



AACRAO

Mentorship Work Group Report



April 2023

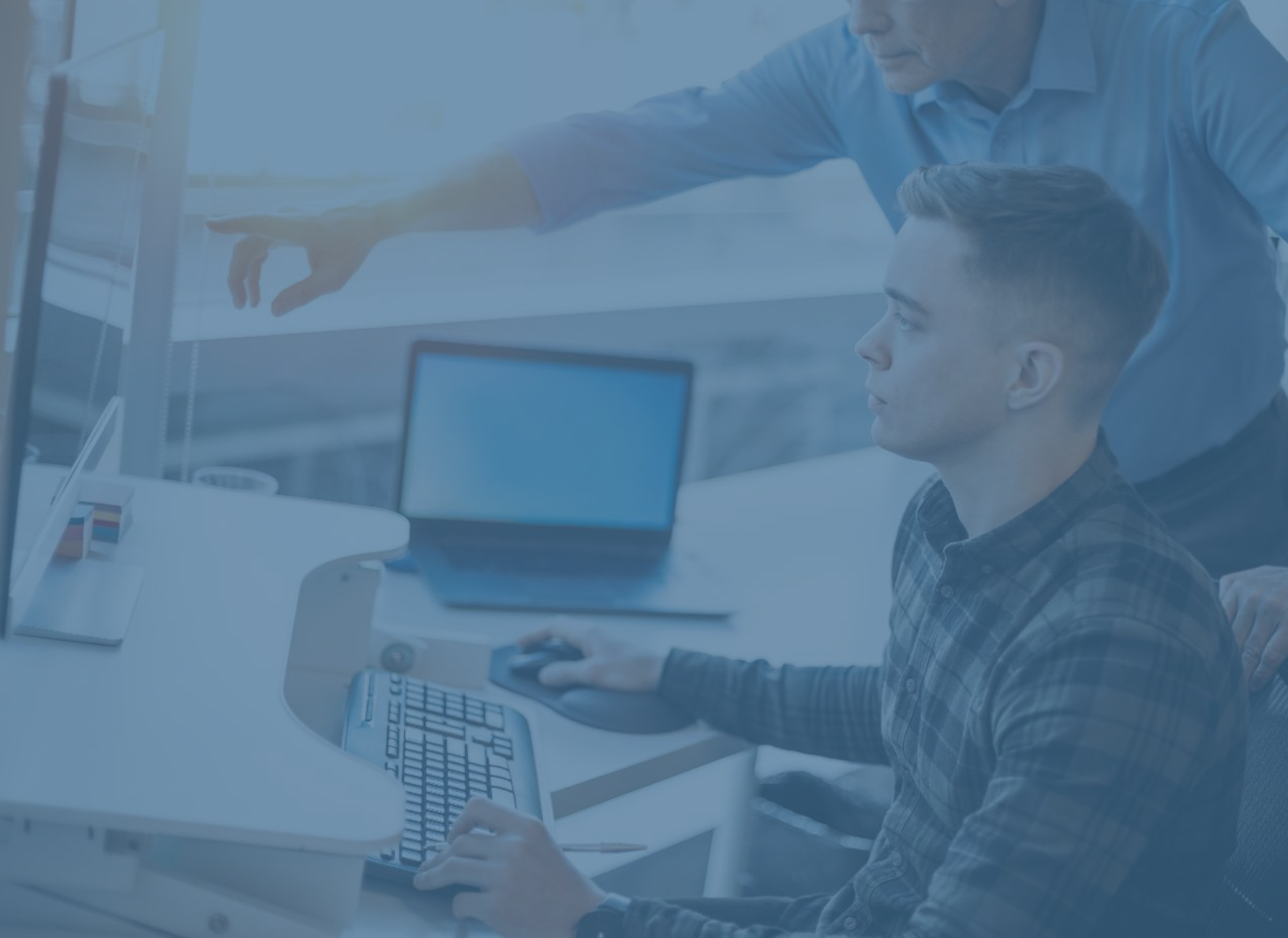
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About AACRAO

AACRAO is a non-profit, voluntary, professional association of more than 11,000 higher education professionals who represent approximately 2,600 institutions in more than 40 countries. Its mission is to provide professional development, guidelines, and voluntary standards to be used by higher education officials regarding the best practices in records management, admissions, enrollment management, administrative information technology, and student services. AACRAO represents institutions in every part of the higher education community, from large public institutions to small, private liberal arts colleges.



Overview

Purpose

Now is an essential time for AACRAO to provide guidance on the meaning and significance of mentorship in these three areas:

- 1 Succession planning:** Career Profile Surveys indicate that those in leadership roles in AACRAO professions plan to retire or change positions in the coming years in large numbers; mentoring plays a critical role in the development of future leaders in our professions.
- 2 Member engagement opportunities:** Recommendations are needed for AACRAO on best practices that could be implemented and considered in future mentor programming.
- 3 Professional development:** Individuals need resources to help them develop mentoring relationships and become excellent mentors and mentees.

Context

Recent AACRAO Career Profile Surveys indicated that leaders in AACRAO professions are approaching retirement or career changes. These surveys did not include questions on mentoring specifically, but many of the narratives submitted by members cited the importance of mentoring in their career trajectories. In addition, there have been conversations in recent AACRAO Leadership meetings and in the New Member Engagement Committee about the importance of mentoring in our professions.

Past AACRAO mentorship opportunities have not reached the level of engagement desired by the Association leadership and membership. In many respects, this was due to “forced pairings” or very short-term relationships, such as at a meeting or conference. Successful mentoring often occurs organically. Discovering best practices and identifying existing successful models will provide the foundation for the Association to make informed decisions for future mentoring opportunities for its members.

Charge

The charge of the Mentorship Work Group was to provide a definition of mentorship to the AACRAO community using:

- 1 Research:** Use existing literature in the field of mentoring to ground the report in established research.
- 2 Survey:** Identify what benefits members have seen from mentoring and being mentored, through a survey or other means to be determined by the workgroup.

- 3 Storytelling:** Collect and present member mentorship stories that demonstrate the impact of mentoring in our professions expanding on *Mentorship in Higher Education: Practical Advice and Leadership Theories* and connected to the research.
- 4 What works/what others do:** Gather details from other professional organizations who have developed programming or initiatives related to mentoring (within/outside of the profession and across institutions/organizations).
- 5 Suggested best practices:** Provide recommendations to the AACRAO membership and Board of Directors on how to be effective mentors/mentees in the AACRAO professions within the following contexts:
 - within AACRAO
 - within regional organizations
 - at conferences
 - at individual institutions
 - as personal development
- 6 Items Outside of Scope:** Acknowledging that the issues impacting the number of professionals in the field and that mentoring is only one piece of the career path, other risks, opportunities, or areas for exploration and development will likely be identified. Recognizing these may be outside of the scope of this Work Group, they will be cataloged for further exploration as part of the work product for review by the Board for further consideration and future opportunities to address.

Work Group Members

- Adrienne Bricker, EdD, *Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Policy, Connection, and Technology and University Registrar*, The Ohio State University (Co-Chair)
- Jennifer Love, *Assistant Vice Provost for Texas One Stop*, The University of Texas at Austin (Co-Chair)
- Lori Harris, *Director of Registration and Clinical Placement*, OSAS University of Maryland - Baltimore
- Laurie Huber, *Workforce Project Manager*, Workforce Intelligence Network
- Nicole Kragt, *Registrar*, Kalamazoo College
- Jennifer McClure, PhD, *Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services*, Howard Community College
- Sandra Mohr, *Interim Dean of Academic Affairs*, New England College of Optometry
- Julia Pomerenk, *Associate Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management and University Registrar*, University of Oregon
- Tiffani Robertson, *Associate Director, Enrollment Management*, Governors State University
- Justin Schilke, *Deputy Registrar*, Rice University
- Steve Seaworth, *Executive Director - INSTEP, Office of Global Programs and Studies*, Wake Forest University
- Frank Yanchak, *University Registrar*, Franklin University

Work Group Structure

The Work Group divided into four subgroups, oriented at assessing distinct areas of the mentorship landscape for colleagues in higher education. Each subgroup was led by a member of the Work Group, who directed activity for the subgroup. The assignments for the respective subgroups were as follows:

Research

Use existing literature in the field of mentoring to ground the report in established research.

- **Nicole Kragt, Kalamazoo College (Lead)**
- Adrienne Bricker, The Ohio State University
- Justin Schilke, Rice University

Survey

Identify what benefits members have seen from mentoring and being mentored through a survey or other means to be determined by the Work Group.

- **Tiffani Robertson, Governors State University (Lead)**
- Lori Harris, University of Maryland – Baltimore
- Jennifer Love, The University of Texas at San Antonio
- Nicole Kragt, Kalamazoo College
- Frank Yanchak, Franklin University

Storytelling

Collect and present member mentorship stories that demonstrate the impact of mentoring in our professions, expanding on *Mentorship in Higher Education: Practical Advice and Leadership Theories* and connected to the research.

- **Jennifer McClure, Howard Community College (Lead)**
- Jennifer Love, The University of Texas at San Antonio
- Julia Pomerenk, University of Oregon
- Tiffani Robertson, Governors State University


Review Existing Programs/Initiatives

Gather details from other professional organizations who have developed programming or initiatives related to mentoring (within/outside of the profession and across institutions/organizations).

- **Steve Seaworth, Wake Forest University (Lead)**
- Adrienne Bricker, The Ohio State University
- Laurie Huber, Workforce Intelligence Network
- Sandra Mohr, New England College of Optometry

Executive Summary

In service of the above charge, this report aims to present research and best practices for mentoring relationships that will be valuable to AACRAO members in any context, including but not limited to their workplace and within their state, regional, or national professional organization. The report opens by presenting basic definitions and helpful ideas on being successful as a mentor or mentee, as well as benefits that can be realized by individuals and organizations from successful mentoring. Qualitative and quantitative data collected by the Work Group are presented, as well as best practices that were learned about through researching other professional organizations and interviewing their members. The report culminates by pointing out key differences between informal mentoring relationships and formal mentoring programs, ultimately concluding and recommending that AACRAO would be best served by a formal mentoring program. Such a program could start small, collect feedback and learn from participants, and then scale to have a large impact on our organization.



Charge: Provide a definition of Mentorship to the AACRAO Community and develop guidance on mentoring relationships.

Introduction

In 2021, AACRAO established a Mentorship Work Group to investigate and develop guidance for AACRAO membership on mentoring relationships and to recommend best practices for mentors and mentees. Another charge of the Work Group was to make recommendations to AACRAO in order to structure and build capacity for mentoring among the membership. The overall goal set by members of the Work Group was to provide an outline for successful informal mentoring, detail great practices in the creation of formal mentoring programs, and challenge AACRAO to generate a successful mentoring program of its own. This Mentorship Work Group report will help establish a baseline for AACRAO members and help inform future work within the organization.

AACRAO members look to the organization for content, resources, and professional guidance. Mentorship provides critical support that is vital to growth and development of leaders in our field. AACRAO members have a wealth of knowledge to share and pass on to others within the organization. The organization could develop capacity for mentoring by providing information to support mentors and mentees in various contexts - such as in their organizations, in their state and regional organizations, or in any other setting where they may benefit from giving or receiving knowledge or support. Mentorship can only enhance the success of the organization by strengthening the pipeline of leadership for institutions and our professions.

Definitions and Meaning

Mentorship

Despite a long-term lack of a concise definition across disciplines, mentoring is traditionally defined as “a relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced protégé (or mentee) for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé’s career.” Such a relationship generally has five general components:

- 1** Focus on achievement.
- 2** Support in one or more of the following areas:
 - Emotional and psychological support. Mentors will encourage and provide acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship.
 - Assistance with career development. Mentors will advocate for their protégés within their organization or field and provide visibility to them with other organizational leaders; they will also protect protégés in difficult political situations and coach them through difficult tasks, and reduce unnecessary risks that might threaten the mentee’s reputation.
 - Role-modeling of behaviors of a leader in the industry.
- 3** Benefits for both the mentor and mentee.

- 4 Regular, personal, and direct interactions, which include sharing of information not generally available to the public.
- 5 Mentors who are significantly more experienced and influential have more achievements than their mentee within an organizational or environmental context.


Mentoring relationships are most successful and satisfying when the mentor and mentee have a shared set of goals and expectations for the relationship. This includes length and cadence of meetings, communication preferences, and what each person hopes to gain from the relationship, among other possible shared goals.

What is a Mentor?

In the context of a professional mentoring relationship, a mentor is a professional who acts as a confidant, advisor, and trusted colleague to one or more mentees. It is particularly important that a mentor be trustworthy and dependable; someone who has exceptional communication skills, empathy, and a willingness to be authentic and engage regularly with their mentee(s). Accordingly, a mentor's role goes well beyond someone who trains another person on the job; a mentor acts as a sounding board and challenges mentees to achieve their goals and overcomes challenges. Traditionally, mentors have been more experienced professionals or experts in a particular field or topic; however, in a so-called reverse mentoring relationship, it may actually be the more junior professional who helps a more experienced person understand a topic, issue, or skill.

What Makes a Successful Mentor?

A good mentor has experience in the field related to the mentee's work. A mentor does not need to have held the same position as their mentee, but should know enough about the role, organization, or the field of the mentee in order to provide valuable insights and knowledge. A good mentor is also friendly and credible. A mentor is willing to be vulnerable, intentional, and committed to sharing time and resources to the mentoring relationship. Committed mentors are confident and work to empower others, as



Mentoring relationships are most successful and satisfying when the mentor and mentee have a shared set of goals and expectations for the relationship.

well as bring forth a growth mindset for themselves and their mentees. Mentors recognize that learning flows both ways in the mentoring relationship. Lastly, mentors employ a variety of mentorship styles to meet the needs and goals of the relationship.

There are several strategies a mentor needs to employ in order to be successful. A key strategy mentors must use is to commit time for their mentees. Doing so signifies that the mentee is important and that the mentor cares about their success. Sharing time may mean checking in with mentees on a regular basis or it may mean being available on an as-needed basis.

Mentors also need to be clear about the relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Discussing the goals, roles, and responsibilities in the relationship will facilitate a positive mentorship experience for both the mentor and mentee. Clearly understanding the mentee's goals is essential to creating a beneficial experience. Mentors should not attempt to clone themselves in their mentees. Rather, they should help the mentee realize their own goals and help them establish a plan to meet those goals. Listening and asking questions is a skill that good mentors exhibit to help the mentee self-reflect and discover what they need to know.

Good mentors model key behaviors that are needed for the mentee to reach their goals. Supporting and encouraging the mentee are also essential behaviors. This includes celebrating successes and helping them parse through difficult situations. A good mentor will push their mentee to challenge themselves by engaging in activities that will strengthen areas for improvement. It is important for a mentor to be vulnerable and reflect upon learned successes and failures with the mentee. This provides a valuable perspective for the mentee and will help them grow.

What is a Mentee?

In a professional setting, a mentee is someone who desires to benefit from and commit to a relationship with a mentor. Often a mentee desires to learn from a mentor because they seek professional advancement in their career. A mentee shows commitment to the mentoring relationship by being proactive and responsive, but is also willing to be flexible and open to applying their new knowledge in a way that is authentic to them. While mentees have traditionally been more junior employees, this landscape is changing. As modern employment trends evolve, people are changing jobs and industries more frequently; individuals are discovering opportunities to be mentored later in their careers as a form of professional development.

What Makes a Successful Mentee?

Just as there are several skills and characteristics a mentor needs to be successful, a good mentee exhibits a particular set of qualities. A good mentee must have the motivation to succeed. Successful mentorship experiences are often driven by the mentee themselves. Reaching out with questions and asking to meet with their mentor are important activities successful mentees engage in. If the mentee does not have the motivation and commitment, these activities are less likely to happen.

Likewise, mentees need to be hard workers and have a positive attitude. Mentorship experiences often take place outside of the mentee's daily tasks. Thus, they need to be willing to put in the extra time and effort to make the experience valuable. As such, they also need good time management skills. Good mentees also need a positive attitude, which helps the relationship run more smoothly and provides a better experience for all parties involved. Moreover, optimistic individuals often outperform pessimistic individuals. Such individuals also take initiative to create positive change and see themselves as responsible for their own success.

A successful mentee also needs to bring forth a growth mindset to the partnership. Most mentorship experiences pair an individual with someone who has more experience in a role or area than the mentee. The mentee needs to be willing to respect the experience and be willing to learn from the mentor for the mentorship to be successful; they should be open to trying new things and experimenting with what they learn by making adjustments to how work is approached.

Furthermore, just as a good mentor must be able to listen well, so must a good mentee. Good communication skills are essential to the partnership and are of particular importance in a mentorship experience. If the mentee is unable to communicate expectations, needs, or conflict, the mentor is likely not going to know what the mentee needs to reach their goals.

Mentor and Mentee Benefits

Senior leaders in organizations and companies across the nation often indicate mentorship experiences significantly impact their overall success. The benefits of engaging in a mentorship relationship, for the mentor, mentee, and organization, are numerous.

Increased Job Performance and Satisfaction

Mentees who have participated in strong mentoring relationships outperform those who have not. Individuals with mentors provide more contributions to their field and enjoy higher salaries than their counterparts. Mentors experience a significant amount of personal satisfaction from the mentorship experience. Seeing how one can assist others in growing in skills and abilities is exceedingly fulfilling for good mentors. Overall, participating in a mentor relationship results in greater job performance.

Connection to Organizational Culture

By participating in a mentoring relationship, both mentor and mentee feel a stronger connection to the organization's culture and actively contribute to enhancing it. This allows mentees to acclimate to—and become contributing members of—the organization more quickly, as well. As a result, employee and organization retention improves, as well as their affinity with the organization. Mentorship programs also increase mentee networks and networking skills. Mentors enjoy introducing new employees or members to key colleagues who may assist in their work and skill development. This is particularly important for employees who work remotely, which is becoming more common in the post-COVID era.

A key benefit of a mentorship experience is the transfer of knowledge. The mentor can share experiences that mentees have not yet experienced, allowing them to learn from the mentor. This vicarious learning may help the mentee to avoid errors and teach them strategies to help them be more successful in their endeavors.

Develop Leadership Skills


Engaging in mentorship activities helps those involved develop leadership skills and gain further confidence in their own abilities. Being a successful mentor means being able to teach, motivate, and provide feedback to one's mentees. These skills are integral parts of leadership development in any field. Additionally, mentees will share positive feedback regarding their mentor, thus increasing the mentor's value to the organization and increasing the likelihood that others will come to them seeking input as well as the possibility of a new position and increased leadership opportunities within the organization.

Communication Skills

The mentorship experience also helps to improve communication and listening skills, as well as help those involved stay current with developments in the field. Whether formally or informally, mentors and mentees learn how to communicate and connect. By cultivating a relationship and navigating communication challenges in a safe environment, both executive and interpersonal learning can occur.

Organizational Benefits

Mentorship programs are not only beneficial to the mentee and mentor, but they are valuable to an organization that encourages, promotes, or requires participation in them. A clear benefit to an organization providing a mentorship experience is the existence of formal and informal professional development. Mentors are able to provide on-the-job training specific to organizational needs, something generalized training programs often lack. Mentorship programs also enhance and promote healthy organizational culture and minimize turnover. Successful mentorship programs help mentees feel more comfortable in the organization and increase the likelihood the mentee will embrace organizational goals and values.



“I think mentors/Coaches are important to pass on lessons learned to the younger professionals entering higher education. We all know higher education is a beast all on its own, and if I hadn't had a mentor many years ago, I do not think I would be where I am today.”
- Survey Participant Story

Providing a mentorship experience also enhances an organization's reputation. By investing in people in this way, organizations establish an interest in success. Commitments like these improve recruitment efforts and make the organization more desirable. As noted previously, mentorship programs also increase mentee affinity with the organization and improve the retention of valuable, contributing members. This increased affinity also helps to support diversity efforts within organizations. As a result, mentoring programs increase mentor commitment to the organization, thus assisting in the retention of qualified and experienced employees.

Diversity and Inclusion

Research shows that one of the most prominent reasons people begin to mentor others is because they had a positive experience with being mentored themselves. Mentors also tend to select mentees who remind them of themselves. When this occurs, there is significant risk of excluding talented individuals with diverse backgrounds from similar opportunities for mentorship and, thus, career advancement. Organizations should nurture developmental networks to support staff who are likely to fail to secure consistent mentoring support. This is because organizations and mentors alike tend to allocate attention, resources, and priority projects to those who are already on track for success. Unfortunately, this can mean that those who are successful receive resources and are enabled toward further success, while others are crowded out of resource allocation and cannot attempt similar contributions. This phenomenon is not typically intentional on the part of mentors, but should be top of mind to both mentors and those charged with assigning mentorship matches.

AACRAO Mentorship Benefits

There are clear benefits to informal and formal mentorship experiences for the overall AACRAO organization. As the needs of membership continue to change and the landscape of the organization evolves, mentorship should be a critical investment of AACRAO's time, energy, and resources. As succession planning becomes much more critical to the role of admissions officers and registrars across the country and the world, AACRAO plays a critical role in enhancing mentorship culture for the organization and the field.

It is important at this point to recognize what AACRAO currently does to support mentorship in the higher education field and within the organization. AACRAO supports a Mentorship Committee, presents the Outstanding Mentor Award at the Annual Meeting, and has frequent structured networking events that cultivate informal mentorship opportunities that bring membership together, both during and outside of annual meetings. These opportunities support inclusion in professional leadership opportunities.

AACRAO has established 11 Core Competencies that “consist of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for all AACRAO professionals irrespective of their role at their institutions.” The competencies were established to help formalize and organize around the essentials needed in our profession. The competencies recognized in this section are an essential reminder of what areas of opportunity exist in enhancing through mentorship relationships.

The Core Competencies are:

- Change management
- Collaborative decision-making
- Diversity and inclusion
- Holistic and systemic thinking
- Interpretation and application of institutional and external data
- Leadership and management
- Problem solving
- Professional integrity
- Communication
- Technological knowledge
- Professional development and contributions to the field

The 11 Core Competencies align with the goals and successes of the membership and the community AACRAO serves. By centering the competencies within a mentorship relationship within the organization, the membership learns and “lives” the competencies in both an informal and formal experience.

Current State

AACRAO Membership Survey Summary

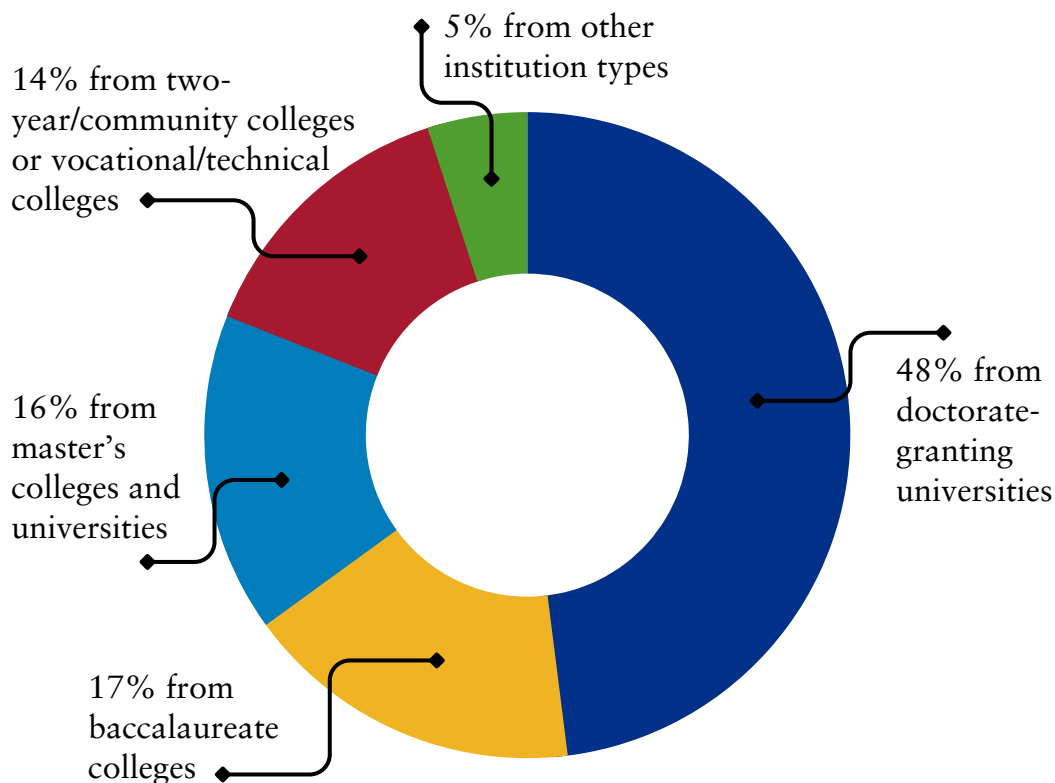
The Mentorship Work Group distributed a survey to the AACRAO membership in March 2021 to gain an understanding of the current membership’s sentiment and needs regarding mentorship. The results of that survey were used to shape the recommendations in this report. The survey requested demographic information from respondents, gauged interest in a mentorship program, and requested thoughts regarding past mentorship experiences. In June 2021, the Mentorship Work Group sent out a follow up request to respondents who agreed to share further information asking them to share their “story” regarding a positive mentorship experience. You will find these anonymous quotes throughout this Work Group report. Of the 276 individuals who completed the survey, 158 (57 percent) indicated they were completing it from the perspective of a mentor and 118 (43 percent) indicated they were completing as a mentee.¹

Summary of Respondents Demographics

The survey begins with institution demographic information to understand more about the respondents place of employment. When asked about their institution’s classification, over 58 percent are from public institutions, 36 percent from private, not-for-profit, just under five percent from private, proprietary, and less than one percent from other institution classifications. **Figure 1** shows the demographic information by respondent for type of University or College.

1. Percentages from the survey results have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Figure 1. Respondent Type Demographics



When it comes to institution size, the results were spread almost evenly with most respondents at institutions with over 20,000 enrolled students. Those in the 1,000-2,499, 2,500-4,999, and 5,000-9,999 enrollment ranges each resulted in about 15 percent. There were close to 10 percent of respondents in the under 1,000 institution size category.

The survey questions sought to further understand more about the respondent's roles at their institution. **Figure 2** shows the respondent roles based upon the membership of AACRAO.

The Work Group also wanted to further investigate how long respondents have been in their field, as this information benefits succession planning and further understanding a mentorship experience. **Figure 3** shows the length of time survey respondents have been in the field. It should be noted that this division may reflect that those with more experience tend to be AACRAO roster members, rather than a true indication of the typical tenure in our respective professions.

The survey questions then gathered from the respondents how long they have been in their current role. This question was intended to better understand the current landscape of movement and tenure. **Figure 4** shows the majority of survey respondents have been in their role for less than 10 years.

Figure 2. Respondent Roles

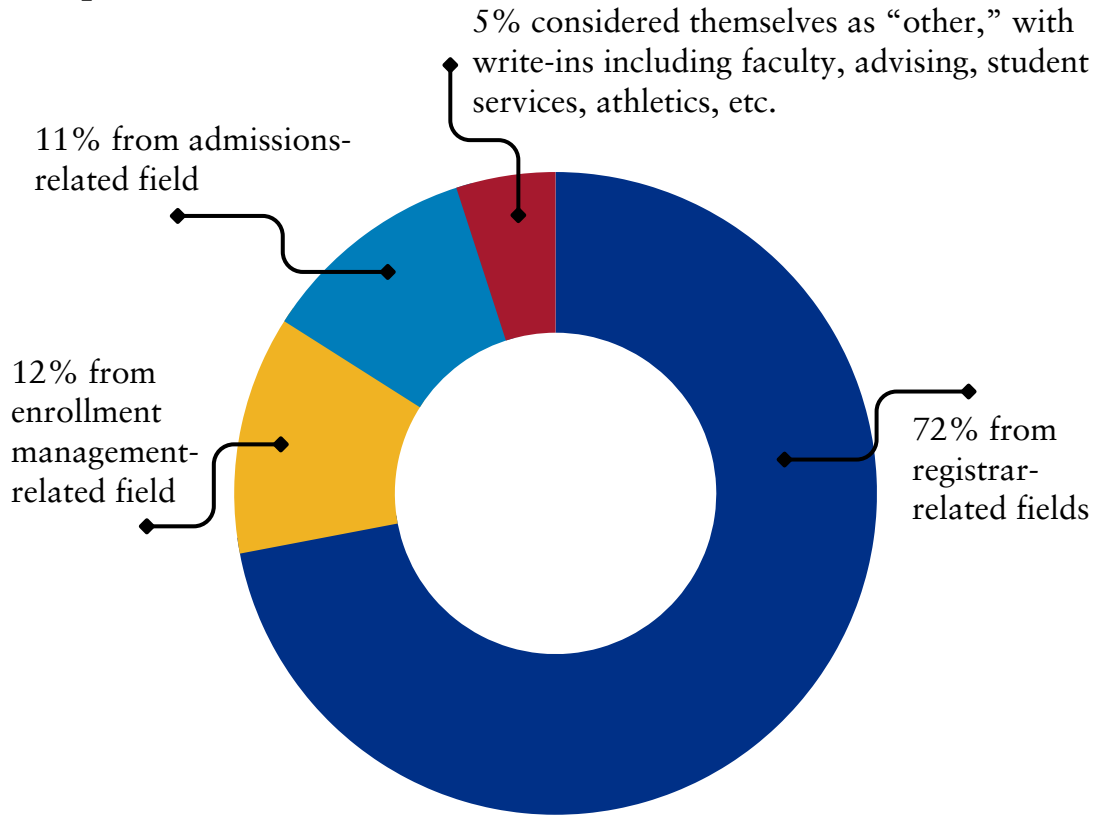


Figure 3. Respondents' Years of Experience in the Field

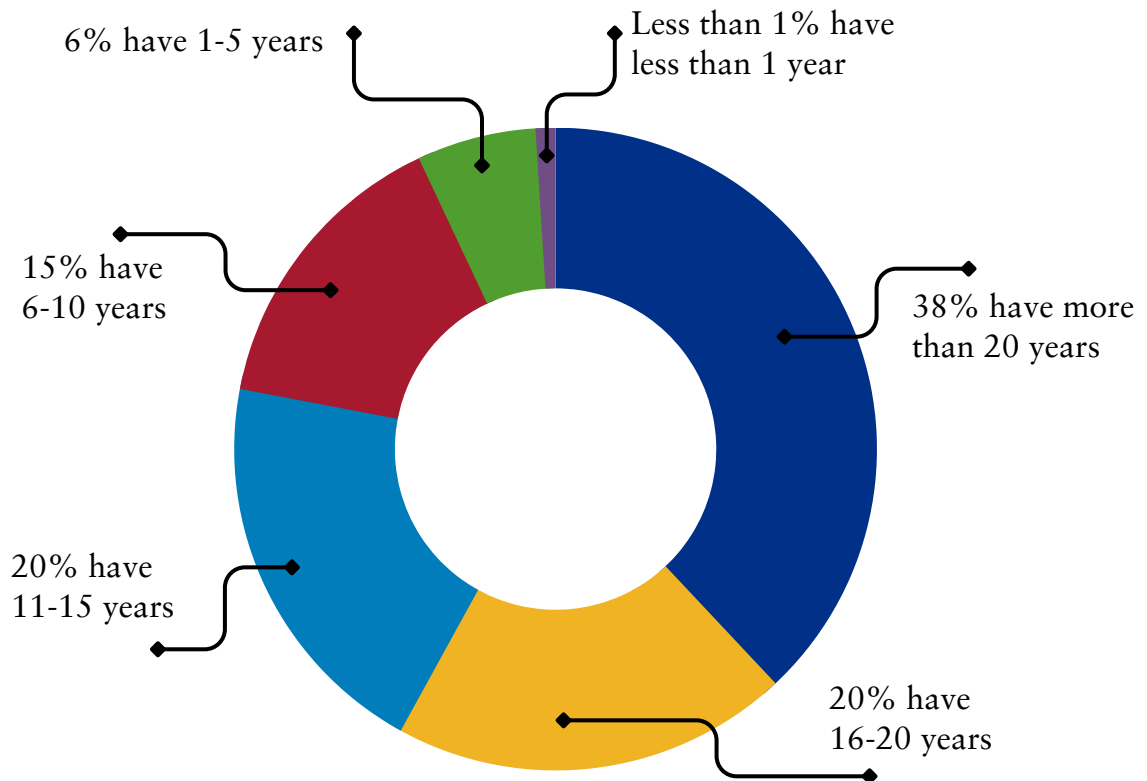
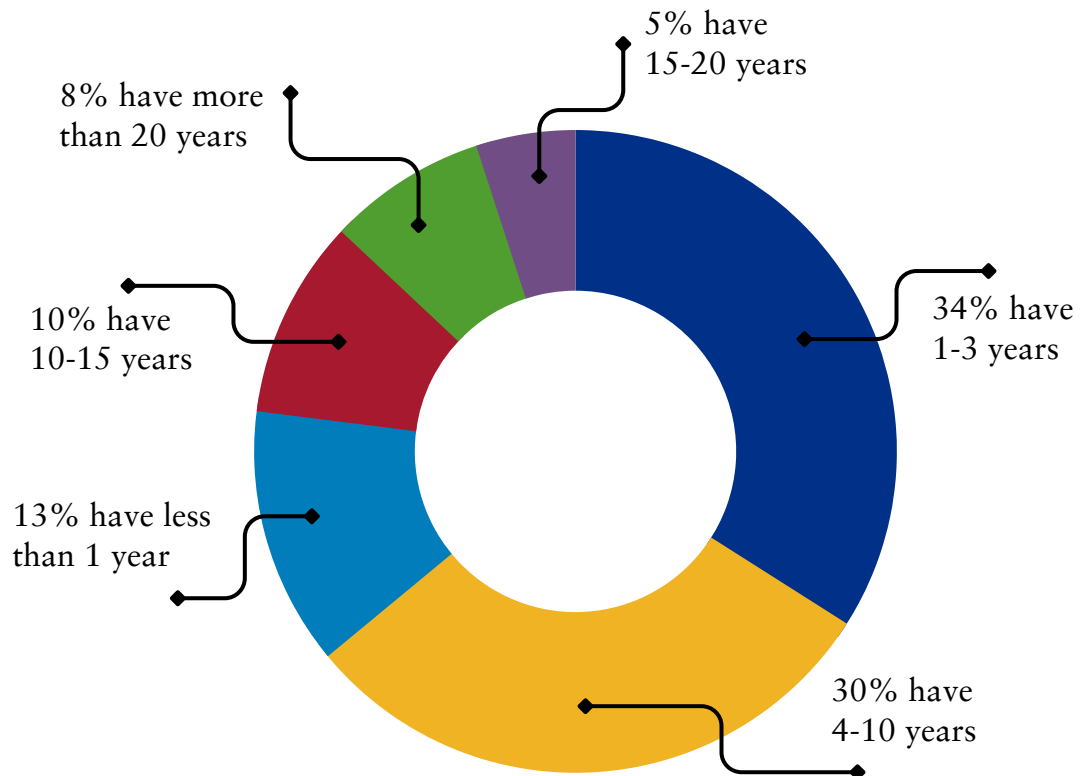


Figure 4. Respondents' Years in Current Role

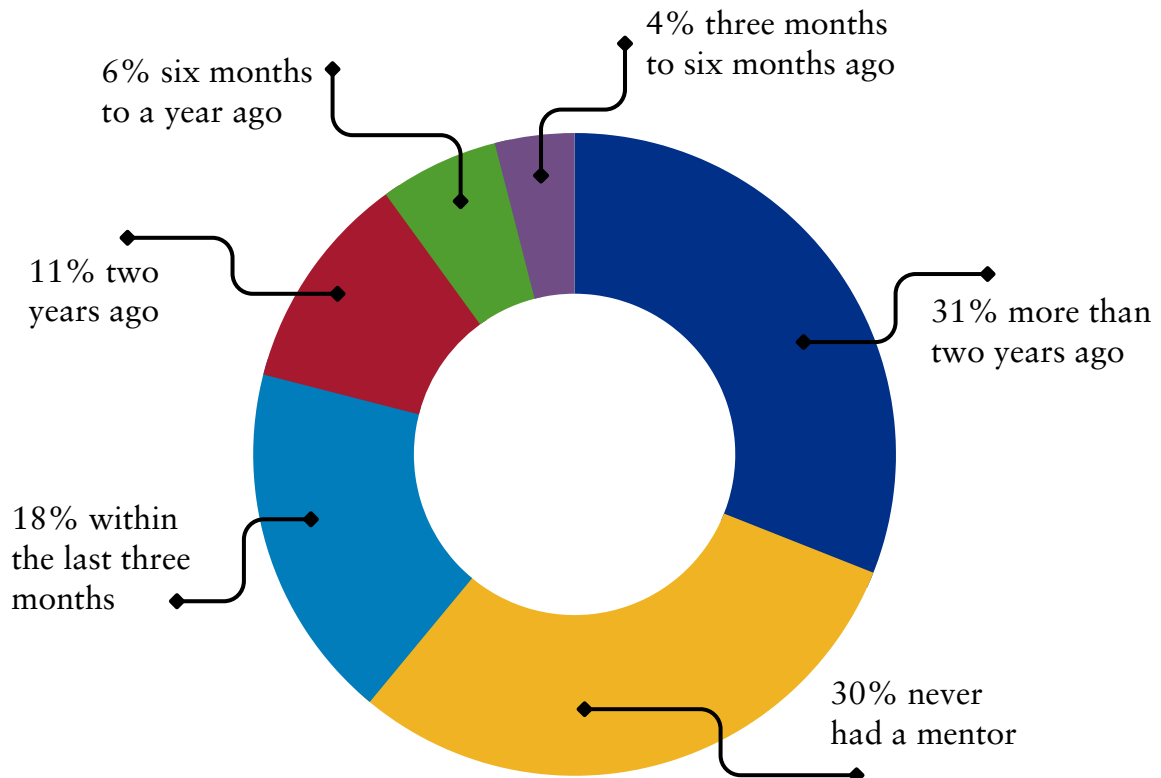


Summary Relating to Interest in Participating and Past Participation in Mentoring Programs

Respondents were asked to share their level of interest in participating in a mentoring program. Sixty percent indicated they were interested in participating in a mentoring program and another 29 percent were highly interested in doing so with only 11 percent indicating they were not interested in such a program or relationship. Preference for the structuring of the mentorship relationship showed favor for an informal or unstructured relationship with 65 percent of respondents selecting this option and 35 percent of respondents preferring a structured relationship.

As displayed in Figure 5, a significant number of respondents indicated they had never had a mentor (30 percent) or were part of a mentoring relationship more than two years ago (31 percent).

Figure 5. When did you last participate in a mentoring program or have a mentor/mentee relationship?



Summary Relating to the Delivery and Topics of Past Mentoring Programs

Respondents were asked which organization/entity delivered their most recent mentoring program or mentor/mentee relationship. At 12 percent and 11 percent respectively, their State or Regional ACRAO or AACRAO provided the program or relationship. Less than five percent of respondents said that NASPA, NAFSA, or NACAC affiliates provided the program or relationship. No respondents said that NACAC provided the program or relationship. Seventy-two percent of respondents said that their most recent mentoring program or mentor/mentee relationship was provided to them by an organization or entity outside of the ones listed on the survey.

Next, respondents were asked in what format their most recent mentor program or mentor/mentee relationship was delivered. Sixty-five percent were delivered in-person, 24 percent via webinar/conference call, just under two percent via an online course, and eight percent were delivered in another format.

When asked what the primary topic of the program or relationship was, 86 percent said professional development, five percent said personal development, and nine percent focused on other topics.



Summary of Preferences When Participating in a Mentoring Program

Respondents were asked to select all areas/skills they would want to gain when participating in a mentoring program or seeking a mentor. Based on the results, respondents wanted individuals with knowledge in the field, leadership and managing, knowledge about campus politics, and professional development support. An additional comment was to have a mentor who can help direct them when they have a particular question related to their role.

The rankings of areas respondents selected from most to least were:



- Knowledge in the field
- Professional Development
- Managing/Supervising Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Campus/Organizational Politics
- Change Management
- Tech Strategies
- Stress Management

Respondents were asked to rank what the most important to least important qualities were when seeking a mentor. The results here show that the most important quality is a personal coach, someone who is connected, has access to networks and is enthusiastic about the field. Members were less likely to care if mentors were inexperienced in the field or willing to share knowledge.

The rankings from most important to least important were:



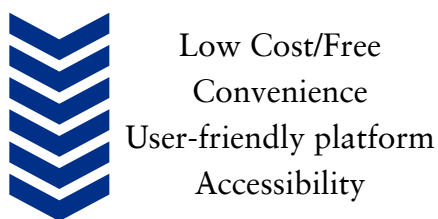
- Access to Networks
- Connectedness
- Personal Coaching
- Enthusiasm in the field
- Empathy
- Listening Skills
- Communication
- Availability
- Willingness to share knowledge
- Experience in the field

“Hoping AACRAO will pursue mentor programming, it's more important than ever.”
- Survey Participant Story

When asked what their preferred method of delivery was for a mentoring program, respondents largely wanted a blended (in-person and virtual) method of mentorship at close to 69 percent. Virtual delivery came in next with close to 23 percent. The remaining preferred in-person (eight percent) or other (less than one percent).

Respondents were then asked what is most important to them about the method of delivery. Low Cost/Free and Convenience were the most important when delivering a mentoring program. This is not a surprise as we know budgets have been and will be for a time in the future due to the pandemic.

Here are the rankings from most important to least important:



The survey closed by asking if there was anything else the respondents would like to share with the Work Group. Many comments were of individuals who have served as a mentor and would be willing to do so again. Some noted that while they were mentors to others, they would benefit from having a mentor as well.

Members were excited to see this topic and the opportunity to start this phase again in the organization. Individuals wished these types of programs had been out there when they started in the profession as they may have benefited from reaching out to those who have been in the profession for some time. Group mentoring was also recommended where a mentor meets with a few mentees at a given time. There is value in hearing from peers during a session. Many mid-level professionals feel stuck where they are and would benefit from talking to mentors not on campus to help navigate those feelings and also see a wider perspective on things from other institutions.

“Mid-management professionals often get stuck in this in-between land. We've proven we are accountable and productive but tend to be pigeonholed by our own success. Other campus leaders or potential employers only see that version of our skill set.”
- Survey Participant Story

Best Practices

The Work Group was charged to determine what mentorship best practices exist in organizations and workplaces across the country. The gathering of the best practices is intended to inform the recommendations of the working group to the membership and AACRAO leadership regarding further investment in mentorship programming. Below are themes of best practices that were gathered throughout the Work Group's research.



Create Inclusive Structure for the Program

- Expectations for partnership and program are clear from the beginning, boundary setting importance, time commitment.
- Build openness into the program, to avoid perceptions of a closed, selective system.
- Work with awareness and coordination with state and regional mentoring programs.
- Mentoring programs should be inclusive and accessible, creating an environment of belonging.
- Create a larger community of practice for mentors.
- Provide training or onboarding process for mentors and mentees in order to provide consistency of foundational experience.



Establish Each Mentor/Mentee Pairing

- Be specific about what benefits both parties expect from the mentoring relationship.
- Maintain confidentiality and gain permission before taking information outside the relationship.
- Should be beneficial for both the mentor and mentee: what do each hope to learn and gain from the partnership?
- Discuss topics beyond just registrar or admissions spaces, such as work life balance, furthering education, professional development, and support.



Enlist Committed Participants

- Ensure both parties are committed by clarifying the *why* of participation – ownership of the experience is necessary for success.
- Make intentional time for foundational conversations around goals and outcomes of experience.
- Make decisions early about time commitment expectations of organization and participants.



Support, Recognize, and Assess Success

- Ensure mentoring opportunities are offered across differences.
- Decrease bias by raising awareness of the fact that individuals are often attracted to similar people to themselves by establishing diverse partnerships.
- Have in mind some strategies to pivot and course correct. Check-in on what's working within the relationship and speak openly.
- Encourage conversations around what the partnerships look like to each participant.
- Discussions on what it looks like when the outcomes or goals are met, and the formal program may end.
- Provide exit interviews for those leaving the formal mentoring program, to inform continuous improvement.
- Establish rewards and recognitions for mentees and mentors that is recognized, documented, certified, or badged.

Creating a Mentorship Culture

Because informal mentoring is most common in our organization and profession, the Mentorship Work Group recommends AACRAO create a mentorship culture to set the stage for the future of AACRAO and its membership. AACRAO could be seen as *the* association to fill this need to build strengths for individual members (mentees and mentors), for our institutions, and for the association. Informal and formal mentoring relationships and programming are necessary for a successful longstanding organization and membership. Below are both informal and formal mentoring program best practices from research.

Informal Mentoring Phases

Informal mentoring relationships are common in the registrar profession, according to AACRAO research. Informal mentoring often has more psychosocial benefits than a formal mentor relationship. Such informal relationships, while organic, tend to still have distinct phases in the mentorship lifecycle, such as:

- **Initiation (six months to one year):** At the start of the relationship, the mentor and mentee begin interacting and getting to know one another.
- **Cultivation (two to five years):** During this phase, the positive expectations for the relationship are tested against reality. The psychosocial and career functions of mentoring reach their peak during this phase.
- **Separation:** Occurs when both mentor and mentee realize the mentoring relationship is no longer serving them. Structural and psychological separation occurs during this phase; mentors and mentees may experience feelings of anxiety or loss as the relationship becomes less prominent in their lives.
- **Redefinition:** Following separation, a friendship often results as mentors and mentees find themselves on more equal footing. Mentors and mentees begin to see each other as peers.

“Be sure to think ahead to how the relationship will end or how someone can gracefully exit if it’s not working out.”

- Survey Participant Story



How long each phase lasts depends on the individuals and environmental circumstances in and around the relationship. AACRAO can leverage the existing research above and create opportunities to cultivate and encourage information mentoring relationships, as there are many engagement opportunities as a membership to leverage.

Identifying an Informal Mentor or Mentee

Since informal mentor relationships do not involve outside entities “matching” a mentee with a mentor, a mentee will seek out a mentor (or vice versa). Such relationships do not typically begin with, “Will you be my mentor?” but rather have a base relationship already; asking such a question directly and upfront causes the relationship to be more transactional than relational. The relationship of the mentee and mentor may be inside the same organization/institution or outside of it. Some locations where an individual may find a mentor (or mentee) include but are certainly not limited to:

- Professional organizations (e.g., state, regional, and national professional groups)
- Other departments/units at the institution
- Civic clubs, service organizations, religious institutions
- Trade or hobby clubs

It is important that both individuals know that the relationship is centered around mentorship. Research has shown that those in an informal relationship that has mutually identified the relationship as a mentor/mentee relationship have higher satisfaction, although more research is needed in this area. During the time of mutual identification of the mentoring relationship, it is appropriate to set boundaries, similar to what exists in formal mentoring programs, such as frequency of meeting, areas of focus, goals, etc.

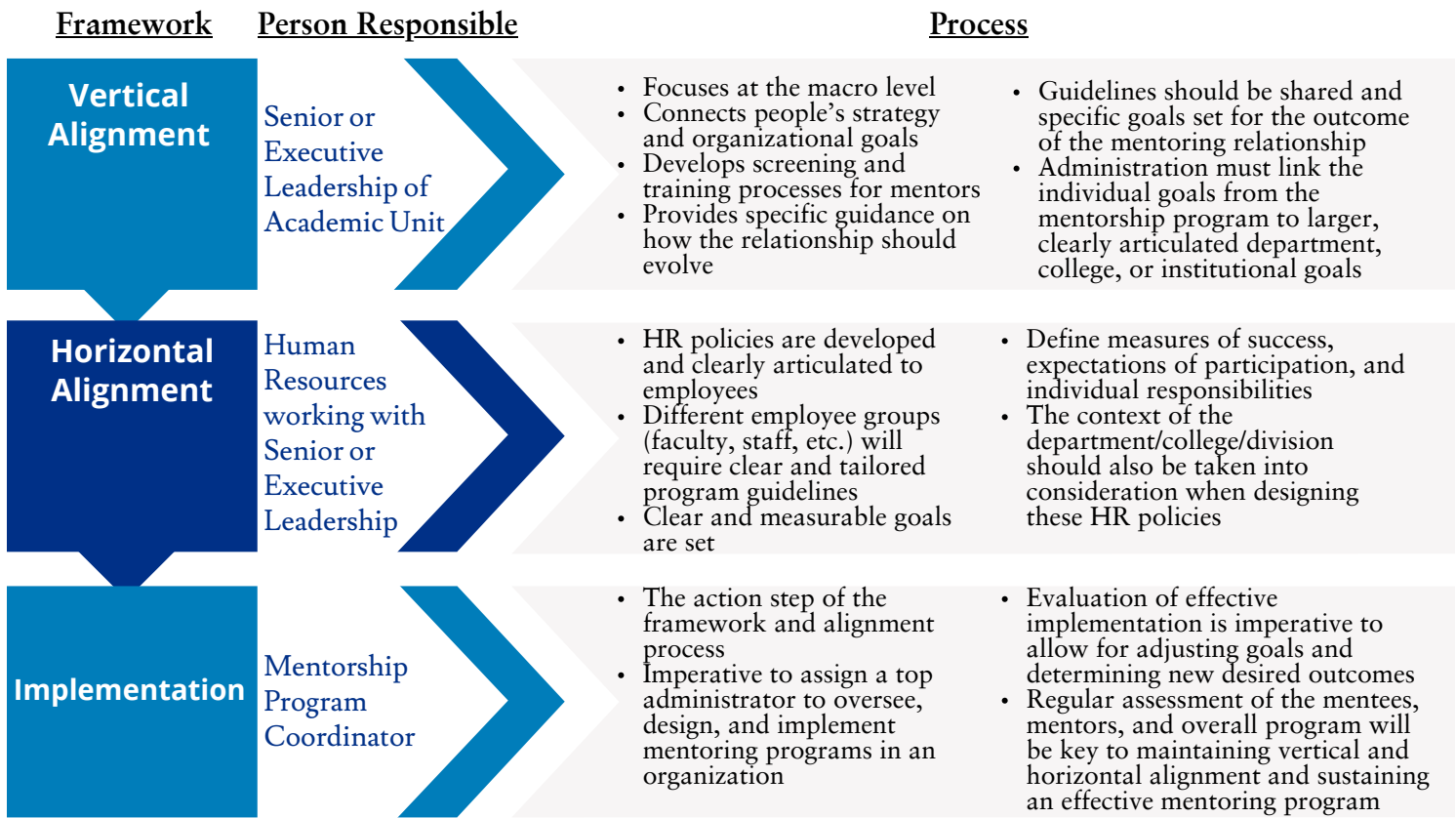
Formal Mentoring Programs

Best practices from research and other professional organizations center around the creation of formal mentorship opportunities and programming. It is plausible that a formal program could provide a gateway for a sustainable mentoring culture. However, formal program participants are more likely to report dissatisfying relationships and also be unwilling to terminate those relationships due to a possible negative perception. Moreover, such formal mentoring programs may create mentor/protégé pairings, but not all pairings will result in an actual formal mentoring relationship for various reasons. These issues should not dissuade institutions or organizations from developing a formal program, but rather, institutions/organizations should include regular feedback for the mentoring relationship to avoid stagnating growth.

Setting up a Formal Mentorship Program

Before starting a formal mentoring program, the organization should determine why a program is being set up and what are the program goals. Mentorship programs often fail due to unclear goals or outcomes (Orsini, Benge, & Carter, 2019). As the goals and outcomes are being identified, a multi-dimensional framework to support the development, implementation, and assessment of the program should also be created to create stability and long-term feasibility. **Figure 6** shows an example framework.

Figure 6. Multi-dimensional Mentorship Framework



Note. From Orsini, Bengue, & Carter (2019); adapted from Baker (2015).

The Work Group has evaluated the benefits of mentorship, assessed the landscape and need from the current membership for a mentorship culture, and has identified informal and formal mentorship best practices from research and other organizations. With this foundation of information, the AACRAO Mentorship Work Group has summarized the following recommendations to present to membership and board leadership to take the opportunity *now* to commit to and create a strong mentorship culture in AACRAO. The benefits of the commitment will be longstanding to the organization and the profession at large.



It is the Work Group’s recommendation that AACRAO create a financial and structural commitment to supporting mentorship throughout the organization.

Recommendations to the AACRAO Board

In reviewing the research and survey results, it is the Work Group's recommendation that AACRAO create a financial and structural commitment to supporting mentorship throughout the organization. This commitment can shape in many ways and should be shaped by members of the AACRAO community.

One example is the creation of a robust mentoring program that would be accessible to all members throughout the year. This could include both a formal mentorship program and informal structures to support those who are new or have limited experience in higher education or in their roles in admissions and the registrar's office. Research has clearly shown that such a commitment would be beneficial not only to the mentors and mentees involved, but also to the future of AACRAO and its leadership.


As noted previously, mentorship programs enhance the culture of the organization by bringing together diverse groups to share their experiences in a formalized way. A formal mentorship program will also help AACRAO members to become more acclimated to the organization while also helping them to adopt organizational goals and values as their own. It would also help to increase member affinity with the organization that may culminate in more active participation. Furthermore, a mentorship program would enhance AACRAO's reputation as a professional organization that is interested in member growth and promotes member success.

The specific recommendations and requested commitments are as follows:

- 1** Creation of a formal, sustainable program rooted in mentoring best practices as detailed in this report.
- 2** A dedicated AACRAO Staff member to support and create a formal mentorship program with necessary supports for participants and to help foster a mentorship culture within AACRAO.
- 3** Database organization/registration for mentor/mentee matches (tagging, keyword search for topics, experts, needs, transitions, Core Competencies, and Professional Proficiencies) by either creating space in current tools or leveraging third party technology.

Key Features of Mentorship Commitment:

- **Competencies and Proficiencies**
 - Alignment with AACRAO Competencies and Proficiencies in both the selection and program development process. Using the Competencies and Proficiencies as the foundation of the program will allow the accessibility needs to be met below, but also create meaningful professional relationships.
 - Embed a culture of mentorship in *all* activities we are doing in the organization.
 - Assessment of success of any efforts should be measured and evaluated for continued success or pivoting of resources.
- **Accessibility**
 - Must offer virtual opportunities for engagement.
 - Opportunities to create partnerships that leverage commonalities and differences in personal identities and professional needs.
 - Matches that go beyond commonalities of position and support networking beyond race, gender, and other visible and discriminated identities.
 - Mentorship across all phases of one's career and big life transitions.
- **State and Regional/Caucus Involvement**
 - Leverage the success of each state and or regional organization. Encourage involvement of state and/or regional members in AACRAO mentorship community to build opportunities of engagement with more potential members.
 - Build upon the amazing efforts of the AACRAO caucuses and create engagement opportunities within and for the caucuses.
 - Start small (perhaps pilot) and grow to build on successes and opportunities for improvement.



“I think this would be a great program. So many of the challenges we face (such as internal politics) either are not addressed in traditional professional development programs, or the strategies offered are vague and generic. Having a mechanism where members of AACRAO can discuss *real world* problems and strategies for solution would be fantastic!”
- Survey Participant Story

Conclusion

It is an exciting and challenging time to lead in higher education and with impending turnover in the AACRAO professions, there is a great opportunity for each of us to engage in mentoring in our respective organizational contexts. In this report, we have offered working definitions of mentorship and research-backed details on benefits and keys to successful mentoring relationships. AACRAO survey respondents show great commitment and enthusiasm for the field and for engaging in mentoring relationships as either a mentor or mentee. While both formal mentoring programs and organic, informal relationships can be beneficial, we suggest that AACRAO would benefit most from piloting, then scaling mentorship programming for employees at member institutions.



Appendix

Mentorship Survey

The following survey has been developed to identify the mentoring experiences and needs of AACRAO members. With the information gathered from the survey, AACRAO hopes to better understand its members' needs, and identify any gaps as it pertains to mentoring opportunities across the profession.

Based on the description of the following survey, please select whether you are completing this survey as a mentor or a mentee:

- Mentor
- Mentee

[BACKGROUND]

Q.1. Are you an AACRAO member?

- Yes
- No

Q.2. Type of Institution

- Associate's Colleges (two-year, community/county colleges, vocational/technical)
- Baccalaureate Colleges
- Master's Colleges and Universities
- Doctorate-granting Universities
- Other

Q.3. Institution Type

- Public
- Private, not-for-profit
- Private, proprietary
- Other

Q.4. Institution Size (Enrollment)

- Under 1,000
- 1,000 – 2,499
- 2,500 – 4,999
- 5,000 – 9,999
- 10,000 – 19,999
- 20,000 +

[PROFESSIONAL]

Q.5. What area is your primary role in?

- Admissions
- Enrollment Management
- International Admissions
- Registrar
- Recruitment
- Other _____

Q.6. How long have you been in your field?

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- More than 20 years

Q.7. How long have you been in your current role?

- Less than one year
- 1-3 years
- 4-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-20 years
- More than 20 years

Q.8. Do you manage or supervise staff?

- Yes
- No

[MENTORING EXPERIENCE]

Q.9. What is your interest in participating in a mentoring program?

- Highly Interested
- Interested
- Not Interested

Q.10. In a mentor-mentee relationship, do you prefer it to be:

- Structured
- Informal/Unstructured

Q.11. When did you last participate in a mentoring program or have a mentor/mentee relationship?

- Within the last 3 months
- 3 months - 6 months ago
- 6 months – 1 year ago
- Two years ago
- More than two years ago
- Never had a mentor

Q.12. Approximately how many mentoring programs have you participated in over the last five years?

- None
- 1 program
- 2 programs
- 3 or more programs

Q.13. Which organization/entity delivered your most recent mentoring program or mentor/mentee relationship?

- AACRAO
- State or Regional ACRAO
- NASPA
- NAFSA
- NACAC
- NACAC affiliate
- Other _____

Q.14. In what format was your most recent mentor program or mentor/mentee relationship delivered?

- In Person
- Online Course
- Webinar/Conference Call
- Other _____

Q.15. What is/was the primary topic(s) of this program or relationship? (Select all that apply.)

- Professional Development
- Personal Development
- Other topics: _____

[NEEDS & WANTS FOR MENTORING]

Q.16. When participating in mentoring programs or seeking a mentor, select all that you would want to gain:

- Knowledge in the field
- Leadership Skills
- Managing/supervising skills
- Tech Strategies
- Change Management
- Stress Management
- Campus/Organizational Politics
- Professional Development Support
- Other _____

Q.17. Please rank order what the most important to least important qualities to you with regard to a mentor, where 1 is the most important factor, and 10 is the least important.

- Experience in the field
- Availability
- Empathy
- Listening Skills
- Communication
- Willingness to share knowledge
- Personal Coaching
- Connectedness
- Access to networks
- Enthusiasm in field

Q.18. What is your preferred method of delivery for a mentoring program?

- In-Person
- Virtual
- Blended (in-person and virtual)
- Other _____

Q.19. What is most important to you about the method of delivery of a mentoring program?

- Convenience
- User-friendly platform
- Low cost/free
- Utilizes most current technology
- Accessibility
- Other _____

Q.20. What is the best way to notify you about new mentor program offerings?

- Email
- Website
- Facebook or other social media site
- Mail
- Digital Ads
- Professional publication Ads
- Other _____

Q.21. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Q22. If you are interested in providing more about your experience as a mentor or mentee, please complete this form and we will reach out to you!

[SUBMIT]

[THANK YOU SCREEN – END SURVEY]

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