

Activity-Focused Mentoring Model

The American Inns of Court has developed several mentoring models for Inns to adapt, implement, and maintain mentoring programs of their own. This model is based on a collection of purposeful mentoring activities.

Overview

There are some Inns that do not have any matching for mentoring beyond their pupillage groups but are still considered to have a “formal” mentoring program. This is because they have created a culture of mentoring and have inculcated mentoring into their Inn meetings. Because these Inns have intentionally planned mentoring-focused activities throughout the year on a regular basis and have incorporated an evaluation, these efforts coalesce into a formal mentoring program.

STEP 1: Establish an Inn Mentoring Committee

Administration of any mentoring program should fall under the purview of an Inn Mentoring Committee. Inn officers should establish a mentoring committee of three to four members, one of whom is an Inn officer to serve as Mentoring Chair. In addition to general operational oversight of mentoring efforts, the committee’s responsibilities should include the following tasks:

- Communicating the existence and organization of the mentoring program
- Establishing timelines for mentoring activities in each Inn program year
- Generating and maintaining a non-inclusive, illustrative list of discussion topics
- Recruiting mentors as participants
- Promotion of each activity to the Inn members
- Creating and communicating guidelines regarding expectations for participants
- Establishing appropriate accountability mechanisms
- Evaluating success and areas for improvement
- Troubleshooting

A sample Mentoring Chair job description is available on our website: http://home.innsocourt.org/AIC/AIC_For_Leaders/AIC_Leadership_JobDesc/Sample_Job_Description_Mentoring_Chair.aspx

STEP 2: Organize your Mentoring Operations

- Have clearly stated roles and responsibilities for each committee member at the start of the year.
- The Mentoring Committee will identify activities that will provide opportunities for mentoring, such as visits

to judges’ chambers or brown bag lunches on specific mentoring topics. [Note: Topics may be solicited from the general membership as part of the end-of-Inn-year satisfaction survey.]

- To comprise a mentoring program, at least four activities in addition to regular Inn meetings should be organized.
- Each activity should be appointed a leader/organizer, who can be a member of the Mentoring Committee, but may be someone else with interest in the subject matter.
- Determine roles for both mentors and mentees in each activity.
- Communicate programs and responsibilities for mentors and mentees early and often.

STEP 3: Apply Guidelines

Each Inn should apply the following guidelines to their program, ensuring they are tailored to meet the needs and personalities of individual Inns:

Size: While the activity itself may include the entire Inn, try to ensure that there are enough mentors on hand to work with only one to three mentees per mentor. This may vary depending upon the specific activity.

Duration: Each mentoring activity cycle lasts for the duration of one Inn program year—usually 9–12 months.

Frequency: Organize one to four activities during the cycle.

Length: A minimum of one hour per activity is recommended, but it can certainly last longer.

Location: Be creative with the location: at your Inn meeting place before or after a meeting, judges’ chambers, local restaurants or coffee shops, the library, a law firm conference room, or even a city park.

Topics: The mentoring committee will agree before the start of the program year on the topic or topics to be covered in the mentoring activities.

STEP 4: Activity Elements

Whatever activity you decide to do, try to incorporate some of the same elements each time:

Brave Space: Each activity should begin by declaring it a “brave space” or environment in which participants should all feel comfortable sharing with each other without the fear of something getting back to an employer. The program organizer should be prepared to bring up relevant topics that are generally uncomfortable if they don’t come up organically—these kinds of topics are the things that need to be talked about the most!

Introductions: Each activity should have some kind of ice-breaker built in to ensure everyone gets a chance to meet each other. Activities held at the start of the year should be different from those at the year's end, as most members will at least know everyone's name and basic statistics by the end of the Inn year.

Mentoring Topics: Each activity should focus on a particular topic related to mentoring or several topics that fall under one umbrella category. You may also choose to focus on a particular aspect of a specialty area and then design the content to have a mentoring focus. Either way, the emphasis for each activity should be on facilitating mentoring.

Engagement: The activities should be designed for interaction between mentees and mentors. This may look different at each activity so be thoughtful about how to get members talking and not always to the same person!

Q&A: Each activity should have built in opportunities for asking questions—whether you do it along the way or at the end of the program, discussion is an important component to participant satisfaction and ensuring members come back for more.

STEP 5: Focus on Professionalism

In any mentoring program, it is important to make professionalism the centerpiece. The transmission of American Inns of Court professional values to mentees should be the ultimate goal. Ensure that members have a strong understanding of what professionalism includes:

- High competence in legal skills.
- Adherence to ethical obligations.
- Appreciation of the importance of civility and professional demeanor in all dealings.
- The importance of pro bono representation and access to justice issues.
- The importance of participation in bar organizations at the local, state and national levels.
- The transmission of professional values and standards to members of the legal profession.
- Balance of self-interest with the interests of clients, the justice system and the public interest.
- Accountability for one's actions.

STEP 6: Continually Assess your Efforts

Knowing what is working and what is not is the only way to improve. Assess the satisfaction level for participants after each activity.

An online survey is the easiest way to gather assessment information, but the mentoring committee should establish the evaluation format for all assessments. Have a process in place for using the data from one year to inform and assist the following year's mentoring committee.

More valuable data is collected if the assessments are done in an anonymous fashion. Anonymous aggregate information can help your Inn become data-driven, making decisions about how to improve the program that much easier. Continuous improvement is the goal.

STEP 7: Ideas to Try

Here are a few activities to get you thinking about how your Inn can find ways to promote the discussion of mentoring, such as:

- Changing up seating at dinners
- Incorporating mentoring into the networking portion of the meeting
- Participation in a mentoring themed scavenger hunt
- Brown-bag lunches on specific mentoring topics
- Lunches held in judges' chambers
- A "speed-mentoring" program

If you would like to keep the national office apprised of your efforts, please send an email to mentoring@innsofcourt.org—we'd love to hear about them. We are always looking for new ideas to share with other Inns.

Mentoring samples, tools, and templates are available on our website: <http://home.innsofcourt.org/Mentoring>

Be bold. Be creative. Be successful.

Have a story you want to share? We want to hear it!
Have a question about mentoring? We're here to help answer it!
Running out of ideas? We're here to help!
mentoring@innsofcourt.org

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