Formalized Staff Mentorship Program

Practice Overview

Practice Name	Staff Mentorship Program
Description	Recurring six-month mentoring opportunity for staff with specific professional development goals.
Participants	All staff are eligible to participate as mentors or mentees with about 200 people participating per cohort.
Frequency	New pairs are established every six months. Mentees are responsible for determining meeting frequency with mentor.
Modality	Virtual and in-person.
Resources	Staff time, no financial resources required, technology for messaging matched pairs recommended.

Introduction

In response to staff engagement survey results that indicated only a small number of staff members received formal mentoring, Sunny Debelak, MBA, campus administrator at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) Green Bay Campus, Jennifer Brown, director of clinical research operations quality in the Office of Research, Jessica De Santis, PhD, assistant professor of anesthesiology and education specialist, Tracy Stasinopoulos, program manager for general surgery residency, and others developed a formal staff mentorship program as part of MCW Leadership Academy. After a successful pilot of the program in 2022, it was formally launched schoolwide in 2023.

The Staff Mentorship Program serves as a formal resource for staff mentoring to facilitate thoughtful connections among staff members and to support a culture of engagement and professional development across MCW.

Goals and Objectives

To design the Staff Mentorship Program, the project team analyzed the level of interest and current mentorship practices of MCW staff using an in-house, 20-question needs assessment survey. Data collected included staff demographics, current and previous mentorship experiences, barriers to securing mentorship, and top skills and areas of interest for professional development. Based on the needs assessment, the following program goals and objectives were identified.

The Staff Mentorship Program aims to:

- Build a network of experienced staff engaged in MCW's institution and missions.
- Provide staff opportunities to learn about and develop their potential for serving all institutional missions.

- Facilitate an environment for learning and support for staff.
- Impact staff knowledge and skills to grow their psychosocial and career development.
- Develop communication strategies between staff and their leaders around career expectations to continue satisfaction of high functioning and/or highly engaged staff.

Through their participation, mentees:

- Identify steps to develop partnerships and interdepartmental relationships for cross-collaborative work.
- Recognize and apply psychosocial and career development factors.
- Foster connections between mentors/mentees and MCW leaders.
- Facilitate intrinsic personal development rather than being project-specific in career growth.

Promising Practice Overview

To date, the program is run on a six-month cycle, beginning with a call for mentors and mentees to apply. As the name suggests, only staff are eligible to participate as mentees; however, both faculty and staff may serve in a mentor capacity. Staff are eligible to participate in the program multiple times. The program team communicates opportunities through their institution's intranet, meetings, and information sessions and through organization-wide emails.

Upon receiving the applications, the team manually matches mentors to mentees with similar interests and areas of improvement. Additionally, the team makes sure that the mentor-mentee pairs are not within the same department to allow networking across the organization. The team uses REDCap, an online data management platform, to support the application process, track member pairings, and automate the notifications to the paired individuals.

Alongside orientation training, participants are provided with a manual that clearly outlines the expectations for mentors and mentees. The program manual also provides necessary materials such as a self-competency assessment, program evaluation, and a learning model that breaks down the program to five core areas:

1. Emotional growth and trust.
2. Interpersonal development.
3. General skill development.
4. Institutional knowledge.
5. Professional growth.

Mentees are responsible for completing self-assessments, setting goals, scheduling meetings, and initiating conversations with their mentors.

The six-month duration is intended to allow flexibility and maximized learning among pairs. The program is primarily virtual to allow for maximum engagement for staff on different campuses, but mentoring partners have the option to meet in-person if they choose. The program also offers several virtual and one in-person networking sessions to help participants build their networks across the organization. Program participants are encouraged to bring a friend to these sessions to help advertise the program.

Results and Impact

After two years, the Staff Mentorship Program has engaged approximately 800 staff members. The program has been evaluated using a pretest/posttest assessment that asks participants a series of five-

point Likert scale questions designed to assess the five core program areas. In the pilot program, there were significant increases across all areas, with an average increase of 30% after the six-month period. The largest increases were in the areas of general skill development, institutional knowledge, and professional growth.

Anecdotally, the team has received extremely positive feedback and gratitude from participants.

"For example, [data] showed a marked increase in positive comments [in program evaluations] from our mentees, including some people who even mentioned they were considering leaving the institution until participating in this program," said De Santis.

Resources Needed

The MCW Staff Mentorship Program requires few resources beyond staff time, particularly in program communications, processing applications, and pairing mentors with mentees. Although the program is supported by human resources, program operations are largely maintained by staff who volunteer their time to sustain the program.

While the team emphasized that the manual labor involved in matching mentors with mentees was one of the more gratifying aspects of the program administration, they did appreciate utilizing technology (i.e., REDCap) to automate notifications and program messaging throughout the six-month cohort cycles.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Developing a sustainable mentorship program meant building upon feedback from each cohort and creating clarity for prospective participants. The MCW team highlighted some lessons that could be helpful for any institution creating a similar program:

- **Send a clear message**. Effective communication channels and robust support from the school were crucial in reaching the 5,500 staff members at MCW, significantly contributing to the program's success.
- **Follow the data.** The team also believes that conducting a needs assessment and continuously gathering feedback were key to the program's achievements to date.
- **Set expectations**. Clearly defining mentorship roles and responsibilities to effectively manage expectations helped to establish more productive mentor/mentee interactions.

"By establishing clear expectations, such as the requirement for mentees to engage actively and bring their questions, participants better understand what they can achieve by putting in the effort," Brown said.

Moving Forward

In the future, the mentorship team at MCW plans to explore affinity groups within the mentorship program to gather individuals who have common interest areas identified through the application process.

Acknowledgements

This case study is based on a July 30, 2024, interview with Sunny Debelak, MBA, campus administrator and Staff Mentorship Program chair, Jennifer Brown, director of clinical research operations quality in the Office of Research, Jessica De Santis, PhD, assistant professor of anesthesiology and education specialist, Charlotte Running, human resources liaison at MCW.

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Medical School Statistics

Name of Institution	Medical College of Wisconsin
Location	Milwaukee, Wisconsin

School Size as of 2023:
  Number of medical students
  Number of full-time faculty
  Number of staff
	
	1,075[1][*]
	1,467[2]
	4,797[3]

Public/Private	Public

*Enrollment includes the number of students in medical school, including students on a leave of absence, on Oct. 31 of each year shown. Enrollment does not include students with graduated, dismissed, withdrawn, deceased, never enrolled, completed fifth pathway, did not complete fifth pathway, or degree revoked statuses.

[1]Source: AAMC. Student Record System. 2003. https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/students-residents/report/student-records-system-srs

[2]Source: AAMC. Faculty Roster: U.S. Medical School Faculty, 2023; https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/faculty-institutions/report/faculty-roster-us-medical-school-faculty. Accessed Sept. 13, 2024.

[3] Source: Debelak S. email communication; Oct. 8, 2024.

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