

AIC Model Mentoring Program – Step-by-Step

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 for Inns to adapt, implement, and maintain mentoring programs of their own.

A Keystone Activity

Mentoring is a time honored legal tradition and a cornerstone of the American Inns of Court. AIC's Professional Creed states a goal of upholding "the highest standards of excellence in professionalism, ethics, civility, and legal skills" and attaining "the highest level of knowledge and skills" in every members' practice area.

Every Inn should strive to have a robust and comprehensive mentoring program that continues to elevate the legal profession. That does not mean that every Inn's program will look the same – there are many ways of doing things and different personalities will dictate what does or does not work within the culture of your Inn.

Try new things and remember that mentoring can come from many different places.

Purpose of the Model Mentoring Program

The purpose of American Inns of Court mentoring model is to make it easy to start or elevate existing mentoring efforts in local Inns.

Ease of Use

While certainly not the only method available, this model mentoring program is a proven approach for Inns using a straightforward format of administration, operation and scheduling which can be adapted to meet the needs and personalities of individual Inns.

Participation

This program is designed primarily to 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. In addition to general operational oversight of mentoring efforts, a committee's responsibilities should include:

- 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, either for one-on-one relationships or small groups
- 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

STEP 2

Organize your Mentoring Operations

- Mentoring will be conducted by Inn mentoring groups appointed by the mentoring committee.
- Each group will have a leader, appointed by the mentoring committee, who is responsible for that group's activities for the program year.
- 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 which will facilitate a successful mentoring experience. An interest form, filled out by both parties, is very helpful in this endeavor.
- Have clearly stated roles and responsibilities for each committee member at the start of the year.
- Communicate programs and responsibilities for mentors and mentees early and often.

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:** Inn mentoring groups should generally have no fewer than three and no more than five mentors.
- **ONE-ON-ONE:** The number of mentees assigned to each Inn mentoring group should be the same as the number of mentors (you shouldn't have mentors double up!).
- **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.]
- **FREQUENCY:** Each mentee should have at least four to five contacts with mentors during the program year, either with the Inn mentoring groups or in mentor-mentee pair meetings.

- **LENGTH:** Mentor-mentee meetings, whether in groups or with individual mentors and mentees, should last at least one hour.
- **LOCATION:** Group leaders should facilitate convenient meeting schedules; one-on-ones can be held at the convenience of the individuals. 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 – in conjunction with the groups – will agree before the start of the program year on the topic or topics to be covered in mentoring.

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 mentoring group to mentees.
- **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 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 6

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. 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 less experienced 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 7

Continually Assess your Efforts

Knowing what is working and what is not is the only way to improve. You should assess both mentors and mentees at each of the following points:

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

The Inn mentoring groups (led by the group leader) should provide progress reports to the Mentoring Committee:

- Mid-year
- End of year

Samples, tools and templates available at:

http://home.innsofcourt.org/AIC/For_Members/Mentoring/AIC/AIC_For_Members/Mentoring

The end of year report should seek input from mentors and mentees and use information from previous group and one-on-one reports. The mentoring committee shall establish the format for all reporting efforts; summary efforts should be provided to the National Office. 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 can make decisions about how to improve the program that much easier. Continuous improvement is the goal.

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!

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