Mentoring Former Prisoners

A Guide for Reentry Programs

Renata Cobbs Fletcher and Jerry Sherk
with Linda Jucovy

Public/Private Ventures
INNOVATION. RESEARCH. ACTION.

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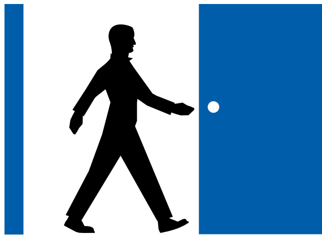

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1 Introduction

I. Introduction

Nearly 650,000 adults are released from America's prisons each year.[1] They return to their communities needing housing and jobs, but their prospects are generally bleak. The majority of returning prisoners have not completed high school.[2] Close to three quarters of them have a history of substance abuse, and more than one third have a physical or mental disability.[3]

These former prisoners are going home to some of the nation's poorest neighborhoods, where they often lack stable social bonds and where there are few supports and services to help them restart their lives. Given the huge gap between their complex challenges and their limited opportunities for addressing them, it is not surprising that recidivism rates are high. In fact, more than half (52 percent) of former state prisoners are back behind bars within three years after their release, either as a result of a parole violation or because they have committed a new crime.[4]

This cycle of recidivism has layers of negative consequences. Households that are already fragile become overwhelmed. Communities that are already struggling fall further behind. And the lives of those who move in and out of prison are wasted. The cost to taxpayers is enormous. Overall, the US spends more than $60 billion a year on prisons and jails. (It costs more than $23,000 to incarcerate someone in a Federal Bureau of Prisons facility for one year and approximately $3,500 per year for probation; incarceration in a state prison can run as high as $45,000 per year.)[5]

Without the development of effective approaches for reducing recidivism, the problem is certain to grow. The number of Americans behind bars has increased steadily and now includes more than 2.3 million men and women.[6] Almost all of them will eventually be released—and unless something changes, more than half will not be successful in reentering their communities and will return to prison.

Ready4Work

Such economic and social considerations led Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) and the US Department of Labor (DOL) to develop *Ready4Work: An Ex-Prisoner, Community and Faith Initiative* in 2003. Funded by DOL and the Annie E. Casey and Ford foundations, Ready4Work was designed to address the needs of the growing

ex-prisoner population and to test the capacity of community- and faith-based organizations to meet those needs. Services consisted of employment-readiness training, job placement and intensive case management, including referrals for housing, healthcare, drug treatment and other programs. Ready4Work also involved a unique mentoring component—including one-to-one and group mentoring—based on the belief that mentors could help ease ex-prisoners' reentry by providing both emotional and practical support. The program operated in 11 cities around the country.[7] The lead agencies at six of the sites were faith-based organizations; at three other sites, they were secular nonprofits. Operations in the remaining two cities were headed up by a mayor's office and a for-profit entity. After the formal three-year demonstration period ended (in Fall 2006), most of the participating programs continued operations, using the Ready4Work model.

Ready4Work targeted 18- to 34-year-olds whose most recent incarceration has been for a nonviolent, nonsexual felony offense, and enrolled them within 90 days of their release from prison. All participants entered the program voluntarily. Together, the sites enrolled approximately 4,500 formerly incarcerated individuals—predominantly African American males, with an average age of 26. Half of all participants had extensive criminal histories at the time of their enrollment, with a record of five or more arrests. A majority had spent more than two years in prison, and almost 25 percent had spent five or more years behind bars. Once individuals entered the program, they were eligible for up to a year of services. The cost per participant/per year of service was approximately $4,500.

Why include mentoring in a reentry program for adults?

For more than 10 years, research has demonstrated that carefully structured, well-run mentoring programs can positively affect social, behavioral and academic outcomes for at-risk young people.[8] Research has also shown how mentoring works—through the development of a trusting relationship between the young person and an adult mentor who provides consistent, nonjudgmental support and guidance. Among the questions that Ready4Work was designed to explore was whether mentoring could similarly lead to positive outcomes for adult ex-prisoners.

Findings from the evaluation of Ready4Work suggest that mentoring may have real benefits in strengthening outcomes in the context of a multifaceted reentry program. Across the 11 sites, about half of the participants became involved in mentoring. Those participants fared better, in terms of program retention and employment, than those who were not mentored.[9] Specifically:

- **They remained in Ready4Work.** Because individuals who leave programs early are less likely to realize the full benefits of participation, one key question is whether there is an association between mentoring and the length of time participants remain in a reentry program. Ready4Work participants

who met with a mentor spent an average of 9.7 months in the program, as opposed to the average of 6.6 months for those participants who never met with a mentor.

- **They were more likely to find a job while in the program.** Research has found that employment plays a crucial role in helping returning prisoners avoid criminal behavior and reincarceration.[10] Thus, a primary goal of Ready4Work was to prepare returning former prisoners for success in the labor market and increase their employment opportunities. Overall, 56 percent of Ready4Work participants were successful in finding jobs. Participants who met with a mentor were more than twice as likely to find jobs as participants who never met with a mentor.
- **They were more successful in retaining jobs.** People recently released from prison not only need to find a job—they need to remain employed in order to both establish stability and, ideally, lay the foundation for longer-term advancement and wage growth. The jobs they find, however, are often temporary or transitional, and ex-prisoners frequently either quit or are fired from these jobs. Ready4Work identified three months of continuing employment, though not necessarily in the same job, as a key retention benchmark. Among participants who ever found a job and were active in the program for at least three months, 65 percent met the retention benchmark—those who met with a mentor were significantly more likely to meet the benchmark than those who did not.
- **They were less likely to recidivate.** At the one-year post-release mark, participants who were mentored, regardless of whether they ever became employed, were 35 percent less likely to recidivate than those who were not mentored.

These results are based on comparing participants who chose to meet with a mentor against those who did not meet with a mentor. Participants, however, were not randomly assigned to meet with a mentor—it was a voluntary component of the program. It is possible that whatever motivated them to take advantage of mentoring may also have motivated them to remain active in the program longer and to try harder to find and retain a job. It is also possible that variances in program quality and structure were sometimes factors in whether or not participants engaged in the mentoring component. Because the evaluation did not include a control group, these results are far from definitive, but they are promising. They suggest that as participants make a transition back into their communities after a period of incarceration, mentoring may play an important role in keeping them involved in a program, employed and out of trouble.

The purpose of this manual

Ready4Work's most innovative aspect may have been its mentoring component. Few social programs have attempted to provide high-risk adults—and, particularly, ex-prisoners—with mentors. Thus, there are few resources that offer practical recommendations and helpful strategies for mentoring this population based on its distinct needs, assets and challenges. While much remains to be tested and learned, this manual draws on the experiences of the Ready4Work sites and established best practices in mentoring to provide guidelines for practitioners who are interested in developing a mentoring component that helps support ex-prisoners and quite possibly enhances the effectiveness of other program areas, such as job placement and retention.

Some key considerations

There are several important points to keep in mind before moving forward to plan and operate a mentoring component. These include:

1. **Mentoring alone is not enough.**

   People newly released from prison have many needs—including housing, healthcare and employment—that must be addressed very quickly so that they don't become insurmountable barriers to successful reentry. Virtually all of the participants in Ready4Work received case management and employment services, including soft-skills training and job placement assistance; some participants took advantage of other wraparound services, such as GED classes or alcohol and drug counseling. The importance of such services is well known. While dependable and supportive mentoring relationships can be a crucial component of a reentry initiative, they are a complement to—not a substitute for—these more traditional services.

2. **It is challenging to convince participants to become, and remain, involved in mentoring.**

   Mentoring was the most challenging aspect of Ready4Work for the sites to implement. Participation in mentoring was voluntary, and only about 50 percent of the ex-prisoners ever met with a mentor. (Female Ready4Work participants were more likely than male participants to be mentored.) Despite the efforts of Ready4Work staff to present mentoring as a key and potentially valuable service, some participants lacked interest in becoming involved. They described a variety of reasons. These include:

- **Mentoring does not seem like a priority.** As they returned to the community and tried to reestablish their lives, most of the former inmates saw finding a job and being able to pay their bills as their major first goals. Any activity not directly related to these goals seemed less important. In addition, with family obligations, transportation obstacles (including access and cost), other programs or classes they were attending, and jobs (once they began working), some participants found it hard to find the time to participate in mentoring.
- **It can seem like another form of reporting.** Often, a condition of release from the criminal justice system requires ex-prisoners to report to parole or probation officers, and in many cases, to regularly submit to drug testing. "Reporting" for a mentoring session can thus, at least initially, seem more like a burden than an opportunity.
- **It can feel like being treated like a child.** For some participants, having a mentor seemed more suitable for youth than for adults. They felt it was unnecessary or even would reflect negatively on the mentee. Participants said that, as adults with life experience, they could take care of themselves; they did not like talking to strangers about their problems; or they already had a close friend or family member they talked to about personal issues.
- **It can feel like there is no common ground with the mentors, or mentors' motives are not trusted.** Some participants believed that mentors who had never been incarcerated themselves could not understand ex-prisoners' experiences and that this created a communication gap that rendered any investment in mentoring pointless. Others were hesitant to engage in mentoring because of concerns that a mentor volunteering through a faith institution would try to influence their religious beliefs or pass moral judgments on their criminal histories. Because the majority of lead organizations in Ready4Work were faith-based, P/PV worked closely with sites to ensure that mentors were clear about their role, as well as about federal funding guidelines that prohibit proselytizing and overt references to faith, and that they maintained a solid separation between their religious beliefs and their mentoring relationships. But some participants continued to have concerns.
- **They worry about confidentiality.** Some ex-prisoners were worried that personal information shared with a mentor might be reported back to their parole officer and used against them as possible evidence of a violation that could put them back behind bars.

Even after participants became involved in mentoring, it could be challenging to keep them committed and engaged. At times, when they found

a job, coordinating schedules and other commitments became obstacles to continuing mentoring. And having participants not show up for their scheduled sessions led to another challenge—retention of mentors. Mentors would get discouraged and become less motivated to maintain the relationships and sometimes would eventually drop out themselves.

3. Mentoring of ex-prisoners is likely to look different from the traditional image of "mentoring," which is drawn from the relationship of a young person with an adult.

Mentoring was included in the Ready4Work program design to provide ex-prisoners with additional support during their period of reentry. Many sites had no experience with mentoring programs prior to Ready4Work. Early on in the project, it became clear to P/PV that mentoring adults was going to follow a different pattern from that of mentoring youth. One major difference was in the form of the mentoring. To address the likelihood that a) sites might struggle with recruiting adequate numbers of mentors for the one-to-one matches that are most common in youth mentoring, and b) participants might at least initially be more comfortable in group mentoring settings, P/PV offered sites the option of implementing either or both approaches. While there were many one-to-one matches, group mentoring was also common across the sites. Most frequently, sites combined both types of mentoring.

In addition, the adults in Ready4Work did not meet with their mentors as regularly or as often as is typically seen in youth mentoring. In part, this may reflect the additional demands on an adult ex-prisoner's time, but it may also reflect the ambivalence that some participants felt about engaging in mentoring. Participants who became involved in mentoring met with a mentor and/or attended group sessions for an average of just over three months. About a third of those participants remained involved for only a month or less. The two thirds who continued to meet with their mentor or attend group sessions did so for an average of 3.5 hours per month (one half hour less than the P/PV recommendation to sites of at least four hours per month).

4. As with all mentoring initiatives, it is essential to build on proven practices.

When mentoring works, it looks deceptively simple: the mentor and participant go out for dinner together and talk; two mentors and five participants sit around a table and discuss successes and challenges on the job; a mentor phones the ex-prisoner she is paired with to ask how things are going in the computer skills training she just started. But as all mentoring

programs have learned, and as research has consistently demonstrated, programs have to implement a number of key practices—involving staffing, recruiting, training, and supervision and support—if the mentoring efforts are going to succeed.[11] This manual aims to provide guidance about what these key practices look like and how to implement them in programs for ex-prisoners.

Structure of the manual

The following sections provide guidelines and recommendations intended to help address the challenges and increase the benefits of mentoring ex-prisoners as part of their involvement in reentry programs:

- Section II provides guidelines for designing a mentoring component, including an overview of mentoring models.
- Section III discusses the importance of hiring a coordinator for the mentoring component.
- Section IV outlines policies and procedures that programs should have in place before implementing their mentoring component.
- Sections V, VI and VII offer guidelines for recruiting, training and matching mentors and providing them with supervision and support.

There are also four appendices that provide additional details. Because group mentoring is likely to be an unfamiliar approach for many program operators, Appendix A describes it in more detail. Appendices B, C and D provide sample forms, suggested training exercises for mentors and a list of additional resources.

II Designing the Mentoring Component

II. Designing the Mentoring Component

In many cases, the lead agency operating a reentry program will plan and implement the mentoring component itself. In some cases, however, the agency might decide to partner with another organization with more experience and expertise in this area to carry out the mentoring component. If a lead agency has contracted with a partner organization in this way, it should work closely with that organization in creating the component. In either case, there are a number of key steps to work through in developing an approach to mentoring that increases the potential for success with a population of ex-prisoners.

This section describes four initial steps:

1. **Defining the mentors' role;**
2. **Deciding on a mentoring model;**
3. **Developing an approach for providing pre-release mentoring; and**
4. **Deciding what to call the mentors, mentees and the component as a whole.**

1. Define the mentors' role.

Whatever specific form the component takes, whether it is one-to-one or group mentoring, the role of the mentor is the same: to provide support and be a positive role model in the ex-prisoners' lives. Mentors:

- Listen;
- Are nonjudgmental;
- Help participants stay focused on the big picture;
- Help them problem-solve and think about the choices they can make; and
- Maintain regular contact so the participant knows there is someone there on whom they can rely.

In some cases, the mentors might also offer practical support: helping participants set goals, cope with stress or budget their money. They might pass

along leads on jobs or housing or give participants tips on how to dress for an interview; they might help participants deal with everyday challenges in life, like figuring out the best way to commute to work.

But the essential role for a mentor is to be a friend. It will take time for some participants to open up and feel comfortable in discussions during mentoring meetings and other interactions with their mentors. Mentors have to work thoughtfully to build the relationship and develop trust—and then maintain that trust over time.

2. Decide on a mentoring model.

There are, as yet, no proven best practices for what a mentoring model for ex-prisoners should look like. This section provides an overview of two potential models—one-to-one mentoring and group mentoring—as well as a brief discussion of how these two models might be combined.

One-to-One Mentoring

Individual—or one-to-one—mentoring typically has these features:

- One mentor is matched with one participant.
- They meet consistently (ideally once a week or once every other week, for six months to a year) at a time and place of their choosing. Mentoring sessions usually last from one to two hours. Between meetings, they maintain contact by telephone.
- The participant and mentor decide how they want to spend their time together. They might, for example, go out for a meal or to the movies or a sports event.
- In conversations during these activities and on the telephone, the mentor acts as a support, a sounding board and a steady, nonjudgmental guide. The conversations might be about family, work, concerns and frustrations about adjusting to life outside prison, sports, politics or life in general.

Potential advantages: One-to-one mentoring is generally considered to be the most effective model because of its potential to foster deeper, more meaningful relationships and provide stronger support. On a practical level, because mentors and participants decide when and where each meeting will take place, this model also might help address the issues of time and transportation that sometimes make it difficult for participants to attend group mentoring sessions that take place at a set time in a designated place.

Potential challenges: Some ex-prisoners may be resistant to one-to-one mentoring because they feel that it puts them in a childlike role. This model can also be demanding for programs to implement—it requires intensive efforts to recruit large numbers of mentors and to screen, train and supervise them. In addition, some potential volunteers may not have the confidence to mentor an ex-prisoner in a one-to-one match. Finally, it may be harder to retain mentors—if their mentee drops out of the program, the mentors may see themselves as having failed and, in turn, become more likely to leave the program rather than get matched with a new mentee.

Group Mentoring

Compared with one-to-one mentoring, group sessions have not been well studied and there is little research identifying specific practices that may make it most effective. However, group mentoring typically has the following features and opportunities for variation (Appendix A discusses group mentoring in more detail):

- Several participants and mentors meet as a group at a set time and place on a weekly or biweekly basis. While the size of a group and the mentor-to-participant ratio can vary from program to program, ideally the same mentors meet consistently with the same group of participants over time.
- Sessions typically last about two hours. There are several approaches groups might take during these sessions. They might use a structured format, which includes a curriculum (such as life skills) or simply has a staff member determine major discussion topics and activities for the group ahead of time. Or they might use a less structured approach in which mentors and participants decide on discussion topics at the beginning of the session.
- Regardless of which approach is taken, the sessions focus on topics that are relevant to formerly incarcerated individuals and their reentry efforts. For example, topics might include goal-setting, stress management, budgeting and financial pressures, family reunification, strategies for avoiding past negative behaviors and involvement with negative acquaintances, persistence and responsibility. Watching relevant theme-based movies together can also serve as a springboard for group reflection and discussion. Even in the most structured formats, group leaders should be flexible so that there is always time for participant-initiated discussions.

- Mentors' roles during the meetings include contributing to discussions and providing nonjudgmental guidance and support. In some models, mentors take turns leading the meetings and moderating the discussions; in other models, program staff take this responsibility.
- Groups can vary their meetings by having guest speakers and going on outings, such as to baseball games or the movies.

Potential advantages: Group mentoring requires fewer mentors and thus can help make recruiting less intensive and demanding of staff time. Group sessions also might hold more appeal for at least some of the ex-prisoners because the dynamic of peer support is used and participants might feel more comfortable sharing experiences and ideas with other ex-prisoners—people who are "walking in their shoes."

Potential challenges: While there is, thus far, no research that has provided evidence one way or the other, it seems possible that group mentoring might not result in relationships and support that are as strong as those in one-to-one mentoring. In addition, although some participants may feel more comfortable in a group situation because they have taken part in groups during incarceration, for others the group setting could promote feelings of still being institutionalized. Finally, some participants and mentors may not feel as committed to the mentoring process—if they do not show up for a session, mentoring activities will still occur for the other people who are present. Thus, it can be easier to rationalize missing a meeting.

A Combination of the Models

In Ready4Work, sites typically offered a combination of both group and one-to-one mentoring. Their experiences suggest several potential approaches:

- **A focus on group mentoring, but with some one-to-one mentoring that serves as an extension of group meetings.** In this approach, some or all of the participants are matched one-to-one with mentors. Mentors and participants attend group mentoring meetings and, at that time, engage in individual conversations. Between group mentoring meetings, they have "check-in" phone calls. However, unlike in programs that focus on a one-to-one approach, the mentor and participant do not necessarily spend time together in individual meetings or outings aside from the group sessions.
- **A focus on group mentoring, but letting one-to-one relationships evolve naturally.** Even when the mentoring is done in groups, participants may develop special bonds with specific mentors who are part

of the group. Thus, group mentoring sessions can provide some time before and after the actual meeting during which participants and mentors have the opportunity to talk one-to-one. In addition, programs may want to develop a policy governing situations in which participants and mentors who have gotten to know each other in a group setting want to transition into a one-to-one mentoring relationship.

- **A focus on one-to-one mentoring, but with some group meetings.** A third "combined" model could include a focus on one-to-one mentoring, but with occasional group meetings that bring together several sets of mentors and participants for discussions.

In addition, programs might offer one-to-one and group mentoring as separate alternatives and work with each participant to determine which model would be best for him or her. Or, a program might start a participant in one model and later encourage him or her to move into the other model, based on that person's individual needs and preferences or on the availability of mentors.

3. Develop an approach for providing pre-release mentoring.

A promising approach for breaking through participants' resistance to becoming involved in mentoring is to provide services while they are still in prison. In Ready4Work, prisoners could be enrolled in the program if they were within 90 days of being released, and this provided sites with the opportunity to begin developing relationships by offering mentoring to enrollees while they were still incarcerated.

Pre-release mentoring might take place through a lead agency's or partner organization's prison ministry outreach. In other cases, pre-release enrollees may be matched with mentors with whom they interact through letter writing, prison visitation and phone contact, thus beginning to form relationships before returning to their communities. In addition, one Ready4Work site, through its partnership with a correctional facility and the local offender supervision agency, integrated videoconferencing into its pre-release mentoring, thus allowing mentors and participants to meet "face-to-face."

4. Decide what to call the mentors, mentees and the component as a whole.

Language matters—words have connotations. Thus, another strategy for addressing participants' resistance to becoming involved in mentoring is to use words for "mentor" and "mentee" that eliminate the potentially negative connotations these words may have for some ex-prisoners. Well-selected terms

might help participants have more positive attitudes about becoming involved. They might also help attract volunteers who don't necessarily see themselves as a "mentor" but are comfortable in a role with a different designation. While, for consistency, this manual most often calls the recipients of mentoring services the "participants" and their counterparts the "mentors," other terms might be preferable given the circumstances of individual programs. These terms could include:

- **For the "mentor"—"coach" or "life coach."** Using one of these terms can make the concept of mentoring more appealing for those participants who might associate "mentoring" with being in a childlike role, while they connect "coaching" with sports and help with the development of specific skills. Those terms may also be more appealing to potential volunteers—and particularly male volunteers, who are traditionally more difficult to recruit as mentors—because the words place more emphasis on guidance than on forming relationships. Alternate terms might include "career coach" or "transition coach."
- **For the "mentee"—"participant," "partner" or "associate."** The word "mentee" is likely to have negative connotations for at least some of the people enrolled in the reentry program because they may feel it defines them as being in a subordinate role.
- **For the mentoring component—"life coaching" or "transition coaching."** As a staff member at one of the Ready4Work sites said: "Life coaching is what we call it. They [participants] can buy into that. To coach, you think through with the objective to become a better person. They can live with that definition of mentoring. They get involved in sports, and coaching is something they like."

The terms a program chooses to use—whether one of these or a different term—should not alter the content and approach of its mentoring component. But the right terms can be an effective tool for avoiding preconceptions about "mentoring" that create a barrier for both participants and potential volunteers.

III Hiring a Mentor Coordinator

III. Hiring a Mentor Coordinator

One of the key lessons that emerged from the Ready4Work sites was the importance of hiring a mentor coordinator—one staff member whose work is dedicated to the mentoring component and who is familiar with all mentoring concerns. Some sites faced initial challenges in getting their mentoring components operating effectively because they did not have a single staff person in that role. When responsibilities were divided among several people, it became difficult to develop a coherent process for implementing the mentoring program.

This section provides guidelines for hiring a mentor coordinator and includes discussions of these steps:

1. **Defining the mentor coordinator's roles and responsibilities; and**
2. **Identifying the experience, personal characteristics and skills necessary for performing effectively.**

In addition, Appendix B includes a sample job description for the mentor coordinator position.

1. Define the mentor coordinator's roles and responsibilities.

While programs will modify this list based on their particular circumstances, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor coordinator typically include:

- Taking the lead on all aspects of the mentoring program, including recruiting, screening, training, matching and supervising mentors;
- Working closely with other program staff to encourage the ex-prisoners to become involved in mentoring, and connecting the mentoring component with other program services, such as job training and placement;
- Helping participants and mentors develop positive and supportive relationships;
- Supporting mentoring retention efforts by consistently monitoring the matches;

- Taking the lead on the planning and implementation of group activities, celebration ceremonies and other events related to the mentoring component; and
- Assisting in marketing the program, including speaking in front of groups to recruit volunteer mentors or to obtain additional program resources.

2. Identify the experience, personal characteristics and skills necessary for performing effectively.

Ideally, it would be possible to hire a mentor coordinator who has experience running a mentoring program for high-risk adults, but there are not many people who have been in that role. Other relevant background could include working with high-risk populations, and particularly with formerly incarcerated individuals; experience in social work or counseling; experience running a mentoring program for other populations, such as at-risk youth and children of prisoners; and experience as a program operator or program coordinator.

In addition, the following personal characteristics and skills seem essential if a mentor coordinator is going to be effective:

- A commitment to working with ex-prisoners, and an understanding of the potential value of mentoring for this population.
- Interpersonal skills, including an ability to get along with people of diverse backgrounds and the expertise to help mentors and mentees address problems and build trusting relationships.
- Presentation skills, including ease with giving recruitment presentations in small- and large-group settings; assisting with and sometimes providing trainings for mentors; and, for programs with group mentoring, facilitating those sessions.
- Administrative and organizational skills, including the ability to maintain orderly records and files, track and keep appointments, and respond promptly to phone messages and emails.
- A positive and flexible personality, contributing to the ability to work well with other program staff and respond calmly and thoughtfully to the many ups and downs involved in running a mentoring program.

In addition, it may be helpful if the mentor coordinator has connections with the communities from which mentors will be recruited. In any case, the mentor coordinator should be skilled at establishing connections and developing relationships that will support successful recruitment efforts.

IV Developing Initial Policies and Procedures

IV. Developing Initial Policies and Procedures

Before programs can start recruiting and training volunteers and begin the actual mentoring activities, they should develop policies and procedures that will help guide their efforts. This section discusses six key steps in this process:

1. **Identifying mission, goals and objectives;**
2. **Defining eligibility requirements for mentors;**
3. **Creating a "mentor participation agreement";**
4. **Developing a confidentiality policy for mentors;**
5. **Creating guidelines for screening potential mentors; and**
6. **Developing strategies and procedures that encourage participants to become involved in mentoring.**

The rest of this manual will then provide guidelines for implementing the mentoring component, including recruiting, training, supervising and supporting mentors.

1. Identify mission, goals and objectives.

The process of creating a written statement that defines the mentoring component's mission, goals and objectives helps everyone involved in the discussion to forge a common vision, and the final document can help guide implementation.

While each program will develop its own mission, goals and objectives, brief examples follow (a sample form illustrating these three elements appears in Appendix B):

- The **mission statement** describes the main purpose of the mentoring effort. The mission statement for the mentoring component will be different from the mission statement for the lead agency or for the reentry program as a whole.

  Example: The mentoring component of the Former Prisoners Reentry Program provides consistent and caring mentors to support and guide participants as they develop the attitudes and skills that will help them become successful in their personal lives and in the workplace.

- **Goals** describe how the program will achieve its mission. They are usually worded broadly.

  Examples: 1) Provide participants with support from mentors that will help them learn to overcome barriers, increase their confidence and gain hope for their futures. 2) Decrease rates of recidivism by encouraging participants to make choices that will help them become successful.

- **Objectives** describe the concrete benchmarks a program has to achieve if it is going to reach its goals and accomplish its mission. Objectives are typically very specific.

  Examples: 1) During the first year of the program, a minimum of 40 participants will receive at least six months of one-to-one mentoring services. 2) During the first year, we will recruit at least 50 mentors and retain at least 80 percent of those mentors for at least six months.

Importantly, having goals and objectives also helps programs measure progress as the mentoring component is implemented. To what extent are you achieving your goals and objectives? What modifications in program practices, such as recruiting and supervision, are necessary for strengthening progress toward goals?

2. Define eligibility requirements for mentors.

Listing the requirements for mentors serves several purposes. It provides information you can use in your recruitment presentations and materials, and it identifies criteria against which you will screen volunteer applicants (recruiting and screening are described more fully in Section V). While requirements will vary among programs, they might include:

- A minimum age for mentors, such as 21 or 24 years old.
- A time requirement, including both length and frequency. For example, programs might require that mentors have the ability to serve for one year and can commit to meeting with their mentee for an hour a week or two hours every other week.
- Safety requirements, including checks of criminal records and child abuse registries. Particularly if you are planning to recruit formerly incarcerated individuals to serve as mentors, programs will need to define a "last date" at which a mentor has been convicted of a felony—for example, you might require that mentors have not been convicted of a violent felony for the past five years.

Other eligibility requirements might include having a good driving record (for one-to-one mentoring, where the mentor may be driving the participant[12]), a history of following through with commitments and the ability to be nonjudgmental.

3. Create a "mentor participation agreement."

This agreement, sometimes called a "mentor contract," includes a list of items that outline the role and responsibilities of the mentor and key program requirements. Having a written agreement can help foster commitment in the volunteer, and it also helps ensure that the volunteer and the program are on the same page. While the specific items will vary from program to program, the agreement is likely to include:

- The length of the volunteer's commitment to the program and the frequency with which he or she is expected to meet with the mentee(s);
- A commitment to learning to understand the role of a mentor (by attending trainings) and to carrying out that role; and
- An agreement to follow program policies and procedures, including confidentiality policies.

Each item in the agreement should be discussed with volunteers before they sign it. The discussion might take place during their screening interview or during an initial orientation or training session, depending upon the point at which your particular program expects to get a commitment from volunteers. It is important to have your board of directors or legal representatives review the agreement before you begin to use it. A sample agreement appears in Appendix B.

4. Develop a confidentiality policy for mentors.

Maintaining confidentiality is an essential aspect of building trust. Thus, all mentoring programs must develop clear confidentiality policies that mentors understand and adhere to. Programs that provide mentoring for ex-prisoners face special challenges in developing and following confidentiality policies:

- Programs have a responsibility to understand laws in their jurisdiction that govern what participant actions or activities they are required to report to legal authorities. These legal requirements must be built into the confidentiality policy.
- One of the reasons some participants in reentry programs are reluctant to become involved in a mentoring relationship is their fear that they will say something to their mentor that could be reported to their parole officer and used in a way that could result in their being returned to prison. Thus, the confidentiality policy must be completely unambiguous, and participants should understand what it includes.

- Some participants in the program may suffer from addiction, depression or other mental illnesses and be at high risk of self-destructive behavior. The confidentiality policy should have clear guidelines for mentors about immediately contacting program staff if they see warning indications of self-destructive behavior, such as drug or alcohol use, not showing up for work, or reconnecting with peers who participate in negative lifestyles. (Mentors also have to be trained to recognize these signs—see Section VI on training mentors.)

The confidentiality policy thus has to be very clear about when and with whom mentors can discuss their mentees. Under what specific circumstances can they discuss their mentee with other mentors? Under what specific circumstances should they speak to program staff? (And it is essential to let mentors know that they make reports only to program staff—not to parole officers or anyone else.) The policy must be explicit about these circumstances, while balancing the needs of confidentiality, legal requirements and safety. A sample policy appears in Appendix B.

5. Create guidelines for screening potential mentors.

There are two reasons to screen individuals who apply to be mentors: to make sure they will be good mentors, and to ensure safety. You want to know that your mentors have a history of carrying through on their commitments and that they have the personal characteristics that will make them able to fulfill their role of supporting participants. You also need to know that they do not have a background that suggests they might pose risks to their mentees.

It is important to have a procedure for screening potential mentors to know that they do, in fact, meet the eligibility requirements you have identified. Screening typically involves at least these steps:

- An in-person interview with each potential mentor;
- A questionnaire they complete about themselves and their interests;
- A check of two or three references; and
- A criminal background check.

Using this kind of structured approach, with layers of screens, increases your chances of identifying those volunteers who will be safe and successful mentors. It does not eliminate also relying on your "gut feeling" that a potential mentor might not be right for your program. Intuition has a place in the screening process, but it cannot replace a systematic process of checks.

6. Develop strategies and procedures that encourage participants to become involved in mentoring.

As the experience of the Ready4Work sites demonstrates, recently incarcerated individuals can have both psychological and practical barriers that make it difficult to get them involved in mentoring. Despite ongoing efforts by staff at the sites, only about 50 percent of participants in the reentry programs ever met with a mentor, and only about a third of participants met with a mentor for two months or more. For those participants who did become involved, there was often a lag between joining the program and being matched with a mentor—an average of 2.5 months from the time they began the reentry program to their first meeting with a mentor.

Clearly, programs need to develop strategies and procedures that address participants' resistance to becoming—and remaining—involved in mentoring. Section II of this manual discussed some of the ways programs can help overcome participants' resistance from the beginning—such as the choice of mentoring model (one-to-one or group), starting mentoring pre-release or making careful decisions about terminology (what you call "mentors" and "mentees"). In addition, programs will need to develop specific approaches that address both psychological and practical barriers. These approaches might include:

- Introducing mentoring from the start as a key element of the support the reentry program is offering. In Ready4Work, for example, a case manager met with each new enrollee to assess needs and connect him or her with appropriate services. This is a key time to present mentoring (or "coaching," if that is the term your program decides on) as a support for participants that can help them benefit even more from other program services. Mentors might provide additional support for participants' job search efforts and help them think through ways to address obstacles both at home and in the workplace. Mentors also serve as a positive alternative to the negative social networks that many participants engaged in prior to incarceration.
- Have program participants who are involved in mentoring make a presentation to new program enrollees about their mentoring experiences.
- Review with participants the written mentoring confidentiality policy so they are clear about it. Discuss any aspects of the policy that participants express uneasiness about.
- Address practical barriers to participation. For programs with group mentoring, for example, participants may have problems with transportation to get to the sessions, or the sessions might take place at a time that conflicts with their work schedules. To address these issues, programs should ensure that group mentoring takes place at a location accessible by public transportation; they should provide participants with transportation passes

so attending does not cost them money; and, finally, they should hold the sessions at a time that takes into account other demands on participants' schedules.

Once participants become involved in mentoring, it is also essential to check in regularly with them about their experiences—a key strategy for helping them stay involved. Supervision of mentors and support for both mentors and participants are discussed in Section VII.

V Recruiting Mentors

V. Recruiting Mentors

Recruiting mentors is a difficult and often frustrating job, requiring patience, creativity, organization and persistence. It is an ongoing challenge for almost all programs. In most communities, there is stiff competition for volunteers —and especially for people who possess both the available time and the kinds of personal characteristics that are required of mentors. There are no easy solutions for the challenges of recruiting. However, a systematic recruitment plan, carefully developed and implemented, will increase your chances of success.

This section provides guidelines for developing such a plan. It includes discussions of:

1. **Setting recruitment goals;**
2. **Targeting your recruitment efforts;**
3. **Getting buy-in from the spiritual leader (if recruiting through houses of worship);**
4. **Developing your recruitment message and materials;**
5. **Keeping track of every step; and**
6. **Providing good customer service.**

The guidelines are drawn from effective practices in the field of mentoring and from the specific experiences and learnings of the Ready4Work sites.

1. Set recruitment goals.

Setting recruitment goals requires answering a series of questions: How many participants do you plan to have in one-to-one matches? How many male volunteers do you need to recruit? How many female volunteers? Are you going to have group mentoring? How large will the groups be? How many mentors do you plan to have in each group?

As you explore these questions and set your goals, also consider these points:

- **Over-recruit:** It is important to recruit more volunteers than your actual goal because a percentage of them will drop out at each step along the way—during the screening process, during training, and after training but before they begin mentoring. Still others may begin to mentor but not fulfill their one-year commitment. In fact, as many as 40 or 50 percent of mentor applicants may drop out at some point in the process. After your program's first few months of implementation, staff will be better able to estimate the dropout rate and have a better understanding of the number of volunteers to target for recruitment.
- **Remember that recruitment is ongoing:** As ex-prisoners enroll in the reentry program and as current mentors drop out, you will need to attract new mentors. In addition, particularly as you are starting up a new mentoring initiative, you may want to take a gradual approach to bringing on mentors so you can gain experience in training and supervising them. Thus, if your first-year goal is to have 40 one-to-one matches, consider setting a sub-goal of making ten matches every three months, instead of aiming for 40 matches right away.
- **Do not recruit more mentors than you can successfully supervise:** The number of matches that a program can successfully make and manage depends on staffing levels. Supervising matches (discussed in Section VII) is crucial for helping trusting relationships develop between the mentor and participant so that mentoring can make a difference in participants' lives. If the mentor coordinator has primary responsibility for supervision, how many matches can he or she handle? The Ready4Work experience suggests that a mentor coordinator should manage no more than 35 to 40 active matches at a time. If the number of matches exceeds this range, an additional part-time staff person should be hired if at all possible. Programs that rely primarily on group mentoring may have somewhat more flexibility in setting goals because they have some leeway in adjusting the size of the groups so that participants are not on a waiting list for a mentor.

2. Target your recruitment efforts.

The more you can identify the characteristics of people you are trying to recruit as well as effective ways to find them and attract them to your program, the more efficient and successful your recruitment efforts are likely to be.

Who are you trying to recruit?

Unless your reentry program is specifically focused on female ex-prisoners, you are likely to have far more male than female participants. The Bureau

of Justice Statistics reports that nationwide, about 80 percent of all prisoners are male. In many areas of the country, a large percentage of enrollees are also likely to be African American, Latino or, in some regions, members of other minority groups such as Native Americans. Thus, many programs will most often be targeting men and minorities to serve as mentors—and these are typically the most difficult groups to recruit. (See Section VI for more information about the role of gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic background in matching participants and mentors.)

In some cases, programs might also target formerly incarcerated individuals to recruit as mentors. Given the unique challenges faced by people returning from prison, some staff at the Ready4Work sites felt that individuals with similar experiences might be better able to support the participants and more likely to earn their trust. Reinforcing this notion, some participants resisted having a mentor because, they said, someone who has never "walked in their shoes" would not be able to understand the situations they were dealing with.

Targeting your recruitment efforts does not mean that you will have only mentors who fit one demographic profile or who come from one kind of background. In identifying several "types" of people they believe should be targeted for recruitment, programs will likely build from their mentor eligibility requirements and from their understanding of the needs of the ex-prisoners enrolled in their particular reentry initiative. The 11 Ready4Work sites, for example, recruited a diverse group of more than 1,000 mentors. They ranged in age from 18 to 80, with an average age of 45. Just under 60 percent were male, and more than 85 percent were African American; 30 percent of the mentors had previously been incarcerated.

Where are you going to target your recruitment efforts?

While the mentor coordinator takes the lead in recruitment efforts, one area where all program staff can contribute is in identifying groups, such as business associations or houses of worship, where targeted recruitment can take place. All programs should canvass their staff and boards to find out where they have connections that are potentially beneficial for recruiting. If a program's participants are primarily male and/or people of color, special attention should be paid to targeting potential sources for mentors where large numbers of these populations are represented.

Ready4Work had six faith-based lead agencies and even more partnerships with local faith-based groups. Thus, much of its mentor recruiting was done through houses of worship. Other potential sources for mentors include service organizations such as national fraternities and sororities

with local chapters and, possibly, community groups from the areas where the ex-prisoners and their families live. Of the more than 1,000 mentors recruited through Ready4Work sites, 54 percent learned of the program through their houses of worship, and 20 percent learned of it through other direct outreach, such as presentations to clubs or at community fairs. Another 18 percent learned about the mentoring opportunity through a friend or acquaintance. It is important to note that general, untargeted recruitment efforts were rarely successful—only 1 percent of the mentors learned about the program from an advertisement.[13]

3. If recruiting through houses of worship, get buy-in from the spiritual leader.

One of the key lessons of Ready4Work was the importance of securing buy-in and support from the pastor, rabbi or imam when recruiting through houses of worship. Faith is a powerful motivator for people to become involved in mentoring, and when faith leaders stand behind the program and explain to their members how it contributes to fulfilling the mission of the house of worship, people will often step forward and volunteer to serve.[14]

4. Develop your recruitment message and materials.

As you develop your recruitment message for presentations to groups and for print materials, there are several key questions to consider:

- What motivates people to volunteer as a mentor?
- What will motivate them to volunteer for your particular program?
- What are your target audiences' obstacles to, and concerns about, becoming involved?

People may be motivated to mentor, for example, because of their spiritual beliefs or a personal commitment to helping others overcome barriers, or because they feel it is important to give back to the community (often recognizing the tremendous negative impact that crime, incarceration and recidivism are having on it). They might be particularly motivated to volunteer for your program because they have had a relative or friend who is or has been in prison or because they feel this population needs strong role models. And they might be motivated because of benefits they may gain as a mentor: for example, becoming part of a group and feeling positive about themselves because they are making a difference.

At the same time, there are reasons why people might be reluctant to become involved in mentoring in general and in your program in particular. They might

be uncomfortable with a program that has as its focus "building relationships." They might be concerned that they will not be able to communicate effectively with people whose lives are very different from their own, or they might feel worried about their safety. Some people will also feel reluctant because they do not think they have the time.

The recruitment message

Your message should appeal to the motivations and address the concerns of potential volunteers and do so in a straightforward way. You want to recruit people who are going to follow through on their commitment and who will be effective mentors. It is not the number of volunteers, in itself, that matters most—what is most important is the number of volunteers who will put their full effort into being successful mentors.

Thus, the recruitment message should include:

- The mentoring component's mission, including a very brief description of the issues of crime and recidivism nationally and locally.
- A brief description of the reentry program's other elements, such as job preparation and job search, and how the mentoring component fits in with them.
- The mentor's role (including whether it is one-to-one or group mentoring, or a combination of both).
- Benefits for the ex-prisoners who participate in mentoring. What successes has your program had to date that can convince people it is worth their contribution of time? Citing (and, in your written materials, footnoting) credible data about promising correlations between mentoring and positive outcomes, such as job placement or reduced recidivism, may also be beneficial (for example, see pages 3 and 4). If possible, include quotes from participants about positive experiences.
- Benefits for the mentors. As with participants, include quotes from mentors about positive experiences, if possible.
- Information about support, activities and events for mentors, including both the initial training and ongoing staff support.
- The required time commitment (length of commitment and frequency of meetings).
- Other mentor eligibility requirements and the screening process.
- Contact information, including the name, phone number and email address of a specific staff member who will respond promptly to inquiries.

If your recruitment message is being delivered to faith-based organizations, either in a presentation or through written materials, it should also contain information on any program restrictions governing discussions of religion by mentors and permissible activities.

Presenting the message to groups

When making your recruitment presentation—delivering your message—to groups of potential volunteers, consider these additional points:

- Have a current mentor also talk briefly about his or her experiences. If possible, select a mentor whose background and demographic profile is similar to that of people in the group to which you are making the presentation. The mentor's talk should be positive but realistic, not artificially glowing.
- Have a current participant talk about his or her experiences with a mentor—or have someone talk who has graduated from the reentry program with the support of a mentor.
- End your presentation with a call to action. Get phone numbers and email addresses of people who are interested in volunteering or want to learn more—and make sure a staff member follows up with each of those people during the few days following the presentation.
- Allow time after the presentation to talk informally with the people who attended. Having refreshments available will encourage people to stay and talk.
- And, finally, make sure materials are available that people can take home with them.

Preparing print materials

Create brochures and one-page flyers that contain the key elements of your recruitment message. Program staff or board members for your organization may be able to connect you with a designer who will do the layout at a reasonable cost, or an editor to help refine the text. You may also be able to find a local printing company that will absorb at least some of the cost of printing your recruitment materials. You might want to print some posters to publicize your program. If you use photographs in any of these materials, select them carefully so they reflect the groups you are trying to reach, and make sure you have permission from anyone whose photo you are using—including a signed photo release form.

5. Keep track of every step—write it down!

The process of recruitment includes a large number of tasks, many of which are ongoing: creating the message, developing and printing materials, meeting with pastors and other potential recruiting partners, identifying new places to make presentations, talking with mentors and participants who will be part of those presentations, and taking care of details (like ordering snacks for recruitment sessions).

While one person—the mentor coordinator—should have oversight and ultimate responsibility for the recruitment efforts, other people are also likely to be involved. To keep track of all the recruitment tasks and to make people more accountable, consider using a matrix like the one shown below or a similar tracking system so that nothing is forgotten and follow-up takes place as necessary. (See Appendix B for a version of this matrix that can be customized with your program's activities.)

Activity	Person Responsible	Target Completion Date	Outcome	Next Steps
Craft and refine the recruitment message for the program.				
Draft brochure language.				
Meet with designer about recruitment brochure.				
Select a mentor and participant to talk at 100 Black Men presentation—help them prepare.				
Check with designer to make sure copies of brochure will be ready for presentation.				
Make presentation to 100 Black Men organization.				
Meet with Rev. Smith at Bright Hope Church to describe program and ask about recruiting from his congregation.				

6. Provide good customer service.

Almost every organization has stories of volunteers who were lost because the organization failed to follow up. This lack of follow-up can occur at many points: A potential volunteer calls to express interest, and it is weeks before anyone from the organization calls her back. A volunteer comes in for a screening interview, and a month passes in silence before the organization calls about a scheduled training. A volunteer completes the training and is eager to start—and nothing happens. With each delay, volunteers are lost. They get tired of

waiting. Their interest fades. They wonder why they should offer their time and effort to an organization that seems not to care whether they come or not. So they move on to something else.

Of course, organizations do not intend to squash potential volunteers' interest and motivation. But they sometimes forget that in a program that relies on volunteers to deliver the services—as mentoring programs do—volunteers are a priority, not something you get around to dealing with between other tasks.

Keep connected with potential volunteers. Keep them involved, interested and motivated—and get them to work as soon as they have been screened and trained. More specifically, keep in touch with potential volunteers through all of these steps:

- Respond within 24 hours to all phone call and email inquiries from potential volunteers. (Even if your program is not currently recruiting new mentors, you will be at some point in the near future.) Enter information about these potential volunteers into a log or database, including the person's name, phone numbers, email address, home address, and any other pertinent information, such as their interest level, concerns and how they heard about the program.
- Follow up by mailing (or emailing) a brochure and letter thanking them for the inquiry and informing them about next steps.
- Follow up again about a week later with a phone call or email.
- If they are interested in moving to the next step, schedule a face-to-face orientation and screening interview that takes place within a week.
- After the orientation and interview, if they seem like a good candidate, immediately inform them of next steps and get their permission to move forward with the screening process. (If they do not meet your eligibility requirements, send them a letter thanking them for their interest.)
- Begin the criminal background check immediately, as this is sometimes a slow process. Complete other areas of screening, such as reference checks. Keep in touch with potential volunteers on a weekly basis and inform them about the status of the process so they stay interested.
- Tell them about the next training, and follow up with a letter giving the training date(s). One week before the training, call or email to remind them of the date—and emphasize the importance of attending. (Your program might decide that potential volunteers can be trained while the screening process is still underway. But they must not begin as mentors until the screening is complete.)

- Within a few days after the training, call or email to keep their interest up and let them know an approximate date when they will be matched with a participant or begin to be part of a mentoring group.
- For one-to-one mentoring, decide on a tentative match, and then help set up an introductory meeting between the mentor and participant as soon as possible.
- At each point in the process, thank potential volunteers for their patience and commitment.

Finally, purchase software that tracks potential volunteers or develop your own system so you know where each person is in the process—and so no one gets lost.

VI Training and Matching Mentors

VI. Training and Matching Mentors

Serving as a mentor is typically both rewarding and challenging, and it can be particularly difficult to develop a positive, supportive relationship with an adult who has only recently been released from prison. Successful mentoring relationships may be a valuable force in helping participants make the transition to productive lives in the community. But as research into mentoring programs has demonstrated, these kinds of relationships do not happen automatically. Mentors need training that helps them develop the skills and acquire the knowledge they need to be successful in their roles.[15]

Because the tone of a mentoring relationship can be set quickly during the first one-to-one meeting or the first group session, it is important that training takes place before the mentor and participant begin to meet. This section provides guidelines for planning a training for new mentors and also includes a brief discussion about matching them with participants after they complete the training.

The section describes following five steps:

1. **Identifying the training goals and topics;**
2. **Addressing the practical issues;**
3. **Paying attention to details;**
4. **Creating a manual to give to mentors; and**
5. **Developing an approach for matching mentors and participants.**

The next section will then discuss ongoing training for mentors, as well as other forms of program support.

1. Identify the training goals and topics.

What do people need to know and be able to do in order to be effective mentors in general, and what special considerations are there for mentoring adults who have recently been released from prison?

While the details of the training will vary depending on the particular program, the overall goals are generally consistent across programs. Training should:

- **Help the volunteers understand the scope and limits of their role as mentors:** Specific topics could include understanding their role in supporting participants and building a trusting relationship; suggested activities for one-to-one matches; the role of mentors during group mentoring sessions; setting boundaries; and understanding when to talk to program staff about possible problems their mentees are facing.
- **Help them develop the skills and attitudes they need to perform well in their role:** These skills and attitudes include active listening; being nonjudgmental; and knowing how to guide participants into making good decisions, rather than telling them what decisions to make. This part of the training should include activities that give attendees a chance to practice communication and problem-solving skills. (Sample activities are included in Appendix C). Programs in which mentors will be facilitating group mentoring sessions will also need to provide training on group facilitation techniques.
- **Provide information about relevant program policies and requirements:** Examples include mentors' time commitment, the importance of consistency, and confidentiality policies. Faith-based programs and all programs that recruit mentors from faith-based organizations should also provide clear instruction on when it is and is not appropriate to discuss religion. (For programs receiving federal grants, federal guidelines prohibit the use of that funding for proselytizing or for requiring participants to engage in any form of religious activities. All programs should be attentive to the fact that discussions of religion may alienate some participants and result in their dropping out of their mentoring relationship. A brochure created for Ready4Work sites on this topic is included in Appendix B.)
- **Provide information about the particular strengths and needs of the participants they will be mentoring:** Topics could include barriers ex-prisoners face, including difficulty getting jobs, substance abuse, depression and other forms of mental illness, family reunification issues such as child custody and child support, and information about recognizing signs of crises in the mentees. Include some discussion about mentor expectations—given the many barriers participants face, it is not surprising that they may have a high rate of not showing up for mentoring sessions or for dropping out entirely. Directly addressing this issue in training can help alleviate mentors' frustration if their mentees attend meetings irregularly or drop out—and it can make mentors more willing to be rematched with a new participant rather than dropping out themselves.
- **Build confidence:** Interactive exercises on skills like communicating effectively are an important way that volunteers can build confidence during

the training. In addition, be sure they know that they are not going to be matched with a participant and then left on their own. Describe to mentors the supports your program will provide, including regular check-ins, ongoing training and quick access to program staff whenever necessary. (These supports are discussed in Section VII.)

Among the forms included in Appendix B is a sample agenda for a training session.

2. Address the practical issues.

When planning the training, consider the following:

- **Who will provide the training?** One person—probably the mentor coordinator—will take the lead in the training, but the session will most likely be a combination of presentations and interactive exercises involving several different people. Some presentations—about the program, the role of mentors, and the supports the program provides to help the mentors succeed—will be given by the mentor coordinator and other program staff. Other presentations—on, for example, recognizing signs of depression in participants or understanding the obstacles they are facing—might be given by outside experts on those topics or by knowledgeable program staff.

  The interactive exercises—including an icebreaker at the beginning of the training and the exercises focusing on the mentor's role and mentoring skills (such as active listening)—present a special challenge. If no one on the program staff is experienced in this type of training, the program might consider contracting with someone who is skilled in providing interactive training to new mentors. Be sure to meet with that person to discuss your program and the population of participants it serves and to plan the training so it addresses both skills that are necessary for all mentors to possess and the particular situations that mentors in your program are likely to encounter.

- **How long will the initial training be?** While length of the training will vary from program to program, there is a lot to cover. You do not want the training to be so long that it discourages people from attending and becoming mentors, but you need to be sure that volunteers have the information and skills they need so they are adequately prepared before they begin mentoring. Thus, consider scheduling a minimum of five or six hours for the training.

- **What are the best times for scheduling it?** As you are conducting screening interviews with potential mentors, ask them about their day and time preferences for attending trainings. Many programs find that trainings are well attended if they are provided on Saturdays, starting around 9:00 a.m. and

going to 2:30 or 3:30 p.m., with a break for lunch. Some programs provide their trainings in at least two parts (for example, three hours in length on two different days), either on weekday evenings or weekend afternoons.

- **How large should the training be?** Although there is no "right" number of attendees for a training, having too few people can make a session fall flat, while too many can make it difficult for everyone to participate actively, be heard and have their questions answered. Fifteen or 20 attendees is a good number to plan for. If your program has recruited a large number of new mentors, such as 40, consider splitting them into two groups and providing a separate training for each group.
- **How will you keep attendees interested and involved?** Use a variety of approaches during the training so attendees are actively engaged, not just sitting and listening to what program staff and other presenters have to say. Your combination of approaches could include, for example, small group discussions, problem-solving activities, questions and answers about mentoring, videos and guest speakers. And begin the training with an icebreaker activity so attendees have an opportunity to speak and feel part of the group from the beginning.

In planning the training, also be sure it is held at a time when other program staff members can attend. It is important for them to be there for at least part of the session so they can introduce themselves and talk very briefly about their role in the reentry program. This will help the new mentors see themselves as part of the bigger picture and feel part of the organization as a whole.

3. Pay attention to details.

It is often the little things that give people the feeling that the program is organized and professional, and that program staff care about them. Thus, be sure to:

- Email or mail a reminder about the training two weeks ahead of time and call participants one week prior to the training;
- Hold the training in a clean, well-lit and comfortable space;
- Have everything prepared and in place before the training begins, including handouts, flipcharts, nametags, sign-in sheets and all other materials and equipment you will be using;
- Try to set up a circular seating arrangement so people can see each others' faces as they speak; and
- Ask staff members to greet attendees at the door upon arrival and chat briefly with attendees as they are leaving.
- And, of course, provide food.

4. Create a handbook to give to mentors.

It will be very useful for mentors to have a handbook that includes key program documents, such as the confidentiality policy; clearly written, easy-to-follow materials that define the mentor's role and describe potential challenges; tips on fulfilling that role and dealing with the challenges; and information on some of the key issues that ex-prisoners confront as they try to successfully reenter their communities. The handbook should also include an up-to-date list of program staff members, with their titles, phone numbers and email addresses so mentors can contact them as necessary.

Use a three-ring binder for the handbook so materials can be updated and added over time. Include handouts you will use during the training, and give the binder to attendees at the beginning of the training so the handouts are right there for them to use as a resource. The handbook will also serve as a reference and guide throughout their time in the program.

The handbook serves another important purpose. While it would be ideal, in terms of training, if all volunteers were recruited in groups and could go through training together, the reality is that, at times, mentors will enter the program one by one, and it might be months before there are enough new mentors to schedule a group training. You may need to get those new mentors matched with a participant or assigned to a mentoring group more quickly than that. In those cases, the mentor coordinator will have to give a shorter, one-to-one training to prepare the new mentors for their role. The handbook then becomes an essential document for the new mentor to review before meeting with the coordinator for the one-to-one training session.

A sample table of contents for a mentor handbook appears in Appendix B.

5. Develop an approach for matching mentors and participants.

How will you decide which new mentor to match with which participant? Or, if the new volunteer will become part of a mentoring group, what criteria will you use to team up mentors within a group?

One-to-one matches should always be between people of the same gender, and even group mentoring sessions may work best when the groups are limited to men or women only. Programs may also want to consider matching mentors and participants who share the same race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, when possible. These factors are important for several reasons. In terms of gender, relationships can become complicated if mentors and participants are of different genders. This is especially true for one-to-one matches but is also a potential obstacle in group mentoring. Participants can

feel more guarded and self-conscious with mentors of different genders—as a result, they may be less likely to communicate honestly and may feel less trusting than they would of mentors of the same gender. In addition, cross-gender matches create a higher likelihood that inappropriate romantic feelings or relationships could develop. It is strongly recommended that programs include a same-gender matching policy in their mentoring guidelines.

Matching people of the same race, ethnicity or background can also foster a greater sense of trust because participants sometimes feel that these shared characteristics mean the mentors have a better understanding of them and their life circumstances. However, it is worth noting that this is not always the case. Many of the successful matches in Ready4Work were between people of differing races, ethnicities and backgrounds. Moreover, trust issues can certainly exist regardless of these factors, and mentor coordinators should train mentors in how to help break down the barriers to trust and communication that might exist.

Beyond these criteria, what is most important is to have an intentional approach to matching. While the mentor coordinator is likely to have the best sense of the qualities of a new mentor, program case managers are likely to have the most insight into participants, and thus it is helpful if the two make the decisions together.

- **For one-to-one mentoring:** Mentor coordinators will learn about new mentors during the screening process—through the interview and questionnaire—and can use this information to help make decisions about matching. Look for things the mentor and participant have in common, such as similar interests, hobbies and personality traits, as well as geographic proximity. Once matched, the mentor and participant should be introduced to each other either over the phone or at the program office by the mentor coordinator.
- **For group mentoring:** If you are using a model that incorporates at least two mentors per group, consider placing a new mentor in a group where the other mentors are more experienced and confident. Also try to team up mentors with different personalities—for example, placing a new mentor who tends to be talkative in a group where the other mentors may be more low-key. In addition, try to match what you believe is the best mentoring team with the participant group that presents the most challenges.

In matching, also be attentive to people's times of availability. Although it is less likely to be a problem in one-to-matches, mentors' schedules—the times when they are available versus the set times when specific groups meet—may limit your flexibility in matching them with specific groups.

VII Providing Supervision and Support

VII. Providing Supervision and Support

Your program has recruited and screened volunteers, provided training that prepares them to become mentors, and matched them with participants or placed them in mentoring groups. Now what? What is your ongoing role in helping to build and maintain the mentor-participant relationships? What is your program's responsibility?

Research on mentoring programs is clear about the critical importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and develop a positive relationship with their mentee. More specifically, research has found that programs in which professional staff provide regular support to mentors are more likely to have matches that meet regularly and mentees who are satisfied with their relationships. And programs in which mentors are not contacted regularly by staff have the greatest percentage of failed matches—matches that do not meet consistently and, thus, never develop into relationships.[16]

This research was conducted on programs that match mentors with youth, and it is typically far more challenging for mentoring relationships to develop when the mentees are adult ex-prisoners. Clearly, programs cannot simply match mentors and participants and leave them to their own devices.

This section is intended to guide you in developing and implementing strategies that increase the likelihood that mentors and participants will meet regularly and develop a trusting relationship, which may in turn contribute to positive outcomes for the ex-prisoners enrolled in your program. The section includes the following eight steps:

1. **Setting up a regular schedule of individual contacts between a staff member and the mentor;**

2. **Having mentors keep logs about their meetings with participants;**

3. **Developing a procedure for checking in regularly with participants;**

4. **Involving the case manager in supporting the relationships;**

5. **Making it easy for mentors to speak to program staff on short notice;**

6. **Providing ongoing trainings and other gatherings for mentors to exchange experiences, challenges and triumphs; and**

7. **Developing a procedure for officially closing mentor-participant matches.**

8. **Recognizing and celebrating mentors' and participants' hard work and success.**

1. Set up a regular schedule of individual contacts between a staff member and the mentor.

Programs need to check in regularly with mentors to learn whether the match is meeting, how the relationship is developing, and what problems may be arising that staff can help to address. These contacts can take place over the telephone or in face-to-face meetings, and it will likely be the mentor coordinator who has the key role in providing this supervision and support. There are two key issues to explore in setting up this system of contacts:

- **How often should the program check in with mentors?** For one-to-one matches, contact the mentor within the first two weeks of the match. Use this conversation to make sure the pair is meeting, to find out what activities they have done together, and to assess how the mentor feels about the match thus far. During the next few months, continue to check in with the mentor every two weeks. These ongoing contacts will help ensure that the mentor and participant meet regularly; they are also important for uncovering any start-up problems that require program staff's immediate assistance. After this early stage, continue to check in once a month to learn whether the mentor or participant is losing interest in the match and to help address problems that may be arising between the pair. It is important to be somewhat flexible about this schedule—as the matches develop, some mentors may need to be contacted more often than others.
- **What should you ask mentors during the check-ins?** Possible questions include:
  - How is your match going? How often have you and your mentee met since we last talked? How much time do you spend together at each meeting?
  - What kinds of activities have you done together? How do you decide on the activities? Do you and your mentee have trouble thinking up things to do together?
  - Do you spend much time talking together? Do you and your mentee enjoy spending time together?

- Does your mentee keep appointments with you? Does he or she show up on time?
- When was your last meeting? What did you do together?
- Do you talk to your mentee on the telephone? How often?
- Do you need help with anything? Is there anything interfering with your match?
- How would you describe your mentee's behavior and attitudes? Does he or she exhibit any behavior or attitudes that trouble you or that you do not understand?
- Are you satisfied with how things are going?
- Is there any training you think would be helpful for you?
- Is there anything else we should be aware of? Is there anything else we can do to help?

In programs that use group mentoring, the mentor coordinator can use the time before or after group meetings to talk with mentors about their experiences and any concerns they have. However, be attentive to the fact that the periods right before and after the group session are also the times when mentors and participants have the opportunity to talk one-to-one. Arrange to speak with mentors either well before or well after the group session so as not to interfere with this individual mentor-participant time.

2. Have mentors keep logs about their meetings with participants.

Mentor logs are an important way for mentors and program staff to keep track of the one-to-one matches and mentoring groups, and to track the development of the mentor-participant relationships. They are also a useful tool for identifying problems and concerns that may reflect ineffective program implementation. Information in the logs can provide the basis for discussion between mentors and program staff during their regularly scheduled interactions.

Each program should develop its own form—with different versions for one-to-one and group mentoring:

- For one-to-one mentoring, the form would include space for both in-person and phone contact, descriptions of activities during in-person meetings, and comments about positive observations or areas of concern. The form should have enough space to cover a record of meetings and phone conversations that take place over a period of a month. Mentors can then give a completed form to the mentor coordinator each month or mail it in.

- For group mentoring, the form would include space for listing all members of the group, activities during the group session, challenges during the session, concerns and positive observations. One mentor from the group can complete the form immediately after each session and give it to the mentor coordinator.

Sample mentor log forms are included in Appendix B.

The mentor logs are not a substitute for one-to-one interactions between the mentor and mentor coordinator. It is not sufficient for mentors to just keep a record of their meetings and mail the information to the program. Active staff involvement—one-to-one discussions with mentors—is essential. In fact, regular interaction between mentors and program staff will not only ensure that pairs are meeting, it has other important purposes as well: It helps mentors feel supported, builds their commitment to the program, helps them be more effective in their role and contributes to their retention.

3. Develop a procedure for checking in regularly with participants.

Program staff should also check with participants in one-to-one matches to make sure they are meeting with their mentor, to identify any problems that need to be addressed and to encourage the participants to stay involved in mentoring. There should be an initial check-in about two weeks after the match is made, with ongoing check-ins taking place monthly.

When participants are in group mentoring, the mentor coordinator can talk to them informally before or after the group sessions. And it is important to telephone participants when they miss a session to talk to them about why they were not there, encourage them to attend, and deal with any practical problems—like transportation issues—that are making it difficult for them to get to the sessions.

4. Involve the case manager in supporting the relationships.

Case managers in the reentry program should also have a role in supervising and supporting the mentoring relationships. In fact, recent research on mentoring for high-risk populations has indicated that relationships last for a longer period of time and are more likely to result in positive outcomes when the case manager has an active role in them.[17]

The mentor coordinator is the person immediately responsible for making sure the relationships are developing, but the case manager has the deepest knowledge about each participant and is best positioned to address serious issues

that may arise. Thus, part of the mentor coordinator's role during the regular check-in with the mentor should be to identify problems and to contact the case manager if the participant appears to need additional help.

In addition, it can be useful for the case manager to speak with the mentor about once a month so they can directly discuss any concerns he or she may have. Because case managers talk to participants regularly—and, thus, can check in with them on an ongoing basis about the mentoring relationship—they are also in a position to give the mentor feedback about how the participant feels he or she is benefiting from the relationship, and this can be important information for helping mentors remain motivated and committed.

5. Make it easy for mentors to speak to program staff on short notice.

Your program should also make sure that mentors know how to contact staff whenever necessary for advice and support. Mentors should have contact information (telephone numbers and email addresses) for the mentor coordinator and other staff who could help them. Program staff also have to understand the importance of responding quickly to any contact from mentors—they should return calls or answer email questions the same day they are received.

6. Provide ongoing trainings.

Training is essential for volunteers before they begin mentoring. As the mentors get to work, the actual experience is likely to lead them to a deeper understanding of some of the challenges and frustrations—as well as the rewards—of mentoring ex-prisoners. To help address these emerging issues, programs should periodically bring the mentors together for additional training. These trainings can take two forms:

- Mentor roundtables, in which mentors meet for an hour or two and discuss their experiences. These sessions might begin with the mentor coordinator asking each mentor to describe one obstacle and one success with their match. Then mentors can provide suggestions for dealing with the obstacles, and get more information about the successes so they can also use approaches that have been working.
- One- or two-hour sessions, with a guest presenter on a special topic (such as substance abuse or mental health issues) that mentors would benefit from knowing more about and that the program might not have had time to cover fully in the initial training for new mentors. These sessions should also include some time for the mentors to share their experiences and ideas and help one another address challenges they are facing.

People tend to have crowded schedules, so it can be difficult to get mentors to attend these ongoing trainings. Schedule them only about four or five times a year, and hold them at a time when people are most likely to attend. In addition, consider providing incentives (coffee mugs or T-shirts with the program's name on them, for example) that serve as an enticement.

7. Develop a procedure for officially closing mentor-participant matches.

Mentoring relationships end. Sometimes they end prematurely because the mentor or mentee loses interest (or never develops interest) and drops out. Ex-prisoners involved in mentoring tend to drop out, or just stop showing up, at fairly high rates. A strong system of support and supervision can help control the number of dropouts, but it is unlikely to eliminate the problem.

Mentors are likely to feel frustrated and discouraged when their mentee drops out or disappears. To help the mentor deal with these feelings—and to try to avoid having the mentor drop out as well—develop a procedure for formally closing the match. Meet with the mentor to discuss why the match ended and try to address the mentor's sense that he or she might have done something "wrong." Encourage the mentor to be re-matched with a new participant. Similarly, if a mentor drops out of a match, meet with the participant to discuss the situation, and encourage him or her to be matched with a new mentor.

In other situations, the mentor and participant may have a strong relationship and regular meetings, but the participant is leaving the program because he or she has officially graduated or has found a steady job and feels ready to leave. When that occurs, meet together with the mentor and participant to recognize their accomplishments and formally close the match. It is also possible that the two may want to stay in touch outside of their now-ended "official" mentoring relationship. Each program will have to develop its own guidelines on whether it wishes to give consent to, or discourage, postprogram meetings.

8. Recognize and celebrate mentors' and participants' hard work and success.

Develop a variety of ways to acknowledge mentors' contributions and participants' accomplishments. Examples include:

- Provide ongoing positive reinforcement. Let your mentors know what they are achieving. When you hear positive comments about the mentor from the participant or case manager, be sure to convey them to the mentor.

- Provide similar positive reinforcement to participants. Let them know about mentors' positive comments about them. And when you attend group mentoring sessions, let participants know, in informal conversations afterward, about their important contributions to the group sessions.
- Send birthday, holiday and thank you cards to mentors, and give them certificates of appreciation.
- Work with partners and local businesses to try to get donations of free tickets and discounts to sports events and other entertainment and cultural events that mentors and participants can attend together.
- Hold periodic celebrations that bring together all the mentors and participants. A party around the winter holidays is one good idea; or if the program is located in an area of the country with long, cold winters, consider a party to mark the beginning of spring. Use the party as an occasion to celebrate mentors' and participants' good work, persistence and success.

Whatever specific strategies you develop, the goals are to let participants know that you recognize their efforts and successes, and to have mentors see that they are an important, highly valued part of the reentry program.

Concluding thoughts

Establishing and implementing effective mentoring programs for formerly incarcerated people is not an easy or simple task. From finding adequate numbers of qualified and committed mentors to convincing program participants to actively engage in mentoring (while simultaneously seeking to find and keep jobs, reunite with family, secure stable housing, stay sober and stay out of prison) to creating solid programs to monitoring matches, obstacles exist at every turn.

But the potential value that mentoring can add to reentry programs merits investing the time, resources, planning and hard work required to overcome these obstacles. As noted at the beginning of this manual, Ready4Work saw very positive correlations between participants being mentored and their success in finding jobs, keeping those jobs, and remaining in the Ready4Work program. Additionally, recidivism rates were lower for participants who were mentored. Other research has also established the importance of positive social relationships in keeping people out of prison.[18] In our work with numerous reentry programs around the country, we have heard from program participants and mentors alike about the power of these relationships.

As federal, state and city governments, as well as communities, seek effective solutions to the reentry crisis, we hope that mentoring will be considered as a potential component of any effort and that the creation of tools such as this manual will be useful in supporting this work.

Endnotes

1 "Serious and Violent Offender Re-Entry Initiative." Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/learn.php. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community.* The Council of State Governments. New York, 2004, xviii. For more information, see www.reentrypolicy.org/reentry/Introduction.aspx#1-note.

2 The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 46 percent of incarcerated individuals have a high school diploma or its equivalent. C. W. Harlow. *Education and Correctional Population*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC, 2003, NCJ 195670. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*.

3 Christopher J. Mumola. *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC, 1999, NCJ 172871; C. W. Harlow, *Profile of Jail Inmates, 1996*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC, 1998, NCJ 164620. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council.*

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5 Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons. June 2006, "Confronting Confinement." Available at www.prisoncommission.org/pdfs/Confronting_Confinement.pdf. Cost calculations were made by the Bureau of Prisons and by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. For more information, visit www.uscourts.gov/newsroom/prisoncost.html.

6 *One in 100: Behind Bars in America.* Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008.

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8 See, for example, Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy Resch. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters* (reissue of 1995 study). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2000; and Cynthia L. Sipe. *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1996. Both available at www.ppv.org.

9 Shawn Bauldry, Danijela Korom-Djkovic, Wendy S. McClanahan, Jennifer McMaken and Lauren J. Kotloff. *Mentoring Formerly Incarcerated Adults: Insights from the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, January 2009. Available at www.ppv.org.

10 See S. B. Rossman and C. G. Roman. "Case-Managed Reentry and Employment: Lessons from the Opportunity to Succeed Program." In *Justice Research and Policy*. 5(2), 2003, 75–100; and Debbie A. Mukamal. "Confronting the Employment Barriers of Criminal Records: Effective Legal and Practical Strategies." In *Journal of Poverty Law and Policy*. January-February 2000, 597-606.

11 For discussions of research-based effective practices, see, for example, Sipe, *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research*; and "Elements of Effective Practice," available on the Mentor website at www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php.

12 Organizations should understand and clearly communicate liability issues for mentors related to transporting participants in private vehicles.

13 Information is from Ready4Work mentor intake data from October 2003 through July 2007.

14 The power of pastoral endorsement for a mentoring initiative was also seen in the Amachi program, which provides mentors for children of prisoners. See Linda Jucovy. *Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures and the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, 2003, 21-22.

15 See Cynthia L. Sipe. “Mentoring Adolescents: What Have We Learned?” In *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring*, Jean Baldwin Grossman (ed.). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999, 18-19.

16 Sipe, “Mentoring Adolescents,” 17; and Carla Herrera, Cynthia L. Sipe and Wendy McClanahan. *Mentoring School-Age Children: Relationship Development in Community-Based and School-Based Programs.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2000.

17 A study of high-risk youth involved in mentoring relationships found that when there was intensive case management of the mentor pairs, the matches met for a longer period of time. See Shawn Bauldry and Tracey Hartmann. *The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth: Findings from the National Faith-Based Initiative*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2004, 25.

18 John H. Laub and Robert H. Sampson. “Understanding Desistance from Crime.” In *Crime and Justice*, M. Tonry and Norval Morris (eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Appendices

Appendix A: Guidelines for Group Mentoring

Almost all of the Ready4Work sites used at least some group mentoring. To some extent, the reliance on the model was a practical response to the challenges of recruiting mentors and, particularly, male mentors. But in addition, there are potential advantages to having group mentoring sessions, where there is peer interaction and the consequent support that can develop among members of the group, and where participants have the opportunity to feel that they are giving—sharing their own knowledge and experience.

Because this approach to mentoring ex-prisoners is relatively new, there are as yet no "best practices" that have been identified by research. Thus, this appendix draws from the experiences of the Ready4Work sites to present guidelines and options for designing a group mentoring model.

How will the groups be organized?

For programs that have not been able to recruit enough volunteers for one-to-one matches, using a group model makes it possible to involve more participants in mentoring; but the groups still have to be small enough in size, and with a large enough proportion of mentors, so strong relationships can form. Key factors to consider include:

- **The number of participants and mentors per group:** An ideal number might be four to six participants and two or three mentors. Having fewer than four participants could result in static and uninteresting group discussions. Having more than six limits the time each participant will be able to talk. Programs should have a ratio of one mentor to every two or three participants. They should also consider having at least two mentors in each group, both so participants get the experience of two different mentors and so the mentors themselves have one another's support in planning and carrying out the group sessions.

  As you begin to put groups together, consider that some participants might not show up very frequently. For example, if you would like to have four participants in a group, you might want to assign six to the group. That way, if two are absent from a session, you will still have enough people present to have good discussions.

- **Selecting mentors and participants for groups:** Just as you have criteria for matching mentors and participants for one-to-one matches, be attentive to which mentors and participants you place together in a group—a major goal, after all, is to have mentor-participant relationships develop over time. If there are two or more mentors in the group, try to include mentors that complement one another—for example, the talkative with the more reserved, the experienced with the less experienced. Similarly, try to have a mix of participants in the group—for example, those with more positive attitudes and those with less positive attitudes, those who are more self-confident and those who are less self-confident. In addition, if you have what you consider to be some particularly strong mentors, you may want to place them in a group that seems to potentially present the most challenges.

At the same time, however, this process of placing mentors and participants in particular groups has to be somewhat flexible because people's schedules may mean they can only attend groups on certain days or at certain times.

When and where should the groups meet?

The first challenge in group mentoring is simply to get participants to attend the sessions. The time, frequency and place of meetings can all affect attendance. Consider:

- **Session length:** Two hours is a good length of time. It allows opportunities for one-to-one conversations between mentors and participants both before the formal session begins and after it takes place, while including about 90 minutes for the session itself.
- **Frequency of sessions:** To provide continuity and have enough frequency so that relationships can develop between the mentors and participants, the group sessions should take place once a week or, at a minimum, once every two weeks. Weekly sessions are optimal but having groups meet at two-week intervals is less intrusive on participants' and mentors' time and, thus, might improve the regularity of attendance. However, if a participant misses a biweekly session, then he or she is essentially going a month without any involvement in mentoring—a large gap in an approach that depends on frequency and continuity to build relationships and provide support.
- **Scheduling of sessions:** Canvass both mentors and participants to see what times are best for them. Early evenings (around 6 p.m.) are usually the most amenable for most peoples' schedules. Be sure to provide plenty of food if the group is meeting around dinnertime.
- **Location of sessions:** The meeting space might be in the lead agency office, a church or a community center. Wherever it is, be sure it is clean, well-lit and comfortable—and convenient for participants and mentors to get to, particularly for those who do not have cars and must rely on public transportation.

In addition, to increase the likelihood that participants will attend the sessions, provide them with public transportation passes or reimburse them for transportation costs.

How structured will the group sessions be?

While every group session needs to have some structure, there is no one "best" way to achieve this. Participants will only continue to attend the sessions if they find them valuable, and each program will need to decide how best to structure and focus its sessions to achieve this.

Moving from the relatively less structured to the most structured, options include:

- **At the beginning of each group session, having participants and mentors (and possibly the mentor coordinator) decide on topics to be discussed.** In this approach, participants can take the lead in deciding what is important for them to talk about. At the same time, running the group session may require more skilled facilitators because they have had less control in structuring it.
- **Preplanning the session by having the mentor coordinator or other program staff determine discussion topics for the group ahead of time.** This approach provides more structure to the sessions, but program staff have to be sure they decide on topics that participants consider relevant and important—and the facilitator has to be flexible enough to incorporate other topics as participants bring them up.
- **Using a curriculum.** In this most structured approach, each session focuses on activities within one lesson or topic from a curriculum. Programs might, for example, use a life skills curriculum that includes sessions on overcoming obstacles, setting and achieving goals, communication skills, conflict resolution, having a positive attitude, handling finances and using the Internet. This approach requires a skilled facilitator who can deliver the curriculum while being sure that participants stay involved, understand the material in the context of their own experiences and challenges, and benefit from the sessions.

Even the least formally structured sessions should include at least some preplanned approaches for discussions. For example, instead of beginning the session by going around the table and asking each participant to say how his or her week went, the facilitator could ask a more focused question, like "What was the best thing that happened on your job search (or at your job) this week?" In Ready4Work, some mentors who were involved in group efforts with little structure reported that it was difficult to know what to talk about, and they also noted that there was a high dropout rate for participants in their programs.

What is the role of mentors and the mentor coordinator during group sessions?

For every group session, someone has to take the role of facilitator—leading the meeting and moderating the discussions. In some programs, the mentors in the group may take turns filling this role while the mentor coordinator stays in the background. In other programs, the mentor coordinator may take on these responsibilities, and the mentors' roles will primarily include contributing to discussions, providing feedback to participants and supporting them.

Even if the mentors take the lead, however, mentor coordinators generally attend the group sessions. If necessary, they can help resolve problems during the session (if, for example, one of the participants is disruptive), and they can fill in for mentors who might have to miss a particular meeting. In addition, they can make announcements about upcoming opportunities for participants, such as a computer class or job openings.

What opportunities will be provided to help mentors and participants form one-to-one relationships within the group setting?

Take steps to try to ensure that one-to-one mentor-participant relationships can develop within the group context—these relationships may lead to additional benefits for participants and might further motivate them to attend the group sessions. All programs should be sure there is time before and after each group session for mentors and participants to have informal one-to-one conversations. Having food available before or after the session can induce participants to come earlier or stay later, and it helps establish a good environment for informal conversation.

In addition, not all of the group sessions have to take place at a set location. Periodically, instead of the regular meeting, the group can use the time to go on activities together—for example, to dinner or to a sports or cultural event. In addition to being a break from the usual session—and being fun—these activities provide opportunities for mentors and participants to have one-to-one conversations and develop stronger relationships. Let the participants decide how they want to spend this time and what would be most useful for them. They might want to go to a restaurant or museum, or they might want to do something entirely practical, like spending time refamiliarizing themselves with how to use the mass transit system after years in prison.

What might a group session look like?

Group sessions will differ from program to program. The following agenda, for a two-hour session, is just one example. It moves from an informal activity to more structured discussions and then back to less structured time.

Time	Activity
6:00-6:30 p.m.	Informal conversation: Participants and mentors talk together as they have dinner—pizza and salad provided by the program.
6:30-6:45 p.m.	Icebreaker activity: The group gathers around a table to begin the meeting. One of the mentors welcomes everyone and leads an icebreaker activity during which each participant briefly talks about how he or she is feeling and where he or she is on the road to work—or, if the person has a job already, how things are going.
6:45-7:15 p.m.	Sharing exercise: This provides an opportunity for participants and mentors to problem-solve together and also celebrate success. It could be an exercise called "Hurdles and Successes," in which each participant describes one problem he or she faced during the week and one success he or she had. The group can then help each participant develop a strategy for dealing with the problem—and can also learn new strategies of their own from the participant's success.
7:15-7:45	Topic of the day: The group can then have a more structured discussion on one topic—the topic of the day. It could be something that comes out of the previous exercise. For example, if several participants have been dealing with conflicts on the job, the discussion could focus on why that tends to happen and larger strategies for avoiding it or coping with it when it occurs. Or the mentor coordinator and mentors might have a pre-planned topic, such as what to do when you feel like giving up and quitting your job, or giving up on trying to find a job.
7:45-8:00 p.m.	Wrap-up and time for informal conversation: Put out a little more food, like cookies or fruit.

As you develop your sessions, what is most important is that they are appealing, so participants want to attend. Make the meetings interesting and interactive; try to include everyone in the discussions; and make sure participant-initiated discussion topics are incorporated into every session.

What are some of the particular challenges that group mentors should be prepared for?

Whether in a one-to-one relationship or in a group setting, the mentor is responsible for fulfilling the role of being a trusted and supportive guide. But group mentoring is a different context from traditional one-to-one mentoring, and it brings with it some special challenges. These include:

- **Developing a trusting relationship with each participant in the group.** As with one-to-one mentoring, the mentor's attitude and approach are the most

important elements in building a strong relationship. But, additionally, in the group setting, mentors have to take care to treat all participants equally and not play favorites. They have to strive to consistently connect with each participant in their group.

- **Listening and guiding, rather than sounding authoritative.** Mentors who set themselves up as authority figures and who push too hard are usually unsuccessful and might contribute to participants' dropping out of the group. All mentors face the challenge of resisting the temptation to give advice, and it may be a particular challenge in a group context. Instead of giving advice when a participant is facing an obstacle or having a problem, consider saying: "Tell me more about it. What have you done so far? How has that worked? Do you have any ideas about how to deal with this? What do you think you should do?" Mentors can also take advantage of the group setting by asking: "Has anyone experienced anything similar?" or "Does anyone have any suggestions for how he might deal with this problem?"
- **Drawing out participants who tend to be quiet.** For some participants, it may take time to open up and feel comfortable taking part in discussions. Mentors need to learn to help them overcome their initial hesitation and begin to feel trusting enough to speak in the group setting. But never try to force participants to talk about something that they have indicated they do not want to talk about.
- **Dealing with difficult participants.** At times, some of the participants may become angry with one another or with a mentor. Mentors have to be sure to continue to speak calmly and help the anger subside; and they also need to know if it is necessary to step back and let the mentor coordinator resolve the situation. Should frequent disruptions occur, have the group develop rules, such as "one person talks at a time," "respect all group members," "no put-downs," and "be supportive of others."

Finally, it is essential for mentors to consistently carry through on their commitment. It is not unusual for some group mentors, when faced with a time crunch on their schedules, to think, "I don't need to show up because (my co-mentor) will be there." Unless there is an emergency, mentors should attend every group mentoring session. When mentors fail to show, participants in the group will wonder why they should bother showing up themselves, and this may result in a higher dropout rate from the group.

How can mentor coordinators contribute to successful group mentoring?

As with one-to-one mentoring, the mentor coordinator and other program staff should see themselves as ready supports who are there to assist group mentors and

participants should they encounter any problems. Provide staff phone numbers and email addresses, and encourage group members to get in touch whenever necessary. Beyond that, mentor coordinators have other key responsibilities in connection with group mentoring. These include:

- Providing training for mentors on being effective in the group setting. While each program will decide what specific training its group mentors need, it will generally include strategies for leading and managing groups and some focus on the particular challenges in fulfilling their roles as a mentor within the group context.
- Helping to plan and manage the group meetings. Before the sessions, the mentor coordinator can talk with the mentors to plan the agenda and troubleshoot any potential problems they think might arise. If the group is using a curriculum, the mentor coordinator has the additional responsibilities of making sure it includes interesting exercises that will engage the participants and of arranging for any guest speakers who might be involved in presenting the curriculum topics. (At the same time, the mentor coordinator should be open to mentors' ideas about curriculum, guest speakers and exercises, and about how to make other improvements in the program.) During the group sessions, the mentor coordinator should be careful to stay in the background but be ready to step forward if it is necessary to deal with any disruptions.
- Making participants feel accountable. If a participant misses a session, the mentor coordinator should be sure someone calls the next day to find out why that person did not attend. Whether it is the mentor coordinator, one of the mentors or the participant's case manager, immediate contact is important. If someone does not call, the message to the participant is, "They didn't miss me," or "They don't care if I don't show up."
- Monitoring the groups. Monitoring groups may be somewhat simpler than monitoring one-to-one matches because the mentor coordinator will attend group sessions to see how things are going. In addition, there is usually an opportunity before and after sessions to check in with mentors about their perceptions of how the group is going and how the relationships are developing, and to help the mentors develop strategies for dealing with challenging or frustrating situations.

Finally, be prepared to periodically regroup. It is not an easy task to implement an ex-prisoner group mentoring component, and it can be especially difficult to keep the attendance level up. The moment attendance begins to fall, talk to staff—and mentors, as well—to thoughtfully modify your approach so that you are addressing barriers that are making it difficult for participants to attend, and so that you can plan sessions they will find valuable.

Appendix B: Sample Forms

This appendix includes examples of forms and other written documents referred to in the manual. They include:

- Job Description: Mentor Coordinator
- Statement of Mission, Goals and Objectives
- Mentor Participation Agreement
- Confidentiality Policy
- Planning Matrix for Mentor Recruitment
- Agenda: Training Session for New Mentors
- Handbook for Mentors Table of Contents
- Training Evaluation Form
- Mentor Report Log for One-to-One Mentoring
- Mentor Report Log for Group Mentoring

The resource list in Appendix D includes websites that offer templates for other forms that mentoring programs may need to develop.

1. Sample Job Description: Mentor Coordinator*

The mentor coordinator will lead a mentoring program that was developed to provide long-term one-to-one and group mentoring to male and female ex-prisoners. Mentees will be between the ages of 18 and 34, and they will have been sentenced to and served time for nonviolent, nonsexual felony offenses (as their last presenting offense). Other services provided to the mentees in the overall program will include job training and job placement.

The mentoring program coordinator should have:

- Experience, confidence and a comfort level in working with ex-prisoners;
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience;
- Interpersonal skills, including an ability to get along with people of diverse backgrounds and the expertise to help mentors and mentees solve relationship and other problems, as they arise;
- Public speaking experience and skills;
- Excellent organizational skills;
- Experience in counseling or social services preferred, but not required; and
- Experience as a mentor program coordinator or as a mentor in a structured mentoring program preferred, but not required.

Mentor coordinator duties include:

- Taking the lead on all aspects of the mentoring program, to include recruiting, orientation, screening, training, matching and monitoring volunteers;
- Working closely with and responding to directives from the lead agency executive director and reentry program director;
- Working closely with program case managers to facilitate the integration of ex-prisoners on their caseloads into the mentoring program;
- Attempting to develop supportive and positive relationships between mentees and mentors, to include working with other program staff to problem-solve relationship issues;
- Supporting program retention efforts by consistently contacting mentor candidates while they are on the waiting list, and by consistently monitoring the matches;

- Taking the lead on the implementation of celebration ceremonies and other mentoring program-related events;
- Helping to plan and facilitate pre-service mentor training and ongoing training sessions;
- Assisting in marketing the program, to include speaking in front of groups in order to recruit volunteer mentors or to obtain additional program resources;
- Helping the mentoring program fulfill its commitment to funding sources, to include the proper completion of evaluations and forms; and
- Other miscellaneous duties as they arise.

*Adapted from the mentor coordinator job description developed by Operation New Hope in Jacksonville, FL, a Ready4Work site.

2. Sample Statement of Mission, Goals and Objectives

Mission: The mentoring initiative provides consistent and caring mentors to guide, support and inspire ex-prisoners to develop the attitudes and skills that will help them become successful in their personal lives, as members of their community and at work.

Our goals are to:

- Enhance the dignity of participants by encouraging them to make choices that will help them become successful;
- Provide participants with the interpersonal support from mentors and staff that will help them to solve problems, gain hope and increase their confidence; and
- Reduce the rate of recidivism for the program's participants.

Our objectives are:

- During the first year of the program, a minimum of 20 participants will receive at least six months of one-to-one mentoring services;
- During the first year of the program, a minimum of 45 participants will receive at least six months of group mentoring; and
- During the first year, we will recruit at least 60 mentors, who will commit to the program for one year. We will retain at least 80 percent of these mentors for six months or more.

3. Sample Mentor Participation Agreement

As a mentor in the Ex-Prisoner Mentoring Program, I agree to:

- Cooperate with all requirements of the screening process.
- Complete the initial mentor training and attend any required ongoing trainings. If I miss a mandatory training, I will contact the mentor coordinator as soon as possible to make up the training.
- Meet with my mentee(s) at least once a week for a minimum of one hour, or once every other week for a minimum of two hours, over a one-year period.
- Support the mission and goals of the mentoring program.
- Try to develop a relationship of trust and respect with my mentee(s) by going slow, being flexible and allowing them to make their own decisions—and by not presenting myself as an authority figure.
- Not push any "personal agenda" (i.e., faith, politics) during interactions with the mentee(s).
- Never come to mentoring sessions while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Notify my mentee at least 24 hours in advance if I must miss a mentoring session, or as soon as possible in case of an emergency.
- Complete and hand in the monthly logging form.
- Abide by the program's confidentiality procedures.
- Never talk about an individual's race, national origin, religious beliefs or sexual orientation in a negative way.
- Follow all other program guidelines, including policies governing sexual harassment and other "boundary issues" (such as not to provide gifts or money to any mentee or his or her family, or to receive gifts or money from them).
- Contact the mentor coordinator if I experience any difficulties with my mentee(s) or with the program.

If I am unable to fulfill my duties as a mentor, I will inform the mentor coordinator immediately so that a replacement can be found.

Signed____ Date________________

4. Sample Confidentiality Policy

In order to build trust, mentors are required to keep conversations with, and information about, their mentees in confidence. There are four exceptions to this rule:

Confidentiality Exception 1: Speaking with the program staff. A mentor may talk to program staff at any time about any information or issues brought up in the match. Staff are there to help problem-solve and to assist individuals with the dynamics of the relationship. *(In addition, programs have a responsibility to understand laws in their jurisdiction that govern what participant actions or activities they are required to report to legal authorities. There may be instances in which mentors are expected to speak to program staff about actions of their mentees. This information should be built into your confidentiality policy.)*

Confidentiality Exception 2: Conversations with fellow mentors during staff-run mentor meetings. During mentor roundtables, mentors are allowed to discuss their respective mentees so that mentors can receive feedback and suggestions from fellow mentors and program staff. However, mentors must maintain a "group confidentiality"— that is, they are not allowed to discuss anything about other mentees to anyone outside of the program.

Confidentiality Exception 3: Receiving permission from the mentee to contact others about a specific problem. The mentee may give the mentor permission to talk to others about him or her when a situation arises where the mentee is seeking outside assistance or support.

Mentors should also make a report to program staff when the mentee:

- Reports child or elder abuse, neglect or endangerment by him/herself or others;
- Discusses drug use or intended drug use;
- Indicates a possible violation of the terms of his or her parole or probation;
- Indicates an intention of hurting him/herself or others, or putting him/herself in danger;
- Reports that another person has an intention of hurting him/herself or others, or putting them in danger; and
- Demonstrates a marked change in functioning (for example, appears depressed or manic, or has noticeable changes in hygiene, sleeping or eating).

5. Sample Planning Matrix for Mentor Recruitment

Activity	Person Responsible	Target Completion Date	Outcome	Next Steps

6. Sample Agenda: Training Session for New Mentors

8:30	Continental breakfast
9:00	Welcome and staff introductions
9:15	Icebreaker (“warmer” exercise)
9:45	What is a mentor? (and exercise)
10:15	Discussion of the ex-prisoner population and mentor expectations
10:45	Break
11:00	Mentoring skills and practices, including communication skills (and exercise)
11:45	Recognizing signs of depression and other crises
12:15	Program rules and guidelines (including confidentiality and reporting)
12:45	Lunch
1:15	Beginning the match (including suggested activities for one-to-one meetings)
1:30	Problem-solving (role-playing vignette exercises)
2:15	Program supports for mentors, and logging procedures
2:30	Comments, questions and training evaluations
3:00	Adjourn

If your program model includes group mentoring, you will need at least an hour to deliver additional training on mentors’ roles in the group sessions and how to facilitate group mentoring. Appendix A has more information on these and other aspects of group mentoring.

7. Sample Handbook for Mentors Table of Contents

Welcome from our Executive Director

Section 1: Introduction to Mentoring

The History of Mentoring

Background on Ex-Prisoner Mentoring

Section 2: Overview of the Mentoring Component

Description and Mission of Lead Agency

Description of Reentry Program

Description of Mentoring Component: Mission, Goals and Objectives

Eligibility Requirements for Mentors

Section 3: Mentoring Concepts and Practices

Build-a-Mentor (Exercise)

Qualities of Good Mentors

Suggested Activities for One-to-One Mentoring Meetings

Section 4: Program Rules

Mentor Participation Agreement

Confidentiality and Reporting Rules

Boundary Issues

When To Ask for Help

Section 5: Working with Ex-Prisoners

Returning Prisoners—Strengths and Obstacles

Beginning the Match

Building Trusting Relationships

Section 6: Communication Skills

Active Listening

Nondirective Approach

Open Questions

Paraphrasing

Problem-Solving

Good Conversations/Bad Conversations (Exercise)

Section 7: Facilitating Group Mentoring

Overview of the Group Mentoring Process

Benefits of Group Mentoring

Critical Elements for Successful Group Mentoring

Group Mentoring Curriculum (if the program uses a curriculum)

Managing/Handling the Group

Section 8: Understanding Substance Abuse Issues

Why People Become Addicted to Substances

The Stages of Recovery

Strategies for Working with Substance Abusers

Section 9: Recognizing Signs of Depression and Other Mental Illness

Understanding Depression

Working with Challenging Situations

Section 10 : Supports for Mentors

List of Staff Members and Contact Information

8. Sample Training Evaluation Form

Date_______________________________________

Name (optional) ____

1. What information did you hope to gain from today's workshop?

____

____

2. To what degree were your EXPECTATIONS MET?

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Exceeded my expectations

3. What was MOST useful to you about this workshop?

____

____

4. Was there anything covered in this workshop that was NOT USEFUL?

____

____

5. Please rate the usefulness of the TRAINING MATERIALS.

   Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely useful

6. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the TRAINER(S).

   Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

7. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the TRAINING FACILITY.

   Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

8. Please rate your OVERALL SATISFACTION with today's workshop.

   Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Please share additional feedback below:

____

____

9. Sample Mentor Report Log for One-to-One Mentoring

It is a good practice to have mentors fill out a "mentor log" directly after each telephone conversation or meeting with their mentee and submit it to the mentor coordinator each month. The mentor coordinator can use the log to check for signs of potential problems (such as infrequent meetings between the mentor and participant). During each monthly check-in, the mentor and mentor coordinator can also review the log together. There is no standard logging form—each program can develop its own. Here is one example.

Mentor's Name: ____

Mentee's Name: ____

Meeting and Telephone Contact Dates and Times	Activities (for Meetings)	Comments and/or Areas of Concern

10. Sample Mentor Report Log for Group Mentoring

It is a good practice to have mentors fill out a "mentor log" directly after each group mentoring session. Have one mentor from each group take 10 minutes after the session to fill out the log and then turn it in to the mentor coordinator. There is no standard group logging form, so each program can develop its own. Here is one example.

Date	
Name of mentor completing log	
Name(s) of other mentors in group	
Names of mentees present	
Names of mentees missing and why (if reasons known)	
Activities group participated in, and how they went	
Describe any noticeable changes (positive or negative) in any mentee and apparent reasons	
Any disruptions or problems in the group? Any concerns?	
Any ideas for activities, or for improvements in the program?	
Do you want the mentor coordinator to contact you? If so, what is the best phone number to use?	

Appendix C:
Mentor Training Activities

This appendix includes the following exercises and handouts that can be used during initial mentor training sessions:

I. Icebreakers or "Warmers"

- Introduction Exercise
- The Name Game

II. Mentoring Concepts and Practices

- Build an Ideal Mentor
- If You Want Easy Listening, Turn on the Radio
- Bad Conversations and Good Conversations
- Realistic and Unrealistic Mentor Expectations
- Vignettes

Appendix D includes links to resources that may help you develop other activities for training sessions.

I. Icebreakers or "Warmers"

These exercises can be a good way to get the training rolling.

Introduction Exercise

Write down the following questions on a flipchart or a dry-erase board, and then go around and have each person respond.

- Name?
- Where do you live?
- Current or former occupation?
- How did the program find you?
- What is one thing you do well?
- Why do you want to be a mentor—now?

"One thing you do well?" allows the trainees to tell others about their interests, hobbies or personal qualities and to feel good about themselves (for example, "People say I'm a good listener").

"Why do you want to be a mentor—now?" begins to get everyone focused on why they are here, which is to guide and support this high-risk population by mentoring them. The depth and emotion of responses to this question are often surprising—for example, "My son was incarcerated." "An uncle of mine died in prison." "I would be in the same situation, but I didn't get caught."

One option for conducting this exercise is to provide each person with a written copy of these questions. Then break the group into twos and have them interview each other. The pairs then report to the larger group—each person does not report the information about him- or herself, but the information about the person he or she interviewed. People are sometimes less apprehensive when they talk about someone other than themselves, and this approach also gives them a chance to connect more closely with another person. In addition, it gets them to begin to practice listening skills, perhaps the most important skills a mentor can have. In a slightly different form, this small group approach also works well when the number of trainees is too large for everyone to get a chance to share with the whole group. In this situation, you could organize the attendees into groups of four who take turns interviewing each other but do not report out to the whole group.

The Name Game

This is another exercise that is an effective way for people to get to know each other very quickly, as answering these questions can tell much about family and culture.

First, write the talking points (listed below) on a flipchart or dry-erase board. As the facilitator, you will want to model the exercise by first sharing about yourself. Then ask each trainee to share.

- What is your full name: first, middle and last?
- What does the name mean?
- Where did your name come from? Who named you, and why this name?
- What is your nickname, and where did it come from?

After everyone shares, the facilitator can bring up the fact that at our core we have many similarities. For example, many are proud of their name, while some are a little embarrassed by it. Some don't know where their name came from. Some may have been named after a sports star, a movie

star or a deceased relative. Another point to make is that mentoring is about telling your story to another person, finding common ground and making a connection, as well as maintaining respect for each other.

II. Mentoring Concepts and Practices

These exercises and handouts can be used as trainees are defining the role of a mentor, practicing communication skills and learning to understand and address potential problems that may arise as they work to develop a relationship with their mentee.

Build an Ideal Mentor

Materials needed. Several sheets of flipchart paper, a number of markers of various colors and tape (to put their finished product on the wall). Optional: an easel to display each group's work when completed.

Goal: To have trainees identify the traits that will help them build relationships with the ex-prisoners and be effective in their role as mentors.

This interactive exercise should be done in small groups of five to eight people. It should take place fairly early in the training agenda, as it gives everyone a chance to stand up and move around and meet and have casual conversations with their peers, and at the same time it taps into each person's creativity.

Step 1: Begin instructions by saying, "This exercise is called Build an Ideal Mentor, and it will help everyone focus on the positive traits and qualities that a mentor needs. After we divide up in groups, I want each group to choose the most artistic individual to draw an outline of a person, from head to foot, on the flipchart. Don't put in any details like eyes and so forth, just an outline, kind of like a 'gingerbread man.'

"Then, one at a time, I want you to pick up a colored marker and draw a symbol that represents a quality of an ideal mentor, and draw it on the part of the body where the trait originates. For example, if you think a good mentor is 'well traveled,' then you might draw a pair of worn shoes; you don't have to write down in words 'well traveled' because later there will be an opportunity to talk about what each symbol means. On the other hand, if you can't think of a symbol, you can draw a line to the part of the body where the trait comes from and then write the name of the trait in the margin.

"We would like everyone in each group to get a chance to draw as many traits as they can think of and use different colored markers. Do your own work, and don't let other groups see your drawings. Also, when you are

finished, choose one, two or more people—it could be the entire group—to share your work with everyone who is here. You have approximately 10 minutes to complete your drawings."

Step 2: As the groups work, walk around to make sure that everyone understands the exercise and that everyone is getting a chance to draw (sometimes one person will monopolize the exercise by drawing each symbol that others suggest, and this isn't as much fun or as effective as giving each person a chance).

Step 3: When the groups are finished, have them turn their drawings over. Then ask for each group to come up one at a time to display and discuss its work. It is best if the facilitator asks presenters to hide their work until they get up in front of the larger group. Ask everyone for "drum rolls" (fingers or hands pounding on thighs or desktops), and then encourage over dramatic "ohs and ahs" from the other trainees as each drawing is unveiled. (This usually draws laughter and smiles from everyone.)

The facilitator should make brief validating comments as the drawings are explained ("good idea," "excellent"). As each group finishes, tape up the drawings side by side, in clear view, so that everyone will be able to see them for the remainder of the day's training.

Step 4: Close the exercise by saying something like, "Looking at the many traits, what traits are common in most of the drawings?" (Most groups draw the heart first, and then ears—for being a good listener—usually second or third.) Then remind the trainees, "We all know the traits and qualities that are needed to be a good mentor, and this exercise just reminds us what they are. You don't need me to tell you, because you've just demonstrated that you already know."

If You Want Easy Listening, Turn on the Radio*

People tend to think of listening as something passive, or they tend not to think about it at all. But listening is actually a skill—a valuable skill that can be practiced and learned.

Listening has been likened to the work of a catcher in baseball. Observers who don't know a lot about the game might believe that a catcher is doing nothing more than waiting for a pitcher to throw the ball. They think that all the responsibility rests with the pitcher, who is, after all, the one who is winding up and delivering the pitch. In the same way, some people believe that all the responsibility in communication rests with the person who is talking. In reality, though, a good catcher is not a passive target waiting to receive the pitch. He or she concentrates on a pitcher's motions; tracks the path of the ball; and, if necessary, jumps, stretches or dives to make the catch. Similarly, a good listener actively tries to catch and understand the speaker's words.

Here are some tips for active listening.

Active listening is the most important skill of a good mentor.

"You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time."
—M. Scott Peck

When you talk with your mentee, try to remember to:

- Clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions so you can give her or him your undivided attention.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Pay attention to your mentee's facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Read between the lines for your mentee's feelings. Learn to say, "How did that make you feel?"
- Ask open-ended questions. Don't ask, "How was work today?" Instead ask, "What did you do during work today?" Then, as appropriate, ask nonthreatening follow-up questions.
- Paraphrase—restate in your own words—what you think your mentee has said. When paraphrasing is accurate, your mentee will feel understood. If it is off the mark, it invites her or him to clarify and also reminds you to listen more closely.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Put yourself in your mentee's "shoes," and try to understand the world from her or his perspective.
- Put aside preconceived ideas, and refrain from passing judgment.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and saying things like, "I see."
- Give your mentee the same respect that you desire for yourself when you are talking to someone.

How to kill a conversation:

- Tell the speaker that the way he or she feels is wrong: "It's silly to feel that way."
- Don't look at the person who is speaking to you.
- Sit slouched over, look distracted, drum your fingers on the table, or use some other body language to signal to the speaker that you're not really interested.

- While the person is speaking, think about what you're going to say in reply. It's not possible to be forming your own words and concentrating on the speaker's at the same time—so the response you're planning is unlikely to be very useful.
- Be judgmental and challenging. Ask questions that put your mentee on the spot: "Why didn't you do better on the job interview?" "Why did you say that to him?" "How could you possibly think that?"
- Interrupt the person who is talking. Finish his or her sentences.

Special ways to kill a conversation on the telephone:

- Be totally silent for minutes at a time while your mentee is talking. Don't say, "I see" or "OK," or ask any questions. That way, your mentee will wonder if you're even there.
- Do something else while the conversation is taking place: work at your computer, read your email, do dishes, fold laundry, pay bills.

Bad Conversations and Good Conversations

- *Materials needed:* "Bad Conversations and Good Conversations" handout (see below).
- *Goal:* To help trainees think concretely about effective and ineffective communication skills.
- This exercise can be done in conjunction with training on communication skills, after 5 or 10 minutes of introductory discussion about specific communication skills, such as active listening, open questions and paraphrasing.

Step 1: Give each trainee a copy of this short handout.

Good and Bad Conversations

Someone I have **Bad Conversations** with is ____________________________________.
The reasons why I have bad conversations with this person include:

-
-
-
-

Someone I have **Good Conversations** with is ____________________________________.
The reasons why I have good conversations with this person include:

-
-
-
-

Continue your instructions by saying, "You'll see there is a place to write someone's name for both the bad and good conversations. If you wish, you can keep this person anonymous by writing down, for example, 'a teacher that I had.' In the bullet points underneath, write down why you have bad or good conversations with each individual. It could be, for example, that he or she doesn't let you finish your sentences. I will give you five minutes to fill this out, then when we come back we will share with the whole group."

Another option for running this exercise is to break up the group into twos and have each person interview his or her partner, and then share what he or she learned about this person with the larger group. Also, if there are too many people in the training to give everyone a chance to share, then you could divide the larger group into smaller groups of four or five people. Instruct them to discuss these points with each other, and ask them to also come to a consensus about what makes for bad and good conversations so that they can later share those ideas with the larger group.

Step 2: After everyone reports to the whole group, the facilitator could point out that, in general, good communicators listen and they focus on the person talking, and poor communicators appear to be somewhat self-centered, as the focus always comes back to them.

Realistic and Unrealistic Mentor Expectations

The initial training should include some discussion of realistic and unrealistic expectations, and it is a topic that you will likely return to during individual support sessions with mentors and during ongoing training sessions. Below are some examples of unrealistic and realistic expectations for mentors. Program staff can brainstorm additional examples based on their experiences with matches in your program.

Unrealistic

My mentee will attend each and every meeting, be on time for every session and also fulfill his/her entire time commitment to the program and match.

Realistic

I don't know if my mentee will show up on time or fulfill his/her commitment to the program. Still, I pledge to show up on time for all meetings. And I also pledge to keep my commitment. If my mentee drops out of the program, I won't personalize it by thinking that I am a failure. Instead, I will fulfill my personal mission of service to this at-risk population.

* * *

Unrealistic

As a result of spending time with me, my mentee will make immediate changes in his or her behaviors. My mentee will stop using drugs and making other bad decisions and will maintain gainful employment.

Realistic

As I have no control over my mentee, I hope that he or she will make positive improvements; but even if not, I will keep offering my time and my support. I understand that with ex-prisoners, there are often setbacks, and that changes can come slowly. I also understand that mentoring is like planting seeds and that there is no set time frame for when those seeds will come to fruition.

* * *

Unrealistic

My mentee will consistently thank me for my time and support.

Realistic

I realize that many ex-prisoner mentees do not have positive attitudes and that they also may not have adequate social skills—so, my mentee may never thank me. That's okay— I will not expect gratitude. Instead, I pledge to give mentoring as a gift.

Vignettes

Vignettes, or scenarios, are an excellent way to get trainees actively involved; and as they work together to come up with creative responses, they will also experience a sense of accomplishment.

When creating vignettes, try to base them on real-life situations that have occurred within your program, but change the names and the details to keep confidentiality. Number the vignettes and print them up; then, just prior to the exercise, hand them out to trainees. (It is helpful if they get copies of all the vignettes, even the ones that others are working on, so that they will be able to follow along during the whole-group discussions.)

To begin the exercise, break the whole group into smaller groups of four to six people. Then assign each group one or two vignettes. Or, as an alternative, assign the same vignette to two groups so that you can discuss the different approaches that they come up with. Ask the trainees to read the vignette aloud within their smaller groups, and then to brainstorm what they would do if they encountered this situation. Also request that someone from their group take notes so that they can later report to the larger group.

Emphasize that there are rarely any absolute right or wrong answers when it comes to dealing with these and similar situations.

Sample vignettes:

1. Your mentee says she is trying to find work, and she tells you she has gone on six job interviews. The mentor coordinator tells you she hasn't been at any interviews at all. Q: What should you do?
2. Your mentee has made great strides in his life. Now employed, he is getting rave reviews from his boss. On top of that, he has also stopped all drug use, which was a huge problem for him. But suddenly, he just disappears and you can't get in touch with him. You later find out that he is on drugs again and he has lost his job. Q: How do you feel? What should you do?
3. Your mentee constantly sees only the negative in everything and everybody. He complains all the time, so much that he's hard to be around. Q: What might you do?
4. You are matched with your first mentee, and she meets with you once. Then you never see her again. The mentor coordinator matches you with another mentee; and after two meetings, she stops showing up. Q: As a mentor, how might you feel? What should you do?
5. Your mentee can't seem to solve the smallest of problems. Even though you have repeatedly talked him through several of his hurdles

and he seems during that time to understand what he needs to do, he never takes the steps needed to change these situations. You are frustrated. Q: What do you do?

6. Your mentee is often late for your meetings together, usually by 20 to 30 minutes. He also doesn't show up for one out of about every four meetings. Q: What should you do?

As people share their responses, even if they are somewhat off target, it is essential to try to find something positive in each answer. When facilitators are critical or non-supportive, trainees get embarrassed and they also shut down. An effective strategy is to point out the best part of the individual's response, make a positive statement about it and then ask the larger group, "And what else could be done in this situation?"

*Adapted from Linda Jucovy. *Training New Mentors*. Public/Private Ventures and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001. Available at www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/30_publication.pdf

Appendix D: Additional Resources

Additional information about Ready4Work

When the Gates Open: Ready4Work, A National Response to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis (October 2005)

This report outlines Ready4Work's goals and design and documents the unique partnerships Ready4Work established among the business, government, community and faith sectors to confront recidivism. It describes key start-up and implementation challenges and, using early outcomes data, touches on a number of promising practices for future reentry efforts.

Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative (February 2006)

This report examines the early implementation of Ready4Work and reports on emerging best practices in four key program areas. While P/PV provided the basic program design to the 17 lead organizations participating in the project, each site was given creative latitude to build programs unique to their own organizations, resources, partnerships and missions. Through this work, many innovative and promising approaches to effective prisoner reentry emerged, as did challenges for which solutions were sought. *Just Out* offers practical advice about recruitment, case management, mentoring and employment, and documents early lessons in this growing area of study, policy and advocacy.

Call to Action: How Programs in Three Cities Responded to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis (March 2007)

This report chronicles how individuals, community organizations, faith institutions, businesses and officials mobilized to build partnerships to address escalating numbers of ex-prisoners returning to their communities. The three cities highlighted in this report—Jacksonville, FL; Memphis, TN; and Washington, DC—were pioneers in responding to the nation's prisoner reentry crisis. They developed impressive programs and eventually joined P/PV's Ready4Work initiative.

Ready4Work In Brief: Update on Outcomes; Reentry May Be Critical for States, Cities (May 2007)

This issue of *P/PV In Brief* provides data from Ready4Work, with a focus on the prison crisis occurring in many cities and states. While much more research is

needed to understand the true, long-term impact of prisoner reentry initiatives, outcomes from Ready4Work were extremely promising in terms of education, employment and program retention, with recidivism rates among Ready4Work participants 34 to 50 percent below the national average.

Mentoring Formerly Incarcerated Adults: Insights from the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative (January 2009)

This report explores mentoring as a tool for supporting the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals within the context of a larger reentry strategy—in this case, the Ready4Work model. The report describes Ready4Work's mentoring component, examining the extent to which mentoring was attractive to participants, the types of people who volunteered to serve as mentors and how receipt of mentoring was related to participants' outcomes, including program retention, job placement and recidivism. While this research was not designed to assess the precise impact of mentoring on formerly incarcerated adults, it provides a first look at how mentoring, or supportive relationships more broadly, can fit into comprehensive reentry efforts.

Internet resources for mentoring ideas and materials

While these resources were developed specifically for programs that mentor youth or use volunteers in a range of direct service activities, the principles and guidelines, in many cases, can be adapted and applied in programs that mentor adult ex-prisoners.

www.energizeinc.com
Energize, Inc.—an online bookstore and resource for volunteer organizations. It includes a reference library of articles and excerpts that can be downloaded on topics such as recruiting and screening volunteers.

www.mentoring.org
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership—includes a variety of materials. For elements of effective practice, go to the site's page at http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php.

www.mentoring.ca.gov/best_practices.shtm
The California Governor's Mentoring Partnership—best practices for mentoring programs.

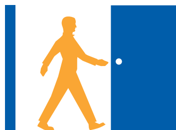
www.nwrel.org/mentoring
The National Mentoring Center at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory—includes information and publications.

www.nwrel.org/mentoring/nmc_pubs.php
The *Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual*—a downloadable document that includes templates for many forms your mentoring program may need to develop.

www.ppv.org/ppv/mentoring.asp
Public/Private Ventures—includes numerous reports on mentoring, and guides to effective mentoring practices.

Organizations and people to contact for additional information

Please see "Appendix: Reentry Resources" in Laura E. Johnson and Renata Cobbs Fletcher with Chelsea Farley. *From Options to Action: A Roadmap for City Leaders to Connect Formerly Incarcerated Individuals to Work*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2008. Available at www.ppv.org.



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