

Can a Mentoring Program Save You Money?

By: [Michael A. Crumpton](#)

Crumpton, M. A., (2014) Can a mentoring program save you money?. *The Bottom Line: Managing library finances*, 27(2), 60 – 63. doi: 10.1108/BL-05-2014-0016

Made available courtesy of Emerald Publishing Group: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/BL-05-2014-0016>

This article is (c) Emerald Group Publishing and permission has been granted for this version to appear here (<http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/>). Emerald does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

*** This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. ***

Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to suggest that a benefit-cost analysis should be performed for mentoring activities so as to justify the effort and expense and as a tool for measuring effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach: Pulling from field literature, this article provides some examples of mentoring programs and resources as well as an example for conducting an analysis.

Findings: The author feels that applying a cost model to mentoring programs can strengthen their appeal overall.

Originality/value: The article and its conclusions are the product of this author and his experiences with such programs.

Keywords: Relationships | Benefits | Mentoring | Investment | Cost | Librarianship

Article:

The easy answer to this is yes, but how? Libraries across the country have a wide variety of mentoring programs for various reasons and objectives. This column is focused on mentoring programs for librarians, in particular in academic librarians. Embracing the value of a mentor is important in a profession that is undergoing tremendous change, in this case both librarianship and higher education. Professional development activities can be critical for librarians who need to sharpen their skills and remain relevant in the face of change and increasingly diverse information seeking behaviors of students and faculty, but most professional development activities can be costly.

Seritan (2005) addressed this value a few years ago in her article, “The development of a mentoring relationship”. She linked the relationship that can be formed between mentees and mentors to the importance of the creation of new knowledge, through the inspiration and relationship novice persons have to individuals who have the patience and skills to guide others. She discusses that the process itself can have a larger impact than the actual content reviewed.

The need for mentoring

Murphy (2008) recognized the need for a different kind of mentoring as library positions and career paths started to change with the move to electronic resources. Traditional approaches to formal mentoring programs usually serve a specific purpose, such as preparation of newer librarians for tenure, but a less structured or informal approach offers a broader opportunity for learning opportunities. And peer mentoring, which would generally be considered less expensive overall, can produce a greater transmission of knowledge and the inspiration to create new knowledge through the building of the relationship and the combining of expertise and experience.

Many different models exist for formal and informal mentoring programs. And several libraries have conducted studies on the value of their mentoring efforts. It is generally agreed, that mentoring has a role within the profession to perpetuate and sustain our values throughout the generations. Addressing professional leadership needs is also a value added for mentoring programs and relationships. Mentoring can also provide the venue for librarians who accept added responsibilities and to create future leadership candidates for turnover at upper levels of administration.

Farmer *et al.* (2009) recognized that mentoring programs need to change as circumstances and needs change and conducted a study to revitalize their program at Kansas State University. In their article, “Revitalizing a mentoring program for academic librarians”, they determined that the traditional formal program of assigning mentors to new librarians, working on promotion or tenure failed to meet some of the other aspects needed in the profession. Their team worked to provide guidance and develop opportunities for persons in all aspects of professional life, which included embracing the values of informal, peer and group mentoring.

To be most effective, mentoring should be purposeful even when it is done informally. Ross (2013) discusses the impact of purposeful mentoring in his article, “Purposeful mentoring in academic libraries”. He talks about the strength of the relationships that can produce the most meaningful results but identifies the importance of structure, as a process or method by which the relationships are formed, to be critical in achieving success. He identifies several different model types of mentoring activities and the potential benefits of each.

In his examples, Ross also addresses the benefits of mentoring for not only the mentee but also for the mentor and the organization overall. While Ross does not address cost directly, he does draw out several areas in which cost can be impacted. These are employee turnover, efficiencies gained from better awareness and training for new librarians and better effectiveness for leadership initiatives within and around the organization.

Both the Ross article and the Kansas State University study and sharing of their revamped program offer a tremendous amount of resources and references that would be useful to anyone putting together a program from the beginning or assessing their program for improvements. It is clear from the assortment of ideas and programs that exist, that mentoring programs and relationships, formal or not, should be customized to each institution accounting for the specific needs of each organization. But a common denominator for the profession is that programs should not be developed in a vacuum, but considers trends and actions within the profession as part of the development of goals and objectives of the program.

So what about the cost?

Many of the components of a mentoring process or program will fall into internal processes from which the costs of developing a program is absorbed internally, and those costs become hidden or not clearly defined. Current research has not meant to quantify those costs for librarianship mentoring but other studies and models exist from which inferences can be made. An example comes from the New Teacher Center at the University of California in Santa Cruz.

Villar and Strong (2007) apply a benefit-cost analysis to a mentoring program used for mentoring new teachers as per California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program. To define simply, benefit-cost analysis estimates the financial benefits of the actual costs of actions taken, considering one-time or ongoing costs and long-term benefits not realized immediately. Villar and Strong also attempt to put a value on intangible costs and benefits, which of course is very subjective.

The costs of a mentoring program can be varied and sometimes not clearly identified. To determine cost, you might consider these types of actions:

- time spent (technically salaries) mentoring or being mentored and not performing other duties;
- any specialized training provided for the mentors to increase their mentoring skills;
- logistical costs of facilities for meetings, refreshments or food, travel if appropriate and recruitment if needed;
- administrative costs of scheduling and/or use of materials to support the process; and
- any other cost associated with not performing the action of a formal mentoring program or framework support for informal activities.

If the organization is in full support of a program, these costs can be considered an investment, and most investments are meant to produce a return or benefit on that investment.

Benefits or returns gained from investing into a mentoring program can be:

- improved skills for the mentor who has himself or herself gained knowledge in the process;
- improved skills of the mentee, who is more efficient in the performance of their job and related activities for promotion, tenure or some other form of advancement;

- success of the mentee who is now more comfortable and engaged in their job responsibilities which helps motivate for retention and reduces turnover; and
- succession planning activities would have a stronger foundation from which institutional knowledge is protected and organizational leadership can be sustained.

Both lists of costs and benefits are highly subjective but have the advantage of justifying the efforts placed into mentoring programs. And while actual formulas might not be used to quantify a program's return on investment, each individual element can be scrutinized for replacement or change if determined to either be too costly or not achieving the desired benefit. In the case addressed by Villar and Strong, they recommended that these costs and benefits be viewed over time for best analysis.

Summary

Many academic institutions have formal mentoring programs which are necessary or useful for specific functions or needs, like tenure attainment or achieving promotion standards. However, the value gained from informal mentoring relationships can be more productive, easier to support and offer more flexibility for the participants. Even informally, some structure should be provided that keeps a program on task and is reflective of the values and mission of the organization.

Many examples exist of good programs, both formally and informally, and it can be concluded that this means mentoring programs represent a value to the professionals involved and the organization that is supporting the effort. Part of the justification for putting forth this effort would be to look at costs versus the expected benefits, or benefits gained to determine if you are coming out ahead in the investment. And using a benefit-cost analysis as a tool, to tweak and modify your program for best results, will certainly help you come out ahead.

Can a mentoring program save you money? Chances are pretty good that it will, if assessed and executed properly.

References

1. Farmer, D. , Stockham, M. and Trussell, A. (2009), "Revitalizing a mentoring program for academic librarians", *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 70 No. 1, pp. 8-24.
2. Murphy, S.A. (2008), "Developmental relationships in the dynamic library environment: re-conceptualizing mentoring for the future", *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 434-437.
3. Ross, K.M. (2013), "Purposeful mentoring in academic libraries", *Journal of Library Administration*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 412-428.
4. Seritan, A.L. (2005), "The development of a mentoring relationship", *Psychiatric Times*, 1 March, p. -.

5. Villar, A. and Strong, M. (2007), "Is mentoring worth the money? a benefit-cost analysis and five-year rate of return of a comprehensive mentoring program for beginning teachers", ERS Spectrum, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 1-17.