

# Research Agenda

## MENTOR's Board of Directors

### Co-Founder and Chairman

Mr. Geoffrey T. Boisi

### Co-Founder

Mr. Raymond G. Chambers  
*Amelior Foundation*

### Vice Chairman

Mr. David A. Coulter  
*J.P. Morgan Chase & Co.*

### Vice Chairman

Mr. Alan D. Schwartz  
*Bear, Stearns & Co. Inc.*

### Members

Mr. James M. Allwin  
*Aetos Capital, LLC*

Mr. Ronald Bernard  
*Corbis Motion*

Mr. Michael Bolton  
*The Michael Bolton Charities, Inc.*

The Honorable Bill Bradley  
*Allen & Company LLC*

Mr. Robert J. Dayton

Mr. James E. Duffy  
*JED Media, Inc.*

Mr. George A. Fertitta  
*Margeotes | Fertitta+Partners LLC*

Mr. Mario J. Gabelli  
*Gabelli Asset Management Inc.*

Mrs. Marian L. Heard  
*United Way of Massachusetts Bay*

The Honorable Thomas Kean  
*Drew University*

Dr. Roy Keith  
*Stonington Partners*

Mr. Willem Kooyker  
*Blenheim Capital Management LLC /  
Derivatives Portfolio Management LLC*

Mr. Lawrence Lederman  
*Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy*

Mr. Thomas G. Mendell  
*The Beacon Group, LP*

The Reverend J. Donald Monan, S.J.  
*Boston College*

Dr. Frank Newman  
*Brown University*

Mrs. Vivian W. Piasecki  
*The Piasecki Family Foundation*

Mr. Phil Ramone  
*Phil Ramone, Inc.*

Mr. Alan Rappaport  
*Bank of America*

Mr. Gerard R. Roche  
*Heidrick & Struggles*

Mr. Bill Russell  
*Center Court Productions*

Mr. Haim Saban  
*Saban Capital Group*

Mr. John A. Schneider  
*Allen & Company LLC*

Mr. James D. Sinegal  
*Costco Wholesale*

Mr. Kenneth I. Starr  
*Starr & Company LLC*

Mrs. Gayfryd Steinberg

Mr. Vincent A. Wasik  
*MCG global, LLC*

Dr. Susan G. Weinberger  
*Public Policy Council*

*From the start I was expected to lose. Everything I have right now is mostly because I defied what the world concluded about me before I could even speak a word in my defense. And my defense is that I am just as capable as any person to do great things. Like you, I think about all the things this world could achieve if only every child was given the right tools. Mentoring is the right tool and it is the way to the American Dream.*

— EAN GARRETT, MENTEE

## The Urgent Need for Mentoring Research

From experience and the limited research that has already been compiled, we know that when done well, mentoring works for young people. Studies of both well-established programs – such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters – and newer programs – such as Across Ages – that provide youth with formal one-to-one mentoring relationships, have provided strong evidence of their success in reducing the incidence of delinquency, substance use and academic failure. These studies further indicate that formal youth mentoring programs can promote positive outcomes, such as improved self-esteem, social skills and career development. Similar benefits are evident for so-called “natural” mentoring relationships – relationships that occur outside of formal programs when youth bond with adults, such as grandparents, clergy, teachers, after-school providers and neighbors.

To help mentoring relationships thrive and endure, MENTOR and United Way of America in 1990 convened a blue-ribbon panel to develop rigorous guidelines for mentoring programs. Called the *Elements of Effective Practice*, these guidelines include measures any mentoring program can implement to offer the best mentoring possible. In 2003, MENTOR once again convened a blue-ribbon panel to update the *Elements* to reflect the latest in mentoring policies, practices, experiences and research.

Still, we need to know more. Mentoring is not a “one-size-fits-all” proposition. Each child has unique needs: the type of mentoring relationship that addresses one child’s needs may not address another’s. We must find out why different types of mentoring are effective for some, but not others, and how we can strengthen and improve mentoring efforts based on this understanding.

Given the demand for more mentors and the need for more mentoring research, MENTOR has made it a priority to establish a long-term research agenda. Therefore, MENTOR recently convened a National Research Summit on Mentoring, led by mentoring research experts Dr. Jean Rhodes, professor of Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Boston, and Dr. David DuBois, associate professor of Community Health Sciences, University of Illinois at Chicago. This document includes priority areas for future research emerging from the summit, recommended strategies to advance mentoring research in these areas and next steps, which together form a National Research Agenda for Youth Mentoring. It also offers ways you can advance this research agenda. We urge you to read this document carefully and consider ways you can take an active role in expanding the body of knowledge that guides our country’s mentoring efforts. Only through rigorous, scientific research can we know how best to help the millions of young people throughout the country who want or need caring adult mentors.



David DuBois, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of  
Community Health Sciences,  
University of Illinois  
at Chicago  
Co-Chair, National Research  
Summit on Mentoring



Jean Rhodes, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology,  
University of Massachusetts,  
Boston  
Co-Chair, National Research  
Summit on Mentoring

# National Research Agenda for Youth Mentoring

BY DR. JEAN RHODES AND DR. DAVID DUBOIS, CO-CHAIRS OF THE NATIONAL RESEARCH SUMMIT ON MENTORING

*We were pleased to co-chair the National Research Summit on Mentoring and offer the following: Priority Areas for Future Research; Recommendations for Advancing Research on Mentoring; and Next Steps.*

## **Priority Areas for Future Research**

The summit participants worked in teams to critically review and integrate findings pertaining to theory, research and practice in each of several key topic areas: Programs, Relationships, Contexts, Special Populations, Developmental and Cultural Perspectives, Evaluation and Research Methodology and Community Organizing and Advocacy.

To inform and complement the work of these groups, keynote contributions were invited from leading scholars in the areas of positive youth development and prevention science. A forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of Community Psychology* will feature a full report of the findings of each summit working group and the keynote contributions.

## **Evaluating the New Generation of Programs**

Mentoring programs today face many challenges, including limited resources, not enough mentors to address young people's needs and a growing number of young people expressing interest in new approaches to mentoring. In response to these and other challenges, programs and funders are increasingly exploring alternatives to the traditional one-to-one model. Among the most popular of these alternative approaches are group, peer and e-mentoring. Strategies tied to particular types of settings – such as school-, workplace- and faith-based mentoring – also are exhibiting rapid growth. Mentoring researchers need to carefully gauge both the effectiveness and costs of these new approaches to mentoring, using randomized, controlled studies. They then need to translate findings into practical decision-making guidelines for program developers and funding agencies.

## **Deciphering “Best Practices” in Mentoring**

Using the Elements of Effective Practice as a foundation, researchers need to carefully evaluate mentoring program practices for their ability to facilitate enduring, positive outcomes for youth. Systematic comparison of practices of differing type and intensity is needed within all relevant program areas, including recruitment, training, matching, supervision and mentor/mentee activities. Researchers need to make these comparisons within specific program models (for example, group mentoring), as well as across the entire spectrum of mentoring program models (for example, traditional one-to-one, group, peer and e-mentoring).

## **Integrating Mentoring with Other Programs and Services**

Mentoring is often included as part of a larger youth development program that has several different components. Currently, however, there is only limited understanding of how best to integrate mentoring with these types of other services. Researchers need to examine the extent to which mentoring adds to the effectiveness of programs with multiple components. They also need to carefully evaluate strategies that may help to maximize these benefits.

## **Understanding the Link Between Mentoring and Academic Achievement**

Increasingly, school systems across the country are challenged to ensure that their students meet or exceed academic standards. Mentoring programs frequently are advocated as a means of promoting the academic achievement of children and adolescents who may be at risk for school failure. Currently, there is encouraging evidence that mentoring relationships can promote academic achievement. However, researchers need to systematically investigate which types of programs and relationships are most effective for ensuring that youth benefit in this area.

### *Improving Mentor Recruitment, Training and Retention*

Most programs struggle to recruit adequate numbers of mentors to meet community needs. Furthermore, as many as half of volunteer mentor relationships dissolve after only a few months. Others fail to provide youth with the most needed forms of guidance and support. Research has indicated that such circumstances may undermine youths' sense of well-being and contribute to negative outcomes. To inform efforts to address concerns in this area, researchers need to rigorously evaluate strategies for recruiting, training and retaining mentors. The strategies examined should include both currently recommended approaches that are detailed in the *Elements of Effective Practice* as well as more recent, emerging innovations in practice.

### *Better Serving Special Populations of Mentees*

Many of the young people served by mentoring programs have special needs. They may be in foster care, have learning disabilities, have a parent who is incarcerated, come from a home where English is a second language, be confronting the demands of already being a parent themselves, etc. Researchers have found that, in many instances, youth with special needs do not benefit from participation in traditional mentoring programs. A number of mentoring program models specifically tailored to young people with special needs appear promising but lack strong research support. To help ensure positive effects of mentoring for special populations, priority should be given to rigorous evaluation of these types of programs.

### *Understanding the Role of Gender, Age and Ethnicity*

Growing evidence indicates that boys and girls experience and benefit from the mentoring process in different ways. The same may hold true for younger versus older youth and for youth from differing ethnic backgrounds. More information is needed about how mentoring programs can best address the needs and experiences of youth within particular gender, age and ethnic groups. Research in this area should focus on the development and evaluation of approaches to mentoring that are geared specifically to the needs and preferences of youth with differing demographic characteristics.

### *Understanding How Mentoring Relationships “Work”*

The relationship between a caring adult and a young person is at the heart of mentoring. Yet, little is known about how such relationships actually influence youth outcomes. Theoretical models that draw on related research

show promise in this regard but have not yet been rigorously evaluated. By more thoroughly examining relationship processes, researchers can help mentoring programs develop more effective strategies for training and supervising mentors and supporting and cultivating mentoring relationships. Researchers examining these models should investigate relationship processes from both the mentors' and mentees' perspectives, and they should attend carefully to patterns of stability and change in relationships over time, including how the length of a relationship affects outcomes.

### *Linking Research and Practice*

Practice and policy decisions in the field of mentoring should have a strong foundation in research. Researchers need to develop and carefully evaluate strategies for facilitating this type of linkage. One priority should be the investigation of strategies that may promote more widespread use of the *Elements of Effective Practice*. An equally important priority should be the development of research-based tools that can be used by organizations to evaluate and improve their mentoring programs. Researchers need to investigate what will induce organizations to actually use those tools, and what effects their adoption may have on both the effectiveness of individual programs and the entire mentoring field.

## ***Recommendations for Advancing Research on Mentoring***

Youth mentoring holds great promise in helping young people succeed in life. To achieve that promise, the public and private sectors must come together and support youth mentoring research in the identified priority areas. MENTOR and the summit co-chairs have developed a set of four recommended strategies for achieving this goal.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

#### ***Increase Support for Youth Mentoring Research Through Dedicated Funding Streams***

Research conducted on youth mentoring to date has been funded through monies dedicated to a variety of youth-prevention issues. No funds have been specifically allocated for mentoring research. But as the need for youth mentoring continues to grow and the types of mentoring continue to evolve, both the government and private-sector organizations will need to dedicate streams of funding to mentoring research. At the same time, they should take steps to ensure the funding is balanced across the full range of identified priority areas and that all research meets the highest standards of independent and scientific peer review.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**

*Develop a Standardized System for Tracking and Evaluating Mentoring Programs*

Youth mentoring programs urgently need a scientifically sound, standardized system of tools and technical assistance they can use to track their program data and evaluate their efforts. This standardized system should include a mechanism that allows researchers to aggregate and analyze data across programs and over time. Researchers could use the resulting data to investigate mentoring practices and procedures – what works best, for whom and under what circumstances – and to discover the ways in which use of a tracking and evaluation system can enhance a program’s effectiveness and sustainability. In addition, the data would allow researchers to track regional and national trends in mentoring.

**RECOMMENDATION 3**

*Conduct a National Longitudinal Study of Youth Mentoring*

Because mentoring shows great promise as a tool for enriching young lives, the federal government, private funding organizations, corporations – or a consortium of those groups – should commission a major longitudinal study of mentoring relationships, using a large, nationally representative sample of youth. This type of investigation would represent a landmark in efforts to understand mentoring relationships and their influence on youth outcomes. The study’s scope also would provide a unique opportunity to gain insight into the characteristics and benefits of mentoring relationships among specialized populations and groups of youth.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**

*Conduct a Multi-site Consortium Study of Youth Mentoring Programs*

With the support and guidance of relevant federal agencies, researchers should conduct a consortium study of mentoring programs at multiple sites across the

country. The study should include programs that offer traditional mentoring services, as well as those that employ newer, alternative mentoring methods. Researchers should design the study to learn more about the practices that make programs most effective and the relative costs and benefits of those practices. Researchers should use the results to refine “best practices” that the entire mentoring community can adopt.

**Next Steps**

The past decade has witnessed remarkable progress in our understanding of mentoring and in our ability to begin to harness its potential as a positive influence in young lives. At the same time, critical work remains to be done. The mentoring field needs more research to:

- Understand the complexities of mentoring relationships and programs;
- Determine the circumstances under which mentoring efforts make a positive difference; and
- Develop effective approaches for linking mentoring research and practice.

This National Research Agenda for Youth Mentoring includes priority areas for strengthening the field’s knowledge base. It also includes recommended strategies to ensure balanced and comprehensive support of research in all of the identified priority areas. During the next year, MENTOR will work with both governmental and private organizations to promote and implement the proposed agenda. A thoughtful, well-planned investment of resources toward gaining a greater understanding of effective mentoring will yield valuable dividends for many future generations of young Americans.

**How You Can Help**

*Based on the summit findings and recommendations – and the urgent need for mentoring research – MENTOR encourages decision makers from all sectors to carefully consider and take thoughtful action on the National Research Agenda for Youth Mentoring outlined in this report.*

**LEGISLATORS** – Develop legislation that authorizes federal agencies to commission studies of mentoring’s efficacy: what works best, why it works and how to implement best practices.

**FEDERAL & STATE AGENCIES** – Consider dedicating a pool of funds to support the identified priority areas for mentoring research.

**PRIVATE SECTOR FUNDERS** – Consider funding organizations or individual researchers to conduct research in the identified priority areas, or form consortia to do the same.

**MENTORING SUPPORTERS** – Advocate for funding to address the identified priority areas for mentoring research.



Gail Manza  
Executive Director



James F. Waller  
Vice President, Institute for  
Public Policy & State Affairs



Tonya T. Wiley  
Vice President, National  
Mentoring Institute

Tell us what you think of  
this National Research Agenda.  
E-mail your comments to  
researchagenda@mentoring.org.

*MENTOR—in partnership with Mentoring Partnerships  
across the country—is leading the movement to connect  
America's young people with caring adult mentors.*

*Network of Mentoring Partnerships*

- ALABAMA**  
Mentor Alabama
- ARIZONA**  
**Tucson**  
Volunteer Center of Southern Arizona  
The Mentoring Partnership
- CALIFORNIA**  
California Governor's Mentoring Partnership  
**Los Angeles**  
MENTOR/Los Angeles Mentoring Partnership
- COLORADO**  
Colorado Mentoring
- CONNECTICUT**  
Connecticut Mentoring Partnership
- DELAWARE**  
Delaware Mentoring Council
- FLORIDA**  
Governor's Mentoring Initiative  
**Palm Beach**  
The Mentor Center of Palm Beach County  
**Tampa**  
The Mentor Connection
- GEORGIA**  
Georgia Mentoring Partnership
- IOWA**  
Iowa Mentoring Partnership
- MAINE**  
Maine Mentoring Partnership
- MARYLAND**  
The Maryland Mentoring Partnership
- MASSACHUSETTS**  
Mass Mentoring Partnership  
**Springfield**  
The Greater Springfield Mentoring Partnership
- MICHIGAN**  
Mentor Michigan
- MINNESOTA**  
The Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota
- NEBRASKA**  
Nebraska Mentoring Coalition  
**Omaha**  
All Our Kids, Inc.: The Midlands  
Mentoring Partnership
- NEW YORK**  
**New York City**  
The Mentoring Partnership of New York  
**Long Island**  
Mentoring Partnership of Long Island
- NORTH CAROLINA**  
The North Carolina Mentoring Partnership
- OHIO**  
**Columbus**  
Mentoring Center of Central Ohio
- OREGON**  
Oregon Mentors
- PENNSYLVANIA**  
**Philadelphia**  
The Greater Philadelphia Mentoring  
Partnership at United Way of  
Southeastern Pennsylvania  
**Pittsburgh**  
The Mentoring Partnership of  
Southwestern Pennsylvania
- RHODE ISLAND**  
Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership
- TENNESSEE**  
**Memphis**  
Memphis Mentoring Partnership
- TEXAS**  
Governor's Mentoring Initiative  
**San Antonio**  
San Antonio: Making Mentoring a  
Partnership
- UTAH**  
Utah Mentoring Partnership
- VERMONT**  
Vermont Mentoring Partnership
- VIRGINIA**  
Virginia Mentoring Partnership  
**Fairfax**  
The Fairfax Mentoring Partnership  
**Charlottesville**  
Mentorville: The Charlottesville  
Mentoring Partnership
- WASHINGTON**  
Washington State Mentoring  
Partnership



1600 Duke Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone 703 224 2200 | Fax 703 226 2581 | Web site www.mentoring.org | AOL Keyword mentor

*This project was funded by a generous grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, with support from  
the MacArthur Network on Transitions to Adulthood and the William T. Grant Foundation.*

*“We must find out why different types of mentoring are effective for some, but not others, and how we can strengthen and improve mentoring efforts based on this understanding.”*

---

*“Only through rigorous, scientific research can we know how best to help the millions of young people throughout the country who want or need caring adult mentors.”*

---

*“A thoughtful, well-planned investment of resources toward gaining a greater understanding of effective mentoring will yield valuable dividends for many future generations of young Americans.”*