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Program Evaluation & Recognition



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Evaluation and recognition are essential parts of building and sustaining a successful mentorship program.

A consistent evaluation process helps firms measure progress, understand participant experiences, identify opportunities for improvement, and ensure the program continues to meet the needs of both employees and the organization.

Recognition efforts reinforce the priority the firm places on mentorship and how much the efforts of mentors and mentees is valued by the firm. It also creates opportunities to lift up models and examples for others to learn from.

Evaluation Methods and Questions

Evaluation should not be viewed only as a measure of success or failure. Instead, it should serve as an ongoing feedback loop that supports stronger mentor-mentee relationships and allows the program to evolve over time.

Evaluation methods may include:

- Regular conversations during mentor-mentee meetings
- Written reflections or feedback forms
- Participant surveys
- Focus groups or program review discussions

Broad Evaluation Questions

Questions posed should ensure a continuum of potential answers and encourage expansive, thoughtfully considered responses. Open-ended feedback provides valuable insight into participant experiences and helps identify opportunities for improvement.

Consider asking all participants:

- **What has been the most valuable aspect of the mentorship program?**
- **What changes or improvements would strengthen the program?**
- **What additional resources or support would improve the mentorship experience?**
- **Are there other comments or suggestions you would like to share about your experience?**

Evaluation Questions Specific to Mentors

Mentors should reflect on the effectiveness of the relationship and their role in supporting the mentee's development.

Consider:

- **Is the mentee engaged and taking initiative?** To what extent is the mentee actively working toward their professional development goals?
- **Is the mentee making progress?** How much has the mentee grown in the areas they identified as priorities? Are there barriers where additional guidance or support could be helpful?
- **Is there a strong relationship foundation?** To what extent do you feel comfortable having open, productive conversations about professional challenges and opportunities with your mentee?

Evaluation Questions for Mentees

Mentees should evaluate whether the relationship is providing meaningful guidance and support.

Consider:

- **Is the mentor providing valuable guidance?** How would you rate and describe the quality and usefulness of the feedback, advice, and perspective you have received?
- **Is the mentor helping address challenges?** To what extent have you identified obstacles or opportunities where your mentor can provide insight or support, and are you receiving it?
- **Is there a strong relationship foundation?** To what extent do you feel comfortable discussing goals, challenges, and professional questions openly with your mentor?

Evaluation Models

When designing a mentorship program, firms should determine how closely the program should connect to formal employee development processes. Two common approaches are the “professional development” model and the “safe space” model.

Professional Development Model

The Professional Development Model integrates mentorship with broader employee growth strategies, career planning, and performance development. This approach positions mentorship as a structured tool for building skills, preparing employees for advancement, and supporting succession planning.

This model works best when mentor-mentee pairings are intentionally aligned with development goals and organizational needs.

Benefits include:

- **Direct connection to career growth:** Mentorship can address specific skills, experiences, and competencies employees (both mentees and mentors) need to develop.
- **Alignment with firm needs:** Programs can support organizational priorities such as leadership development, project management, and future staffing needs.
- **Recognition of growth:** Firms may incorporate mentorship outcomes into broader development conversations, including opportunities for advancement, increased responsibility, or expanded roles.

For example, a mentee may identify a goal of developing stronger project management skills and work with a mentor to create opportunities for learning, reflection, and practical experience.

Similarly, a mentor may be identified as needing to grow in their communications or coaching skills. Feedback of a mentee may point toward growth or further development needed in these areas.

Safe Space Model

The Safe Space Model separates mentorship from formal performance evaluation systems. The goal is to create an environment where participants can have open and candid conversations about career development, workplace challenges, and professional experiences.

This model requires clear communication from firm leadership that mentorship discussions will remain separate from performance reviews unless participants choose otherwise.

Benefits include:

- **Encourages honest conversations:** Mentees may feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics, such as career uncertainty, workplace challenges, or questions about advancement.
- **Builds trust:** Mentors can provide guidance and perspective without the relationship feeling evaluative.
- **Supports employee well-being:** Participants have a dedicated space to discuss challenges and seek advice.

Both models can be effective. The appropriate approach depends on the firm’s goals, culture, and level of trust within the organization. Some firms may choose to incorporate elements of both models by using mentorship for professional development planning while maintaining clear boundaries around performance evaluation.

Recognition & Reward

Recognition Matters

Recognition is an important part of sustaining participation and demonstrating that mentorship is valued by the organization.

—> Firms should consider ways to acknowledge mentors and mentees who contribute meaningfully to the program.

Recognition strategies may include:

- Highlighting successful mentorship relationships
- Recognizing mentors who dedicate significant time and effort
- Celebrating mentee growth and accomplishments
- Including mentorship participation as part of broader firm culture initiatives
- Ensuring mentorship is considered in the context of promotions, salary increases, or other rewards

Evaluation questions related to recognition might include:

- How well do you believe participants in the mentorship program are being recognized for their efforts?
- How meaningful do you find the firm's acknowledgment of mentorship engagement and outcomes?
- How might we celebrate successful mentorship relationships and outcomes?

Disparate Responsibility and Reward for Mentoring

Firms should go into the development of a formal mentorship program being aware of current patterns of behavior in their organization related to informal mentorship. Who tend to be those most expected or encouraged to mentor? Who takes time to do so, and who defers to others? Who is lifted up for their mentorship efforts, and does that praise or recognition actually reflect the time and attention put toward the effort and its outcomes?

Mentorship is often unevenly encouraged, expected, and rewarded. Some members of the firm may be more often encouraged or expected to take on mentorship roles than others, and expectations of compliance with all aspects of formal mentorship programs may be inconsistent based on role or various types of power in the organization.

Firms need to be aware of this potential unevenness, look for patterns, and address them. Disparate distribution of mentorship responsibilities, and uneven compliance with or reward for meeting mentorship program requirements, can undercut employee morale and the integrity of mentorship efforts.

Conclusion

The AIA St. Paul Mentorship Task Force has put forward these recommendations with the intention of prompting firm leaders, mentors, mentees, and others in the architecture community to take action: not just to start up a new mentorship program or to strengthen an existing one, but to make mentorship a stronger priority in the architecture profession for the benefit of all.

We hope that what is outlined in this report proves helpful. We also know that the perspectives and recommendations it contains are not the final word. As AIA St. Paul is a foundational partner in the AIA Minnesota Next Gen Initiative, which includes attention to mentorship for at least the next four years, we welcome readers' insights and suggestions related to this report and ideas for next steps to support firm mentorship efforts.



From our experience as both mentees and mentors, we know that **mentorship done well can be incredibly rewarding**; it can fuel the skills, knowledge, and networks that grow meaningful workdays and propel careers forward. Thank you for the work you are doing to make this potential a reality.



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