Mentorship Collaboration…What's Working!
Prepared by the Mentor Michigan Providers Council

Collaborating with other mentoring programs, organizations, and businesses can help your agency operate more efficiently and effectively. Having mutual respect, open communication, and trust are keys to successful collaborative efforts.

"Collaboration" as it relates to mentoring programs
Collaboration is a working relationship that mutually benefits two or more independent programs. They come together to work jointly on fulfilling their individual missions or on a mutually defined purpose or mission (i.e. it may be around their global mission to serve children through mentoring or on a specific purpose such as mentor recruitment). True collaboration is met when all programs are actively involved in the initiatives. Responsibilities and successes must be shared by everyone.

Mentoring collaborations make sense when…
- Organizations have a shared vision.
- The collaboration enhances the capacity of each agency equally for mutual benefit and common purpose.
- It furthers the following fundamental goals and objectives:
  - Serving more children and youth in quality mentoring relationships
  - Addressing service gaps
  - Improving quality, efficiency, and effectiveness
  - Fostering innovation, new ideas; capitalizing on the experience each partner brings
  - Directing more resources to the delivery of services versus duplicative administration and infrastructure
- All programs involved have the desire and drive to work together. A passive organization or one that feels they are being "forced" into the relationship will become a burden on the collaboration.

Mentoring collaborations do not make sense when…
- Only one of the collaborating agencies receives benefit from the relationship.
- It does not further one of the goals or objectives outlined above.
- There are issues with trust or problems with communication.

When collaboration of mentoring programs makes sense, members of the collaboration can learn to effectively share leadership, decision-making, and resources by…
1. Building trust by all programs having a clear understanding of the other organizations, their missions, and their interest in collaborating.
2. The collaborating agencies establishing and coming to agreement on a unifying purpose for the collaboration.
3. Establishing and coming to agreement on specific goals of the collaborative.
4. Defining a structure, decision-making process, resource distribution system, and conflict resolution process to support the collaboration.
5. Mutually developing and coming to agreement on a work plan that defines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each collaborating partner.
6. Creating a communication system that works for all agencies involved.
7. Meeting in-person regularly.
8. Addressing conflict immediately and openly to keep it from escalating.

9. Establishing and agreeing on specific methods of evaluating the collaborative.

When collaboration of mentoring programs makes sense, the collaboration members address or avoid turf issues and power struggles by…
- Communication . . . Communication . . . Communication
- Being completely honest and up front on any issues or concerns that may arise. Be aware issues my be sensitive or may offend other programs. You need to be prepared to deal with them directly and not let them fester.
- Using trained, objective facilitators at meetings, retreats, etc.
- Having resource incentives (financial, recognition, services, etc.) that promote effective and healthy collaboration behaviors and outcomes.
- All of the programs having a "voice" in decisions about the collaboration.

Mentoring programs have collaborated with other mentoring agencies by…
- Being in a mentoring collaborative whose activities impact agencies through training events, networking opportunities, mentor recruitment and referral, sharing news and information, and having an awards and fundraising events.
- Working with a funding agency to collaborate with other mentoring programs to apply for grants as a group. Joint goals and objectives are defined for the proposals. Funds are then dispersed to the individual programs.
- Participating in a collaboration whose efforts are to support mentors and mentees through mentor events, field trips, information sharing, retail store and activity discounts in the community, and fundraising initiatives.
- Examples: quarterly events for matches, centralized trainings for community based mentoring programs, recruit mentors through a centralized program that refers them to an agency that meets their needs, referral sharing of youth when they are on a waiting list for a long time, centralize background checks, email tree to share information between programs, monthly collaboration meetings to share information, plan, and network, and create a Mentor Card to provide free and discounted activities for mentor matches.

Mentoring programs have collaborated/partnered with other organizations by…
- Working in a relationship to design, implement, and fund mentoring programs in juvenile courts, school systems, governmental agencies, and human service agencies.
- Partnering with other non-mentoring agencies to combine services and resources to implement/support a mentoring program.
- Creating a network of businesses and organizations to recruit and refer volunteers and in-kind service providers to these agencies.
- Initiating a "win-win" situation between businesses/higher education and a mentoring program. The companies/institutes are utilized through financial/in-kind donations, recruitment of volunteers, internal resources, and opportunities for student resources such as job shadows or internships, career exploration, classes, and trainings. In return, the mentoring program gives the company/school PR and marketing opportunities, networking possibilities with other sponsors, and recognition at events. One mentoring program even created an "Employment Network" to assist the companies in posting open positions and for mentors to disseminate their resumes.
- Sharing resources such as a mentoring program giving community programs meeting space and these agencies giving services/resources to the mentoring organization.