructive and specific. Ask questions and help them to shift their understanding of Aboriginal cultures and ways of doing business.

## **NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **Staff with Disabilities Network Pilot Mentoring Program 2003**

The pilot mentoring program for staff with disabilities was established and facilitated by the TAFE Professional Development Network and the WorkAble Coordinator, Disability Programs, in collaboration with the Staff with Disabilities Network. The initiative was supported through Disability Programs and Human Resources Directorates. The program ran for 12 months.

The facilitation process occurred within an action-learning framework which encouraged reflection, networking interactions and flexibility within the partnerships. This was to ensure that the relationships could accommodate individual needs including reasonable adjustment requirements, time restraints and communication styles.

### **The Program**

The aims of the mentoring program were to:

- improve access to skill acquisition and knowledge
- facilitate career development
- facilitate personal and professional development
- recognise the existing skills of staff with disabilities

- develop and retain skilled staff with disabilities
- develop and enhance people management skills.

An overview of the proposed mentoring program was presented at the Staff with Disabilities Network workshop in November 2002. Participants at the conference lodged an expression of interest to participate in the mentoring program.

An orientation workshop was conducted. This focused on roles, expectations and responsibilities of both mentor and mentee. The facilitators also guided pairs into clear and understood mentoring agreements. Individual meeting times were negotiated between the mentees and mentors to suit their reasonable accommodation needs and mutual work arrangements. A learning resource handbook was also provided to support participants throughout the program.

A 'progress' workshop was conducted mid-way which included a short career development component. All participants developed an individual career plan.

The final mentoring workshop provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their significant milestones, the professional and personal value of the program and its future directions. A formal written evaluation was conducted.

## Outcomes

The pre-program expectations of the mentees were met or exceeded. The gains reported included a renewed interest and focus on their professional development.

The majority of the mentoring relationships have continued beyond the formal program with a genuine commitment to foster the development and careers of the mentees.

All participants agreed that the program provided them with the opportunity to make contact with members of a group outside their normal working relationship. Participants were encouraged to challenge themselves and 'step outside their comfort zone'.

The program has facilitated the upgrading of the skills, motivation, morale and confidence of staff with disabilities. Further it has led to better human resource outcomes for the Department and has facilitated disability awareness in an ongoing and non-confrontational process.

The success of the 2003 Pilot Mentor Program for staff with disabilities demonstrated that mentoring is a strategy that is valued and has positive outcomes for both the Department and the individuals.

In 2004 the Staff with Disabilities Network has decided to make the program accessible to more members by creating regional mentoring programs in Western Sydney and the Hunter.

In addition, staff with disabilities across TAFE institutes, regional offices and state office locations will be encouraged to act as either mentee or mentor to other staff. The facilitators feel this will represent another non-confrontational strategy for raising disability awareness and inclusion.

## Advice to Others

- Have at least one (we had two) facilitators who remain available to all participants throughout the program providing support and guidance
- Emphasise the value of personal and professional development through mentoring (for both mentor and mentee)
- Have a flexible program designed to meet the needs of the individuals and culture of the agency
- Plan the program and ensure you organise active support and consultation with senior staff/managers. Widely report the program results

- Ensure specific mentor training and support is provided at the beginning of the program and developed through the program with further workshops and facilitator support
- The workshops proved to be an important learning tool for mentors and mentees and provided valuable opportunities to network and evaluate the program's progress.

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