



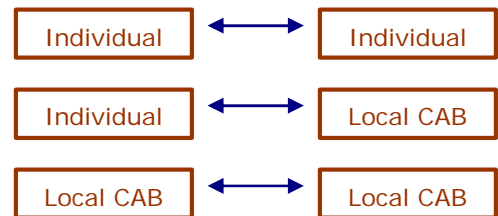
# Mentoring 101

## Introduction

As community members, most of what we learn about HIV/AIDS research doesn't happen in a classroom or training. We learn as we go, and more often than not, we learn from each other. Mentoring is a powerful tool to grow the number of informed and active community members in your local community advisory board, and perhaps one of the most important things we can do to strengthen our collective voice.

## Types of Local Mentoring Programs

**Traditional vs. Team Mentoring:** When most people think of mentoring, they think of traditional one-on-one relationships, but mentoring can also be done in teams. For example, a veteran Community Advisory Board (CAB) member in an established CAB, could mentor the co-chairs of a newly established CAB; or an existing CAB, could 'adopt' a newly formed CAB.



**Personal vs. Professional Mentoring:** Mentoring relationships can be more social in nature (assigning new CAB members a mentor to make sure they feel welcome and included), or more professional (preparing a CCG member to serve on a new particular committee or protocol team). It's important for mentor and mentee to define their relationship from the beginning.

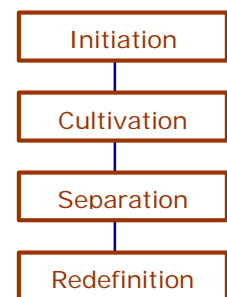
### Short Term vs. Long Term Mentoring:

Mentoring relationships can be for a short period of time. For example, you may have gone to a conference or scientific meeting where first-timers were assigned a 'buddy' for the duration of the event. Some mentoring relationships, however, may last years. While this is something that should be discussed at the beginning of the relationship, both parties should be aware of the (eventual) shift from a mentoring relationship to a colleague relationship, and be flexible when that time comes.

## Stages in a Mentoring Relationship

**Initiation:** The mentor and recipient become acquainted and informally discuss their common interests, shared values and goals. Occasionally matchmakers who assign mentors to recipients can foresee "mentor marriages made in heaven," but more often mentors and recipients prefer to choose one another. Taking time to become acquainted with one another's interests, values and goals seems to help mentoring relationships gain a better start than when such activity is given a low priority.

**Cultivation:** The mentor and recipient communicate initial expectations and agree upon some common procedures and expectations as a starting point. This includes:



- The frequency of contact, the availability and the accessibility of the mentor and recipient.
- The amount and kind of support that is needed by the recipient or that can be provided by the mentor.
- The various roles the mentor finds comfortable: listener, supporter, advisor, guide, counselor, role model, friend, nurturer or resource in the background. Many other roles might be identified.
- The range of roles the recipient will find natural: listener, observer, initiator of requests for help or guidance, need for nurture or autonomy, self-expectations as peer or co-equal. Many other roles might be communicated.

In the very few cases where there is a big difference between the needs and expectations of the two individuals--and where neither party can accommodate to the other--the pair is able to part company on a friendly basis before the actual mentoring and inevitable frustration begins.

**Separation:** Gradually, needs are fulfilled. Objectives are met. Professional growth takes place. New challenges are presented and achieved. This stage may last for months or years.

**Redefinition:** The mentor and recipient redefine their relationship as colleagues, peers, partners and/or friends. <sup>1</sup>

## Cultural Differences Between Mentor and Mentee

If you and your mentor or mentee are from different cultures, you have different traditions, customs, and practices. If you don't understand each other's culture, you have a greater likelihood of misunderstanding, miscommunicating, and potentially offending or hurting your mentoring partner. What stereotypes do you have of different cultures? What preconceived notions do you have of how people from different backgrounds behave? Holding on to old beliefs perhaps learned in childhood can be a block to truly understanding others.

*Solution:* Consciously clear your mind and keep it open. Notice where you tend to prejudge. Listen far more than you talk. Be open to learning from your mentoring partner, and find out as much as you can about his/her culture. Try to step into your mentor's or mentee's shoes and picture his/her life. Ask questions. When you're not sure of how to interpret something said, ask what it means. Read up on your partner's culture, attend a cultural event together, or read a book he/she read growing up.

## Remote Mentoring

If you can't find a mentor locally, look for one in another city, state/province, or even country. This kind of a relationship, called remote mentoring, can be extremely valuable, and yet it poses many challenges. The biggest problem is the inability to meet regularly face to face. You won't have the details of "being there." You could be in different time zones, which affects times for your phone meetings.

*Solutions:* If at all possible, meet in person in the early phase of your partnership. Having this meeting will bring greater commitment from both of you. With a face-to-face meeting as a foundation, your subsequent meetings by phone should run a lot more smoothly. Structure your phone meetings. Send documents in advance so you each can review the same information during your meeting. Take careful notes. Since you can't use visual facial clues and body language, ask plenty of questions, and summarize even more often than you would in face-to-face meetings.

## Tips for Mentors

1. **Don't jump at the chance to give your advice too early in the conversation.** Listen carefully and thoroughly understand the issues first. Diagnose the problem before you consider a prescription.
2. **Don't fall into the trap of being the "answer person" who has the golden piece of advice.** Let your mentees do some preliminary thinking on their own. Ask questions such as: *"What factors are important here?"*
3. **Try sharing your experience.** It may be more appropriate to share what's worked for you rather than telling your mentees what to do. Most of us learn well from stories. Then it's up to your mentees to determine what will work for them.
4. **Give advice when your mentees ask for and need it.** One of the most frustrating responses to the question, *"What do you think I should do?"* is *"What do you think you should do?"* It can feel manipulative to mentees. You appear to have an opinion but are withholding it.
5. **Provide direction and give advice when your mentees are stuck.** Go ahead and give specific advice if it's appropriate. Then ask: *"How do you think my advice would apply to your situation?"* The goal is for mentees to make the outcome their own. Your advice is meant only to get your mentees "unstuck." <sup>2</sup>

## Tips for Mentees

1. **Be proactive and seek feedback from your mentors.** Corrective feedback and advice can be a bitter pill to swallow, but it can also be very helpful. Your willingness to ask for and listen to feedback from your mentor can provide important opportunities for growth.
2. **Openly discuss the topic of feedback early in your mentoring partnership.** Encourage your mentor to give you feedback. Say that you value her/his perspective and want to hear an honest assessment of your performance. Mention the **form** in which you prefer to receive feedback. If you value directness and honesty, tell her/him that you would like to hear direct, frank, straightforward feedback. Or you might ask your mentor to be honest with criticism but also sensitive to your feelings. Say that you also want to hear what you're doing well.
3. **Be specific when asking for feedback.** Instead of asking, *"How am I doing?"* ask specific questions: *"Did that question I asked make sense?"* or *"Where can I learn more about this topic?"* This approach will encourage your mentor to be more specific and helpful in her/his feedback.
4. **Ask for suggestions on how you could improve.** Invite your mentor to suggest specific changes in what you say or do. You could even ask her/him to model or demonstrate the target behavior. Your mentor may also help you learn more about specific areas of HIV/AIDS research, or let you know where to go to learn more about topics you are interested in.
5. **Finally, receive feedback nondefensively.** Keep a neutral demeanor, and don't take the comments personally. Try to **triangulate the discussion**; that is, join with your mentor to look at the issue. Focus on your behavior or your performance, not on you as a person.

6. **Seriously consider all advice and suggestions.**

Accept advice and suggestions with an open mind, and be willing to try new things. Try new ideas as soon as you can, and share the results with your mentor. Knowing how things are going will make her/him better able to provide continued help. If you never follow through on suggestions, or if you forget to share the results of trying them, your mentor is likely to get frustrated, feel that she's/he's wasting time, and move on to a more receptive mentee.<sup>3</sup>

**For more information on Mentoring**

**The Mentoring Group**

13560 Mesa Drive, Grass Valley, CA 95949 (530) 268-1146

<http://www.mentoringgroup.com>

The Mentoring Group provides consulting/technical assistance, skill-based training, skill assessment, research/evaluation, and publications related to mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> Kram, K.E. (1983). Phases of the mentor relationship. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26, 608-625.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Tips for Mentors by Kathleen Barton, MBA, The Mentoring Group [www.mentoringgroup.com](http://www.mentoringgroup.com)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Tips for Mentees by Kathleen Barton, MBA, The Mentoring Group [www.mentoringgroup.com](http://www.mentoringgroup.com)