

## Mentoring as a Disability Inclusion Strategy

A mentoring program is a talent-development and retention strategy, one that uses the organization’s human resources to improve employee satisfaction, develop leaders and teach new skills. Mentoring is also an effective tool for increasing and shaping inclusive culture.

Traditionally defined, mentoring means a one-on-one relationship through which a senior person (the mentor) motivates and supports the personal or professional development of a junior person (the mentee). Today, however, mentoring has evolved to also include a variety of models, including virtual, peer, reverse and flash programs. And, in many organizations, “mentoring cultures” are being established to encourage “natural mentoring” to occur without specific program parameters.

A *Diversity Best Practices* survey found that 80 percent of companies surveyed either had formal diversity mentoring programs or were in the process of establishing them to positively impact recruitment and retention.<sup>1</sup> In the disability inclusion space, more and more employers are coordinating or participating in mentoring programs to improve recruitment, retention and advancement of individuals with disabilities, facilitating their success during their early years with an organization.

Ready to implement effective mentoring strategies to impact your disability inclusion outcomes? The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) recommends the following steps:

### ADOPTING A MENTORING CULTURE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

- ➔ Conduct a needs assessment
- ➔ Lay the groundwork and set the program objectives
- ➔ Align the mentoring program with organizational goals, strategies and mission
- ➔ Develop the mentoring program
- ➔ Train the participants
- ➔ Develop a mentoring program roadmap
- ➔ Gain senior leadership support
- ➔ Recruit a program manager
- ➔ Create a steering committee – or enlist an Employee Resource Group to lead the effort<sup>2</sup>

### IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL MENTORING STRATEGIES

- ➔ Create, and update as needed, an individualized mentoring plan
- ➔ Complete a professional or personal assessment
- ➔ Conduct interviews with other mentors
- ➔ Define professional development goals
- ➔ Develop a professional development plan
- ➔ Attend professional networking or learning activities
- ➔ Submit feedback and progress updates to appropriate staff

[1] Diversity Primer, pg. 118, Diversity Best Practices ([https://encrypted.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&ved=0ahUKewj8tNqWzNPSAhVmhlQKHfUyCfAQFghCMAY&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.diversitybestpractices.com%2Fsites%2Fdiversitybestpractices.com%2Ffiles%2Fimport%2Fembedded%2Fanchors%2Ffiles%2Fdiversity\\_primer\\_chapter\\_08.pdf&usq=AFOjCNGSYUSJP9Pc-pC91MyzbVdVUKCkqw&bvm=by.149397726.d.cGw](https://encrypted.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&ved=0ahUKewj8tNqWzNPSAhVmhlQKHfUyCfAQFghCMAY&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.diversitybestpractices.com%2Fsites%2Fdiversitybestpractices.com%2Ffiles%2Fimport%2Fembedded%2Fanchors%2Ffiles%2Fdiversity_primer_chapter_08.pdf&usq=AFOjCNGSYUSJP9Pc-pC91MyzbVdVUKCkqw&bvm=by.149397726.d.cGw))

[2] Adapted from the Federal Workplace Mentoring Primer, [www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/fed-wmp.pdf](http://www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/fed-wmp.pdf)

A mentoring program can have a positive impact on an organization, improving employee retention and engagement, and enriching workplace culture. It can also serve as an organizational strategy towards disability inclusion and diversity success.

## MENTORING PROGRAM EXAMPLES AND RESOURCES

### **Cultivating Leadership: Mentoring Youth with Disabilities**

*Background from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).*

[www.DOL.gov/odep/pubs/fact/cultivate.htm](http://www.DOL.gov/odep/pubs/fact/cultivate.htm)

### **Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups**

*A publication from EARN.*

[www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/erg\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/erg_toolkit.pdf)

### **Workplace Mentoring Primer**

*A publication from EARN.*

[www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/wmp.pdf](http://www.AskEARN.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/wmp.pdf)

### **Disability Mentoring Day (DMD)**

*Coordinated by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), this large-scale national effort takes place the third Wednesday of every October. Employers may participate in DMD and also consider using October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, to launch a mentoring program.*

[www.AAPD.com/disability-mentoring-day](http://www.AAPD.com/disability-mentoring-day)

### **Rising Leaders Mentoring Program**

*Sponsored by the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN), this six-month career mentoring opportunity links at least 70 college students and recent graduates with disabilities to business professionals from USBLN partner companies. (Contact [www.USBLN.org](http://www.USBLN.org) to learn more about becoming a partner company.)*

[www.USBLN.org/what-we-do/rising-leaders-mentoring-program](http://www.USBLN.org/what-we-do/rising-leaders-mentoring-program)

### **Career Exploration Mentorship Program for Students and Young Professionals with Disabilities**

*Hosted by Pearson and National Federation of the Blind, this program provides guidance, support and advice from experienced Pearson professionals working in a variety of legal-related positions to students and recent graduates who are blind or have low vision.*

[www.NFBNJ.org/employment-opportunities/#Pearson%20Announces%20Career%20Exploration%20Mentorship%20Program%20for%20Students,%20Young%20Professionals%20with%20Disabilities](http://www.NFBNJ.org/employment-opportunities/#Pearson%20Announces%20Career%20Exploration%20Mentorship%20Program%20for%20Students,%20Young%20Professionals%20with%20Disabilities)

### **National Disability Mentoring Coalition**

*Brings together more than 40 organizations focused on improving the awareness, quality and impact of mentoring for youth and adults with disabilities. Members include nonprofits, employers, higher education, foundations and government agencies.*

[www.PYD.org/blog/national-center/national-disability-mentoring-coalition-members-sponsors](http://www.PYD.org/blog/national-center/national-disability-mentoring-coalition-members-sponsors)

### **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership**

*Aims to fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for America's young people and to close the mentoring gap for the one in three young people growing up without this critical support.*

[www.Mentoring.org](http://www.Mentoring.org)

Sign up for EARN's biweekly newsletter and alerts about upcoming webinars and other educational events. Visit **AskEARN.org** to learn more!