

» Module 2: The Infrastructure

So, you think your mentoring program is ready to take off ... you have a group of people who are committed to making the program work. You recruited some enthusiastic volunteers who are keen to become mentors, and you identified some young people who lack adult friendship and guidance. What more could you possibly need to get a mentoring program off the ground?



The truth is, you need a lot more than some dedicated people with good intentions. Before you can build a strong mentoring program, you need to build a solid infrastructure or foundation to base it upon.

The concept of mentoring is a simple one, yet the administration of mentoring programs can be quite complex. Whether your program is just getting started, or has been in existence for years, you must ensure that it rests upon strong organizational pillars. In doing so, you are likely to increase its quality and durability.

To be structurally sound from ground up, your program should be supported by:

- An analysis of the entire program and its feasibility
- A suitable organizational framework
- A clear mission statement and strategic plan
- Appropriate human resources
- Basic administrative requirements.

Let's get busy and build your mentoring program's infrastructure. We'll start with an assessment of the program and its viability.

Program Analysis

People are often so keen to start building mentoring programs that they ignore some fundamental components of solid program footings. When starting the construction process it is important to first assess the feasibility of the mentoring service, and develop a plan to provide an effective program.



Why bother?

It is especially important to conduct a feasibility assessment and program plan if you are building a new mentoring program. But those who are expanding or upgrading an existing program can also benefit from this analysis. Check out some of the advantages of analyzing your program's viability.

Doing a feasibility study and program plan can help you to:

- **Find out**
Find out if the vision for the program is realistic and worth pursuing, by causing you to assume an objective, unemotional perspective.
- **Create**
Create a detailed "map" of what you need to do to achieve the vision for the program.
- **Evaluate**
Evaluate and manage your program's performance as you work towards the goals and objectives identified in your plan.
- **Anticipate**
Anticipate threats to success, and create plans to deal with them.
- **Motivate**
Motivate others by communicating the vision and how it will be achieved.
- **Enhance**
Enhance your program's credibility (especially with potential funders) by presenting it in a thoroughly considered, organized manner.

Is it doable?

The best starting place for initiating a new mentoring program, and for expanding or improving an established program, is to explore whether a quality program is achievable and sustainable. Have a look at some of the important questions to examine in your feasibility study regarding:

- **The program**
 - What type of program do you envision?
 - What are the critical outcomes you are aiming to achieve?
 - What are the standards of an effective program and can you meet them?
 - What skills, facilities, information systems, materials, etc. does the program require?
 - How should the program be managed?
 - How can the program work with other community groups?

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- **The market**
 - Is there really a need for the program ... to what extent ... how do you know?
 - Who are your targeted mentees and volunteer mentors ... how many are there?
 - How can you recruit and maintain them?
 - Who else offers related services, and how can you work with them?
- **The financial resources**
 - How much does it cost to run the program?
 - What financial resources are available?
 - Where can you obtain additional funding?
 - How will you sustain the program in the long term?
- **The barriers to success**
 - What are the risks in running the program and how can you manage them?
 - How do you deal with funding shortfalls?
 - How do you address a lack of mentors?
 - Do clients have difficulties accessing your program?
 - What other obstacles to success exist and how can you overcome them?

How do you do it?

If your feasibility assessment indicates that your mentoring program is "doable", then the next step is to outline how to effectively "do" it. This can be done in a program plan. The answers to the questions you asked in the feasibility study form the basis of your program plan. Think of the program plan as a business plan. It analyzes and describes how your program's "business" is conducted. It causes you to think through the practical side of your program, and becomes your guidebook as you implement the program.

Your program plan should present information on all major aspects of your program's functioning. Have a closer look at what to include in your program plan:

- **The organization**
Describe the organization that oversees your program, as well as the governance, management and staff structures.
- **The program**
Describe your mentoring program and its expected outcomes. Outline how those outcomes are evaluated. Detail the need for the service and how your program meets that need. State how your program works with similar services and other organizations in the community.
- **Marketing**
Describe the client group(s) that your program targets, in terms of its features, needs, assets, size, growth rate and so on. Outline the plans for engaging clients and volunteers, and promoting the program in the community.
- **Human resources**
Describe the staff and volunteer resources that are required.

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- **Sustainability**
Outline how your program is funded currently, and the plan for securing funding in the longer term.
- **Finances**
Provide budget and cash flow projections for at least two years. Include current balance sheets and statements of income if available.
- **Operations.**
Present a schedule of operational events and responsibilities, detailing actions to be taken, goals and results to be achieved, and timelines.

A well-presented program plan can be used as a valuable communication tool when seeking support for your program. The feasibility analysis and program plan can help you and your potential supporters to be sure the program's underpinnings are solid.

Let's look now at another key component of your program's infrastructure: the organizational framework.

Organizational Framework

Whether you are initiating a brand new mentoring program, or are working with one that is long established, one of the fundamental issues to address is the type of organizational framework in which your program would operate best.



Have a look at some of the possible organizational structures that your mentoring program could work within:

- **Stand-alone mentoring organization**
Your mentoring program could exist as an independent agency that focuses on mentoring. The organization would likely be incorporated under relevant Provincial legislation. For Federal tax purposes, the agency may be a registered charity or a non-profit organization (for more information, see the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency's web site listed in Bibliography). While your agency may be affiliated with other organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada, it would essentially be an autonomous body, free to determine its own mission, goals and strategies. This model is usually best suited to those programs that have well-developed administrative and service delivery structures, a wealth of human resources, a strong funding base, connections with related organizations, and broad based community support.
- **One program within a larger organization**
Your mentoring program could exist within a larger organization whose mandate is broader than just mentoring. For instance, a mentoring program for pregnant and parenting teens might be best administered through a local multi-service family support agency. Similarly, a church or faith organization might create a mentoring program for its youth members. Mentoring programs that are part of larger organizations must have resources that are specifically dedicated to effectively running the mentoring component, in order to be successful. This model is often suitable for those programs that are new upstarts, those serving specialized or narrowly defined groups of clients, those offering one piece of a larger continuum of services, or those with limited funding, human resources, community profile, or administrative or service delivery expertise. Also, many mentoring programs have chosen to group together with other programs under one organizational umbrella in recent years, (often through mergers of two or more agencies), in order to economize their resources and to offer the best quality and widest range of services to their clients.
- **Satellite of another organization**
Your mentoring program could become affiliated with another organization as a satellite of that agency. This model is often used when a smaller community delivers mentoring services to its region by working through the administrative structure of an organization in a nearby, larger centre. For instance, Big Sisters and Big Brothers of Edmonton has satellites in the neighboring communities of Parkland and Strathcona. By utilizing this structure, the satellite program can often economize limited resources and

create a more sustainable program for its community.

- **Partnership of more than one organization**
Your mentoring program could exist as a partnership of one or more community groups. For instance, a mentoring program for street youth might exist through a partnership of police, youth serving organizations, schools and agencies for the homeless. It makes sense to operate a program as a collaborative effort when sharing resources and expertise create the best possible services for the community. Mentoring programs that exist through such partnerships often have one partnering organization acting as a fiscal and/or supervisory agent, with the other partners offering expertise and support through a committee. A partnership agreement should guide these collaborations.

Determining the best organizational structure for your mentoring program also involves deciding how to effectively direct or oversee the program. Explore these two options:

- **Board of directors**
Any non-profit or charitable organization requires a voluntary board of directors to govern its affairs. The board sets policies for the organization, and is accountable for its mission, strategic plan, financial resources, human resources oversight, among other responsibilities. So if your mentoring program exists as a stand-alone organization, you require a group of committed board leaders to be accountable for its operation. When a mentoring program is a satellite or one program within a larger organization, the board of the larger agency is ultimately accountable for your mentoring program. When a mentoring program exists through a partnership, then generally the board of the fiscal and supervisory agent for the partnership assumes ultimate accountability for the program.
- **Advisory committee**
If your mentoring program does not exist as an independent organization with its own board of directors, then perhaps an advisory committee could provide guidance and support to the organization that is ultimately accountable for your program. For example, in a:
 - **Program within a broader focused agency** - an advisory committee could offer information and recommendations to the agency's board regarding the mentoring program and policies that affect it.
 - **Satellite program** - an advisory committee could consist of members of the community in which the satellite program operates. The advisory committee could offer advice to the board regarding issues specific to their community, and if appropriate, could assist with the administration and delivery of the program in their area.
 - **Partnership** - the partnering groups should act as an advisory committee to offer guidance to the fiscal and supervisory agent's board, and perhaps to take on some responsibilities for program delivery.

Now let's examine another element of a strong program infrastructure: the mission and strategic plan.

The Blueprints

Would you construct a building without blueprints? Probably not, because your structure may never get off the ground if no one understands what you are trying to create and how to build it. Or your structure could crumble because important elements were missed. You might even find that you end up with a building that is unrecognizable because you have strayed so far from the blueprint.



The mission statement and strategic plan are your blueprints as you build and expand your mentoring program.

The mission

Your mission statement answers "Why are we here?" and "What outcomes do we hope to achieve?". In other words, it states the organization's highest purpose or reason for being. This becomes the guidepost for all plans, decisions and activities related to the program.

The mission statement should succinctly say:

- Who the organization is,
- What it does,
- For whom, and
- Where.

If you are looking for examples of other organizations' mission statements, [search the Mentoring Canada online library](#).

The plan

Your organization not only needs a mission, but also a strategic plan for achieving its mission. Simply put, a strategic plan outlines the organization's strategic goals and objectives, along with a set of detailed steps or tactics to pursue each goal. The strategic plan should simply state:

- What to do,
- Why to do it, and
- How to do it.

If you are looking for examples of strategic plans, [search the Mentoring Canada online library](#).

The strategic plan is a bit different from the program plan. Program planning is like taking a snapshot of the program to provide an overview of your program's entire operations and where they are headed. Strategic planning, by contrast, is an ongoing process that involves examining internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats. Based on this analysis, focused priorities and strategies for reaching these goals are set.

The Building Blocks of Quality Mentoring Programs

If your mentoring program exists as a stand-alone organization, your board of directors is responsible for establishing the mission statement and strategic plan. With a mentoring program that depends on another organization for its administration, it is important that the program clearly fits within that organization's mission and is included in its strategic plan.

If you are responsible for your program's "blueprints", you can check out more information on mission and planning in the Board Training Module that is included on the [Mentoring Canada](#) website.

Now let's have a look at who will carry out the mission and plan: the workers.

The Workers

The volunteer and paid workers who are building your mentoring program must be appropriately skilled, screened, trained and managed to ensure a solid program and safe, positive mentoring relationships.



The volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of any mentoring program. Your program likely utilizes volunteers in a variety of capacities ... as mentors, board and committee members, and for office support, fundraising, special events, or any other job they can reasonably perform.

Volunteers in all these roles must be managed. Volunteer management has become increasingly sophisticated, with codes of conduct for [volunteer management](#) and [volunteer screening standards](#) now guiding the field. The importance of these standards of practice cannot be understated: voluntary organizations and their boards are being held legally and financially accountable when they do not meet their duty of care and comply with these standards. It is therefore essential that your program's volunteers be managed in accordance with current standards.

The staff

Just as your mentoring program's volunteer workers must be screened, so must its paid staff. Police record checks, child welfare record checks (where available), reference checks, and thorough interviews are recommended screening requirements for both volunteers and paid staff.

Mentoring programs must also ensure that their paid employees come to the job with the necessary skills. This is especially true for casework positions. Casework staff should have educational credentials and experience in a relevant human services discipline, such as social work or psychology. They should also receive training regarding mentoring and volunteer management issues. If this instruction is not available from a formal training program, it should be obtained in-house, or through an affiliated organization.

Not every mentoring program will have paid workers. Some small programs may use volunteers to fulfill roles that are typically done by staff in larger mentoring organizations. It is essential, though, that volunteers in such roles as volunteer screening and orientation, screening of mentees, match supervision and other critical casework roles, also have relevant human services education and experience, as well as training in mentoring and volunteer management issues.

Remember, mentoring program staff are called upon to make very responsible decisions that impact the safety and development of children and youth. And your organization will be held accountable for the actions of program staff. So be sure you have enough workers, and be sure you have workers with the training and qualifications necessary to ensure the well being of those whom your organization serves.

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If you are responsible for overseeing your mentoring organization's workers, you can check out more information on human resources in the Board Training Module that is included on the [Mentoring Canada](#) website.

For a deeper understanding of your mentoring program's volunteer management requirements, go on a volunteer research expedition.













Volunteer Expedition

Your mentoring program's most precious resources are its volunteers. Volunteers are often utilized not only as mentors, but also to stuff envelopes, design web sites, govern your board, organize group activities, and to fulfill almost any other role you can imagine. Effective screening and management of this valuable resource will ensure rewarding experiences for all volunteers, and positive outcomes for mentees and the organization.











To learn more about effective volunteer management, you are going on a research expedition!

1. Link to the [Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement](#). (NOTE: this page can be found on the Volunteer Canada website.)
2. Scroll down to pages 9 through 18 (check the bottom left and right hand corners of the document for page numbers) and research the "Organizational Standards for Volunteer Involvement".
3. Then come back to this page to reveal your findings! Indicate whether your research confirms or refutes the following volunteer management "theories":

| THUMBS UP OR THUMBS DOWN? | CONFIRM ! | REFUTE! |
|--|---|---|
| Anyone within the organization can be given the responsibility of managing volunteers |  |  |
| Volunteers performing basic tasks do not require supervision and feedback. |  |  |
| The volunteer screening process may differ among people applying for the same position, depending on the individual's circumstances. |  |  |
| Your organization must have policies and procedures that structure the involvement of volunteers. |  |  |
| Volunteer recognition is an extra part of your volunteer program that should be done if your budget allows. |  |  |
| Because they are not paid employees, volunteers do not require regular performance appraisals. |  |  |

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| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Volunteers should be treated in harmony with human rights, employment standards, and freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation. |  |  |
| Records must be maintained only on those volunteers who have regular, direct contact with the organization's clients. |  |  |
| Volunteers should be considered as equal members of the organization's human resources team. |  |  |
| The volunteer's rights always come before the client's rights in volunteer discipline or dismissal situations. |  |  |

Were your research findings accurate? If not, have another look at the [Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement](#). If your research expedition was successful, move on and learn about some important administrative supports for your mentoring program's infrastructure.

Administrative Supports

A strong mentoring program is built upon a variety of essential administrative supports. These basic requirements can help to provide stability, security, predictability and clarity to your program.

Have a look at some of the administrative supports that form vital part of your mentoring program's infrastructure:



- **Bylaws**
 - The board of directors of the organization that creates your mentoring program's policies requires a set of rules and regulations - called the bylaws, charter or constitution - that governs its internal operations.
 - The bylaws provide organization and continuity to such matters as the definition of who is included in the organization's membership, the composition of the board and how board meetings will be run.
 - When disagreements arise on your board regarding the ways it conducts its internal affairs, the bylaws should provide the solution.
 - Bylaws are required in order to receive and maintain your organization's incorporation and charitable status.

- **Policies and procedures**
 - Your mentoring program needs policies and procedures to guide the decisions and actions of its board, staff, volunteers and clients.
 - Policies are broad rules that describe what to do. Procedures are more detailed rules that describe how to accomplish a policy.
 - Policies and procedures should be clear, realistic and practical. Responsibility for these policies should be assigned. They should be in writing, and should be contained in a manual that is available to everyone whom these rules affect.
 - Your program will require policies and procedures for many aspects of its operations, such as casework, personnel, fundraising, financial management and public relations.

- **Funding**
 - Your mentoring program requires an adequate funding base, consisting of both financial resources and gifts-in-kind.
 - Your funding base could include support from government, foundations, the United Way, corporate donors, individual donors, endowment funds, gaming activities, special events, product sales, and other sources.
 - All fundraising activities should enhance the program's public image, and should comply with current ethical standards.
 - Funding that has long-term, multi-year potential should be sought as much as possible, to make the program stable and reliable. Keep in mind that initiating a mentoring program without sufficient, longer-term funding is irresponsible: if your program is not around to support matches beyond the short term, those matches can actually be damaging to the mentees.

- **Financial controls**
 - Your mentoring program should utilize generally accepted accounting practices. For instance, it should adhere to a financial accountability code, (such as the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's Ethical Fundraising & Financial Accountability Code) as well as the principles and standards for not-for-profits developed by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants.
 - If your program is a registered charity, it must abide by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency regulations such as spending at least 80% of its receipted donations on charitable activities, and issuing charitable receipts according to guidelines.
 - Your program must operate within an annual budget approved by its board of directors.
 - An independent annual audit on your program's finances should be conducted by a qualified accounting firm.

- **Documentation**
 - Detailed documentation must be maintained on all volunteers and clients, including those who apply to the program but are never matched. All program related documentation should be legible, and each entry must include a readable date and signature of the author. These confidential files must be stored in secure, locked facilities, and should be kept indefinitely.
 - Your program should also maintain appropriate records on such things as incorporation and charitable registration documents, financial transactions and reports, charitable receipts, annual tax returns, board minutes, policies and procedures, insurance policies, funding contracts, partnership agreements, leases, personnel files, and any other important administrative matter.

- **Insurance**
 - Your program has a responsibility to assess and control risks related to its activities. Carrying adequate insurance coverage is an important part of risk management.
 - Your mentoring program is undertaking substantial risk simply due to the nature of its service. The program has a duty of care to its mentees, and could be held liable if harm comes to a mentee as a result of accident, injury or abuse. It is therefore extremely important to carry insurance to cover these possibilities.
 - Liabilities and losses also could arise from many other situations, such as crime, wrongful dismissal, property damage, tenants liability and so on. It is wise to carry a comprehensive insurance policy that minimizes liability for the organization as a whole, board members, staff, volunteers and clients.
 - Seek legal advice to be certain that your program is sufficiently insured.

Now that you have the important administrative elements in place for your program's infrastructure, you are ready for another apprenticeship challenge. Ms. Mentor is waiting to put you to the test.

Dear Ms. Mentor

Ms. Mentor is back, and it is time for the next phase of your "apprenticeship" with her. Just choose the response that you think is the best advice for each mentoring program problem. Ms. Mentor, our resident "expert", will let you know what she thinks about your suggestion.

Dear Ms. Mentor,

We are caseworkers in a community based mentoring program, who are having a hard time keeping up with the workload. We are constantly bringing this up with our supervisor, but nothing is ever done about it. Help us solve our problem once and for all. **Please tell us how many matches each full-time caseworker should have to supervise on his or her caseload.**



Overworked and Underpaid

- (A) A maximum of 60
- (B) A maximum of 50
- (C) A maximum of 40
- (D) It depends

Dear Ms. Mentor,

I am the Executive Director of an innovative mentoring organization. In recent years we have started several new "spin-off" programs, most of which have been quite successful. The latest project proposal is a counseling service for the families of the children and youth in our programs. I can't help but think we might be straying off course and spreading ourselves a little too thin with this project. **What is the best guidepost for my board as they decide whether to approve this latest proposal?**

Lost Without a Compass

- (A) The availability of funding for the project
- (B) The organization's mission
- (C) The needs of the community

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Dear Ms. Mentor,

I am sitting on a committee that is hoping to initiate an Aboriginal mentoring program in our community. The committee has had a few meetings, and we are all very enthusiastic about making this project happen. The problem is that everyone wants to start off in different directions, which causes us to feel overwhelmed and frustrated. **Please direct us as to which of the following is the best starting place.**

Confused Committee Member

- (A) Get funding for the program
- (B) Recruit mentors for the program
- (C) Do a feasibility study and program plan
- (D) Set up your screening, matching and supervision processes

You have now assembled the solid infrastructure needed for a quality mentoring program. Quality mentoring also depends on the presence of several crucial elements that together form the body of your program. To build these elements into your program, check out Program Components.