

College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Innovation Fund Proposal
Peer Mentoring Pilot Program

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Abstract

Creating a sense of belonging and inclusion is one of the best ways to encourage employee engagement, productivity, and ultimately retention. When a new employee is hired, there is a critical window to establish an empowerment culture and to continue cultivating it throughout their first year and beyond. Matching a new hire with an established peer will provide a foundation of resources that enables staff to build collaborative relationships with faculty and support our students.

A sense of alienation and lack of institutional training are real threats to new hires' success. Mentorship programs can help retain new mentees by fostering belonging, but they also provide valuable interactions for the established mentors as well. By investing in a program that pairs people in a formal relationship, we can leverage institutional knowledge and increase accessibility as well as gain valuable insights from diverse perspectives.

Summary

In this proposed pilot program, up to 10 new hires in the College of Arts and Sciences will be assigned a peer mentor. The mentor will receive a \$500 honorarium for a year of mentorship and will be invited to participate in ongoing training. The mentee will receive individualized coaching, support with job specific tasks, and a broader understanding of university systems.

In the current environment, many new hires do not have a robust onboarding experience and training plans are left for individual units to determine. While it is important to recognize the unique needs of departments and programs, it can be difficult for some units to train a new hire without the support of a large or experienced team. Frequently, a new hire is given the names of one or two individuals to whom they can ask questions, but this is not a formalized relationship and puts the responsibility on the new hire which does not foster accessibility or inclusion. Furthermore, the informal nature can create workload and pay inequities as unofficial mentors are often not compensated or recognized for their contributions.

Unlike traditional mentorship programs where junior employees are paired with more senior employees who may have different levels of supervisory influence, a peer mentorship relationship focuses on creating a safe space for the new hires to ask questions, take risks, and explore areas of interest. This can lead to overall employee satisfaction by feeling seen and heard. There is also a larger focus on job specific tasks which can include job shadowing as a component of training.

In this program, the mentor/mentee pair is encouraged to meet bi-weekly and attend ongoing events aimed at personal and professional development as well as building community.

Goals of this relationship include:

- Understand the basic functions of the job and learn the common language of CU
- Gain access to systems and communities
- Enable staff to bring expertise outside of CU that advances the mission of the university
- Make connections and gain awareness of other entities on campus
- Increase engagement and foster relationships

Considerations for selection:

- For mentors and mentees: willing to dedicate five hours a month during normal working hours for a 12-month commitment with support from their supervisor to arrange coverage for any missed work
- Additional consideration for mentors: length of time in their current role, with a preference given for mentors who have been in their role for more than a year

The timeline will be broken into two phases. Phase one will consider mentees who have been hired within 6 months of the program launch. Phase two will consider mentees hired while phase one is underway, with the goal of matching these mentees with mentors as soon as possible after being hired.

Mentees and mentors will be matched on similar roles and job functions as well as complementary experience or interests.

Events

To build community and develop skills, there will be several events. The first set of events is directed at mentors because it is crucial for mentors to have the resources and support from leadership to build an effective relationship with their mentees. Training may include sessions from internal experts or leaders in the field, with the basic framework to include:

- Initial training to include guidelines for a mentoring relationship, the overall purpose of their role, and how to set the stage for the year
- Midyear check-in to discuss any key successes or challenges
- Final meeting to collect feedback that can help shape future onboarding efforts and document best practices

The second set of events is for both mentors and mentees. Participants will be encouraged to take the CliftonStrengths Finders assessment as a starting point to leverage individual strengths. This will be followed by a two hour [CliftonStrengths Introductory Session](#) offered by Campus HR Learning and Development. Additionally, there will be quarterly social gatherings to foster community and belonging. These events could include an ice cream social, coffee and bagels, ping pong at the UMC, etc.

Budget

Total: \$8980

Breakdown:

\$5000 – 10 honoraria for mentors, \$500 each

- \$500 – Honorarium for a Program Manager to plan, create, and execute the program
- \$2000 – Training sessions for mentors, to include honorarium/fee for trainer and refreshments
- \$280 – CliftonStrengths Finders assessments, 20 at \$14 each
- \$1200 – Food and space reservation fees for social gatherings, 4 at \$300 each

Foreseeable challenges and mitigations:

- To encourage cross-division collaboration, mentors and mentees will not be limited to a match in their division. However, units within CAS are diverse in their needs and approaches and could differ more than is useful to a new hire and could cause greater confusion. Looking at specific duties and functions during the matching process will help alleviate unnecessary confusion.
- Mentors may be unable to dedicate enough time to mentor/mentee relationship with their current workload. It is important for each mentor to work with their supervisor to arrange for additional support within their unit to create a plan that allows mentors to dedicate the necessary time to this commitment.
- It is possible there won't be enough people who want to be a mentor or mentee. However, the BIPOC Mentorship Program had 18 applicants to be mentors but only had enough funding to select five mentors. They also had more applicants to be mentees than they were able to select as well, highlighting a need for more programs like this.
- Because the nature of new hires is ongoing, a phased model may not be the best approach. If the mentorship program is continued after this pilot, it may be beneficial to have a rolling process that matches mentees with mentors within a month of being hired.

References

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