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# Group Mentoring for Immigrant and Refugee Professionals

A BRIEF GUIDE FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO GET STARTED

***NOTE:** In early 2023, the WES-based Global Talent Leadership Network facilitated a collaboration between JVS Toronto, New Women New Yorkers, Plus Consulting Career Club, and Prospanica to offer its first U.S.-based group mentoring program for internationally trained immigrants and refugees. From this experience, we distilled a number of lessons that can be used by other organizations seeking to start similar programs.*

Internationally trained immigrants and refugees constitute nearly **20 percent of the labor force in the United States**. Yet, despite their experience, skills, and knowledge, an estimated **2 million college-educated immigrants and refugees find themselves either unemployed or underemployed**. Many of these immigrants have strong social and familial connections, yet they often find the ins and outs of professional networks difficult to navigate.

Given the importance of strong social networks to finding and obtaining good jobs, this difficulty presents a substantial barrier. Group mentoring can be a powerful solution. Group mentoring programs offer job seekers a quick and effective way to enhance their networks while also providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their career goals. The programs also provide international talent looking for work (mentees) with the opportunity to build relationships with U.S. professionals working in their field (mentors).

## Key Characteristics of Effective Mentoring Programs: Equitable, Goal-Oriented, and Time-Bound

Successful programs are designed as equal partnerships between mentees and mentors. Both sides benefit. The expected benefits and group norms are often established through a written partnership agreement that mentors and mentees review and sign during their first meeting.

Each group should include one mentor and three to four mentees. Effective group mentoring programs often span at least five two-hour group mentoring sessions over a 10-week period.

These meetings provide mentees with benefits such as:

- Opportunities to learn about the local job market, workplace culture, and industry trends
- Access to business networks
- Improved job search and networking skills
- Understanding of **specific technical and educational skills required for their chosen career**
- Information about licensure and accreditation processes

### Mentee Benefits



Obtain strategic **tools** for ongoing **career development** and success



Enhance **communication skills** and develop **professional etiquette**



Identify **talents needed** in the U.S. workplace



Build **networks** for work and career success



Become **employed** in their field of expertise

At the same time, these meetings help employers and industry professionals identify skilled candidates whom they might have otherwise overlooked. Occupation-specific mentoring groups, such as those centered on engineering or accounting, or industry-specific groups, such as IT or health care, are especially effective.

### Mentor Benefits



Optimize **coaching** and **mentoring skills**



Build **leadership** excellence



**Learn** from networks for work and career success



Explore **new perspectives** and expand **professional networks**



Learn about and **contribute to the community**

## 12 Steps to Launching a Successful Group Mentoring Program for Immigrants and Refugees

So what does it take to launch an effective group mentoring program? The following steps are based on JVS Toronto's established group mentoring program model.



### Step 1

#### Evaluate your community and organizational needs.

Before you begin a program, make sure you are familiar with your local community and employment landscape. Successful group mentoring programs are based on real needs at both ends of the talent pipeline.

##### Questions to consider:

- **What does the immigrant and refugee population look like in your area?**
- What jobs need to be filled in your community?
- Would this program serve an unmet need or opportunity?



### Step 2

#### Conduct an organizational readiness assessment.

Discuss your organizational goals and objectives for starting a new group mentoring program for immigrants and refugees. Then determine what your organization already has in place to launch the program, and what it needs to put in place.

##### Questions to consider:

- Will a program for immigrants and refugees fill a gap or enhance your existing programs or services?
- What resources do existing programs already have in place? (for example, ongoing programs for immigrants, mentoring coordinator) What additional resources and support will your organization need to run the program effectively? How will you obtain these?
- Do you have connections that you can leverage to recruit mentors and job-ready mentees (for example, an existing employment preparation program)?
- What outcomes would you like to see for mentors and mentees? How will you measure these? (for example, participant surveys, interviews, and so on)



### Step 3

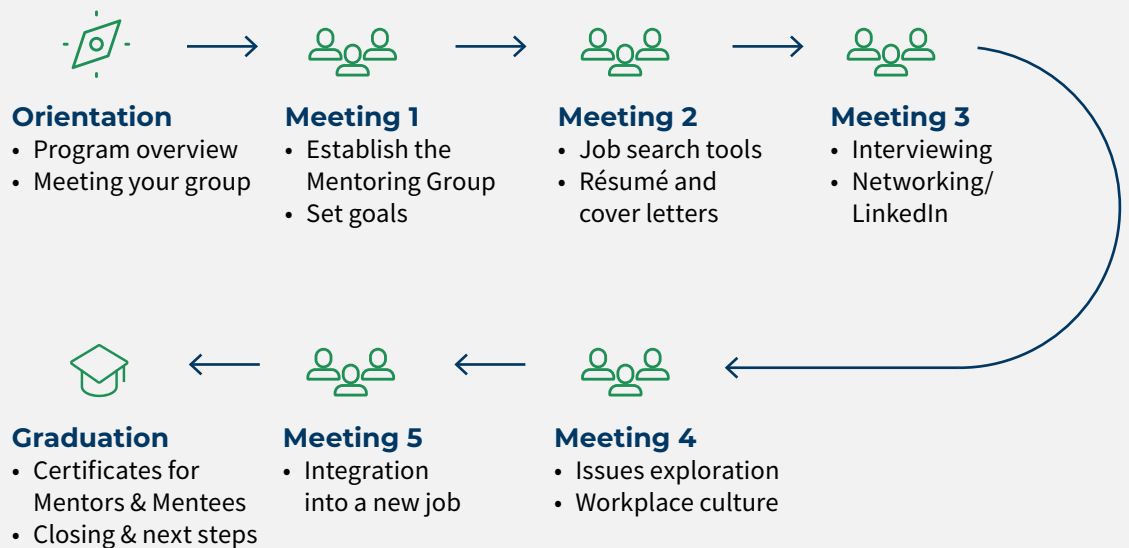
#### Assign a mentoring program coordinator to manage the program.

The success of the program will rely heavily on effective organization and management, making a program coordinator essential. Program coordinators establish structure, facilitate mentor-mentee team building, manage effective communication among the participants, resolve conflict if needed, and can provide insight to help improve the program. They are also a driving force behind resource mobilization and community building within the cohort. They are indispensable in creating an environment for mentors and mentees to grow and succeed together.

#### Questions to consider:

- What are the key responsibilities of a program coordinator?
- How will you train the program coordinator?
- What support will the program coordinator have to run the program effectively?

### Program Cycle





## Step 4

### Recruit, screen, and select mentors and mentees.

Begin recruiting mentors and mentees several months in advance of program launch to allow time for the interviewing and selection process. Recruit mentors first. You might consider engaging existing volunteers or program participants you already have a relationship with. Organizational events and newsletters offer opportunities for recruitment.

Once you know your mentors' professional skills and specializations, begin recruiting mentees.

#### Questions to consider:

- What is your program eligibility criteria for mentor and mentee participation? How will you screen for interest, commitment, availability, and other criteria?
- What skills and backgrounds are you looking for?
- Do you have the ability to conduct background checks if mentors are new to volunteering with your organization? (Note: This step is critical.)
- What are your recruitment channels? (emphasize the benefits to both mentors and mentees when recruiting)
- What coaching, training, and support do mentors and mentees need to be successful?



## Step 5

### Provide mentor orientation and training.

Mentors will need the opportunity to familiarize themselves with program goals, mentee needs, and mentor roles and responsibilities. Be clear about time commitments, including meeting and preparation time, and provide mentors with an approximate schedule. Be clear about what meeting preparation entails. (For example, are mentors expected to review each mentee's résumé? Do they need to source guest speakers?) Explain the concept of a partnership agreement, and how it will help to establish a baseline for a successful mentor-mentee relationship.

#### Questions to consider:

- What documentation will you have in place? (A partnership agreement will be critical. See Step 6 below.)
- How long will the orientation and training be?
- How will you support and monitor mentor success?



## Step 6

### Draft partnership agreements.

The intended working relationships between mentors and mentees will be articulated in a partnership agreement. Mentors should create a first draft of these agreements before the program launches. These agreements will be reviewed, edited, and signed by all mentor-mentee groups during the first program meeting.

#### Questions to consider in drafting partnership agreements:

- How will the program be sequenced and structured? What are the group's goals?
- What should be the meeting norms?
- What are the group's expectations?
- How will possible conflicts be resolved? (for example, between mentor and mentee, between mentees, and so on)



## Step 7

### Orient mentees.

Like mentors, mentees will also need a dedicated session to better understand the program's structure and goals, mentor roles and responsibilities, and time commitments expected of all participants. At this training, you should also plan to address common misconceptions, for instance that a mentor will "get me a job," or "refer me to their organization," or that "a mentor will 'teach' me to master a specific skill."

#### Questions to consider:

- What are the mentees' goals, and what are their expectations of the program?
- What do the mentees expect from their mentor?
- Can the mentees commit the time and effort needed to fully engage in the program?



## Step 8

### Match mentees and mentors.

The mentoring program coordinator will match mentors and mentees and assign the mentoring groups. Mentees are grouped according to their professions and matched as close as possible to the mentor's profession and experience.

#### Questions to consider:

- Can mentors and mentees be matched based on industry, education, or employment goals?

- Can you establish groups of three to four mentees with one mentor?
- How many groups can be filled and managed at the same time?



## Step 9

### Launch the program! (And sign the partnership agreement.)

The mentoring program coordinator will coordinate and schedule kickoff meetings, when all mentors and mentees meet. The coordinator will explain the program and expectations, reiterate roles and responsibilities, including those of the mentoring coordinator, and discuss next steps. Make sure there is time for questions. Mentors and mentees will then meet in their groups for introductions, to build rapport, and establish goals. The groups will also review and sign the partnership agreement.

#### Questions to consider before and during kickoff meetings:

- What are the key outcomes that each mentee wants to achieve?
- When will the program coordinator offer mentees an opportunity to provide input to the partnership agreement?
- How many sessions will there be over what span of time? (Five sessions over 10 weeks is enough to establish effective learning and build a network that can last.)



## Step 10

### Schedule group mentoring sessions, and establish ways to support participants throughout the program.

Mentors will schedule in-person or hybrid (a mix of in-person and online) mentoring meetings, if possible. They are responsible for preparing topics, additional resources, and providing tips to support mentees' learning objectives. In some cases, it may be necessary for the program coordinator to provide resources to mentors. The program coordinator should also be available to support mentors and mentees and address any challenges that may arise along the way.

#### Questions to consider:

- What are the expected ways of communicating during and in between meetings?
- How will the program coordinator monitor the sessions and support all participants' success? (for example, online documents and communication, individual calls, and so on)
- How will ongoing progress and feedback be recorded?



## Step 11

### Wrap up and celebrate!

When all sessions are completed, organize a celebration as one large group – if possible, bring multiple mentoring groups together. Facilitate networking between the groups. Invite mentors and mentees to share their experience. Consider bringing in a speaker to provide additional professional development for both mentors and mentees.

#### Questions to consider:

- How will you celebrate the completion of the program?
- How will mentees continue to be supported as they pursue their career goals?
- How can you engage mentors in future program activities?



## Step 12

### Evaluate and review.

Collect feedback from participants and partners to assess mentor and mentee satisfaction and progress towards desired outcomes to enhance the experience of future cohorts. Identify key lessons and areas that need improvement.

#### Questions to consider:

- To what extent were the mentor and mentee goals achieved?
- What did you learn? Based on the findings, will you continue the program? If so, how can you improve it?
- Are additional resources or supports needed to continue the program and build on its success?



## Bonus Step

### Plan for the next round of mentoring!





## Additional Resources:

[Empowering Internationally Trained Immigrants: Insights from a Group Mentoring Program \(article\)](#)

[What Is Group Mentoring? A Comprehensive Guide \(website\)](#)

[TRIEC Mentoring Partnership Tools for Mentors and Mentees \(online tools\)](#)

[8 steps to start a group mentoring program \(article\)](#)

If you are interested in learning more about group mentoring programs, contact [WES Global Talent Bridge](#).