

# Capturing the Mentoring Landscape

## Executive Summary

The State of Mentoring in Canada  
March 2021



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**MENTOR Canada** is a coalition of organizations that provide youth mentoring. Our goal is to build sector capacity to expand access to mentoring across Canada. Our work is focused in four areas: research, technology, public education and development of regional networks. It was launched by the **Alberta Mentoring Partnership, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada**, and the **Ontario Mentoring Coalition**.

The **Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)** is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies. Since its establishment in December 1991, SRDC has conducted over 400 projects and studies for various federal and provincial departments, municipalities, as well as other public and non-profit organizations.

MENTOR Canada would like to acknowledge the generous intellectual contribution of **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership (USA)** to the execution and success of The State of Mentoring Research Initiative. All three studies conducted as part of the *Initiative* are inspired by similar studies previously undertaken by MENTOR (USA).

MENTOR Canada wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the **Government of Canada's Youth Employment Skills Strategy** and **BMO Financial Group** to the realization of The State of Mentoring Research Initiative.

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Canada's Youth Employment  
Skills Strategy



## Executive Summary

**An estimated 16 percent of young adults participated in a mentoring program during their childhood or adolescence.**

The last decade has seen a proliferation of mentoring programs in Canada: as many as one-third of mentoring programs has been created within the last ten years. According to our Mapping the Mentoring Gap study, an estimated 16 percent of young adults participated in a mentoring program during their childhood or adolescence. These programs play an important role in supporting youth on their path to productive adulthood: formal mentors fill a gap for youth who have limited access to natural mentors and provide complementary benefits for youth who do have natural mentors in their lives. Yet, until now, we knew relatively little about the landscape of formal mentoring programs in Canada.

**For the first time, we have evidence that shows the extent and diversity of mentoring programs in Canada, the young people they serve, and the challenges they face. Capturing the Mentoring Landscape** is the last of three studies conducted by MENTOR Canada as part of *The State of Mentoring Research Initiative* – the first ever pan-Canadian study on youth mentoring. Its objectives are to increase our understanding of the prevalence, scope, structure, as well as the strengths and challenges of Canadian youth mentoring programs and services.

This executive summary provides answers to the following questions:

1. Who participates in mentoring programs?
2. Who are the young people waiting to be served?
3. What do mentoring programs look like?
4. What is the quality level of mentoring programs?
5. What challenges are organizations facing?

The results show that the mentoring sector in Canada is diverse in terms of program size, location, structure, intended outcomes, and populations served. More importantly, the results demonstrate that the demand for mentoring is strong, but that many programs and organizations face several challenges as they attempt respond to this demand.

## 10 Key Findings

1. More than half of organizations offering mentoring programs have children and youth waiting for a mentor.
2. Mentor recruitment is a challenge for half of all organizations.
3. Fundraising and grant writing is the top operational challenge for nearly a fifth of organizations providing mentoring.
4. Two-third of mentoring programs serve 100 youth or less.
5. 45% of mentoring programs target youth living in poverty.
6. 38% of programs target youth with mental health needs.
7. Providing a developmental relationship for youth is a top goal for 30% of programs.
8. 32% of programs for young adults have career exploration and employability as top goals.
9. One-on-one mentoring relationships account for slightly over half of program models. 22% of mentoring programs have a group mentoring model.
10. Two-thirds of organizations offer a minimum of 2 hours of pre-match training to their mentors.

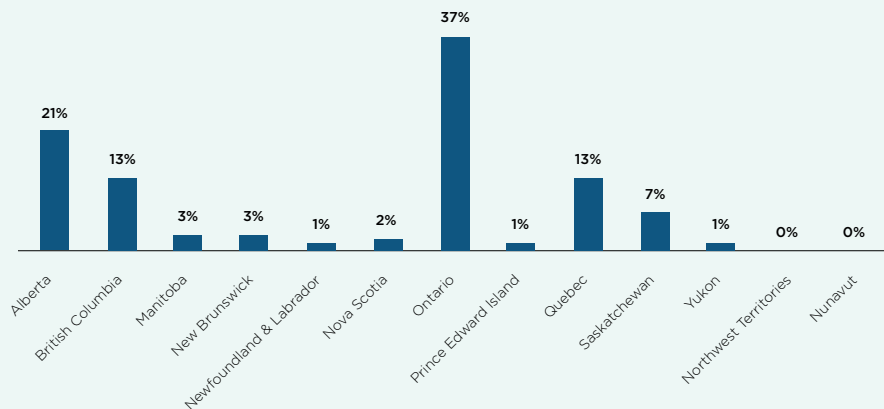
Respondents provided information about their activities during their previous fiscal year, that is roughly January-December 2019 or April 2019-March 2020. As such, respondents provided information about their organization and their programs and services prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Study design

The lack of research on youth mentoring in Canada is an important barrier to generating evidence-based policies and practices which have the potential to improve the effectiveness and reach of mentoring for young people across the country. To address this barrier and collect essential data about youth mentoring, MENTOR Canada launched The State of Mentoring Research Initiative in 2019 with support from the Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and BMO Financial Group. MENTOR Canada worked with the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) – a non-profit research organization with 30 years' experience providing high-quality research and evaluation support for evidence-informed decision-making – to carry out the research. As part of The State of Mentoring we consulted extensively with critical stakeholder group of the sector: youth, mentors, and mentoring service providers.

Between April and September 2020, 150 youth-serving organizations participated in the Canadian Survey of Youth Development and Mentoring Organizations. **These organizations provided details about 215 mentoring programs.** Respondents from across Canada participated in the online survey. A larger proportion of responses came from Alberta and Ontario where established regional networks (the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and the Ontario Mentoring Coalition) helped promote the survey to their members and partners (see figure 1). 79 percent of organizations who participated were non-profits and 64 percent were registered charities.

**Figure 1**  
Service providers (n=150)  
who responded to the  
survey across Canada



### Definition of Mentoring Program for the purpose of this survey

A structured set of related activities and/or services to respond to the needs of a specific target group, usually over an extended timeframe, that are directly tied to or in support of, or dedicated to, the main goals of mentoring. Mentoring is a primary – though not necessarily the only – change mechanism through which program outcomes are achieved.

**65 percent of organizations who participated in the survey reported that the general youth population was one of their top three primary target groups.**

## 1. Who participates in mentoring programs?

Organizations reported serving between 3 and 100,000 children and youth in dedicated mentoring programs in their last fiscal year (c. 2019):

- The vast majority of organizations served 500 youth or less;
- The median for the total number of youth served as part of all mentoring programs in an organization was 95;
- Nearly two-thirds of mentoring programs served 100 youth or less in each of their programs.

Three quarters of organizations reported having 100 mentors or less. The median number of mentors per organization was 53. Mentors were more likely to identify as women compared to men: 55 percent of organizations reported that more than half of their mentors were women whereas only 13 percent reported that more than half of their mentors were men.

**Close to three-quarters of mentoring programs served young people between the ages of 6 to 18.** Overall, programs served boys and girls in similar proportions. Programs also served a small proportion of youth who identify as non-binary, Two-Spirit, or as part of other cultural gender minorities.

A large number of mentoring programs intentionally served broad groups of youth. 65 percent of organizations who participated in the survey reported that the general youth population was one of their top three primary target groups. 45 percent selected youth living in poverty as one of their top target groups. Other primary target groups of mentees included:

- Youth with mental health needs (38 percent);
- Academically at-risk youth (36 percent); and
- Youth from rural or remote areas (33 percent).

**Mentoring programs cater to a diverse youth population.** A number of organizations reported that youth with various ethnocultural backgrounds or lived experiences constituted one of their three primary target groups:

- 29 percent of organizations reported that Indigenous youth were one of their primary target groups;
- 24 percent targeted racialized youth;
- 24 percent, newcomer youth;
- 22 percent, LGBTQ2S+ youth; and
- 21 percent, youth in care.

Most organizations that did not intentionally target youth with various ethnocultural backgrounds or lived experiences still reported that young people from these groups participated in their mentoring programs and services.<sup>1</sup> **Although organizations tend to serve the general youth population, many serve mentees who face a variety of barriers, challenges and have potentially specialized needs.**

**A significant proportion of youth on waitlists had mental health needs, were academically at-risk, and/or living in poverty.**

## 2. Who are the young people waiting to be served?

**54 percent of organizations reported that they had young people waiting to receive mentoring.** The median number of young people on a waitlist was 40. A significant proportion of youth on waitlists had mental health needs, were academically at-risk, and/or living in poverty. Boys or young men were waiting to receive mentoring in greater proportions than girls or young women: 60 percent of organizations that provided details about their waitlist indicated that girls and women accounted for 26-50 percent of the young people on their waitlist whereas nearly half of these organizations indicated that boys and men accounted for 51-75 percent of the young people waiting for a mentor and 13 percent indicated that they accounted for three-quarters or more of their waitlist.

## 3. What do mentoring programs look like?

Participating organizations provided details about 215 mentoring programs. **A large number of programs tended to focus on broad outcomes:**

- 30 percent focused on providing a developmental relationship between a young person and an adult;
- 25 percent focused on general youth development.

However, a number of programs had more specialized goals such as career exploration and employability, bullying prevention, academic enrichment, leadership development, or life and social skills development. Career exploration and employability were the most common outcomes for programs targeting young adults: these outcomes were the focus of nearly one-third of programs for youth over the age of 18.

The most common types of programs were:

- Out-of-school enrichment programs (43 percent);
- In-school enrichment programs (35 percent);
- Career-readiness or youth employment programs (21 percent).

Mentoring programs were offered across a range of locations:<sup>2</sup>

- 66 percent were offered in urban locations and 30 percent in suburban locations;
- 55 percent in rural locations; and
- 5 percent in remote locations.

A small proportion of programs were also offered on reserve (4 percent) or in Métis settlement regions (2 percent). 7 percent of programs were offered at least partially online, although only 1 percent operated primarily online. Common meeting locations included the general community (45 percent) and in a school setting (37 percent).

Just over half of mentoring programs operated primarily as one-to-one mentoring models and 22 percent as group mentoring. Nearly two-thirds of programs stated that they expected mentors and mentees to meet at least once a week. 58 percent of programs were expected to last 7 months (school-year) or more, 19 percent had an expected duration of 12 months. 17 percent had no fixed duration.

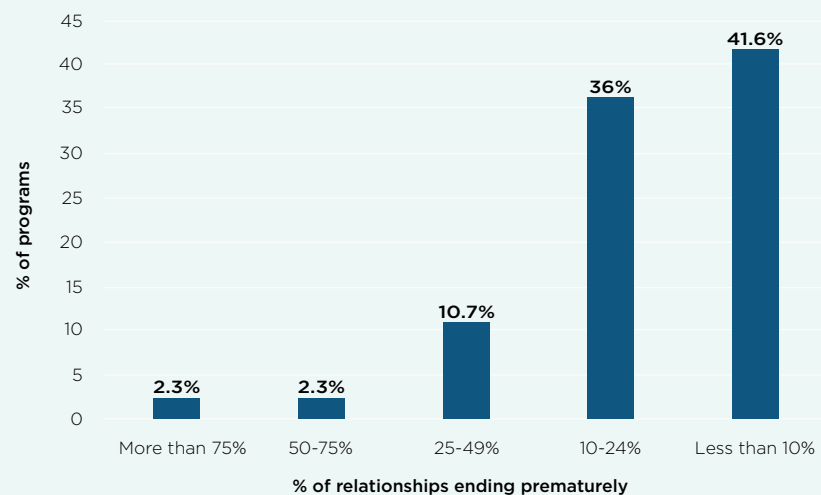
#### 4. What is the quality level of mentoring programs?

**Two-thirds of organizations offered a minimum of two hours of pre-match training to their mentors**, generally considered as the minimal threshold in the youth mentoring sector. 21 percent provided mentors with 5 or more hours of training before their first contact with youth. Of note, 4 percent of organizations offered less than one hour of pre-match training for mentors and 5 percent offered no pre-match training.

The great majority of programs provided support for mentors during the course of their relationship with their mentees, most often one post-match contact per month. However, 10 percent of organizations offered less than one support contact with mentors per month and 1 percent of them indicated that they did not provide any post-match support to their mentors.

**Early termination of mentor-mentee relationships is a common challenge for mentoring programs** (see figure 2). Only 42 percent of programs reported that fewer than one in ten mentor-mentee relationship did not meet the minimum commitment length required by the program in the last year. Over one-third of programs reported that between 10 and 24 percent of mentoring relationships ended prematurely, while nearly one-tenth of programs reported that between 25 and 49 percent of their mentoring relationships did not meet the minimum length commitment. This finding is concerning as research has shown that early termination not only limits mentoring programs' impact, but can also have negative consequences for youth.

**Figure 2**  
Percentage range of mentor-mentee relationships that did not meet the minimum length commitment in the last year (per program)



## 5. What challenges are programs facing?

**The Canadian mentoring landscape is dominated by organizations with mentoring programs that serve a small number of youth.** Close to two-thirds of organizations served fewer than 200 youth in their mentoring programs. The top operational challenges these organizations reported – such as program growth and scaling, fundraising and grant writing, program sustainability, and program evaluation – may be at least in part attributable to their small scale.

**Our survey also confirmed that mentor recruitment is the most prevalent challenge organizations face across the country: 39 percent of organizations indicated that it was their biggest challenge and another 13 percent indicated that it was their second biggest challenge.**

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Parent/family engagement, mentor training, integrating cultural perspectives in service design and delivery, and developing meaningful activities for mentors and youth were also commonly reported program delivery challenges (top 2), albeit in much lower proportions than mentor recruitment.

### Implications for policy and practice

**The Canadian mentoring field is diverse and dynamic:** over one-third of mentoring programs were established in the last decade. While many organizations and mentoring programs across the country tend to serve the general youth population, mentees in these programs often face a variety of barriers and challenges and have potentially specialized needs. To be effective, mentoring programs need to be able to respond to these specific needs. There is no one-size-fits all approach to delivering youth mentoring programs.

**Too many young people in Canada are waiting for a mentor.** Mentor recruitment is the biggest challenge organizations face. The demand for mentoring is strong but the relatively small scale of most mentoring programs and the challenges they face – particularly in the areas of program growth and scaling, sustainability, and fundraising – raise some concern about their ability to continue offering high quality mentoring programs without increased support and investments. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges most organizations face.

**There is an opportunity to continue to increase the quality and effectiveness of mentoring programs across the country.** A number of organizations and programs are struggling to meet quality thresholds in terms of program structure and delivery, including mentor training, match support, and match duration.



Findings from this study have highlighted priority areas where MENTOR Canada can focus its efforts to best support programs as they work to improve their quality and increase their reach. These findings will guide our work to reinforce sector capacity and advocate for increased investment.

In the coming months, MENTOR Canada will collaborate with youth representatives, organizations supporting youth from diverse backgrounds, as well as policymakers to interpret the findings and co-create a set of recommendations to address the challenges and opportunities identified through this research. MENTOR Canada will also work with the sector to create tools and resources and address pressing challenges such as mentor recruitment, training as well as program sustainability.

### Learn more

MENTOR Canada will release a complete **Capturing the Mentoring Landscape report** in the spring of 2021. The report will expand on the study's methodology and its findings.

In the upcoming weeks, MENTOR Canada will also share the results from *The State of Mentoring Research Initiative's* two other studies:

- **Mapping the Mentoring Gap:** This study seeks to understand young adults' access to mentors and the barriers to accessing mentors they may have encountered during their childhood and adolescence. The study also explores young people's experiences of mentoring and the effect of having had access to a mentor on their current lives.
- **Raising the Profile of Mentoring:** This study examines adults' opinions about youth mentoring and its place in Canadian society. The study also explores adults' experiences as mentors: their interest and capacity to mentor young people as well as the barriers and facilitators to mentoring.

### How can MENTOR Canada support your programs?

**Mentor recruitment:** Increase your recruitment and visibility to potential mentors by listing your programs in the MENTOR Connector, a free online platform that links mentors and youth to mentoring programs across Canada.

**Mentor training:** Help your mentors acquire mentoring basics by taking our Online Orientation for new mentors.

**Advocacy:** Consult findings from our State of Mentoring Research Initiative to find compelling arguments for continued investment in youth mentoring. Use our Mentoring Amplifies marketing materials to support your public awareness campaigns.

Visit [mentoringcanada.ca](https://mentoringcanada.ca) to learn more.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Information regarding demographic subgroups, ethnocultural identities, and gender identities were reported by organizations on a percentage scale. Each organization provided the proportional range of their total mentors and mentees who have that specific identity. As each organization has a different number of mentees or mentors, we have not calculated the proportion of all mentees and mentors within each subgroup.

<sup>2</sup> A single program could be offered in multiple settings/locations. The total exceeds 100 percent.