NPHI BEST PRACTICES SERIES: MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is a two-way exchange in which an experienced advisor (mentor) helps a less experienced colleague (mentee) develop professionally, and often personally. Mentorship is increasingly recognized as important to public health capacity building and NPHI workforce development. By creating a culture of mentorship and institutionalizing mentorship programs, NPHIs can provide staff with tools and support to develop their full potential and contribute maximally to the institute's development and success.

IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP FOR NPHIs

- NPHIs should make staff development a priority. This is important not only to maximize the contributions of staff to the NPHI's work but also to increase staff retention.
- A formal mentorship program is one way to institutionalize a 'culture of mentorship' in an NPHI. With a culture of mentorship, investment of senior staff in development of more junior staff becomes routine.
- A structured program that connects early-career staff with senior mentors has potential to address workforce development and sustainability challenges that can threaten an institute's growth and success.
- Mentored staff are said to have greater job satisfaction, increased productivity, increased professionalism, decreased turnover rates, stronger commitment to their organization, and better managerial skills than non-mentored colleagues.

THE PROGRAM: WHAT IS INVOLVED IN SETTING UP AN NPHI MENTORSHIP PROGRAM?

Institutional support and commitment at every level are essential for a successful NPHI mentorship program. The most important element is a director who views mentorship as critical to both staff and NPHI development.

Benefits of a Mentorship Program

For Mentors
- Re-engagement with learning
- Increased professional growth and development
- Satisfaction from helping others and passing skills to the next generation
- Satisfaction from helping the NPHI

For Mentees
- Career development
- Development of leadership and technical skills
- Increased confidence
- Development of professional networks

For NPHIs
- Increased staff productivity and success
- Development of future leaders
- Mechanism to actively address issues of recruitment, retention, and succession planning
- Increased job satisfaction and staff retention
- Advancement of the principles of a learning organization, where skills and knowledge are shared and enhanced, making the best use of talent in the organization
- Increased pool of persons who can contribute to the NHPI's mission and vision

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With high-level support ensured, the next steps are to define the goals of the program and the resources needed and to create a structure and guidelines/policies that best suit the goals. This might include appointing a coordinator or committee to oversee and manage the program.

It might be prudent to start on a small scale to learn how mentoring fits into the organization and to identify obstacles and success factors. Once a structure is in place, the mentorship program can be scaled up as resources allow.

Additional ways NPHI leadership can help institutionalize a culture of mentorship include:

- Providing templates for structuring the mentor-mentee relationship
- Providing training on mentorship and coaching for mentors
- Providing visibility for mentors and mentees within the organization
- Providing small amounts of resources for carrying out mentored projects

THE PARTICIPANTS: CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD MENTORSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Mentors can come from any level of the organization or from outside the NPHI. Retired NPHI leaders often welcome opportunities to serve as mentors. In addition to proficiency in public health practice and a willingness to invest time and effort on behalf of a colleague, characteristics of persons who perform well as mentors include enthusiasm about the mentoring role, creativity in problem solving, strong communication skills, ability to bridge generational issues, and understanding of organizational culture. Successful mentees are those who have a demonstrated desire to learn, can describe their objectives for the partnership, and are willing to invest time and energy in the program.

Matching of mentors and mentees should be based on goals and interests of mentees and mentors, as well as the expressed learning needs of the mentee and skills and experience of the mentor. Successful mentoring requires the 'right' relationship between mentor and mentee; options for re-matching should be integrated into program planning.

THE PARTNERSHIP: MAKING IT WORK

Every mentoring relationship is unique because each partner's experience, personality, and professional development objectives will differ. However, partnerships typically go through a series of stages such as the following:

- Preparation – Both mentor and mentee must prepare individually and in partnership and clarify their expectations and roles (see Box).
- Negotiation – Partners must agree on goals for the relationship, responsibilities of each partner, frequency and methods of communication, learning support required

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for the mentee, confidentiality considerations, criteria for success, and approximate duration of the partnership. It is useful to have a formal program plan or mentoring agreement to formalize these decisions. Answers to some key questions might be helpful:

- o For the mentee, what challenges are you facing in your current situation? What are the personal and professional development goals and priorities that you want to focus on?
- o For the mentor, what knowledge and skills do you feel most comfortable sharing and focusing on?
- o For both:
    - ▪ What are your expectations for the mentoring relationship?
    - ▪ How much time can you devote?
    - ▪ How and when do you prefer to meet/communicate?
    - ▪ What are the potential obstacles to the partnership?
    - ▪ What are potential benefits to the mentee, the mentor, and the NPHI?

- The pair should structure the relationship based on realistic determinations of availability and time. Experience shows that time required is often underestimated. Given the other duties and responsibilities of senior public health professionals, it can be a major barrier to program success. In addition, mentoring is a skill that does not necessarily come naturally to every accomplished senior scientist or public health leader; mentors can be expected to need training and support at different stages of the mentoring relationship.

- Project development – Sometimes it is useful to have the mentorship focus on a particular project. A project can be an opportunity for the mentor to help the mentee with issues ranging from time management and delegation to communications and writing skills. If funds are available, a small amount of support, linked to specific deliverables, can be an incentive for both parties to invest the needed time in the partnership.

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- Partnership – Once the relationship has been formed and goals identified, the partners need to adjust to each other's style of working and communicating and begin the real work of making progress toward shared goals. As a team, the mentor and mentee should revisit the program plan and the learning process periodically, reflect on the mentoring relationship, assess progress, and make any adjustments to ensure a successful outcome.

Roles and Responsibilities

Partners in a mentoring relationship share a basic set of roles and responsibilities, such as to establish expectations, make a realistic determination of time to devote to the partnership, communicate at agreed-upon intervals, and agree to fully support and participate in the program. Beyond this, there is no single formula for a mentoring relationship, and roles and activities might vary based on the mentee's goals and the stage of the partnership.

In a successful mentorship relationship, the mentor's roles can include:

- ✓ *Communicator* – encourage two-way exchange of information
- ✓ *Counselor* – listen actively and explore options for achieving goals; share experiences on stress management, life/work balance, time management
- ✓ *Motivator/advocate* – provide encouragement and support in pursuing goals
- ✓ *Sponsor* – create opportunities; support the mentee's growth as an NPHI leader
- ✓ *Coach* – clarify goals and developmental needs; teach managerial and technical skills; help plan a research and publication schedule; critique manuscripts and proposals
- ✓ *Advisor* – recommend strategies for career development; help identify obstacles and appropriate actions to overcome them
- ✓ *Role model* – teach by example
- ✓ *Referral agent* – identify resources and experiences to broaden skills and/or experience
- ✓ *Door opener* – expand the mentee's professional network; identify resources to support professional development and career progression

The mentee's roles can include:
- ✓ *Initiator* – schedule discussions and actively seek the mentor's advice; identify needed skills, knowledge, and goals
- ✓ *Planner* – maintain a program plan and work with the mentor to set realistic goals, developmental activities, and milestones
- ✓ *Resource partner* – work with the mentor to seek resources for learning and career development
- ✓ *Continuous learner* – actively participate in the mentoring process and demonstrate a willingness to take full advantage of this opportunity to learn; contribute ideas about options for solving problems; learn and practice self-empowering skills and behaviors; attend professional development programs and events sponsored by the NPHI or partners

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- Closure – As the mentorship relationship comes to an end, the participants will be balancing plans for the mentee's continued success with the need to bring the formal partnership to a close. They might want to work together to define the types of support the mentee might need in the future and discuss options for continuing the partnership informally. Some questions for consideration include:
  - What part of the relationship worked for you? What did not?
  - Would you do it again?
  - How would you change the agreement for a new partnership?
  - How did the experience affect your overall work experience?
  - How can you share what you have learned with others?

EVALUATION OF A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM
Periodic evaluation of the program (e.g., by use of surveys, interviews, activity logs) is important to guide needed changes and inform future initiatives.

**NPHI BEST PRACTICES SERIES:
CASE STUDIES**

Nigeria Institute of Medical Research (NIMR)

IANPHI/Heymann Mentorship Program