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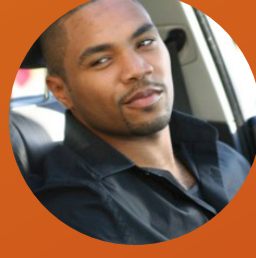
A “LESSONS LEARNED” GUIDE FROM WHAT IT TAKES
E-MENTORING WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

URBAN  YOUTH
MENTOR PROGRAM





URBAN YOUTH
MENTORS &
MENTEES



ENHANCING YOUTH-SERVING MENTORING PROGRAMS: Lessons Learned from What It Takes E-Mentoring

A PROGRAM SUPPORTED BY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Overview	2
The Power of Partnerships	2
Program Rationale: Innovations for Serving African-American Boys Well	3
Program Planning	4
Selecting and Operating an E-Mentoring Platform	9
Recruiting, Training and Engaging Youth	11
Recruiting, Training, and Engaging Mentors	13
Additional Ways WIT Approached Mentor Engagement	15
Integrating Online Mentoring and Offline Activities	15
Implementing the Program	16
Measuring Progress and Sharing Results	17
Conclusion	18
Appendix	18
Partnerships That Enabled E-Mentoring to Be Implemented	18
Urban Youth	18
United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey	19
Knight Foundation	19
Founder Page	20

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This guide affords program developers and implementation-level staff an opportunity to be mindful of key considerations in integrating technology-influenced mentoring initiatives into an existing mentoring program or other program serving at-risk youth, particularly for African-American males. What It Takes (WIT) founders and e-mentoring program staff engaged in a number of processes to develop, operate, and improve the WIT e-mentoring initiative as a complimentary effort to the stand-alone WIT symposiums, thereby more effectively serving its target audience. These processes in the following discussions frame the key lessons learned about e-mentoring implementation with African-American men and boys:

- The Power of Partnerships
- Program Rationale: Innovations for Serving African-American Boys Well
- Program Planning
- Selecting and Operating an E-Mentoring Platform
- Recruiting, Training, and Engaging Youth
- Recruiting, Training, and Engaging Mentors
- Implementing E-Mentoring
- Measuring Progress and Sharing Results

This guide is informed, in part, by the Urban Youth Racing School What it Takes E-Mentoring Project Interim Evaluation Report for March 30, 2011 to April 30, 2012, as well as the report for the period ending May 30, 2013, both prepared by Jamie M. Bracey, Ph.D.¹



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

The guidance, approach, and information in this guide are born from the lessons learned from the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Urban Youth (UY) What It Takes E-Mentoring Initiative. Establishing partnerships enabled UY to enhance its existing programs through e-mentoring. The key partners for that enhancement were its funder, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and its fiduciary and technical assistance partner, the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey (UWGPSNJ). The background of each of these organizations' relevant work provides context for the e-mentoring program that this report is based on. (See Appendix)

1 Urban Youth. (2012). *Interim Evaluation of the What It Takes E-Mentoring Program*. Urban Youth: Philadelphia.

PROGRAM RATIONALE: INNOVATIONS FOR SERVING AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS WELL

Although African-American males are not homogenous or monolithic and other youth may be attracted to and benefit from this type of e-mentoring program or program component, What It Takes used innovations in particular response to realities documented in studies on hundreds of African-American boys and men. The studies that informed the WIT e-mentoring approach show a significant connection between motivation, academic achievement, increased student awareness of informal and supplemental educational programs, increased emotional and cognitive engagement and a decreased interest in criminal activities as success increased². Research findings have highlighted the importance of involvement in social organizations and the diversity of African-American men's individual social networks as predictors of certain kinds of productive engagement³. E-Mentoring, connecting mentees and mentors in a virtual space, significantly enhances African-American male's ability to develop a sense of belonging and involvement in the social organization that the e-mentoring community affords. At the same time, e-mentoring brings diversity into the individual social network of each of its participants. E-Mentoring can mitigate impact from the complicated mix of social, economic, and educational realities that tend to limit African-American male realization of their potential in civic, academic and career arenas.

E-Mentoring was designed to complement the WIT face-to-face gathering of professional African-American men at youth-focused symposiums. The symposiums'



panel discussions are uniquely impactful because they create an environment of shared history and discussion that allows the young men who participate to establish a connection with an older generation of high-profile and successful men who have effectively navigated the social pitfalls that students may experience. In a “safe place” for sharing, questions regarding strategies to stay on track and persist dominate the communication. The innovation provides an opportunity for this population of young Black males to increase their level of psycho-social engagement and personal motivation to achieve. These engagements served as the main lever for attracting and ultimately, sustaining the e-Mentoring relationship.

The WIT asset-based approach to African-American male engagement has several levels of innovation. The first uses engagement, motivation and identity formation theories to provide mentees an alternate, transformative reality focusing on intentional conversations about what it takes to be successful in academic, professional, and personal pursuits. The second level of innovation that distinguishes WIT is the extraordinary access

2 Urban Youth. (2012). *Interim Evaluation of the What It Takes E-Mentoring Program*. Urban Youth: Philadelphia.

3 Urban Youth. (2012). *Interim Evaluation of the What It Takes E-Mentoring Program*. Urban Youth: Philadelphia.

that e-mentees have to a level of professional males who individually would be nearly impossible for most parents, educators and community leaders to reach without significant time and investment. The third level of innovation is the way mentors and mentees communicate, which relies heavily on this generation's affinity for social networking and interactivity.

When programs like Scared Straight and other deficit-oriented models emerged, they used fear to intervene with youth. WIT uses an approach based on the presumption that every e-mentee has hope for his life and that cultivating this hope will prevent youth from getting off track. In past prevention models, much of the emphasis has been on teaching resiliency life skills instead of future-oriented visioning. While the two approaches should be complementary, it is the WIT stance that without a future-oriented vision that is supported through e-mentoring, the need for resiliency and struggle fades as life options disappear.

Capitalizing on this generation's attraction to, increasing use of, and fluency with social networking, WIT incorporated an e-mentoring component to compliment face-to-face interactions. Whether text messaging,

Tweeting, spending time on a social networking site, or even e-mailing, teens are spending more time than ever before engaged in a virtual world that arguably has open-access and endless possibilities. According to research⁴ by the Pew Research Center, American youth are the most fervent users of social networks, with a far greater percentage of the population (65%) using networks than among adults. Nevertheless, 35% of American adults is a significant number, suggesting a facility with social networking sufficient for a successful e-mentoring program. Furthermore, 61% of teens send messages to friends via social networking sites and 42% do this daily. A separate study⁵ found that 75% of 12 to 17 year olds now own a cell phone, up from 45% in 2004. Also, teens from low-income households, particularly African-Americans, are much more likely than other teens to go online using a cell phone.

Technology and access create a space for a mutually beneficial e-mentoring relationship between young African-American males and high-profile, highly successful African-American men who would otherwise be off-limits. Social networking specifically addresses the needs of African-American males by providing

"It does not matter how you are being mentored because as long as you get what you need to know and take some advice to better yourself for the step as a young black man."

—Amir Lewis, Mentee

4 Lenhart, A. (2009). *It's Personal: Similarities and Differences in Online Social Network Use Between Teens and Adults*. Presentation at International Communications Association Annual Meeting. Retrieved August 6, 2013, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2009/19-Similarities-and-Differences-in-Online-Social-Network-Use.aspx>

5 Lenhart, A., Ling, R., Campbell, S., and Purcell, K. (2010). *Teens and Mobile Phones*. Retrieved August 6, 2013, from <http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2010/PIP-Teens-and-Mobile-2010-with-topline.pdf>



a direct connection to these often unreachable caring adults. The African-American e-mentors offer e-mentoring students credible authorities who are poised to deliver affirmation and information; amounting to essential “counter-storytelling” which serves to ameliorate the pervasive messages African-American male students often see in media, hear in school, and experience in life about the “risk” of being a young African-American male. Further, social networking allows for the mentee-mentor interaction to occur in a way that’s convenient for two separate populations with separate lives and activities; young men with school and activities can frequently communicate with professional men with careers and families. A message can be left via technology at a time that’s convenient for one, and responded to via technology at a time that is convenient for the other. Finding a convenient and low-effort path for connecting these two populations is the most scalable way to offer young African-American males the access to this particular population of caring adults. Sources such as the National Urban League’s 2013 State of Black America Report reveal that African-

American civic engagement and other equity measures are down nationally, and in comparison to Americans as a whole and to other minorities.

E-Mentoring reinforces the What It Takes asset-based model by building upon skills and familiarity African-American youth today already have with technology. Counter-intuitively, technology is not the innovation but it is the key tool for serving the innovations that drive the program design to achieve African-American male youth engagement. As a result, the initiative taps into their affinity for internet devices by guiding students towards effective use of that technology as a means to develop connections to caring adults, and through those connections develop the technical, organizational, and cognitive skills critical to academic and professional success.

The chart on the next page captures the big picture results of program participation. More information can be found in the two program evaluation reports which are available upon request.



“E-Mentoring is yet another way to meet the mentees where they are. There is an assumption that adults are the only one’s that are busy, teens are busy as well, so e-mentoring gives us another avenue to reach young men and for the young men to reach mentors”

— Steve Vassor, Mentor

Data Points	Year 1 (2011–2012)	Year 2 (2012–2013)
# of students recruited per registered school	(# Students) School (94) Imhotep Institute HS (23) Mastery Shoemaker HS (16) FitzSimons HS (73) Simon Gratz HS (49) Mastery Pickett HS (4) Duckery Public (8) WD Palmer Leadership HS Total = 173 recruited and processed	(# Students) School (58) Imhotep Institute HS (23) UYRS Engines Program (25) Mastery Shoemaker (11) Strawberry Mansion HS (15) One Bright Ray HS (15) Audenried HS (14) Germantown HS (7) Randolph HS Total = 168 recruited and processed
# of students registered on platform	icouldbe platform (1:1 model) N = 37	LinkedIn platform (group model) N = 122
# mentors recruited (registered) on platform	83 recruited, 35 approved and registered	69 new recruits, 59 approved and registered
# mentors/mentees formally matched	25/37	34/122
Ratio of mentors/mentees	1:1 (individual)	1:3.5 (group)
% of mentees matched on platform	21%	73%
% of mentors retained	71%	58%
Frequency of technology based exchanges	Monthly	Monthly
# of social events to foster mentoring community	1 WIT orientation/training 1 WIT panel	1 WIT orientation/training 1 WIT panel

PROGRAM PLANNING

While several high-quality, comprehensive mentoring program planning and implementation guides are available to practitioners⁶, this guide seeks to address specific considerations from lessons learned through implementing the WIT e-mentoring program with African-American male youth. These considerations are key for developing new e-mentoring programs and/or enhancing existing youth-serving programs through the integration of an e-mentoring component:

1. Adhere to Elements of Effective Practice for E-Mentoring. The National Mentoring Partnership⁷ has a comprehensive guide to implementing research and evidence-based practices within your e-mentoring program.
2. Customize your definition of e-mentoring. At this time, there is no universal definition for e-mentoring, particularly for African-American male youth. Identify and use mentors' and mentees' needs and expectations to establish a shared and easily

6 National Mentoring Partnership (2005). *How to Build A Successful Mentoring Program Using the Elements of Effective Practice: A Step-By-Step Tool Kit for Program Managers*. MENTOR: Alexandria, VA.

7 National Mentoring Partnership. (2002). *Elements of Effective Practice for E-Mentoring*. Retrieved September 26, 2012, from <http://lib.adai.washington.edu/clearinghouse/downloads/Responsible-Mentoring-Elements-of-Effective-Practice-for-Ementoring-280.pdf>

communicated definition of e-mentoring and how it is similar to or different from traditional mentoring to bring expectations in alignment.

- 3.** Program Goals are to be developed. The goals should:
 - a.** Reflect mentees' perceived needs and expectations. Find out what students might expect from e-mentors. Seek information around their educational plans, college-going mindset, career development experiences, community engagement, hobbies, desired topics of discussion, and pro-social life skills.
 - b.** Reflect mentors' perceived needs and expectations. Seek information from mentors regarding their ideal approach and timing of mentor-mentee engagement, recommended facilities with technology, and experiences engaging with digital natives in an on-line space. For instance, hosting events or having conversations with potential mentors allows for dialogue and information gathering that may influence plans for mentor-mentee engagement.

This is particularly important for e-mentoring as this initiative exists in a space void of a universal definition of what the engagement looks like, particularly for African-American male youth.

- 4.** Plan program evaluation. E-Mentoring adds an exciting new data source for evaluating your enhanced program. The technology may provide an electronic log of communications that can be

viewed and analyzed. It also allows an opportunity to implement mandatory or optional surveys, pre/post tests, or other forms of evaluation. WIT found these to be promising practices and allowed evaluators access to e-mentoring platform communication logs as well as optional surveys that were conducted via the platform.

- 5.** Operational processes should include a detailed Internet safety policy. E-Mentoring programs that support the well-being and positive engagement of mentors and mentees, should have a clear, written and accessible internet safety policy that addresses:
 - a.** Frequency of communication. Communication between mentees and mentors should take place at least weekly and mentees and mentors should respond to one another within 24 hours of a posting or message. Systems will need to be in place to support this best practice; namely, an administrator to monitor and facilitate communication.
 - b.** Diversity of communication. Communication should take the form of original messages or postings of genuine topics of interest between mentors and mentees; and mentee and mentors discussion stimulated by responses to brief quotes, compelling headlines, readings, pictures, videos or questions that frame the content delivery; and a mix of conversational exchange, wonder, information, personal concern, accountability, and encouragement.

C. Code of conduct on the platform. Define the boundaries of interaction on and off the platform. Also, clarify what is and what is not appropriate to discuss. Some practices enacted in the WIT E-Mentoring code of conduct include:

1. Mentors DO initiate at least weekly contact through the LinkedIn Groups.
2. Mentors and mentees DO have face-to-face meetings in the form of “What It Takes E-mentor School Visits”. These are the ONLY in-person contact mentors can have with mentees.
3. Mentors DO initiate a School Visit by emailing WIT as well as the school coordinator. The school-based coordinator will get in touch with program staff and mentors to set up visits. No unsupervised visits with students are allowed. Other mentees may be present as well.
4. Mentors and mentees DO NOT exchange personal contact information or make arrangements for off-line contact. These types of communication are not authorized by What It Takes or the school, unless that contact is coordinated as part of the What it Takes E-Mentor School Visit as mentioned above.
5. Mentors DO NOT initiate discussions re: sexual topics with mentees. Mentors must



be careful that topics such as violence, drugs, alcohol, illegal behavior, and other risky behavior are not regular, ongoing discussions. References to topics such as sex, violence, drugs, alcohol, illegal behavior, and other risky behavior should only be made in the context of prevention statements for positive encouragement and the topic should quickly move to student goals and how choices can hinder or help reaching one’s goals.

6. If such topics or other sensitive matters are discussed mentors MUST email WIT or the school coordinator with the information so that the school can be supportive of the students.
7. If mentors become aware that a child may be in danger or is a danger to self or others,

the mentor MUST call and email WIT. Of course, if this concern is in response to an immediate emergency (“I am going to hurt myself today”) the mentor should call local emergency personnel and then call and email What It Takes.

8. Mentors DO go back to view all training and information videos that are posted to the official What It Takes Mentors LinkedIn Group. These videos are the official training for mentoring.

Without a written and well-communicated code of conduct the program can lose focus, experience distraction, as well as be harmful. A clear code of conduct supports the mission and operation specifically.

SELECTING AND OPERATING AN E-MENTORING PLATFORM

The E-Mentoring platform is the technology through which much of the mentor-mentee communication occurs, and it provides access to content and activities that influence mentee-mentor interactions. A major consideration for integrating or developing an e-mentoring program, which focuses on technological

enhancements to mentor-mentee communications, is how the technological platform will facilitate (or hinder) the flow of communication between mentors and mentees.

Technology platforms that create a space for virtual communication are abundant, and choosing the right one is critical to the effectiveness of your initiative. The e-mentoring platform will have a range of assets and liabilities that impact your efforts to engage mentors and mentees. There are several well-known and less well-known e-mentoring platform vendors that can be considered, including existing social networking sites. Ensure that the functioning of the platform clearly aligns to the vision and goals of the mentoring program. It is important to note the cost difference between year one and year two.

1. Remain flexible and consider the changing landscape of technology platforms and the needs of your population. WIT advanced expertise from United Way in selecting the initial platform for the e-mentoring component. Initial considerations included the platform’s curriculum alignment to program goals, ability for multiple means of communication between mentee and mentor, accessibility of data reports to monitor engagement

“ Technology cannot be used as a replacement for a mentor, but it can be used to extend the relationship between Black men and boys, making the engagement experience more fulfilling by meeting the boys where they are as technology consumers, with a future oriented purpose to the online exchanges.

—Michelle Martin, COO Urban Youth

”

in curriculum activities and other measures of engagement, and opportunity for program staff to communicate with mentors and mentees. The strength of the initial e-mentoring platform rested in the data reports that informed level of engagement in the curriculum that aligned to program goals. However, the text-heavy curriculum and lack of opportunities for mentees and mentors to engage in real-time unstructured dialogues and multimedia elements resulted in low-levels of engagement. Also, the cost of the icouldbe platform, \$300 per student, becomes prohibitive if the plan is to engage a large number of students. As such, for Year Two great attention was paid to considering an alternate platform that would allow for more organic and multi-media communication around topics of mutual interest and be more cost effective.

2. Build on existing networks popular to your target population(s). The design of the e-mentoring component and the content that is conveyed through the technology is the best place to address the unique needs of African-American males. In Year Two, WIT employed the use of LinkedIn as the e-mentoring platform and developed video based curriculum units to enhance engagement. Students were oriented to this change by framing LinkedIn as “professional Facebook”. Using the type

of social networking sites that your mentees and mentors already use on a regular basis can ensure quick training on how to use the technology, and a familiarity that facilitates frequent use.

3. Ensure e-mentoring platform is available to mentees and mentors. The platform must be available to participants. Enabling mobile or smart-phone accessible e-mentoring platforms can facilitate involvement in the program. UY found at least 50% of students in each site had access to a mobile device. It is essential to create and/or otherwise ensure access (e.g., a computer lab, library, or loaner technology) for youth who don't have mobile access or other necessary technology.
4. Ensure e-mentoring platform interface is engaging to mentees. The e-mentoring platform should first and foremost engage participants in mentoring in an easy and user-friendly way. The more the platform can be similar to or embedded in interfaces that



many African-American students in your setting are already familiar with the better chance they have of using it and creating more frequent organic mentor-mentee engagement. Familiarity also helps build the trust and belonging that can foster African-American male engagement. UY also found that using text or email to communicate new content or postings was helpful in reaching out to participants and bringing them back to the platform. Lastly, the ability for real-time communication (or close to it) satisfies a youth's need for immediate gratification. Platforms that create barriers to communication by delaying message delivery can alienate youth from the platform and from e-mentoring itself.

5. Ensure students can read and understand the directions or other text on their own. Students should be able to use the platform independently, without a mentor, teacher, or other adult. There is a national challenge with reading proficiency among African-American boys, and literacy levels of text and content should be kept simple. Some ways this can be done are to: reduce the number of words on the page; give audio or video directions to use the platform; and if possible, consider giving various non-writing options for interaction in the platform and delivery of content, including pictures and video. However, youth with very low literacy levels may not be able to participate without feasible accommodation.

RECRUITING, TRAINING AND ENGAGING YOUTH

There are many youth who are in need of enhanced and innovative mentoring opportunities, however the nature of technology-based mentoring doesn't allow for success without a few key considerations. Key practices to employ are:

1. Recruit from existing youth-serving programs. Where possible, leverage existing infrastructures to increase the number of youth being served. There are a few obstacles to engaging African-American boys that can be mediated by using existing programs. First, is the significant investment of time required to build trust, a key component of mentoring programs, with African-American boys. E-Mentoring can build off of the trust already developed in the context of that existing program. A second obstacle is the transit, time, and resources necessary for assembling youth together. If youth are already gathered for a particular activity e-mentoring can be built into that time. A third is access to computers and the Internet. Existing programs often have access to those technologies on site, with a knowledgeable instructor, both of which can be harnessed by the e-mentoring program. And lastly, UY found that e-mentoring was most effective when it was complimented by some face-to-face interactions with mentors, which also can be built into existing programs. How the online mentoring model can

work with in-person activities is discussed further in the section below, Integrating Online Mentoring and Offline Activities. Consider partnering with networks of after school programs, team sports, school-based or community clubs, social and emotional learning advisories, or faith-based programs.

Leveraging a partnership may mean that, instead of being a core intervention, mentoring simply serves as a critical component of student engagement in another program.

2. Build and nurture partner relationships. The more the organizational partner comes to know about and experience the e-mentoring program, the stronger and more sustainable the partnership will be for serving the students around the e-mentoring mission. The e-mentoring platform itself can support the organization's building and nurturing of its partner relationships by sharing inspiring or meaningful interactions that occur on the e-mentoring platform. This can be done by describing or sharing actual screenshots of salient

moments of online interaction. Other ways of tuning the partner into the initiative is by providing hands-on experience with the platform, inviting them to face-to-face and virtual events, and assigning organizational leaders as mentors or members of the online mentoring network. Doing so can help solidify the organizational partnership so that it can be sustainable or even grow.

3. Work with existing youth advocates. A program's effectiveness in engaging African-American male youth can be enhanced if a youth advocate who has existing relationships or positive influence over targeted youth can be a part of the ongoing interaction and support of the e-mentoring experiences. For instance, a coach, club leader, or counselor can regularly speak to his youth about the value of the e-mentoring program, mentors, and activities while finding ways to spotlight or influence mentees' engagement in the program.
4. Provide mentee training. Mentees need to be given an opportunity to conceptualize what an e-mentor is and what an e-mentor can do for him. Mentee orientations, less than one hour in length, were developed to challenge the boys to understand this, help them develop their plan for engaging their mentor, and answer questions.
5. Resource a staff member(s) or volunteer(s) to retain youth and monitor progress. Employ a mentee coordinator to interface with the programs or schools from which the students are recruited. The purpose is to promote attendance, track and



stimulate e-mentoring platform activity, invite and influence mentee engagement as needed, facilitate mentor in-person visits, and engage with site-based youth advocates.

RECRUITING, TRAINING, AND ENGAGING MENTORS

Several useful guides to aid in recruiting, training and engaging mentors exist⁸. Research has shown that mentors who believe the e-mentoring component adds significant value to their mentor-mentee relationships are more likely to be successful⁹. Although it is a priority to use research to influence the training and engagement process, there are some basic recruiting and onboarding considerations that were learned from working with the African-American men in the WIT E-Mentoring Initiative. Success with these men, particularly regarding e-mentoring, requires a few key practices:

1. Use personal networks to recruit mentors. Although cold advertisement and traditional marketing were necessary, WIT also leveraged centralized recruitment around men in their network. Augment that through social media and word of mouth to recruit mentors. This provides the opportunity to build a core set of mentors who are fully in-tune with the organization's passion and values. Additionally, it builds enthusiasm and quick commitments to mentor.
2. Use of celebrity mentors will impact engagement. What It Takes featured several notable men such as Charles Barkley, Stephen A. Smith, Joe Frazier,



Mike Vick, Ryan Howard and James “JB” Brown among others. These men shared their stories about sacrifices they made as teenagers to achieve academic and professional success. Having the celebrity mentors helped to engage students. During the initial phase of student recruitment, the What It Takes Symposium, the celebrity affiliation helped to attract students. The mentors were also excited about the opportunity to be able to network with the celebrities and other professional mentors who were apart of the program.

3. Nurture and extend volunteers enthusiasm and commitment. Manage the volunteer's steps from signing up through actually mentoring. In order to accomplish this, plan ways to keep mentors informed about the process and engaged in the mission during the enrollment process.
4. Design an efficient and administratively feasible, volunteer-friendly onboarding process. In order to capitalize on mentors' enthusiasm, consider how to create a streamlined application process

8 National Mentoring Partnership. (2005). How to Build A Successful Mentoring Program Using the Elements of Effective Practice: A Step-By-Step Tool Kit for Program Managers. MENTOR: Alexandria, VA.

9 Yovlene, L. (August 2013). What makes e-mentoring work? Retrieved August 24, 2013, from <http://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/what-makes-e-mentoring-work/>

that can be completed in several days. Minimally, the application stages should provide the organization basic identification, contact, and eligibility information, as well as the information the vendor needs for an appropriate background check. Coordinating this process closely, allows for volunteers to solidify their commitment sooner. The organization can formalize their affiliation as mentor volunteers.

5. Arrange for and communicate privacy considerations. Address privacy concerns of potential mentors by providing different avenues for submitting information. Provide clear orientation and direction to mentors about how to complete the process safely. Build in collection methods that allow mentors to submit their personal information in a way that is comfortable for them. Address cultural issues of resistance to submitting private information online and highlight ways that their privacy will be protected. Assuaging reluctance can be done through communicating about what is collected, what it is used for, who will see it, and who will

maintain the information. Further, being clear about disqualifying guidelines at the start allows potential mentors to realize whether there is reason to apply or not.

6. Deepen mentors' skill and knowledge of youth. Train mentors on youth development. Specifically, teach them how to communicate using the e-mentoring platform. Further, create scenarios and guidance for mentors to consider in identifying strategies for maximizing mentee activity.
7. Message, methods, and meaning are crucial. When attempting to recruit African-American men for e-mentoring, it is important to be mindful of the message and methods you use, and the meaning they portray to the mentors. Using the Internet, the message has to be brief and concise, but clear. The method varies based on the forms of Internet used, i.e. email, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. Finally, men need to be affirmed that they can bring meaning to the life of their mentees by simply being actively engaged.



Sometimes all it takes is for one young person to know what it takes to be successful.

**—Howard “H” White, SVP Jordan Brand,
Author “Believe to Achieve”**



8. Mentors, like mentees, need a traditional orientation to review the fundamentals of mentoring and review expectations. In addition to the orientation, mentors should also be provided additional opportunities for professional and personal development. Online opportunities are to be provided to allow the mentors the opportunity to be trained at their convenience.
9. Retention. From year one to year two, 50% of the mentors returned. Most of the mentors that did not participate in the second year of the project felt that the effort for them to participate outweighed the impact they felt they could have as an e-mentor. In addition, WIT learned men who expressed experience with mentoring really did not understand how to forge a formal mentoring relationship with the student via an e-mentoring platform and often expressed that the experience did not mirror their view of mentoring.
10. Background checks can also be a major deterrent when it comes to structured mentoring. Men fear that they will be rejected because of offenses that happened many years ago or offenses that are minor. This fear prevents many men from seeking out or following-up on mentoring opportunities even if they feel they are otherwise qualified to be a mentor.

ADDITIONAL WAYS WIT APPROACHED MENTOR ENGAGEMENT

The WIT E-Mentoring Initiative employed all of the aforementioned actions. When WIT staff needed immediate action from mentors or wanted to have high confidence, program staff raised awareness of important information by not only using email and platform posts, but also using online call services to automate calls with recorded messages from WIT staff. Communication and engagement of mentors were enhanced by use of mobile messaging through the handheld versions of the online social networking platform that hosted WIT E-Mentoring. Other important efforts to engage mentors included a mentor only social networking group, breakfast meetings, and advertised happy hour events for e-mentors and men from other community serving programs. WIT sought engagement through community communication strategies such as community radio interviews, newspaper editorials, and participation in community round-tables.

INTEGRATING ONLINE MENTORING AND OFFLINE ACTIVITIES

Students are better engaged when there is coordination between online mentoring and offline activities. These can sit alongside each other through mentee-mentor interactions that occur through both in-person and via on-line communication. However, infusing in-person mentoring sessions with the assigned online mentor is not the only way to boost engagement or impact of your

mentoring program. For instance, WIT scheduled face-to-face site visits where students participated in large symposiums or smaller themed breakout sessions.

The program staff found it helpful to respond to planned as well as emergent themes in online conversations by arranging visits from experts on the topic at hand. Some online narrated PowerPoint and video based lesson modules were deliberately designed in preparation for planned face-to-face interactions. Meanwhile other multi-media curriculum units emerged in response to students' interest or a particular site's interest. For example, when students expressed interest in professional athletes and their own conditioning, WIT arranged for a visit to the school from a mentor experienced in fitness training for professional athletes. Another time, after an online video-based lesson and mentor conversations about code-switching, the program found ways to help support students to attend an opera in another city while dressed in tuxedos. Thus, the integration of online mentoring and offline activities can be both pre-planned and further enhanced by opportunities that arise.

IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAM

Day-to-day operations should be made to align to the program's original vision and serve the planned impact that was decided at the start of the program. The notable key practices for implementing the e-mentoring program are twofold:

1. Continue to evaluate and ensure accessibility for mentees. While a mentee might have full use of a

mobile device at the beginning of the program, that access may not continue. As discussed above, creating continuing avenues of access to the platform, via computer labs or loaner computers, should be top of mind.

2. Diversify mentor-mentee contact. Youth benefit from regular and consistent interaction with their mentors. A structured schedule of communication through the platform, via activities and content videos ensures participants keep coming back and can use the content to generate organic mentoring moments. As a supplement, create a few opportunities for youth and mentors to meet face-to-face to diversify the experience and keep the youth and mentors engaged. E-Mentoring through a structured platform alone began to seem rote for WIT participants, but was enhanced by two What It Takes Symposiums and a What It Takes Conference that included the symposium along with career oriented workshops. It is important to have the mentors come to where the students are to continue the conversation from the symposiums. If it is not feasible for mentees to have structured in-person contact with their assigned mentor(s), then it is also beneficial to have other mentors have in-person interaction among pairs or small cohorts of mentees.

MEASURING PROGRESS AND SHARING RESULTS

While there are several good mentoring program evaluation criteria and methods available, e-mentoring¹⁰ provides a unique avenue to measure data and to share the results with participants and other stakeholders.

1. E-Mentoring metrics. This investigation can include process-based, goals-based or outcomes metrics. During the first 2-3 years the program is best served by a process-based or formative evaluation. As the program achieves fidelity of implementation, a goals-based or outcomes evaluation is more appropriate. As e-mentoring is a newer method of mentoring, established metrics that speak specifically to e-mentoring are still emerging. Programs should use standard mentoring quality measures, and contribute to the field by establishing their own key metrics. WIT employed both a formative evaluation and a case-study research approach to inform the continuous improvement of the e-mentoring program.
2. Use of the e-mentoring platform data. The measures of engagement that will frame the data collected from the e-mentoring platform are to be clearly defined and communicated to mentees and mentors. WIT metrics included; number of posts originated and responded to each week, comparison of original posts to note responsiveness to content delivered, the portion of a group who has responded, the number of online interactions

among mentees, the number of interactions among mentors, and the existence of original posts unsolicited by program content.

3. Internally communicate your key metrics regularly. As youth, mentors, coordinators, and other internal team members are made aware of short-term or formative metrics and the movement towards them, the heart of the program is fed and nurtured regularly. Audience-appropriate transparency about the program's key in-progress measures can bring about organic and continuous improvement of the program.

CONCLUSION

The sustainability of the African-American male mentor-to-mentee engagement in an e-mentoring space rests in regular structured conversations about topics of mutual interest, and these are mediated by the ways trust is built in the relationship and genuine envisioning of success. The scope of this guide frames guidance for establishing effective structures and resources including recruitment, training, and retention through lessons learned from the development, implementation, and evaluation of the What It Takes e-mentoring initiative. Although this guide may be helpful for the design and implementation of any e-mentoring program, its purpose is to address the unique needs of programs targeting African-American males. Other action-oriented youth mentoring advocates, will find that each of the aforementioned processes are necessary if an organization, program, policy maker, or individual aims to build, a sustainable, youth-responsive mentoring program.

Considerations for the communications platform and related mode of communication between mentee and mentor are most salient. Program planners are well served by employing the type of social networking sites that their mentees and mentors already use on a regular basis. In doing so, assumptions are uncovered about the ways in which mentors and mentees use these sites. The e-mentoring platform needs to engage participants in mentoring in an easy and user-friendly way. The more the platform can be similar to or embedded in interfaces that many African-American students in your setting are already familiar with the better chance they have of using it and creating more frequent organic mentor-mentee engagement. Attention to the mode of content delivery with a focus on ensuring that it is engaging is key. Text-heavy content may serve as an unnecessary hindrance to high levels of mentee and mentor engagement.

Mentoring continues to be a valuable method of keeping youth on track to educational and personal success. Harnessing new methods of communication in the mentoring arena is critical to keeping youth engaged in the mentoring process and expanding access to youth who don't have physical proximity to these role models. Youth, and mentors, will continue to use technology; creating effective avenues to incorporate that use in mentoring can expand the scope of mentoring programs and positively influence the benefits for youth.

APPENDIX

PARTNERSHIPS THAT ENABLED E-MENTORING TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Urban Youth

Urban Youth (UY) is a leader in providing academically focused hands-on programs that expose and engage urban youth to science, technology, engineering,

and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences, and is intentional in delivering knowledge of what it takes for their students to meet success in their lives. UY has a distinguished history as a social enterprise that has generated over \$4 million in corporate donations, many of them repeat funders. That level of investment has allowed the UY to achieve a 99% high school graduation rate, and a 90% college matriculation rate for students who have been involved in UY programs. UY has served 3,500 students in the past 15 years, with 85% from urban areas that are below the poverty level.

Although all UY programs are strategically designed to relate and add value to each other, UY particularly leverages the value of mentoring through its What it Takes (WIT) symposiums and its WIT E-Mentoring Initiative. As such, WIT is a common feature to all UY programs. WIT is a national outreach initiative that is designed to connect highly successful minority entrepreneurs, scientists, professional athletes, businessmen, military and medical professionals with hundreds of African-American males at risk of dropping out of high school. The mission of the program is to engage and motivate students towards success in their academic and professional endeavors. Through e-mentoring and social networking, at risk males between the ages of 14 and 18 are taught technical, organizational, and cognitive skills critical to academic and professional success. What it Takes fills a significant motivational void often felt among minority students, by having successful high profile men, many of whom have struggled through the same paths as the target audience (14 to 18 year olds), reach back and guide students towards "what it takes" to be successful in life.

Mentoring, along with exposure to and accomplishment within a range of programs that build career and life

skills, cumulatively impacts students' preparation and life choices. To that end, the What It Takes E-Mentoring Program serves as a vehicle to introduce and encourage its students to participate in mentoring, activities and complimentary programs of other youth serving organizations. The e-mentoring component began as a two-year pilot serving students in the Philadelphia area.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation– Funder

Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities, and foster the arts. The foundation believes that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged. For more, visit KnightFoundation.org.

United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey–Technical Assistance

United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey's (UWGPSNJ's) mission is to harness, leverage and strategically invest the collective power of donors, advocates and volunteers, to drive measurable results that improve the lives of people in our region. UWGPSNJ is the one organization with the ability to bring the business community, organized labor, public and non-profit sectors together to identify critical needs across our region and collectively address complex issues to drive real, measurable, systemic change that ensures children succeed in school, families are financially stable and all community members have their health and basic needs met. UWGPSNJ's expertise is in uniting, problem solving and driving collective action to amplify the power of the individual and achieve what no one person can achieve alone.

UWGPSNJ believes that everyone deserves a quality education, a family- sustaining income and good

health. At UWGPSNJ, we work to make sure people get the support services they need right now while simultaneously addressing the root causes of key issues – that's how UWGPSNJ creates true community impact. Most importantly, UWGPSNJ realizes that when education, income and health are improved at a community level, everyone benefits.

UWGPSNJ intervenes at critical transition points in people's lives, from cradle to career and beyond - when children enter kindergarten and need to be ready to learn; when they finish third grade and need to transition from learning to read, to reading to learn; when they hit those vulnerable teenage years and need to stay on track to graduation, ready to pursue college and career; when they need to find a job that pays a family sustaining wage; and when they're older and need a support system to age with dignity in their own home or community. It is during these critical transition points that people need a hand up, not just a hand out.

As the regional Mentoring Partnership in Greater Philadelphia affiliated with M.E.N.T.O.R./The National Mentoring Partnership, UWGPSNJ has been improving the quality of mentoring and mentoring programs in the region for almost 20 years. Recruitment of African-American males as mentors and serving African-American male youth well has long been a priority of UWGPSNJ's work because of the alarmingly high school drop out rate. UWGPSNJ's experience has been that mentors can help youth navigate the critical transition points in life and help keep youth on track for a successful transition to adulthood, however effectively engaging African-American male youth, and recruiting African-American men as mentors has been a challenge for many formal mentoring programs.

Authored by: Ashaki B. Coleman, PhD & Broderick Boxly, EdD



URBAN YOUTH

RACING SCHOOL
NAVAL ENGINE PROGRAM
RPV PROGRAM
MENTOR PROGRAM

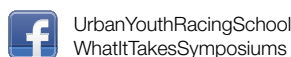
ANTHONY MARTIN, FOUNDER URBAN YOUTH

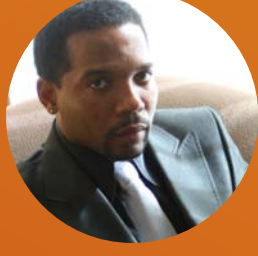
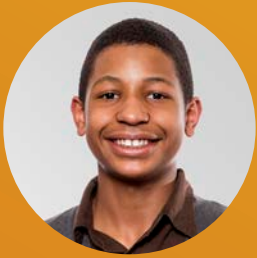
The vision of sports marketing expert Anthony Martin that led to the formation of the Urban Youth Racing School (UYRS), a nonprofit organization, 15 years ago continues to inspire and drive the school today. Martin is the Founder and Executive Director of the newly formed Urban STEM Academy (USA), a partnership with the US NAVY and UYRS, the only school of its kind. UYRS uses innovative educational techniques to teach urban students “STEM” - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. UYRS uses motorsports as a vehicle to increase students’ exposure to and interest in self-directed learning, scientific inquiry and transfer of knowledge, with the primary goal of 100% high school graduation.

Answering the President’s recent challenge to the nation to lower high school drop-out rates, Martin once again

convened a panel of successful minority male role models for a candid motivational conversation targeting young men in Philadelphia. The first “What It Takes” symposium kicked off in April 2009 in Philadelphia. The town hall meeting featured several notable men such as Charles Barkley, Stephen A. Smith, Joe Frazier and James “JB” Brown among others and focused on the sacrifices they made to achieve academic and professional success. This program has led to the successful What It Takes e-mentoring program funded by the Knight Foundation.

Martin has been recognized as one of the 70 most influential African-American men in the Automotive Industry in On Wheels magazine and was also honored at the Urban Wheel Awards at the Detroit Auto Show for “Diversity in Motorsports 2007.”







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