

MESSAGING FOR MALE MENTOR RECRUITMENT: AFTER THE APPLICATION



Men tend to respond to different recruitment messages and techniques than women. Therefore, mentor-recruitment programs should apply messaging strategies according to the audience's gender. Similarly, program managers must recognize that men respond differently than women to screening, training and case management processes. Moreover, efforts should be made to retain men who choose to apply. This document is designed to share tips to keep male recruits engaged throughout the screening and training processes and to support them once they have been matched to a suitable mentee.

Several factors are key to the successful recruitment of men, including 1) the recruitment message itself, 2) male involvement throughout the process, 3) persistence (especially with respect to faith-based organizations), and 4) minimal application-processing time.

MALE INVOLVEMENT

To ensure that the mentoring movement in Michigan grows, men will need to be included in the process every step of the way. Mentoring organizations will also need to evaluate and encourage male participation at every level – including board, staff, and volunteer. Recruiting male mentors requires the integration of this male perspective into each facet of the program's operations, which may require some restructuring within what is currently a female-dominated sector. Strategies for integration include male board-member recruitment, male staff hirings; the creation of male task forces, and consultation with men who reside or work in the communities being served.

POLICY REVIEW

Mentoring programs face a unique and difficult challenge. On the one hand, program policies must protect youths and promote positive outcomes.

On the other hand, they should not be so rigid that they discourage volunteers from entering the program. Male volunteers desire flexibility. As a result, we recommend that program managers review their policies to ensure flexibility whenever possible. For example, research indicates that planned activities, as recommended by the mentoring organization, are characteristic of program strength and viability, and contribute to positive outcomes for participating youths. However, programs that mandate specific activities tend to discourage participation, because not all volunteers will be able to meet each requirement.

Mentoring programs would benefit by systematically abbreviating the inquiry-to-match processing time and identifying "dead-end" inquiries before excessive time and resources are spent pursuing the inquirer (e.g., develop an initial mentor application-screening mechanism to identify common obstacles, such as a candidate's busy travel schedule).

PERSISTENCE

Recruiting male mentors can be slow process, and you will likely encounter unexpected failures and successes along the way. When the going gets tough, keep in mind two key ingredients for success: persistence and patience.

Be persistent. Some communities expect a lasting relationship and continued communication in order for recruitment efforts to be successful. This is particularly true for recruiting members of faith-based communities. However, other communities may respond better to traditional models, such as recruitment presentations or display booths at business conferences and job fairs. For example, college students may volunteer in order to fulfill academic requirements and may not expect to develop a relationship with program staff. In short, know your audience, and be aware of their context. Doing so will help you invest your resources wisely.

Furthermore, it is critical to move men from application to match quickly, and this requires persistence and diligence from the program staff. One considerable obstacle to effective male recruitment is lag time, which can cause potential volunteers to lose interest.

Be patient. Not every volunteer who applies will become a mentor. Processing high numbers of inquiries (typically via callbacks) that go nowhere can drain organizational capacity and become self-defeating. Instead, consider developing an initial mentor application-screening mechanism and focus your efforts on inquiries that show promise.

AFTER THE APPLICATION

Mentors, in general, and males, in particular, desire consistency when working with a mentoring program. For example, it is recommended that males have one staff person as the primary contact throughout the match. It is equally important for staff members to create trusting relationships with male mentors so that they are comfortable seeking support and asking questions. Men may feel disconnected from the program if they do not have an ongoing relationship with a case manager or match specialist.

SCREENING

It is important that volunteers be properly screened. We understand that this can take time. However, it is just as important for programs to accelerate the recruitment, screening and training processes and match male recruits as quickly as possible. Programs have found that men are more likely to lose interest or take on new responsibilities if the process is long and drawn out. Men do not take their commitments lightly, and when they apply to become mentors they are usually ready to get started.

TIPS:

- Contact the male recruit within 48 hours of receiving a completed application. Thank him for applying, and let him know what to expect from the screening process.
- Give the male recruit a timeline:
"Thank you for applying to become a mentor with [program name]. My name is [insert], and I will be your [insert title, i.e., case manager/match specialist]."
- At this point you will want to find out if the volunteer has any questions about the program and ensure that he understands your screening and training processes.

- Schedule an interview. If possible, meet at a place where the potential mentor will be comfortable; a place that does not require a great deal of travel for the volunteer – his office, coffee shops and other neutral locations may be more comfortable than your office.

"Can we schedule an interview now? I would like to meet with you two weeks from today to ensure that your references have had time to respond to our questions and that we've received the results from your background check."

- Let the potential mentor know what to expect during the interview and training.

"The interview will take about an hour. Our goal is to see if you are a good fit for our program and to answer your questions to see whether we are a good fit for your interests. [Note: If the volunteer is required to bring anything to the interview let him know – paperwork, identification, or interest forms.]"

- Once the interview is completed, the next step is training.

[Describe training process]. Our next training will be [dates]. Are you available?" or "We accommodate training around our volunteers' schedules. Can you tell me what your availability is for training?"

- Close the conversation by reviewing what was discussed.

"Thanks for talking to me today, Mike. I look forward to meeting you on [date] at [location]. I'm really excited that you are interested in our program. If you have any questions or concerns before we meet, you may reach me by phone or e-mail. Do you still have my contact information, or would you like me to give that to you?"

Complete background checks in a timely manner. Schedule training as soon as possible, and communicate the date, time and location in writing (e-mail or letter) as well as by phone or in person during the interview.

- When interviewing:
 - Be direct regarding requirements
 - Give the volunteer an opportunity to share and respond to concerns
 - Provide a clear timeline for next steps (training, matching, reporting)

TRAINING

(Review current training activities and materials to ensure that you have represented the male perspective. Consult with male staff members or current male mentors.

MATCHING

One of the keys to retaining a mentor is a good match. Two common errors to avoid during the matching process: 1) matching the new mentor to the first youth available; and 2) waiting for the “perfect” match. It is important to find a match with common interests and without having the volunteer wait too long. The mentor should be updated regularly regarding the status of a potential match. Male mentors should have the opportunity to approve or decline a potential mentee after hearing a brief overview of the child’s interests and background.



Remember, the first meeting can be nerve-racking for a mentor. Calm his nerves by meeting with him prior to the youth’s arrival, Explain what will occur during the first meeting, and provide structured activities to help the mentor and mentee get acquainted. It’s important that they use this time to “break the ice” prior to their first outing on their own. Do allow them adequate time alone during this initial meeting so that they can start developing a meaningful one-on-one relationship.

Some men may continue to struggle to determine what to do during their meetings. You may want to provide the mentor with a list of sample activities for the pair to consider during the initial month. In addition, if your program has partnered with other businesses, men may enjoy structured activities throughout the year, such as free tickets to sporting events.

MATCH MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

In order to increase the number of active male mentors, efforts must be focused on both recruitment and retention. Research shows that male retention rates are lower than female retention rates.

As a result, mentoring programs struggle to increase the number of male mentors, no matter how many new male mentors they recruit.

Each mentor has different needs. It is important to understand the mentor’s desired form of communication. For example, while you may prefer phone calls, the mentor may prefer e-mail. Case management is a critical component of a mentoring relationship, and you must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the volunteer. There are a variety of ways to conduct case management, including phone, e-mail, or face-to-face communication. In some cases, social-networking tools, such as Facebook, can be an effective way to communicate with your mentors and provide a network for them. While social-networking tools do not take the place of one-on-one case management, they can be a way to enhance communication.

Often, male mentors are reluctant to share concerns related to the match or to reach out for support. In the event a male mentor should call, he is likely more concerned than he may appear, so be sure to keep this in mind. It is important that you provide him with clear answers to his questions and share any related resources to assist him. You will gain the mentor’s trust by responding to his needs, and he will feel more connected to the program. Connected mentors are committed mentors.

CLOSURE

When a decision is made to close a match, it is important to communicate that process to the mentor clearly. He will want to know what to expect at the closure meeting and will likely have questions regarding future contact with his mentee. At this time, it is also recommended that you have a conversation with the volunteer to let him know that you appreciate his role in your program. Explore with him the possibilities to be engaged in your program in the future. Let him know that you would love to match him with another young man, have him on your board, or engage him in special events or fundraising activities.