Mentoring Works

High-quality mentoring provides research-proven benefits to youth - boosting academic aspiration and achievement, strengthening social and emotional development, and reducing the likelihood of involvement in risky behavior - that prepare them for a lifetime of contribution and leadership in their communities. Illinois is fortunate to have a substantial and diverse mentoring community. Yet we know we can achieve much more by elevating attention to best practice, raising the number of male mentors for our boys and young men, and increasing resources to the field.
State of Mentoring in Illinois

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Introduction

The Illinois Mentoring Partnership (IMP) is committed to promoting healthy development by substantially increasing the quantity and quality of mentoring relationships for youth in Illinois. The Partnership serves as a resource and capacity building organization that works collaboratively across sectors to support existing and emerging mentoring organizations by:

- providing access to a wealth of nationally-tested resources, training, and technical assistance,
- advancing adherence to national standards of best practice in the Illinois mentoring community,
- developing and supporting a statewide network of mentoring organizations to address shared challenges and craft effective solutions to those challenges, and
- raising public awareness of the vital role of mentoring in healthy youth development.

In the summer and fall of 2013, IMP partnered with the University of Illinois at Chicago to conduct a survey of youth mentoring programs in the state of Illinois. The goal was to provide information that would aid IMP with:

- designing training and technical assistance to fit the most urgent needs of Illinois mentoring programs,
- enhancing public awareness and advocacy among funders, partner corporations, and policymakers of the need for high-quality youth mentoring programs,
- facilitating recruitment of volunteers to serve in mentoring programs in the areas of the state where they are most urgently needed, and
- evaluating the long term impact of IMP’s efforts by establishing a baseline for comparison.

The methodology used to conduct the survey and analyze the data collected is described in the Appendix to this report. Briefly, 178 of 407 contacted organizations completed the survey, for a 44% response rate. Of the respondents, 145 organizations reported having youth mentoring programs as defined for this report (see Appendix). A total of 152 youth mentoring programs are represented, given that some organizations operate more than one distinct mentoring program. The organizations that chose not to respond may or may not actually provide youth mentoring. For this reason, it is difficult to determine how representative the programs included are of mentoring programs for youth as a whole in Illinois. We suspect, however, that this report may underrepresent the smallest programs and those based in schools without an outside nonprofit partner.¹ During the past year, the 152 programs that are the focus of this report served 34,297 children and youth through the services of 17,819 mentors. The actual total number of mentees and mentors in Illinois is most certainly larger than these figures.

¹ These programs are less likely to have an online presence or other external visibility.
Program Characteristics

Program Location
The majority of the programs that responded to the survey are located in Chicago (60%) or in Suburban Cook County (10%). An additional 27% were located in other parts of Illinois (“Greater Illinois”) and 3% had headquarters outside of Illinois. As can be seen below, youth served (“mentees”) are distributed similarly, with 37% of youth mentored through programs located in Greater Illinois. In comparison, approximately 50% of the children living in poverty in Illinois live outside of Cook County. It thus appears that among youth from low-income families, those who reside in Greater Illinois are at present proportionally underserved by mentoring programs. Our more detailed regional map shows this pattern is most notable in the Northwest and Southern regions of the state.

Percentage of Programs
- Chicago: 60%
- Greater Illinois: 27%
- Suburban Cook County: 10%
- Other (HQ outside of IL): 3%

Percentage of Mentees
- Greater Illinois: 37%
- Suburban Cook County: 30%
- Chicago: 27%
- Other (HQ outside of IL): 61%

IL Regions by Zip Code Groupings

Children in Poverty numbers approximated based on KIDS COUNT Data Center data.

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2 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, http://datacenter.kidscount.org
A wide range of organizations recognize the positive impact mentoring brings to the well-being of youth and the entire community and so have chosen to run mentoring programs. The preponderance of programs (80%) are run by non-profit organizations, more than half of which run other youth programs as well.
PROGRAM SIZE

Illinois is home to well-established mentoring organizations serving relatively large numbers of youth, small start-up programs run by volunteers, and a wide variety of medium-sized programs.

- In the past year, individual programs reported serving between 2 and 8,000 mentees, with an average of 232 and a median number of 60.
- The number of mentors involved in programs during the past year ranges from 1 to 1,800, with an average of 125 and a median of 35.
- To examine program size (number of mentees served) in relation to responses to other questions on the survey, we separated the responses into four categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Category</th>
<th>Number of Mentees</th>
<th>Percent of Programs</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>1-30</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>31-100</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>101-250</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Large</td>
<td>251+</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Although nearly two-thirds of programs are small (31%) or medium (34%) in size according to our criteria, the preponderance of mentored youth (88%) are currently served in large or very large programs. As mentioned above, we suspect that our survey sample underrepresents the proportion of small programs as they are often isolated and difficult to find, in many instances run by one or more dedicated volunteers out of their home or church.

MENTORING FORMAT

Most programs surveyed (72%) report providing mentoring in the form of one-to-one mentor-mentee relationships. However, group mentoring is also common, either in combination with one-on-one mentoring or as the primary mentoring format. In total among our survey respondents there are **1.9 youth for every 1 mentor**.
MENTOR/MENTEE MEETING LOCATION

Mentoring programs reported various locations for mentor-mentee meetings.

- **Site-based programs have a set place where the mentor and mentee primarily meet**; this includes programs based in schools as well as those based at non-profit organizations. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of programs are site-based, with those in which mentors and mentees meet at a non-profit (34%) being somewhat more numerous than those based in schools (24%) or other sites (16%) such as faith-based locations or workplaces.

- **Mentor/mentee-choice programs have their mentors and mentees meet at different locations of their choosing**. These locations in a given program could include anywhere from a park to the mentor or mentee’s home and are likely to vary from outing to outing. Such programs make up the remaining 26% of programs responding to the survey.

- **Greater Illinois programs tend to be school-based**, whereas Chicago programs more often have mentors and mentees meet in non-profit organizations or in locations chosen by the mentor and mentee.

- **Although, as noted**, school-based programs make up approximately 1 in 4 programs, they tend to be bigger in size and thus account for a larger portion (47%) of the overall number of youth served by responding programs.

Mentor/Mentee Meeting Location

Mentees Served by Meeting Location

Mentor/Mentee Meeting Location in each Region
MEETING TIMES

The timing of mentoring activities has an important effect on who can be recruited as mentors and mentees. One-third (33%) of programs have mentoring activities take place after school and another 12% have mentoring take place during school. These times might be difficult for adults with jobs without flexible schedules. Many of these programs rely on corporate partnerships to provide mentors. The bulk of the remaining programs surveyed are ones in which mentors and mentees meet either on weekday evenings (21%) or on weekends (30%). These programs may have an easier time finding mentors, but face challenges related to transportation and conflicts with other after school programming for mentees.

COMMITMENT

A crucial aspect of a successful mentoring relationship is consistent contact. About 4 in 5 programs (79%) require at least 3-5 hours a month and the preponderance (87%) ask mentors to commit for at least one school or calendar year.
**PROGRAM AGE**

Many of the programs that responded to the survey have been in existence for over 15 years. Older programs are more likely to be large or very large. Furthermore, although there are small programs in every age group, no program serving more than 250 mentees has been in existence for fewer than 3 years.

![Program Age by Size](image)

**PROGRAM RESOURCES**

Mentoring programs responding to the survey are fairly evenly distributed across different levels of annual budget, ranging from 25% with annual budgets of under $10,000 to 15% with budgets over $250,000. Only 15% of programs, however, reported the equivalent of more than 5 full-time staff members and more than half (59%) reported fewer than two. At least 25% of programs are staffed exclusively by volunteers (assuming a budget of less than $10,000 cannot support a paid staff member). This reality carries important implications for staff training and program development.

![Annual Budget for 2012](chart)

![Full-Time Equivalent Staff Members](chart)
Targeted Risk Factors & Outcomes

**RISK FACTORS TARGETED**

Every child can benefit from a dedicated mentor, but risk factors such as living in poverty, living in a single-parent household, and involvement with the justice system may reflect a higher level of need. **There are high levels of key risk factors in the lives of youth and families in Illinois, suggesting a particularly noteworthy need for mentoring of young people in the state.** Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center and Voices for Illinois Children for 2011 reveal the following:

- 613,319 (19.6%) children lived in poverty
- 1,008,000 children (34%) lived in single-parent families
- 37% of single parent families were living below the poverty line
- 822,000 children (26.6%) received SNAP Benefits
- 36,000 teens age 16 to 19 (5%) were not in school and not high school graduates
- 67% of 4\(^{th}\) grade students had reading achievement levels below proficient
- 124,000 children (5%) had difficulty speaking English
- 15,099 children (0.5%) lived in substitute care (2012)
- 34,300 arrests of youth ages 10-16.

Mentoring programs responding to the survey frequently reported targeting their services toward youth experiencing these same risk factors, including low family income (76%), single parent (53%), and being in foster care (23%).

Research has shown that well-designed mentoring programs can be of significant benefit to youth who experience these and related risk factors, decreasing the likelihood that they will become involved with drugs or alcohol or engage in violent behavior while increasing positive outcomes such as self-esteem, relationships with parents, peers, and teachers, school attendance, and academic achievement.\(^3\)

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TARGET OUTCOMES

Research on mentoring programs has indicated that one of the most powerful elements of mentoring is its ability to influence a number of outcomes simultaneously. Indeed, most mentoring programs target a range of different areas that are vital to young persons' development. Programs in Illinois overall are most likely to focus on positive youth development (86%), academic success (82%), social skills (64%), life skills (66%), and youth risk behavior prevention (59%). The strong emphasis on positive youth development and social and life skills represents a challenge for mentoring programs, as it can be difficult to document impact in such areas. They tend to be less easily quantifiable than other outcomes such as academic achievement or juvenile justice system involvement. Likewise, especially for those programs that focus their services on younger children, the benefits of youth risk prevention strategies may not be able to be documented until several years later.

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There is a growing level of interest among potential corporate-sector partners in the use of mentoring to promote workforce readiness and to support young people in facing the challenges of both getting in and staying in college. Because of the interest of a particular corporate funder, we included a question on the survey specifically asking programs if they serve high school or college students with a primary goal of supporting college or career readiness: 62% said yes. This was especially true of programs in Chicago, with nearly three-quarters (73%) of these programs reporting a college or career focus.
Age

Although particulars of mentoring relationships change with age, a supportive adult is important for children and youth of every age group. The preponderance of mentoring programs in Illinois (79%) serve a combination of age groups, either by virtue of continuing to serve the same mentees over several years or enrolling youth at different ages.

Most programs similarly reported having mentors from a range of age groups, from older peers to retired adults. The group represented most often in most programs is working age adults (88%), followed by college students (73%).

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5 DuBois et al. (2011).
RACE AND ETHNICITY

A majority of the youth served by the mentoring programs in Illinois responding to the survey are members of racial/ethnic minority groups, with about 1 in 3 youth (35%) being African-American and a smaller proportion, about 1 in 4 (23%), being Hispanic. In comparison, the percentages of children in poverty in Illinois are roughly equivalent (African-American: 32%; Hispanic: 30%)\(^6\), suggesting that among Illinois youth in low-income families Hispanic youth may be somewhat underserved by mentoring programs. Most mentors, on the other hand, are White (56%), although mentors of color do constitute the majority in nearly one in three programs that responded to the survey. Furthermore, African-Americans comprise approximately 15% of the population of Illinois, but make up an estimated 20% of the mentors in programs, suggesting they are serving at a greater rate than other groups. Small and medium programs are more likely to have majority African-American mentors (35% of small and 42% of medium programs), whereas large and very large programs tend to have majority White mentors (61% and 75%, respectively).

\(^6\) Estimates based on KIDS COUNT Data Center data
Mentoring programs for youth in Illinois responding to the survey appear to disproportionately serve female mentees, with nearly two-thirds (65%) reporting having served a majority of girls in the past year and 15% having served girls either predominately or exclusively. 10% of programs reported serving predominately or exclusively boys. Small programs are more likely to be predominately one gender (22%, 9 programs each gender).

Mentors appear to be even more disproportionately female with nearly 4 of 5 (78%) of programs reporting a majority of female mentors. Larger programs are especially likely to have predominately female mentors and mentees. Since 40% of the programs surveyed report making only same-gender matches, the lower percentage of male mentors may explain why fewer male mentees are being served. This possibility is supported later in this report by data on waiting lists and recruitment challenges.
EMENTOR has established 12 *Elements of Effective Practice* (hereafter referred to as the *Elements*) for operation of a mentoring program. The first six of these are Standards for day-to-day programmatic operations, with research-informed Benchmarks for program quality provided for each area. This survey was not intended as a thorough assessment of adherence to the *Elements*. However, through a series of questions the survey provided an opportunity for programs to self-report about their compliance with selected practice benchmarks for each of the programmatic *Elements* with the exception of Recruitment, as seen below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measured Benchmarks for Elements of Effective Practice Standards</th>
<th>Programs that Meet Benchmarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Screening: Mentor Assessment &amp; Background Check</strong></td>
<td>49% (74 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Criminal records check (90% meet this benchmark)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal interview (89%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written application (85%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Child abuse &amp; neglect record check (76%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reference check (63%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Screening: Commitment Requirements</strong></td>
<td>53% (81 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Requires minimum 1 school year commitment (79%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Requires an average 3-5 hours/month or 1+ meeting/week (94%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Requires application from parents (76%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Requires informed consent from parents (82%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>90% (123 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mentor completes at least 2 hours of initial in-person training (90%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matching</strong></td>
<td>82% (120 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program arranges and documents initial meeting between mentor and mentee (82%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring &amp; Support</strong></td>
<td>33% (50 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contacts mentor monthly (74%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contacts mentee monthly (73%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evaluates relationship quality (54%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Offers ongoing training to mentors (73%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closure</strong></td>
<td>53% (79 programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has a formal closure procedure or policy for mentor-mentee matches (53%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 16% of programs meet all benchmarks measured by the survey, but each individual benchmark is met by a majority of programs. The preponderance of programs, furthermore, report practices that meet the measured benchmarks for training (90%) and matching (82%). It is reassuring as well that 90% of programs responding to the survey report running criminal record

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7 Includes programs that reported requiring 1-2 hours of initial in-person training
8 See below for discussion of additional measures of matching benchmarks not included in here
checks and that 89% do personal interviews, as these are crucial for child safety. However, only about half (49%) the programs report taking all the recommended Mentor Assessment & Background Check steps. Reference checks, required by 63% of programs, can be time-consuming, but may be instrumental for discovering information about mentors’ lives that other methods cannot capture.

The two areas where programs are most consistently not meeting benchmarks relate to Monitoring & Support and Closure. The low level of compliance with recommended practice for Monitoring & Support may reflect a lack of appreciation of the critical nature of this kind of support as well as challenges with staff availability. Nonetheless, research shows poor relationship monitoring and early closures can cause harm to youth, so failure to meet these benchmarks is concerning.\(^9\)

Many programs have expressed to Illinois Mentoring Partnership staff that limited staff size makes it impossible to provide ongoing support and supervision for relationships. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that 42% of the programs with reported practices that met all of the benchmarks in our survey were programs with less than two staff people, suggesting that compliance with these benchmarks is possible even for very modest sized programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meets Measured Benchmarks by Program Size (# Youth)</th>
<th>Meets Measured Benchmarks by Meeting Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Large (251+)</td>
<td>Mentor/Mentee-choice 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (101-250)</td>
<td>School-Based 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (31-100)</td>
<td>Other Site 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (1-30)</td>
<td>Non-profit Organization 4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also important to note that the relatively small percentage of programs meeting all measured benchmarks seems likely to in part reflect the high number of programs relying on a site-based model. In such programs, for example, there may be less of a perceived need for rigorous screening and monitoring. Consistent with this possibility, a notably larger proportion (41%) of programs in which mentors and youth are alone in the community did meet all of the benchmarks. The 59% of those programs that did not, however, are concerning and reflective of a need for increased opportunities for quality improvement. Furthermore, only 2% of programs with 30 or fewer mentees reported practices that met all of the measured benchmarks. These


DuBois et al. (2011).
small programs may be generally more informal, but it will be important for them to begin to put appropriate policies and safeguards in place.

While Closure is an area of weakness overall, mentor/mentee-choice programs and school-based programs are both substantially more likely to have closure policies than programs where mentors and mentees meet at a non-profit or other site.

There was no significant relationship between location in Illinois and compliance with the *Elements*, suggesting that Chicago, Cook County and Greater Illinois have similar needs for best practice assistance.

The Matching section of the *Elements* requires programs to consider their “aims, as well as the characteristics of the mentor and mentee when making matches”. Because of this allowance for variation by program, we did not attempt to assess whether this Benchmark was met. It is of note, however, that the majority (57%) of programs require similar interests when making matches and that 45% report soliciting and honoring preferences of mentors, youth, and/or parents. The survey asked what criteria *must* be met when matching mentors and mentees, so it is likely that programs attempt to match by more criteria than reflected here but do not always have enough options to have requirements in these areas.
The survey asked programs what areas they systematically measured to evaluate their programs and what tools or strategies they used for evaluation. The preponderance of programs (81%) report measuring some form of youth outcomes. In contrast, much smaller proportions of programs report tracking staff support contacts with participants (36%) or match closures (30%). Furthermore, while it is common for programs to track participant feedback and satisfaction, all other methods of evaluation (e.g., pre/post measures) were reported by fewer than half of the responding programs. These trends cast doubt on the ability of programs to meaningfully measure either adherence to program model or impact on youth outcomes.

**Evaluation Areas Measured**

- Youth outcomes
- Frequency of mentor-youth contact
- Mentor-mentee relationship quality
- Mentor satisfaction
- Staff support contacts
- Mentor training quality
- Match closures
- Type and frequency of risks faced by youth
  - None
  - Other

**Evaluation Tools Used**

- Participant feedback & satisfaction ratings
- Participation rates
- Measures gathered pre and post-program
- Retrospective perceptions of program impact
- Anecdotal records
- Compare program vs. non-program group
- No evaluation conducted
- Other
Program Challenges

WAITLIST

43% of the mentoring programs surveyed maintain a waitlist for youth. 2,379 youth were reported to be on the waitlists of these programs. We strongly suspect that the 57% of programs that do not maintain waitlists also are likely to have substantially more youth interested in participating in their programs than they are able to serve. In approximately one-third of programs (35%), youth spend an average of over 6 months on the waitlist. Programs report difficulty matching youth due to a general lack of available mentors (29%), the program’s requirement of same-gender matching (18%; most likely reflecting a lack of male mentors relative to the number of boys who are referred to the program), or the program’s geographic match criteria (11%).

Top Reasons for Youth to be on Waitlist

- Not enough mentors
- Gender match criteria
- Geographic match criteria
- Delay in completion of background checks
- Insufficient staff to support mentors
- Fixed program capacity
- Insufficient staff to match youth
- Insufficient funding
- Space limitations
- Insufficient staff to process mentor applications
- Race/ethnic match criteria
- Other

OTHER CHALLENGES

Mentoring programs in Illinois report struggling to recruit volunteers who can make the required commitment, especially male mentors and mentors of color, and to find sufficient funding opportunities. Staff time is a major challenge to both recruiting and fundraising. Suburban Cook County (67%) and Greater Illinois (64%) programs are more likely than those in Chicago (28%) to cite finding male mentors as a challenge to recruitment.
Top Challenges for Recruiting Mentors

- Attracting male mentors
- Do not have staff time to devote to recruitment
- Attracting mentors of color
- Volunteers do not follow through
- Recruitment efforts do not generate enough inquiries
- No staff time to follow up with potential volunteers
- Attracting older adults/retirees
- Attracting college students
- Length of commitment period
- Attracting other specific population
- Other

Percent of Programs (selected top 3)

Top Challenges to Program Sustainability & Growth

- Insufficient funding opportunities
- Insufficient staff to identify and pursue funding opportunities
- Mentor recruitment
- Mentor retention
- Ability to effectively evaluate your program
- Insufficient support from overall agency or organization
- Match support
- Insufficient support from collaborating partners
- Staff retention
- Other

Percent of Programs (selected top 3)
Illinois Mentoring Partnership’s Role

Programs also were asked to select the top three ways IMP could be helpful to their program and its staff. Programs hope IMP can assist them with their primary challenges of **funding and mentor recruitment** both through corporate partnerships and by raising the public profile of mentoring. There was also a high level of interest in receiving support from IMP in providing **training for staff and mentors**. Small and medium-sized programs are particularly interested in having IMP provide training for mentors.

### Ways the Illinois Mentoring Partnership Can Help

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number of Programs (selected 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop partnerships with corporations to supply mentors/funding</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise public profile of mentoring to support recruitment and fundraising</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training for program staff</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training for program mentors</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote legislation for public resources to support mentoring</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support volunteer recruitment</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide technical assistance on best practice or quality self-assessment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop strategies to address common problems, such as the cost of background..</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring mentoring providers together to share best practices</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host conferences or summits on research and best practice</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish best practice standards</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish standards for credentialing mentoring programs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support adherence to high standards among mentoring programs across the state</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

As evidenced by the findings of this survey, Illinois is fortunate to have the benefit of a substantial and diverse mentoring community. Unfortunately, existing programs are able to serve only a small fraction of the youth in Illinois who would benefit from a consistent, caring mentor. This survey has allowed us to obtain a much better understanding of the nature of the existing mentoring program community and to identify key challenges to its growth and sustainability. Many of the findings have significant implications for funders and other advocates for mentoring as well as for the work of the Illinois Mentoring Partnership. In the conclusion to this report, we highlight some of these findings and discuss their potential implications both for the work of the Partnership and for others in the state interested in advancing high quality mentoring for all young people in need.

AN OVERVIEW OF MENTORING IN ILLINOIS

The 152 responding programs served 34,297 youth through the services of 17,819 mentors during the past year. Illinois mentoring programs vary greatly in size, program design and location, resources, and population served. Programs serve between 2 and 8,000 mentees. Over 70% rely on a one-to-one model. 26% have mentors and mentees choose their meeting locations, 24% meet in school, and 50% meet at other sites. Budgets range from less than $10,000 [25% of programs] to over $250,000 [15% of programs].

Mentoring programs in Illinois are providing wide-ranging opportunities for young people despite having very limited resources to do so. With very modest budgets, programs are serving large numbers of youth. High quality mentoring has the potential to be a very cost effective approach to serving a wide range of young people facing a variety of risk factors.

Most mentoring programs have fewer than two full-time staff, presenting a variety of challenges for staff development, program quality, and fundraising. The majority of mentoring programs are operating on a shoestring, with at least 1 in 4 operating with no paid staff and nearly 60% with fewer than two full-time staff. While these staffing levels obviously provide challenges, almost half of the programs that met all of the key benchmarks of effective practice had less than two full-time staff, suggesting that high quality programming is possible even with low staffing levels. Nonetheless, special attention will need to be given to the needs of staff who cannot be available during the traditional work day as IMP expands its training and technical assistance programs.

Boys appear to be underserved in mentoring programs throughout the state. While research suggests that boys are at the highest risk for a variety of negative outcomes, current mentoring programs in Illinois appear to be serving boys at a substantially lower rate than girls. This appears to be due in large part (though certainly not exclusively) to the lower number of male volunteer mentors. Helping programs to expand the availability of male mentors will be important to the work of IMP.
Children in poverty outside of Cook County may be particularly underserved. Based on our survey, 63% of children served in mentoring programs live in Cook County, while only 50% of the children in poverty in Illinois live there. This suggests that particular attention should be paid to increasing access to mentoring opportunities for young people who live outside of Cook County.

**ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE**

Each of the measured benchmarks of effective practice was met by at least half of the programs and most were met by the preponderance. There is every indication that mentoring programs in Illinois are committed to providing effective services to youth. This provides an important opportunity for IMP to work with mentoring programs to strengthen their operations by incorporating more evidence-based practices.

Nonetheless, few programs report meeting all measured benchmarks of effective practice. While most programs are committed to high-quality practice, there is substantial room for improvement in ensuring that youth in Illinois are receiving high quality mentoring. It is critical for mentoring programs to never lose sight of the reality that a failed mentoring relationship risks increasing the same negative outcomes that they are hoping to address. Some particular areas seem worth highlighting:

- **90% of programs do criminal background checks for prospective mentors, but 37% do not complete a reference check.** While reference checks can be time consuming, they have the potential to be tremendously helpful in screening out individuals who appear to be overcommitted or who have a history of getting involved in activities on a whim and not following through. No other aspect of the screening process is likely to share this valuable information that could separate a successful relationship from a failed one.

- **46% of programs do not evaluate the quality of the mentoring relationship, and over 25% do not contact mentor or mentee monthly.** When a relationship is in trouble, it frequently may be possible to save it with appropriate support and intervention. Failing to monitor the health of the relationship risks premature closures and harming the very youth the program seeks to serve.\(^{10}\)

- **47% of programs have no formal procedures for ending the relationship.** When a relationship ends, particularly if it ends prematurely, it is important to offer both the mentor and mentee some sense of closure. Doing so is likely to be particularly important when relationships end prematurely so as to help avoid or minimize any potential negative effects of such closures. Further interviewing the parties can help to identify contributing factors and make it possible to responsibly determine whether or not either party should be matched with a new mentor or mentee.

\(^{10}\) Grossman & Rhodes (2002).
• **42% of the programs that met all benchmarks had fewer than two full-time staff.**

While many programs may feel their small staff size makes it impossible to meet the *Elements of Effective Practice, IMP hopes to explore with these programs their strategies for implementing recommended practices and to develop approaches for sharing these strategies across programs.*

**Evaluation**

**Evaluation of mentoring programs tends to be modest and to rely heavily on satisfaction surveys.** Rigorous evaluation of mentoring programs is challenging and expensive. Few programs will be able to undertake the cost and demands of a controlled study of youth impact. Nonetheless, as a first step, most if not all programs can substantially improve the rigor of their current evaluation methods by ensuring that they are operating with a sound program model built upon research-proven elements of effective practice and then monitoring their compliance with those intended practices. Focus should be on those practices that research indicates are key drivers of youth outcomes such as mentor training and ongoing support of relationships. A number of tools exist to help programs to track compliance in such areas. MentorCore, produced in partnership with MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, is one such tool. It provides a relatively inexpensive way for programs to monitor all aspects of their program activities and to easily generate regular reports about their performance against key measures of program accountability. Such information can be invaluable in identifying areas for program improvement and in reporting to funders about program activities. As more programs begin to employ this kind of standardized tool, it will become increasingly possible to aggregate data across programs and thus gain an understanding of implementation at a state-wide level. In contrast, the widely used tool of satisfaction surveys unfortunately provides little information to inform program improvement.

**Very few programs have any form of a comparison group for measuring impact.** While programs may chart the progress of their mentees on a number of variables, without a basis for comparison, these reports fail to tell the program whether or not they are being effective. Most programs will not have an opportunity for a true control group of randomly assigned youth not receiving the benefit of their program. Yet, with some creativity, many are likely to be able to identify reasonable comparison groups that can give them a far richer sense of the nature of the impact their program is having on the young people they serve as well as one that is more credible to potential funders and other external stakeholders. Such strategies can include using data from youth on a waiting list or data on comparable youth from public sources such as schools. The importance of incorporating these types of data into evaluations is underscored by the reality that young people may naturally show a negative trajectory over time on a number of measures that are of interest to programs. For example, as children age, they tend to report a higher tolerance for violent behavior and are more likely to skip school or become involved with

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drugs or alcohol. Without a comparison group, programs may fear they are having a negative impact, when in reality they are being effective at slowing a negative developmental trend.

Helping programs to better understand and implement meaningful program evaluation will be an important role for IMP.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Recruitment of male mentors is a substantial concern for mentoring programs. The survey makes clear that male mentor recruitment remains a challenge particularly outside of the city of Chicago. IMP will work with programs to develop joint strategies for increasing the number of available male mentors throughout Illinois.

Many programs express a strong need for training both for staff and for volunteer mentors. IMP is uniquely positioned to bring a variety of training and technical assistance opportunities for a wide variety of mentoring programs.

Current funding levels are inadequate to meet current need. Any effort to bring mentoring “to scale”, reaching all young people in need of a mentor in Illinois, will require the injection of more funding into the field. Successfully meeting this need for mentoring resources will necessitate increasing both public investment in mentoring and that of the corporate and philanthropic communities. As IMP intends to undertake a Corporate Mentoring Challenge to raise the number of mentors from Illinois corporations, it will be equally important to ensure that those mentors are matched by the financial commitment necessary to ensure mentoring relationships are appropriately supported. Additionally, IMP is committed to raising the level of public and private sector financial investment in high quality mentoring more broadly.

KEY PRIORITIES FOR IMP BASED ON SURVEY RESULTS

Bringing mentoring for youth “to scale” in Illinois will necessitate realistically recognizing its strengths and limitations; raising the quality of mentoring programming by substantially expanding use of evidence-based practices; and substantially increasing public and private sector commitments financially and in expanding the pool of available mentors. As such, IMP must commit to:

- Working to raise the profile of mentoring in the public and corporate sector to expand funding resources and to support recruitment of high quality mentors, with special attention to expanding the pool of male mentors;
- Working with programs to increase effectiveness through evidence-based programming with special attention to learning from programs currently meeting key Elements’ benchmarks despite modest staff sizes;
- Working with programs, the public sector, and academic partners to improve program capacity for meaningful program evaluation and continuous quality improvement; and
• Expanding training opportunities for all program staff, working to be sensitive to the challenges of programs relying on small or all volunteer staffing.
Appendix

METHODS

The research team utilized a variety of approaches to identify organizations in Illinois that may be operating mentoring programs for youth and thus be appropriate to complete the survey that is the basis for this report. These included

1. consulting lists of organizations involved in youth mentoring that were available from the Illinois Mentoring Partnership (IMP);
2. searching relevant on-line databases, including the directories of programs maintained by MENTOR: National Mentoring Partnership, the Tutor-Mentor Connection (http://www.tutormentorconnection.org/) and Guidestar (http://www.guidestar.org/);
3. conducting a search via Google; and
4. a snowball sampling technique in which survey respondents were asked to share contact information for other youth mentoring programs that they were aware of in the state.

Overall, 407 organizations and programs were identified to be invited to complete the survey. This invitation, sent via email to a key contact at each organization/program, introduced the survey and its purpose, provided a link for completing the survey online, and described the available incentives for completing survey. For organizations/programs located in Chicagoland, incentives for completing the survey included tickets to a Cubs baseball game and/or tickets to visit the Brookfield Zoo. Organizations/programs located outside of Chicagoland were entered into a drawing for a $100 Walmart gift card. The research team sent up to four follow-up emails to each organization/program, as needed, to encourage completion of the survey. The research team and staff of IMP also made phone calls to several programs and organizations to further encourage and support their completion of the survey. Finally, when outreach to one contact at an organization/program did not result in the survey being completed, a new contact was identified and used whenever possible.

Representatives from 178 of the 407 organizations (44%) responded to the survey. Prior to completing the survey, all respondents were provided with informed consent information for participation in the research, the procedures for which were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago. The survey began with a series of questions to determine whether the respondent’s organization was currently providing mentoring to youth. Youth mentoring was defined as follows: “adults or older peers providing support to youth (e.g., guidance) for the purpose of facilitating one or more areas of their development.” Respondents who indicated that their organization did provide mentoring to youth were then asked to indicate whether the following two statements were true of the organization’s mentoring program(s): 1) Youth receiving mentoring are primarily between 5 and 22-years-old and 2) Mentors and youth are matched to spend time together on repeated occasions, either on a one-to-one basis or in a group format with 10 or fewer youth. Only those organizations that endorsed both statements
were considered representative of those that IMP is currently oriented toward supporting and thus included in this report. When organizations operated more than one mentoring program, the respondent was asked to complete the survey separately for each distinct program. These criteria and procedures resulted in a final total of 152 programs from 145 organizations.

In addition to identifying overall trends in responses to individual survey questions, analyses of the survey data tested for potential differences between programs based on several factors. These factors were:

1. program size by number of mentees (Small [1 – 30], Medium [31 – 100], Large [101 – 250], Very Large [251+]),
2. location in the state of Illinois (Chicago, “Suburban Cook County” [Cook County not including Chicago], “Greater Illinois” [all other areas of IL], or Other [HQ outside of IL]),
3. match meeting location (Mentor/mentee-choice, School-based, Non-profit site, or Other site-based), and
4. Elements of Effective Practice (programs that met every standard listed in the Elements section of this report).

Only those differences that were statistically significant (i.e., 10% likelihood or less of being due to chance) are noted in the report. In other words, findings are broken down by a given program characteristic (e.g., size) only when analyses indicate the differences involved are meaningful.