

Offer Mentors to Service Members, Family Members Who Are Students

Overview

Mentoring can provide a support structure for those re-entering a community and will ensure that reintegration is swift and complete. Mentoring provides a way for a community to show that it is invested in the veteran's future and make it more likely that they will soon become contributing members of the community. Simply knowing that the community cares about their education can make a difference to the military community. Many will be first-generation college students from backgrounds that may not have prepared them for higher education or the campus community. By participating in a mentoring program, members of the military community can gain the social and cultural capital vital to success in higher education.

Properly mentored veterans will be more likely to move through the educational process and join the workforce at a much faster pace. As these protégés enter the workforce in a higher income bracket, they will generate additional tax revenue for their communities. They will also be in a position to do other traditionally middle-class or higher activities, such as purchasing a home, which also benefits the community.

Mentors can come from many groups, such as disabled veterans, members of Student Veterans of America (SVA), university faculty and staff members or other members of the military community. Mentors can also come from private sector groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Rotarians or other private groups/corporations or institutions.

Is it being done already? Look for peer-to-peer programs in your area that already exist. A simple Google search will usually determine if there are mentoring programs through other volunteer agencies in your area. The school might offer mentoring with its alumni association or career services center. American Corporate Partners teams with some of the nation's largest and most prestigious institutions and private firms to provide just this practice. If other programs exist, you could offer to help them or learn from their experience.

There are four basic steps in designing a mentoring program: 1) Program Design and Planning; 2) Recruit and Train Mentors; 3) Advertising the Program and Recruiting Protégés; and 4) Match the Participants.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Program Design and Planning

The very first step to designing a mentoring program for the military community is to make sure you have a veteran (or other member of the community) at the table when you are doing so. They will be invaluable in highlighting the differences between the military and civilian mindset, lifestyle and language. Next, identify the military population in your area. Contact the local college or university's VA liaison (sometimes called a certifying official) to find out how many

veterans are currently on campus. If this person is not available, another place to seek this number is the university's records office.

Both Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and SVA have produced checklists that will be useful in understanding the process of admission and receiving VA benefits while in school. Please see *Additional Resources* for links.

You may wish to replicate the success of other programs or develop your own program from scratch. If you would like an example of a mentoring project, go to the American Corporate Partners website. See *Additional Resources* for more information.

A good mentoring program should include the following:

- Defined scope and logistics for the mentoring project
- Criteria for matching participants (mentors to protégés)
- How long you expect the mentor relationship to last
- If your program is going to match students with PTSD/TBI or other physical or psychological injuries with mentors, your mentors may need additional information or training to familiarize themselves with these conditions
- System for matching participants addressing the participants' interests, proximity, availability, age, gender, ethnicity and personality type
- Methods by which a participant can terminate a relationship and how you will handle a relationship that isn't working for one or both participants

Develop job descriptions for the mentor positions you will need that include skill sets, preferred background and experiences, time commitments and to whom the volunteers will accountable.

Define what outputs you would like to achieve through mentoring and how you will measure them. For instance, would you like to see a greater number of veterans on campus, or a better retention rate across semesters? How about a better transition for university graduates into the workforce?

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Program manager

Task: Develop the mentoring program; manage records, accounts; act as program historian; develop survey

Attributes: Detail-oriented

Who: Retired teacher or career counselor

Hours: 10 per week

Step 2: Recruit and Train Mentors

Mentors can come from veterans service organizations (VSOs), including IAVA, as well as the Chamber of Commerce and the members of the American Corporate Partners.

You will need to gather your mentors together to provide training and discuss such things as the scope of the program, program rules, expectations, obligations, roles of the mentor, ethical issues in the mentor/protégé relationship and resources available to the mentors. Training should ensure that mentors are prepared to handle "rejection" by the protégé and closure of the relationship.

The motivation behind a mentor's participation can have a profound impact on the success of the program. Consider incorporating question in the interview which explore that motivation including:

- The potential mentor's qualifications
- The potential mentor's goals for participation
- Background with the military

You will likely need a document for prospective mentors to sign that clearly defines the roles, obligations, time commitments, etc. required of a mentor. This will help ensure accountability within the program. Your organization may also consider including a background check in the volunteer process. Whenever possible, urge those protégés who have successfully integrated or graduated from your program to become mentors themselves.

Training could also include a visit from an expert on the military community in your area, perhaps the leader of the local Family Readiness Group (FRG) on base, or someone who is familiar with the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Perhaps a few volunteers could attend one of these courses or a FRG meeting as an observer.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Mentor trainer

Task: Develop a module to address the scope of the mentor program, the essentials of mentoring, partnership building, time requirements and covering the different types of mentors: advisor coach, teacher, motivator and sponsor

Attributes: Good communication skills, experience mentoring

Who: Academic advisor, businessman, college financial aid officer

Hours: Five per week

Step 3: Advertise the Program and Recruit Protégés

Mentor programs typically seek those who they are looking to assist. As many who attend colleges and universities are on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc., consider developing a presence on these sites. Additional places to publicize would be in the school's newspaper or radio station. Approach the school's public relations office about posting information on their website and social media sites.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Marketing and communications specialist

Task: Acts as a point of contact, receiving protégés into the program; performs outreach to the veteran population; explains the program to prospective participants

Attributes: Tech-savvy, outgoing, detail-oriented, work a flexible schedule

Who: Retired salesman, businessman, marketing student

Hours: Four per week

Step 4: Match the Participants

You will need to provide your mentors and protégées with some training prior to initiating their relationship. Find short mentoring programs like the one made available by **Hire Heroes USA**, which includes the different roles that a mentor can take on and a suggested scope of the mentor-protégé relationship.

Measures of Success

Key Success Factors for Mentoring

Establish your key success factors for mentoring so that you can measure any progress you make. These can include: number of veterans attending local schools, veteran retention rates at local schools, graduation rates, survey results of participants in the program, mentor retention rates, etc. Tracking the results of your efforts provides an organizational memory that can be far more accurate and complete than that of any single individual. The ability to track the change created by the community's efforts will motivate volunteers and workers. This data will highlight potential improvements for future events and help identify best practices that can be shared across communities. The best method for tracking the success of volunteer efforts is often the survey. See *Surveying Guideline Tool* (Tool 5.2) for more information. The survey should also track softer measures like "satisfaction."

How well you are matching your pairs? A well-matched pair should be enjoyable to both mentor and protégé, with the protégé feeling supported in their educational goals and willing to recommend the program to others, while the well-managed mentor should continue to mentor others.

Track retention rates and numbers of students. Students attending the universities can tell you a lot about whether or not a mentoring program is working properly because of their classroom interaction with the service members.

Protégé retention. Another hard number is the number of protégés who go on to be mentors in the program. Those who experience the success of your program and strive to provide the same experience to others are a clear indicator of success.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Pre-mentor survey:** In order to measure the success of an effort, one must first know the baseline situation. Conducting a survey prior to the community's efforts will provide a much stronger background for analysis later.
- **Post-mentoring survey:** The pre-campaign survey must be preserved and included in the post-campaign survey. Include additional questions in order to assess the successes and failures of the effort. What worked? What didn't? Such information will prove invaluable.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Surveyor

Task: Conduct pre- and post-campaign surveys in-person, on the telephone, over email and through whatever other medium might be necessary; compile survey results; prepare an overall presentation of the acquired data

Attributes: Familiar with statistical analysis

Who: A member of the university's office of budgeting and planning or records office would be an excellent candidate

Hours: 20 over one month period

Surveys are not the only method of measuring success:

- Interviews of volunteers and participants at events allow you to ask more in-depth questions, and can build relationships with participants and volunteer
- Focus groups can provide qualitative data about your efforts and participants could have their memories jogged by listening to others; focus groups also create common terms for shared experiences and build organizational relationships with participants (*esprit de corps*)
- A review of the participation or documentation can tell you how many volunteers or organizations participated each year, the demographic of the participants. etc.; this information is has the advantage of being quantifiable, but is restricted to the types of information actively gathered and provides little depth

Additional Resources

- **American Corporate Partners:** http://www.acp-usa.org/ACP_COMMUNITY/Mentoring_Tips
 - This group's website has a wealth of information for would-be mentors, protégés and those who support them
- **Hire Heroes USA:** <http://www.hireheroesusa.org/>
 - Hire Heroes has a mentoring handbook that can serve as an example for your community
- **Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA):** <http://iava.org/>
 - The GI Bill and VA services change over time; this veterans service organization is an excellent place to stay up-to-date on any changes that might affect the protégés – it also provides useful tips for properly using the benefits that service members have earned
- **Student Veterans of America (SVA):**
http://www.studentveterans.org/resourcelibrary/documents/Combat_to_College_Guide.pdf
 - This checklist is comprehensive and organized chronologically – it is an excellent tool for that veteran just starting his college career