



EVALUATION • MANAGEMENT • TRAINING

**EMT ASSOCIATES, INC.**

771 OAK AVENUE PARKWAY, SUITE 2  
FOLSOM, CALIFORNIA 95630-6802  
916.983.6680 fax: 916.983.6693

15720 VENTURA BOULEVARD, PENTHOUSE  
ENCINO, CALIFORNIA 91436-2929  
818.990.8301 fax: 818.990.3103

[www.emt.org](http://www.emt.org)

September 30, 2006

Dear Project Director:

We are delighted to be able to make this case study available to you to help you make your mentoring program a success. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools under contract with EMT Associates, Inc. Although this publication has not yet been officially released by the U.S. Department of Education, we have been authorized to make it available on the Web at this time to solicit your feedback.

The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government. This publication also contains hyperlinks and URLs for information created and maintained by private organizations. This information is provided for the reader's convenience. The U.S. Department of Education is not responsible for controlling or guaranteeing the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of information or a hyperlink or URL does not reflect the importance of the organization, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered.

We value your feedback on this publication. Please send your comments to us at:

Mentoring Resource Center  
C/O EMT Associates  
771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2  
Folsom, CA 95630  
Phone: 1-877-579-4788  
E-mail: [Shelly@EMT.org](mailto:Shelly@EMT.org)

Sincerely,

Judy Strother Taylor  
Project Director



# U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center

## Case Study

By Christina Borbely, Ph.D.

## *Making the Connection: Using Your Evaluation For Program Improvement and Sustainability: Elyria School District Mentoring Program*

### Introduction

The mentoring paradigm has experienced a proliferation of programs over the past 15 years<sup>1</sup>. Programs must distinguish themselves with exceptional services, sustainable infrastructure, and demonstrating positive outcomes for youth. Both service providers and program funders are scrutinizing mentor programs for results. This increased accountability has led to an emphasis on program evaluation

Service providers are motivated to implement mentoring strategies with proven success and funders are inclined toward supporting programs that demonstrate desired impacts on youth. The result is greater frequency and level of rigor with which mentoring programs are evaluated for effective implementation and outcomes. In addition, service providers are integrating program evaluation into their mentor program plans. Local level program evaluations give service providers insights into program improvement opportunities through strategic refining of services

As program evaluation becomes a standard mentoring program component, service providers are becoming informed participants as the contractors of evaluators, if not the evaluators themselves. Developing capacity to make strategic choices about how to

assess program implementation and program outcomes provides many benefits. Among them is the opportunity for service providers to conduct evaluations that are pertinent to their programs and systematically integrate information yielded from the evaluation into better practice. That is, in addition to satisfying funders' requirements, supporting applications for new and additional funding, and contributing to the advancement of the field, evaluation offers direct benefits to mentor programs. Strategic use of evaluation findings can inform decisions about recruitment efforts, implementation procedures, and allocation of resources.

In general terms, program evaluation is designed to help determine the value of the program. Program improvement is a matter of determining how to increase that value.<sup>2</sup> It may be a leap to move from demonstrating value to implementing strategic methods of increasing value. Mentor programs may encounter limitations in time or resources, may opt to focus the evaluation on funder-designated outcomes, or may partner with an

<sup>1</sup> National Mentoring Center Bulletin (2004). Into the Crystal Ball: A Roundtable Discussion on the Future of Mentoring. Vol 2(3).

<sup>2</sup> Swearer Center for Public Service, Brown University (2000). Community Work: Program Management, Evaluation. Providence, RI.

<sup>2</sup> The Ohio Department of Education offers five academic designations on individual school report cards based on four performance measures. Academic Watch and Academic Emergency indicate schools are not proficient in meeting basic standards of state indicators, performance index, growth calculation, and/or adequate yearly progress measures.  
<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcard/PDF/0506Guide.pdf>

evaluator who produces a single annual report. These are common obstacles that inhibit the likelihood program evaluation will generate program improvement. Navigating around these obstacles will result in efficient and evidence-driven approaches to refining program infrastructure and positive impacts.

Deliberate steps are necessary to ensure the evaluation process produces information that can be used to promote better mentor programming. Additionally, there must be a mechanism in place to ensure that the information is put to use for this purpose. To facilitate the process, use a systematic approach, confirm buy-in from core stakeholders and establish accountability at every step. There are multiple methods for developing the evaluation-improvement mechanism and there are noteworthy best practices.

The following case study offers insight into the process of translating program evaluation into program improvement. It illustrates the value of establishing a system for monitoring and assessment of program components in order to gather feedback and information used to inform the provider's approach to and delivery of excellent mentor program services.

### *Program Description*

The Elyria Mentor Partnership Program (EMPP) is a collaborative of community agencies in Lorain County, Ohio dedicated to serving students in high poverty schools and schools in or at risk of academic emergency<sup>3</sup>. Elyria City Schools is a driving force in the collaborative, and partners with agencies that can provide support, resources, and potential mentors. Through meaningful relationships with positive role models, EMPP is designed to promote positive outcomes among youth at risk of educational failure, school drop out, and delinquent behavior.

EMPP conducts a program evaluation across three sites. One-to-one mentoring occurs as

part of a school-based lunch buddy program, a school-based after school club, and a community-based book club in a public housing site. In the 2006 outcome findings<sup>4</sup>, EMPP participation was associated with a variety of positive impacts:

- To date, 60 one-to-one mentor matches have been established. All matches that were made in the first year were sustained in the second year.
- Based on grade point average (GPA), 53% of mentees improved academic performance while participating in EMPP.
- Decreases in GPA varied depending duration of the mentoring match: 50% of sustained mentees (12+ months of participation) demonstrated GPA decrease; 62% of early termination mentees (participation terminated in less than 12 months) showed decreases in GPA.
- 22% of mentored students had no unexcused absences; 23% of sustained mentees had no unexcused absences.
- 37% of mentored students decreased their number of unexcused absences; 45% of sustained mentees decreased their number of unexcused absences.
- 51% of mentored students increased their average attendance rate; 56% of sustained mentees increased this rate.
- Only 17% of mentored students were suspended in the 2005-2006 academic year; 0% of sustained mentees were suspended; 31% of early termination mentees were suspended.

---

<sup>4</sup> Change over time compares data from 205-2006 academic year to the previous year.

The program has undergone substantial changes since its inception in 2004 in order to achieve these successes. In the first year of funding, only two of four partnering agencies participated in the EMPP collaborative. Furthermore, the designated evaluator was unavailable to provide services. Of the 200 proposed screenings for potential mentors, 19 were conducted. Twelve matches total were recorded. At the end of the first year, EMPP knew their next step “had to be dramatic, because what we were doing wasn’t working.”

The impact of their next steps are evident by the progress made toward achieving outcome goals in the program’s second year. The Year 2 annual evaluation report indicated that EMPP participants *exceeded* target outcomes for improved academic performance and school attendance (GPRA measures) and in other areas, as well. How did EMPP turn things around?

#### **EMPP Strategic Partners**

- Elyria City Schools
- The Center for Leadership in Education
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Erie Shores
- Girl Scouts of America, Erie Shores
- Boy Scouts of America, Erie Shores
- Department of Early Childhood, Lorain County Community College
- Lorain County Joint Vocational School, Teacher Education Exploration Program

### ***Best Practices and Strategies***

EMPP was a new initiative relying on untested partners for key elements of program governance and service delivery. The initial year was fraught with obstacles and challenges. EMPP persevered and through a variety of strategic choices are achieving commendable success in achieving program goals. This is not an accident, nor based on luck. The EMPP team, in addition to dedication of core members, relies on active reflection and proactive problem solving to drive their program towards success.

There are several key strategies that EMPP has utilized in making the connection between evaluation and program improvement, including a strong and collaborative partnership with their evaluator, utilizing a combination of both process and outcome information, and integrating a data-based decision making and planning process.

### ***#1 Ensuring the Evaluator is Part of the Team***

An external evaluator contracted during the EMPP program planning and funding application stage was unresponsive to requests for services at the inception of EMPP program year. As a result, the program lacked a cohesive mechanism for gaining insight into program implementation or collecting relevant data. In order to rectify this, EMPP made a point to engage a new external evaluator with (1) experience and (2) a mission aligned with that of the program. They forged a partnership with The Center for Leadership in Education (CLE). The partnership includes open communication and a team approach to ensuring the success of the EMPP mentor program services.

The role of the CLE team is more that of program facilitator than merely evaluator. CLE collaborated with EMPP after the conclusion of the program’s first year in order to:

- identify what went wrong and what went right,
- analyze why, and
- determine what to do about it.

Disclosing program gaps and deficit, especially after a tough year, may feel disheartening. The process, though, empowered EMPP to move forward with a clear sense of program priorities, lessons learned, and how to utilize their experiences to improve the program. The analysis yielded changes such as more formal partnership terms among collaborating agencies, establishment of a universal data collection system (across agencies), and more frequent

and structured meetings of the EMPP advisory board.

The term “external evaluator” can be misleading. The “external” aspect should refer to the evaluator’s professional affiliation being other than that of the program and to the unbiased perspective offered from that vantage point. Nothing else about “external” should extend to the role of the evaluator. An evaluator who is a partner, a collaborator, and a teammate will ensure that output from the evaluation is timely, relevant to the program mission, and applicable to program improvement (and funder requirements or other purposes). For EMPP, this meant undergoing trial and error in finding the right evaluation partner and creating a climate of collaboration.

## #2 Combining Process and Outcome Evaluation

Program evaluations come in different forms. Process evaluation (also referred to as formative evaluation) allows for continuous learning about how the program is working as it is implemented. It focuses on clearly describing and assessing program design and implementation. Process evaluation makes it possible to answer questions concerning “why” and “how” programs operate the way they do and what can be done to improve them. Outcome evaluation (also referred to as summative evaluation) focuses on producing clear, quantifiable evidence concerning the degree of program impact on program participants. It assesses the immediate or direct effects of program activities (as compared to sustained impact). Outcome evaluation articulates the results generated by the program and makes it possible to answer the question “so what”.

EMPP combines elements of both types of evaluation. They monitor mentor recruitment efforts, match attendance, and mentee re-matching. EMPP knows what is happening at each program site, including program procedures and activities. This information is systematically and regularly collected. It is compiled and reviewed monthly. At the

monthly advisory board meeting, representatives from the collaborative assess progress, changes, and setbacks. The up-to-date information on program operation permits strategic allocation of resources, revisions to recruitment or program compiled and reviewed monthly. At the monthly advisory board meeting, representatives from the collaborative:

- Assess progress, changes, and setbacks.
- Use up-to-date information on program operation to
  - determine strategic allocation of resources,
  - revise recruitment or program components,
  - develop of relevant supports and resources.

The result is a dynamic and responsive mentoring program infrastructure positioned to achieve desired outcomes.

At the same time that EMPP relies on elements of process evaluation to hone implementation, the program is conducting its outcome evaluation. In true partnership, the execution of the outcome evaluation is a collaborative effort. The system entails:

- Establishing a data task list
- Developing an appropriate timeline for collection, compilation, and analysis of data.
- Designating appropriate parties to each task.
- Monitoring progress of outcome evaluation at regular intervals.

EMPP outcome evaluation data (including that from school records) are collected and entered by the program representative from the Elyria School District. Data analysis and findings are generated by the evaluator, CLE. The interpretation and application of outcome evaluation results are provided by the entire advisory board.

The combination of process and outcome evaluation allows EMPP to scrutinize the program operation in (effectively) real time

action while tracking progress that will evidence the ultimate impact of participation.

### *#3 Using the Evaluation to Inform Decision Making*

EMPP accesses information collected for evaluation purposes on a frequent basis. The evaluation information is factored into decisions such as how, where, and who to recruit as potential mentors; what new partnerships to forge; or how to promote lasting relationships between mentors and mentees. There are several critical factors that drive this process.

- Protocol dictates that relevant data be monitored in a timely fashion (i.e. not put off to the end of the quarter, etc.).
- There is a clear and concise method for compiling the data.
- Compiled information is distributed to advisory and reviewed at monthly meetings.
- Information is factored in to the decisions made by the advisory board.

The cyclical nature of this system lends itself to continuity and accountability. Initial resistance to the process abated when program staff and partnering agencies observed the value of a consistent and relevant mechanism for using feedback to better mentoring services. The turn-around time for the monthly “reckoning” has increased over time and EMPP continues to refine the process.

For EMPP, using the evaluation process to inform their decision making has been critical to making a “come back” from a problematic first year. Having concrete evidence to support choices is preferable to going on instinct or hoping that intuition is correct.<sup>5</sup> For example, strategic partnership development is directly tied to the need for potential mentors evidenced in the process evaluation. This led to EMPP’s leveraging of formal

<sup>5</sup> Phillips-Jones, L. (2003). Time to Evaluate. CCC/The Mentoring Group. Grass Valley, CA.

partnerships established with committed new partners and building stronger collaboration with participating partners. EMPP is now partnering with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, a community college early education department, and a vocational high school’s program for future educators. The decision to begin recruiting new mentors as early as possible in order to match a majority of students by October 30<sup>th</sup> was driven by outcome evaluation findings that demonstrated that longer duration matches showed substantially more improvement in key GPRA outcomes than shorter duration matches. The EMPP program evaluation process provides concrete information used in deliberate and calculated decisions to promote the program’s success.

### *Program Replicability*

- Develop a schedule for compiling and reviewing key aspects of program operation.
- Create a user-friendly system for reporting on key aspects of program operation (e.g. a spreadsheet, a form, etc.).
- Establish a committee or board to review and incorporate evaluation information into decision making. This will increase accountability for program success.
- Let program staff, volunteers, and partners know exactly how evaluation information is being used. This will promote buy-in from key stakeholders.
- Use an external evaluator to lend credibility to feedback/findings and to provide an outside perspective.
- Conduct evaluation of every program sites in order to see what is working/having impact in varied settings or with varied populations.
- Leverage variability in participation rates or program services to discern differences in successful implementation and outcomes.
- Identify potential comparison data sets (e.g. use non-participant school records) to demonstrate true impact of program participation.

## Additional Resources

- **Evaluating Your Program: a beginner's self-evaluation workbook for mentoring programs:** This free resource, developed by [ITI](#), is a guide to conducting a mentoring program evaluation. The guide covers all aspects of determining the measurable outcomes, collecting and analyzing the data, and using the results in a program's marketing efforts. [http://www.itiincorporated.com/sew\\_dl.htm](http://www.itiincorporated.com/sew_dl.htm)
- **W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook:** This handbook provides a framework for thinking about evaluation as a relevant and useful program tool. Written primarily for project directors who have direct responsibility for the ongoing evaluation of W.K. Kellogg Foundation-funded projects, it can easily be adapted for use in other settings. <http://www.wkcf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>
- **Planning and Evaluation Resource Center (PERC):** PERC is an online clearinghouse of evaluation and planning tools designed for and by youth development practitioners. <http://www.evaluationtools.org/>
- **User-Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations:** A comprehensive guide found on the National Science Foundation website. Although written for NSF programs, this guide offers something for even the most experienced evaluators. Chapters include the evaluation of a hypothetical project (for greater understanding of the process) and an overview of common qualitative methods and data analysis techniques. <http://www.ehr.nsf.gov/EHR/REC/pubs/NSF97-153/start.htm>

## References

- <sup>1</sup> National Mentoring Center Bulletin (2004). Into the Crystal Ball: A Roundtable Discussion on the Future of Mentoring. Vol 2(3).
- <sup>2</sup> Swearer Center for Public Service, Brown University (2000), Community Work: Program Management, Evaluation. Providence, RI.
- <sup>3</sup> Phillips-Jones, L. (2003). Time to Evaluate. CCC/The Mentoring Group. Grass Valley, CA.
- <sup>4</sup> Adapted in part from the web resources section (11/05) of the National Mentoring Center. <http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/index>

### *About the Author: Christina Borbely, Ph.D.*

Christina is a consultant at the Center for Applied Research Solutions (CARS) providing technical assistance to California's Safe and Drug Free Schools & Communities grantees, California's Mentoring Programs, and other state and federal grant programs. Also a member of the Evaluation, Management, & Training Inc (EMT) team, Christina coordinates program evaluations for El Dorado County Office of Education and Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bay Area. Previously, Christina was a member of the research staff at Columbia University's National Center for Children and Families. Her work in the field of youth development and prevention programs has been presented at national conferences and published in academic journals. She is also a mentor to youth in underserved populations. Christina received her doctoral degree in developmental psychology, with a focus on children and adolescents, from Columbia University (2004).

### *About The Elyria Mentor Partnership Program*

EMPP serves students of Elyria City Schools, Lorain County, Ohio, who are most at risk of educational failure, dropping out of school, involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in delinquent behavior, lack strong positive role models, or live in one of the high-crime zones. EMPP believes each student is different, each with his or her individually compelling story. The program is designed to promote youths' strengths and reduce risks one child at a time by providing meaningful relationships with positive role models. For more information about EMPP services, contact Heidi Rock, Grants Manager, Elyria City Schools at [RockHeidi@elyriaschools.org](mailto:RockHeidi@elyriaschools.org)

# Mentoring Resource Center

## Case Study Series

**The Mentoring Resource Center (MRC)** has been created to provide United States Department of Education Mentoring Program grantees with training, technical assistance, publications, research, and consultation, all in an effort to help their program staff design and implement the highest quality mentoring programs. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, the MRC is a collaborative effort between EMT Associates, located in Folsom, CA, and the National Mentoring Center, located in Portland, OR.

## Let's Hear From You!

*The MRC Case Study Series offers effective strategies and insights from successful programs on various topic areas. We are always on the lookout for successful programs and potential topics. Please contact us with your recommendations for future Case Study articles.*



## Contact Us:

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

**Mentoring Resource Center**  
c/o EMT Associates  
771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2  
Folsom, CA 95630

MRC Toll-Free Number: (877) 579-4788  
fax: (916) 983-6693  
email: [edmentoring@emt.org](mailto:edmentoring@emt.org)  
web: [www.edmentoring.org](http://www.edmentoring.org)

**Project Director:** Judy Strother Taylor  
**Contributing Editor:** Kerrilyn Scott-Nakai  
**Graphic Design:** Julienne Kwong

"Mentoring Resource Center Case Study Series" is published periodically by EMT Associates under its Mentoring Resource Center contract with the U.S. Department of Education. The information or strategies highlighted in The Mentoring Resource Center Case Study Series do not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education, nor are the ideas and opinions expressed herein those of the U.S. Department of Education or its staff. © 2005 by The Mentoring Resource Center. Permission to reproduce is granted, provided credit is given