

## **Effective Practices for Establishing Mentoring Programs**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation explores the various options for developing mentoring projects. The specific emphasis is on effective practices for providing initial program training to participants, ideal organizational structure of training, participants, and presentation curriculum. With the explosion of mentoring programs and funding nationwide, there exists a rush to take advantage of these funding options. Additionally, certification and licensing requirements by many states are providing an additional motivation for interpreters seeking credentials to seek out mentoring and ways to advance skills in a potentially limited time. The presenters have provided numerous trainings to various states and organizations and through those experiences, have explored a number of options for the optimal framework and training for mentoring programs. They will share their philosophy on mentoring and the effective practices for a team of Deaf/Hearing presenters.

There is a great deal of discussion nationally on the issue of the “gap” between graduation and qualification, and ways to approach closing the gap. Qualification may be viewed as employability, certification, assessment, or some other measure deemed appropriate by those contracting with or hiring interpreters. Nationally, states are recognizing that providing a workshop based on a cursory needs assessment of interpreters has fallen woefully short of closing skill gaps necessary to increase the pool of those qualified to interpret for Deaf and hard of hearing adults and children. Of the many interventions available to address skill gaps and human performance issues, among the systematic approaches, one effective approach to professional development is formal mentoring.

States and statewide organizations are beginning to accept mentoring programs as a viable avenue to providing a meaningful individualized system for professional development instead of the “one-size-fits-all” approach of a workshop. There can and have been a variety of ways to establish a structured, formal program. This paper explains an effective process for establishing a successful program. The authors have been involved in mentoring for over 50 years combined. Having both graduated from and taught in the only formal, academic program for mentoring for interpreters, the Master Mentor Program (MMP), their expertise stems from mentoring every graduate of the MMP with the development of the required mentorship project. Both have also developed and administered mentoring projects and training for their own practice. Of recent, their work has focused on assisting states and state organizations with the development, provision, administration, and refinement of mentoring projects.

**Effective programs include:**

1. Comprehensive training to initiate a mentoring program lasting at least two days, optimally three.
  - Rationale: Mentors begin with an icebreaker serving a multiple purpose, followed by an introduction to the Vygotskian approach to mentoring, experience mentoring and being mentored, concepts of meta-mentoring, its applications and uses, development of a 3+3 self-assessment, determination of cause vs. symptoms, effective questioning techniques, and guidance on developing skill activities. Training days are maximally effective when they are 4-6 hours in length. To enable mentors to absorb the amount of information while applying it,

needs to happen over a series of days so as not to reach overload and an inability to benefit from the entire training. Additional training can be provided to focus more directly on skill building activity development, portfolio development, etc.

2. A team of mentors: one Deaf and one hearing.
  - Rationale: Mentors and interpreters who seek mentoring benefit enormously from a dual-perspective approach. Deaf people who have the potential and desire to become a mentor are more likely to become involved when there is a Deaf-trained mentor providing the training.
3. Training for mentees.
  - Rationale: There has been a shift in the paradigm for effective mentoring. Because of that, mentees may be coming to the mentoring relationship with goals that may not be congruent with the new paradigm. To facilitate a successful mentoring relationship, mentees begin with an icebreaker similar to mentors to be used later in the training. Training is provided on the new paradigm and will allow mentors to provide their services more effectively and efficiently.
4. A mechanism for support for newly trained mentors via distance or face-to-face sessions.
  - Rationale: Mentors, having been trained, need both a support group of like-minded and trained mentors as well as input from experienced mentors. As they begin to apply their new knowledge, this type of support can help to address concerns, frustrations, provide additional guidance, etc.
5. Project duplicability.
  - Rationale: For a project to take life and to have a notable return on investment, the project should be able to replicate itself. This replication enables organizations to stretch their initial monetary investment over several years. It is always beneficial for the hosting organization to capitalize on the training provided to participants and to provide ways for the program to grow and expand exponentially on a limited initial investment.
6. Program Measurement.
  - Rationale: Projects should contain measurements of effectiveness that are both qualitative and quantitative.

To that end, the authors have developed a mentoring program and processes that have far-reaching benefits to states especially duplicability. It is hoped that this structure can provide guidance to states and organizations with establishing viable mentoring programs with longevity as its central goal.

The primary objective and philosophical foundation for this training is best summarized by an initial PowerPoint slide shown to all groups at the outset of mentoring training:

*Give me a fish, I eat for a day.*

*Teach me to fish, I feed myself (and others) for a lifetime.*

**Goals & objectives** for establishing effective mentorship programs to consider are:

Goal I – Train 20 mentors from various regions of the state. Mentors will:

1. Be able to demonstrate effective mentoring techniques via a mentee-centered approach;
2. Understand the mentoring cycle;
3. Be able to articulate the benefits of and the need for portfolio segments;
4. Be able to incorporate strategies to address various learning styles and preferences;
5. Understand the critical element of cause versus symptom analysis;
6. Be able to develop meaningful skill activities; and
7. Be able to assist in the development of independent study plans.

Goal II – Provide overview of the mentoring process to 20 interpreter mentees from various regions of the state. Mentees will:

1. Embrace the need for and be able to develop portfolios;
2. Understand the mentoring process via a mentee-centered approach;
3. Be able to articulate the obligations, responsibilities, and rights of the mentoring participants: mentors and mentees;
4. Understand the essentials of self-assessment and the need for the cause versus symptom analysis;

*Mentoring Training Effective Practices*

5. Be able to develop a 3+3 assessment, 3 effective patterns and 3 challenging patterns, and prioritize challenges on which to focus (foundational skills versus narrow-gap closure approach); and
6. Be able to develop an independent study plan and participate in skill development activities that are meaningful and realistic in scope.

Goal III – Mentors mentor a minimum of 2 interpreter mentees. Mentors will:

1. Provide on-going mentoring to 2 interpreter mentees in their respective areas in the six months following comprehensive mentoring training, including:
  - Promotion of mentoring services,
  - Identification of potential mentees,
  - Interview and selection of mentees,
  - Development of the mentoring relationship,
  - Articulation of duties, obligations, responsibilities, etc.,
  - Be available a minimum of 2-3 hours per month to meet with mentees, and
  - Provide meta-mentoring and oversight to at least one mentor in next six-month cycle;
2. Provide meta-mentoring and support to a newly trained mentor in the second half of the cycle;
3. Provide on-going mentoring to one interpreter mentee in the second half of the cycle;
4. Develop independent study plans for themselves as mentors for certificate of completion and CEUs for themselves as applicable;
5. Participate in online listserv discussions regarding the mentoring process as it is applied;
6. Participate in mentor training providing services as a meta-mentor in second-level mentor training;
7. Develop a program in their respective regions repeating the processes in Phase I-III:
  - Provide mentor training to new mentors in Phase III,
  - Provide mentoring support to newly trained mentors, and

- Continue to mentor at least one new mentee every six months; and
- 8. Provide six-month and one-year reports on program activities, successes, feedback, measurement statistics determined by the host organization, and evaluation.

Goal IV – Mentees will participate in the mentoring relationship. Mentees will:

1. Be able and willing to commit and work a minimum of 2 hours per week on skill development activities for six months;
2. Be responsible and take control of the mentoring relationship;
3. Provide on-going and end-of-program evaluation of evaluation process; and
4. Maintain a journal of mentoring activities.

The structure of the program is a process to train mentors and mentees simultaneously. The goal for this is to ensure that the mentoring participants begin with a similar base of knowledge, expectations, and understanding of the philosophical approach to mentoring. This structure has proven successful and a time-saving benefit. It has also bypassed potential conflicts that may arise from mentors utilizing an approach to mentoring for which mentees may not understand or have been prepared.

Two trainers are utilized for every phase of the initial one-year process. It is maximally effective to utilize one Deaf and one hearing trainer. This combination of trainers encourages and provides a number of benefits:

1. All participants understand and benefit from translating all spoken English source materials for visual accessibility;
2. Deaf members of the community are more encouraged to participate and become mentors for interpreters (not only language mentors); and
3. Participants are able to experience first-hand the ability, effectiveness, and potential of Deaf mentors.

Candidates for training are selected by the host organization. Criteria may be membership in the organization, certification (or lack thereof) at a certain level or a particular type, regional, employment or other affiliations, a combination of factors, or others as deemed appropriate by the host organization.

## **Phase I**

An initial training schedule provides sufficient time for:

1. Training to mentors;
2. Training to mentees;
3. Relationship-building; and
4. Mentoring.

The most effective schedule that captures and enables all of the aforementioned needs has been:

*Friday* – all day training to Mentors exclusively;

*Saturday* – all day training to Mentors and Mentees separately with a final meet-and-greet hour at the conclusion of the day; and

*Sunday* – 1/2 day provided for mentoring sessions, wrap-up, and evaluations.

Not included in the formal schedule but from experience, social time has been enormously beneficial and effective. Training provided to the Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf (TSID) recently was held at the Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf (SWCID) in Big Spring, Texas. SWCID provided dorm and meeting space (as well as other services) to assist TSID in providing the training to participants at a significantly reduced cost. Because Big Spring is a small community, the majority of the time after training hours was spent in the dorm lobby. This provided for additional time for prospective mentors and mentees to get to know each other on a less formal basis and to begin to form bonds that strengthen the mentoring process post-training.

This initial training is followed by six months of mentoring provided by the trained mentors to the trained (and possibly untrained) mentees. Support is provided via a listserv during this time by one or both of the trainers to ensure that questions, concerns, conflicts, etc. are addressed and for mentors to have a place to discuss issues with each other as they apply the mentoring concepts. This listserv discussion will provide the basis for future training of the mentors to become meta-mentors and trainers.

## **Phase II**

A second “round” of training is held. This second phase has the intent to prepare those who formerly received mentoring training to develop skills as a meta-mentor (a concept developed in the MMP) and to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to provide mentoring training in their own areas for Phase III. Previously trained mentees are selected to return to receive mentoring training as well as those potential mentors who have been identified by the host organization and who were unable to attend Phase I.

Similar considerations need to be addressed for training days and times for Phase II with an additional need. Training time separate from mentor training needs to be provided the previously-trained mentors to facilitate their participation in Phase II mentor training as meta-mentors. To ensure that there is ample time, an additional 1/2 day is required to ensure that there is no loss in training time to the other groups. The most effective schedule that captures and enables all of the aforementioned needs is:

*Thursday* – 1/2 day training to Meta-Mentors/Trainers exclusively;

*Friday* – all day training to Mentors exclusively;

*Saturday* – all day training to Mentors and Mentees separately with a final meet-and-greet hour at the conclusion of the day; and

*Sunday* – 1/2 day provided for mentoring sessions, wrap-up, and evaluations.

Subsequent to this training, an additional listserv must be developed for the newly trained meta-mentors who will now provide the support and mentoring to the Phase II trained mentors. The trainers then become an access point only to the Meta-Mentors to provide support as they move up the tier in the process. This additional listserv will also begin to address needs for training new mentors and establishing a mentorship program in their respective areas.

## **Phase III**

At the conclusion of Phase II, the Meta-Mentors become trainers and in a more regional approach, will provide training similar to Phases I & II. This regional training concept will train previously trained mentors on meta-mentoring and preparing them eventually to provide training to new mentors.