

Council Mentor Program

“Boards do not need to do anything different for people who are different. They do need, however, to build a board culture that is welcoming, uses the talents of its members and has clear standards and expectations for all board members.” *Governance Matters: Brown Bag Lunch Roundtable, Ontario*

“By incorporating diverse perspectives and idea, boards also find better solutions to complex problems and enjoy increased innovation.” *Inclusive Governance in Practice: Characteristics and Strategies*

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BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE OF A MENTORING PROGRAM

Why a Council Mentor Program Makes Sense

Joining a Council can be daunting for everyone. Often it can feel like you are an outsider coming into a well-established group like a family. While you feel lost and unsure about your role and what you will contribute to the council it can feel like everyone else seems to know each other and have a shared history and a shared language. Despite whatever amount of orientation you may have received before your first meeting, it is not unusual to feel like a bit of an outsider.

With this dynamic it is common that a new council member may sit back, observe, and not engage in discussions. This is an understandable approach; however, council leaders cannot afford to have new members on the sidelines for long. It is important that all council members are engaged and contributing their perspective. There is a reason the member is a part of the council after all. For certain, councils cannot afford to recruit and provide orientation to new members just to have them resign shortly after because they do not feel connected or valued.

Mentoring is a cost-effective means of preparing new council members for full participation in the work of the council. Additionally, mentor programs can help with the engagement of seasoned council members as well. While full participation is something most councils would say they strive for, few have actual strategies for achieving this ideal. This guide aims to provide the council with an understanding of what full participation is, and a framework for developing a Council Mentor Program. A mentor program will put the council in the right position to achieve full participation from all the members, new and seasoned, and both those with and those without brain injury.

Definition of Full Participation

Full participation is an affirmative value focused on creating settings that enable people — whatever their identities, backgrounds, or positions—to thrive, realize their capabilities, engage meaningfully in activity, and enable others to do the same. This concept offers a holistic framework for (1) connecting diverse people and projects around a shared vision for increasing people’s capacities to succeed and thrive, and (2) mobilizing change at multiple levels and leverage points so that this vision can be implemented, sustained, and continually renewed. It covers the continuum of decisions and practices affecting who joins councils, whether they feel respected and valued, how their work is conducted and supported, and what kinds of activities count as important¹.

¹ Retrieved on 8/18/20 from (<https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/full-participation-and-arts-culture-and-humanities>)

The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living (ACL) operates by the standard that all people can live with dignity, make their own choices, and participate fully in society. ACL provides grants for state brain injury programs. As such they further their position as it relates to brain injury. Programs supporting individuals with brain injury should provide tools, resources, and supports for integrating people with disabilities fully into community, work, and recreation to promote equal opportunities, self-determination, and respect². Full participation of individuals with brain injury and family members is a key principle. Their presence does not constitute full participation unless they are equal, contributing members with a sense of belonging

In a study conducted to understand what full participation means from the perspective of an individual with a brain injury, participants described needing to be free to define and pursue participation on their own terms rather than meeting predetermined societal norms. Participation was viewed as both a right and a responsibility, influenced by and ascribed to the person and to the society. Participation does not occur in a vacuum; the environment dynamically influences participation³.

The National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada (2006) indicated that on fully engaged boards, new board members take less time to become effective participants⁴.

Mentoring as a strategy to achieve full participation

Definition of mentoring

In the context of this council mentoring program, mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced council member with a newer council member. The mentor provides knowledge, advice, and support to a newer member. The new member, or mentee, is seeking information and knowledge about the working of the council. Models of mentoring range from extremely formal to informal relationships. Based on feedback from the Brain Injury Advisory Council

² Retrieved on 8/24/20 from (<https://acl.gov/about-acl/administration-disabilities>)

³ Joy Hammel, Susan Magasi, Allen Heinemann, Gale Whiteneck, Jennifer Bogner & Evelyn Rodriguez (2008) *What does participation mean? An insider perspective from people with disabilities, Disability and Rehabilitation, 30:19, 1445-1460, DOI: 10.1080/09638280701625534*.

⁴ Bugg, G., Dalhoff, S., *National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada*; 2006).

(BIAC) steering team, this model attempts to strike a balance between extremely formal and informal, as a semi-structured time limited model.

Benefits

Mentoring creates a welcoming climate for newer members, especially new council members from different backgrounds, cultures, abilities, and levels of experience on councils.

Benefits to mentees can include:

- A more immediate connection to the program and council
- Ability to contribute to the council sooner
- Able to contribute more effectively to the vision of the council
- Seeing the big picture and surrounding context and more able to make informed decisions
- Building social capital within the council
- Learning to take a leadership role on the council

Benefits to mentors can include:

- Learning from a fresh point of view
- Gaining new insights
- New lines of communication
- New contacts

Benefits to the council can include:

- Retention of council members
- More cohesive council
- More productive council meetings as meeting time is not spent acclimating new members
- Allows for succession planning

Adapted from "Board Mentoring Handbook", the Maytree Foundation, Ontario, 2007.

Successful mentoring relationships go through four phases: preparation, negotiating, enabling growth, and closure. These sequential phases build on each other and vary in length. In each phase, there are specific steps and strategies that lead to mentoring excellence. The following are general strategies to ensure success for a mentor program.

Strategies

- Regularly check in.
- Actively listen/advise.
- Ask for and give feedback to ensure the pace and learning experience is satisfactory.
- Provide timely support, create appropriate challenges to facilitate learning.
- Use the time together productively.

- Evaluate goals and deadlines throughout the process.
- Give constructive criticism and accept and reflect on it.
- Advise on what you know, do not be afraid to admit what you do not know. Find other resources if you cannot provide guidance.
- Do not shy away from difficult conversations. It is a safe place to talk.
- Celebrate each small success!

The End is the Beginning. Consider what you want your mentoring relationship to look like after the formal relationship concludes.

1. Be sensitive to when the relationship should end.
2. Find a personal way to express your feelings about the experience.
3. Give and receive thanks.
4. Even if you are disappointed in the outcome, identify and express the positive benefits you gained because of being in the mentoring relationship.
5. Take time to consider what you learned and identify what you will do differently in another mentoring relationship.
6. Celebrate!

Adapted from: <https://neighbourhoodartsnetwork.org/tac/media/BMO-Learning-Room-Links/boardmentoringhandbook.pdf>

COUNCIL MENTOR PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The BIAC Mentor Program will include a process for matching new members (mentees) to existing members (mentors), training mentors, a written agreement outlining expectations for both the mentee and the mentor, and the program will be time limited to 11 months with a minimum total of 4 meetings given that the BIAC meetings are held quarterly.

This semi-structured program incorporates an evaluation that allows tracking of measurable outcomes. The program emphasizes the learning objectives of the new council member, or mentee. The design considers that the council members are volunteers and the program must be easy to administer.

Selection of Mentors (See Appendix A for mentor/mentee survey)

It is important to have a process and criteria for selecting mentors to ensure successful outcomes for the program. The following criteria are recommended for mentors.

1. A minimum of one year on the council.
2. Understanding of mission and vision of the council and state plan.
3. Understanding of the challenges faced by new members.
4. A willingness to share experience as a council member.
5. Ability to meet the time commitment of the mentor program.
6. A desire to be a leader.

Mentor Readiness Checklist:

- I have a sincere interest in helping this person or being helped by this person.
- We have mutual interest and compatibility.
- I am clear about my role.
- I can commit adequate time for the mentoring relationship.
- I am willing to use my network of contacts to help in the progress.
- I have access to opportunities and resources to support learning.
- I am committed to developing my own mentoring skills.

Selection of Mentees (See Appendix A for mentor/mentee survey)

The following criteria are recommended when selecting new council members to become mentees.

1. A willingness and commitment to increase their understanding of the council
2. A desire to increase their engagement with, and effectiveness on, the council
3. Ability to listen attentively and communicate with their mentor should they need clarification

Matching

Matching mentors with mentees should be a process where significant consideration is given. A small percentage of matches don't work, even when there are clear matching criteria such as age, gender, ethnicity/race, vocational and avocational interest and, in the case of individuals with brain injury, injury details (type of injury, date of injury, and continuing areas of challenge in relation to the injury).

Methods used for matching in a peer mentorship relationship can apply to matching council members. These matching criteria are based on:

1. similar demographic background (e.g., age, marital status, geographical location, educational background)
2. similar marital or family status (e.g., spouse of individual with brain injury, single, parent of a school-aged child)
3. similar injury history (e.g., cognitive challenges, physical challenges, cause of injury)
4. similar interests (e.g., shared religious beliefs, common work, or social backgrounds)
5. the mentor's ability to meet the specific psychological needs of the partner (e.g., need for structure, role model, social support).

BIAC has a member application which lends itself nicely to this program. If an individual indicates that they are interested in being matched with a mentor, BIAC can take the information provided on the member application to ensure a good mentor/mentee match across the points outlined above.

Characteristics of an effective mentor include (*screened out those with specific mental health issues (suicidal or violent behavior) and individuals actively abusing substances*⁵):

- Ability to see the mentee's point of view
- Strong communication skills
- Dependable and consistent
- Insight into personal limitations and strengths

⁵ Hibbard, Cantor, Charatz, Rosenthal, Ashman, Gunderson, et al. *Peer support in the community: initial findings of a mentoring program for individuals with traumatic brain injury and their families*, 2002 (p. 116-117).

- Ability to help the mentee see the bigger picture
- Ability to provide constructive feedback
- Ability to set clear boundaries and expectations

Characteristics of an effective mentee include:

- Open to feedback
- Ability to follow through
- Willingness to learn about the council and the long-term strategic goals
- Ability to follow expectations and adhere to boundaries

Training

Training for mentors does not need to be extensive. However, it is recommended that the Council Chair dedicate time to provide new mentors with an overview of the mentor program, the expectations, and to review and match mentees. One of the main roles of the mentor is to ensure that the mentee reviews and understands the council orientation material and that they are able to answer questions as the mentee engages with the council.

It is most effective when mentors are trained in a group and take on mentees at the same time. This allows for mentors to learn from one another. Consider offering this on a cyclical basis. For example, if BIAC takes on new members at a consistent time, it would be ideal to solicit and train for mentors about 2 months prior to that time. *If this is not possible, it will still be helpful to introduce the mentors and mentees that are already established partners, so the new mentors and mentees can learn from each other.*

Agenda:

- I. Review of the BIAC Mentor Program
- II. Overview of expectations/roles
- III. Discussion on boundary setting
- IV. Review effective strategies for ending mentorship relationship once the program is completed (after the first year on the council for new mentee).
- V. Review the orientation materials to ensure that they are equipped to support their mentee as they review this information.

Written Agreement

The success of the program is contingent upon clear expectations for both the mentor and the mentees. It is important to indicate what the purpose of the program is and what it is not. For example, the mentor is not intended to be a life coach. The relationship is specific to mentorship on the workings of and engagement in the Brain Injury Advisory Council. Clear boundaries are important so that mentees understand what they can expect from the

relationship. A written agreement can be useful to ensure everyone is on the same page. This agreement can also be helpful if boundaries become unclear.

When an individual agrees to be either a mentor or mentee they are committing to the program and to achieving the end goal which is to ensure all council members are engaged and have the opportunity for full participation in the council.

The following are items to consider and to come to agreement on as a mentor pair, negotiate the following:

1. How much time can be committed to the relationship on a regular basis? Be realistic.
2. Write down goals and analyze them to meet the SMART criteria.
3. Agree on a discussion format. (e.g. Formal agendas, topic-driven agendas, check-in conversations, etc.)
4. Use a journal to help stay focused, monitor progress and capture follow-up items.
5. Establish any ground rules. (e.g. Confidentiality, boundaries and “hot topics”)
6. Be flexible! Expectations and plans will change as your relationship progresses.
7. Evaluate progress, milestones, goals, regularly.
8. Learning styles are important, identify and discuss successful learning.
9. Articulate criteria for success. What does success “look” like?

See Appendix B for a sample “written agreement form”.

BIAC Mentor Program

This program is designed to be 11 months in duration. The length is due to BIAC meeting quarterly. This breaks down to approximately 5-6 hours of time commitment. These encounters include attending orientation and meeting prior and after each council meeting for the first year. These meetings can be done either in person or virtually.

BIAC Mentor Program Outline (see Appendix C for the Mentor Program timeline and Appendix D for the mentor mentee timeline).

1. Prior to meeting with their mentee, the mentor should attend the orientation (either in person or virtually).
2. Following orientation, the mentor will schedule a meeting with the mentee prior to the first council meeting to:
3. The mentee and mentor arrive to the first meeting early so that the mentee can be introduced by the mentor to the other members
4. Following the first council meeting arrange for a meeting to discuss any questions the mentee has
5. Meet with the mentee prior to the second, third, and fourth council meetings

6. Meet with mentee following second, third, and fourth council meetings

The following provides a more in-depth outline for implementation of the BIAC Mentor Program.

Assignments for Council Mentors

- Participate in the orientation – Having experienced council members participate in the orientation session is a good idea, and even if the mentee does not have a formal role in the session, they can help to fill-in gaps, offer context when necessary, and translate any acronyms or terms that are used.
- Meet with the new council member BEFORE the first council meeting – Go to coffee or find some other opportunity to meet and get to know the new council member. If meetings happen remotely, arrange for a ‘virtual’ meeting.

The goal of this first meeting is to help him or her know what to expect at the first council meeting (including what to wear, how the meeting flows, and any practices that may be unique to the council). Also use this as a time to gather information to use in introducing the new council member (this should be more than getting a copy of his or her bio).

The mentor should discuss the following at the initial meeting:

1. The parameters of the relationship they both are comfortable with; how often to meet, what the best way is to communicate, etc.
 2. Goals and objectives for the mentoring relationship.
 3. Mentor should be able to identify why he/she wants a mentee and what can be gained from this experience.
 4. Suggest ways he/she can assist the mentee in reaching their goals.
 5. Share why he/she chooses to be an active council member.
 6. Discuss the confidentiality of the relationship.
- If the meeting is in person, meet a few minutes ahead of the first council meeting so that the mentor can greet the mentee, introduce the mentee to other council members and sit next to the mentee.
 - Provide a formal, but informative, introduction – Work with the council chair to ensure that the council agenda allows time at the start for a formal introduction. While council members may have seen the new council member’s bio, this is an opportunity for the mentor to fill-in the blanks and offer something along the lines of: “One thing I learned that her bio doesn’t tell you is...” Make sure there is also time for the rest of the council to offer their own introductions too so the new council member knows who is sitting at the table.
 - Serve as a coach during the meetings – having the mentor sit next to the mentee allows for the mentor to quietly provide additional background information, translate terms

and acronyms, and help him or her navigate through the council materials. This can also be accomplished through the private chat function if meeting virtually.

- Meet prior to each of the three remaining meetings – this will allow for the mentor to review the agenda and provide any necessary background information as well as answer any questions the mentee may have prior to the beginning of the meeting.
- Follow-up between meetings – Debriefing after meetings is especially important for new council members who may be looking for some additional information, a bit of history, or the perspective that a long-time council member can bring. The mentor should have the meeting agenda in front of them when they call, and ask specific questions that will prompt discussion: “What additional information would be helpful to you regarding the discussion we had about the new program we are about to launch?”
- If the mentee misses a meeting the mentor should call – the goal is to send the message that attendance is important and that his or her participation was missed. Take the time to call and walk him or her through key discussion items.
- The mentor should also check-in regarding committee assignments – council members will tell you that they feel most engaged when they are doing committee work—but only if they are on the right committee and the work feels meaningful. Find an opportunity to check-in on how his or her committee service is going. The mentor and mentee should not hesitate to talk to the council or committee chair if any problems are identified.
- The mentor should communicate with the council chair – After the first meeting and follow-up call to let the council chair know how things seem to be going and to let them know if there are steps they can be taking to engage the new member.

Adapted from, “Board mentors” – a strategy for engaging new board members, <https://www.starboardleadership.com/board-chair-companion/board-mentors-a-strategy-for-engaging-new-board-members/>

Assignments for Council Mentees

- Attend orientation.
- Attend all scheduled meetings with the mentor.
- Ask questions: Use time together wisely to get the knowledge you are seeking.
- Be prepared with questions at each meeting to learn about the council.
- Be a good listener.
- Feel free to take notes at meetings, as this is a learning experience.
- Think about what can be learned from your mentor and their experiences; what committees they have served on, roles they have played on the council.
- Try to attend meetings and events with your mentor, when appropriate.
- Identify problems/obstacles that they are encountering so they can be discussed with their mentor.
- Do not take your mentor for granted; do not ask for inappropriate information or favors.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is often an afterthought when implementing a new initiative. Instead this should be one of the first components to developing a program. As such, evaluation is an important tool in mentoring. Evaluation provides the opportunity for continuous improvement and means of identifying ways to increase effectiveness both at the individual and council level. Feedback from participants helps establish best practices for mentoring⁶.

Evaluating a mentoring program

It is important to **evaluate your mentoring program** to ensure that it is achieving its aims. You should do this by assessing the mentors as well as the program itself.

It is good practice to measure the progress of the mentoring relationship:

- at the beginning to establish expectations
- after six months to assess how well the relationship is working
- at the end of the program, complete final survey to measure outcomes

To evaluate the program, you could ask all participants to give feedback on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship.

The formats for the feedback could include:

- a **simple questionnaire** where the participants answer specific questions about the program
- a **written report** from each participant
- an **interview** of each of the participants

You can evaluate the mentor in the same way. However, also consider including specific mentoring criteria as development goals for mentors⁷.

For the BIAC Mentor Program it is recommended that a brief form be completed at the beginning of the relationship to establish the expectations of both the mentor and mentee. This is accomplished through the completion of Appendix A, Written Agreement Form. This would be followed by a questionnaire at six months to ensure expectations are on target and are being met. A final questionnaire will be administered at the end of the mentor relationship to gain feedback on the process and ensure expectations were met.

See Appendix B and C for a sample six month and end of program feedback questionnaires.

⁶ Board Mentoring Handbook, The Maytree Foundation, 2007.

⁷ Retrieved on August 24, 2020 from: (<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/mentoring-programmes-monitoring-evaluating-and-reviewing>)