

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING E-MENTORING SERVICES

The questions that follow represent key points for programs to consider when thinking about offering virtual mentoring, or e-mentoring, services to youth. These questions are offered as an additional planning tool and conversation starter alongside the research-informed Scale for Assessing E-Mentoring Readiness distributed by MENTOR. Programs will want to thoroughly discuss these questions with staff and other stakeholders prior to either shifting to a virtual approach or adding virtual components to existing in-person services.

For each of the five categories of questions below, please try to answer these questions collaboratively as a program staff, noting where you lack answers or need to do more information gathering. Then, for each category, rate your overall level of comfort with your answers on the scale offered below:

- 4 points** - *We have answered all these questions pretty well and feel good about our planning and moving forward.*
- 2 points** - *We have somewhat answered these questions, but have some work to do to figure things out.*
- 0 points** - *We have not really answered these questions at all and have considerable work to do in determining the answers.*

Add up your total points to determine your level of readiness. There is a maximum of 20 points available. Note many of these questions are about aspects of quality programming that might be critical to success, so look carefully at the places where your program scored poorly and do not assume a high overall score means smooth sailing.



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1. BASIC CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

- Is our program considering offering e-mentoring as a permanent form of service delivery or is this a temporary shift due to emergency or unexpected circumstances?
 - If this will be temporary, what circumstances will shift us back to regular in-person services?
- Is our program offering e-mentoring as the primary method of mentor-mentee contact or is this a supplement to regular in-person contact?
- If e-mentoring is the primary way mentors and mentees will communicate, have we fully considered the risks and rewards of this approach? What might be improved by this approach? What will be more complicated? What might be impossible?
- If e-mentoring is supplementary, how frequently will mentors and youth communicate this way? And will the interactions be substantively different than their in-person interactions?
- Are there special reasons for our use of e-mentoring (e.g., to facilitate meetings for a school-based program during snow days; keeping matches in touch over summer break; offering support to youth in crisis outside normal program hours; etc.)?

Category Rating: (0, 2, or 4 points) _____

2. PROGRAM MODEL AND SETTING QUESTIONS

- Does our program have a theory of change that explains how your mentoring services/ relationships and other program components (e.g., a curriculum) work to influence mentee development and the pathways of change toward the ultimate outcomes or goals of the program?
- Applying our theory of change to e-mentoring service delivery, have we considered:
 - The degree to which that pathway of change is **dependent on in-person interactions** that might facilitate role modeling, learning or practicing a new skill (e.g., engagement in sports or a science experiment), or building or changing relationships among groups of youth within a program setting (e.g., a group mentoring program trying to improve peer relations and connectedness in a school)?
 - The degree to which **program activities** can feasibly be participated in remotely? Do they require special equipment or physical space? If so, can that be recreated remotely by providing supplies or doing activities asynchronously (e.g., having mentors and youth work on projects separately at home and then share on camera). Do staff need to observe the activities and how can they do that using the technology?
 - The degree to which mentors and youth can **build trust** and **form a strong bond** when communicating via technology.
- Do mentor-mentee interactions take place at (or are part of) an institution (e.g., a school) whose virtual communication policies will need to be followed? If so, do we have full understanding of the scope of those policies? If not, have we determined the types of policies we will need to have in place?
- Have we considered any legal or liability/risk management considerations that need to be addressed (e.g., accommodations for participants with disabilities; data security)?
- Do we know the types of parent/caregiver permission needed for youth to participate in these services? Have we engaged with parents to determine whether they would be content/comfortable with an e-mentoring model?
- If you are working in multiple sites, cities, or regions, will e-mentoring be offered at all sites or only those where in-person activities are not possible? If it varies by location, might this have differential effects on participant experiences (and program outcomes)?

Category Rating: (0, 2, or 4 points) _____

3. PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE QUESTIONS

- If e-mentoring is a shift from in-person meetings (even if temporary), how similar would an online mentoring experience be to what mentors and youth wanted when they joined the program?
 - Would this be a radical shift, or will their interactions still follow a familiar format?
 - Will that personal touch that makes mentoring special be diminished? Or will online interaction create a safer space for youth to confide in a mentor (particularly adolescents)?
 - Might you lose mentors or youth if they feel this new approach is too far from what they wanted from the program experience?
- If e-mentoring will be added onto in-person meetings, or done temporarily, how will we communicate with mentors, youth, and caregivers about these changes? How will this change our expectations of them? What kind of time do they need to prepare for this change?
- How might the mentors we recruit be different than if we were running an in-person program? What might be the strengths and challenges that come from working with different mentors? Do we understand the motivations of those who volunteer for e-mentoring?
- What are the benefits and challenges of e-mentoring for youth and families? Do we know how we will these nuances to them? Will this method of mentoring be a good fit for the needs we know they bring to the program?
- If we are going to be primarily virtual, are there opportunities for in-person meetings? What would be involved in offering occasional meet-ups or allowing matches that option? What policies might be needed around in-person meeting?
- Other than meeting with their mentor/mentee, what else will participants do online with the program? Will recruitment be virtual? Match check-ins? Activity reporting and data collection? What will the full online participant experience look like?
- How will we keep mentors and youth engaged online? What prompts and prescribed activities or conversation starters will we offer? How can we ensure active participation?
- How will virtual communication change the mentor-mentee relationship? What challenges might arise from the use of technology (e.g., youth not having privacy at home or mentors not responding to texts quickly)? Conversely, what will being online together allow them to do that they couldn't do in-person?
- How will our training of virtual matches be different from training of in-person matches?

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4. TECHNOLOGY CHOICE QUESTIONS

- Do our mentors and mentees already communicate via any technology tools (e.g., phone, text, email, social media, video chat, online message board/forum, proprietary platform)? If so, do we know what seems to work for them? If not, what are the reasons they don't? Can we utilize a technology with which they are already comfortable and use on a regular basis rather than introducing a new platform?
- Do we have a comprehensive understanding of the technology access of our mentors and mentees and their families?
 - Is there sufficient access to WiFi, data, mobile devices for every youth and mentor? If not, how big is the gap? Are the gaps more related to hardware or internet access? Or other factors (such as a lack of privacy or specific software)? Are youth sharing devices with other family members? Will that impact privacy or time they can spend on the device (e.g., shared computer or tablet)?
- What language- or disability-related considerations might influence the technology we choose? Have we ensured that the hardware and software we are considering will be inclusive?
- Revisiting our theory of change, what type of technology would be a good fit for our program's activities?
 - What technology would best facilitate the activities mentors and mentees need to do together?
 - Would you need to supplement technology with any physical materials (e.g., a workbook that gets filled out or materials to do a science experiment)?
 - What technology might enhance or hinder relationships? Do we know pros and cons of each (e.g., email vs text messaging)?
- Will we ask our participants to use just one tool (e.g., Zoom) or will we ask them to use multiple technologies (e.g., Zoom, plus text messaging and logging into the program website for activity instructions)? How can we simplify things?
- If we had a magic wand and could build the *perfect* technology system for our program from scratch, what would that look like? Is it possible to get similar performance from existing tools?
 - Does it seem like we might have to build our own proprietary system based on our analysis of existing/available technology tools? Do we understand the resources and timelines needed for that development?

Category Rating: (0, 2, or 4 points) _____

5. STAFF AND RESOURCE CAPACITY QUESTIONS

- Do we know the volume of staffing needed to run the program using the selected (or proposed) technology? Do we know how long critical tasks in implementing the program will take?
- If our use of e-mentoring is temporary or an add-on to existing services, do we know the impact this will have on staff time? Does this increase or decrease staff responsibility/hours? Does it change the skills staff are required to have?
- If e-mentoring is temporary or an add-on, do we have the buy-in of staff on making this change? Are they in favor of this change or is more communication needed to address their concerns?
- What kind of technology familiarity does our staff currently have?
 - Are they comfortable doing more of their work in virtual environments?
 - Do they have strong internet access and technology skills?
 - What kind of training might they need?
 - What kind of on-going technical support might they need?
- How stable is our staffing? Are we facing any budget shortfalls (or, conversely, expecting new investment)? Have we determined the minimum staffing needed to safely and successfully implement the program?
- Do we have sufficient technical support to run a tech-focused mentoring program or component? Who will be responsible for technical support? How will this support be communicated to mentors and mentees?
- Do we know the technology costs associated with offering e-mentoring, including internet access, devices for participation, and the purchasing/licensing of software or subscriptions to online services? Will these costs fluctuate or grow over time?
- If we are adding e-mentoring on as permanent new capacity, how stable our overall funding at this time? Is *now* the right time to invest in technology and try something new?
- What types of approvals from your Board or other executive leadership would you need to shift to virtual mentoring or to make the financial investment?

Category Rating: (0, 2, or 4 points) _____

TOTAL Rating of Planning and Capacity (sum scores from each category here):

_____ / **20** (points available)