

Mentoring Ex-Prisoners: A Guide for Prisoner Reentry Programs



U.S. Department of Labor

November 2007

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Public/Private Ventures
under a grant funded by the
U.S. Department of Labor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BY AUTHOR

The author would like to thank the following people and organizations for their contributions to this publication: Fred Davie, for his support of the initial idea for this project, which was instrumental in moving it forward; Jerry Sherk, who tirelessly compiled the guide's contents; Linda Jucovy, who provided expert editing and writing support that greatly enhanced the quality of the publication; Chelsea Farley, for her superb editing and shepherding of the publication process; and Wendy McClanahan, for her strong leadership of the research on Ready4Work, especially her collaborative approach to examining its mentoring component. Thanks also to the US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, the US Department of Justice Office of Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Casey and Ford foundations for their generous and ongoing support of Ready4Work and prisoner reentry more broadly. Finally, we deeply appreciate the leaders and staff of each of the Ready4Work sites. Their hard and persistent work as pioneers in this new area, mentoring ex-prisoners, delivered rich information to study and learn from while providing thousands of men, women and youth with a valuable service. And, thanks to all current and former P/PV program and research staff who contributed their strong skills and hard work to the Ready4Work demonstration project over the past few years.

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This project was supported by the U.S. Department of Labor under a grant to Public/Private Ventures: No. AF-12986-03-60. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly 650,000 people are released from America's prisons each year.ⁱ They return to their communities needing housing and jobs, but their prospects are generally bleak. The majority of ex-prisoners have not completed high school.ⁱⁱ In addition, close to three quarters of them have a history of substance abuse, and more than one third have a physical or mental disability.ⁱⁱⁱ

These former prisoners are going home to some of the nation's poorest neighborhoods, where they often lack stable social bonds and support networks and where there are few services to help them restart their lives. Given the huge gap between their complex challenges and their limited opportunities for addressing them, it is not surprising that recidivism rates are high. In fact, more than half (52 percent) of former state prisoners are back behind bars within three years after their release, either as a result of a parole violation or because they have committed a new crime.^{iv}

This cycle of recidivism produces many negative consequences. Households that are already fragile become overwhelmed. Communities that are already struggling fall further behind. The lives of those who move in and out of prison are wasted. And the cost to taxpayers is enormous. Overall, the US spends more than \$60 billion a year on prisons and jails. (It costs more than \$23,000 to incarcerate someone in a Federal Bureau of Prisons facility for one year and approximately \$3,500 per year for probation; incarceration in a state prison can run as high as \$45,000 per year or more.)^v

Without the development of effective approaches for reducing recidivism, the problem is certain to grow. The number of Americans behind bars has increased steadily and now includes more than 2.1 million men and women.^{vi} Almost all of them will eventually be released, and, unless something changes, more than half of them will not be successful in reentering their communities and will return to prison.

Ready4Work

The economic and social considerations discussed above led the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) enter into a grant relationship to develop *Ready4Work: An Ex-Prisoner, Community and Faith Initiative* in 2003. Funded by DOL and the Annie E. Casey and Ford Foundations, Ready4Work was designed to address the needs of the growing ex-prisoner population and to test the capacity of community- and faith-based organizations to meet those needs. Services consisted of employment-readiness training, job placement and intensive case management, including referrals for housing, health care, drug treatment and other programs. Ready4Work also involved a unique mentoring component—including one-to-one and group mentoring—in the belief that mentors can help ease ex-prisoners' reentry by providing both practical and emotional support. The Ready4Work program served adult former prisoners in 11 cities around the country.^{vii} The lead agencies at six of the sites were faith-based organizations; at three of the other sites, the lead agencies were secular nonprofits. Operations in the remaining two cities were headed up by a mayor's office and a for-profit entity. After the formal, three-year demonstration period ended in Fall 2006, nine of the participating programs continued their operations using the Ready4Work model.

Ready4Work targeted 18- to 34-year-olds whose most recent incarceration had been for a nonviolent, non-sexual felony offense and enrolled them within 90 days of their release from prison. All participants entered the program voluntarily. Together, the sites enrolled approximately 4,500 formerly incarcerated individuals—predominantly African-American males, with an average age of 26. Half of all participants had extensive criminal histories at the time of their enrollment, with a record of five or more arrests. A majority had spent more than two years in prison, and almost 25 percent had spent five or more years behind bars. Once individuals entered the program, they were eligible for services for up to one year. The cost per participant/per year of service was approximately \$4,500.

Why Include Mentoring in a Reentry Program for Adults?

For more than ten years, research has demonstrated that carefully structured, well-run mentoring programs can positively affect social, behavioral and academic outcomes for at-risk young people.^{viii} Research has also shown **how** mentoring works—through the development of a trusting relationship between the young person and an adult mentor who provides consistent, nonjudgmental support and guidance. Among the questions that Ready4Work was designed to explore was whether mentoring could similarly lead to positive outcomes for adult ex-prisoners.

Early findings from the evaluation of Ready4Work suggest that mentoring can have real benefits in strengthening outcomes in the context of a multifaceted reentry program. Across the 11 sites, about half of the participants in the reentry program became involved in mentoring. Those participants fared better, in terms of program retention and employment, than those who did not participate in the mentoring program.^{ix} Specifically:

- **They remained in Ready4Work.** Because individuals who leave programs early are less likely to realize the full benefits of participation, one key question is whether there is an association between mentoring and the length of time participants remain in a reentry program. Ready4Work participants who met with a mentor spent an average of 10.2 months in the program, whereas those participants who never met with a mentor only spent an average of 7.2 months in the program.
- **They were more likely to find a job while in the program.** Research has found that employment plays a crucial role in helping ex-prisoners avoid criminal behavior and reincarceration.^x Thus, a primary goal of Ready4Work is to prepare ex-prisoners for success in the labor market and increase their employment opportunities. Overall, 56 percent of Ready4Work participants were successful in finding jobs. Furthermore, participants who met with a mentor were more than twice as likely to find jobs than participants who never met with a mentor.
- **They were more successful in retaining jobs.** People recently released from prison not only need to find a job, but they also need to remain employed in order to establish stability and, ideally, to lay the foundation for long-term advancement and wage growth. However, the jobs they find are often temporary or transitional. Ex-prisoners also have a high rate of either quitting these jobs or being fired. Thus, Ready4Work looks at three months of continuing employment, although not necessarily in the same job, as a key job retention benchmark. Among the participants who found a job and were active in the program for at least three months, 65 percent met the job retention benchmark. Furthermore, those who met with a mentor were 56 percent more likely to meet the benchmark than those who did not.
- **They were less likely to recidivate.** At the one-year post-release mark, mentored Ready4Work participants, regardless of whether they attained employment, were 39 percent less likely to recidivate than those participants who were not mentored.

These results are based on comparing participants who chose to meet with a mentor against those who did not meet with a mentor. Participants, however, were not randomly assigned to meet with a mentor—it was a voluntary component of the program. It is possible that whatever motivated them to take advantage of mentoring may also have motivated them to remain active in the program longer and to try harder to find and retain employment. It is also possible that variances in program quality and structure were sometimes factors in whether or not participants engaged in the mentoring component. Because the evaluation did not include a control group, these results are not definitive; however, the results are extremely promising. They suggest that as participants make a transition back into their communities after a period of incarceration, mentoring may play an important role in keeping them involved in the program, employed and less likely to recidivate.

The Purpose of This Manual

Ready4Work's most innovative aspect may have been its mentoring component. Few social programs have attempted to provide high-risk adults—and, particularly, ex-prisoners—with mentors. Thus, there are few resources that offer practical recommendations and helpful strategies for mentoring this population based on its distinct needs, assets and challenges. While much remains to be tested and learned, this manual draws on the experiences of the Ready4Work sites and promising practices in mentoring to provide information and suggested guidelines for practitioners who are interested in developing a mentoring component that helps support ex-prisoners and quite possibly enhances the effectiveness of other program areas, such as job placement and retention.

Key Considerations

There are several important points to keep in mind before developing and operating a mentoring program. These include:

1. Mentoring alone is not enough.

People newly released from prison have many needs—including housing, health care and employment—that must be addressed very quickly so that they do not develop into insurmountable barriers to successful reentry. Virtually all of the participants in Ready4Work received case management and employment services, including soft-skills training and job placement assistance. In addition, some participants took advantage of other wraparound services, such as GED classes or alcohol and drug counseling. The importance of such services is well known. While dependable and supportive mentoring relationships can be a crucial component of a reentry initiative, those relationships are a complement to—not a substitute for—these necessary reentry services.

2. It is challenging to convince participants to become, and remain, involved in mentoring.

Mentoring was the most challenging aspect of Ready4Work for the sites to implement. Participation in mentoring was voluntary, and only about 50 percent of the ex-prisoners met with a mentor. In addition, female Ready4Work participants were more likely than male participants to become involved in the mentoring program. Despite Ready4Work's staff efforts to present mentoring as a key and potentially valuable service, some participants lacked interest in becoming involved. These participants described a variety of reasons why they were not interested in mentoring, including:

- **Mentoring does not seem like a priority.** As they returned to the community and tried to reestablish their lives, most of the former inmates prioritized finding a job and being able to pay their bills as their major first goals. Any activity not directly related to those two goals seemed less important. In addition, with family obligations, transportation obstacles such as accessibility and cost, other programs or classes they were attending, and jobs (once they began working), some participants found it hard to find time to participate in mentoring.
- **It can seem like another form of reporting.** Often, a condition of release from the criminal justice system requires ex-prisoners to report to parole or probation officers and, in many cases, to regularly submit to drug testing. “Reporting” for a mentoring session can thus, at least initially, seem more like a burden than an opportunity.
- **It can evoke feelings of being treated like a child.** For some participants, having a mentor seemed more suitable for youth than for adults. They felt it was unnecessary or even would reflect a position of weakness, as the mentee. Participants said that, as adults with life experience, they could take care of themselves; they did not like talking to strangers about their problems; or that they already had a close friend or family member who they talked to about personal issues.

- **Participants can feel like there is no common ground with the mentors or that mentors' motives cannot be trusted.** Some participants believed that mentors who had never been incarcerated themselves could not understand ex-prisoners' experiences, which created a communication gap that rendered any investment in mentoring pointless. Others were hesitant to engage in mentoring because of concerns that a mentor volunteering through a faith institution would try to influence their religious beliefs or pass moral judgments on their criminal histories. Because the majority of lead organizations in Ready4Work were faith-based, P/PV worked closely with sites to ensure that mentors were clear about their role, as well as about federal funding guidelines that prohibit proselytizing and overt references to faith, and that they maintained a solid separation between their religious beliefs and their mentoring relationships; however, some participants continued to have concerns.
- **Participants worry about confidentiality.** Some ex-prisoners were worried that personal information shared with a mentor might be reported back to their parole officer and then used against them as possible evidence of a violation that could put them back in prison.

Even after participants became involved in mentoring, it was challenging to keep them committed and engaged. At times, after they found a job, coordinating schedules and other commitments became obstacles to continuing the mentoring. Further, participants not showing up for their scheduled sessions led to the challenge of retaining mentors. Mentors would get discouraged and become less motivated to maintain the relationships and sometimes drop out themselves.

3. Mentoring of ex-prisoners is likely to look different than the traditional image of “mentoring,” which is drawn from the relationship between a young person and an adult.

Mentoring was included in the Ready4Work program design in order to provide ex-prisoners with additional support during their period of reentry. Many sites had no experience with mentoring programs prior to Ready4Work. Early on in the project, it became clear to P/PV that mentoring adults was going to follow a different pattern than mentoring youth. One major difference was in the form of the mentoring. To address the likelihood that a) sites might struggle with recruiting an adequate number of mentors for one-to-one matches and b) participants might, at least initially, be more comfortable in group mentoring settings, P/PV offered sites the option of implementing either or both approaches. While there were many one-to-one matches of mentors and participants, group mentoring was also common across the sites. Most frequently, sites combined both types of mentoring.

In addition, the adults in Ready4Work did not meet with their mentors as regularly or as often as is typically the case in youth mentoring. In part, this may reflect the additional demands on an adult ex-prisoner's time, but it may also reflect the ambivalence that some participants feel about engaging in mentoring. Participants who became involved in mentoring met with a mentor and/or attended group sessions for just over three months, on average. About a third of those participants remained involved for only a month or less. The two thirds who continued to meet with their mentor or attend group sessions did so for an average of 3.5 hours per month, which was one half hour less than the P/PV recommendation to sites of at least four hours per month.

4. As with all mentoring initiatives, it is essential to build on proven practices.

When mentoring works, it looks deceptively simple: the mentor and participant go out for dinner together and talk; two mentors and five participants sit around a table and discuss successes and challenges on the job; a mentor phones the ex-prisoner she is paired with to ask how things are going in the computer skills training she just started. However, as all mentoring programs have learned and as research has consistently demonstrated, programs have to implement a number of key practices—involving staffing, recruiting, training, supervision and support—if the mentoring efforts are going to succeed.^{xi} This manual aims to provide guidance about what these key practices look like and how to implement them in programs for ex-prisoners.

Structure of the Manual

The following sections provide guidelines and recommendations intended to address the challenges and to increase the benefits of mentoring ex-prisoners as part of their involvement in reentry programs:

- Section II provides guidelines for designing a mentoring component, including an overview of mentoring models.
- Section III discusses the importance of hiring a coordinator for the mentoring component.
- Section IV outlines policies and procedures that programs should have in place before implementing their mentoring component.
- Sections V, VI and VII offer guidelines for recruiting, training and matching mentors and for providing them with supervision and support.

There are also four appendices that provide additional details. Because group mentoring is likely to be an unfamiliar approach for many program operators, Appendix A describes it in more detail. Appendices B, C and D provide sample forms, suggested training exercises for mentors and a list of additional resources.

II. DESIGNING THE MENTORING COMPONENT

In many cases, the lead agency operating a reentry program will plan and implement the mentoring component itself. In some cases, however, the agency might decide to partner with another organization with more experience and expertise in this area, to carry out the mentoring component. If a lead agency has contracted with a partner organization to operate the mentoring component, it should work closely with that organization in creating the component. In either case, there are a number of key steps to work through in developing an approach to mentoring that increases the potential for success with a population of ex-prisoners.

This section describes several initial steps:

- Defining the mentor's role
- Deciding on a mentoring model
- Developing an approach for providing pre-release mentoring
- Deciding what to call the mentors, mentees and the component as a whole.

1. Define the mentor's role.

Whatever specific form the component takes, whether it is one-to-one or group mentoring, the role of the mentor is the same: to provide support and to serve as a positive role model in the ex-prisoner's life. Mentors:

- Listen
- Are nonjudgmental
- Help participants stay focused on the big picture
- Help participants problem-solve and assess how to make wise choices among competing alternatives
- Maintain regular contact so the participant knows there is someone there on whom they can rely.

In some cases, the mentors might also offer practical support by helping participants set goals, cope with stress and/or budget their money. Mentors might pass along leads on jobs and housing or give participants tips on how to dress for a job interview. Further, mentors might help participants deal with everyday challenges in life, such as figuring out the best way to commute to work.

One of the most important roles of a mentor is to be a friend. It will take time for some participants to open up and feel comfortable engaging in discussions during mentoring meetings and during other interactions with their mentors. Mentors have to work thoughtfully to build the relationship and develop trust—and then maintain that trust over time.

2. Decide on a mentoring model.

There are, as yet, no proven best practices for what a mentoring model for ex-prisoners should look like. This section provides an overview of two potential models—one-to-one mentoring and group mentoring—as well as a brief discussion of how these two models might be combined.

One-to-One Mentoring

Individual—or one-to-one—mentoring typically includes the following features:

- One mentor is matched with one participant.

- They meet consistently (ideally once a week or once every other week, for six months to a year) at a time and place of their choosing. Mentoring sessions usually last from one to two hours. Between meetings, they maintain contact by telephone.
- The participant and mentor decide how they want to spend their time together. They might, for example, go out for a meal, to the movies or to a sporting event.
- In conversations during these activities and on the telephone, the mentor acts as a support, a sounding board and a steady, nonjudgmental guide. The conversations might be about family, work, concerns and frustrations about adjusting to life outside prison, sports, politics or life in general.

Potential advantages: One-to-one mentoring is generally considered to be the most effective model because of its potential to foster deeper, more meaningful relationships and to provide stronger support to the participant. On a practical level, because mentors and participants decide when and where each meeting will take place, this model also might help address the issues of time and transportation that sometimes make it difficult for participants to attend group mentoring sessions that take place at a set time in a designated place.

Potential challenges: Some ex-prisoners may be resistant to one-to-one mentoring because they feel that it puts them in a childlike role. This model can also be demanding for programs to implement—it requires intensive efforts to recruit large numbers of mentors and to screen, train and supervise them. In addition, some potential volunteers may not have the confidence to mentor an ex-prisoner in a one-to-one setting. Finally, it may also be harder to retain mentors. If their mentee drops out of the program, the mentors may see themselves as having failed and, in turn, become more likely to leave the program rather than get matched with a new mentee.

Group Mentoring

Because group sessions are a relatively new approach to mentoring, there is no research, as of yet, that identifies specific practices that may make it most effective. However, group mentoring typically includes the following features and opportunities for variation (Appendix A discusses group mentoring in more detail):

- Several participants and mentors meet as a group at a set time and place on a weekly or biweekly basis. While the size of a group and the mentor-to-participant ratio can vary from program to program, ideally the same mentors meet consistently with the same group of participants over time.
- Sessions typically last about two hours. There are several approaches groups might take during these sessions. They might use a structured format, which includes a curriculum (such as a life skills curriculum), or in which a staff member determines major discussion topics and activities for the group ahead of time. Or, they might use a less structured approach, in which mentors and participants decide on discussion topics at the beginning of each session.
- Regardless of which approach is taken, the sessions focus on topics that are relevant to formerly incarcerated individuals and their reentry efforts. For example, topics might include goal-setting, stress management, budgeting and financial stress, family reunification, strategies for avoiding past negative behaviors and involvement with negative acquaintances, persistence and responsibility. Watching relevant theme-based movies together can also serve as a springboard for group reflection and discussion. Even in the most structured formats, group leaders should be flexible, so that there is always time for participant-initiated discussions.
- Mentors' roles during the meetings include contributing to discussions and providing nonjudgmental guidance and support. In some models, mentors take turns leading the meetings and moderating the discussions; in other models, program staff serve in those roles.

- Groups can vary their meetings by having guest speakers and going on outings, such as to baseball games and films.

Potential advantages: Group mentoring requires fewer mentors, making the recruitment process less intensive and demanding on staff time. The group sessions also might hold more appeal for at least some of the ex-prisoners because the dynamic of peer support is used, and participants might feel more comfortable sharing experiences and ideas with other ex-prisoners—people who are “walking in their shoes.”

Potential challenges: While there is, thus far, no research that has provided evidence one way or the other, it seems possible that group mentoring might not result in relationships and support that are as strong as those in one-to-one mentoring. In addition, although some participants may feel more comfortable in a group situation because they have taken part in group sessions during incarceration, for others the group setting could promote feelings of still being institutionalized. Finally, some participants and mentors may not feel as committed to the mentoring process because even if they do not show up for a particular session, mentoring activities still proceed for the other people who are present. Thus, it can be easier to rationalize missing a meeting.

A Combination of the Models

In Ready4Work, sites typically offered a combination of both one-to-one and group mentoring. Their experiences suggest several potential approaches:

- **A focus on group mentoring, including some one-to-one mentoring that serves as an extension of group meetings.** In this approach, some or all of the participants are matched one-to-one with mentors. Mentors and participants attend group mentoring meetings and, at that time, engage in individual conversations. Between group mentoring meetings, they have “check-in” phone calls. However, unlike programs that focus on a one-to-one approach, the mentor and participant do not necessarily spend time together in individual meetings or outings aside from in the group sessions.
- **A focus on group mentoring, encouraging one-to-one relationships to evolve naturally.** Even when the mentoring is done in groups, participants may develop special bonds with specific mentors who are part of the group. Thus, group mentoring sessions can provide some time before and after the actual meeting where participants and mentors have the opportunity to talk one-to-one. In addition, programs may want to develop a policy governing situations in which participants and mentors who have gotten to know each other in a group setting can transition into a one-to-one mentoring relationship.
- **A focus on one-to-one mentoring, including some group meetings.** A third “combined” model could include a focus on one-to-one mentoring, including occasional group meetings that bring together several sets of mentors and participants for group discussions.

In addition, programs might offer one-to-one and group mentoring as separate alternatives and work with each participant to determine which model would be best for him or her. Or, a program might start a participant in one model and later encourage him or her to move into the other model, based on that person’s individual needs and preferences, or on the availability of mentors.

3. Develop an approach for providing pre-release mentoring.

A promising approach for breaking through participants’ barriers to becoming involved in mentoring takes place through services provided while they are still in prison. In Ready4Work, prisoners were permitted to enroll in the program if they were within 90 days of being released. This provided sites with the opportunity to begin developing relationships by offering mentoring to enrollees while they were still incarcerated.

Pre-release mentoring might take place through a lead agency's or partner organization's prison ministry outreach. In other cases, pre-release enrollees may be matched with mentors with whom they interact through letter writing, prison visitation and phone contact, thus beginning to form relationships before returning to their communities. In addition, one Ready4Work site, through its partnership with a correctional facility and the local offender supervision agency, integrated videoconferencing into its pre-release mentoring, thus allowing mentors and participants to meet "face-to-face."

4. Decide what to call the mentors, mentees and the component as a whole.

Language matters—words have meaning. Thus, another strategy for addressing participants' resistance to becoming involved in mentoring is to use words for "mentor" and "mentee" that eliminate the potentially negative connotations these words may have for some ex-prisoners. Well-selected terms might help participants have more positive attitudes about becoming involved in mentoring. They might also help attract volunteers who may have difficulty seeing themselves as a "mentor" but may be more comfortable in a role with a different designation. While, for consistency, this manual most often calls the recipients of mentoring services the "participants" and their counterparts the "mentors," other terms might be preferable, given the circumstances of individual programs. These terms could include:

- **For "mentor"—"coach" or "life coach."** Using one of these terms can make the concept of mentoring more appealing for those participants who might associate "mentoring" with being in a childlike role, while they connect "coaching" with sports and with helping to develop specific skills. Those terms may also be more appealing to potential volunteers—particularly male volunteers, who are traditionally more difficult to recruit as mentors—because the words place more emphasis on guidance than on forming relationships. Alternate terms might include "career coach" or "transition coach."
- **For "mentee"—"participant," "partner" or "associate."** The word "mentee" is likely to have negative connotations for at least some of the participants enrolled in the reentry program because they may feel it defines them as being in a lesser role.
- **For the mentoring component—"life coaching" or "transition coaching."** As a staff member at one of the Ready4Work sites said, "Life coaching is what we call it. They [participants] can buy into that. Coaching includes helping the participant think through different situations with the objective of helping him/her make positive life choices. They can live with that definition of mentoring. They get involved in sports, and coaching is something they like."

The terms a program chooses to use—whether one of these suggested terms or a different term—should not alter the content and approach of its mentoring component. However, the right terms can be an effective tool for avoiding preconceptions about "mentoring" that create a barrier for both participants and potential volunteers.

III. HIRING A MENTOR COORDINATOR

One of the key lessons that emerged from the Ready4Work sites was the importance of hiring a mentor coordinator—one staff member whose work is dedicated to the mentoring component and who is familiar with all mentoring concerns. Some sites faced initial challenges in getting their mentoring components operating effectively because they did not have a single staff person in that role. When responsibilities were divided among several people, it became difficult to develop a coherent process for implementing the mentoring component.

This section provides guidelines for hiring a mentor coordinator, including:

- Defining the mentor coordinator's roles and responsibilities; and
- Identifying the experience, personal characteristics and skills necessary for performing effectively in this position.

In addition, Appendix B includes a sample job description for the mentor coordinator position.

1. Define the mentor coordinator's roles and responsibilities.

While programs will modify this list based on their particular circumstances, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor coordinator typically include:

- Taking the lead on all aspects of the mentoring program, including recruiting, screening, training, matching and supervising mentors;
- Working closely with other program staff to encourage the ex-prisoners to become involved in mentoring and connecting the mentoring component with other program services, such as job training and placement;
- Helping participants and mentors develop positive and supportive relationships;
- Supporting mentoring retention efforts by consistently monitoring the participant-mentor matches;
- Taking the lead on planning and implementing group activities, celebration ceremonies and other events related to the mentoring component; and
- Assisting in increasing public awareness of the program, including speaking in front of groups to recruit volunteer mentors or to identify potential sources of additional program resources.

2. Identify the experience, personal characteristics and skills necessary for performing effectively in this position.

Ideally, it would be possible to hire a mentor coordinator who has past experience running a mentoring program for high-risk adults; however, there are few people who have served in that role. Thus, other relevant backgrounds could include working with high-risk populations, particularly with formerly incarcerated individuals; experience in social work or counseling; experience running a mentoring program for other populations, such as at-risk youth and children of prisoners; and experience as a program operator or program coordinator.

In addition, the following personal characteristics and skills may be essential to an effective mentor coordinator:

- A commitment to working with ex-prisoners and an understanding of the potential value of mentoring for this population.
- Interpersonal skills, including an ability to get along with people of diverse backgrounds and the expertise to help mentors and mentees address and overcome problems and build trusting relationships.
- Presentation skills, including ease with giving recruitment presentations in small- and large-group settings; assisting with, and sometimes providing, trainings for mentors; and, for programs with group mentoring, facilitating those sessions.
- Administrative and organizational skills, including the ability to maintain orderly records and files, track and keep appointments and respond promptly to phone messages and emails.
- A positive and flexible personality, contributing to the ability to work well with other program staff and respond calmly and thoughtfully to the many ups and downs involved in running a mentoring program.

In addition, the mentor coordinator should be skilled at establishing connections and developing relationships that will support successful recruitment efforts. Further, it would be especially helpful if the mentor coordinator has connections with the communities from which mentors will be recruited.

IV. DEVELOPING INITIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Before programs can start recruiting and training volunteers and begin the actual mentoring activities, they should develop policies and procedures that will guide their efforts. This section discusses six key steps in this process:

- Identify mission, goals and objectives
- Define eligibility requirements for mentors
- Create a “mentor participation agreement”
- Develop a confidentiality policy for mentors
- Create guidelines for screening potential mentors
- Develop strategies and procedures that encourage participants to become involved in mentoring.

The rest of this manual will then provide guidelines for implementing the mentoring component, including recruiting, training, supervising and supporting mentors.

1. Identify mission, goals and objectives.

The process of creating a written statement that defines the mentoring component’s mission, goals and objectives encourages everyone to forge a common vision. The final document should also help guide implementation of the mentoring component.

While each program must develop its own mission, goals and objectives, the following are brief examples (a sample form illustrating these three elements appears in Appendix B):

- The mission statement describes the main purpose of the mentoring effort. The mission statement for the mentoring component will be different than the mission statement for the lead agency or for the reentry program as a whole.

Example: The mentoring component of the Former Prisoners Reentry Program provides consistent and caring mentors to support and guide participants as they develop the attitudes and skills that will help them become successful in their personal lives and in the workplace.

- Goals describe how the program will achieve its mission. They are usually worded broadly.

Examples: 1) Provide participants with support from mentors that will help them learn to overcome barriers, increase their confidence and gain hope for their futures; 2) Decrease rates of recidivism by encouraging participants to make choices that will enable them to be successful.

- Objectives describe the concrete benchmarks a program has to achieve if it is going to reach its goals and accomplish its mission. Objectives are typically very specific.

Examples: 1) During the first year of the program, a minimum of 40 participants will receive at least six months of one-to-one mentoring services; 2) During the first year, we will recruit at least 50 mentors and retain at least 80 percent of those mentors for at least six months.

Importantly, having goals and objectives also helps programs measure progress as the mentoring component is implemented. To what extent are you achieving your goals and objectives? What modifications in program practices, such as recruiting and supervision, are necessary for strengthening progress toward achieving your goals?

2. Define eligibility requirements for mentors.

Listing the requirements for mentors serves several purposes. It provides information you can use in your recruitment presentations and materials, and it identifies criteria against which you will screen volunteer applicants (recruiting and screening are described more fully in Section V). While requirements will vary among programs, they might include:

- A minimum age for mentors, such as 21 years old.
- A time requirement, including both length and frequency. For example, programs might require that mentors have the ability to serve for one year and can commit to meeting with their mentee for an hour a week or two hours every other week.
- Safety requirements, including checks of criminal records and child abuse registries. Particularly if you are planning to recruit formerly incarcerated individuals to serve as mentors, programs will need to define a “last date” at which a mentor has been convicted of a felony. For example, you might require that mentors have not been convicted of a felony for the past five years.

Other eligibility requirements might include having a good driving record (for one-to-one mentoring, where the mentor may be driving the participant^{xii}), a history of following through with commitments and the ability to be nonjudgmental.

3. Create a “mentor participation agreement.”

This agreement, sometimes called a “mentor contract,” includes a list of items that outline the role and responsibilities of the mentor and key program requirements. Having a written agreement can help build commitment in the volunteer, and it also helps ensure that the volunteer and the program are on the same page. While the specific items will vary from program to program, the agreement should include:

- The length of the volunteer’s commitment to the program and the frequency with which he or she is expected to meet with the mentee(s);
- A commitment to learning and embracing the role of a mentor (by attending trainings) and to carrying out that role; and
- An agreement to follow program policies and procedures, including confidentiality policies.

Each item in the agreement should be discussed with volunteers before they sign it. The discussion might take place during their screening interview or during an initial orientation or training session, depending upon the point at which your particular program expects to get a commitment from volunteers. It is important to have your board of directors or legal representatives review the agreement before you begin to use it. A sample agreement appears in Appendix B.

4. Develop a confidentiality policy for mentors.

Maintaining confidentiality is an essential aspect of building trust. Thus, all mentoring programs must develop clear confidentiality policies that mentors understand and adhere to. Programs that provide mentoring for ex-prisoners face special challenges in developing and following confidentiality policies:

- Programs have a responsibility to understand laws in their jurisdiction that govern what participant actions or activities they are required to report to legal authorities. These legal requirements must be built into the confidentiality policy.
- One of the reasons some participants in reentry programs are reluctant to become involved in a mentoring relationship is their fear that they will say something to their mentor that could be reported to their parole officer and used in a way that could result in their being returned to prison. Thus, the confidentiality policy must be completely unambiguous, and participants should understand what it includes.
- Some participants in the program may suffer from addiction, depression or other mental illnesses and be at high risk of self-destructive behavior. The confidentiality policy should have clear guidelines for mentors about immediately contacting program staff if they see warning signs of self-destructive behavior, such as drug or alcohol use, not showing up for work, or reconnecting with peers who participate in negative life-styles. Mentors also have to be trained to recognize these signs—see Section VI on training mentors.

The confidentiality policy thus has to be very clear about when and with whom mentors can discuss their mentees. Under what specific circumstances can they discuss their mentee with other mentors? Under what specific circumstances should they speak to program staff? Further, it is essential to let mentors know whether they should make reports only to program staff, not to parole officers or anyone else. The policy must be explicit about these circumstances, while balancing the needs of confidentiality, legal requirements and safety. A sample policy appears in Appendix B.

5. Create guidelines for screening potential mentors.

There are two reasons to screen individuals who apply to be mentors: 1) to make sure they will be good mentors and 2) to ensure safety. You want to know that your mentors have a history of carrying through on their commitments and that they have the personal characteristics that will enable them to fulfill their role of supporting participants. You also need to know that they do not have a background that suggests they might pose risks to their mentees.

It is important to have a procedure for screening potential mentors to know that they do, in fact, meet the eligibility requirements you have identified. Screening typically involves, at least, the following steps:

- An in-person interview with each potential mentor;
- A questionnaire they complete about themselves and their interests;
- A check of two or three references; and
- A criminal background check.

Using this kind of structured approach, with layers of screens, increases your chances of identifying those volunteers who will be safe and successful mentors. In addition, organizations should choose mentors that best fit the environment and needs of their particular reentry programs.

6. Develop strategies and procedures that encourage participants to become involved in mentoring.

As the experience of the Ready4Work sites demonstrates, recently incarcerated individuals can have both psychological and practical barriers that make it difficult to get them involved in mentoring. Despite ongoing efforts by staff at the sites, only about 50 percent of participants in the reentry programs met with a mentor, and only about a third of participants met with a mentor for two months or more. For those participants who did become

involved, there was often a lag time between joining the program and being matched with a mentor—an average of 2.5 months from the time they began the reentry program to their first meeting with a mentor.

Clearly, programs need to develop strategies and procedures that address participants' resistance to becoming—and remaining—involved in mentoring. Section II of this manual discussed some of the ways programs can help overcome participants' resistance from the beginning—whether that be the choice of mentoring model (one-to-one or group), starting mentoring pre-release or making careful decisions about terminology (what you call “mentors” and “mentees”). In addition, programs will need to develop specific approaches that address both psychological and practical barriers. These approaches might include:

- Introducing mentoring from the start as a key element of the support the reentry program is offering. In Ready4Work, for example, a case manager met with each new enrollee to assess needs and connect him or her with appropriate services. This is a key time to present mentoring (or “coaching” if that is the term your program decides to use) as a support for participants that can enhance the other program services. Mentors might provide additional support for participants' job search efforts and help them think through ways to address obstacles both at home and in the workplace. Mentors also serve as a positive alternative to the negative social networks that many participants engaged in prior to, and possibly during, incarceration.
- Have program participants who are involved in mentoring make a presentation to new program enrollees about their mentoring experiences.
- Review the written mentoring confidentiality policy with participants so they understand the confidentiality policy mentors are bound to uphold. Discuss any aspects of the policy that participants express uneasiness about.
- Address practical barriers to participation. For programs with group mentoring, for example, participants may have problems with transportation getting to the sessions, or the sessions might take place at a time that conflicts with their work schedules. To address these issues, programs should ensure that group mentoring takes place at a location accessible by public transportation; they should provide participants with transportation passes so attending does not cost them money; and, finally, they should hold the sessions at a time that takes into account other demands on participants' schedules.

Once participants become involved in mentoring, it is also essential to check in regularly with them about their experiences—a key strategy for helping them stay involved. Supervision of mentors and support for both mentors and participants is discussed in Section VII.

V. RECRUITING MENTORS

Recruiting mentors is a difficult and often frustrating job, requiring patience, creativity, organization and persistence. It is an ongoing challenge for almost all programs. In most communities, there is stiff competition for volunteers—especially for people who possess both the available time and the personal characteristics that are essential to effective mentors. There are no easy solutions for the challenges of recruiting. However, a systematic recruitment plan, carefully developed and implemented, will increase your chances of recruiting committed and effective mentors.

This section provides guidelines for developing a recruiting plan, including:

- Set recruitment goals
- Target your recruitment efforts
- Get support from faith leaders (for programs that are recruiting through houses of worship)
- Develop your recruitment message and materials
- Keep track of every step—write it down!
- Provide good customer service.

The guidelines are drawn from effective practices in the field of mentoring and from the specific experiences and lessons learned from the Ready4Work sites.

1. Set recruitment goals.

Setting recruitment goals requires answering a series of questions, including: How many participants do you plan to have in one-to-one matches? Are you going to have group mentoring? How large will the groups be? How many mentors do you plan to have in each group? Do your mentors represent a mix of varied life experiences?

As you explore these questions and set your goals, also consider the following points:

- **Over-recruit:** It is important to recruit more volunteers than your actual goal because a percentage of them will drop out at each step along the way—during the screening process, during training, and after training but before they begin mentoring. Still others may begin to mentor but not fulfill their one-year commitment. In fact, as many as 40 to 50 percent of mentor applicants may drop out at some point in the process. After your program's first few months of implementation, staff will be better able to estimate the dropout rate and the number of volunteers the program needs to target for recruitment.
- **Remember that recruitment is ongoing:** As ex-prisoners enroll in the reentry program and as current mentors drop out, you will need to attract new mentors. In addition, particularly as you are starting a new mentoring initiative, you may want to take a gradual approach to bringing on mentors so you can gain experience in training and supervising them. Thus, if your first-year goal is to have 40 one-to-one matches, consider setting a sub-goal of making ten matches every three months, instead of aiming for 40 matches right away.

Do not recruit more mentors than you can successfully supervise: The number of matches that a program can successfully make and manage depends on staffing levels. Supervising matches (discussed in Section VII) is crucial to ensure trusting relationships develop between the mentor and participant so that mentoring can make a difference in the participant's life. If the mentor coordinator has primary responsibility for supervision, how many matches can he or she handle? The Ready4Work experience suggests that a mentor coordinator should manage no more than 35 to 40 active matches at a time. If the number of matches exceeds this range, an addi-

tional part-time staff person should be hired if at all possible. Programs that rely primarily on group mentoring may have somewhat more flexibility in setting goals because they have some leeway in adjusting the size of the groups so that participants are not on a waiting list for a mentor.

2. Target your recruitment efforts.

The more you can identify the characteristics of people you are trying to recruit as well as effective ways to find and attract them to your program, the more efficient and successful your recruitment efforts are likely to be.

Who are you trying to recruit?

Unless your reentry program is specifically focused on female ex-prisoners, you are likely to have far more male than female participants. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that nationwide about 80 percent of all prisoners are male. In many areas of the country, a large percentage of enrollees are also likely to be African American, Hispanic or, in some regions, members of other minority groups such as Native Americans.

Programs would do well to target mentors that have common life experiences, who might have overcome similar challenges or barriers, and who could empathize with the mentees. Often times, these are typically the most difficult groups to recruit.

In some cases, programs might also target formerly incarcerated individuals to recruit as mentors. Given the unique challenges faced by people returning from prison, some staff at the Ready4Work sites felt that individuals with similar experiences might be better able to support the participants and more likely to earn their trust. Reinforcing this notion, some participants resisted having a mentor because, they said, someone who has never “walked in their shoes” would not be able to understand the situations they were facing.

Targeting your recruitment efforts does not mean that you will have only mentors who fit one demographic profile or who come from one kind of background. In identifying several “types” of people that should be targeted for recruitment, programs will likely build from their mentor eligibility requirements and from their understanding of the needs of the ex-prisoners enrolled in their particular reentry program. The eleven Ready4Work sites, for example, recruited a diverse group of more than 1,000 mentors. They ranged in age from 18 to 80, with an average age of 45. Just under 60 percent were male, and more than 85 percent were African American—both groups that are traditionally difficult to recruit. In addition, 30 percent of the mentors had previously been incarcerated. In addition, 30 percent of the mentors had previously been incarcerated.

Where are you going to target your recruitment efforts?

While the mentor coordinator takes the lead in recruitment efforts, one area where all program staff can contribute is in identifying groups, such as business associations or houses of worship, where targeted recruitment can take place. All programs should canvass their staff and boards to find out where they have connections that are potentially beneficial for recruiting. If a program’s participants are primarily male and/or minorities, special attention should be paid to targeting potential sources for mentors where large numbers of these populations are represented.

Ready4Work had six faith-based lead agencies and many more partnerships with local faith-based groups. Thus, much of Ready4Work’s mentor recruiting was done through houses of worship. Other potential sources for mentors include service organizations, such as national fraternities and sororities with local chapters, and, possibly, community groups from the areas where the ex-prisoners and their families live. Of the more than 1,000 mentors recruited through Ready4Work sites, 54 percent learned of the program through their houses of worship, and 20

percent learned of it through other direct outreach, such as presentations to clubs or community fairs. Another 18 percent learned about the mentoring opportunity through a friend or acquaintance. It is important to note that general, untargeted recruitment efforts were rarely successful—only one percent of the mentors learned about the program from an advertisement.^{xiii}

3. If recruiting through houses of worship, get support from the pastor or other spiritual leader.

One of the key lessons of Ready4Work was the importance of securing buy-in and support from the pastor, rabbi or imam when recruiting through houses of worship. Faith is a powerful motivator for people to become involved in mentoring, and when faith leaders stand behind the program and explain to their members how it contributes to fulfilling the mission of the house of worship, people will often step forward and volunteer to serve.

4. Develop your recruitment message and materials.

As you develop your recruitment message for presentations to groups and for print materials, consider several key questions:

- What motivates people to volunteer as a mentor?
- What will motivate them to volunteer for your particular program?
- What are your target audiences' obstacles to, and concerns about, becoming involved?

People may be motivated to mentor, for example, because of their spiritual beliefs, a personal commitment to help others overcome barriers or because they feel it is important to give back to the community (often recognizing the tremendous negative impact that crime, incarceration and recidivism have on the local community). They might be particularly motivated to volunteer for your program because they have had a relative or friend who is or has been in prison or because they feel this population needs strong role models. Further, they might be motivated because of benefits they may gain as a mentor. For example, by becoming part of a group and feeling like they are making a difference, they adopt a more positive outlook about themselves.

At the same time, there are reasons why people might be reluctant to become involved in mentoring in general and in your program in particular. They might be uncomfortable with a program that has as its focus “building relationships.” They might be concerned that they will not be able to communicate effectively with people whose lives are very different from their own, or they might be worried about their safety. Some people will also feel reluctant because they do not think they have the time.

The recruitment message

Your message should appeal to the motivations and address the concerns of potential volunteers in a straightforward manner. You want to recruit people who are going to follow through on their commitment and who will be effective mentors. It is not the number of volunteers, in itself, that matters most—what is most important is the number of volunteers who will commit fully to becoming successful mentors.

Thus, the recruitment message should include:

- The mentoring component's mission, including a very brief description of the issues of crime and recidivism locally and nationally.

- A brief description of the reentry program's other elements, such as job preparation and job search and how the mentoring component fits in with them.
- The mentor's role, including whether it is one-to-one or group mentoring or a combination of both.
- Benefits for the ex-prisoners who participate in mentoring. What successes has your program had to date that can convince people it is worth their contribution of time? Cite, or footnote in your written materials, credible data about promising correlations between mentoring and positive outcomes, such as job placement and/or reduced recidivism. If possible, include quotes from participants about positive experiences.
- Benefits for the mentors. As with participants, include quotes from mentors about positive experiences, if possible.
- Information about support, activities and events for mentors, including both the initial training and ongoing staff support.
- The required time commitment (length of commitment and frequency of meetings).
- Other mentor eligibility requirements and the screening process.
- Contact information, including the name, phone number and email address of a specific staff member who will respond promptly to inquiries.

If your recruitment message is being delivered to faith-based organizations, either in a presentation or through written materials, it should also contain information on program restrictions governing discussions of religion by mentors and permissible activities.

Presenting the Message to Groups

When making your recruitment presentation—delivering your message—to groups of potential volunteers, consider these additional points:

- Have a current mentor talk briefly about his or her experiences. If possible, select a mentor whose background is similar to that of the people in the group to which you are making the presentation. The mentor's talk should be positive but realistic.
- Have a current participant talk about his or her experiences with a mentor, or have someone talk who has graduated from the reentry program with the support of a mentor.
- End your presentation with a call to action. Get phone numbers and email addresses of people who are interested in volunteering or want to learn more and make sure a staff member follows up with each of those people within a few days following the presentation.
- Allow time after the presentation to talk informally with the people who attended. Having refreshments available will encourage people to stay and talk.

And, finally, make sure materials are available for people to take home with them.

Preparing Print Materials

Create brochures and one-page flyers that contain the key elements of your recruitment message. Program staff or board members for your organization may be able to connect you with a designer who will do the layout at a rea-

sonable cost, and you may be able to find a local printing company that will absorb at least some of the cost of printing your recruitment materials. You might also want to print some posters to publicize your program. If you use photographs in any of these materials, select them carefully so they reflect the groups you are trying to reach, and make sure you have permission from anyone whose photo you are using—including a signed photo release form.

5. Keep track of every step—write it down!

The process of recruitment includes a large number of tasks, many of which are ongoing, including: creating the message, developing and printing materials, meeting with pastors and other potential recruiting partners, identifying new places to make presentations, talking with mentors and participants who will be part of those presentations and taking care of details, such as ensuring there is food available for potential volunteers after a presentation to encourage them to stay around and talk.

While one person—the mentor coordinator—should have oversight and ultimate responsibility for the recruitment efforts, other people should also be involved. To keep track of all the recruitment tasks and to ensure accountability, consider using a matrix, like the one shown below, or a similar tracking system to recall each task and to ensure follow-up on tasks as necessary. See Appendix B for a version of this matrix that can be customized to your program's needs.

Activity	Person Responsible	Target Completion Date	Date	Outcome
Craft and refine the recruitment message for the program				
Draft brochure language				
Meet with designer about recruitment brochure.				
Select a mentor and participant to talk at 100 Black Men presentation—help them prepare.				
Check with designer to make sure copies of brochure will be ready for presentation				
Make presentation to 100 Black Men organization				
Meet with Rev mith at Bright Hope Church to describe program and ask about recruiting from his congregation.				

6. Provide good customer service.

Almost every organization has stories of volunteers who were lost because the organization failed to follow-up. This lack of follow-up can occur at many points, for example: 1) a potential volunteer calls to express interest,

and it is weeks before anyone from the organization calls her back; 2) a volunteer comes in for a screening interview, and a month passes before the organization calls about a scheduled training; 3) a volunteer completes the training and is eager to start, but nothing happens. With each delay, volunteers are lost. They get tired of waiting. Their interest fades. They wonder why they should offer their time and effort to an organization that seems not to care whether they come or not. So they move on to something else.

Of course, organizations do not intend to squash potential volunteers' interest and motivation. But they sometimes forget that in a program that relies on volunteers to deliver the services—as mentoring programs do—volunteers are a priority, not something you get around to dealing with between other tasks.

Keep connected with potential volunteers. Keep them involved, interested and motivated and get them to work as soon as they have been screened and trained. More specifically, keep in touch with potential volunteers through the following steps:

- Respond within 24 hours to all phone call and email inquiries from potential volunteers. Even if your program is not currently recruiting new mentors, you will be recruiting at some point in the near future. After responding to potential volunteer inquiries, enter information about these potential volunteers into a log or database, including the person's name, phone numbers, email address, home address, and any other pertinent information, such as their interest level, concerns and how they heard about the program.
- Follow up by mailing, or emailing, a brochure and letter thanking them for the inquiry and informing them about next steps.
- Follow up with a phone call or email in another week.
- If they are interested in moving to the next step, schedule a face-to-face orientation and screening interview that takes place within a week.
- After the orientation and interview, if they seem like a good candidate, immediately inform them of next steps and get their permission to move forward with the screening process. If they do not meet your eligibility requirements, send them a letter thanking them for their interest.
- Begin the criminal background check immediately, as this is sometimes a slow process. Complete other areas of screening, such as reference checks. Keep in touch with the potential volunteer on a weekly basis and inform them about the status of the process so they stay interested.
- Tell them about the next training and follow up with a letter giving the training date(s). One week before the training, call or email to remind them of the date and emphasize the importance of attending. Your program might decide that potential volunteers can be trained while the screening process is still underway; however, they must not begin as mentors until the screening is complete.
- Within a few days after the training, call or email to keep their interest up and let them know an approximate date when they will be matched with a participant or begin to be part of a mentoring group.
- For one-to-one mentoring, decide on a tentative match and then help set up an introductory meeting between the mentor and participant as soon as possible.
- At each point in the process, thank the potential volunteer for his or her patience and commitment.

Finally, purchase software that tracks potential volunteers or develop your own system so you know where each person is in the process—so no one gets lost.

VI. TRAINING AND MATCHING MENTORS

Serving as a mentor is both rewarding and challenging, and it can be particularly difficult to develop a positive, supportive relationship with an adult who has only recently been released from prison. Successful mentoring relationships may be a valuable force in helping participants make the transition to productive lives in the community. However, as research into mentoring programs has demonstrated, these kinds of relationships do not happen automatically. Mentors need training that helps them develop the skills and acquire the knowledge they need to be successful in their roles.

Because the tone of a mentoring relationship can be set quickly during the first one-to-one meeting or the first group session, it is important that training takes place before the mentor and participant begin to meet. This section provides guidelines for planning a training for new mentors and also includes a brief discussion about matching them with participants after they complete the training.

The section discusses the following steps:

- Identifying the training goals and topic
- Addressing the practical issues
- Paying attention to details
- Creating a manual to give to mentors
- Developing an approach for matching mentors and participants.

The next section will discuss ongoing training for mentors, as well as other forms of program support.

1. Identify the training goals and topics.

What do people need to know and be able to do in order to be effective mentors in general and what special considerations are there for mentoring adults who have recently been released from prison?

While the details of the training will vary depending on the particular program, the overall goals are generally consistent across programs. Training should:

- **Help the volunteers understand the scope and limits of their role as mentors.** Specific topics could include: understanding their role in supporting participants and building a trusting relationship; suggested activities for one-to-one matches; the role of mentors during group mentoring sessions; setting boundaries; and understanding when to talk to program staff about possible problems their mentees are facing.
- **Help them develop the skills and attitudes they need to perform effectively in their role.** These skills and attitudes include active listening, being nonjudgmental and knowing how to guide participants into making good decisions, rather than telling them what decisions to make. This part of the training should include activities that give attendees a chance to practice communication and problem-solving skills. (Sample activities are included in Appendix C). Programs in which mentors will be facilitating group mentoring sessions will also need to provide training on group facilitation techniques.
- **Provide information about relevant program policies and requirements.** Examples include mentors' time commitment, the importance of consistency and confidentiality policies. Faith-based programs and all programs that recruit mentors from faith-based organizations should also provide clear instruction on when it is and is not appropriate to discuss religion. For programs receiving federal grants, federal guidelines prohibit the use of that funding for proselytizing or for requiring participants to engage in any form of religious activities. Further, all programs should be attentive to the fact that discussions of religion may alienate some

participants and result in their dropping out of their mentoring relationship. Text from a brochure created for Ready4Work sites on this topic is included in Appendix B.

- **Provide information about the particular needs of the participants they will be mentoring.** Topics could include: barriers ex-prisoners face, including difficulty getting jobs, substance abuse, depression and other forms of mental illness; family reunification issues, such as child custody and child support; and information about recognizing signs of crises in the mentees. Include some discussion about mentor expectations—given these barriers, it is not surprising that participants may have a high rate of not showing up for mentoring sessions or for dropping out entirely. Directly addressing this issue here can help alleviate mentors' frustration if their mentees attend meetings irregularly or drop out, and it can make mentors more willing to be rematched with a new participant rather than dropping out themselves.
- **Build confidence.** Interactive exercises on skills like communicating effectively are an important way that volunteers can build confidence during the training. In addition, be sure they know that they are not going to be matched with a participant and then left on their own. Describe to mentors the supports your program will be providing, including regular check-ins with them, ongoing training and quick access to program staff whenever necessary. These supports are discussed in Section VII.

Among the forms included in Appendix B is a sample agenda for a training session.

2. Address the practical issues.

When planning the training, consider the following:

- **Who will provide the training?** One person—probably the mentor coordinator—will take the lead in the training, but the session will most likely be a combination of presentations and interactive exercises involving several different people. Some presentations—about the program, the role of mentors in the program and the supports the program provides to help mentors succeed—will be given by the mentor coordinator and other program staff. Other presentations—on, for example, recognizing signs of depression in participants or understanding the obstacles they are facing—might be given by outside experts on those topics or by knowledgeable program staff.

The interactive exercises—including an icebreaker at the beginning of the training and the exercises focusing on the mentor's role and mentoring skills, such as active listening—present a special challenge. If no one on the program staff is experienced in this type of training, the program might consider contracting with someone who is skilled in providing interactive training to new mentors. Be sure to meet with that person to discuss your program and the population of participants it serves and to plan the training so it addresses both skills that are necessary for all mentors to possess and the particular situations that mentors in your program are likely to encounter.

- **How long will the initial training be?** While length of the training will vary from program to program, there is a lot to cover. You do not want the training to be so long that it discourages people from attending and becoming mentors, but you need to ensure that volunteers have the information and skills they need to be adequately prepared before they begin mentoring. Thus, consider scheduling a minimum of five or six hours for the training.
- **What are the best times for scheduling the training?** As you are conducting screening interviews with potential mentors, ask them about their day and time preferences for attending trainings. Many programs find that trainings are well attended if they are provided on Saturdays, starting around 9:00 a.m. and going to 2:30 or 3:30 p.m., with a break for lunch. Some programs provide their trainings in at least two parts (for example, three hours in length on two different days), either on weekday evenings or weekend afternoons.

- **How large should the training be?** Although there is no “right” number of attendees for a training, having too few people can make a session fall flat, while too many can make it difficult for everyone to participate actively, be heard and have their questions answered. Fifteen or 20 attendees is a good number to plan for. If your program has recruited a large number of new mentors, such as 40, consider splitting them into two groups and providing a separate training for each group.
- **How will you keep attendees interested and involved?** Use a variety of approaches during the training so attendees are actively engaged, not just sitting and listening to what program staff and other presenters have to say. Your combination of approaches could include, for example, small group discussions, problem-solving activities, questions and answers about mentoring, videos and guest speakers. Also, begin the training with an icebreaker activity so attendees have an opportunity to interact with and feel part of the group from the beginning.

In planning the training, also be sure it is held at a time when other program staff members can attend. It is important for them to be there for at least part of the session so they can introduce themselves and talk very briefly about their role in the reentry program. This will help the new mentors see themselves as part of the larger goal of successful reentry and as a part of the organization as a whole.

3. Pay attention to details.

It is often the little things that give people the perception that the program is organized and professional and that program staff care about them. Thus, be sure to:

- Email or mail a reminder about the training two weeks ahead of time and call participants one week prior to the training.
- Hold the training in a clean, well-lit and comfortable space.
- Have everything prepared and in place before the training begins, including handouts, flip charts and all other materials and equipment you will be using.
- Try to set up a circular seating arrangement so people can see each others' faces as they speak.
- Ask staff members to greet attendees at the door upon arrival and chat briefly with attendees as they are leaving.

And, of course, arrange to provide refreshments.

4. Create a handbook to give to mentors.

It will be very useful for mentors to have a handbook that includes: key program documents, such as the confidentiality policy; clearly written, easy-to-follow materials that define the mentor's role and describe potential challenges; tips on fulfilling that role and dealing with challenges; and information on some of the key issues that ex-prisoners confront as they try to successfully reenter their communities. The handbook should also include an up-to-date list of program staff members, with their titles, phone numbers and email addresses so mentors can contact them as necessary.

Use a three-ring binder for the handbook, so materials can be updated and added over time. Include handouts you will be using during the training and give the binder to attendees at the beginning of the training to allow them to reference the handouts during the training. The handbook will also serve as a reference and guide for them while they are serving in the program.

The handbook serves another important purpose. While it would be ideal, in terms of training, if all volunteers were recruited in groups and could go through the training together, the reality is that, at times, mentors will enter the program one by one, and it might be months before there are enough new mentors to schedule a group training. You may need to get those new mentors matched with a participant or assigned to a mentoring group more quickly than that. In those cases, the mentor coordinator will have to give a shorter, one-to-one training to prepare the new mentors for their role. The handbook then becomes an essential document for the new mentor to review before meeting with the coordinator for the one-to-one training session.

A sample table of contents for a mentor handbook appears in Appendix B.

5. Develop an approach for matching mentors and participants.

How will you decide which new mentor to match with which participant? Or, if the new volunteer will become part of a mentoring group, what criteria will you use to team up mentors within a group?

You may wish to arrange matching mentees with mentors who have a similar life story and who could help the mentee work through the many hurdles they will face when they reenter society. Programs should also consider matching mentors and participants who share the same socioeconomic background, when possible. These and other factors are important for several reasons. Participants can feel more guarded and self-conscious with mentors that they feel they can not relate with. As a result, they may be less likely to communicate honestly and may feel less trusting than they would with mentors that share their background.

Matching people of similar backgrounds can also foster a greater sense of trust because participants sometimes feel that these shared characteristics mean the mentors have a better understanding of them and their life circumstances. However, it is worth noting that this is not always the case. Trust issues can certainly exist regardless of these factors, and mentor coordinators should train mentors in how to help break down the trust and communication barriers that may exist in the mentor-participant relationship.

Beyond these criteria, what is most important is to have an intentional approach to matching. While the mentor coordinator is likely to have the best sense of the qualities of a new mentor, program case managers are likely to have the most insight into participants; thus, it is helpful if the two make the matching decisions together.

- **For one-to-one mentoring:** Mentor coordinators will learn about new mentors during the screening process—through the interview and questionnaire—and can use this information to help make decisions about matching. Look for things the mentor and participant have in common, such as similar interests, hobbies and personality traits, as well as geographic proximity. Once matched, the mentor and participant should be introduced to each other either over the phone or at the program office by the mentor coordinator.
- **For group mentoring:** If you are using a model that incorporates at least two mentors per group, consider placing a new mentor in a group where the other mentors are more experienced and confident. Also try to team up mentors with different personalities. For example, place a new mentor who tends to be talkative in a group where the other mentors may be more low-key. In addition, try to match what you believe is the best mentoring team with the participant group that presents the most challenges.

In matching, also be attentive to people's times of availability. Although it is less likely to be a problem in one-to-one matches, mentors' schedules—the times when they are available versus the set times when specific groups meet—may limit your flexibility in matching them with specific groups.

VII. PROVIDING SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

Your program has recruited and screened volunteers, provided training that prepares them to become mentors and matched them with participants or placed them in mentoring groups. Now what? What is your ongoing role in helping to build and maintain the mentor-participant relationships? What is your program's responsibility?

Research on mentoring programs is clear about the critical importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and develop a positive relationship with their mentee. More specifically, research has found that programs in which professional staff provide regular support to mentors are more likely to have matches that meet regularly and mentees who are satisfied with their relationships. Consequently, programs in which mentors are not contacted regularly by staff have the greatest percentage of failed matches—matches that do not meet consistently and, thus, never develop into relationships.

This research was conducted on programs that match mentors with youth, and it is typically far more challenging for mentoring relationships to develop when the mentees are adult ex-prisoners. Clearly, programs cannot simply match mentors and participants and leave them without support and guidance.

This section is intended to guide you in developing and implementing strategies that increase the likelihood that mentors and participants will meet regularly and develop a trusting relationship, which may in turn contribute to positive outcomes for the ex-prisoners enrolled in your program. The section includes the following steps:

- Set up a regular schedule of meetings between a staff member and the mentor
- Have mentors keep logs about their meetings with participants
- Develop a procedure for checking in regularly with participants
- Involve the case manager in supporting the relationships
- Make it easy for mentors to speak to program staff on short notice
- Provide ongoing trainings and other gatherings for mentors to exchange experiences, challenges and triumphs
- Develop a procedure for officially closing mentor-participant matches.

Finally, this section, and this manual, ends with suggestions for one more essential program task—recognizing and celebrating mentors' and participants' hard work and success.

1. Set up a regular schedule of meetings between a staff member and the mentor.

Programs need to check in regularly with mentors to learn whether the match is meeting, how the relationship is developing and what problems may be surfacing that staff can help to address. These contacts can take place over the telephone or in face-to-face meetings, and it will likely be the mentor coordinator who has the primary role in providing this supervision and support. There are two key issues to explore in setting up this system of contacts:

- **How often should the program check in with mentors?** For one-to-one matches, contact the mentor within the first two weeks of the match. Use this conversation to make sure the pair is meeting, to find out what activities they have done together and to assess how the mentor feels about the match thus far. During the next few months, continue to check in with the mentor every two weeks. These ongoing contacts will help ensure that the mentor and participant meet regularly. They are also important for uncovering any start-up problems that require program staff's immediate assistance. After this early stage, continue to check in once a month to learn whether the mentor or participant is losing interest in the match and to help address

problems that may arise between the pair. It is important to be somewhat flexible about this schedule—as the matches develop, some mentors may need to be contacted more often than others.

- **What should you ask mentors during the check-ins?** Possible questions include:
 - a) How is your match going? How often have you and your mentee met since we last talked? How much time do you spend together at each meeting?
 - b) What kinds of activities have you done together? How do you decide on the activities? Do you and your mentee have trouble thinking up things to do together?
 - c) Do you spend much time talking together? Do you and your mentee enjoy spending time together?
 - d) Does your mentee keep appointments with you? Does he or she show up on time?
 - e) When was your last meeting? What did you do together?
 - f) Do you talk to your mentee on the telephone? How often?
 - g) Do you need help with anything? Is there anything interfering with your match?
 - h) How would you describe your mentee's behavior and attitudes? Does he or she exhibit any behavior or attitudes that trouble you or that you do not understand?
 - i) Are you satisfied with how things are going?
 - j) Is there any additional training you think would be helpful for you?
 - k) Is there anything else we should be aware of? Is there anything else we can do to help?

In programs that use group mentoring, the mentor coordinator can use the time before or after group meetings to talk with mentors about their experiences and any concerns they have. However, be attentive to the fact that the periods right before and after the group session are also the times when mentors and participants have the opportunity to talk one-to-one. Arrange to speak with mentors either well before or well after the group session so as not to interfere with this individual mentor-participant time.

2. Have mentors keep logs about their meetings with participants.

Mentor logs are an important way for mentors and program staff to keep track of the one-to-one matches and mentoring groups and to track the development of the mentor-participant relationships. They are also a useful tool for identifying problems and concerns that may reflect ineffective program implementation. Information in the logs can provide the basis for discussion between mentors and program staff during their regularly scheduled interactions.

Each program should develop its own form—with different versions for one-to-one and group mentoring:

- For one-to-one mentoring, the form should include space for both in-person and phone contact, descriptions of activities during in-person meetings and comments about positive observations or areas of concern. The form should have enough space to cover a record of meetings and phone conversations that take place over the period of a month. Mentors should provide a completed form to the mentor coordinator each month.

- For group mentoring, the form should include space for listing all members of the group, activities during the group session, challenges during the session, concerns and positive observations. One mentor from the group can complete the form immediately after each session and give it to the mentor coordinator.

Sample mentor log forms are included in Appendix B.

The mentor logs are not a substitute for one-to-one interactions between the mentor and mentor coordinator. It is not sufficient for mentors to just keep a record of their meetings and mail the information to the program. Active staff involvement—one-to-one discussions with mentors—is essential. In fact, regular interaction between mentors and program staff not only ensures that pairs are meeting, it also helps mentors feel supported, builds mentors' commitment to the program, helps mentors be more effective in their role and contributes to mentor retention.

3. Develop a procedure for checking in regularly with participants.

Program staff should also meet with participants in one-to-one matches to make sure they are meeting with their mentor, to identify any problems that need to be addressed and to encourage the participants to stay involved in the mentoring. There should be an initial check-in about two weeks after the match is made, with ongoing check-ins taking place monthly.

When participants are in group mentoring, the mentor coordinator can talk to them informally before or after the group sessions. And it is important to telephone participants when they miss a session to talk to them about why they were not there, encourage them to attend and deal with any practical problems—like transportation issues—that are making it difficult for them to get to the sessions.

4. Involve the case manager in supporting the relationships.

Case managers in the reentry program should also have a role in supervising and supporting the mentoring relationships. In fact, recent research on mentoring in high-risk populations has indicated that relationships last for a longer period of time and are more likely to result in positive outcomes when the case manager has an active role in them.

The mentor coordinator is the person immediately responsible for making sure the relationships are developing, but the case manager has the deepest knowledge about each participant and is best positioned to address serious issues that may arise. Thus, part of the mentor coordinator's role during the regular check-in with the mentor should be to identify problems and to contact the case manager if the participant appears to need additional help.

In addition, it can be useful for the case manager to speak with the mentor about once a month so they can directly discuss any concerns the mentor may have. Because case managers talk to participants regularly—and, thus, can check in with them on an ongoing basis about the mentoring relationship—they are also in a position to give the mentor feedback about how the participant feels he or she is benefiting from the relationship. This can be important information for helping mentors remain motivated and committed.

5. Facilitate access for mentors to speak to program staff on short notice.

Your program should also make sure that mentors know how to contact staff whenever necessary for advice and support. Mentors should have contact information (telephone numbers and email addresses) for the mentor coordinator and other staff who could help them on short notice. Program staff also have to understand the importance of responding quickly to any contact from mentors. They should return calls or answer email questions the same day they are received.

6. Provide ongoing trainings.

Training is essential for volunteers before they begin mentoring. As the mentors get to work, the actual experience is likely to lead them to a deeper understanding of some of the challenges and frustrations—as well as the rewards—of mentoring ex-prisoners. To help address these emerging issues, programs should periodically bring the mentors together for additional training. These trainings can take two forms:

- **Mentor roundtables**, in which mentors meet for an hour or two and discuss their experiences. These sessions might begin with the mentor coordinator asking each mentor to describe one obstacle and one success with their match. Then mentors can provide suggestions for dealing with the obstacles and gain more information about successful approaches to the overcoming those obstacles.
- **One- or two-hour sessions with a guest presenter on a special topic**, such as substance abuse or mental health issues, that mentors would benefit from knowing more about and that the program might not have had time to cover fully in the initial training for new mentors. These sessions should also include some time for the mentors to share their experiences and ideas and help one another address challenges they are facing.

People tend to have crowded schedules, so it can be difficult to get mentors to attend these ongoing trainings. Schedule them only about four or five times a year, and hold them at a time when people are most likely to attend. In addition, consider providing incentives (i.e., coffee mugs or t-shirts with the program's name on them) that encourage participation in the ongoing training programs.

7. Develop a procedure for officially closing mentor-participant matches.

Mentoring relationships end. Sometimes they end prematurely because the mentor or mentee loses interest (or never develops interest) and drops out. Ex-prisoners involved in mentoring tend to drop out, or just stop showing up, at fairly high rates. A strong system of support and supervision can help control the number of dropouts, but it is unlikely to eliminate the problem.

Mentors are likely to feel frustrated and discouraged when their mentee drops out or disappears. To help the mentor deal with these feelings—and to avoid having the mentor drop out as well—develop a procedure for formally closing the match. Meet with the mentor to discuss why the match ended and try to alleviate the mentor's possible concern that he or she might have done something “wrong.” Encourage the mentor to be re-matched with a new participant. Similarly, if a mentor drops out of a match, meet with the participant to discuss the situation and encourage him or her to be matched with a new mentor.

In other situations, the mentor and participant may have a strong relationship and regular meetings, but the participant is leaving the program because he or she has officially graduated or has found a steady job and feels ready to leave. When that occurs, meet together with the mentor and participant to recognize their accomplishments and formally close the match. It is also possible that the two may want to stay in touch outside of their now-ended “official” mentoring relationship. Each program will have to develop its own guidelines on whether it wishes to give consent to, or discourage, post-program mentoring meetings.

8. Recognize and celebrate mentors' and participants' hard work and success.

Develop a variety of ways to acknowledge mentors' contributions and participants' accomplishments. Examples include:

- Provide ongoing positive reinforcement. Let your mentors know what they are achieving. When you hear positive comments about the mentor from the participant or case manager be sure to convey them to the mentor.
- Provide similar positive reinforcement to participants. Let them know about mentors' positive comments about them. In addition, when you attend group mentoring sessions, let participants know, in informal conversations afterwards, about their important contributions to the group sessions.
- Send birthday, holiday and thank you cards to mentors and give them certificates of appreciation.
- Work with partners and local businesses to try to get donations of free tickets and discounts to sports events and other entertainment and cultural events that mentors and participants can attend together.
- Hold periodic celebrations that bring together all the mentors and participants. For example, have a party around the winter holidays, or, if the program is located in an area of the country with long, cold winters, consider a party to mark the beginning of spring. Use the party as an occasion to celebrate mentors' and participants' good work, persistence and success.

Whatever specific strategies you develop, the goals are to let participants know that you recognize their efforts and successes and to have mentors see that they are an important, highly valued part of the reentry program.

Concluding Thoughts

The Ready4Work program demonstrated that mentoring can be a very useful tool in a prisoner reentry program. However, establishing and implementing effective mentoring programs for formerly incarcerated people is not a simple task. From finding adequate numbers of qualified and committed mentors to convincing program participants to actively engage in mentoring (while simultaneously seeking to find and keep jobs, reunite with family, secure stable housing, stay sober and stay out of prison), to creating solid programs, to monitoring matches, obstacles exist at every turn.

The potential value that mentoring can add to reentry programs merits investing the time, resources, planning and hard work required to overcome these obstacles. As noted at the beginning of this manual, Ready4Work saw very positive correlations between participants being mentored and their success in finding jobs, keeping those jobs and remaining in the Ready4Work program. Additionally, recidivism rates were lower for participants who were mentored. Other research has also established the importance of pro-social relationships in keeping people out of prison. In our work with numerous reentry programs around the country, we have heard from program participants and mentors alike about the power of these relationships.

As federal, state and city governments, as well as communities, seek effective solutions to the reentry crisis, we hope that mentoring will be considered as a potential component of any effort and that the creation of tools, such as this manual, will be useful in supporting this work.

APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR GROUP MENTORING

Almost all of the Ready4Work sites used at least some group mentoring. To some extent, reliance on the model was a practical response to the challenges of recruiting mentors, particularly to the challenge of recruiting male mentors. However, there are potential advantages to group mentoring sessions, including peer interaction, support that develops among members of the group, and participants may feel like they are contributing to the group by sharing their own knowledge and experience.

Because this approach to mentoring ex-prisoners is relatively new, there are not, as yet, “best practices” that research has identified. Thus, this appendix draws from the experiences of the Ready4Work sites to present guidelines and options for designing a group mentoring model.

How will the groups be organized?

For programs that have not been able to recruit enough volunteers for one-to-one matches, using a group model makes it possible to involve more participants in mentoring. However, the groups still need to be small in size with a large enough proportion of mentors to foster strong relationships amongst the participants and amongst the participants and mentors. Key factors to consider include:

- **The number of participants and mentors per group.** An ideal number might be four to six participants and two to three mentors. Having fewer than four participants could result in static and uninteresting group discussions. Having more than six participants limits the time each participant will be able to talk. Programs should have a ratio of one mentor to every two or three participants. Programs should also consider having at least two mentors in each group—both so participants get the experience of two different mentors and so the mentors themselves have one another’s support in planning and carrying out the group sessions.

As you begin to put groups together, consider that some participants might not show up very frequently. For example, if you want to have four participants at each group session, you may want to assign six to the group to ensure that, if two are absent from a session, you will still have enough participants present to foster good discussions.

- **Selecting mentors and participants for groups.** Just as you have criteria for matching mentors and participants for one-to-one matches, be attentive to which mentors and participants you place together in a group—a major goal, after all, is to have mentor-participant relationships develop over time. If there are two or more mentors in the group, try to include mentors that complement one another. For example, pair the talkative mentors with the more reserved and the experienced mentors with the less experienced. Similarly, try to have a mix of participants in the group. For example, pair participants with more positive attitudes with those who have less positive attitudes and pair participants who are more self-confident with those who are less self-confident. In addition, if you have what you consider to be some particularly strong mentors, you may want to place them in a group that has the potential to present the most challenges.

At the same time, however, this process of placing mentors and participants in particular groups has to be somewhat flexible because people’s schedules may dictate that they can only attend group sessions on certain days and at certain times.

When and where should the groups meet?

The first challenge in group mentoring is simply to get participants to attend the sessions. The time, frequency and place of meetings can all affect attendance. In deciding when and where groups should meet, consider:

- **Session length.** Two hours is an ideal length of time. It allows opportunities for one-to-one conversations

between mentors and participants both before the formal session begins and after it takes place, while including about 90 minutes for the session itself.

- **Frequency of meetings.** To provide the continuity and frequency of meetings required to ensure that relationships develop between the mentors and participants, the group sessions should take place once a week or, at a minimum, once every two weeks. Weekly sessions are optimal; however, having groups meet at two-week intervals is less intrusive on participants' and mentors' time and, thus, might improve the regularity of attendance. However, if a participant misses a biweekly session, then he or she is essentially going a month without any involvement in mentoring—a large gap in an approach that depends on frequency and continuity to build relationships and to provide support.
- **Scheduling of sessions.** Survey both mentors and participants to see what times are best for them. Early evenings (around 6 p.m.) are usually the most amenable for most peoples' schedules. Be sure to provide plenty of refreshments if the group is meeting around dinnertime.
- **Location of sessions.** The meeting space might be in the lead agency office, a church or a community center. Wherever it is, be sure it is clean, well-lit, comfortable and convenient for participants and mentors to get to, particularly for those who do not have cars and must rely on public transportation.

In addition, to increase the likelihood that participants will attend the sessions, provide them with public transportation passes or reimburse them for transportation costs.

How structured will the group sessions be?

While every group session needs to have some structure, there is no one “best” way to achieve this. Participants will only continue to attend the sessions if they find them valuable, and each program will need to decide how best to structure and focus its sessions to achieve this goal.

Moving from the relatively less structured to the most structured group sessions, options include:

- **At the beginning of each group session, have participants and mentors (and possibly the mentor coordinator) decide on the discussion topics.** In this approach, participants can take the lead in deciding what is important for them to talk about. At the same time, running the group session may require more skilled facilitators because they have had less control in structuring the session.
- **Preplan the session by having the mentor coordinator or other program staff determine discussion topics for the group ahead of time.** This approach potentially provides more structure to the sessions, but program staff have to be sure they decide on topics that participants consider relevant and important. Further, the facilitator has to be flexible enough to incorporate other topics as participants bring them up.
- **Use a curriculum.** In this most structured approach, each session focuses on activities within one lesson or topic from a curriculum. For example, programs might use a life skills curriculum that includes sessions on overcoming obstacles, setting and achieving goals, communication skills, conflict resolution, demonstrating a positive attitude, handling finances and using the Internet. This approach requires a skilled facilitator who can deliver the curriculum while being sure that participants stay involved, understand the material in the context of their own experiences and challenges and benefit from the sessions.

Even the least formally structured sessions should include at least some preplanned approaches for discussions. For example, instead of beginning the session by going around the table and asking each participant to say how his or her week went, the facilitator could ask a more focused question such as, “What was the best thing that happened on your job search (or at your job) this week?” In Ready4Work, some mentors who were involved in

group mentoring sessions with little structure reported that it was difficult to know what to talk about. They also noted that there was a high dropout rate for participants in their programs.

What is the role of mentors and the mentor coordinator during group sessions?

For every group session, someone has to take the role of facilitator—leading the meeting and moderating the discussions. In some programs, the mentors in the group may take turns filling this role while the mentor coordinator stays in the background. In other programs, the mentor coordinator may take on these responsibilities, and the mentors' roles will primarily include contributing to discussions and supporting and providing feedback to participants.

Even if the mentors take the lead, however, mentor coordinators generally attend the group sessions. If necessary, mentor coordinators can help resolve issues that arise during the session (i.e., if one of the participants is disruptive), and they can fill in for mentors who might have to miss a particular meeting. In addition, mentor coordinators can make announcements about upcoming opportunities for participants, such as a computer classes and job openings.

What opportunities will be provided to help mentors and participants form one-to-one relationships within the group setting?

Take steps that encourage one-to-one mentor-participant relationships to develop within the group context—these relationships may lead to additional benefits for participants and also might further motivate them to attend the group sessions. All programs should ensure that there is time before and after each group session for mentors and participants to have informal, one-to-one conversations. Having refreshments available before or after the session may encourage participants to come early or to stay late, and refreshments help establish a good environment for informal conversation.

In addition, not all of the group sessions have to take place at a set location. Periodically, instead of the regular meeting, the group can use the time to participate in activities together, such as a group dinner, sporting event or a cultural event. In addition to being a break from the usual session—and being fun—these activities provide opportunities for mentors and participants to have one-to-one conversations and develop stronger relationships with each other. Allow the participants to decide how they want to spend this time and what would be most beneficial for them. They may want to go to a restaurant or museum, or they may want to do something entirely practical, such as familiarizing themselves with how to use the mass transit system after years in prison.

What might a group session look like?

Group sessions will differ from program to program. The following agenda, for a two-hour session, is just one example. It moves from an informal activity to more structured discussions and then back to less structured time.

Time	Activity
6:00-6:30 p.m.	Informal conversation: Participants and mentors talk together as they have dinner—pizza and salad provided by the program.
6:30-6:45 p.m.	Icebreaker activity: The group gathers around a table to begin the meeting. One of the mentors welcomes everyone and leads an icebreaker activity during which each participant briefly talks about how he or she is feeling and where they are on the road to work—or, if they have a job already, how things are going with their job.

6:45-7:15 p.m.	Sharing exercise: This provides an opportunity for participants and mentors to problem-solve together and also to celebrate success. It could be an exercise called “Hurdles and Successes,” in which each participant describes one problem he or she faced and one success he or she experienced during the past week. The group can then help each participant develop a strategy for dealing with the problem and also can learn new strategies of their own from each participant’s success.
7:15-7:45 p.m.	Topic of the day: The group can then have a more structured discussion on one topic—the topic of the day. It could be something that comes out of the previous exercise. For example, if several participants have been dealing with conflicts on the job, the discussion could focus on why that tends to happen and larger strategies for avoiding it or coping with it when it does occur. Or, the mentor coordinator and mentors may have a pre-planned topic, such as what to do when you feel like giving up and quitting your job or when you feel like giving up on trying to find a job.
7:45-8:00 p.m.	Wrap up and time for informal conversation: Put out more refreshments, such as cookies or fruit.

As you develop your sessions, what is most important is that they are appealing, so participants want to attend. Make the meetings interesting and interactive; try to include everyone in the discussions; and make sure participant-initiated discussion topics are incorporated into every session.

What are some of the particular challenges that group mentors should be prepared for?

Whether in a one-to-one relationship or in a group setting, the mentor’s responsibility is to fulfill the role of being a trusted and supportive guide. However, group mentoring occurs in a different setting than traditional one-to-one mentoring, which brings with it some special challenges. These challenges include:

- **Developing a trusting relationship with each participant in the group.** As with one-to-one mentoring, the mentor’s attitude and approach are the most important elements in building a strong relationship. In addition, within the group setting, mentors have to take care to treat all participants equally and to not play favorites. They have to strive to consistently connect with each participant in their group.
- **Listening and guiding, rather than sounding authoritative.** Mentors who set themselves up as authority figures and who push too hard are usually unsuccessful and may even contribute to participants dropping out of the group. All mentors face the challenge of resisting the temptation to give advice, and it may be a particular challenge in a group context. Instead of giving advice when a participant is facing an obstacle or having a problem, consider saying, “Tell me more about the obstacle you are facing. What have you done to deal with it so far? How has that worked? Do you have any ideas about what to do next? What do you think you should do?” Mentors can also take advantage of the group setting by asking, “Has anyone experienced anything similar?” or “Does anyone have any suggestions for how he might deal with this problem?”
- **Drawing out participants who tend to be quiet.** For some participants, it may take time to open up and feel comfortable taking part in group discussions. Mentors need to learn how to help them overcome their initial hesitation and how to trust the group setting enough to feel comfortable sharing with the group. However, do not force participants to talk about something that they have indicated they do not want to talk about.
- **Dealing with difficult participants.** At times, some of the participants may become angry with one another or with a mentor. Mentors have to respond by speaking calmly to help the anger subside. Mentors also need to assess whether it is necessary to step back and let the mentor coordinator resolve the situation. Should frequent disruptions occur, have the group develop rules, such as “one person talks at a time,” “respect all group members,” “no put-downs” and “be supportive of others.”

Finally, it is essential for mentors to carry through consistently on their commitment. It is not unusual for some group mentors, when faced with a time crunch on their schedules, to think, “I don’t need to show up, because (my co-mentor) will be there.” Unless there is an emergency, mentors should attend every group mentoring session. When mentors fail to show, participants in the group wonder why they should bother showing up themselves, and this may result in a higher dropout rate from the group.

How can mentor coordinators contribute to successful group mentoring?

As with one-to-one mentoring, the mentor coordinator and other program staff should see themselves as ready supports that are there to assist group mentors and participants should they encounter any problems. Provide staff phone numbers and email addresses and encourage group members to get in touch whenever necessary. Beyond that, mentor coordinators have other key responsibilities in connection with group mentoring. These include:

- **Provide training for mentors on being effective in a group mentoring setting.** While each program will decide what specific training its group mentors need, it will generally include strategies for leading and managing groups and some focus on the particular challenges in fulfilling their roles as mentors in a group context.
- **Help to plan and manage the group mentoring sessions.** Before the sessions, the mentor coordinator can talk with mentors to plan the agenda and to troubleshoot any potential problems they think might arise. If the group is using a curriculum, the mentor coordinator has the additional responsibilities of making sure the agenda includes interesting exercises that will engage the participants and of arranging for any guest speakers who might be involved in presenting the curriculum topics. At the same time, the mentor coordinator should be open to mentors’ ideas about curriculum, guest speakers and exercises and about how to make other improvements in the program. During the group sessions, the mentor coordinator should be careful to stay in the background, but he or she must also be ready to step forward, if necessary, to deal with any disruptions.
- **Hold participants accountable.** If a participant misses a session, the mentor coordinator should ensure someone calls the next day to find out why that person did not attend. Whether it is the mentor coordinator, one of the mentors or the participant’s case manager, immediate contact is important. If someone does not call, the message to the participant is, “They didn’t miss me” or “They don’t care if I don’t show up.”
- **Monitor the groups.** Monitoring groups may be somewhat simpler than monitoring one-to-one matches because the mentor coordinator will attend group sessions to see how things are progressing. In addition, there is usually an opportunity before and after sessions to check in with mentors about their perceptions of how the group sessions are going and how the relationships are developing and to help the mentors develop strategies for dealing with challenging or frustrating situations within the group.

Finally, be prepared to periodically regroup. It is not an easy task to implement an ex-prisoner group mentoring component, and it can be especially difficult to keep the attendance level up. The moment attendance begins to fall, talk to staff and mentors to thoughtfully modify your approach to address the barriers making it difficult for participants to attend and to plan sessions participants will find valuable.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE FORMS

This appendix includes examples of forms and other written documents referred to in the manual. They include:

- Job Description: Mentor Coordinator
- Statement of Mission, Goals and Objectives
- Mentor Participation Agreement
- Confidentiality Policy
- Agenda: Training Session for New Mentors
- Mentoring Manual Table of Contents
- Training Evaluation Form
- Mentor Report Log for One-To-One Mentoring
- Mentor Report Log for Group Mentoring

The resource list in Appendix D includes websites that offer templates for other forms that mentoring programs may need to develop.

1. SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION: MENTOR COORDINATOR*

The mentor coordinator will lead a mentoring program that was developed to provide long-term one-to-one and group mentoring to male and female ex-prisoners. Mentees will be between the ages of 18-34, and they will have been sentenced to and served time for nonviolent, nonsexual felony offenses (as their last presenting offense). Other services provided the mentees in the overall program will include job training and job placement.

The mentoring program coordinator should have:

- Experience, confidence and a comfort level in working with ex-prisoners
- Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience
- Interpersonal skills, including an ability to get along with people of diverse backgrounds and the expertise to help mentors and mentees solve relationship and other problems, as they arise
- Public speaking experience and skills
- Excellent organizational skills
- Experience in counseling or social services preferred, but not required
- Experience as a mentor program coordinator or as a mentor in a structured mentoring program preferred, but not required.

Mentor coordinator duties include:

- Take the lead on all aspects of the mentoring program, to include recruiting, orientation, screening, training, matching and monitoring volunteers.
- Work closely with and responding to directives from the lead agency executive director and reentry program director.
- Work closely with program case managers in order to facilitate the integration of ex-prisoners on their caseloads into the mentoring program.
- Attempt to develop supportive and positive relationships between mentees and mentors, to include working with other program staff to problem-solve relationship issues.
- Support program retention efforts by consistently contacting mentor candidates while they are on the waiting list, and by consistently monitoring the matches.
- Take the lead on the implementation of celebration ceremonies and other mentoring program-related events.
- Help to plan and facilitate pre-service mentor training and ongoing training sessions.
- Assist in marketing the program, to include speaking in front of groups in order to recruit volunteer mentors or to obtain additional program resources.
- Help the mentoring program fulfill its commitment to funding sources, to include the proper completion of evaluations and forms.
- Other miscellaneous duties as they arise.

*Adapted from the mentor coordinator job description developed by Operation New Hope in Jacksonville, Florida, a Ready4Work site.

2. SAMPLE STATEMENT OF MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Mission: The mentoring initiative provides consistent and caring mentors to guide, support and inspire ex-prisoners to develop the attitudes and skills that will help them to become successful in their personal lives, as members of their community and at work.

Our goals are to:

- Enhance the dignity of participants by encouraging them to make choices that will help them become successful.
- Provide participants with the interpersonal support from mentors and staff that will help them solve problems, gain hope and increase their confidence.
- Reduce the rate of recidivism for the program's participants.

Our objectives are:

- During the first year of the program, a minimum of 20 participants will receive at least six months of one-to-one mentoring services.
- During the first year of the program, a minimum of 45 participants will receive at least six months of group mentoring.
- During the first year, we will recruit at least 60 mentors, who will commit to the program for one year. We will retain at least 80 percent of these mentors for six months or more.

3. SAMPLE MENTOR PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

As a mentor in the Ex-Prisoner Mentoring Program, I agree to:

- Cooperate with all requirements of the screening process.
- Complete the initial mentor training and attend any required ongoing trainings. If I miss a mandatory training, I will contact the mentor coordinator as soon as possible to make up the training.
- Meet with my mentee(s) at least once a week for a minimum of one hour, or once every other week for a minimum of two hours, over a one-year period.
- Support the mission and goals of the mentoring program.
- Try to develop a relationship of trust and respect with my mentee(s) by going slow, being flexible, and allowing them to make their own decisions—and by not presenting myself as an authority figure.
- Not push any “personal agenda” (i.e., faith, politics) during interactions with my mentee(s).
- Never come to mentoring sessions while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
- Notify my mentee(s) at least 24 hours in advance if I must miss a mentoring session or as soon as possible in the case of an emergency.
- Complete and hand in the monthly logging form.
- Abide by the program’s confidentiality procedures.
- Never talk about an individual’s race, national origin, religious beliefs or sexual orientation in a negative way.
- Follow all other program guidelines, including policies governing sexual harassment and other “boundary issues,” such as not to provide gifts or money to any mentee(s) or to his or her family or to receive gifts or money from my mentee(s).
- Contact the mentor coordinator if I experience any difficulties with my mentee(s) or with the program.

If I am unable to fulfill my duties as a mentor, I will inform the mentor coordinator immediately so that a replacement can be found.

Signed _____ Date _____

4. SAMPLE CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

In order to build trust, mentors are required to keep conversations with, and information about, their mentees in confidence. There are four exceptions to this rule:

Confidentiality Exception 1: Speaking with the program staff. A mentor may talk to program staff at **any time** about **any information or issues** brought up in the mentoring sessions. Staff are there to help problem-solve and to assist individuals with the dynamics of the relationship. *In addition, programs have a responsibility to understand the law in their jurisdiction that governs what participant actions or activities they are required to report to legal authorities. There may be instances in which mentors are expected to speak to program staff about particular actions and/or statements of their mentees. This information should be built into your confidentiality policy.*

Confidentiality Exception 2: Conversations with fellow mentors during staff-run mentor meetings. During mentor roundtables, mentors are allowed to discuss their respective mentees so that mentors can receive feedback and suggestions from fellow mentors and program staff. However, mentors must maintain a “group confidentiality”—that is, they are not allowed to discuss anything about other mentees to anyone outside of the program.

Confidentiality Exception 3: Receiving permission from the mentee to contact others about a specific problem. The mentee may give the mentor permission to talk to others about him or her when a situation arises where the mentee is seeking outside assistance or support.

Mentors should also make a report to program staff when the mentee:

- Reports child or elder abuse, neglect or endangerment by him/herself or others
- Discusses drug use or intended drug use
- Indicates a possible violation of the terms of his or her parole or probation
- Indicates an intention of hurting him/herself or others, or of putting him/herself in danger
- Reports that another person has an intention of hurting him/herself or others, or of putting the mentor in danger
- Demonstrates a marked change in functioning (i.e., appears depressed or manic or has noticeable changes in hygiene, sleeping and/or eating).

6. GUIDELINES REGARDING THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PROGRAMS DIRECTLY SUPPORTED WITH FEDERAL FUNDS

Key Principles

1. In general, public dollars cannot fund “inherently religious” activities, such as religious worship, instruction or proselytization.
2. Faith-based groups who do sponsor religious activities should separate these events, by time or by location, from publicly funded activities.
3. Program recipients may choose to take part in any privately funded religious activities, but their participation in these activities must be voluntary and not a program requirement.
4. Faith partners must not discriminate against beneficiaries on the basis of religion; they must serve all returnees who agree to participate in the program, regardless of returnees’ own religious commitments.
5. The integrity of faith groups is protected by law. This means partnering faith groups may, for example, continue to keep crucifixes, crescents, or Stars of David on facility walls, and they may maintain their religious identity.
6. In instances where a more directly religious “partner” organization exists (such as a previously existing church or a larger community organization that supplies guidance or direction), establishing a 501(c)3 organization with a separate budget will make it easier to keep track of the public funds received and spent.
7. In mentoring, all mentors should be trained to offer guidance in a manner that respects the religious freedom of returnees. This means that mentors can be available to answer questions, but they must never force their own religious viewpoint onto ex-offenders or coerce participation in a religious activity.

For more information, please visit www.dol.gov/cfbci.

7. SAMPLE AGENDA: TRAINING SESSION FOR NEW MENTORS

- 8:30 Continental breakfast
- 9:00 Welcome and staff introductions
- 9:15 Icebreaker (“warmer” exercise)
- 9:45 What is a mentor? (accompanying exercise)
- 10:15 Discussion of the ex-prisoner population and mentor expectations
- 10:45 Break
- 11:00 Mentoring skills and practices, including communication skills (accompanying exercise)
- 11:45 Recognizing signs of depression and other crises
- 12:15 Program rules and guidelines (including confidentiality and reporting)
- 12:45 Lunch
- 1:15 Beginning the match (including suggested activities for one-to-one meetings)
- 1:30 Problem-solving (role-playing vignette exercises)
- 2:15 Program supports for mentors and logging procedures
- 2:30 Comments, questions and training evaluations
- 3:00 Adjourn

If your program model includes group mentoring, you will need at least an hour to deliver additional training on mentors’ roles in the group sessions and how to facilitate group mentoring. Appendix A has more information on these and other aspects of group mentoring.

8. SAMPLE HANDBOOK FOR MENTORS TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome from our Executive Director

- SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO MENTORING**
The History of Mentoring
Background on Ex-Prisoner Mentoring
- SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF THE MENTORING COMPONENT**
Description and Mission of Lead Agency
Description of Reentry Program
Description of Mentoring Component: Mission, Goals and Objectives
Eligibility Requirements for Mentors
- SECTION 3: MENTORING CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES**
Build-a-Mentor (Exercise)
Qualities of Good Mentors
Suggested Activities for One-to-One Mentoring Meetings
- SECTION 4: PROGRAM RULES**
Mentor Participation Agreement
Confidentiality and Reporting Rules
Boundary Issues
When to Ask for Help
- SECTION 5: WORKING WITH EX-PRISONERS**
Ex-Prisoners—Strengths and Obstacles
Beginning the Match
Building Trusting Relationships
- SECTION 6: COMMUNICATION SKILLS**
Active Listening
Non-Directive Approach
Open Questions
Paraphrasing
Problem-Solving
Good Conversations/Bad Conversations (Exercise)
- SECTION 7: FACILITATING GROUP MENTORING**
Overview of the Group Mentoring Process
Benefits of Group Mentoring
Critical Elements for Successful Group Mentoring
Group Mentoring Curriculum (if the program uses a curriculum)
Managing/Handling the Group
- SECTION 8: UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES**
Why People Become Addicted to Substances
The Stages of Recovery
Strategies for Working with Substance Abusers

SECTION 9: RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION AND OTHER MENTAL ILLNESS

Understanding Depression

Working with Challenging Situations

SECTION 10: SUPPORTS FOR MENTORS

List of Staff Members and Contact Information

9. SAMPLE TRAINING EVALUATION FORM

Date _____ Name (optional) _____

1. What information did you hope to gain from today's workshop?

2. To what degree were your EXPECTATIONS MET?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

3. What was MOST useful to you about this workshop?

4. Was there anything covered in this workshop that was NOT USEFUL?

5. Please rate the usefulness of the TRAINING MATERIALS.

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

6. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the TRAINER(S).

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

7. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the TRAINING FACILITY.

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

8. Please rate your OVERALL SATISFACTION with today's workshop.

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Please share additional feedback below:

11. SAMPLE MENTOR REPORT LOG FOR GROUP MENTORING

It is a good practice to have mentors fill out a “mentor log” directly after each group mentoring session. Have one mentor from each group take ten minutes after the session to fill out the log and then turn it in to the mentor coordinator. There is no standard logging form—each program can develop its own. Here is one example.

Date _____

Name of mentor completing log

Name(s) of any other mentor(s) in group

Names of mentees present

Name(s) of mentee(s) missing and why (if reasons known)

Describe activities the group participated in and how they went

Describe any noticeable changes (positive or negative) in any mentee(s) and apparent reasons

Describe any disruptions or problems in the group and any general concerns

Describe any ideas for activities and/or any ideas for improvements in the program

Do you want the mentor coordinator to contact you? If so, provide contact information here

APPENDIX C: MENTOR TRAINING ACTIVITIES

This appendix includes the following exercises and handouts that can be used during initial mentor training sessions:

- I. **ICEBREAKERS OR “WARMERS”**
 - Introduction Exercise
 - The Name Game

- II. **MENTORING CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES**
 - Build an Ideal Mentor
 - If You Want Easy Listening, Turn on the Radio
 - Bad Conversations and Good Conversations
 - Realistic and Unrealistic Mentor Expectations
 - Vignettes

Appendix D includes links to resources that may help you develop other activities for training sessions.

I. ICEBREAKERS OR “WARMERS”

These exercises can be a good way to get the training rolling.

1. Introduction Exercise

Write down the following questions on a flipchart or a dry-erase board, and then go around and have each person respond.

- Name?
- Where do you live?
- Current or former occupation?
- How did the program find you?
- What is one thing you do well?
- Why do you want to be a mentor—now?

Discussing one thing each trainee does well allows the trainees to tell each other about their interests, hobbies or personal qualities and to feel good about themselves (i.e., “People say I am a good listener”).

Discussing why each trainee wants to be a mentor focuses the trainees on why they are here—to guide and support this high-risk population by mentoring them. The depth and emotion of responses to this question are often surprising, including such responses as: “My son was incarcerated,” “An uncle of mine died in prison,” and “I would be in the same situation, but I didn’t get caught.”

One option for conducting this exercise is to provide each person with a written copy of these questions. Then, break the group into pairs and have them interview each other. The pairs then report the information about the person he or she interviewed to the larger group. People are sometimes less apprehensive when they talk about someone other than themselves, and this approach also gives them a chance to connect more closely with another person. In addition, it gets the trainees to begin practicing listening skills, perhaps the most important skill a mentor can have. In a slightly different form, this small group approach also works well when the number of trainees is too large for everyone to get a chance to share with the whole group. In this situation, you could organize the trainees into groups of four, who take turns interviewing each other but do not report back to the whole group.

2. The Name Game

This is another exercise that is an effective way for people to get to know each other very quickly, as answering these questions reveals a lot about one’s family and culture.

First, write the talking points (listed below) on a flipchart or dry-erase board. As the facilitator, you will want to model the exercise by first sharing about yourself. Then, ask each trainee to share.

- What is your full name: first, middle and last?
- What does your name mean?
- What is the origin of your name? Who named you and why this name?
- What is your nickname and where did it come from?

After everyone shares, the facilitator can bring up the fact that at our core we have many similarities. For example, many are proud of their name, while some are a little embarrassed by it. Some do not know where their name came from. Some may have been named after a sports star, a movie star or a deceased relative. Another point to make is that mentoring is about telling your story to another person, finding common ground and making a connection, as well as maintaining respect for each other.

II. MENTORING CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

These exercises and handouts can be used as trainees define the role of a mentor, practice communication skills and learn how to recognize and address potential problems that may arise as they work to develop relationships with their mentees.

1. Build an Ideal Mentor

Materials Needed: Several sheets of flip-chart paper, a number of markers of various colors and tape (to put their finished product on the wall). Optional: an easel to display each group's work when completed.

Goal: To have trainees identify the traits that will help them to build relationships with the ex-prisoners and to be effective in their role as mentors.

This interactive exercise should be conducted in small groups of five to eight people. It should take place fairly early in the training agenda, as it gives everyone a chance to stand up, move around and meet and have casual conversations with their peers, and, at the same time, it taps into each person's creativity.

Step 1: Begin instructions with: "This exercise is called Build an Ideal Mentor, and it will help everyone focus on the positive qualities and traits that a mentor needs. After we divide into groups, I want each group to choose a representative to draw an outline of a person, from head to toe, on the flip chart. Do not put in any details like eyes and so forth, just an outline, kind of like a 'gingerbread man.'"

"Then, one at a time, I want you to pick up a colored marker and draw a symbol that represents a quality of an ideal mentor. Draw the symbol on the part of the body where the trait originates. For example, if you think a good mentor is 'well-traveled,' then you might draw a pair of worn shoes; you do not have to write out 'well-traveled' because later there will be an opportunity to talk about what each symbol means. On the other hand, if you cannot think of a symbol, you can draw a line to the part of the body where the trait comes from and then write the name of the trait in the margin.

"We would like everyone in each group to get a chance to draw as many traits as they can think of and use different colored markers. Do your own work and do not let other groups see your drawings. Also, when you are finished, choose one, two, or more people—it could be the entire group—to share your work with everyone who is here. You have approximately ten minutes to complete your drawings."

Step 2: As the groups work, walk around to ensure that everyone understands the exercise and that everyone is getting a chance to draw because sometimes one person will monopolize the exercise by drawing each symbol that others suggest and that is not as much fun or as effective as giving each person a chance to draw.

Step 3: When the groups are finished, have them turn their drawings over. Then, ask for each group to come up one at a time to display and discuss their work. It is best if the facilitator asks presenters to hide their work until they get up in front of the larger group. Ask everyone for "drum rolls" (fingers or hands pounding on thighs or desktops), and then encourage over-dramatic "ohs and ahs" from the other trainees as each drawing is unveiled. This usually draws laughter and smiles from everyone.

The facilitator should make brief validating comments as the drawings are explained (i.e., "good idea," "excellent"). As each group finishes, tape up the drawings side-by-side, in clear view, so that everyone will be able to see them for the remainder of the day's training.

Step 4: Close the exercise by asking, "Looking at the many traits, what traits are common in most of the drawings?" Most groups draw the heart first and then the ears—for being a good listener—usually second or third.

Then, remind the trainees, “We all know the qualities and traits that are essential to be a good mentor, and this exercise just reminds us what they are. You do not need me to tell you because you just demonstrated that you already know.”

2. If You Want Easy Listening, Turn on the Radio*

People tend to think of listening as something passive, or they tend not to think about it at all. But listening is actually a skill—a valuable skill that can be practiced and learned.

Listening has been likened to the work of a catcher in baseball. Observers who do not know a lot about the game might believe that a catcher is doing nothing more than waiting for a pitcher to throw the ball. They think that all the responsibility rests with the pitcher, who is, after all, the one who is winding up and delivering the pitch. In the same way, some people believe that all the responsibility in communication rests with the person who is talking. In reality, though, a good catcher is not a passive target waiting to receive the pitch. He or she concentrates on a pitcher’s motions; tracks the path of the ball; and, if necessary, jumps, stretches or dives to make the catch. Similarly, a good listener actively tries to catch and understand the speaker’s words.

Here are some tips for active listening:

ACTIVE LISTENING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL OF A GOOD MENTOR.

“You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time.”

—M. Scott Peck

When you talk with your mentee, try to remember to:

- Clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions, so you can give her or him your undivided attention.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Pay attention to your mentee’s facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Read between the lines for your mentee’s feelings. Learn to say, “How did that make you feel?”
- Ask open-ended questions. Ask, “What did you do during work today?” rather than asking, “How was work today?” Then, as appropriate, ask non-threatening follow-up questions.
- Paraphrase—restate in your own words—what you think your mentee has said. When paraphrasing is accurate, your mentee will feel understood. If it is off the mark, it invites her or him to clarify and also reminds you to listen more closely.
- Ask questions when you do not understand.
- Put yourself in your mentee’s “shoes” and try to understand the world from her or his perspective.
- Put aside preconceived ideas and refrain from passing judgment.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and saying things like, “I see.”
- Provide your mentee with the same level of respect that you desire for yourself when you are talking to someone.

How to kill a conversation:

1. Tell the speaker that the way he or she feels is wrong. “It’s silly to feel that way.”
2. Fail to look at the person who is speaking to you.
3. Sit slouched over, look distracted, drum your fingers on the table or use some other body language to signal to the speaker that you are not really interested.
4. While the person is speaking, think about what you are going to say in reply. It is not possible to be forming your own words and concentrating on the speaker’s at the same time—so the response you are planning is unlikely to be very useful.
5. Be judgmental and challenging. Ask questions that put your mentee on the spot, such as: “Why didn’t you do better on the job interview?”; “Why did you say that to him?”; or “How could you possibly think that?”
6. Interrupt the person who is talking or finish his or her sentences.

Special ways to kill a conversation on the telephone:

1. Be totally silent for minutes at a time while your mentee is talking. Fail to say, “I see” or “OK” or to ask any questions. That way, your mentee will wonder if you are even there.
2. Do something else while the conversation is taking place, such as work at your computer, read your email, do dishes, fold laundry or pay bills.

¹Kavanaugh, J. *Everyday Heroes: A Guidebook for Mentors*. Santa Fe, NM: Wise Men & Women Mentorship Program, “Los Sabios,” and Injury Prevention and Emergency Medical Services Bureau, Public Health Division, New Mexico Department of Health. 1998.

*Adapted from Jucovy, Linda. *Training New Mentors*. Public/Private Ventures and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. 2001. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/30_publication.pdf

3. Bad Conversations and Good Conversations

Materials Needed: “Bad Conversations and Good Conversations” handout (see below).

Goal: To help trainees think concretely about effective and ineffective communication skills.

This exercise can be done in conjunction with training on communication skills, after five or ten minutes of introductory discussion about specific communication skills, such as active listening, open questions and paraphrasing.

Step 1: Give each trainee a copy of this short handout.

GOOD AND BAD CONVERSATIONS

Someone I have **Bad Conversations** with is _____

The reasons why I have bad conversations with this person include:

- _____
- _____

Someone I have *Good Conversations* with is _____

The reasons why I have good conversations with this person include:

- _____
- _____

Continue your instructions by saying, “You will see there is a place to write someone’s name for both the bad and good conversations. If you wish, you can keep this person anonymous by writing down, for example, ‘a teacher that I had.’ In the bullet points underneath, write down why you have bad or good conversations with each individual. It could be, for example, that they do not let you finish your sentences. I will give you five minutes to fill this out, and then when we come back we will share out to the whole group.”

Another option for running this exercise is to break the group up into pairs, have each person interview his or her partner and then have each person share what he or she learned about his or her partner with the larger group. Also, if there are too many people in the training to give everyone a chance to share, then you could divide the larger group into smaller groups of four or five people. Instruct them to discuss these points with each other and then ask them to come to a consensus about what makes for bad and good conversations, so that they can later share those ideas with the larger group.

Step 2: After everyone reports to the whole group, the facilitator could point out that, in general, good communicators listen and focus on the person talking, whereas poor communicators appear to be somewhat self-centered, as the focus always comes back to them.

4. Realistic and Unrealistic Mentor Expectations

The initial training should include some discussion of realistic and unrealistic expectations, and it is a topic that you will likely return to during individual support sessions with mentors and during ongoing training sessions. Below are some examples of unrealistic and realistic expectations for mentors. Program staff can brainstorm additional examples based on their experiences with matches in your program.

Unrealistic

My mentee will attend each and every meeting, be on time for every session and fulfill his/her entire time commitment to the program and to the match.

Realistic

I do not know if my mentee will show up on time or fulfill his or her commitment to the program. Still, I pledge to show up on time for all meetings, and I pledge to keep my commitment. If my mentee drops out of the program, I will not personalize it by thinking that I am a failure. Instead, I will fulfill my personal mission of service to this at-risk population by trying to be matched with a new mentee.

Unrealistic

As a result of spending time with me, my mentee will make immediate changes in his or her behaviors. My mentee will stop using drugs, stop making other bad decisions and will maintain gainful employment.

Realistic

As I have no control over my mentee, I hope that he or she will make positive improvements; but even if not, I will continue offering my time and support. I understand that with ex-prisoners there are often setbacks, and that changes can come slowly. I also understand that mentoring is like planting seeds and that there is no set timeframe for when those seeds will come to fruition.

Unrealistic

My mentee will consistently thank me for my time and support.

Realistic

I realize that many ex-prisoner mentees do not have positive attitudes and that they may lack adequate social skills—so, my mentee may never thank me. This is okay, as I will not expect gratitude. Instead, I pledge to give mentoring as a gift.

5. Vignettes

Vignettes, or scenarios, are an excellent way to get trainees actively involved; and, as they work together to come up with creative responses, they will also experience a sense of accomplishment.

When creating vignettes, try to base them on real-life situations that have occurred within your program, but change the names and the details of those events to maintain confidentiality. Number the vignettes and print them; then, just prior to the exercise, hand them out to the trainees. It is helpful if they get copies of all the vignettes, even the ones that others are working on, so that they will be able to follow along during the larger group discussions.

To begin the exercise, break the whole group into smaller groups of four to six people. Then, assign each group one or two vignettes. Or, as an alternative, assign the same vignette to two groups, so that you can discuss the different approaches they devise to deal with the presented situations. Have the trainees read the vignette aloud within their smaller groups and then brainstorm what they would do if they encountered this situation. Also, request that someone from the group take notes, so that they can later report to the larger group.

Emphasize that there are rarely any absolute right or wrong answers when it comes to dealing with these and similar situations.

Sample vignettes:

1. Your mentee says she is trying to find work, and she tells you she has gone on six job interviews. The mentor coordinator tells you she has not been to any interviews. Q: What should you do?
2. Your mentee has made great strides in his life. Now employed, he is getting rave reviews from his boss. On top of that, he has also stopped all drug use, which was a huge problem for him. However, suddenly, he just disappears, and you cannot get in touch with him. You later find out that he is on drugs again and that he has lost his job. Q: How do you feel? What should you do?
3. Your mentee constantly sees only the negative in everything and everybody. He complains all the time, so much that he is hard to be around. Q: What might you do?
4. You are matched with your first mentee, and she meets with you once. Then you never see her again. The mentor coordinator matches you with another mentee; and, after two meetings, she stops showing up as well. Q: As a mentor, how might you feel? What should you do?
5. Your mentee cannot seem to solve the smallest of problems. Even though you have repeatedly talked him through several of his hurdles and he seems, during that time, to understand what he needs to do, he never takes the steps needed to change these situations. You are frustrated. Q: What do you do?
6. Your mentee is often late for your meetings together, usually by 20 to 30 minutes. He also does not show up for one out of about every four meetings. Q: What should you do?

As people share their responses, even if they are somewhat off-target, it is essential to try to find something positive in each answer. When facilitators are critical or non-supportive, trainees get embarrassed, and they also shut down. An effective strategy is to point out the best part of the individual's response, make a positive statement about it, and then ask the larger group, "And what else could be done in this situation?"

APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A. Additional information about Ready4Work

Farley, Chelsea and McClanahan, Wendy S. *Ready4Work In Brief: Update on Outcomes; Reentry May Be Critical for States, Cities.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. March 2007. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/216_publication.pdf

VanDeCarr, Paul. *Call to Action: How Programs in Three Cities Responded to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. March 2007. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/211_publication.pdf

Farley, Chelsea and Sandra Hackman. *Ready4Work In Brief.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. September 2006. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/205_publication.pdf.

Good, Joshua and Pamela Sherrid. *When the Gates Open: Ready4Work—A National Response to the Prisoner Reentry Crisis.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. October 2005. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/189_publication.pdf.

Jucovy, Linda. *Just Out: Early Lessons from the Ready4Work Prisoner Reentry Initiative.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. February 2006. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/198_publication.pdf

For other information, visit the Public/Private Ventures website at: http://www.ppv.org/ppv/community_faith/community_faith_initiatives.asp?section_id=3&initiative_id=2.

B. Internet resources for mentoring ideas and materials

While these resources were developed specifically for programs that mentor youth or use volunteers in a range of direct service activities, the principles and guidelines can, in many cases, be adapted and applied in programs that mentor adult ex-prisoners.

www.energizeinc.com

Energize, Inc.—an online bookstore and resource center for volunteer organizations. It includes a reference library of articles and excerpts that can be downloaded on topics such as recruiting and screening volunteers.

www.mentoring.org

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership—includes a variety of materials. For elements of effective practice, go to the site's page at http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php.

www.mentoring.ca.gov/best_practices.shtm

The California Governor's Mentoring Partnership—best practices for mentoring programs.

www.nwrel.org/mentoring

The National Mentoring Center at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory—includes information and publications.

www.nwrel.org/mentoring/nmc_pubs.php

The *Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual*—a downloadable document that includes templates for many forms your mentoring program may need to develop.

www.ppv.org/ppv/youth/youth_publications.asp?section_id=7

Public/Private Ventures—includes numerous reports on mentoring, and guides to effective mentoring practices.

Inclusion of these resources is for informational purposes only and does not represent an official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor of these entities, their products or services.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ “Serious and Violent Offender Re-Entry Initiative” website, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/re-entry/learn.php. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council: Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community*. The Council of State Governments. New York, 2004, xviii, <http://www.reentrypolicy.org/reentry/Introduction.aspx#1-note>.

ⁱⁱ The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that 46 percent of incarcerated individuals have a high school diploma or its equivalent. C. W. Harlow, *Education and Correctional Population*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2003), NCJ 195670. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher J. Mumola, *Substance Abuse and Treatment, State and Federal Prisoners, 1997*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC, 1999) NCJ 172871; C. W. Harlow, *Profile of Jail Inmates, 1996*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 1998), NCJ 164620. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*.

^{iv} Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin, *Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2002), NCJ 193427. Cited in *Report of the Re-entry Policy Council*.

^v Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons, June 2006, “Confronting Confinement.” (A Report of the Commission’s Findings and Recommendations) http://www.prisoncommission.org/pdfs/Confronting_Confinement.pdf. Cost calculations were made by the Bureau of Prisons and by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. <http://www.uscourts.gov/newsroom/prisoncost.html>.

^{vi} Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 5, 2006. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/pjim05.pdf>; and “Confronting Confinement.”

^{vii} Ready4Work also includes a juvenile component operating at six additional sites.

^{viii} See, for example, Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy Resch. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters*. 2000 (reissue of 1995 study). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures; and Cynthia L. Sipe. *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV’s Research: 1988-1995*. 1996. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. Both available at www.ppv.org.

^{ix} See McClanahan, Wendy. *P/PV Preview: Mentoring Ex-Prisoners in the Ready4Work Reentry Initiative*. March 2007. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. Available at www.ppv.org.

^x See S. B. Rossman and C. G. Roman. “Case-Managed Reentry and Employment: Lessons from the Opportunity to Succeed Program.” In *Justice Research and Policy*. 5(2), 2003, 75–100 ; and Debbie A. Mukamal. “Confronting the Employment Barriers of Criminal Records: Effective Legal and Practical Strategies.” In *Journal of Poverty Law and Policy*. January-February, 2000, 597-606.

^{xi} For discussions of research-based effective practices, see for example, Sipe, *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV’s Research*; and “Elements of Effective Practice” on the Mentor website at http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/design/elements_of_effective_practice.php.

^{xii} Organizations should understand and clearly communicate liability issues for mentors related to transporting participants in private vehicles.

^{xiii} Information is from Ready4Work mentor intake data from October 2003 through July 2007.

