

The Mentorship Handbook: A Guide for SLA Chapters and Divisions to Establish Mentorship Programs

The changes and challenges of the information environment call for ongoing assessment of skills, career goals, and directions by today's information professional. As detailed in the *Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century* document, there are extensive knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for information professionals to thrive in their careers. In the *Vision for the Professional Development Program* (August 1997) developed by SLA's Professional Development Committee, it was stated that the Association needs to provide substantive assistance in assisting members to evaluate their current competencies (professional and personal), identifying competency gaps, and developing a strategy to acquire new and required competencies. A mentorship program is an important way of providing this type of support. Mentorship can also go beyond assistance in developing competencies and can provide the mentee with direction in other areas, such as developing a network, as will be discussed later.

Headquarters conducted a survey with all of the chapters and divisions to see whether they thought a mentorship program should be managed by headquarters, the chapters and divisions, or both. The majority of respondents reported that they would prefer for this program to be managed by chapters and divisions, but would like for headquarters to provide them with direction in establishing such a program. They felt that it is more appropriate to coordinate at a chapter level, based on geographic proximity, or within a division because of specialty areas that their members have in common. SLA headquarters has put together this handbook in an effort to assist the chapters and divisions with setting up their own mentorship programs.

What is a mentor?

The word "mentor" originated from the book *The Odyssey*. The character Odysseus had a close friend named Mentor who cared for his son for ten years while he traveled. Mentor, who was the goddess Athena in disguise, embodied male and female qualities such as being nurturing, supportive, protective, as well as aggressive, assertive, and risk taking. Mentor acted in the role of parent, teacher, friend, guide, and protector to Odysseus's son¹

The role of a mentor varies, depending upon the level of commitment established by both the mentor and mentee. Types of mentoring relationships include:

- Teacher, trainer, coach
- Positive role model

¹ *Women, Mentors, and Success*. Joan Jeruchim and Pat Shapiro. New York: Jawcett Columbine, 1992.

- Developer of talent
- Opener of doors
- Protector
- Sponsor
- Successful leader²

A mentoring relationship can be established based on just one of these areas, or a mentor can serve in all of these functions. Typically, a mentoring relationship is developed between someone who is new to the profession and a more experienced person in the field. However, mentoring relationships can involve someone who has been in the field for awhile, but is changing career paths and is looking for guidance and support. It can also be someone who is just looking for support and direction.

What is the role of a mentor?

Mentors can serve in a variety of roles, again, depending on the level of commitment in the relationship. Since the mentee has chosen to find a mentor, this person is most likely looking for a role model, a leader to look up to who has what he/she wants. Mentors can convey their aspirations and goals and share with the mentee the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competencies) necessary to get where he/she is. In turn, the mentor can assist the mentee in assessing his/her strengths and weaknesses and determine which competencies need to be developed.

A mentor can also help the mentee with developing a network by providing guidance of where to go to develop a professional network such as chapter or division activities and, if the mentor feels comfortable, introduce the mentee to those in the mentor's network.

Other roles that a mentor can play is to provide emotional support and suggest ways that the mentee can become more involved in the profession.

What are the characteristics of a potential mentor?

The most important characteristic of a potential mentor is the motivation to serve as mentor. Though the level of mentorship is up for negotiation, mentors must be willing to invest the necessary time and energy. Mentors should have the skills to assist others in a positive, constructive way. This includes excellent communication skills, especially the ability to be an active listener and to provide feedback in an effective manner. Mentors should also have an active network of professional contacts.

² "Developing Formal Mentoring Programs in Organizations." Ronald J. Burke and Carol A. McKeen. *Business Quarterly*, p. 76-79, Winter, 1989.

What are the characteristics of a potential mentee?

There are some qualities that mentors should look for in a potential mentee to have the most effective relationship possible. Mentees should exhibit the potential for leadership. In addition, they should be open to feedback and advice. Mentees should also exhibit the commitment to advancing him/herself and the profession.

Stages of Developing a Mentoring Relationship

There are several stages which mentoring relationships typically go through, though the sequence and pace may vary:

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|--------------------|---|
| Exploration | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Assessment-Finding out about each other-Is there a match? Comfort level, personal and/or professional interests, personality, etc. |
| Negotiation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-What do you and I want from this? What's important to you? Me?-Establishing expectations; what are the "givens" and negotiable...roles?-Good feeling and comfort with relationship begins |
| Affirmation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Investment in the relationship begins-Risk taking; willing to be taught as well as teach-Continue to define and redefine relationship-Having a reciprocal relationship-Upholding responsibilities of the relationship-Over long term, relationship may be viewed more as a friendship than a "mentorship" |
| Termination | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Done, hopefully by mutual consent-One's commitment to program is over |
| Option: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Some participants continue the relationship-Being thankful of the relationship and the foundation from which to move on-Student may now feel able to assume a mentor role with another individual |

K Leisey, Mentor Program, UMBC, 1993.

If a potential mentor and mentee agree to the mentoring relationship during the Exploration

stage, the parameters of the relationship must be established during the next stage, Negotiation. Being clear about the parameters of the relationship is vital in order for the mentoring relationship to work. One tidbit of advice is for the mentor and mentee to reevaluate their ability to participate on a monthly basis once the relationship is in full swing. Many of us have good intentions, but when it comes down to it, our busy schedules may preclude us from sticking to our commitments.

Recommendations for Setting Up a Mentorship Program for Your Chapter and Division

Now that you have a better understanding of what mentorship is all about, you are ready to set up a program for your chapter or division. Here are the suggested steps to set up your mentorship program.

Educate your membership: It is recommended that you educate your membership on what mentoring is all about before you establish this type of program. You are welcome to use the materials included in this handbook. Let them know why you have decided to set up a mentoring program and the level of commitment you are expecting from both the mentors and mentees. It is recommended that the mentor and mentee make a one year commitment. How often they will have contact with each other is up to them, but in order for both the mentor and mentee to reap the benefits of the program, a year is ideal. If they choose to continue their relationship past the year, that is up to them.

Solicit volunteers. Post a message to your listserv or do a mailing to the members of your chapter and division soliciting volunteer mentors and those interested in finding a mentor. Most likely you will have more people wanting a mentor than those who are willing to serve as a mentor. If you don't have enough mentors, make some phone calls to leaders within your division asking them to serve.

Have potential mentors and mentees complete a profile. In this packet there are sample forms for both the mentors and mentees to fill out that provide background information and each person's goals for the program. These will enable you to better coordinate potential matches and allow the mentor and mentee to learn about each other before they set up their initial meeting.

Match up mentors and mentees. Go through your profiles and match up each mentor with a potential mentee. Look for areas of similarity. Once you've made a match, provide both individuals with guidelines of what you are expecting out of each in your mentorship program. Then, put the mentor and mentee in contact with one another and encourage them to set up an "exploration" meeting. This meeting does not have to be in person since there may be geographical differences between them, especially for the divisions or chapters that cover a large geographical area. It is recommended that the meeting be held by phone if it is not possible to do it in person.

Contact mentors and mentees. Soon after pairing the mentor and mentee, give each one a call to see if the match is an appropriate one. If it is not, go through the profiles and try again. Don't take it personally if the match doesn't work since personalities have a lot to do with whether two people decide to establish a mentoring relationship.

Follow up. In order for you to continuously improve your program, it is recommended that you have the mentor and mentee evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program. After a year, conduct a brief interview with both the mentor and mentee to discuss how well the mentorship relationship worked out.

BEST OF LUCK! If you need any assistance in getting your mentorship program started or keeping it going, feel free to contact SLA's Director of Professional Development at 1-202-234-4700 x617.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Mentee Profile

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Preferred area of expertise of mentor (check all that apply):

Subject Area _____

Solo librarian

Non-traditional role (please describe) _____

Preferred racial/ethnic background of mentor:

American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Asian/Pacific Islander

African American/Black Caucasian Hispanic

No preference

Preferred gender of mentor:

Male

Female

No preference

Please describe your work experience in the information field.

What would you like to get out of a mentoring relationship?

How much time are you expecting a mentor to commit to working with you?

What is your preferred manner in which to communicate with your mentor?

What are the personal qualities you are looking for in a mentor?

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Mentor Profile

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Areas of expertise of mentor (check all that apply):

Subject Area _____

Solo librarian

Non-traditional role (please describe) _____

Racial/ethnic background:

American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Asian/Pacific Islander

AfricanAmerican/Black

Caucasian

Hispanic

Gender:

Male

Female

No preference

Please describe your work experience in the information field.

Why do you want to serve as a mentor?

How much time are you willing to commit to your mentoring relationship?

What is your preferred manner in which to communicate with your mentee?

What are the personal qualities you are looking for in a mentee?

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