

## Mentoring as a Disability Inclusion Strategy

A mentoring program is a talent development and retention strategy, one that uses the organization's human resources to improve employee satisfaction, develop leaders and teach new skills. Mentoring is also an effective tool for increasing and shaping inclusive culture.

Traditionally defined, mentoring means a one-on-one relationship through which a senior person (the mentor) motivates and supports the personal or professional development of a junior person (the mentee). Today, however, mentoring has evolved to also include a variety of models, including virtual, peer, reverse-and-flash programs. And, in many organizations, "mentoring cultures" are being established to encourage "natural mentoring" to occur without specific program parameters.

A *Diversity Best Practices* survey found that 70 percent of companies surveyed offered formal diversity mentoring programs.<sup>1</sup> In the disability inclusion space, more and more employers are coordinating or participating in mentoring programs to improve recruitment, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities, facilitating their success during their early years with an organization.

Ready to implement effective mentoring strategies to impact your disability inclusion outcomes? The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) recommends the following steps:

### ADOPTING A MENTORING CULTURE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

- ➔ Conduct a needs assessment
- ➔ Lay the groundwork and set the program objectives
- ➔ Align the mentoring program with organizational goals, strategies, and mission
- ➔ Develop the mentoring program
- ➔ Train the participants
- ➔ Develop a mentoring program roadmap
- ➔ Gain senior leadership support
- ➔ Recruit a program manager
- ➔ Create a steering committee – or enlist an Employee Resource Group to lead the effort

### IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL MENTORING STRATEGIES

- ➔ Create, and update as needed, an individualized mentoring plan
- ➔ Complete a professional or personal assessment
- ➔ Conduct interviews with other mentors
- ➔ Define professional development goals
- ➔ Develop a professional development plan
- ➔ Attend professional networking or learning activities
- ➔ Submit feedback and progress updates to appropriate staff

A mentoring program can have a positive impact on an organization, improving employee retention and engagement, and enriching workplace culture. It can also serve as an organizational strategy towards disability inclusion and diversity success.

## MENTORING PROGRAM EXAMPLES AND RESOURCES

### **Cultivating Leadership: Mentoring Youth with Disabilities**

*Background from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).*

[www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/cultivate.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/cultivate.htm)

### **A Toolkit for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Employee Resource Groups**

*A publication from EARN.*

[https://askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EARN\\_ERG\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EARN_ERG_Toolkit.pdf)

### **The Workplace Mentoring Playbook**

*A publication from EARN.*

<https://askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EARN-NDMC-Workplace-Mentoring-Playbook-FINAL-A.pdf>

### **Disability:IN NextGen Leaders Initiatives**

*NextGen Leaders are college students and recent graduates with disabilities who have demonstrated talent and leadership in the STEM, finance, and business fields. NextGen Leaders collaborate with Disability:IN's Corporate Partners to prepare for employment through mentorship, networking, and recruiting opportunities. Students are matched one-on-one with mentors from Disability:IN Corporate Partners and have the opportunity to attend the Disability:IN Annual Conference free of charge.*

<https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders-initiatives>

### **National Federation of the Blind Career Mentoring Program**

*Connects blind and low vision students with successful blind role models who help them navigate their path from education to career success.*

<https://www.nfb.org/programs-services/career-mentoring>

### **National Disability Mentoring Coalition**

*Brings together more than 60 organizations focused on improving the awareness, quality, and impact of mentoring for youth and adults with disabilities. Members include nonprofits, employers, higher education, foundations, and government agencies.*

<https://ndmc.pyd.org>

### **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership**

*Aims to fuel the quality and quantity of mentoring relationships for America's young people and to close the mentoring gap for the one in three young people growing up without this critical support.*

[www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)

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