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Examining Youth Mentoring Services Across America

Findings from the 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey

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Executive Summary for *Examining Youth Mentoring Services across America*

In 2016, MENTOR and its affiliates led the largest data collection effort in almost 20 years to examine the prevalence and practices of youth mentoring programs across America. The effort had had three major goals:

Better understand the structure, services, and challenges of mentoring programs so that MENTOR and its affiliates could provide them with appropriate professional development, training, and technical assistance

Identify who programs are serving and the groups of adults that are stepping up to mentor youth in programs so that we might boost mentor recruitment and ensure that youth with the most needs are being served adequately

Provide MENTOR with a baseline understanding of the field that we can monitor for trends and use to inform a growth strategy

In the end, the national survey captured information on:

- 1,271 mentoring agencies and 1,451 distinct mentoring programs
- 413,237 youth served by 193,823 mentors and supported by 10,804 staff members
- The services, practices, settings, goals, challenges, and financial resources of these programs

Mentoring programs reported two most common challenges:

Mentor Recruitment & Fundraising

Who Provides Mentoring?

79% of youth mentoring agencies are nonprofits, 9% are K12 schools or districts, 3% are government agencies, 3% are higher education institutions, and the remaining 6% are religious institutions, for-profits, healthcare facilities, and others.

MENTOR'S influence on programming

- 36% of mentoring agencies received technical assistance or training from a MENTOR affiliate
- 21% received assistance from MENTOR's national office
- 7.5% received assistance through the National Mentoring Resource Center (operated by MENTOR)
- 50% of agencies use the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ in their work.

Agencies using the Elements ran programs that were:

- **More likely to require longer match commitments**
- **Have longer average match length (20 months for Elements users vs. 16 for those that did not), as well as a shorter waitlist of youth waiting for a match**
- **Less likely to have challenges around mentor training, program design, fundraising, developing partnerships, and providing staff development**
- **Less likely to offer no training to mentors and more likely to offer more than 3 hours of pre-match training**

What Do Mentoring Programs Look Like in Practice?

- Mentoring pairs or groups are most likely to meet weekly for a total of 2-3 hours a month
- 78% of all matches met their minimum length expectation, but...
- About one-third of programs struggle to get half of their matches to their minimum duration, which research tells us limits the impact of programs and may even harm youth with a negative experience

Program Reach (% of youth served)

- **34% of youth are served by a One-to-One model**
- **35% by a Group model**
- **12% by Blends of One-to-One and Group**
- **7% by Cross-Age Peer models**
- **3% by E-mentoring programs**
- **9% by other models**

The average program has grown in size and diversified in its goals over the last 20 years

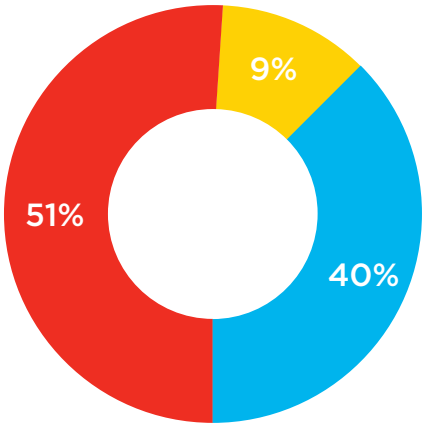
- The average program serves 285 youth, a dramatic increase compared to prior surveys
- Today, only 44% of programs reported that "providing a caring adult relationship" was a top 4 goal of their program (100% said this in a 1999 survey, 77% did in 2011). This highlights a major shift in the field towards using mentoring in targeted ways and expecting mentoring to produce meaningful outcomes beyond just the personal value of the relationship itself.Other common program goals include:
  - Life and social skills (54% of all programs)
  - General youth development (51%)
  - Academic enrichment (36%)
  - Career exploration (26%)
  - Leadership development (20%)
  - College access (17%)

How are Mentoring Programs Funded and Staffed?

Program staffing has remained stable over time, but is much more reliant on volunteers

- The average program has 7.45 FTE on staff, but only 4.1 are paid employees
- 3.35 FTE are volunteer staff (two decades ago, the average program only had 1.6 volunteer staff members)
- 59% of programs have fewer than 3 staff members, which can lead to issues with meeting the demand and sustainability

Program funding is stable in recent years, but limited and potentially precarious for many



- **The average program budget is $153,465**
- **However, 51% of programs have a budget under $50,000 (two-thirds of programs are under $100,000)**
- **Only 9% of programs have a budget above $500,000**
- **40% of all programs have a budget that falls in between**

Sources of Funding for Mentoring Programs
• Private foundation grants – 14%
• Fundraising events – 14%
• Individual donations – 12%
• Business and corporate donations – 11%
• Federal/state/local government – 21% (9%/8%/4%)

We get what we pay for in the mentoring field

Based on estimates in this survey, the average cost-per-youth-served across all programs is $1,695 a year. This is virtually identical to prior estimates (adjusted for inflation).

However, the survey data suggests a trend that:

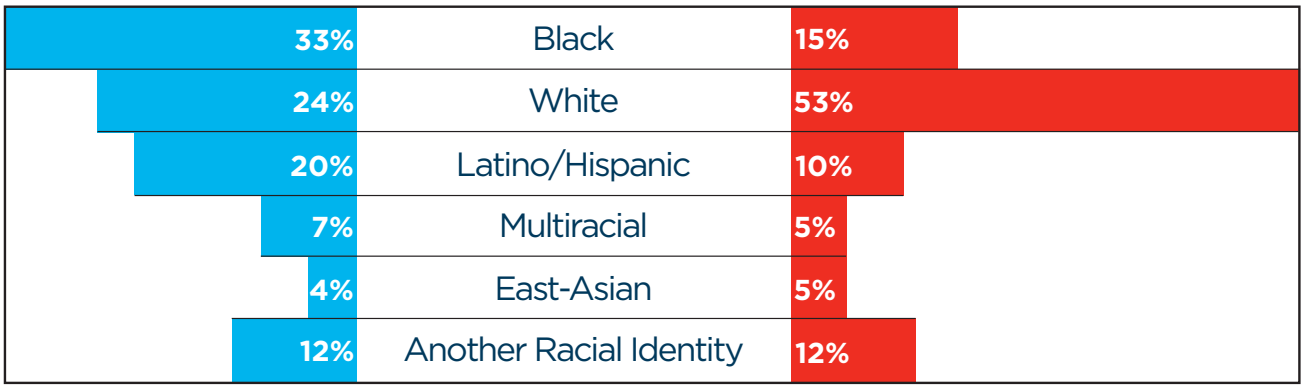
- As the percentage of higher-needs youth in a program increases, so does the average cost
- As the cost-per-youth increases, programs offer more quality services, including:
  - More pre- and post-match training
  - More match support
  - Longer expectations for match length
- Most importantly, as program costs increased, so did the percentage of matches meeting their minimum length. Increases in funding lead to better mentors and stronger mentoring relationships, without which, programs have little chance of producing results.

Who Participates in Mentoring and How are They Supported?

Mentors and youth differ in some key ways

Mentors by Gender
- 52% women
- 47% men
- 1% transgendered or gender neutral

Youth by Gender
- 60% girls
- 38% boys
- 2% transgendered or gender neutral



Boys are 25% more likely to be on a waiting list

Top 5 Mentor Subgroups (minimum estimates)

- Employees of corporate partners – 20%
- Young professionals – 19%
- College students – 13%
- Members of affinity groups – 9%
- Retired persons – 9%

Top 5 Youth Subgroups (minimum estimates)

- Low income – 51%
- Academically at-risk – 36%
- Single parent household – 27%
- First generation to go to college – 14%
- Incarcerated parents or family members – 8%

Main Conclusions

- Youth mentoring programs are increasingly diverse across ages, models, and intended outcomes, suggesting that while mentoring is increasing in relevance and application, there is no "cookie-cutter" approach to delivering mentoring relationships.
- Though it has grown in scope and diversity, the mentoring field is still relatively grassroots and therefore challenging to scale. The typical mentoring program has a small staff, limited funds, and is often overly dependent on financial support from a small number of sources.
- Programs are increasingly addressing critical societal challenges, which requires more complex mentoring models. This has placed strain on programs since funding levels have remained essentially flat for two decades. As this report illustrates, we "get what we pay for" with mentoring in terms of the quality of programs and delivering for the highest risk youth. Investment levels must be proportionate to the "who" and "what" of programs.
- In spite of meaningful increases in markers of program quality over time, there are still too many mentoring programs struggling to meet quality standards in terms of training, match support, and duration.

Paths Forward

This report not only seeks to inform but also offers actionable information for programs, funders, policymakers, researchers, and other key stakeholders in meeting the mentoring needs of our young people.

The need to more closely examine programs serving high percentages of higher risk youth - We need to continue to understand more about the effective practices of these more focused programs to produce training and technical assistance materials that can bring more of this work to vulnerable youth that need it the most.

The need to invest more in evaluation of programs and continue to create accessible tools and guidance - For stability and continued growth, the field must continue to build quality evidence of impact, both short and long-term. This report found that too many programs lack the funds and in-house capacity to evaluate their impact with the rigor that would hold up to scrutiny. Since service provision is the number one priority, investments in mentoring must dually prioritize evaluation efforts. It is a high-leverage investment strategy that meets short-term needs while also delivering long-term gains for the broader field, as well as the individual program.

The need to better support and integrate "informal" mentors - with a focus on the potential for recruiting more representative mentors – We are committed to determining ways to support the organically occurring mentoring in our communities and better connect it to structured programs when mutually beneficial. This must happen in conjunction with continued support for structured mentoring programs, particularly for youth with multiple risk factors as past research shows they are less likely to be met with informal mentors.

The promotion of mentoring as a tool for social justice and driving greater equity – At MENTOR, we see these relationships as not only a form of critical support for individual young people, but also a powerful force for improving communities, changing systems of injustice, addressing inequality, and driving greater connection, understanding, and unity.

Introduction

One of the real success stories in the youth development field over the last 30 years has been the growth of youth mentoring from a niche service provided primarily to boys from single parent homes to a cornerstone strategy that is meaningfully embedded not only in youth development programs, but also in education, public health, workforce development, juvenile justice, child welfare, and many other systems and institutions.

This growth in the application of mentoring relationships was initially facilitated by emerging research from organizations like Public/Private Ventures, whose studies of Big Brothers Big Sisters programs (among others) starting in the late 1980s started to shed light on the significant positive impacts that volunteer mentors could have on the children they serve. These impacts were further promoted in popular books such as Marc Freedman's *The Kindness of Strangers* (1993) and Jean Rhodes's *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth* (2002).

As interest in this approach to supporting young people grew, organizations like Points of Light, United Way of America, America's Promise Alliance, and National One-to-One (now known as MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership) paved the way for mentoring to be inserted into public policy and quickly scaled through public and private investment. The investments in the Juvenile Mentoring Program by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the late 1990s sparked a wave of funding at the federal level. This federal funding has expanded and contracted from year to year but has consistently reached $100 million or more through a number of initiatives over the last two decades and has played a major role in growing the field to the size we see today.

About 20 years ago, one national analysis of programs offering mentoring identified 2,320 local organizations working in the mentoring space.[i] A survey of 722 of those found that almost 40 percent *were less than five years old*, highlighting just how quickly this strategy had expanded across the nation. By 2002, it was estimated that there were more than 5,000 mentoring programs operating in the United States.[ii]

Because of the proliferation of mentoring into such a wide variety of youth-serving organizations and contexts, it has been particularly challenging, even to this day, to say how many "mentoring programs" are operating in the United States. Many organizations that offer volunteer mentors as part of a suite of youth services and supports may not identify as "mentoring programs" explicitly. Similarly, many youth development and workforce development programs consider their staff to be mentors to the youth they serve, often forming deeply personal and long-term relationships, but lacking the formal structure we commonly associate with programmatic mentoring. It seems being a mentoring program is often a subjective designation.

What we do know is that according to the GuideStar nonprofit directory, there are roughly 36,900 youth development organizations currently operating in the United States[iii] and more than 10,000 results are returned in that database when searching for the term "mentoring" (it is worth noting that this number likely does *not* capture mentoring efforts that are directly led by schools or districts, or for-profit organizations, but may also *include* nonprofit programs that mentor adults). MENTOR's own Mentoring Connector database, which serves to connect prospective mentors to local volunteer opportunities, currently houses up-to-date records on almost 2,300 youth mentoring-focused programs nationwide—an impressive number, but

likely not representative, because of this recruitment focus, of the total volume of programs working in this space across America.

Prior Efforts to Track the Prevalence of Mentoring Programs

There have been several previous efforts by research organizations, and MENTOR itself, to survey and codify the nation's mentoring programs (and even the nation's mentors) and learn more about the services being offered to young people:

- Perhaps the most rigorous early survey of the nation's programs is the aforementioned study conducted by Public/Private Ventures (and commissioned by MENTOR, then known as One to One Partnership) and released in 1999[iv]. This study, which began in 1996 and resulted in the report *Mentoring School-Age Children: A Classification of Programs*, sent surveys to 2,320 programs that the authors identified as likely serving youth, at least in part, with a mentoring approach. A total of 722 mentoring programs returned completed surveys and the results offered first-of-their-kind insights into characteristics and infrastructure of the organizations offering mentoring. Ultimately, the survey results were used to develop a classification system of the nation's programs, sorting them by common features and structural elements. This groundbreaking study set a baseline for the understanding of this emerging field and certainly was inspirational in the development of this 2016 survey.
- A few years later, MENTOR commissioned another survey of the nation's mentoring programs using a database of 4,223 known programs our organization had compiled. This survey drew responses from 1,762 programs, each answering a few basic questions about their services. The resulting report, *The 2000 Prevalence of Mentoring Survey Results*[v], further examined key program features, such as the location and frequency of match meetings and the percentages of youth being served in group mentoring programs.

- In 2005, MENTOR released a report titled *Mentoring in America 2005: A Snapshot of the Current State of Mentoring*[vi], which drew from a variety of sources, including recent surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service[vii]. Unlike the previous two surveys of organizations, this data was focused solely on *mentors*, both in and out of formal programs. Some of the data on mentors' experiences within programs further illuminated what these relationships looked like in that context, but the report also offered a juxtaposition of programmatic mentoring with what other adults were experiencing outside of any formal program context.
- In 2011, MENTOR once again sent a brief survey to the approximately 5,550 youth mentoring programs in its national database at that time (with 1,023 responding). As with the 2000 prevalence survey, this survey was intended to capture broad information about the services and infrastructure of the nation's formal mentoring programs. The resulting study, *National Mentoring Programs Survey Report*[viii], once again detailed several aspects of mentoring programs, such as their staffing, their program models, and the volume and needs of youth served.

Each of these previous national surveys attempted to gather information that could inform public policy and private investments in mentoring, as well as identify gaps

in services and areas where mentoring programs (and mentors) could improve their work or support even more youth. **Throughout this report, we will compare our 2016 results to similar findings from these previous surveys where possible and appropriate.** These historical comparisons will illustrate how the mentoring field has changed or, in some cases, stayed remarkably similar over time.

In addition to these previous national-level surveys, many of MENTOR's affiliates operating at the municipal, regional, or state level have conducted regionally focused (and often very in-depth) program surveys. For example, the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota last surveyed the 188 programs they work with across the state in 2013[ix]. Oregon Mentors, now known as the Institute for Youth Success, conducted a similar survey of mentoring programs in Oregon, most recently in 2012[x]. And in 2015, the California Mentoring Partnership did its first scan in more than a decade and successfully surveyed 123 programs across the state in an effort to understand program needs and service capacity[xi]. Many other MENTOR affiliates have led surveys and maintained program databases since the turn of the century, primarily in an effort to track their clients and the recipients of their training and technical assistance services, as well as to direct prospective volunteers to appropriate local programs. These combined efforts over the last 16 years have been instrumental in supporting MENTOR's understanding of the scope and structures of the nation's mentoring programs.

Purpose of the 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey

With the 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey, MENTOR sought to build on this history of national and regional data collection to meet several key goals:

- **Standardize the information being collected at the state level by MENTOR affiliates –** As noted above, our affiliates have spent more than a decade collecting information that is relevant to their municipal or state efforts, but that information has been difficult to aggregate at the national level. One of our core goals with this survey was to standardize the information being collected about the nation's mentoring programs, while also allowing for some customization and unique information gathering that could inform local decisions or the needs of regional funders and initiatives.
- **Improve the data being collected from parts of the country that do not currently have a MENTOR affiliate –** While MENTOR's local affiliates have traditionally gathered robust information about the mentoring happening in their communities and states, MENTOR lacked information about what mentoring programs looked like in those states where we do not have an on-the-ground presence supporting programs. To this end, we did significant outreach to service providers in states where MENTOR does not have an affiliate. Unfortunately, only about 19 percent of the survey respondents came from the 26 states where MENTOR does not have an affiliate, highlighting the important role that close working relationships between service providers and intermediary organizations play when attempting to gather meaningful data in a survey such as this.
- **Capture in-depth information about the services of mentoring programs and needs that MENTOR may be able to address –** Ultimately, MENTOR's main goal in conducting this survey was to inform our work as a "servant leader" to the mentoring field. While that work often extends beyond formal programs to include the promotion of naturally formed relationships between youth and caring adults, we continue to be focused on the nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions, foundations, and faith-based organizations that fund and run formal mentoring programs to purposefully connect youth to caring adults in their community. These organizations play a vital role in stemming

inequality of opportunity and in reconnecting communities that have grown apart in an increasingly stratified and self-sorted American society, stifling economic and social mobility.

However, to serve these programs and help them grow to scale nationally, MENTOR must understand what they look like—their staffing and funding, their mentors, their program designs, and the youth and families that benefit from what they offer. To that end, we asked for a significant amount of information in this survey. The core 2016 national survey consisted of 40 in-depth questions that covered almost every aspect of these programs' mentoring services. Because we wanted to assess the full breadth and scope of the mentoring "field," we encouraged survey responses from organizations that used mentoring *as a primary or otherwise-critical aspect of the services they provide youth*, even if they also offered other discrete services to young people and their families.

Because we did not have rigorous inclusion or exclusion criteria, this survey represents the responses of *those who considered themselves* to be "mentoring programs" in some meaningful way. This means that we may have missed out on responses from service providers that offer mentoring-like guidance through their staff or as a purely optional "add-on" to their core services. Future iterations of this survey may attempt a broader reach so that we can better understand the full depth and breadth of the mentoring provided throughout all youth-serving organizations and across extremely diverse programs.

Development of the 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey

Development of the 2016 survey began in the spring of 2015 with a review of the surveys that MENTOR's affiliates had been delivering at the regional level for several years. This review identified key questions and topic areas, as well as nuances in how similar questions had been asked in divergent ways in the past. This information would prove invaluable in developing a new survey that would meet both the needs of MENTOR's national office and of the affiliates across the nation.

Once this initial historical review was complete, we engaged in the following process until the survey launch in March of 2016:

1. Drafted an initial survey and further refined it with a working group of representatives from MENTOR affiliates (see sidebar for working group members).
2. Added state-specific questions at the request of affiliates that had some additional data collection needs related to local issues or initiatives. These questions were only seen by respondents in those states.
3. Identified a research partner to support the work (Dr. Sam McQuillin of the University of South Carolina, who then brought on graduate student Heather McDaniel to support the data analysis).
4. Settled on a data collection tool that could accommodate the needs of the survey, such as the ability of an agency to report on multiple programs they operate in a single survey response. The survey was ultimately built using the Survey Gizmo platform.
5. Developed an incentive plan that would make a small cash prize drawing available for programs in every state in the United States and Washington, D.C., in an effort to boost our response rate.
6. Further refined and tested the survey until the official launch in February of 2016.

Survey Working Group Members

- Brad Strong – Mentor Colorado
- Chad Butt – Mobius Mentors
- Dustianne North – California Mentoring Partnership
- Eric Rosser – Maryland Mentoring Partnership
- Janet Heubach – Mentoring Works Washington
- Kimeta Dover – Mentoring Center of Central Ohio
- Meghan Perry – Institute for Youth Success
- Whitney Mastin – Midlands Mentoring Partnership

One thing worth noting about the survey design is that we wanted as many programs as possible to submit as much information as possible. Given that this survey was rather lengthy (with an average time to complete of around 30 minutes) it was determined that only a handful of truly critical questions would be required of respondents. Thus programs were able to skip certain questions or report on areas where they had actual data to share while skipping or noting areas where they lacked the depth of information we were looking for. We also designed many questions to allow the respondent to report a range or representative category rather than an exact number or percentage. So, for example, the percentage of program funds that come from a particular source or the percentage of mentors from a particular demographic group were reported as ranges rather than as exact hard numbers or percentages that would ultimately need to add up to 100 percent for each program.

As you will find throughout this report, this created some challenges in terms of the analysis and reporting, but we felt that this was a critical approach in boosting the overall number of responses. Our efforts would have rendered fewer responses had we required organizations to audit and report exact numbers for budgets, age ranges of youth, racial breakdowns, and other sensitive information about their program. Thus, while many findings are represented by ranged estimates, we have a much more representative overall sample of programs as a result of this approach. We received a lot of information from a lot of programs, but not every piece of information from every single program. Such are the tradeoffs in doing this type of research on a field as broad as this one.

Data Collection and Development of the Final Data Set

Data collection for the 2016 survey ran from February (in a handful of affiliate states) through October, when our final affiliates ended their open window for responses. Nonaffiliated states had a survey window of March to mid-September. Because of the lengthy survey window, we asked programs filling out the survey to reflect back on, and report data pertaining to, *their last full year of operation*. In the case of school-based programs, this may have resulted in reporting on services that stretched across two distinct school years, but most programs were simply able to provide information about who they had served in the last calendar year. As a result, this survey is reflective of mentoring services and relationships that span from as early as February of 2015 through October of 2016. However, we felt that asking programs to consider *their* last full year of services brought some level of standardization to the findings and accurately captured what these programs looked like in practice over their most recent 12-month timeframe.

In an effort to reach as many programs as possible, MENTOR engaged in the following activities to help spread the word and increase the volume of responses:

- Direct emails to all of the mentoring programs in our Mentoring Connector database
- Frequent tweets to all of MENTOR's followers on Twitter
- Direct emails to mentoring programs listed in state or regional databases maintained by our affiliates, as well as follow-up calls and emails to programs that had not yet responded as the survey window closed
- Email and phone outreach to leading service providers and funders in states without a MENTOR affiliate, asking them to disseminate the survey link to programs they worked with
- Email, webinar, and phone outreach to several national organizations and partners asking them to disseminate the link to their affiliates and local chapters around the country

MENTOR's Affiliate Network was especially instrumental in boosting our response rate by calling local programs, checking in with programs that had started but not finished a survey, and offering local incentives for programs that did complete the survey. These efforts leveraged the strong relationships they have built with programs in their regions and ensured that we received a meaningful number of responses.

Once the survey was closed, the data analysis team at the University of South Carolina (USC) did extensive data checking and cleaning, mostly looking for redundant programs, obvious typos, and inaccurate data. Our affiliates also reviewed data at the state level to ensure that the information collected fit with their basic understanding about the size and scope of familiar programs. Additionally, we engaged in an analysis of "write-in" answers to several questions and in 74 cases we recoded a write-in answer to a response that was available as a checkbox selection (for example, in cases where a program wrote in the name of one of our affiliates but did not select "Mentoring Partnership" from the choices of who they worked with).

We also removed two program responses (one in Washington State and the other in Massachusetts) where data had been erroneously provided by an unauthorized program person.

Once the data cleanup was complete, all MENTOR affiliates were provided with an initial report illustrating how each question was answered, as well as a similar national-level report they could compare their state against. Much of this information was shared with stakeholders in their regions or states during January's National Mentoring Month.

In preparing this report, MENTOR staff and the data team at USC then completed a series of analyses that included the following steps:

1. Developing research questions we wanted answered in the report.
2. Running crosstabs and other analyses to illustrate how responses to one question influenced or correlated with responses to others.
3. Determining how to handle missing data: Because not every question in the survey was required, we do not have all answers to all questions from each of the 1,451 programs that completed a survey. We felt that programs might have trouble completing the full survey if every item was required (especially since some of the information is sensitive to the youth or families served by their program) and in the interest of a higher response rate, only critical questions were marked as required. In most instances, we have included the number of respondents in the figures and tables in this report, which should clarify the findings. In many instances missing program data was not included in the calculation of percentages or totals.
4. Determining how to handle the ranges that the survey questions employed: This was, in many ways, the most challenging aspect of the data analysis. As noted above, for many questions, we asked programs to report on an estimated range, rather than a specific number or percentage. For example, the survey asked them to estimate what percentage of their budget came from a particular source in particular intervals (<10 percent, 11–25 percent, 26–50 percent, 51–75 percent, 76–90 percent, and >90 percent). While this was useful in determining how many programs fell into each range, in order to calculate, say, the overall funding percentages across all programs, we needed to make an estimation of how those reported ranges added up to, in this case, programs' total budgets. In most instances, we used the midpoint of the range as the estimate of the actual percentage. While this did introduce some statistical noise into the results,

we felt that this was the most accurate and fair method available to us in estimating the overall percentages across programs for many questions. Instances where we have made estimations based on ranges are noted throughout the report.

Additional information about the project methodology and analysis is available by request through MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership.

Final Results of the Data Set Presented in this Report

In the end, this survey produced a data set with the following characteristics:

- Completed surveys from 1,271 unique organizations that operate structured youth mentoring programs
- Detailed information on 1,451 unique programs implemented by these organizations (each could report on more than one program they happen to operate)
- Information on 413,237 youth served by these programs
- Information on 193,823 mentors who served in these programs
- Detailed information about these programs' services, settings, staffing, funding, training, challenges, goals, and evaluation efforts.

MENTOR believes this to be the largest and most comprehensive data set about youth mentoring programs ever developed and the remainder of this report details our main findings and conclusions from the survey results. We think this information sheds considerable light on the current state of mentoring programs in the United States and highlights paths forward that can strengthen this field over time.

Chapter 1: Who Provides Mentoring?

As a starting point for understanding mentoring programs in the United States, we wanted to learn a bit about the organizations—or "agencies," as we called them in the survey—that house and implement mentoring programs. In many cases, there is little distinction between the agency and the mentoring program itself—for example in the case of a local agency that *only* offers a one-to-one mentoring program in the community. But increasingly, mentoring programs are being embedded in larger social service, education, or youth development organizations. And even dedicated mentoring providers, such as a local Big Brothers Big Sisters affiliate, may offer more than one distinct mentoring program (e.g., a community-based one-to-one program and a separate group mentoring program in the schools).

Because mentoring is often embedded in multiservice organizations, we wanted to better understand what types of agencies were running mentoring programs and what other services they provided. It was also critical that we capture information about each of the programs they run *individually* so that we could better understand those program models and compare similar types of programs across the country. This detailed program information is covered in chapter 2 "What Do Mentoring Programs Look Like in Practice?"

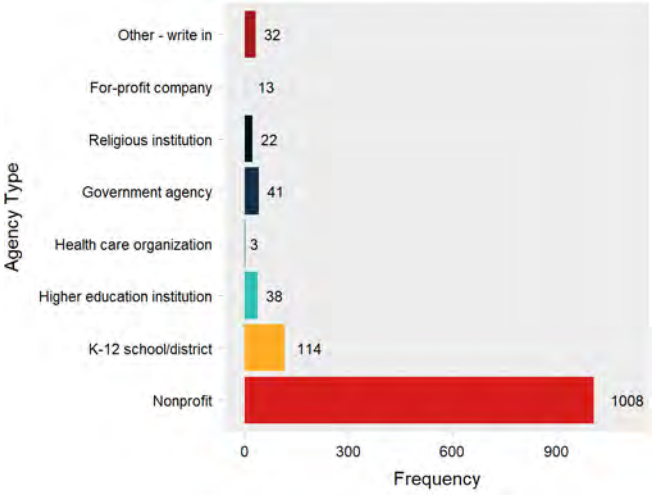
In total, we received completed surveys from 1,271 unique agencies around the country.

The Types of Agencies that Operate Mentoring Programs

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of agencies that participated in our survey are nonprofits, accounting for 79 percent of the respondents. School districts and K–12 schools accounted for 9 percent of the total, with government agencies and higher education institutions each representing 3 percent of agencies (see Figure 1). Surprisingly, only 22 of the 1,271 organizations that responded were religious institutions, which are likely underrepresented in this data set, given the broad popularity of youth groups in churches, temples, mosques, and other houses of worship. Clearly more formal mentoring is happening in those settings than is represented here.

Due to the outreach methods at our disposal, this data set mostly reflects the types of organizations that MENTOR and our affiliates commonly work with: Community-based nonprofits and educational and government institutions that offer mentoring services. And, as noted earlier, more than 80 percent of the respondents came from parts of the country where MENTOR has an on-the-ground presence in working with programs. Future iterations of this national survey will likely expand the outreach to many other types of youth serving organizations that may be engaged in mentoring. But the organizations taking the 2016 survey might be commonly described as representing the "traditional" (in which mentors and youth are intentionally matched) mentoring field as it's been understood over the last few decades of growth.

Our agency is a ...



Sample size: 1271
Nonresponses: 0

Figure 1 - Agency Types

> *"Because mentoring is often embedded in multi-service organizations, we wanted to better understand what types of agencies were running mentoring programs and what other services they provided."*

Using a grouping of U.S. Census designations for what constitutes an urban/metropolitan or rural community, we found that the vast majority of agencies and programs (90 percent) were operating in urban or metropolitan areas. See the end of chapter 2, page 29, for more details about how programs in urban and rural areas compare.

The Number of Mentoring Programs Agencies Operate

As noted in the Introduction, agencies could report on multiple distinct programs that they operate in a single survey response (up to three unique programs). But running more than one mentoring model was a fairly rare occurrence. Of the 1,271 agencies that completed a survey, 888 (70 percent) indicated they ran just a single program. This means that most mentoring programs, either through conscious planning or limitations in resources, have decided to do one thing and do it well.

Unfortunately, the data on agencies reporting that they ran more than one mentoring program model indicates that respondents may have, in part, misinterpreted this question. Some respondents reported they ran multiple programs but were only providing survey responses on one of them (it is unclear as to why) while others indicated that they operated 20, 30, or even up to 100 distinct programs (even though the survey instructions made it clear that a single program could have multiple sites or locations). Clearly no one local agency is operating 100 distinct program models, regardless of location. So while the average number of programs was 2.56, we feel that the *mode* of one program far more accurately represents the reality of the mentoring field. Most agencies that offer mentoring do so as a single, unique service to their community.

The Other Services That Agencies Provide

We asked agencies about any additional services they offered to youth and families, noting that these should be services that are unrelated to what is provided through mentoring, not as *part* of the mentoring services. Respondents were allowed to select "all that apply" or write in an alternative.

As seen in Table 1, these agencies offered a wide variety of other services and supports, most commonly other positive youth development programming (65 percent), academic support programs (49 percent), and empowerment and leadership development programs (46 percent).

Other prominent types of services included college and career readiness, service learning, and after-school or daycare services. This table really highlights the diversity of mentoring settings and contexts referenced in the Introduction.

It is encouraging that every category of additional programming that we asked about had some representation, illustrating the popularity of mentoring as a strategy, and that many organizations provide broader "wraparound" services that can meet a wide variety of youth needs at once. This is particularly encouraging given that in many service settings, the role of a mentor is to act as "a connector" that engages youth in the many other services that are available, ensuring that mentees get a wealth of support, which goes far beyond what the mentor's guidance alone can provide. MENTOR is extremely gratified by this evolution of the mentoring field that less frequently relies on the individual mentor or program to be the *sole* solution, but instead uses a mentoring relationship as a catalyst or "anchor" to develop a more comprehensive "web of support"[xii].

Table 1 - Other Agency Services

What other non-mentoring services or programs does your agency (or a larger parent organization you are under) provide to youth and/or families?

Services	Frequency	Percent
Academic support programs	619	48.70
After school/daycare programs	417	32.81
Case management	347	27.30
College and career readiness	558	43.90
Drop in center/homeless/runaway services	104	8.18
Education (Primary or Secondary school)	291	22.90
Empowerment/leadership development	583	45.87
Foster care or services for foster youth	140	11.01
Independent living/transition-aged youth services	131	10.31
Medical/healthcare services	90	7.08
Mental health prevention and wellness	242	19.04
Outpatient psychiatric treatment	48	3.78
Positive youth development	827	65.07
Pregnancy prevention	130	10.23
Psychological counseling	162	12.75
Residential or inpatient psychiatric treatment	32	2.52
Service learning/volunteerism	553	43.51
Services for juvenile justice-involved youth	252	19.83
Services for pregnant and parenting teens	157	12.35
Services for youth with disabilities	194	15.26
Substance use disorder prevention or treatment	159	12.51
Violence prevention	225	17.70
Workforce development	331	26.04
Other - Write In	214	16.84

Strategies to Recruit Mentors

We also asked agencies to provide information about the strategies that they have found to be effective in recruiting volunteer mentors. We asked this of agencies, and not of individual programs, because we felt that most organizations would implement comprehensive volunteer recruitment initiatives rather than doing completely separate recruitment activities for any distinct programs they might offer. Certainly it's easier to filter prospective volunteers to the appropriate mentoring programs than to spend the resources and staff time to recruit to each program individually. However, we do recognize that there is most likely some variation in the effectiveness of different recruitment strategies across programs.

Table 2 - Recruitment Strategies

Please select your agency's most successful recruitment strategies for mentors.		
Recruitment Strategy	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Media/Public relations	270	21.24
National Mentoring Month events and promotions	52	4.09
Online outreach (Facebook, program website, etc.)	432	33.99
Community events and in-person presentations by staff	669	52.64
Referrals from community partners	415	32.65
Referrals from the Mentoring Connector database	52	4.09
Referrals from our local Mentoring Partnership	38	2.99
Volunteer Centers and other volunteer organizations	83	6.53
Word-of-mouth from current or former mentors	856	67.35
Other - Write In	173	13.61

Agencies could select up to three strategies that they had found to be most effective in recruiting volunteer mentors. They also had the option of writing in a strategy not represented in the choices offered.

As seen in Table 2, word-of-mouth promotion by current mentors and recruitment presentations by staff were rated far above other recruitment approaches. This is not surprising, given that mentoring is a fairly labor-intensive and long-term form of volunteering and not something that most people would jump into impulsively, making either a personal "ask" or detailed explanation by a staff member critical.

This is confirmation of long-standing practitioner wisdom that indicates that most mentors will commit if someone they know and trusts makes a direct ask and if they have detailed information about the goals, structure, and forms of support offered by the program. This is further confirmed by the 2005 MENTOR report[xiii] which found that 50 percent of mentors indicated that someone they knew asked them to take on the task of mentoring. In light of this information, MENTOR and other leaders in creating public awareness about mentoring may further emphasize recruitment campaigns that empower individuals, especially those already mentoring, to recruit others. Alternatively, technical assistance that builds local program capacity to deliver effective recruitment presentations would also be potentially impactful based on our findings here.

It is also worth noting that a few recent innovations in the mentoring space are also considered highly effective by mentoring agencies. Online outreach to individuals was noted as successful by 34 percent of programs, suggesting that a strong online marketing strategy should no longer be considered a luxury by programs but as something that is inherent to getting the opportunity to mentor in front of as many prospects as possible.

Referrals from community partners were also rated as a commonly successful strategy, which speaks volumes about the collaboration and cooperation in the youth mentoring field. While at one time mentoring organizations may have been reluctant to share lists of prospective volunteers in an effort to maximize their share of a limited volunteer pool, it seems that perhaps the field has evolved to the point where prospective volunteers who are not a good fit for one program are generously referred to another appropriate program in the community. This networked approach to recruitment may maximize the availability and impact of mentoring relationships locally, ensuring that each willing mentor finds the opportunity to serve that is right for him or her.

Potential areas for recruitment growth include both increased use of the Mentoring Connector system and direct recruitment referrals from MENTOR's affiliates. These services were only rated as meaningful by 7 percent of respondents combined. MENTOR is hopeful that ongoing improvements to the Mentoring Connector, as well as broader public awareness campaigns sponsored by key national partners, will lead to increased use of this service. Currently, the Mentoring Connector only offers publically searchable records for 1,704 programs nationally (as of February 2017). As noted in the Introduction, this is just a

fraction of the nation's programs and MENTOR encourages all providers to consider signing up for these direct referrals.

There were also a surprising number of write-in answers for the recruitment question (13 percent of respondents chose a write-in answer). A quick analysis of these responses indicates that strategies such as direct partnerships with religious institutions, higher education institutions, and local businesses; using AmeriCorps members in the mentor role and listings in online volunteer opportunity aggregators (such as VolunteerMatch) are also useful to mentoring programs. Some of these strategies are confirmed in chapter 4's examination of subgroups of mentors (see page 44), particularly the high percentage that come from business partners and student groups.

Table 3 - Evaluation Activities

What evaluation activities has your agency engaged in for your mentoring services in the past five years?		
Evaluation Types	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Qualitative evaluation	871	68.53
Implementation evaluation	572	45.00
Outcome evaluation	631	49.65
Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation	108	8.50
Return-on-investment study	49	3.86
We haven't engaged in any evaluation activities	179	14.08
Other - Write In	66	5.19

Table 4 - Evaluation Stakeholders

Who plays a role in planning and implementing your agency's mentoring-related evaluation efforts?		
Stakeholder	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Executive Director/Program Coordinator	992	78.05
Staff evaluation specialist (internal staff)	383	30.13
Professional external evaluator	131	10.31
Funding agency or philanthropy	98	7.71
Our local Mentoring Partnership	91	7.16
School or district staff	154	12.12
We have not done any evaluation work	111	8.73
Other - Write In	137	10.78

Evaluation Practices Across Agencies

Another agency-level set of questions revolved around the types of program evaluation activities that each had engaged in. Naturally, evaluation activities may vary across multiple programs run by the same agency (e.g., doing a comparison group outcome study of an established one-to-one program while doing separate formative evaluations about a brand new group mentoring offshoot). But the 2016 survey was primarily interested in *any* mentoring-related evaluation activities they had undertaken *in the last five years*, regardless of the specific program.

As seen in Table 3, over two-thirds of programs (68.5 percent) reported doing some qualitative evaluation, defined as examining "participant experiences through interviews, end-of-year satisfaction surveys, case notes, focus groups, or other data sources." This is encouraging and points to programs making a good effort to gather key stakeholder perspectives and feedback. However, it is somewhat disappointing to know that one-third of agencies had not done this at all over the last five years.

Another 45 percent of agencies had engaged in some kind of implementation evaluation that emphasized program efficiency, quality of services, and fidelity to the program model. In many ways, this type of ongoing commitment to assessing performance is the key to making meaningful program improvements. It is encouraging that such a high percentage of programs engaged in this type of evaluation. And when asked who plays a role in planning and implementing evaluation activities (see Table 4), agencies reported a diverse and skilled team of stakeholders leading these efforts. MENTOR hopes more agencies can engage in implementation evaluation in future years through targeted training and technical assistance and increased investment by funders in meaningful evaluation.

Surprisingly, essentially half of agencies indicated that they had undertaken an outcome evaluation in the past five years, but only 8.5 percent said they had used an experimental design or even a simple comparison group. This means that the vast majority of the effort to examine program outcomes might be thought of not as true evaluation but as *outcome monitoring*, in which improvements or declines among mentees are tracked, but not compared to other similar groups of non-mentored youth.

This makes sense given the state of the field, particularly the budget and staffing patterns noted in chapter 3 (see page 31), which find that most programs are minimally staffed and doing the best they can with limited funds. More rigorous evaluation designs are quite expensive and a heavier lift for staff and participants. Not all programs are in a position to do increasingly robust evaluation designs, but all should be encouraged to at least do the type of outcome monitoring noted here, if not go beyond that with some simple comparison groups.

Perhaps most discouraging among these findings is that 14 percent of agencies hadn't evaluated their services *at all*—not even a satisfaction survey or review of program data—in the last five years. Interestingly, on the separate question about evaluation roles, agencies were also given the option of "We have not done any evaluation work," with 9 percent of agencies choosing this option. It is unclear why those two numbers are slightly different, but clearly somewhere around 10 percent of programs are not making any effort to track, evaluate, or better understand their services or what youth or the community gain from them. This is an area that can use further attention from technical assistance providers, investors in mentoring, and other nonprofit capacity builders.

Challenges Faced by Mentoring Agencies

Because MENTOR and its affiliate network invest so much time and effort into providing the mentoring field with tools, trainings, coaching, and other support, we wanted to better understand the current issues agencies are facing and their areas of need. We asked agencies to choose up to four key challenges. As shown in Table 5, two unsurprising topics rose to the top of the list: mentors and money.

More than 47 percent of programs noted that mentor recruitment was a key challenge, while fundraising and program sustainability challenges were noted by 44 percent and 28 percent, respectively. These might *always* be the top challenges for nonprofit mentoring programs, given the nature of the work, but some of the other areas of need may actually point to potential solutions to these challenges.

If mentoring leaders, funders, and intermediary organizations can offer more support to the agencies that reported issues with evaluation and data collection (26 percent), perhaps more providers would be able to demonstrate the type of impact that can lead to more investment. The 31 percent of programs that want to improve parent and family engagement might find those efforts paying off in terms of increased volunteer turnout, given the findings noted earlier about the value of word-of-mouth recruitment—an engaged family is a family that can bring additional new mentors to agency doors by talking about the program with other adults.

Other challenges noted by agencies spoke to aspects of program quality and service delivery, with the need for quality mentor training materials (26 percent) and the design of culturally relevant services and activities (16 percent) leading the list of needed service improvements.

Table 5 - Agency Challenges

Please choose the main challenges or areas of need for which you think your agency's mentoring programs might benefit from additional support.

Challenge Area	Frequency	Percent
Blending mentoring with other services	176	13.85
Cultural perspectives in service design and delivery	202	15.89
Developing meaningful activities for mentors and youth	286	22.50
Fundraising/grantwriting	555	43.67
General program design/theory of change	96	7.55
Integrating youth development principles	77	6.06
Making strong mentor-mentee matches	189	14.87
Mentor recruitment	601	47.29
Mentor training (including curriculum development)	336	26.44
Offering mentoring in rural settings	108	8.50
Parent/family engagement	397	31.24
Partnership development	162	12.75
Professional development of staff	193	15.18
Program evaluation/data collection	331	26.04
Program sustainability/growth	362	28.48
Supporting mentor-mentee matches	190	14.95

Support Services to Mentoring Organizations

We also asked agencies who they had turned to in the last year when they wanted to improve the quality and capacity of their mentoring services. A healthy 36 percent of agencies reported that they had received help from a MENTOR affiliate, with 21 percent receiving help directly from MENTOR's national office staff or from our national webinars and publications. Additionally, another 7.5 percent of agencies had received help through the National Mentoring Resource Center, which is also managed by MENTOR and delivered by our affiliates and other partners. There may be some overlap across these MENTOR-related forms of support, since programs that work with our affiliates also tend to engage our national office and vice versa. But we were quite happy to learn that so many programs considered us a meaningful form of support for their work.

There are, of course, many other technical assistance and training organizations that work with mentoring programs and they were well represented in this survey as well. United Way agencies provided help to over 14 percent of agencies, unsurprising given the generous and geographically widespread support that they offer youth-serving organizations of all types. Other nonprofit and for-profit consulting firms accounted for 9 percent and 4 percent of support services, respectively.

We also asked these agencies if they had used the latest addition of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ in their work and if they were familiar with the Benchmarks and Enhancements recommended in that resource. A healthy 45 percent indicated they either use *Elements* "regularly" or "a bit" in their work. Unfortunately, almost 50 percent of programs indicated that they are not using or are not aware of the new *Elements*. Given that MENTOR's affiliates are currently operating in about half of the states in the United States, we feel proud of these numbers and their reflection on our efforts to improve program quality and be a hands-on resource for programs and funders. For a historical comparison on usage of *Elements*, see the sidebar.

However, there is clearly work to be done in promoting effective program practices. Recent research has found that adherence to the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ leads to longer and stronger matches.[xiv] We also found some evidence in this trend in this study.

When compared to programs that did not use the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ in their work, programs in agencies that indicated that they used this resource "regularly" or "a bit" were:

- More likely to require longer commitments by mentors and youth to the match (especially year-plus requirements).
- More likely to report a longer average match length (20 months for *Elements* users versus 16 for nonusers), as well as a smaller waitlist of youth waiting for a match.
- Less likely to report challenges around mentor training, program design, fundraising, developing partnerships, and providing staff development.
- Less likely to report that they offered *no* training to mentors and more likely to offer *more than* three hours of pre-match training.

MENTOR is gratified that this cornerstone resource has been confirmed in multiple studies to lead to important outcomes for matches and noticeable improvements in program quality. But there is also room to grow the adoption of this resource, as well as to provide additional evidence-informed practice guidance for diverse programs that may be offering something which looks different than "traditional" mentoring. See chapter 5, page 52, for more discussion of paths forward in further expanding the development and use of best practices.

Use of the Elements over Time

The 2011 survey of programs conducted by MENTOR found that 63 percent of respondents used the third edition of the *Elements* "frequently" or "sometimes" in their work. Our 2016 survey found that 45 percent of programs indicated they used the resource in similar ways. However, because our question was specifically about the fairly new fourth edition of that resource, there were an additional 14 percent that were not aware of the new edition and another 5 percent of programs that indicated that they had used the third edition but not the fourth at the time of the survey.

Both surveys found roughly 23 percent of programs had not used any edition of the resource, suggesting that adoption of *Elements* has remained fairly steady in recent years.

The Relationship Between Training and Technical Assistance and Program Quality

Obviously the impact of the use of the *Elements* tells one story about how agencies and programs improve their quality, but we also used this survey as an opportunity to gauge the impact of the broad variety of training and technical assistance that MENTOR, our affiliates, and other quality service providers offer mentoring organizations.

To do this, we used the question related to collaboration with training and technical assistance intermediaries noted above and cross-referenced those responses with other key program characteristics, such as levels of training and match support and match longevity and retention.

For the most part, there weren't huge differences in these characteristics between agencies and programs that indicated they received training or technical assistance from MENTOR or one of our affiliates, those that worked with another assistance provider, or those who received no assistance at all. This makes sense logically: Organizations that seek assistance might do so because they are struggling, but they may also do so because they are high performers that want to get even better. Conversely, an agency that is not requesting assistance might be doing just fine already or might be a low-quality program that doesn't realize they could improve. Taken together, our results here indicate that these differences tend to wash out when looking across all programs.

There were some variations, however, that seemed to indicate the value of working with a technical assistance provider:

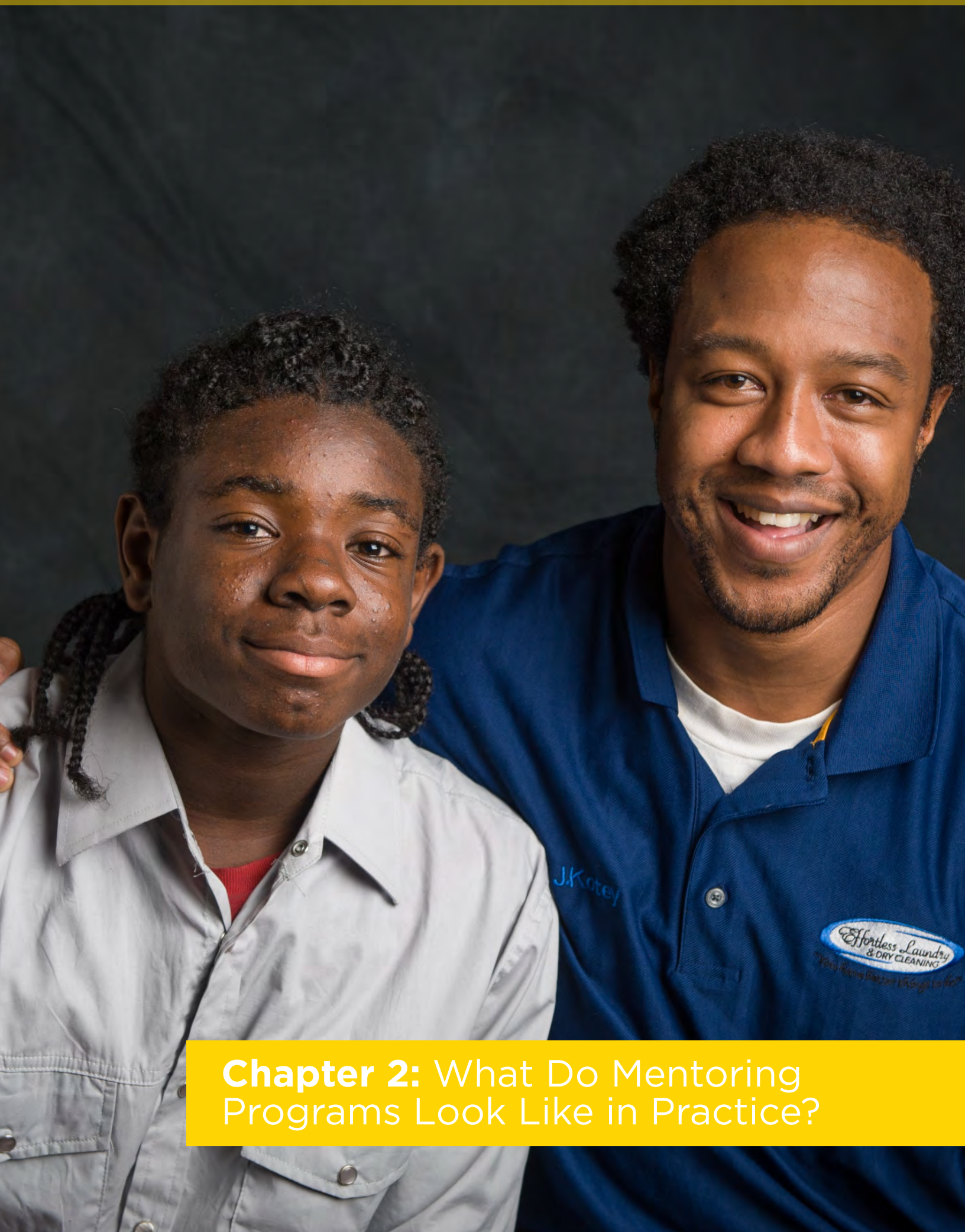
- Agencies that received technical assistance were less likely to report challenges with blending mentoring and other services, designing their programs' theory of change, making strong matches, delivering training, and supporting matches. However, they were more likely to report challenges such as fundraising and sustainability, developing partnerships, mentor recruitment, and offering services in rural areas.
- Agencies that worked with MENTOR or its affiliates were, unsurprisingly, most likely to report using the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*™ (61 percent) compared to those who worked with another assistance provider (only 32 percent) or didn't work with anyone (28 percent).
- Agencies that did *not* work with an assistance provider had much larger youth-per-staff ratios (133 youth per staff member) than those who worked with a provider (100 youth per staff for those MENTOR served and 69 youth per staff for other assistance providers).
- Programs that worked with MENTOR and its affiliates were far less likely to offer only one hour or no pre-match and post-match training. Those that received no help from any assistance provider were most likely to offer no training or only one hour pre- and post-match. Those that worked with MENTOR were also most likely to have matches meeting multiple times per month or weekly.

The biggest differences by far among those that received technical assistance and those that did not were related to program evaluation activities. Agencies that reported receiving training or technical assistance from MENTOR and its affiliates were much more likely than those who worked with other intermediaries or received no assistance to report doing:

- Qualitative evaluation
- Implementation evaluation
- Outcome evaluation (including experimentally designed evaluations)
- Return-on-investment studies

They were also least likely to report having done no evaluation activities in the last five years.

Clearly, there is room to grow the support available to mentoring organizations—both by MENTOR and others—and the future maturation of the field depends on supporting programs in strengthening and expanding their services. We hope that future research will shed further light on the value of intermediaries working in the mentoring space. MENTOR is currently conducting a random-assignment evaluation of its core technical assistance services that we anticipate will show the value that training and technical assistance organizations bring to improving program quality.

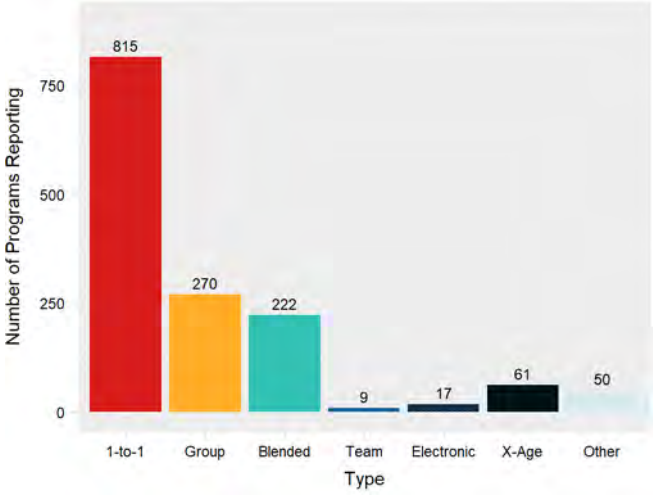


Chapter 2: What Do Mentoring Programs Look Like in Practice?

The 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey collected survey responses from 1,451 distinct mentoring programs. As noted in the previous chapter, some agencies reported on more than one program they operate and MENTOR certainly appreciates their willingness to share information about each of their program models separately as it allows us to do much more accurate analysis and comparisons of programs of different types.

As seen in Figure 2, the majority of youth mentoring programs (56 percent) are using a one-to-one model that matches a single adult and child in a relationship. This number climbs to 71 percent if we include programs that use a "blended" model in which one-to-one matches meet in groups for shared activities. Purely group programs make up an additional 19 percent of programs, making it the second most popular program model.

The primary model for this mentoring program is...



Sample size 1444
Nonresponses: 7

Figure 2 - Program Models

Perhaps most surprisingly, only 4 percent of mentoring programs reported using a pure cross-age mentoring model where an older youth mentors a younger child, most often in a school setting. These types of programs have shown effectiveness over the years (for example, the Cross-Age Mentoring Program rated as "promising" in the Department of Justice Crime Solutions database[xv]) in spite of some occasional challenges in implementation (perhaps most notably in the 2007 report *High School Students as Mentors*[xvi]). This may be a model with considerable potential for growth in future years as schools and other institutions look to give meaningful service and leadership development experiences to older youth while providing critical role modeling and social support to younger students.

We also examined how many youth are served by each program model, recognizing that programs come in all shapes and sizes. Table 6 shows the percentage of all mentees survey programs reported by program model.

In spite of considerable growth in communications technology over the last decade, surprisingly few programs (only 17 in the whole sample) use an exclusively electronic or online mentoring model, although many programs allow for electronic communication for matches that primarily meet in person. Even then, only 43 programs in the sample indicated that online meetings were "typical" of their matches.

Table 6 - Percentage of Mentees by Model

Program model	% of all mentees
One-to-one	34%
Group	35%
Blended, one-to-one, and group	12%
Cross-age peer	7%
E-mentoring	3%
Team mentoring	<1%
Other	8%

Match Meeting Locations

The survey also asked programs to report on where their matches met in an effort to separate community-based programs (where matches meet primarily out in the community) to more site-based programs that are bound to a particular school, community center, or other institution. However, programs were allowed to select "all that apply" to capture the full range of meeting locations they make available to mentors and mentees.

As shown in Table 7 (next page), 47 percent of programs have matches meeting out in the community, suggesting that these programs are primarily community-based, although a predominantly site-based program may occasionally allow for meetings out in the community, especially on group outings or for special events. Schools were another common meeting location, with 33 percent of programs reporting that their matches meet there *during* the school day.

Table 7 - Meeting Locations

Where do this program's matches typically meet?		
Meeting Place	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Out in the general community	683	47.07
K-12 school (during day)	472	32.53
Afterschool program	411	28.33
Higher education institution	94	6.48
Community center	201	13.85
Nonprofit organization	370	25.50
Religious facility	99	6.82
Juvenile justice facility	45	3.10
Other residential facility	49	3.38
Worksite	82	5.65
Online	43	2.96
Other - Write In (Required)	142	9.79

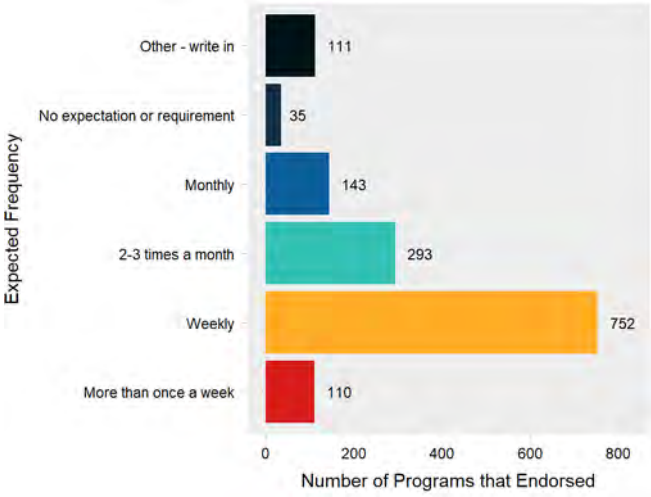
Another 28 percent of programs met in after-school settings, but it is unclear as to what percentage of these were at the school site as opposed to a nonprofit organization or other nonschool location. A quarter of all programs had matches meeting at a nonprofit facility. See below for a breakdown of how match meeting locations compare historically.

Match Meeting Frequency, Time Commitment, and Duration

The 2016 survey also asked mentoring programs to report on the frequency and intensity of the meetings between mentors and mentees. Figure 3 shows that the vast majority of programs (80 percent) expected mentors and mentees to meet either at least once a week or two-to-three times a month. Only 10 percent of programs have matches meeting once a month and only 35 programs in the whole national sample reported no requirement for meeting frequency. Interestingly, 8 percent of programs had matches meeting more than once a week—this was most common in after-school program settings and programs housed at schools during the day.

As shown in Figure 4, 67 percent of programs either required matches to meet for a total of three-to-five or six-to-ten hours per month. Surprisingly, about 12 percent of programs only required one-to-two total hours of mentoring per month, while at the other end of the spectrum, 9 percent of programs were expecting more than 10 hours a month of mentor-mentee interaction.

What is the expected frequency for mentors and mentees to meet in this program?



Sample size 1444
Nonresponses: 7

Figure 3 - Meeting Frequency

Match Meeting Locations Over Time

For historical context, we compared our findings here with the 1999 study by Sipe and Roder, which found fairly similar breakdowns of where matches met. The earlier study, however, asked where matches *primarily* met, whereas the 2016 survey did not specify whether these locations were the primary location, making exact comparisons challenging.

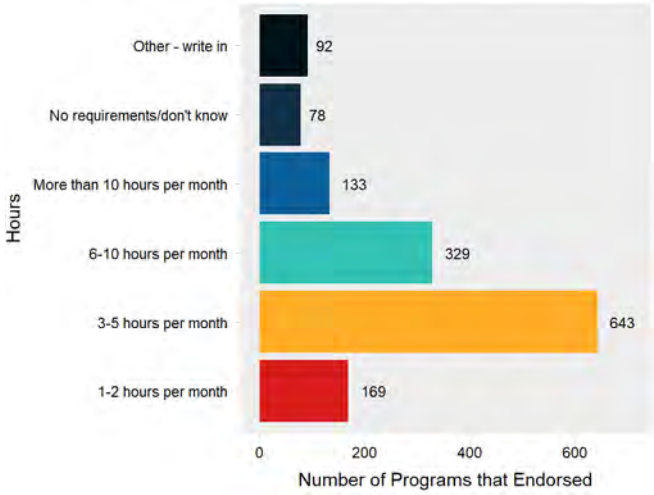
1999 Study[xvii]

- 55% of programs had matches primarily meeting in the community
- 32% of programs had matches primarily meeting in schools
- 5% of programs had matches primarily meeting at community centers or nonprofits
- 4% of programs had matches primarily meeting at mentors' workplaces
- Few programs met in faith organizations, specifically churches
- No mention of matches meeting online

2016 Study

- 47% of programs have matches meeting in the community
- 33% of programs have matches meeting in schools
- 25% of programs have matches meeting at a nonprofit, 14% at a community center
- 6% of programs have matches meeting at worksites
- 7% of programs have matches meeting in faith institutions
- 3% of programs have matches meeting online

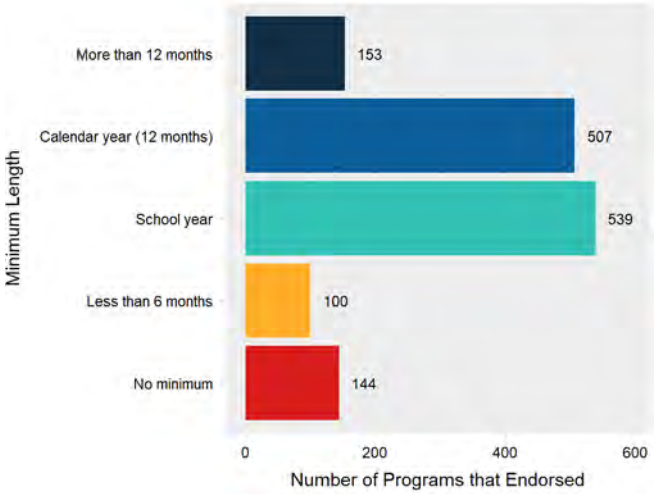
How many total hours per month are mentors and mentees expected to meet together in this program?



Sample size 1444
Nonresponses: 7

Figure 4 - Meeting Length

What is the minimum length of commitment per match for mentors in this program?



Sample size 1443
Nonresponses: 8

Figure 5 - Minimum Expected Match Commitment

These frequency and intensity findings work together to show that the majority of programs have matches meeting weekly or biweekly for an hour or two each time, with the rest of the field operating at the margins of either very frequent, intensive mentoring or, unfortunately, sporadic meetings that do not add up to a whole lot of mentoring in total for participating youth.

We also asked about the minimum expectations around match length. Much of the mentoring research to date has promoted the notion that "longer equals stronger" when it comes to mentoring relationships. It seems that the field has largely received this message, with 72.5 percent of programs reporting either a calendar year or school year minimum length of commitment (see Figure 5). Only 100 programs were purposefully "short term" in requiring a less-than-six-month match, while 10 percent of programs somehow had no stated expectation for match length. Further analysis indicated that these were more likely to be programs meeting in after-school settings or those that employ a group or peer mentoring model, perhaps suggesting that mentoring was a distributed function shared by many volunteers, staff, or students over the course of a year. See the box below for more details about how match duration expectations have changed over time.

In addition to asking about minimum match length, we also wanted to see if those expectations were being met in reality. As shown in Figure 6 (next page), about a third of programs reported that more than 90 percent of their matches made it to that minimum time commitment, with another 36 percent indicating that between 76 and 90 percent made it to that minimum expectation. At the other end of the spectrum, 13 percent of programs indicated that less than half of their matches made it to that minimum threshold—a discouraging number. If we include the 19 percent

Match Length Expectations Over Time

1999 Study[xvii]

- 74% of programs expected a calendar or school year match
- 15% expected less than 9 month matches
- 10% had no minimum commitment

2000 Study[xix]

- 55% of programs expected 6-12 month matches
- 16% of programs expected more than a 12 month match
- 10% of programs expected less than six month matches
- 8% had no minimum commitment

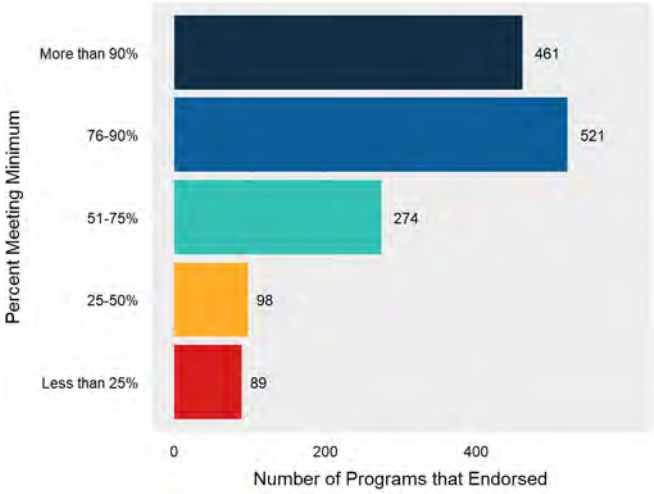
2016 Study

- 72.5% of programs expect a school year or calendar year match
- 11% of programs expect *more* than a 12 month match
- 7% of programs expect less than six month matches
- 10% have no minimum commitment

of programs that have between 50 and 75 percent of their matches lasting the intended duration, that means that perhaps about a third of the nation's mentoring programs are struggling somewhat to give large numbers of the youth they serve the relationships they are expecting, at least in terms of duration.

Other research has estimated the number of matches that close prematurely at around 30-40 percent of all matches (across various models)[xx, xxi]. To explore match length further, we then calculated the estimated number of matches that made it their intended duration in each program (using the midpoint of the ranges in Figure 6 weighted by the total number of youth each program served). This offers a more global estimate of the percentage of all matches nationally that are making it to their minimum expected time commitment.

In the last year, roughly what percentage of matches in this program met the minimum length of commitment



Sample size 1443
Nonresponses: 8

Figure 6 - Percentages of Matches Meeting Minimum Duration

This analysis found that approximately 78 percent of all matches across all programs made it to their minimum expected time commitment, meaning 22 percent ended prematurely. This estimate is in line with prior research and suggests that programs were accurately reporting the percentage of matches that persist as long as they minimally should.

Given that many matches close before their time, we also asked programs to report their top three reasons why their matches tended to close prematurely. As seen in Table 8, about half of all programs selected changes in mentor or mentee life circumstances as

Table 8 - Reasons for Early Match Closure

For those matches that ended early (before the minimum length of Commitment), please choose the most common reasons.		
Reason	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Mentor change in life circumstances	769	53.00
Mentee change in life circumstances	787	54.24
Mentor unfulfilled/unrealistic expectations	198	13.65
Mentee unfulfilled/unrealistic expectations	136	9.37
Mentor did not feel youth needed them	54	3.72
Cultural differences	21	1.45
Family interference/lack of support	194	13.37
Lack resources to provide match support	111	7.65
Unknown	114	7.86
Other	173	11.92

the leading causes of premature closure, followed by two reasons that have emerged in recent research as being common friction points in mentoring relationships: unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations by mentors and a lack of support or interference from the youth's family. Both of these reasons have surfaced in important qualitative research by Renee Spencer[xxii] and others[xxiii] that highlight the need for strong parent engagement and pre-match preparation of all participants. Overly enthusiastic recruitment messages can also allow participants to set unrealistic expectations for what the experience of mentoring will actually be like and lead to premature closures and heartbreak for vulnerable youth.

One surprising finding was that 9 percent of programs indicated that it was *youth* who were leaving programs because of unfulfilled or unrealistic expectations. That may seem like a small percentage of programs, but note that this was listed as one of their *top three* challenges in terms of match duration, suggesting that this is more common than one might think. Clearly, the mentoring field has some work to do in helping youth, and their parents and guardians, understand what participating in a mentoring program will be like and how to get help in addressing problems when a match is not going as expected. It is also a harsh reminder that youth should be empowered to have a meaningful say in their participation in a program, including the selection of their mentor and the goals and structure of the relationship.

In sum, we are left with the conclusion that almost four of every five matches last as intended, but that for youth in about a third of the nation's programs, making it to that expected match length is basically *a coin-flip proposition*. This suggests that mentoring

stakeholders must further support these programs with training and technical assistance, which can alleviate match difficulties and help prevent these match duration challenges.

However, it's worth noting that many match closures are unavoidable—families move, mentors change jobs, life happens. Our field might benefit from reexamining the expectation that matches should inherently last as long as possible—years, if not decades—in every program. If we know that a healthy percentage of matches will *not* be able to endure for the long haul (meaning *beyond* the year-long minimums most frequently required here), perhaps there is need to explore mentoring models that are inherently shorter in duration and have lower expectations on match length. If the "gold standard" of long-term matches is inherently difficult for large percentages of programs and matches to achieve, it may be that other more focused, short-term program models can avoid the disappointment and even harm that can come when an expected long-term match fizzles out. The viability of this approach depends on many factors, including youth needs, but for many children and mentors, shorter and more episodic mentoring might be very beneficial while also reducing potential harm.

Program Goals and Activities

As noted in the Introduction, mentoring has diversified considerably over the last 20 years, with caring adult-youth relationships being deployed in an endless variety of settings and in service of myriad goals for young people and communities. To explore how this diversification has played out in the services provided to youth and families, the 2016 survey asked programs to choose up to *four* "core goals or youth outcomes" that they strive to produce.

Table 9 offers a snapshot of the outcomes mentoring programs tend to emphasize, illustrating the many diverse applications of mentoring across America and the wide variety of ways programs see their work contributing to the greater good.

Table 9 - Top Goals of Youth Mentoring Programs

Please choose the core goals or youth outcome areas for this mentoring program.		
Outcome Areas	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Academic enrichment	529	36.46
Career exploration	376	25.91
Civic engagement	119	8.20
College access	259	17.85
Educational attainment	222	15.30
Family support	127	8.75
General youth development	743	51.21
Identity development	91	6.27
Juvenile justice/re-entry	53	3.65
Leadership development	303	20.88
Life skills/social skills	782	53.89
Literacy	107	7.37
Mental health and well-being	149	10.27
Positive health behaviors	214	14.75
Pregnancy prevention	15	1.03
Providing a caring adult relationship	642	44.25
Recreational activities	177	12.20
Resiliency	169	11.65
STEM education	91	6.27
Substance use/abuse	40	2.76
Violence prevention	76	5.24
Other	114	7.86

A few of the findings to note:

- The prevalence of mentoring programs addressing life skills and social skills (54 percent) was a bit of a surprise, narrowly beating out "general youth development" for the most common goal. This speaks volumes about the value of mentoring relationships in helping youth navigate the world around them and connecting with other people.
- Given that 33 percent of programs have matches meeting in the schools (with another 28 percent meeting in after-school programs), it's not surprising that 36 percent of programs noted that they emphasize academic enrichment, with another 15 percent focusing on educational attainment (including preventing leaving school early). Another 7 percent address literacy needs.
- It was surprising to see that only 6 percent of programs selected identity development as one of their top four outcomes. One interpretation of this, given how central concepts of identity and role modeling seem to the function of a mentor, is that programs simply see this as being a given in their work, but one that they don't inherently track as a formal outcome. They may focus on "harder" outcomes that are of more interest to funders, such as improved grades or health behaviors. Most mentoring programs do not formally measure changes or growth in identity as part of their evaluation efforts, which might explain the relative underrepresentation of that goal here.

- The survey included the option of "providing a caring adult relationship" as an outcome, but surprisingly only 44 percent of programs indicated this was a *top four* priority. Once again, this may have simply seemed like less of a serious *outcome* to respondents. But another interpretation is that the mentoring field has evolved to view a relationship with a caring adult *primarily* as a vehicle or "context" to disrupt a dysfunctional ecology around a child and/or deliver other services and supports (this idea has been promoted recently by researchers such as Tim Cavell, Julia Pryce, and Chris Elledge[xxiv]). For historical comparison, the 1999 Sipe and Roder study found that 100 percent of programs indicated that "one of the principal goals is to have the mentors and youth form relationships." Two decades later that number has been cut by more than half! Even the 2011 study by MENTOR[xxv] found that "Friendship/Socialization" (with the mentor) was a main focus of 77 percent of all programs. But mentoring these days is being deployed increasingly as a precision tool. This table reflects that reality, with healthy representation for outcomes as varied as mental health (10 percent of programs), recreation (12 percent), positive health behaviors (15 percent), and career exploration (26 percent).

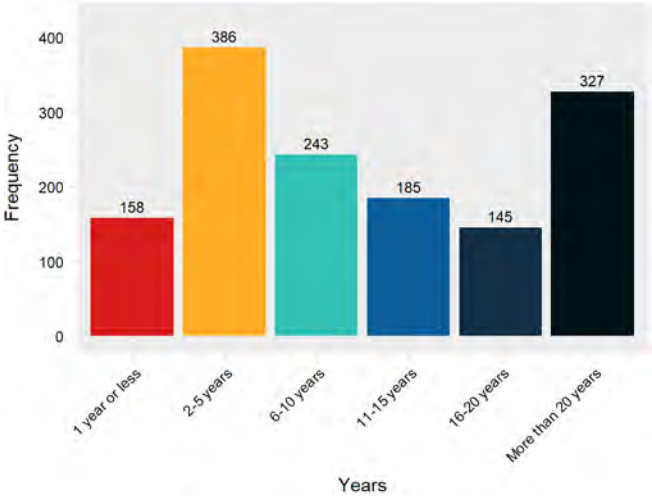
A breakdown of program goals by types of programs can be found in the comparison sections later in this chapter.

Program Longevity

As noted previously, the 1997 survey of mentoring programs found that almost 40 percent of them were relatively new to the work, being less than five years in operation. For the mentoring field, history may still be repeating itself because our 2016 survey (see Figure 7) found that about 38 percent of programs reported being either in their first year (11 percent) or two-to-five years old (27 percent). Similarly, 45 percent of programs in 2016 were more than a decade old, compared to 41 percent in 1999[xxvi].

So while it's a positive sign that the field has been able to maintain a steady core of mature, experienced programs over time, the ongoing number of new programs suggests considerable challenges with program sustainability and long-term investment in mentoring in some communities. On one hand, this "churn" is positive—new programs bring innovation and expand services to regions or populations that have lacked mentoring opportunities. The tough competition for funds, and thus longevity, is reinforced somewhat by the previous chapter's examination of agency challenges—fundraising and program sustainability were the second and third most selected barriers to providing mentoring in communities. See chapter 3 for much more information about the funding stability of mentoring programs represented in this survey.

How many years has this program been offering mentoring?



Sample size 1444
Nonresponses: 7

Figure 7 - Age of Mentoring Programs

Comparing One-to-One, Blended, and Group Mentoring Programs

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the three largest program models were one-to-one, group, and blended programs, which have mentor-mentee pairs meet in group contexts at least some of the time. While each model represents a large segment of the mentoring field, we wanted to see if they differed along some key program dimensions:

Match Meeting Locations

- One-to-one programs were much more likely to have matches meet out in the community (58 percent of them indicated this) than group mentoring programs (28 percent) or blended programs (46 percent). They were also slightly more likely to have matches meet at school during the day.
- Group programs, however, were more than twice as likely (49 percent) as one-to-one (19 percent) to meet in after-school settings, with 37 percent

of blended programs meeting in after-school programs.

- Blended and group programs were much more likely to have matches meeting at community centers, nonprofit facilities, and religious settings than one-to-one programs.
- Other meeting locations were fairly consistent across the three models.

Match Meeting Frequency

- Group mentoring programs were most likely to meet weekly or more than once a week (65 percent of all group programs), followed closely by one-to-one (62 percent) and blended (52 percent) programs.
- Other frequencies of meeting times were fairly even across the other options, although 5 percent of group mentoring programs have no expectations on meeting frequency compared to only 1 percent of group or one-to-one programs.

Minimum Match Commitment

- One-to-one programs were much more likely to have a school or calendar year minimum commitment (79 percent) than blended (67 percent) or group programs (63 percent). However, group programs were the most likely to specify a school-year commitment (47 percent of all group programs had this minimum).
- Only 5 percent of one-to-one programs had no minimum commitment, but 13 percent of blended and 18 percent of group mentoring programs noted no minimum. One-to-one was least likely to require a minimum of less than six months, as well, making it the most intensive commitment of the three models.

Program Goals

There was remarkable similarity across the goals of all three models, with most of the goals we asked about being fairly even, within a few percentage points. However, a few interesting trends did emerge:

- One-to-one programs were least likely to focus on career readiness, civic engagement, college access, leadership development, and STEM topics compared to group and blended programs.

- Group programs were least likely to focus on general youth development, family support, or resiliency.
- Blended programs were the least likely to focus on literacy.
- Following up on a trend noted earlier in this chapter, 51 percent of one-to-one programs chose "providing a caring adult relationship" as a core goal, but only 31 percent of blended programs and 25 percent of group programs indicated this was a focus. This illustrates that one-to-one programs are still the preferred model for emphasizing the relationship and providing broad-based youth development support, while group and blended programs focus much more on specific academic pursuits and connecting youth to career and community.

Program Challenges

As with program goals, the challenges across the models were fairly similar, with the following exceptions:

- Group and blended mentoring programs were more likely than one-to-one programs to report challenges with blending mentoring with other services, fundraising and grant writing, general program design, and professional development of staff.
- Group programs reported far fewer challenges than blended or one-to-one programs in the areas of designing match activities, making strong matches, supporting matches, and recruiting mentors.

Staffing Levels

Unsurprisingly, group mentoring programs had the highest staff-to-youth ratio, but the average number across all group programs was higher than expected: 181 youth for every 1 FTE staff person. One-to-one programs reported a 1:67 ratio and blended programs reported the lowest ratio of these three models at 1:58.

Costs to Serve Youth

The next chapter of this report, "How Are Mentoring Programs Funded and Staffed?," goes into much more detail about the budgets and costs per youth for mentoring programs as a whole, something that was especially challenging to calculate using the survey data collected. But our analysis shows that of these three models, group mentoring programs had the lowest cost per youth (an estimated $1,191 a year), followed by blended ($1,659) and one-to-one ($1,913) programs. Readers should note, however, that these estimates fluctuate wildly depending on geography, program goals, the needs of youth served, and many other variables, and they do not contain any in-kind resources or volunteer time. Thus, these averages do not accurately represent many programs or their realistic (let alone ideal) budget needs. Please see chapter 3 for a much more thorough examination of program funding and costs.

Comparing Site-Based and Community-Based Programs

In addition to comparing program models, we wanted to see if program setting also predicted differences among key program characteristics. This was more challenging to assess than the comparison of program models, as programs were not required to identify exclusively as "site-based" or "community-based"—they were allowed to check all of the meeting locations that applied for their matches.

What we found is that many programs indicated that their matches met at both specific sites and out in the community. A total of 418 programs (29 percent) indicated that matches met at *both* community- and site-based locations, such as a school, faith institution, or workplace. This is not surprising as many site-based programs have outings where mentors and youth go into the community at least a few times per year (and many community-based matches will occasionally meet at a specific location, such as a mentor's workplace or at an after-school program).

However, there were some programs that indicated they were purely site-based, with 762 programs indicating they *only* had matches meet at a school, after-school program, nonprofit facility, religious institution, or at a juvenile justice, medical, or residential facility. This represented 53 percent of all programs in our sample. On the other hand, only 271 programs (18 percent) indicated that their matches exclusively met out in the community, rather than at any designated site (or at least the ones we offered as choices in the survey).

Given that these two groups of programs represent our best guess as to which programs were purely community- or site-based, we compared them across several key characteristics.

Table 10 - Meeting Frequency by Location

Meeting Frequency	Community-Based	Site-Based
More than once a week	2%	10%
Weekly	44%	57%
2-3 times a month	32%	15%
Monthly	11%	8%
No expectation	2%	2%
Other	9%	7%

Match Meeting Frequency

As shown in Table 10, site-based programs were much more likely to meet frequently, especially weekly and more than once a week.

Minimum Match Commitment

Site-based programs were much more likely to report having a school-year minimum commitment (55 percent) or no minimum (12 percent) than community-based (8 percent and 3 percent, respectively) programs. However, community-based programs were more likely to require a calendar-year commitment (75 percent to 16 percent), not surprising given how many site-based programs are tied to the school year.

Program Goals

A similar pattern emerges when comparing the goals of site-based and community-based programs as we found when examining group and one-to-one programs. Site based programs are more likely to emphasize academic and instrumental pursuits: career readiness, civic engagement (surprisingly), college access, educational attainment and support,

leadership development, literacy, and STEM topics. Community-based programs were more likely to emphasize family support, general youth development, identity development, juvenile justice avoidance and reentry, life skills, mental health, positive health behaviors, relationships with caring adults, resiliency, substance abuse prevention, and violence prevention. Both types of programs addressed pregnancy prevention equally (and not very often, at only 1 percent of programs in each category).

Program Challenges

Site- and community-based programs were shockingly similar in terms of the challenges they reported, with the only meaningful differences being community-based programs reporting more struggles with mentor recruitment, program sustainability, and offering services in rural settings. Site-based programs only reported struggles in one category at a meaningfully higher rate than community-based programs: program evaluation. But for most other challenges, these two types of programs only differed by a few percentage points.

Staffing Levels

Site-based programs, unsurprisingly, reported a much higher staff-to-youth ratio (155 youth for every staff member reported). Community-based programs served only 46 youth for every staff member.

Costs to Serve Youth

As with the cost difference between group and one-to-one models, we see a similar pattern of site-based programs being far less expensive ($1,423 per youth per year) than community-based programs ($2,173). But, as noted previously, these funding estimates vary wildly and should be interpreted with caution. It is also worth noting that community-based programs are addressing a range of much more serious goals and topics (mental health needs, juvenile justice involvement, substance abuse, and so on.) than site-based programs are on average. This "higher needs = higher costs" trend is further detailed in the following chapter.

Note that the 2016 survey also asked programs about the pre-match and post-match training and support practices. The findings related to these questions are covered in chapter 4, "Who Participates in Mentoring and How Are They Supported?"

Comparing Urban and Rural Programs

We also did some analyses of programs operating in urban and rural areas to see if they differed in meaningful ways. (See Chapter 3's discussion of funding levels in rural and urban programs for the methodology we used to sort programs into these categories.) But looking at a few key characteristics, we find rural programs comparing quite well to their urban counterparts. Rural programs:

- Are more likely to require year-long matches than urban programs (83 percent to 70 percent)
- Are more likely to expect weekly or more frequent content (72 percent to 58 percent)
- Have a longer average match length (23 months to 17 months)
- And have a higher percentage of matches last their intended duration (79 percent to 75 percent)

Rural programs are more likely to focus on general youth development, life skills, healthy behaviors, substance abuse, and the relationship itself than urban programs.

Rural programs are also more likely to report challenges such as developing meaningful match activities, mentor recruitment, and, unsurprisingly, struggling to deliver services in a rural setting (but even then, only 30 percent of rural programs said their rural location was a main challenge).

The average rural program has a budget ($66,537) that is about 40 percent of the average urban program, while serving about 78 youth per program compared to the 308 by urban providers.

Chapter 3: How Are Mentoring Programs Staffed and Funded?

The 2016 National Mentoring Program Survey found that 413,237 youth were being served by the 1,451 programs that participated. While this is obviously not comprehensive of the entire spectrum of youth served by mentoring programs nationwide, it is worthwhile to note an average program size of 285 youth. This is compared to average program sizes of 164 and 208 youth in the previously discussed 1999[xxvii] and 2000 studies[xxviii], respectively. This growing and large average number inherently begs questions about how many individuals staff these programs and their financial capacity to serve large numbers of youth year after year.

Staffing of Mentoring Programs

We asked programs in the survey to report the number of staff they had (represented as FTE), broken down by the categories of Program Director/Coordinator, Other Paid Staff, Volunteer Staff, AmeriCorps/VISTA/National Service Staff, and Other. These various positions were then aggregated to give us a picture of overall program staffing. Table 11 provides several ways of looking at the staffing that programs reported.

Table 11 - Staffing of Mentoring Programs

Total staff in all programs	10, 804 FTE
FTE per program	7.45 FTE
Average number of youth per staff member (All programs)	98.5 youth
Average number of youth per staff member excluding very large agencies	38 youth
Median number of youth per staff member	28 youth

Table 12 shows the staff-to-youth averages across program models.

One thing to note about the staffing patterns of mentoring programs is that there are a handful of very large agencies that serve high numbers of youth with very little staffing per mentee. These are most commonly large urban programs operated by national organizations that have many built-in efficiencies and automated systems that can depress staffing levels compared to more "mom-and-pop" type programs. If we include those large agencies we see almost a 1:100 staff-to-youth ratio. But if we eliminate these large agencies (defined as any program reporting a greater than 1:200 staff-to-youth ratio), that average drops to 38 youth per staff member. If we use the median staffing of programs, it drops even further to 28 youth per staff member.

Table 12 - Youth per Staff Member Across Program Models

Model	Youth per Staff Member
Blended One-to-One & Group	58
Cross-Age-Peer Mentoring	164
E-Mentoring	198
Group Mentoring	181
One-to-One	67
Other	249
Team Mentoring	19

This is a consistent theme throughout this staffing and funding section: The averages across all programs are a bit misleading as they are heavily skewed by a small handful of large and expensive programs that serve many youth with few staff, as well as by a large number of programs getting by with *very little* staffing and funding.

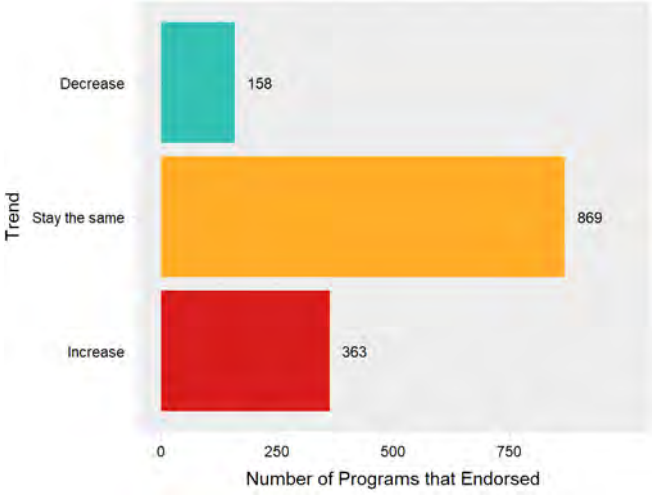
In fact, we found that 59 percent of programs nationwide had less than three staff members total (including volunteer staff) delivering their mentoring services. And those tiny one- or two-person programs served 117,927 youth, about 29 percent of all mentees reported in our survey. Unsurprisingly, most programs (90 percent) have a program director or coordinator leading the delivery of the program. But about half of programs noted that they have *no other paid staff* supporting the program beyond that coordinator. Only 21 percent of programs reported having any VISTA or other national service positions involved in supporting mentoring. This paints a picture of well over half of the nation's mentoring programs essentially being entirely run by one or two people—doing all the tasks associated with quality mentoring for many, many youth without a lot of help. This certainly is a meaningful finding from a sustainability point of view in that many programs become basically unstaffed when one of those people leaves. It can also make fundraising a challenge if a small staff's time is consumed by programmatic tasks at the expense of things like grant writing or connecting with donors.

It's also worth looking at these staffing levels from a historical perspective. The 1999 report *Contemporary*

Issues in Mentoring[xxix] found an average staff size (across 52 programs examined) of 4.8 paid FTE with about another 1.6 FTE of volunteer staffing (6.4 FTE total). This is compared to an average staff size today of 7.45 FTE (with about 4.1 FTE being paid). In 1999, the average paid staff-to-youth ratio in a program was 1:60; today we find a ratio of 1:70. There may be a lot of noise and inconsistency in comparing these averages over time (especially because volunteer mentors were included as a "staff" category in the 1999 study), but our findings suggest that the size and capacity of programs has stayed remarkably steady in this field over time. Programs today seem to be slightly more reliant on *volunteer* staff to manage programs that the 1999 study found. It is also clear that the number of youth served per paid staff member has undoubtedly grown in the last 20 years, which suggests that programs have learned to do more with limited funds by leveraging volunteers in the operations of the program.

The good news is that for most programs in this survey, recent staffing (paid or not) is stable or even growing. As shown in Figure 8, 89 percent of programs reported that their staff had grown or stayed the same over the last year. This is important because, as discussed in chapter 4, 87 percent of programs reported that the number of youth served had increased or stayed level in the last year, with only 13 percent reporting a decline in youth participation (see Figure 11, page 41, for more details).

Compared to the previous program year, did the total number of staff positions for this program...



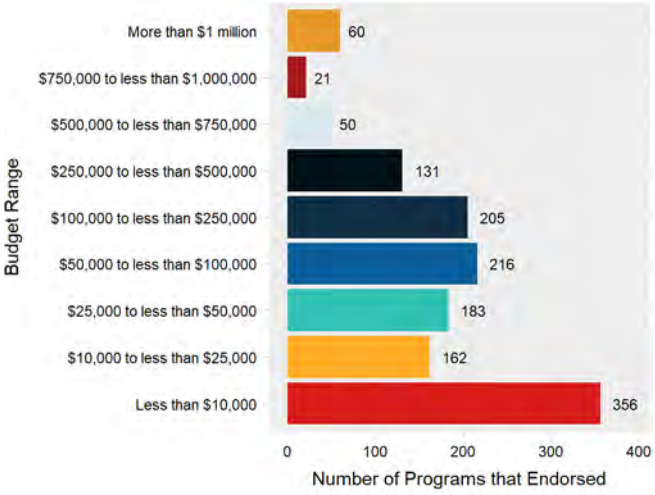
Sample size 1390
Nonresponses: 61

Figure 8 - Staffing Trends

Funding of Mentoring Programs

The 2016 survey also asked programs a series of questions about their funding, including sources and trends in their overall funding over time. Because we didn't feel mentoring programs would be comfortable sharing exact dollar amounts (either in total or by source) we asked them to select appropriate ranges for their overall budget and the percentage of that budget that came from various sources. Because we gathered information in ranges rather than hard dollar amounts, much of the analysis in this section is based on estimates derived from the ranges and will inherently contain some inconsistency with the true reality in the field. However, we feel that this financial information paints a reasonably accurate picture of what the funding experience of most mentoring programs looks like.

What is the current annual budget for this mentoring programs services?



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Nonresponses: 67

Figure 9 - Program Budget Ranges

The programs participating in the survey reported an estimated $222,302,500 in funding over the past year, if the total is calculated using the median of each range (and a $1 million cap for programs that reported meeting or exceeding that threshold). Calculating total funding using the upper and lower limits of ranges produces estimates of $274 million and $171 million, respectively. Averaged across all programs, the median estimated total produces an average budget of $153,465 per program across the 1,451 programs we surveyed.

But this average number is not quite an accurate representation as it is artificially inflated by a cluster

of very large, high-budget programs. The funding reality for most individual programs is not as robust as that six-figure average might suggest. As illustrated in Figure 9 (see previous page), 51 percent of programs have a budget *under* $50,000 per year and a full two-thirds of programs are below that $100,000 mark. This means that many, many youth are being served by programs with extremely small budgets and large amounts of volunteer time and other "sweat equity" that is not captured in these budget numbers.

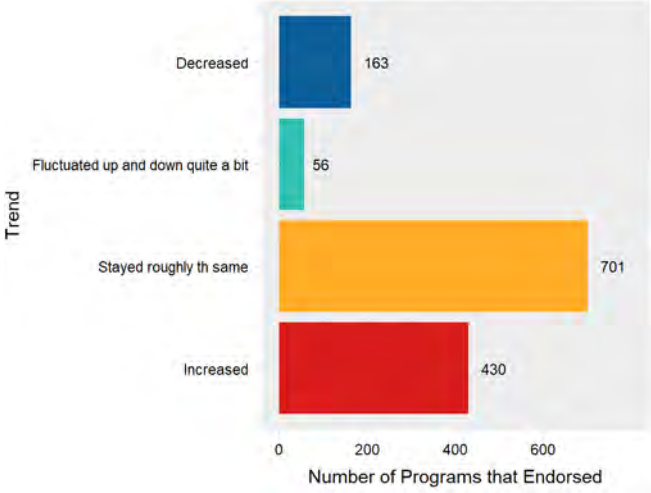
Only 9 percent of the mentoring programs that completed this survey have an annual budget above $500,000, but as noted above, their budgets tend to overinflate the average across programs dramatically. So while we do see some extraordinarily well-funded mentoring programs—mostly affiliates of national brands operating in large cities—this field remains, even today, mostly reflective of its grassroots origins. In spite of the massive investment in mentoring over the last two decades, most programs that bring youth and caring adults together are fairly modest operations.

Fluctuations in Funding

The good news about the funding of programs is that it seems to have remained at least stable over recent years. Programs were asked if their funding had grown, shrunk, fluctuated up and down, or held steady over the last three years. As shown in Figure 10, 52 percent of programs indicated that their funding had been stable, with another 32 percent indicating that their funding had increased. Only 16 percent of mentoring program budgets had fluctuated wildly or decreased in the last three years, suggesting a period of great stability in mentoring program financial support.

This funding stability is critical, as the number of youth being served for many programs is increasing from year-to-year (see chapter 4 for details). While the demand for mentoring in communities is rising, recent trends reported here suggest that mentoring programs have been able to grow or maintain budgets and staffing to keep up with that demand. This somewhat contradicts the overall trend across youth development focused nonprofits: The *2015 State of the Nonprofit Sector* report from the Nonprofit Finance Fund found that 61 percent of youth-serving nonprofits reported that they did not secure the funds needed to meet the demand of their clients[xxx].

Over the last three years, our budget has...



Sample size 1350
Nonresponses: 101

Figure 10 - Fluctuation in Funding Over 3 Years

Of course, the reality is that mentoring programs may have much more community need than they are able to meet—that information was not requested in this survey. But at the very least, mentoring program funding and staffing does not seem to be *shrinking* as the demand is growing. Although, as we note later in this chapter, the overall funding situation for the field might be more tenuous than these trend results suggest.

Funding from Various Sources

Interesting patterns emerge when looking at the sources of funding for mentoring programs. Table 13 illustrates the percentage contribution of each funding source to the total budget (for all programs that reported a budget source). This highlights that many different funding sources contribute to the financial

Table 13 - Funding Percentages by Source

Source	Percent of Budget
Federal Government	8.92
State Government	7.83
County or Municipal Grants	3.59
K-12 School/District/LEA/ESD Grants	2.11
Private Foundation Grants	14.47
Communtiy Foundation Grants	5.67
United Way Grants	5.94
Business or Corporate Donations	10.73
Private Philanthropy Donations	5.58
Individual Donations/Bequests	12.38
Fundraising Events	14.24
Earned Income/Contracted Income	4.21
Mentoring Partnership Support	1.44
Other	2.89

sustainability of the mentoring field but that no one source is responsible for funding the movement at the macro level. In fact, private foundations, fundraising events, individual donors, and businesses are the only sources that even exceed 10 percent of the contributions to the overall funding of the field.

While that may seem like mentoring programs are benefitting from diverse funding sources, the reality is that the average program in our survey was only getting any funding from about 4.5 sources. Even more concerning is that 509 of the programs in this survey indicated that 75–100 percent of their funding comes from a *single* source (see Table 14).

Table 14 - Number of Programs with >75 Percent Funding From One Source

Federal Government Grants	100
State Government Grants	61
County or Municipal Grants	29
K-12 School/District/LEA/ESD Grants	27
Private Foundation Grants	44
Communtiy Foundation Grants	14
United Way Grants	15
Business or Corporate Donations	24
Private Philanthropy Donations	20
Individual Donations/Bequests	62
Fundraising Events	34
Earned Income/Contracted Income	17
Mentoring Partnership Support	10
Other	52

That means that 35 percent of all programs would be in dire straits and would likely face closure if they lost this single particular funding source in a given year. Government funding leads the list of sources on which programs are "existentially dependent," with 13 percent of all programs reporting that government funds (mostly federal and state) make up more than three-fourths of their annual budget. Around 9 percent of programs report being dependent on individuals or families supporting their work, either through donations, fund-raising events, or private philanthropy (such as family foundations). This paints a picture where large-scale disinvestment by foundations, government agencies, or wealthy individuals would have dire consequences for a significant number of the nation's programs. The government-sourced funds are particularly worrisome as their investments often occur in places where other sources of support are not available (particularly from the private sector) or are used to bring much–needed services to high-risk populations of youth (e.g., the recent push for mentoring programs serving youth who have been commercially sexually exploited).

The Costs to Serve Individuals in Mentoring Programs

One of the most sought after pieces of information for funders, policymakers, and practitioners in the mentoring field is a reasonable estimate of what it costs to serve a child in a program for one year. This cost-per-youth number has all kinds of implications for staffing levels, program growth and expansion, and benchmarking when making funding available to mentoring programs through competitive grants. It is very understandable that the field wants solid estimates of what it costs to produce a "unit" of mentoring (one match for the intended duration), as would be the case in any other field or industry.

But, as with many of the findings in this survey, the devil is in the details. As noted throughout this report, the programs that participated in this survey are incredibly diverse, offering services at varying levels of intensity and in service of wildly divergent goals. They also serve youth who have higher or lower levels of risk and protective factors in their lives and who may require supports that reflect that level of need.

The simplest, and least accurate, method of determining what it costs the nation's programs to serve youth is to take the total budget these programs reported (estimated at $222,302,500) and divide it by the 413,237 youth they reported serving. This results in an average of $538 for every youth served. But this number is tremendously flawed:

- It includes programs that reported a budget range but did not accurately report the number of youth they serve (such as by including waitlist youth that did not get a mentor or by reporting a number of youth that seems extremely small given their budget size, such as one program that reported serving two youth with a $1 million budget; this program was removed from the analyses that follow).
- It includes the 22 programs that spend over $10,000 a year to serve a child—these programs tend to be highly targeted programs that offer intensive support to youth with serious needs.
- It also is lowered considerably by the *nearly 500 programs* that reported an annual cost-per-youth

of *under* $500. For example, one faith-based organization reported serving around 600 youth with a budget of $5,000. Needless to say, an average of $8 per youth served seems like an atypical number for anyone to be planning a budget around. These programs are obviously making due with ample in-kind donations and volunteer staffing, but they throw off any budget estimates as they basically report doing the work for almost free.

Further complicating these cost-per-youth numbers is the reality that we did not ask about actual budget numbers—the ranges we did ask about resulted in considerable estimation work for this report—nor did we ask about the depth and complexity of services. We simply don't know *what it is these programs are doing with youth* beyond the frequency and length of the match. Important considerations, such as the integration of clinical support or other required professional skills of the staff or mentors, the value of in-kind donations of space and activity costs, and the ideal level of staffing needed to make the program function *as intended* are simply not accounted for in our survey results.

"One of the most sought after pieces of information for funders, policymakers, and practitioners in the mentoring field is a reasonable estimate of what it costs to serve a child in a program for one year."

However, we have analyzed the data provided to try and make an educated guess as to what the nation's programs are actually spending to serve the youth who come through their program doors in a given year.

One way of doing this was to calculate the cost-per-youth-served of each program and then calculate the average across all programs. This involved using the midpoint of the budget range reported by each program divided by the number of youth they reported serving. We also removed a few outliers on the upper end that seemed unrealistic. For example, a few programs reported a cost-per-youth exceeding $100,000. We thus eliminated any program that reported a cost-per-match of over $50,000 from the analyses that follow, even though some of them may have been legitimate reports, such as programs that serve youth in medical facilities or provide mentoring in a residential facility.

Calculating this for the remaining sample, and estimating true costs at the midpoint of our budget ranges, provides an **estimated cost-per-youth-served of $1,695.** Using the lower and upper end of those budget ranges provides estimates of $1,007 and $2,313, respectively.

These numbers seem to align with previous estimates of program cost from earlier studies. For example, the *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring* report found an average cost-per-youth-served of $1,114 annually ($2,289 if in-kind costs were accounted for)[xxxi]. Adjusted for inflation, that $1,114 would be roughly $1,623[1] today. While our cost numbers in this survey do not account for in-kind costs in any way, this adjusted budget number is squarely in line with the "best guess" estimate that we find today. It may be that mentoring has become slightly more expensive per youth served over the last 20 years, but as noted throughout this report, mentoring is being applied in much more diverse settings, with higher-needs youth, and is being expected to produce meaningful results on a whole host of serious societal outcomes in ways that would have been unimaginable several decades ago. If the dollars-per-youth has not reflected that shift over 20 years, the mentoring field may be faced with some uncomfortable conversations. On the other hand, programs may have become more efficient over time, using technology and other innovations to reduce staffing and costs (this was clearly seen in the staffing section above).

In light of this concern, to further clarify program costs we then examined them by program model and the severity of needs of the youth served.

1 Calculated using the CPI Calculator provided online by the Bureau of Labor Statistics at https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl).

Costs by Program Model

To dig deeper into estimated costs-per-match, we looked at these results by program model (see Table 15). As noted previously, group mentoring is among the lowest-cost models, along with cross-age peer mentoring and e-mentoring (which likely has greatly reduced overhead due to the absence of large facilities). One-to-one, blended, and team mentoring are the most expensive models. It is worth noting, however, that many of these estimates are taken from very small sample sizes and should be interpreted with caution.

Table 15 - Costs per Youth by Program Model

Cost Per Youth	Model
Blended One-to-One & Group	$1,659
Cross-Age-Peer Mentoring	$1,170
E-Mentoring	$1,251
Group Mentoring	$1,191
One-to-One	$1,913
Other	$1,544
Team Mentoring	$2,857

Costs by Type of Youth Served

We also examined costs by the type of young person served by the program to gauge whether programs serving high proportions of higher-risk youth were generally more expensive. This is an important distinction because we want to avoid giving policymakers and funders global estimates of costs-per-youth that could be misapplied to wildly different programs and for youth with varying levels of need. Our hypothesis was that higher-risk groups of youth would be more expensive to serve than youth on average and that the costs of running a program would increase as the proportion of high-risk youth in the program increased.

This hypothesis was largely proven to be correct in our analyses. In general, programs serving substantial numbers of higher-risk youth were likely to be more expensive than the overall average of $1,695 per youth served. Those costs generally, but not always, increased as the percentage of higher-risk youth in the program increased. Table 16 offers some simple comparison points that illustrate this overall trend for a number of youth subgroups that might be considered higher risk. This table offers four sample cost-per-youth points for a number of levels of serving high-risk youth subgroups:

- Cost at 0–10 percent of youth (these are programs that serve virtually no youth from the subgroup)
- Cost at 26–50 percent of youth (these are programs that have a significant number, but not a majority, from the subgroup)
- Cost at 76–90 percent of youth (these are programs where the vast majority of mentees are members of the subgroup)

Table 16 - Costs per Match per Youth Subgroup

Youth Subgroup	Costs at 0-10% of youth	Costs at 26-50% of youth	Costs at 76-90% of youth	Costs at more than 90% of youth
Adjudicated/Juvenile Justice Involved	$1,725	$2,111	$2,586	$1,303
Disabilities or Special Health Needs	$1,649	$1,418	$1,091	$2,183
Foster Care	$1,660	$2,686	$4,004	$2,718
Gang Involved	$1,846	$2,011	$2,859	$973
Incarcerated Parent	$1,668	$1,829	$2,768	$1,544
Left School Early	$1,782	$1,480	$2,737	$3,613
Low Income	$809	$1,361	$1,449	$2,145
Mental Health Needs	$1,929	$1,960	$1,614	$3,562
Pregnant and Parenting	$1,867	$2,077	$1,744	$5,048
Receiving Special Education Services	$1,695	$1,725	$1,917	$2,086
Runaway or Homeless	$1,619	$2,359	$4,656	$1,838
Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation	$1,817	$2,131	$3,318	$4,542

- Cost at more than 90 percent of youth (these are programs that might be considered to be *purely* serving one specific subgroup of youth)

As with all of these cost estimates, readers are encouraged to interpret these findings cautiously and note that in many cases the number of programs representing these subgroup costs may be rather small.

"In general, programs serving substantial numbers of higher-risk youth were likely to be more expensive than the overall average of $1,695 per youth served."

In looking at these numbers, we see that for programs that serve very few youth from these groups, their average costs-per-youth are mostly around the overall national average of $1,695 (the exception being programs that serve very few low-income youth). This is to be expected since they serve what might be called a "typical" range of mentees that have varied needs, backgrounds, and levels of risk. But for most subgroups, the costs climb as the percentage of the youth in these higher-risk subgroups increases. The trend is not perfect in each subgroup, but the general pattern is one of programs becoming more expensive to operate as the percentage of higher-risk mentees increases.

Interestingly, in several subgroups, those programs that are serving the highest percentage of these youth (above 90 percent) see their costs-per-youth dramatically drop. This suggests that perhaps these programs are part of multiservice organizations where these youth are offered many, many other services, but that the mentoring piece *alone* does not cost very much (e.g., a program serving incarcerated juveniles or one offered at a homeless shelter where other needs are addressed outside of the mentoring services). Programs were asked to submit their budget range for *only* the mentoring program, not for other discrete services their agency might offer. Perhaps these youth are getting a number of other very expensive services that are not accounted for here, along with a fairly "cheap" mentor.

But even though these are small samples with a lot of estimation and variance in them, we are confident that this information shows a general trend that is true: Mentoring programs that plan on serving a high percentage of youth with substantial needs should plan on spending far more than the overall average cost-per-youth we have found nationally. As noted previously, that cost hardly seems to have risen at all

over the past 20 years and we feel that these estimates examining more intensive support for subgroups of mentees perhaps offer a more accurate picture of true program costs for those that want to provide mentoring to youth from the most difficult circumstances.

Funding of Programs in Urban and Rural Areas

We also examined the funding levels of programs by the types of communities they are in. The U.S. Census has nine distinct designations of urban, metropolitan, and rural counties which are differentiated by the size of the population and whether the area is adjacent to another metropolitan area or not. Rather than analyze our sample by all nine categories, we decided to do a simple grouping of programs into what we called "urban/metropolitan" or "nonurban/rural" areas.

The "urban" category includes zip codes in counties that are part of any metropolitan area above 20,000 people, regardless of whether it is adjacent to another metropolitan area or not. This category includes major cities, suburbs over 20,000 people of those cities, and standalone cities larger than 20,000 people. The "rural" designation includes any zip code in a county that is not part of a metropolitan area above 20,000 people. So while this may include very small suburbs adjacent to a larger metropolitan area, we felt that this 20,000-person size limit would be the best way of generally dividing our sample into urban and truly rural programs.

We found that the average budget of a program operating in an urban setting was $169,696 compared to $66,537 for rural programs. In terms of costs-per-youth-served, urban programs are slightly more expensive ($1,696 per youth) than rural programs ($1,597).

Costs per Mentor as an Alternative Metric

Another way of looking at program costs was to calculate the amount of funding per mentor, rather than per youth. This likely provides a better estimate for group mentoring programs and other programs where mentors may be serving more than one child at a time or several children in sequence over the course of a year. In many ways, mentors are a better unit of analysis because program staff must recruit, screen, and train mentors at a level that is likely beyond what those tasks take for the average youth participant. A mentoring program can only serve youth if they have mentors in hand, so we were curious as to what these budget numbers looked like per mentor.

The average cost-per-mentor across all programs was $3,182 using the midpoint of the estimated budget ranges (compared to $1,695 per youth). One-to-one programs had the lowest cost-per-mentor at $2,487, with blended programs at $4,068 and group programs at $4,564. One might expect blended programs to be closer to that one-to-one cost since those programs are essentially making one-to-one matches. But the costs of group activities and outings (including physical space, transportation, supplies, and so on), as well as supervisory staff, likely pushed the costs of those programs closer to what we see for group programs. This is a good reminder to funders that programs that involve group activities are going to be much more expensive than those where mentors and mentees go off into the community together and are responsible for all of the content of their relationship.

The Relationship between Funding Levels and Measures of Program Quality

The last set of analyses that we ran related to program cost was an examination of whether increases in program expenditures were associated with various indicators of program quality. It's often been said that "you get what you pay for" in social services and we wanted to see if programs that were spending more per youth were getting better programming, and theoretically better outcomes for youth, out of the increased funds.

Table 17 - Training Levels and Cost per Youth

Pre-Match Training	Cost Per Youth
None	$1,413
1 hour	$1,433
1-2 hours	$1,541
3-4 hours	$1,637
More than 4 hours	$2,167
Post-Match Training	**Cost Per Youth**
1 hour	$1,149
None	$1,340
1-2 hours	$1,746
3-4 hours	$1,933
More than 4 hours	$2,074

Mentor Training

For the most part, we found that programs that spent more per youth did indeed exhibit increases in the quantity and quality of services. For example, Table 17 illustrates that as the level of pre- and post-match training in a program increases, so do their average costs per youth served. Now, one can argue that this simply shows that it costs more to do more work, but there is a reward for that work: outcomes for youth, mentors, families, and communities. Few people in the mentoring field would argue that additional training for mentors is a waste of time (especially in light of the recent research findings mentioned previously on the value of training in driving match length and quality). This is clear confirmation that if programs (or their funders) want to offer the best services, they need to be prepared to invest in the work at the level that allows for that.

Table 18 - Match Support and Costs Per Youth

Post-Match Support	Cost Per Youth
No post-match training/support contact occurs	$794
Don't know	$889
Less than 1 post-match training/support contact per month	$1,407
1 post-match training/support contact per month	$1,743
2-4 post-match trainings/support contacts per month	$1,761
Other - Write In	$1,786
More than 4 post-match trainings/support contacts per month	$2,097

Match Support

We find a similar pattern when looking at the costs of providing more frequent match support. There is increasing emphasis on ensuring that mentors get the ongoing support they need to stick with their commitment and give their mentees the best support possible. But we also know that many programs struggle to meet *their own support policies* and that the functions of match support are often understaffed. Table 18 shows that providing more intensive support increases costs accordingly.

Meeting Frequency

We found a similar pattern around the frequency of match meetings, where those programs that offered more frequent mentor-mentee interactions also reported a higher cost-per-youth. This is interesting as group- and site-based mentoring programs were most likely to report meeting weekly or more than once a week, yet were also among the least expensive models. In spite of that, Table 19 shows that programs that meet more frequently also cost more to operate.

Table 19 - Meeting Frequency and Cost per Youth

Expected Frequency	Cost Per Youth
No expectation or requirement	$1,000
2-3 times a month	$1,523
Monthly	$1,537
Weekly	$1,769
More than once a week	$1,847
Other - Write In (Required)	$1,881

Match Length

Finally, we found that all of this increased training, meeting frequency, and match support adds up to longer matches for young people and their mentors. As shown in Table 20, as programs report increases in the percentage of their matches that make it to their intended minimum duration, the cost-per-youth also increases. This illustrates that these more-expensive programs generally provide quality services and produce longer matches, while avoiding the types of short-term negative mentoring experiences that we know harm youth. Once again, this aligns well with recent research by Kupersmidt and colleagues that correlated increased adoption of proven practices with match length and other positivie outcomes. This is some of the clearest evidence we have as a field that skimping on program costs does not pay off for youth and that if funders and programs want to produce quality results, they should be prepared to invest in them at an appropriate level. With youth mentoring services, we truly get what we pay for.

Table 20 - Increases in Match Persistence with Cost Per Youth Served

Percentage of Program Matches Meeting for the Intended Duration	Cost Per Youth
0-25%	$1,358
26–50%	$1,264
51–75%	$1,474
76–90%	$1,784
91–100%	$1,939

Chapter 4: Who Participates in Mentoring and How Are They Supported?

While it can be illuminating to examine the funding, staffing, and programmatic structure of mentoring organizations, it is important to remember that mentoring is inherently a "business of people" and that all of this infrastructure and investment is ultimately in service of the individuals who invest their time and their hearts into these relationships. The 2016 survey asked a number of questions about the youth who are served by mentoring programs and the volunteer mentors who serve them.

Mentees

As noted earlier in this report, these 1,451 mentoring programs served 413,237 young people over their last full year of operation—an average of 285 youth per program.

Diving a bit deeper into these numbers uncovers some additional details: 46 programs reported serving no youth, suggesting that they were brand-new start-up programs that had yet to bring mentees into the program (or perhaps suggesting that they simply didn't want to report their true numbers served). Removing these programs changes the average size across programs to 294 youth-per-program.

As noted previously, about 59 percent of programs are small operations with fewer than three staff members. Similarly, we find that 64 percent of programs (930) serve 100 or fewer youth. Seventy-seven percent serve 200 or less, with only about 5 percent of all programs serving more than 1,000 youth.

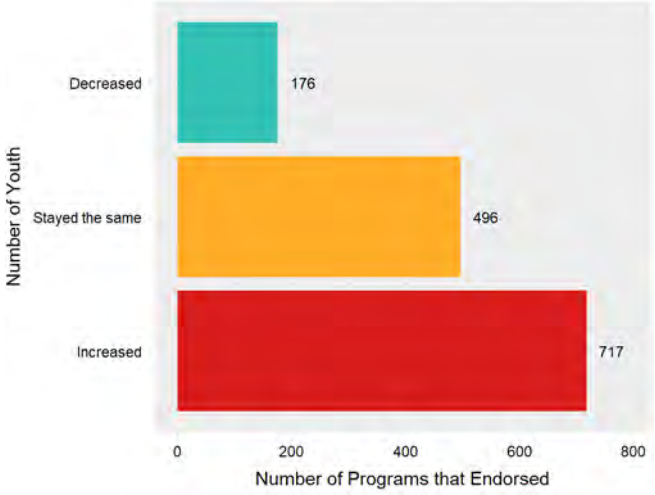
Table 6 (page 21) offers the breakdown on the percentage of mentees by program model, highlighting that the vast majority of mentees are served in group, one-to-one, or blended models, with all other models combined accounting for only about 19 percent of the youth served.

Because group mentoring served the largest number of youth (and around 24 percent of all mentors) it's worth noting that, on average, group mentoring programs had a mentor-to-youth ratio of 1 mentor to 3.14 youth.

Fluctuations in Youth Served

We also asked programs to report whether their totals of youth served had changed over the past year. Figure 11 illustrates that most programs (87 percent) saw their numbers of youth served increase or remain flat (with 52 percent of programs reporting increases). This is encouraging as it suggests that these programs are remaining popular in their communities and that staff

In the last year, the number of youth served by this program...



Sample size 1389
Nonresponses: 62

Figure 11 - Changes in Number of Youth Served

are stepping up to grow the numbers served in spite of staffing and funding challenges (remember that 52 percent of programs indicated that their *funding* had remained flat and 63 percent reported flat *staffing*).

We also asked respondents to provide some reasons as to why their numbers fluctuated. For those whose numbers served dropped, the most common reasons were changes in program funding, recruitment struggles, and changes in staffing (presumably loss of staff).

Programs that saw their numbers served rise were most likely to cite increase in community demand, successful mentor recruitment, and simply an unexpected bump in enrolment as the main reasons. However, they were not very likely to site funding changes or staffing changes, meaning that in few instances, this increase in program size was not related to more investment or resulting staff increases.

Youth on Waitlists

We also asked programs to report on the number of youth that they had on a waitlist at the time they filled out the survey. Based on results of previous state-level surveys conducted by MENTOR affiliates, waitlist information is notoriously hard to collect accurately as many programs are either not comfortable reporting the (sometimes large) number of youth waiting for an appropriate mentor, while other programs simply stop accepting youth into the program when their available "slots" are filled, essentially eliminating any waitlist. Perhaps unexpectedly, less than two-thirds of survey respondents answered the waitlist questions in the

2016 survey. This resulted in some challenges answering questions around waitlist numbers, particularly in that it was unclear whether a nonresponse meant there were no youth on a waitlist or that those youth were simply not reported.

"Most shockingly, around 16 percent of programs indicated that they did not track how long youth spent on their waitlist."

But those that did answer these questions highlighted that there still is a need to boost mentor recruitment to meet the demand. The average program in our study had 63 youth on a waitlist if we ignore nonresponses; if we calculate nonresponses as a "0," that number drops to 44. Boys were more likely to be on a waitlist than girls (about 25 percent more waitlist youth were boys), suggesting an ongoing need to boost male recruitment (or to simply match these boys with female volunteers, as research has found little difference, overall, for cross-gender matches).

We also asked how long youth lingered on these waitlists. Boys, on average, spent much more time on waitlists than girls in these programs. When looking at the average time spent on waitlists, 45 percent of programs indicated that boys spent more than four months on waitlists. Only 30 percent of programs indicated that girls spend that long, on average, waiting to be matched. Another 30 percent of programs indicated that girls average less than a month on their waitlists—only 20 percent of programs could say the same about the wait their boys endure.

Most shockingly, around 16 percent of programs indicated that they did not track how long youth spent on their waitlist.

Youth Served by Gender

When looking at youth served by gender, we find that programs are serving slightly more females than males—52 percent to 47 percent, respectively. These numbers likely include youth that are on waitlists who are receiving some services from the program, since we did phrase the question as youth "placed in a match or otherwise supported." This suggests that boys are slightly underrepresented in the nation's mentoring programs compared to their total share of the population. It may also be a reflection that some boys have left programs after spending, as noted above, considerable time on waitlists.

About 1 percent of mentees were reported as transgendered or gender neutral. Only about 20 percent of programs reported serving any transgender youth, meaning that most programs either served none or were not comfortable sharing (or even tracking) that information.

Youth Served by Age

We also examined youth served by age ranges. As illustrated in Table 21, the nation's mentees are fairly evenly distributed across the typical elementary, middle, and high school age ranges. Barely more than 4 percent of mentees in the programs surveyed were 19 or older. This finding somewhat clarifies the types of mentoring programs that filled out this survey. There are many large national programs, such as YouthBuild or the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe working with "opportunity youth" and other youth in the 19–24 age range that may be underrepresented in this study. Learning more about programs that serve slightly older youth as they transition into early career and ongoing education will be a focal point of future research and engagement by MENTOR.

It was encouraging to see mentoring deployed across the developmental stages of youth. This hopefully suggests that mentoring relationships are a resource youth can find in their community *as their needs change over time*, with different programs stepping in to help youth overcome hurdles at particularly key moments in their lives.

Youth by Race

The 2016 survey asked mentoring programs to estimate the percentage of their youth who fell into the following racial categories:

- Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American
- East Asian or Asian-American
- Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Latino or Hispanic American
- Middle Eastern or Arab American
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
- South Asian or Indian American
- Multiracial
- Other

For this question, we once again used a series of ranges —Less than 10 percent, 10–25 percent, 26–50 percent, 51–75 percent, 76–90 percent, more than 90 percent—rather than have programs calculate the exact percentage. This means that we did not get *specific* numbers of youth in these categories, resulting in the need to do additional estimating of actual representation during the analysis phase.

To get an accurate sense of the racial makeup of the nation's mentees as a whole (as represented by the program sample), we used the midpoint of each range to estimate the number of youth in each category in each program (based on the total number of youth they reported serving). The results of this breakdown can be seen in Table 22.

Table 22 - Ethnicity and Race of Mentees

Ethnicity	Percent of Mentees
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American	33.31
East Asian or Asian-American	4.23
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.24
Latino or Hispanic American	20.27
Middle Eastern or Arab American	1.87
Native American or Alaskan Native	2.63
Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American	24.30
South Asian or Indian American	2.24
Multiracial	6.69
Other:	2.24

Although Black youth are around 14 percent of the U.S. child population[xxxii], they represent a full third of the survey respondents' mentees—a fairly large overrepresentation. Latino and Hispanic youth are 25 percent of the youth population, but only represent 20 percent of the respondents' mentees—a slight under-representation. Non-Hispanic White youth represent 52 percent of the child population in the United States, but comprised only about 24 percent of mentees in these programs. Other racial groups, such as Native American youth or Pacific Islander youth, were slightly overrepresented in mentoring services compared to their percentage of the general youth population.

When looking at programs that serve a preponderance of youth from one demographic group or another, we see a similar pattern of overrepresentation of some racial or ethnic groups. We examined programs that indicated more than 75 percent of their mentees came from a particular racial or ethnic group and found 333 programs (23 percent of all programs) that indicated more than three-quarters of their mentees were Black. Another 133 programs (9 percent) indicated they served predominantly White mentees, with 70 programs indicating a serving predominantly Latino or Hispanic youth, which is a bit lower than one might expect (perhaps influenced by the relatively low number of survey responses we received from locations in the country that might have higher concentrations of Latino families). Very few programs indicated that they served heavy percentages of East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, Native American, or multiracial youth.

Interestingly, few programs reported serving no Black youth (15 percent), Latino/Hispanic youth (30 percent), or White youth (33 percent). However, 70 percent of programs reported serving no Native American, Middle Eastern, or Pacific Islander youth.

One thing to note about our findings related to mentee ethnicity and race is that many programs did not answer the race questions completely or noted that they do not track certain information, inherently making actual totals underreported. The race estimates reported here are conservative estimates, but should reasonably reflect the reality across the sample.

Other Characteristics of Youth Served

In addition to examining the age and race of mentees, we also wanted to understand some of the life circumstances and personal traits these youth brought to programs. This youth "subgroup" information helps illuminate who programs are targeting for their services (or, conversely, who is demanding and seeking services). It can also demonstrate whether programs are reaching populations that align with the goals and outcomes they indicated are most important in their work (see chapter 2).

Unfortunately, this information is hard to report across the full sample due to several complicating factors:

- Unlike age or race, youth often belong to many subgroups simultaneously. However, programs did not report this information fully for each child they serve. They simply reported broad estimates across *all* the youth they serve.
- As with the racial data, programs often chose "we do not track this information" or simply skipped demographics that they felt did not apply to them (or did not want to report on). Even though the survey instructions indicated that respondents should skip a category if they knew they served

no youth in that category, those skipped responses likely also include programs that simply could not or did not want to provide estimates, which invites caution when trying to use these findings to describe the more than 413,000 youth these programs served in their last year.

- The ranges themselves have variance—as with other data in this report, the estimates of how many youth fall into a category are drawn from the midpoint of ranges.

In spite of these analysis challenges, it was important for MENTOR to examine the challenges and characteristics of the youth served by these diverse programs. This is information that is valuable to policymakers and funders, as well as a reality check for mentoring programs more generally about who our field is reaching. We have tried to report this information here as accurately as possible given the available data, using a conservative approach.

Table 23 shows several ways of understanding just how many young people fall into the categories we asked about. This table offers three data points:

- **The estimated total number of youth reported in a subgroup category** – Keep in mind that this number is likely underreported because we were unable to estimate for programs that skipped the question or reported not tracking this information.
- **The percentage of all youth served who are in a category, estimated using *only programs that reported serving some youth in the category*** – This eliminates programs that skipped the question, as well as programs that indicated they don't track this information or don't know if they serve youth in a given subgroup. Thus, this approach may *overestimate* percentages by eliminating many programs that serve no youth in the category. But for programs that know for sure they serve youth in a subgroup, this represents the percentage of all mentees across those programs.
- **The percentage of all youth served compared to the full reported total of 413,237 youth** – This number is the most conservative percentage estimate, but it is the least likely to overinflate these estimated percentages. These percentages represent a minimum based on program estimates divided by all youth in all programs.

Table 23 - Mentees Totals and Percentages by Subgroup

Subgroup	Total number of reported youth in programs	Percentage of mentees in subgroups (only programs that responded to question)	Percentage of mentees in subgroups (full reported total of 413,277 mentees)
Academically at-risk	147,312	55.29%	35.65%
Adjudicated or juvenile justice–involved	18,416	13.76%	4.46%
Disabilities or special health care needs	14,507	10.43%	3.51%
Enrolled in postsecondary education/college	11,606	14.35%	2.81%
First generation in family to go to college	56,826	29.01%	13.75%
Foster, residential, or kinship care	20,023	13.13%	4.85%
Gang-involved	8,646	11.40%	2.09%
High academic achievers	24,817	16.13%	6.01%
Incarcerated parent(s) or family members	31,278	19.29%	7.57%
Left school prematurely	4,961	8.52%	1.20%
LGBTQ	5,552	6.72%	1.34%
Low income	209,630	64.92%	50.73%
Mental health needs	25,872	20.34%	6.26%
Military parents	8,055	8.06%	1.95%
Pregnant/early parenting	8,115	9.88%	1.96%
Receiving special education services in school	30,653	17.62%	7.42%
Recent immigrant or refugee	11,187	10.01%	2.71%
Runaway/homeless youth	7,055	7.59%	1.71%
Single-parent household	110,022	56.17%	26.62%
Truant youth	14,804	18.02%	3.58%
Victims of commercial sexual exploitation	5,271	10.21%	1.28%

As we see in the most conservative estimates in Table 23 (see previous page), the largest subgroups were low-income status (roughly 51 percent of all mentees), being academically at risk (36 percent), and being from a single-parent home (27 percent). The low-income and single-parent estimates are not surprising given the historical origins of the mentoring movement in America, but the high percentage of mentees struggling academically is noteworthy and aligns with the high percentages of mentoring programs that reported emphasizing academic or school-related goals. We also see programs serving both high academic achievers (6 percent of mentees) and those receiving special education services (7 percent), suggesting that mentoring is frequently being directed to students of all types and abilities. This work is also reflected in the relatively high percentage of mentees who are, or will soon be, the first in their family to go to college (14 percent of all mentees). These estimates suggest that many mentoring programs, both in and out of schools, are targeting youth who are struggling or who have already left school early (1 percent of mentees).

Other estimated subgroups hint at the difficult circumstances that many youth face and the targeted efforts of mentoring programs to serve them. Conservatively estimated, around 7 percent of mentees were reported to have currently or formerly incarcerated parents, 6 percent have mental health needs, and 5 percent are engaged in the child welfare system.

Another way of looking at who is served by mentoring is to examine who is serving very high percentages of youth in these subgroups within programs. As with race, most programs serve a diverse array of youth subgroups and have not really concentrated their services on one subgroup population. It is worth noting, however, that some programs do serve very high percentages of youth from various subgroups, such as the 407 programs that indicated *more than 75 percent* of their mentees were academically at risk (this is 33 percent of all programs that answered this question) or the 805 programs that served a high percentage of low-income youth (62 percent of reporting programs). We found 53 programs that served high percentages of foster care youth, 50 focused on high academic achievers, 57 focused on youth with mental health needs, and 41 focused on adjudicated or juvenile justice–involved youth.

Conversely, there were almost no programs in our sample designed to predominantly serve LGBTQ youth (only 4 programs above the 75 percent threshold), youth with disabilities (24 programs), gang-involved youth (11 programs), pregnant or parenting teens (11 programs), recent immigrants or refugees (20 programs), victims of commercial sexual exploitation (9 programs), or youth who had left school early (13 programs).

Thus, the overall trend is that the vast majority of mentoring programs serve a blend of youth with various needs and strengths, with very few programs designed to serve high percentages of youth with very specific needs. This might help explain why research on mentoring programs, generally speaking, has demonstrated results on a wide variety of outcomes at a small level of impact, while failing to produce stronger outcomes on more targeted areas of concern to policymakers[xxxiii]: Most programs serve diverse youth with diverse needs in diverse ways, which results in a broad impact but often not a particularly deep one compared to more focused youth interventions.

Mentors

As with mentees, we asked the programs responding to the 2016 survey to tell us a bit about the demographics of the volunteer mentors who serve in their programs. Programs reported a total of 193,723 mentors in their programs, an average of 2.13 youth-per-mentor across all programs (including both group and one-to-one programs).

As with mentees, the mentors in these programs skewed female, with 60 percent of mentors reported as female, 38 percent reported as male, and the remaining 2 percent being transgendered or nongendered.

Mentors by Race

The racial breakdown of mentors differs considerably from that of mentees. As with the youth race data, these percentages had to be estimated based on reported ranges and should be interpreted with some caution.

Table 24 shows that over 53 percent of all mentors across programs were non-Hispanic White—compared to only 24 percent of mentees. And while Black and Latino/Hispanic youth accounted for 33 percent and 20 percent of mentees, respectively, only 15 percent and 10 percent of mentors represented those groups across all programs. The other racial categories for mentors were fairly equivalent to their mentee counterparts.

Table 24 - Ethnicity and Race of Mentors

Ethnicity/Race	Percent of Mentors
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American	15.04
East Asian or Asian-American	4.55
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2.39
Latino or Hispanic American	9.99
Middle Eastern or Arab American	1.69
Native American or Alaskan Native	2.36
Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American	53.33
South Asian or Indian American	2.21
Multiracial	5.13
Other:	3.31

This racial breakdown is reflective of other prior research that has noted the large percentage of White mentors serving youth of color, both in and out of formal programs. The 2005 survey of mentors[xxxiv] (which included informal mentors working with youth outside of a program context) found that 84 percent of the mentors in programs identified as White—a much higher percentage than the 53 percent we found here. This higher percentage of White mentors was also reported in a more recent examination of U.S. Census data, which found that 77 percent of mentors in programs identified as White[xxxv]. (This Census data also showed that 57 percent of mentors were female, which aligns with the 60 percent we estimated here in our sample.)

It is unclear why our estimate of mentors of color is so much higher here than in previous studies. As noted in chapter 2, the programs in this survey tended to be mostly urban and part of a metropolitan region of some size, which may have provided more access to mentors of color. Alternatively, this may simply be the result of statistical "noise" based on this survey's use of ranges and estimates. Regardless of the reason, we still see an overall trend that has mentoring programs struggling to find groups of mentors that mirror the youth they serve along racial lines.

Characteristics of Mentors

In addition to looking at the racial composition of mentors, we also analyzed other characteristics of mentors. As with the youth subgroup information, there was considerable missing data for these questions, with many programs skipping the question (leaving ambiguity about whether their results reflected a lack of mentors in a subgroup or simply an unwillingness to share the information) or noting that they do not track information related to the subgroup.

But unlike the youth subgroup information, mentors had one advantage: They were less likely to be members of multiple subgroups simultaneously. A "young professional" may be likely to also be an "employee of corporate partners," but they are exceedingly unlikely to fall into other groups we asked about, such as being an AmeriCorps member, a retired person, or a college student. Thus, it was easier to more accurately estimate the percentage of mentors overall that may come from a particular subgroup. Readers should note that these subgroup estimates aggregate to a total of 109 percent of the total number of mentors reported overall. Although these estimates may be slightly overinflated, we feel that the data presented here represents a reasonable breakdown of the percentages of mentors across all programs in the survey.

As shown in Table 25, the largest mentor subgroups are employees of businesses that have partnered with the program and "young professionals." Obviously, there is some significant overlap among these groups, but it is encouraging to see just how much America's businesses and corporations are stepping up to support local mentoring efforts, not just financially but also in the form of the vast human capital they can offer programs and youth.

Students of all types also comprised a significant group of mentors, with college students representing 13 percent of all mentors across programs and high school students representing 7 percent of all mentors (some programs are even using middle school students as

mentors, but this represented a fraction of 1 percent of mentors). The high school student result is surprising given that only about 1 percent of programs indicated using a cross-age mentoring model, perhaps suggesting that some high school students are volunteering in more traditional community-based programs rather than in cross-age programs at their school.

It is also encouraging to see about 9 percent of mentors coming from the fast-growing population of retired individuals. This has long been an underutilized source of mentors in programs. In the 1999 Sipe and Roder study, 5 percent of mentors were seniors or of retirement age[xxxvi]. Unfortunately, the 2005 MENTOR study did not separate out mentors in and out of programs, so there is no comparable number available from that report. However, it seems clear that the number of available adults of retirement age has increased over time as the Baby Boomer generation has grown older, and mentoring programs are making inroads into utilizing more of these individuals.

Also encouraging is the high percentage of mentors who were at one time mentees *in the same program*. Around 8 percent of mentors fell into this category, suggesting that programs are creating strong connections with mentees and leveraging their experience long term through alumni groups and other opportunities to get reengaged and serve the next wave of youth. This strategy of using those who were once served to mentor the next generation has long been a goal of the mentoring movement as it creates an ethos of service and community that can truly take the generational impact of these relationships to scale. It will be interesting to see if future studies of mentor demographics find similar patterns of former recipients returning in their adulthood as mentors.

Mentor Training and Support

In addition to looking at the types of individuals who were stepping up to serve as mentors in programs, we also wanted to explore the types of support they found when they got there. Thus, we asked a series of questions regarding:

- The pre- and post-match training that mentors received
- The frequency of staff check-ins and match support
- Whether the program provided them with a curriculum to guide their mentoring activities.

This information should paint a representative picture of how the nation's mentoring programs prepare, support, and guide mentors in their work.

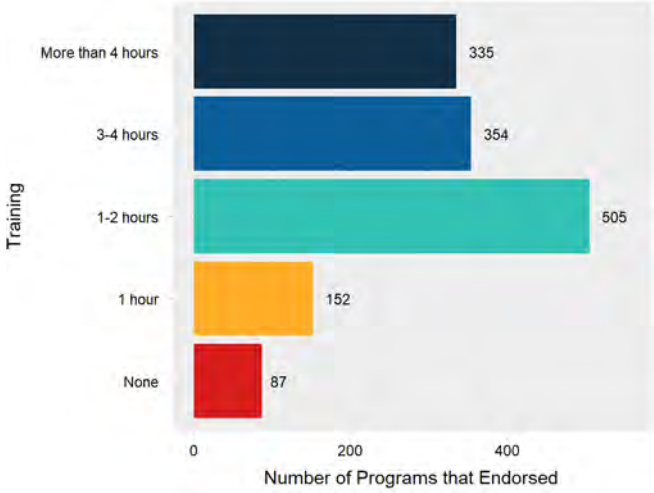
Table 25 - Total and Percentages of Mentors by Subgroup

Subgroup	Total estimated number of mentors in this subgroup	Estimated percentage of mentors compared to the total reported number of mentors (193,723)
AmeriCorps or other national service related positions	4,118	2.13%
College students	25,190	13.00%
Employees of corporate partners	38,063	19.65%
Employees in a specific, targeted field	12,845	6.63%
Former mentees in the program	16,214	8.37%
High school students	13,557	7.00%
Local/state government employees	7,148	3.69%
Members of affinity groups (e.g., civic, cultural, religious, alumni, professional)	17,842	9.21%
Middle school students	1,179	0.61%
Nonworking/unemployed persons	3,619	1.87%
Retired persons	17,078	8.82%
Spouses co-mentoring	3,488	1.80%
Teachers/school employees	13,234	6.83%
Young professionals	37,220	19.21%

Training Provided to Mentors

As shown in Figure 12, the vast majority of programs provide significant pre-match training. Almost 48 percent of mentoring programs provide more than three hours of pre-match training, with about half of those offering more than four hours.

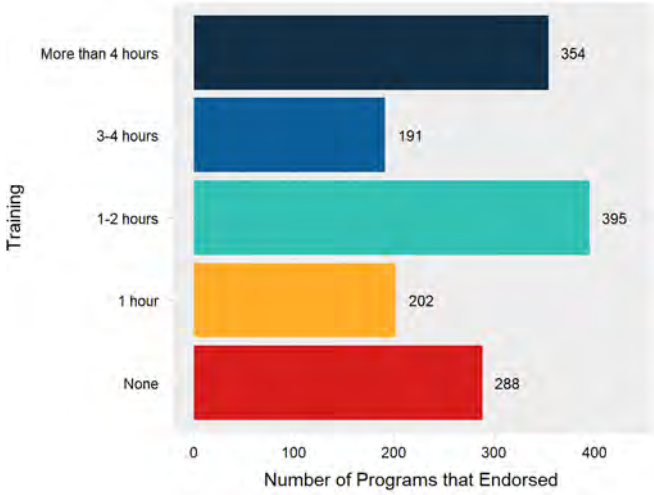
On average, how much training are mentors expected to receive BEFORE they are matched with mentees?



Sample size 1433
Nonresponses: 18

Figure 12 - Pre-Match Mentor Training

On average, how much training are mentors expected to receive AFTER they are matched with mentees?



Sample size 1430
Nonresponses: 21

Figure 13 - Post-Match Mentor Training

The largest group of programs, about 35 percent, offered what might be considered the bare minimum of around two hours of training, with another 11 percent offering only an hour. Unfortunately, 87 programs noted that they offer no pre-match training to mentors.

While pre-match training might set new mentors up for success, we know that it can't possibly answer or address all of the questions that mentors might have over the course of their relationships with youth. Figure 13 shows that mentoring programs offer far less training after the match is made than before. Around 62 percent of programs offer two hours or less of ongoing training to their mentors, with an extremely disappointing 20 percent of programs offering no ongoing training to their mentors over the course of their mentoring relationships. As reported previously in this report, the average match length across all programs was about 16 months—clearly the needs and communication patterns of any young person will change dramatically over this length of time and it is worrisome to see such a low dosage of ongoing training offered to mentors in so many programs.

On the other hand, there are clearly a robust number of programs providing generous ongoing training to mentors. About 38 percent of programs reported offering more than three hours of ongoing training to mentors after they were matched. Almost 25 percent of programs offered more than four hours of training, suggesting these programs are really investing in mentors and have high expectations of what they will provide young people.

For historical comparison, the 1999 Sipe and Roder study found that 49 percent of programs offered two or more hours of pre-match training[xxxvii]. As noted above, we find roughly that same percentage (48 percent) offering *three* or more hours of training today. By 2011, 73 percent of programs offered two or more hours of training[xxxviii] (we find 83 percent here). This suggests that programs are placing more emphasis on pre-match training, especially in programs that are serving challenging subgroups of youth or supporting youth in addressing serious needs.

Unfortunately, the 1999 study did not ask programs about *ongoing* training practices. The 2011 MENTOR study found that 66 percent of programs "always" provide opportunities for ongoing training, but did not specify an amount. Today we find 80 percent offering at least some ongoing training to their mentors. The prevalence and depth of ongoing training we see today is another indicator that programs are investing

heavily in boosting their mentors' skills, confidence, and ability to manage the ups and downs of the relationship. And recent research has highlighted the payoff for this investment in training, finding that mentor training practices are the most predictive factors in promoting match strength and length[xxxix].

Support from Staff Provided to Mentors

Ongoing training certainly matters for mentoring programs, but we also wanted to explore just how frequently programs provided check-in support to the mentors they had matched with a child (we did not ask about similar check-ins with youth or parents).

As shown in Figure 14, we found small percentages of programs that offer very little support (14 percent at less than once a month or none) or a lot of support (10 percent more than once weekly). The vast majority of programs either offer monthly support check-ins (36 percent) or biweekly check-ins (25 percent).

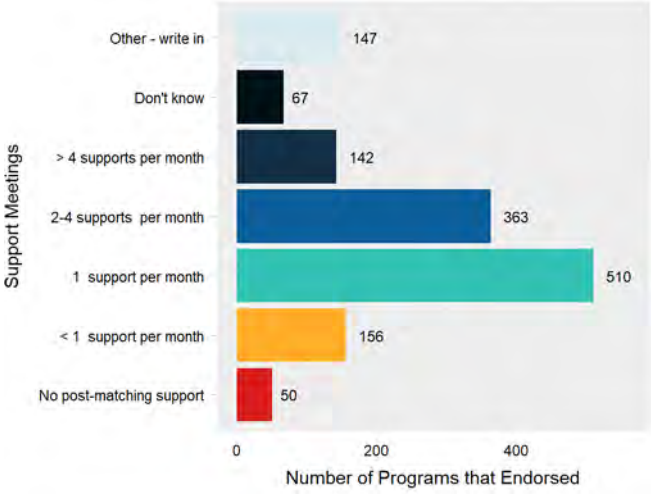
The findings from the 2016 study mirror other examinations of match support. The 1999 Sipe and Roder study found that about 80 percent of programs offered check-ins at least monthly, compared to 71 percent in this study. We found, however, fewer programs indicating that they offered support less than once a month or not at all (14 percent) compared to the 1999 study (19.5 percent). It is worth noting that our current sample also had a number of programs indicating they didn't know how often they did check-ins or choosing another frequency, complicating these historical comparisons.

We did not find any meaningful difference in staff support across different program models, although one-to-one programs were slightly more likely to check in monthly than group or blended programs, while group programs were more likely to report offering *no* ongoing support.

Use of Curriculum by Mentors

The last aspect of mentor training and support we examined is whether the program provides mentors "with a specific curriculum to follow (e.g., a manual or workbook of prescribed activities)." To our surprise, 50 percent of programs indicated that they do use an activity guide or curriculum of this type. These curricula likely vary considerably in their level of guidance, ranging from a listing of suggested activities all the way up to tightly scripted weekly tasks and discussion prompts. The programs themselves are also likely to vary in how mentors adhere to the provided curriculum—some programs strongly emphasize these activities and track mentors' "delivery" of the curriculum closely, while others may allow matches more freedom in using the activity materials.

On average, how frequently do mentors have training or support contact with program coordinators or other staff (e.g., supervision, check-ins, supplemental training, etc.)?

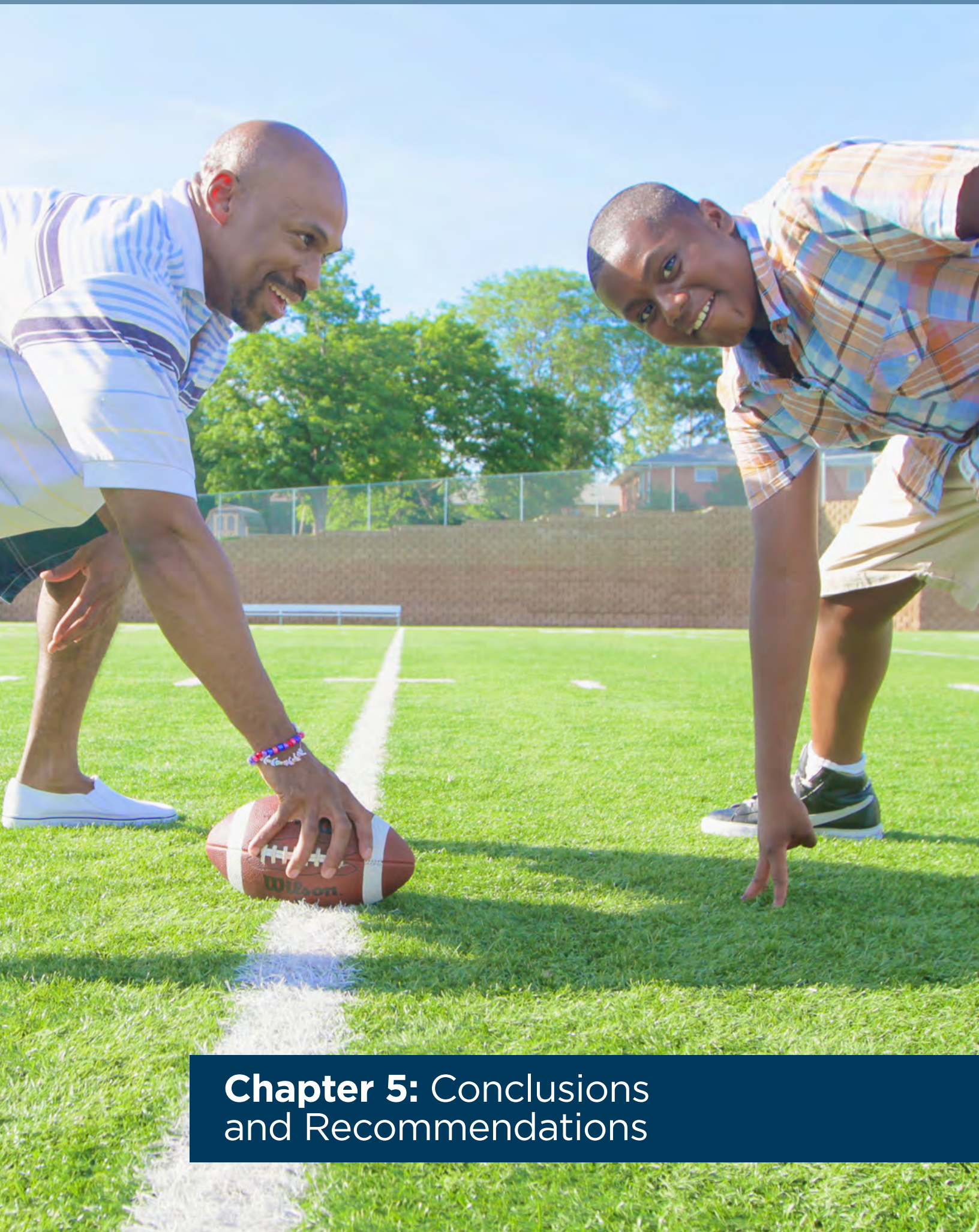


Sample size 1435
Nonresponses: 16

Figure 14 - Staff Support Frequency

But the fact that half of the nation's mentoring programs are getting *this intentional* about how mentors and youth spend their time together speaks volumes about how seriously programs are taking the pursuit of outcomes, no longer content to let matches go off on their own and *hopefully* hit the mark. Instead, they are equipping mentors with tools and tasks that allow the match to form a close relationship *within* the context of some meaningful, instrumental activities.

This heavy reliance on curriculum is likely also a reflection of the popularity of group mentoring programs. Sixty-five percent of group mentoring programs use a curriculum to guide activities, compared to 55 percent of blended programs and only 42 percent of one-to-one programs. But even that percentage for one-to-one programs is impressive, considering that those programs were more likely to be meeting out in the community and, presumably, giving mentors and mentees more unsupervised freedom in what they do with their time together.



Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Major Themes from This Survey

In many ways, this survey and report represent the most comprehensive investigation of American youth mentoring programs to date. While this report does not answer every research question we had, and there are certainly unexplored angles to the ones we did answer, there are a few themes that emerged from our findings that we think are notable.

1. The demand for mentoring is growing and the applications of mentoring across ages, models, and intended outcomes are diversifying, suggesting that while many youth-serving organizations offer mentoring, this is by no means a cookie-cutter approach to supporting youth. Thankfully, we found that, for the most part, programs are stable in their staffing and funding and rising to meet this challenge. As a whole, mentoring is being offered to youth throughout their childhood and adolescence and into young adulthood across a variety of settings and in service of myriad goals. This indicates that the field is doing the best it can to provide each child with the right mentor they need in the right moment in their life.

2. In spite of this expansion of scope and diversity of programs, this field is still relatively challenging to scale at the program level. The growth of the mentoring movement has not been fueled by increased funding necessarily, especially in recent years, but by increased *demand* from families and communities as the concepts of mentoring have spread in American culture. We find here that the typical mentoring program has a small, increasingly volunteer-driven staff and limited funds—and is often overly dependent on financial support from a small number of sources. For these reasons, most programs also lack rigorous evidence of their effectiveness from strong evaluations. These factors combine to give us some concern about the sustainability and long-term viability of the dedicated formal programs that do this work and reach the youth who need a mentor the most. Mentoring may be more popular than ever, but it's unclear as to whether the field has the infrastructure and investment to meet demand and make those relationships easy to find through high-quality programs.

3. Programs are increasingly driving towards critical outcomes and applying mentoring to serious youth and societal challenges. But the desire to use mentoring strategically in this way has placed strain on programs since funding levels have remained essentially flat for almost two decades. As this report illustrates fairly definitively, we "get what we pay for" with mentoring in terms of quality and delivering for the highest risk young people and most transformative outcomes Investment levels must be proportion to the "who" and "what" of programs.

4. In spite of some meaningful increases in markers of program quality over time, there are still too many mentoring programs struggling to give mentors, youth, and parents the quality experience they deserve in terms of training and support, match quality and duration, and in providing a mentor who has a background or lived experience that can speak in important ways to the child they are serving. Clearly there is a need for more research on how to avoid these challenges, as well as easy-to-access training and technical assistance support that can help programs do the hard work of improving their services.

Limitations of This Report

This study, while rich in information, does offer some cautions that policymakers, funders, and other mentoring stakeholders should keep in mind as they use the information provided here:

- The sample here represents an unknown percentage of all programs operating in the United States and may not be perfectly representative of the field as a whole. The sample also suffers from limited geographic spread and may over or underrepresent certain kinds of programs, such as those serving older youth and young adults.

- The survey design led to a fair amount of missing or unclear data. The approach of not requiring all questions in an effort to maximize response rates lead to challenges in definitively answering some questions.
- There is limited sampling of emerging program models and more targeted mentoring services here. Promising models such as team mentoring or e-mentoring were represented by a very small number of programs and may not be very representative of all programs working in those spaces.

Paths Forward

This report offers a lot of actionable information for programs, funders, policymakers, researchers, and other key stakeholders in meeting the mentoring needs of our young people. It informs critical work and calls on us to take action in a number of key areas:

- **The need to more closely examine the successful practices of programs serving high percentages of higher-risk youth:** This report confirms what we have long expected: That serving these youth is both challenging and more expensive than what we might call "traditional" mentoring for the general youth population. But we need to continue to understand more about the effective practices of these more focused programs and produce training and technical assistance materials that can bring more of this work to scale for vulnerable youth that need it the most.
- **The need to invest more in evaluation of programs and build capacity through accessible tools and guidance:** If the mentoring field wants to continue to find stability and grow to scale, we need to continue to build more quality evidence of the impact, both short- and long-term, of these professionally-supported mentoring relationships. But the levels of evaluation reported here will make that a challenge. Too many programs are simply not evaluating their impact in a rigorous way that would hold up to scrutiny and since service provision is the number one priority, investments in mentoring must dually prioritize support for evaluation efforts, both on practice and outcome. It is a high-leverage strategy for investing that will also have long-term gains for the broader field as well as the individual program.
- **The leveraging and improved support of "informal" mentors, when appropriate, especially in service of getting more diverse mentors into programs:** As one would imagine, organically occurring mentoring in the context of a young person's life is optimal, but we also need to find ways of taking that human capital and applying it more to program settings and for maximized effect, particularly for youth that research shows are less likely to find an informal mentor in the first place.

"Mentoring may be more popular than ever, but it's unclear as to whether the field has the infrastructure and investment to meet demand and make those relationships easy to find through high-quality programs."

- **The promotion of mentoring as a tool of social justice and for driving greater equity:** At MENTOR, we see these relationships as not only a form of support for individual children as they grow up, but as a powerful force for changing systems of injustice, addressing inequality, and for reconnecting an American society that has perhaps grown apart in deeply profound ways. We see new ideas like critical mentoring and the use of mentoring to spur civic engagement as being an increasingly important ideas in the evolution of our field. Eventually, the mentoring movement must play a vital role in going "upstream" to address the root causes that lead so many young people to needing a mentor through a program in the first place. We feel it's time to start making mentoring truly transformative—in the biggest sense of the word—for America and for whole communities and not just for those individuals who are lucky enough to receive the love and support of a mentor through the types of outstanding programs represented in this survey and report.

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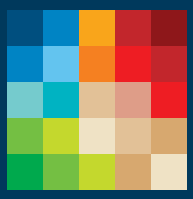

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