Maintaining Your Program

Once your youth mentoring program is designed, implemented, and up and running, you will need to determine how you will maintain both the quality and activities over time. You will need to consider program sustainability, staff development, evaluation, growth, and advocacy. In a nutshell, how will you keep your doors open and continue to provide high-quality programming?

**SIX SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPTS**

If your program design and implementation are sound—and if you follow the advice in the “Introduction and Setting the Stage” and “Program Planning and Design” sections—you should be on track to have a sustainable youth mentoring program.

Sustainability is about ensuring your program is stable over time. Many factors can affect a program’s sustainability:

1. Being able to provide high-quality services that adhere to your policies and procedures, as well as *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*
2. Having the flexibility to withstand unexpected challenges
3. Securing a variety of funding sources
4. Improving the program continuously
5. Developing and retaining a high-quality staff
6. Implementing a program evaluation and learning from the results

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION**

Staff members who recruit mentors, train participants, and make and monitor matches are crucial to your program’s success—and unqualified staff members and high turnover can put your program at risk. From the beginning, think about how you will:

1. Provide and pay for initial and ongoing staff training
2. Compensate paid staff members and/or recognize and support volunteer staff members
3. Respond to staff training needs when a challenge, trend, or new programming area requires additional knowledge or skills
4. Retain staff members by preventing burnout and ensuring they are appreciated for their important work

**PROGRAM EVALUATION**

If you have a mission statement, objectives, and a logic model or theory of change, you’re well on your way to developing program evaluation activities to help you measure the quality and efficacy of your services.

Three primary types of evaluation activities for youth mentoring programs are:

* Assessing service quality
* Assessing youth outcomes
* Assessing the application of best practices

**EVALUATION ACTIVITIES**

**Assessing service quality**

* Involves collecting feedback from program stakeholders regarding their experience in your program
* May include feedback from mentors, mentees, and families regarding the quality of your training, support, and overall program management

**Assessing youth outcomes**

* Involves using tools to capture attitudes, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs connected to mid- or long-term youth outcomes
	+ Often includes a measurement of the strength of mentor-mentee relationships
	+ Provides evidence of the consistency and duration of relationships
	+ Provides data (surveys, records, and observations) that demonstrate progress toward desired youth outcomes, such as improved peer relationships or self-management

**Assessing the application of best practices**

* Involves processes to demonstrate your program’s adherence to *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*

**ADVOCACY**

You or your designated program leader should be involved in advocacy work that promotes community awareness of youth mentoring, as well as adequate resources from public and private sources for the entire field.

Along those lines, program leaders should:

* Stay informed about trends, collaborative opportunities, legislation, and research
* Participate in advocacy campaigns at the local, state, regional, and national levels

Be sure to avoid conflicts of interest and follow all regulations that govern allowable advocacy activities.