



# MENTORING FACT SHEET

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

Mentoring Resource Center

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## Developing Effective Policies and Procedures for OSDFS Mentoring Programs

Among the most valuable assets an organization has are the policies and procedures that guide its work. Most, if not all, public and private nonprofit organizations have written manuals governing agency operations, fiscal practices, human resources, and other day-to-day functions. Youth mentoring programs, such as those sponsored by the Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS), are no exception. It is important for OSDFS programs to establish, document, and continuously update the policies and procedures that guide the safe and effective delivery of services. Although the task often seems arduous, the stability and security brought to your program from having a well-designed manual of policies and procedures is fully worth the effort.

Written policies and procedures for mentoring programs contribute to program success by:

- **Supporting the organization's vision and operating principles.** Policies and procedures provide a clear statement of an agency's mission, values, and vision, and provide a framework for implementing these guiding principles.
- **Providing staff with clear guidelines on how to administer a program.** The establishment of policies and procedures promotes a smoothly run program through a consistent set of instructions that remain in place through staff turnover, organizational change, and funding cycles.
- **Addressing risk management issues.** A fully developed set of policies and procedures helps ensure that programs are being implemented safely, effectively, and consistently, minimizing potential areas of risk.

- **Providing a blueprint for replication, expansion, fund development and marketing.** A manual for program policies and operations that reflect the program's mission will allow others to replicate the program and can serve as a foundation for sustainability, marketing, and expansion efforts.

### Policies vs. Procedures—What's the Difference?

**Policies** reflect the principles and standards of an organization or program, defining *what* is acceptable to ensure program success, the safety of youth in the program, and effective and consistent program operations. For example, mentoring programs have policies that describe guidelines for matching mentors and mentees. Policies are usually nonnegotiable in nature, may indicate who has authority for final decisions, and may describe consequences for noncompliance with program rules. They should be approved by the agency's board of directors (and legal counsel if there are questions as to the legality of a policy).

**Procedures** describe *how* a particular policy or operational function is to be implemented and managed within the program. They describe the step-by-step process necessary to implement and support policies and other agency practices. For example, a policy on making matches is supported by step-by-step procedures covering how this is accomplished, what forms to use, how long the process should take, and who is responsible. Procedures are usually governed by the program coordinator and other agency staff and may be modified on a regular basis as needed (although in some instances,

## Comparison of Policies and Procedures

### Policies

- Widespread application
- Nonnegotiable, changes infrequently
- Expressed in broad terms and requirements
- Statements of “what” or “why,” or both
- Answer major operational issue(s)
- Approved by the board or advisory council

### Procedures

- Narrower focus
- Open to change or continuous improvement
- Detailed description of activities
- Statements of “how,” “when,” “who,” and sometimes “what”
- Describe process
- Managed by program staff

especially concerning procedures involving risk areas, agency boards will still want to sign off on them).

## What Should Policies and Procedures Cover?

In general, your manual should describe every key aspect of how you run your mentoring program. Organizing policies and procedures into areas of program activity will help ensure that you have covered all the bases. As you decide what to include, it may be helpful to review the *Elements of Effective Practice*<sup>1</sup> and other guides for building a successful mentoring program.

Common areas for both policy and procedure development include, but are not limited to:

- Recruitment
- Mentor and mentee eligibility
- Mentor screening

- Mentor training
- Matching of mentors and mentees
- Support and supervision of matches
- Match closure
- Record-keeping
- Confidentiality
- Transportation
- Overnight visits and out-of-town travel
- Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect
- Rules of conduct for mentors and mentees
- Unacceptable behavior
- Evaluation

Procedures should be consistent with the policies that have been established. For example, a policy on confidentiality must be supported by specific procedures guiding staff and volunteers on how to maintain confidential records and other information. In some instances, programs quickly develop operational procedures before a clear policy has been developed. If you find yourself in that situation, stop and take some time to review these procedures. Ask yourself if they are really necessary, and if so, what policy and/or programmatic objective do they serve? In general, policies should drive procedures rather than the other way around.

Include supporting documents in your manual that help the reader understand the context in which the policies and procedures were developed. Examples of these documents include a brief history of the agency, mission and vision statements, staff and volunteer position descriptions, organizational charts, copies of memoranda of understanding, and any long-range planning documents.

<sup>1</sup>MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, (2003). Available at: [http://www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/design/elements\\_of\\_effective\\_practice.php](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php).

### **Special Considerations for Programs Working in Educational Settings**

Most OSDFS mentoring programs have both formal and informal relationships with local schools and are often operated at a school site and within the context of the school day. As you develop or revise policies and procedures for your mentoring program, take the time to review school policy and get feedback from school liaisons or administrators to be sure you are not inadvertently violating or contradicting their policies. For example, the school may have specific requirements of its volunteers that would affect your program's volunteer recruitment policies.

### **Tips for Developing Sound Policies and Procedures**

- Do some self-assessment. Most agencies' policies and procedures profile falls somewhere on the following continuum of descriptors:
  - The agency has a comprehensive youth mentoring policies and procedures manual and regular reviews are made to ensure it is current.
  - The agency has policies and procedures that are not fully developed and may exist in various locations within the agency.

- The agency has been operating for some time without a policies and procedures manual.

Whatever your agency's profile, it's a good idea to dedicate some time to ensuring that your policies and procedures are in order and are protecting you from risk. Pull together a review team to consider the questions at the bottom of this page.

- Review policies and procedures of partner organizations as needed, looking for areas of possible contradiction or confusion.
- If your state has a state mentoring partnership, contact the representatives to see if the state has developed quality assurance standards or other tools that you can use as you develop or modify your policies and procedures.
- Take advantage of the resources available to you, such as those on the following page. Resources offer aids such as generic forms and policies you can adapt for your own use. Put some thought into selecting and adapting these items for your program. For example, if you don't need a policy on transportation because you only operate within a school building, don't include it.

### **Effectiveness Assessment of Policies and Procedures: Questions To Ask**

Has our program developed a written policies and procedures manual?

Does the manual cover all aspects of program operations and provide guidance for handling particular situations that have come up?

Are our policies approved by our board or advisory council?

Does our program orient new and current staff to the contents of the manual?

Is our policies and procedures manual accessible to all staff?

How often do we review and update our manual?

Is the manual used or referenced when staff or clients have questions?

- Involve and engage your staff, board, and volunteers to help develop, modify, and review policies and procedures. You can either set up a committee to do this work or simply ask

several people to review each item before it gets final approval. Be clear about who makes the final decisions.

### Resources that can help you develop your own policies and procedures

#### Web

*Elements of effective practice toolkit*, available as a free download, is a comprehensive toolkit for program development and operations based on the second edition of the *Elements of Effective practice*.  
[http://www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/eeptoolkit/](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/).

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. (2003). *Elements of effective practice* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.  
[http://www.mentoring.org/program\\_staff/design/elements\\_of\\_effective\\_practice.php](http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php).

*Foundations for successful youth mentoring: A guidebook for program development* covers all the basics of starting and operating an effective mentoring program.  
<http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/foundations.html>.

*Generic mentoring program policy and procedure manual*, published by the National Mentoring Center, has advice on developing an operations manual and sample policies and procedures that can be downloaded and adapted.  
[http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/policy\\_manual.html](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/policy_manual.html).

*How to develop an operations manual for your mentoring program*. J. Sherk. EMT. This guide is based on the California Mentoring Partnership's recommended best practices for mentor programs. <http://www.emt.org/userfiles/MentoringProgOperationsManual.PDF>.

The EdMentoring.org website has a library of sample forms that grantees can review and download in PDF format. <http://www.edmentoring.org/forms.html>.

The Non-Profit Risk Management Center offers a wide range of services—from technical assistance to software to training and consulting help—on a vast array of risk-management topics. <http://www.nonprofitrisk.org/>.

#### Print

Robinson, V. (1992). *Organizing effective school-based mentoring programs*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of Partners in Education. This practical guide to developing school-based programs includes sections on program design and administrative procedures.

White, L., Patterson, J, and Herman, M. (1998). *More than a matter of trust: Managing the risks of mentoring*. Washington, DC: Non-Profit Risk Management Center. This book discusses key elements to consider when establishing a risk management program and offers practical information that can help mentoring programs craft reasonable and effective policies and procedures.

#### The Mentoring Fact Sheet is published by:

U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center  
771 Oak Avenue Parkway, Suite 2  
Folsom, CA 95630  
MRC Hotline: 1 (877) 579-4788, fax: (916) 983-6693  
E-mail: [edmentoring@emt.org](mailto:edmentoring@emt.org)  
Web: <http://www.edmentoring.org>

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