

**Critical Issues for Mentoring Policy and Practice
As Developed by the Research and Policy Council
September 27, 2006**

Objective: To identify the top five policy and top five practice questions that, if answered, would have an impact on the mentoring field today. The list of research questions that would impact policy or practice was developed using three criteria: demand, impact and timeliness.

POLICY QUESTIONS

Group 1

Members: Michael Karcher, Judy Strother Taylor, James Waller, Gary Walker

1. Are there any pressing social problems for which mentoring is a solution or a critical part of the solution?
2. What is the unit cost of an effective program for a) high-risk groups; b) youth served through regular community-based mentoring; and c) youth served through other models, such as school-based, peer mentoring, etc.
3. What are the most effective ways to translate research findings into policy and/or practice?
4. What is the value added in terms of impact for each dollar spent on training, mentor support or staff development?
5. What dose of mentoring does it take to get genuine, long-term impact? Is there a safe minimum?

Group 2

Members: John Gomperts, Stephen Hamilton, Irv Katz, Michael Weinstein

1. Are there any pressing social problems for which mentoring is a solution or a critical part of the solution?
2. What is the cost-benefit ratio for the intervention? Is a particular method more cost-effective than another?
3. Who are the potential constituents for any policies we would develop? What kind of groups or organizations that can influence policymakers have to care about what we care about? What are the problems those people really care about?
4. What additional benefit do you get with an existing youth development program by bringing mentoring in?
5. Is there a certification process? Should there be? If so, should it be public, or private?
6. What is the best way to recruit?

Overall Top Policy Questions

1. What are the social problems that people care about where mentoring is part of the solution?
2. What is the cost of good mentoring, and is it cost-effective? (must maintain focus on quality because when you do mentoring "on the cheap" you increase the likelihood of early termination of the mentoring relationship and negative impact on the young person.)
3. What is the right dose of mentoring? What is the minimal dose that will have the best effect?

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Group 3

Members: David DuBois, Belle Liang, Edward Seidman, Linda Stewart

1. What don't we know about getting mentoring knowledge into practice? What does the practice field want to know (needs assessment) and how would the information best be disseminated?
2. What are the reliable, valid, effective strategies for assessing quality in mentoring relationships?
3. What are the reliable, valid, effective strategies for assessing quality in mentoring programs?
4. What are the reliable, valid and effective strategies for achieving quality in volunteer recruitment and retention?
5. What does the mentor need to know? What is most effective, both in terms of the content and method used for training and support?

Group 4

Members: Shay Bilchik, Richard Lerner, Renée Spencer, Andrea Taylor

1. What are the characteristics of effective mentoring relationships? What are the characteristics of effective mentors?
2. What is the context in which we support our mentors most effectively? Where do they go for help? What is the structure needed?
3. What constitutes a good match from the beginning? Why do you put a mentor and mentee together?
4. What are the strategies for dealing with relationships that are not working? Sometimes conflict is good and it is inevitable; so what is too much conflict?
5. For children of prisoners, does mentoring facilitate a better relationship with the incarcerated parent? Does it facilitate the parent being more positively integrated back into the family and reduce recidivism?
6. How do we drive "scale" effectively? What are the key factors?

Overall Top Practice Questions

1. What do practitioners need? – i.e. what do they want to know and how do we disseminate it?
2. How can mentoring be brought to scale without losing effectiveness?
3. What makes a mentoring relationship effective? How do we take what we know now and apply it?
4. What are the best strategies for effective volunteer recruitment and retention?