



YOUTH MENTORING NETWORK

Fostering the growth and development of high quality youth mentoring

Melbourne Mentoring Forum

May 24th 2007

Held in Conjunction with:



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Melbourne Mentoring Forum

National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks, Consultation
Queen Victoria Women's Centre, Thursday 24th May, 2007

1. Purpose of consultation

2. Issues from the forum discussion

- Role of Benchmarks
- Operation of Benchmarks
- Pre-program planning
- Training
- Structure
- Implementation

3. Key issues from the workshop session

- Program design and planning
- Evaluation
- Operational governance and management
- Operations
- Recruitment
- Selection and Screening
- Training and development
- Matching
- Monitoring and Supporting

1. Purpose of consultation

The purpose of this forum was to gain feedback from the mentoring community on the new benchmarks (BM). The goal was to ascertain whether the new benchmarks were practical and applicable in the field and whether there were any gaps. The questions that were asked of the forum were:

- What incentives were there to adhere to the BMs?
- What recognition would there be for programs that adhered to the BMs?
- What controls were there around programs that do not adhere?
- Were the BMs too lenient?
- What relationship exists between the Victorian Office for Youth best practice guidelines?
- How and who will review the BMs?
- What participation would there be from the field?

Two issues that were raised during the making of the BM and also during the forum concerned the appropriate length of a quality mentoring relationship and what constituted a mentoring program.

2. Issues from the forum discussion:

The main issues from the forum discussion are summarised as follows:

- a. To promote and present the BMs as being accessible, flexible and inclusive to all programs. There is need for some reworking of the assumptions and context for BMs.

- b. Accredited training for mentors. Is there scope or need to formalise mentor training or 'train the trainer' programs to assure quality. Is this a BM issue?
- c. Sharing of resources to all mentoring programs. There is some issue/discussion about sharing knowledge and work, not to reinvent the wheel and duplicate work that is already out there.
- d. Support networks to go further and seek out smaller programs that have less capacity. But the issue is that there are supports out there, both national and state. It is about interest and capacity of programs going out and seeking this information.

The role of benchmarks

The role of the BMs was seen as a necessary device in the community. It was agreed that some principles were needed, minimum standards for all agencies to get too. The following comments were made:

- There were concerns regarding duplication of work at national and state levels.
- There were concerns regarding the applicability and relevance for small regional and rural mentoring programs. The question "to what extent can you go with the BMs?" Issues of geographical divergence and practicality were also raised in this context.
- The BMs covered a "good list of topics, and not too specific, this is good".
- Comments regarding different factors and barriers that would affect smaller programs in taking on the BMs or even going ahead with mentoring, "will new programs shy away?" Suggestions were raised to resource smaller programs with tools or assistance to meet the BMs.
- A very useful suggestion was to contextualise the BMs and to change the overview to reflect the life cycle of programs. They flow in waves and where initial stages are very experimental. This point was to emphasise that the BM were flexible to apply at any stage of the program's cycle.

How do you operationalise the BMs?

Participants were interested in "what it actually means to implement BMs". In what sense can they be implemented without strangling the creativity and innovation of individual programs?

- Suggestions for a tool to help generate meaning around what each part concerns.
- Outline what expectations there were of each section
- Consider turning the BMs into a tangible resource with colour and texture
- How do you sell/promote the BMs to smaller, more informal mentoring programs? How can they safeguard their program using the BMs?
- Comment: "It is important to firstly understand the goal and vision of mentoring in each state/region. From that understanding will evolve the operational style and context."

Pre-program planning

The BMs are good indicators of what needs to be completed for high quality programs.

- Is it important to meet the BMs before the program is started (for new programs)?
- What are the legal implications of non-informed mentoring?
- If programs are not achieving BMs, the partnership should support the program to achieve by providing tools and resources.
- Emphasis on the fact that a program does not need to be well resourced or expensive to meet BMs and have a quality program.

Stakeholder engagement

Discussion concerned the management of stakeholder relationships and the possibility of stakeholders to further assist with resources.

- How can you benchmark around stakeholder relationships? There is no reference to or emphasis on stakeholder engagement pre-program planning part 1 I.
- It is possible to take learnings from other mentoring programs to discuss planning – to take experience from others e.g. community, NGO

Training

Training was seen as an integral part in both the BMs and program. Training allows for the value of mentoring to be fully realised and also acts as a tool for mentor screening.

- Is there a need to train mentees? (Given a chance) is it something that is worth including?
- Training and BMs should be connected to each other. i.e. Link training to BMs and highlight the importance of BMs and BMs should reflect the need for quality training.
- Feedback should be given to mentors during training sessions.
- Is there scope for formally accredited training, e.g. through TAFE institutions. It was recognised that it would be valuable to pursue formally accredited training programs. However, should this be a benchmark?
- Is there scope to centralise training resources? Either through VYMA, TAFE or other institution.
- There will be a training summit in July, hosted by the VYMA and Victorian Office for Youth.

Simplicity and complex structures

Assumptions need to be clarified on the structure of the BMs. Affecting all programs; the structure of BMs should be attractive to all programs, whether the BMs exist in complex or simple structures.

- Simplicity ensures success as busy people are able to undertake the task. Simplicity will also attract more programs.
- Is a complex structure appropriate? These BMs then ensure that structures behind programs are complete and in place, guaranteeing quality programs.
- The BMs may be complex; however its presentation may be simple.

Implementation

The YMN could play an advisory role in the implementation of BMs. Translating BMs into practical achievements.

- A major issues with implementation centred on sharing knowledge and skills with other programs. In the situation where programs are forced into competition for funding, collaboration and sharing tools and resources with other programs would encourage consistency in implementation.
- A staged approach to implementation would not overwhelmed smaller and newer programs.

3. Key issues from the workshop session

Participants worked through individual sections to unpack the practical and functional usability of the BMs. Suggestions for changes to the BMs are listed. Specific changes are indicated in *italics*.

Program design and planning

There was discussion on “What was the level of resources needed to implement and finance” mentoring programs. There is opportunity to elaborate on this point, however, it was realised that the BM were “Not a how-to guide but a how-to framework”.

b. Consultation with relevant stakeholders

Possible to add “Commitment of support” or “Developing ownership of the program”

d. Paid worker

For some rural and smaller programs it is not possible to have a “paid coordinator”

Instead say: “Skilled and appropriately resourced worker”

Evaluation

Allow more creativity and innovation that comes out of specific programs. The language was too limiting and should allow for more diversity and creativity.

“Must” changes to “becomes part” to allow for some programs that have evaluations that develop organically throughout the period of support. Evaluation tools e.g. film and drama as way of evaluating that is restricted

c. An evaluation team that has “accountability and transparency”, representative...

Outline that the purpose of evaluation determines what questions are asked – funding or self/internal.

Organisational governance and management

d. Missing child safety policy and Practice standards

Legal –Need to elaborate

f. Implementing “and reviewing ongoing development” of the mentoring program

i. Support plan – what does this mean and can it be resourced out?

YMA or YMN staff development, some elaboration is needed. The point was that programs are under resourced as it is and there is an opportunity for both organisations to provide this support (further to NRGize)

h. Long term and diverse funding – not to scare people away. This may scare some new programs away because realistically, programs don’t know what their funding is from year to year. It was noted that if there was no guarantee of funding or funding secured for only 1 year, mentoring should not be considered as a viable option for that community.

g. *Add management of privacy details* – where the details and forms are actually private, in line with policy (this last part is a little too prescriptive and somewhat redundant)

Operations

Needs to recognise electronic and virtual mentoring

“What about ICT” – is there a need to benchmark around the issues of security and privacy, awareness about good practice, checks and balances?

Recruitment

Discussion of “Promote child safe organisation” – how would this be done and who determines this? Possibility to link and give resources to how to determine “child-safe” organisation, however not the role of BM, possibly the role of a “Practise guide” that goes along with the BMs.

Selecting mentees, should be “voluntary” and should be “targeted”

Selection and Screening

Practice guideline to implement this would be if

b. Face-to-face or telephone?

What about regional and rural where telephone is the only way?

Leave as "personal"

Training and Development

Discussion around "Ongoing support" how and what, this brought up the example of knowledge and resource sharing, particularly for training module. Referred to NRGize resource.

Matching

The "Matching" title unclear, opportunity to elaborate on blurb

"Information to make the match"

Operational content - explain and elaborate the intent of program and process to mentors.

Monitoring and Supporting the Match

Suggestion that split the two sections to:

"Starting the match" and "Monitoring and supporting" as are different sections

b. Relationship expectations and *"aligning expectations in reality"*

d. And e. more prescriptive month etc. less dates more open

Discussion surrounding "what is regular" and does "regular make a mentoring program?"

g. *By providing workshops for ongoing learning and development or celebrations.*

This section should also include recognition of mentee's contribution

k. Redundant

What materials? Take out.

Closing

The forum agreed that it was good practise to formalise the end as it is a formal relationship.

Side discussion

*** BMs were a guide for best practise mentoring and do not prescribe 'how-to'. They are seen as minimum standards. BM not standards, document to give indication of program gaps and compliance

*** What is the reality of funding bodies seeing the application of these BM? YMN and VYMA were not able to predict how funding bodies would react.

*** Should the BMs be weighted in importance? This was not within the scope of YMN or VYMA.

*** The forum recognised that the field of mentoring was still in its infancy i.e. comparison to child care

Document Prepared By:

Suzie Ly | Network Assistant | Youth Mentoring Network