

Traditional Mentoring Pairs Model

The American Inns of Court, in conjunction with the Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough Center on Professionalism at the University of South Carolina School of Law, has developed a model mentoring program based on 1:1 pairs for Inns to adapt, implement, and maintain mentoring programs of their own.

Overview

This program is designed to facilitate one-to-one mentoring pairs and to primarily engage students and Inn members with three or fewer years of experience. In general, members serving as mentors should have significant experience in practicing law. These general guidelines may be altered depending on the needs of individual Inns, which may have more experienced members in need of mentoring, younger members with new skill sets to share, or a mentoring structure that is integral to the development of educational programming. No matter how your Inn operates, these steps can help you achieve your mentoring goals.

STEP 1: Establish an Inn Mentoring Committee

Administration of the mentoring program should fall under the purview of an Inn Mentoring Committee. Inn officers should establish a mentoring committee of three to four members, one of whom will be an Inn officer, the Mentoring Chair. In addition to general operational oversight of mentoring efforts, a committee's responsibilities should include the following tasks:

- Communicating the existence and organization of the program
- Establishing timelines for mentoring activities in each Inn program year
- Generating and maintaining a non-inclusive, illustrative list of discussion topics
- Recruiting both mentors and mentees for one-on-one relationships
- Matching mentees with mentors
- Creating and communicating guidelines regarding expectations between mentors and mentees
- Establishing appropriate accountability mechanisms
- Evaluating success and areas for improvement
- Troubleshooting

A sample Mentoring Chair job description is available on our website: http://home.innsocourt.org/AIC/AIC_For_Leaders/AIC_Leadership_JobDesc/Sample_Job_Description_Mentoring_Chair.aspx

STEP 2: Organize your Mentoring Operations

- Establish mentoring as an opportunity for Inn members to volunteer and get more involved with the Inn.
- Have clearly stated roles and responsibilities for each committee member at the start of the year.
- Mentoring will be conducted by Inn mentoring pairs matched by the mentoring committee.
- Inn mentoring pair selections will be made—whenever possible—by the mentoring committee prior to the start of the Inn's program year.
- When making matches, the mentoring committee should take into consideration areas of practice, common interest and other relevant factors that will facilitate a successful mentoring experience. Using an interest form [[samples available online](#)], filled out by both parties, can be very helpful.
- Communicate programs and responsibilities for mentors and mentees early and often.
- Ensure there is a procedure for any interested party to get involved in some fashion.

STEP 3: Apply Guidelines

Each Inn should apply the following guidelines to their program, ensuring they are tailored to meet the needs and personalities of individual Inns:

Size: 1:1 pairs.

Duration: Each mentoring cycle lasts for the duration of one Inn program year—usually 9–12 months.
[Note: Mentoring relationships created through this program may continue for longer on their own.]

Frequency: Each mentee should have at least four to five contacts with mentors during the program year, either with other Inn mentoring pairs or in their own mentor-mentee pair meetings.

Length: Mentorship meetings, whether in groups or with individual mentors and mentees, should last at least one hour.

Location: Pairs should coordinate to find convenient meeting schedules. Be creative with the location: at your Inn meeting place before or after a meeting, judges' chambers, local restaurants or coffee shops, the library, a law firm conference room, or even a city park.

Topics: The mentoring committee will agree before the start of the program year on the minimum topic or topics that should be covered in mentoring; pairs can certainly cover more ground or customized topics on their own.

STEP 4: Create Formats & Schedules

The following format is suggested as a workable approach for most Inn mentoring programs. Adjust as needed.

Session One—Group Meeting with Mentors and

Mentees: Substantive in-depth presentation (actual presentation or group discussion) by one or more members of Inn committee to the full complement of mentor/mentee pairs.

Session Two—Individual Session: One-on-one meeting between individual mentors and mentees.

Session Three—Group Meeting: Group discussion following up on either or both of the first two sessions between mentoring group members and mentees.

Session Four—Individual Session: One-on-one meeting between individual mentors and mentees.

Session Five—Group Meeting: Closing group discussion between mentoring group and mentees to discuss any final issues.

This combination of group presentations, discussions and one-on-one mentoring has proved to be an effective mentoring technique in both the law and other professions. Specialty practice focused Inns may find one set of topics to discuss, whereas a general Inn may have another set.

The group meetings are an excellent opportunity to employ many of the “speed-mentoring” programs that are available in our programs library.

STEP 5: Focus on Professionalism

In any mentoring program, it is important to make professionalism the centerpiece. The transmission of American Inns of Court professional values to mentees should be the ultimate goal. Ensure that members have a strong understanding of what professionalism includes:

- High competence in legal skills.
- Adherence to ethical obligations.
- An appreciation of the importance of civility and professional demeanor in all dealings.
- The importance of pro bono representation and access to justice issues.
- The importance of participation in bar organizations at the local, state and national levels.

- The transmission of professional values and standards to members of the legal profession.
- Balancing self-interest with the interests of clients, the justice system and the public interest.
- Accountability for one’s actions.

STEP 6: Continually Assess your Efforts

Knowing what is working and what is not is the only way to improve. Mentors and mentees should be given the opportunity to evaluate how things are going on a regular basis, but at least:

- After each group mentoring activity
- After each one-on-one activity

The Inn mentoring pairs should also provide progress reports to the Mentoring Committee:

- Mid-year
- End of year

The end of year report should seek input from mentors and mentees and use information from the year’s group and one-on-one reports. The mentoring committee shall establish the format for all reporting efforts, although an online survey had proven to be one of the most effective and efficient ways. Have a process in place for using the data from one year to inform and assist the following year’s mentoring committee.

More valuable data is collected if the assessments are done in an anonymous fashion—it is difficult to give criticism or offer advice for improvement if you know your mentor is going to read or hear it. Anonymous aggregate information can help your Inn become data-driven and makes decisions about how to improve the program that much easier. Continuous improvement is the goal.

If you would like to keep the national office apprised of your mentoring efforts, please send an email to mentoring@innsofcourt.org—we’d love to hear about them. We are always looking for new ideas to share with other Inns.

Mentoring samples, tools, and templates are available on our website: <http://home.innsofcourt.org/Mentoring>

Be bold. Be creative. Be successful.

Have a story you want to share? We want to hear it!
Have a question about mentoring? We’re here to help answer it!
Running out of ideas? We’re here to help!
mentoring@innsofcourt.org

© 2017 AMERICAN INNS OF COURT. The American Inns of Court Mentoring Models were developed for individual American Inns of Court to adapt, implement, and maintain mentoring programs of their own. If you are interested in reproducing this document for use outside of the American Inns of Court, please contact Rita Zimmerman at rzimmerman@innsofcourt.org to request permission.