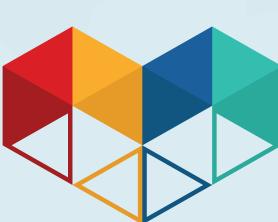# GROWING INSIGHTS & INNOVATIONS

A Research Agenda
for the Modern Youth
Mentoring Movement

Dear Colleagues,

What are our expectations when it comes to mentoring young people? While the field, research, and models have all evolved, diversified, and innovated greatly over the last few decades, that singular question continues to yield many different answers depending on one's vantage point. To some, mentoring is a strategy aimed at leveling the playing field by supporting individual youth who lack critical supports and opportunities. For others, mentoring is a tool to address systemic local or national problems such as violence, substance misuse, underemployment, or educational inequity. Still, for others, mentoring is a complimentary resource, a steady presence that can help young people take advantage of all the other services and supports the world might offer them beyond that one relationship. Lastly, others will focus on mentoring as a source of emotional support and joy, a kinship-like presence that offers role-modelling, positive experiences, and a consistent ear.

None of these conceptions of mentoring are wrong or mutually exclusive, but the varied perspectives that often surround the leading or highest purpose of mentoring have influenced the directions in which the field has grown considerably over the decades. The research on mentoring has similarly been influenced by these different perspectives, and has also, of course, contributed to them — we know more than ever about the different dimensions of mentoring of young people, but in some ways those of us working to further the mentoring movement view this work through remarkably different lenses and seek different data. This sometimes leads us to struggle cohesively in defining what research around this work is most vital, especially since relationship is so widely accepted as an asset to youth development and is seen through so many different lenses with a rapidly innovating and diversifying field.

The good news is that mentoring research has expanded significantly over the past few decades. Back when MENTOR was founded more than 30 years ago, research surrounding the field was just emerging. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a nonprofit dedicated to social research and policy organization, was a leader in pioneering studies about mentoring relationships, especially for vulnerable populations. While P/PV was fairly alone in that endeavor back then, today we rely on research from an ever-increasing body of researchers who specialize on the various facets of mentoring, including complex meta-analytic studies, to examine and improve the availability, quality, and impact of mentoring relationships that drive equity for young people across America.

Though we have made significant progress in the past few decades, there remains work to do in order to ensure more young people have access to quality mentoring in the years to come. The question today is what new research will help move this work forward? How might we provide actionable and relevant information to inform the diverse viewpoints and approaches to mentoring, viewpoints often shaped by our own experiences and world views? How might this new data support in delivering effective mentoring programs that will not only mitigate the inequities our young people face but that could catalyze changes in the systems and structures perpetuating disconnection and isolation? We will need fresh research to reach deeper understanding in order to make that happen and to honor those different perspectives in our field.

In response to this critical need, MENTOR has developed the following Research Agenda to clarify and outline key areas for future mentoring research — to sharpen our focus while informing funders and policymakers about how we can strengthen the mentoring movement together. We remain committed to ensuring research is actionable and our resulting resources and tools bridge the gap from research to practice and are informed by voices and perspectives most proximate. We are grateful for the collaboration, expertise, and insight of the many researchers, practitioners, and thought-leaders who contributed to this working agenda, and look forward to sharing it with stakeholders of all kinds to continue informing the movement, ensuring all our young people have the relationships they need to thrive and strive.

Sincerely,

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One of the simple truths about mentoring young people is that it's a complex activity, one that brings a wide variety of individuals together, often during moments of hardship or transition, to create something new, unique, and personally meaningful. Like all human relationships, mentoring relationships require not just initial connection, but also care and maintenance over time and a set of conditions that allow them to thrive and work toward a common purpose. Although the concept of mentoring is as old as civilization itself (and certainly embedded into the culture and ways of knowing of many communities), one of the defining features of the modern youth mentoring movement is the use of scientific research to better understand and scale these complex relationships — what makes them work, how they support individuals' development, and how we can create even more of these relationships than the world we inhabit might produce naturally. From the seminal research of organizations such as Public/Private Ventures almost 30 years ago to the advanced meta-analytic studies of today, mentoring research has allowed us to examine — and in many cases improve — the availability, quality, and impact of mentoring relationships for young people across America.

Because of this investment in research, we now have a wealth of evidence that these relationships —both through dedicated mentoring programs and those occurring naturally in communities — can contribute positively to just about every aspect of a young person's development and life journey. Crucially, this research has also highlighted key practices for mentoring that occurs in programs and helped guide a generation of adult volunteers how to step up more effectively in support of young people. We know more about the science, and art, of mentoring than ever before.

But as the mentoring movement has matured, so have the questions we ask of it. Our field is rapidly evolving to question old modes of thinking and embrace new ideas, to center youth voices and align this work with efforts to address long-standing American problems and inequities. There is always more to learn.

This Research Agenda highlights **_four key areas for future mentoring research_** that MENTOR believes will help strengthen the mentoring movement over the next decade. These calls to action were developed in collaboration with a working group of leading researchers, practitioners, and thought-leaders and this document reflects their consensus on what is most critical to study in the years ahead so that the power of mentoring relationships can benefit even more young people.

RESEARCH PRIORITY 1: Increase research on the role of mentoring in supporting youth identity development and combating loneliness and isolation

One of the clear trends of the last 30 years of mentoring research has been a focus on studying the effectiveness of mentoring in helping youth achieve critical goals (e.g., high school graduation, career planning) and avoid serious barriers along the way (e.g., substance misuse or becoming involved in the justice system). Program evaluations often focus on these outcomes, as do studies on natural mentoring relationships and policymakers and institutional leaders have long desired to see these individual-level youth outcomes aggregate at larger scales into proof of major progress on long-standing social issues and inequities. While research examining these outcomes has obvious importance, our working group felt as though an overemphasis on achievement-focused outcomes may miss many of the most common benefits of mentoring. The primary recommendation of our working group was to focus future research more strongly on youth identity development and other "human-centered" outcomes such as creating a sense of belonging and connection. This was viewed as especially important when considering mentoring in support of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, immigrant and refugee, and other groups that experience marginalization, discrimination, and disconnection in our institutions and society.

Mentors can be critical assets in the formation of healthy identity, helping young people explore their values, strengths, and passions, and ultimately merge what may be many diverse identities into a coherent and strong sense of self. Mentors can also help youth find connection and community that honors their identity and lets them know they belong. This healthy identity development is absolutely foundational — it's difficult to imagine youth thriving or reaching their potential without it. Healthy identity can be thought of as a "touchstone" outcome from which the more achievement-oriented outcomes typically studied in mentoring emerge. But in spite of the centrality of healthy identity to human development, the topic is largely ignored in much of the research on mentoring, especially in program evaluations.

Similarly, the research of most interest to policymakers often seems built around the notion that a mentoring relationship is *only* a means to an end, that the provision of a caring adult into the life of a young person. who may be lonely, isolated, or lacking in loving support may not have much inherent value unless it addresses some other problem or achievement-oriented outcome. Scholars such as Tim Cavell, Renee Spencer, and Sam McQuillin have recently emphasized[1] the importance of a *bilateral* view of mentoring, noting that mentors can both be applied to the problems and transitions youth are facing, but can also simply provide the safe, supportive, and nurturing relationship experiences that we know are essential to healthy human development and mental well-being.

We agree that there must be room in this field for what they term "supportive"

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[1] Cavell, T., Spencer, R., & McQuillin, S.D. (2021). Back to the Future: Mentoring as Means and End in Promoting Child Mental Health. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 50*, 281 - 299. DOI:10.1080/15374416.2021.1875327

mentoring as well as what might be called "problem-focused" mentoring, and that both types of mentoring have inherent value and meaningful outcomes attached to them. The actions recommended below can help the field in reframing the value of mentoring along more humanistic lines and avoid an overemphasis in our research on deficit orientations, as well as the misapplication of mentoring to longstanding societal challenges that cannot be addressed by mentoring alone.

Action: Prioritize Identity-Related Outcomes and Build Understanding of How Mentors Support the Identity Development of Young People Facing Adversities and Experiencing Marginalization

We feel that the mentoring movement needs greater emphasis on studies that explore how mentors can help youth form their understanding of who they are and develop a true sense of self that synthesizes their many identities. This understanding is particularly needed for supporting young people experiencing marginalization and isolation within the communities they inhabit (e.g., LGBTQ+, BIPOC, immigrant/refugee youth, youth in poverty) as well as youth facing isolation and a lack of support for other reasons (e.g., rural youth, youth in opioid-impacted communities). Research can clarify key relationship qualities and mentoring activities that support identity development, knowledge that can then be translated into practice tools that allow even more adults to support identity formation and activate young peoples' sense of purpose and belonging.

Outcomes such as positive racial and gender identity, reduced stereotype threat, self-confidence and sense of agency, and the development of critical consciousness, are all crucial identity-related outcomes to prioritize in new research if we are to understand how mentors (and mentoring programs) can support identity development and serve as a protective barrier against discrimination and marginalization. Unfortunately, these types of outcomes are often undervalued by policymakers and funders, but we feel they are among the core outcomes of mentoring and should be at the forefront of our thinking about the impact of mentoring.

Action: Examine the Impact of Mentors on Youth Isolation and Sense of Belonging

The challenges the world has faced during the COVID-19 pandemic have only further highlighted the negative experiences of isolation and disconnection from others. After well over a year of social distancing, many of us understand at a deeper level now why human connection and inclusion are so essential. But we know that many of the young people who wind up seeking the help of a mentor were lonely and isolated long before the pandemic. We know that young people can feel isolated within their schools and communities, often experiencing a lack of adult support and healthy peer relationships. And while many studies of mentoring do ask young people if they have "someone they can turn to," most research in our field only examines the closeness of relationships as a moderator or mediator of other outcomes, forgetting that being in a close, healthy, mutually

supportive relationship has inherent value. We encourage the field to focus more on examining the use of mentors to build connection for young people who feel marginalized and isolated. So much of the recent emphasis on building "social capital" is focused on career connections and high levels of achievement. But expanded networks of support can also simply provide youth with social-emotional support and a sense of connectedness and belonging. A greater emphasis in research design on examining outcomes such as increased connectedness to others, reduced isolation, a greater sense of belonging, and a growing hopefulness for the future will help establish these as truly meaningful outcomes and worthy of both policymaker interest and greater investment. As with identity, it's hard to imagine young people thriving and contributing to the world around them if these outcomes are missing, and it's time to emphasize them in the mentoring movement.

RESEARCH PRIORITY 2: Study innovative strategies to expand natural mentoring relationships within systems and institutions

While many of the relationships we champion in this movement take place in programmatic contexts led by youth-serving organizations, the reality is that the *vast majority* of mentoring relationships young people experience come about more organically through family, faith, and community connections and in institutions where youth and adults come together, such as in schools and afterschool programs, sports and recreation leagues, and summer camps and

hobby clubs. While scaling the mentoring that occurs in programmatic contexts will always be important, new research might also significantly expand the mentoring that forms naturally, especially if it can influence institutions to take on new mentoring roles and capacities.

Action: Evaluate Efforts to Strengthen Schools and Other Institutions as Key Relationship Hubs

Schools and other educational spaces represent tremendous opportunities for expanding their role as "mentor-rich" relationship hubs, either by facilitating students' connections to adults in the community or by asking school personnel to bring deeper mentoring mindsets and actions to their primary work. Juvenile justice and child welfare systems, early career workplace settings, and health care and faith institutions also have vast potential to expand mentoring relationships through both structured programs and by transforming the skills and abilities of adults in those spaces to naturally serve young people in increasingly mentor-like ways.

Fresh research can illuminate how adults in these institutions can build deeper relationships with youth and open the door for more mentoring to occur. The use of peers and "near-peers" in these settings can further expand the supportive relationships young people experience and tap into the lived experience and voices that might resonate best with some youth. The youth development field has increasingly been captivated by the notion of expanding youths' access to networks of support, but

doing that at scale requires more research on the activities and mentor roles that build these networks safely and effectively.

In addition to scaling the mentoring relationships that form naturally in communitieis, fresh research can highlight how a commitment to a culture of youth-centeredness and mentoring might transform these institutions themselves.The hope is that if we can build a mentoring mindset into the work of adults in all of the spaces that young people experience, perhaps those spaces become more equitable, justice-oriented, and effective in their missions over time. This may be a generational goal, but at MENTOR, we believe systemic change can occur when institutions become more human-centered and when mentoring is part of what young people are offered by *default*.

Action: Prioritize Research on Emerging and Innovative Strategies for Expanding Natural Mentoring Opportunities

There are several emerging approaches to making mentoring connections that warrant more study, such as **youth-initiated mentoring** (where youth are taught skills for finding and maintaining their own mentoring relationships) and **caregiver-initiated mentoring** (in which parents and other caregivers gain skills that allow them to find caring adult relationships for their child). While these approaches can also be used to support recruitment of mentors to volunteer-based programs, both of these models also hold tremendous potential for expanding mentoring that forms naturally in communities, as they support youth and their families in building the networks of

mentoring support they need and on their terms. Empowering the nation's young people and their caregivers to find more mentoring in their communities and networks will greatly help in scaling the support young people experience.

In terms of growing the "pool" of mentors outside of programmatic contexts who might respond when asked, the past decade has also seen the emergence of what might be considered **community-wide mentoring initiatives**, such as the [Everyday Mentoring](#) work spearheaded by our Affiliate in Pittsburgh. These efforts aim to provide adults from every walk of life with information about stepping into mentoring roles and opportunities to build a culture of mentoring at a municipal or regional scale. New research can highlight the efficacy of these types of collaborative large-scale mentoring initiatives.

Lastly, and regardless of the innovations being tried to expand mentoring that forms naturally, we simply need more research about what keeps more Americans from stepping up and serving as mentors in every sense of the word. Research can further **clarify barriers** to mentoring engagement — both systemic and personal — and teach us how we can **grow the pool of individuals** who see themselves as mentors-at-the-ready. While not every American adult can, or even should, mentor a child, research by MENTOR and others suggests we can grow mentor engagement considerably with the right levers, and additional research will further highlight effective approaches to maximizing mentoring across communities.

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RESEARCH PRIORITY 3: Increase actionable research on mentoring that occurs in diverse programmatic settings

Over the last few decades, our field has expanded to include an increasingly diverse array of program models and approaches. However, research has continued to portray mentoring in a more monolithic way, with the traditional one-to-one community-based models that have commonly been associated with formal mentoring programs as the norm. There is a need to be more specific with regard to the type of programming being studied so that we can learn much more about the key practices at work in different models and be more precise in our identification of relevant expected outcomes. Our investment in programmatic research should mirror the diverse composition and structures of the programs bringing mentors into the lives of youth in increasingly creative ways.

Action: Invest in Research on Group Mentoring Models

According to MENTOR's research, there are now more young people being served by **group** and **blended 1:1-group** mentoring models than by those offering traditional one-to-one relationships.[2] New research can illuminate the effective practices of both staff and mentors within these programs, as well as the types of outcomes for which these models might be especially impactful. Increasing our ability to match a young person to the right format of mentoring for their needs and preferences will contribute

greatly to the overall effectiveness of the mentoring movement.

Action: Grow Knowledge and Application of Effective Virtual Mentoring Strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for mentors and youth to be able to connect virtually when in-person interactions are not consistently available. And in an increasingly digital world, this promising expansion of e-mentoring over the last year — even if born of crisis — is likely to become something of a "new normal" long after the pandemic has faded. Our young people are digital natives and know only of a world rich in virtual connections and digitally-mediated relationships, and our mentoring services and research will need to honor that reality moving forward.

We critically need new research about the **program capacities**, the **practices of staff and mentors**, and the **characteristics of effective mentoring technologies**, in order to maximize the scale and impact of virtually-delivered mentoring. Research in the years ahead can highlight when and how virtual communication can equal, or even surpass, the effectiveness of primarily in-person mentoring. Fresh research can also fill key knowledge gaps, such as the best practices for using technology within relationships that are primarily in-person and the use of new and innovative technologies, such as virtual worlds and avatars, as the setting for mentoring interactions.

[2] Garringer, M., McQuillin, S., & McDaniel, H. (2017). *Examining youth mentoring services across America: Findings from the 2016 Mentoring Program Survey*. Boston, MA: MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership. Retrieved from http://www.mentoring.org/new-site/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Mentor-Survey-Report_FINAL_small.pdf

Action: Expand Understanding and Adoption of Targeted Mentoring Strategies

In recent years, leading scholars such as Jean Rhodes have suggested that mentoring services can strengthen their effectiveness by either **training mentors to deliver evidence-based interventions** addressing specific youth needs or by **utilizing mentors in a supportive accountability role**[3] that enhances the effectiveness of non-mentoring interventions (e.g., supporting youth receiving mental health services). Recent scholarship has also highlighted the potential of mentoring focused on specific **transition points** for youth (e.g., last year of high school, parents divorcing, exiting the child welfare system, etc.). Many programs are using **paid mentors** in an effort to better offer targeted support to certain groups of young people. Research suggests these types of tightly-focused programs often show large effects, but more information is needed to support widespread adoption of these promising approaches. Increased applied research in these areas can build our understanding and perhaps greatly increase program effectiveness.

RESEARCH PRIORITY 4: Invest in more research on the societal-level changes that are produced by mentoring relationships

We have strong research showing that mentoring relationships can help promote the success of individual young people, but we currently lack similar evidence about how those *individual* stories of success add up to broader changes for groups of people, whole communities, or even the nation, over time. We have little understanding of the "ripple effects" of mentoring — for example, the way mentoring a child might strengthen a whole family or positively impact their classroom and other children at school. Widening our lens, it also remains unclear as to the degree to which mentoring relationships can contribute to addressing large-scale American challenges such as economic inequality, inequities in systems such as education, justice, and public health, and in overcoming the negative impacts of systemic racism and gender discrimination. As noted, policymakers have long sought proof of this impact at scale, and it is time to expand our understanding of how these personal relationships create change in aggregate. We must understand more about how mentoring helps *all* of us.

Action: Increase Research on Mentoring and Civic Engagement and Social Justice

An important first step in generating this knowledge, is conducting more research on the connections between mentoring and youth empowerment and civic engagement — how mentors help that next generation of citizens prepare for and make change in the world. Research focused on concepts such as **critical mentoring** and **youth activism** can help us understand how mentors can not only help develop individual young people, but also scaffold their efforts to drive systemic change in their communities. This feels like a critical moment in the nation's history to study and learn from

[3] Rhodes, J. (2020). Older and Wiser. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press. DOI:10.2307/j.ctv13qfw7d

justice-oriented mentoring efforts and scale successful approaches to these youth-adult partnerships.

Additional research should focus on how mentoring relationships, both in and out of programs, change the values, worldviews, and sense of community in both young people *and adults*. How do we change as individuals when we mentor? And do those changes add up to broader shifts in how Americans think about, treat, and step up for each other? New research can grow our understanding of how participation in mentoring leads to other positive forms of community engagement and whether mentoring drives adults and institutions to further collaborate on community-wide efforts to support youth—what might be thought of as **collective impact**.

Action: Grow the Investment in Longitudinal Mentoring Research

We often talk about the impact of mentoring on long timescales, looking back on a lifetime to note that a mentor set us on a better course. But our understanding of the "long tail" of mentoring is limited and longitudinal studies can help us understand the contribution that mentoring relationships and additional factors make to both personal growth and society-level goals such as educational attainment, economic mobility, stability of employment, and improved health outcomes across the lifespan.

Longitudinal research can also build our understanding of the contribution of mentoring to more of those aforementioned **human-centered goals** such as long-term

life satisfaction, happiness, and a sense of purpose. Knowing how mentoring relationships influence these outcomes at scale over the lifespan will help fully articulate the value of mentoring beyond more limited, economically-focused frameworks. These studies can be expensive and inherently require long timeframes, but they represent the key to understanding the broader impact of this movement.

Action: Listen to the Voices of Young People

Lastly, but most importantly, our greatest obligation with new mentoring research is to **center the voices of young people**. *What do they want from the adults they encounter? How do they perceive mentoring? How do they find value in the mentoring they do get? How are they feeling about gaps in their support? How do they bounce back from a negative mentoring experience? What do they see in mentoring that we adults do not?* Youth voice can be more effectively incorporated into any program evaluation or research study and **youth-led participatory action research** is one strategy that holds great value for ensuring that mentoring is focused on what young people want for themselves and their community. There are also opportunities to track what young people are saying about the availability of mentors at larger scales. MENTOR, in particular, is well positioned to study **mentoring gaps**, at scales ranging from schools and districts up to the city, state, and national levels. Adults may think we are offering the mentoring youth need, but it's their voices that matter the most in that determination.

Centering youth voice in our movement will take increased recognition that we cannot respond effectively to the mentoring needs of young people if we are not directly asking them about their mentors (or lack thereof) and tracking our progress in delivering for them. Research can help us honor youth voices and avoid our tendencies toward adultism in how we facilitate the mentoring movement.

Further Calls to Action

These recommendations put forth by our working group cover a lot of ground and will clearly require ongoing collaboration and investment by all stakeholders in the mentoring movement. The four priorities articulated here each represent important bodies of work that will allow mentoring to grow in quality and availability, and perhaps even strengthen whole communities over time.

Below we note additional important steps that different stakeholders in our movement can take, both individually and collaboratively, in meeting the goals of this agenda.

For Policymakers and Philanthropy

- Invest in appropriate mentoring evaluations and research as a standard part of all programmatic investments. If we are going to invest public or private dollars into growing mentoring programs, we should also provide support for evaluation activities that can build our shared knowledge of what is working. This evaluation work should include formative and implementation evaluations, especially for programs in their infancy, to ensure that services are being delivered efficiently and with fidelity. As programs mature, they should have opportunities for meaningful outcome evaluations when appropriate. But in general, funders should prioritize generating knowledge alongside the push to grow programs to scale.

- Embrace research on human-centered outcomes, such as identity development, loneliness, feelings of isolation, belonging, happiness, adaptive coping, and hopefulness. These have often been neglected in our field in pursuit of policy goals (e.g., academic achievement, criminal behavior, employment, etc.).

- Similarly, place greater emphasis on the proximal outcomes we know mentoring relationships are good at producing, rather than prioritizing distal outcomes that are largely beyond the control of a single relationship or program (e.g., valuing outcomes such as improved school belonging and connectedness as a precursor to academic achievement; or tracking improvements in emotional regulation and problem-solving skills as the pathway to reduced delinquent behavior later in life).

- Emphasize research that fits the lifecycle of programs, prioritizing implementation research and mentoring relationship quality goals in the early years of a program, and only moving to rigorous outcome evaluations when programs are mature enough to likely be producing their optimal results.

- Take a continuous improvement approach to programmatic investments. Evaluation results that are less-than-hoped-for are often an opportunity to improve a program, not end the investment.

- Prioritize the replication of proven program models over the creation of completely new initiatives from scratch. Our field has substantial research on specific programs with proven results, but few of them have been scaled optimally in the wake of strong evaluation results.

For Mentoring That Occurs in Programmatic Contexts

- Strengthen program theories of change so that the work of mentors and youth can be focused on prioritized needs and addressed with evidence-based practices. This can improve program results and further support evaluation and research efforts by clarifying what is appropriate to measure.

- Build evaluation into program activities and the program lifecycle — especially process evaluation that can help ensure that services are being delivered as intended and can find efficiencies that maximize resources. Practitioners should embrace a spirit of continuous improvement and data collection that can help strengthen programming and ensure they are meeting the expectations of the youth and families served.

- Invest in data collection and maintenance. Keeping track of important program data takes staff time and skills, as well as adequate technology and tools. We encourage investing in these capacities at a scale that is appropriate to the size and scope of the program.

- Collaborate with researchers whenever possible to answer key questions about the services being offered to youth and families. While youth outcomes are important, *how* the program achieves them is just as important, especially when planning to expand the reach of a program or teach others to do similar work. But we can only grow our scientific understanding when programs partner directly in those efforts.

For Researchers

- Emphasize the types of proximal and human-centered outcomes discussed here and ensure policymakers that those shorter-term and personal markers of growth are also known to improve long-term outcome trajectories and that mentoring programs are contributing to the greater good in the long run even if they focus on modest goals in the present.

- Codify and clearly articulate staff and mentor practices in research studies. Many evaluations examine the influence of mentoring on desired outcomes, but unfortunately provide no or minimal information that would teach others how those outcomes were achieved. Researchers can ensure that their reports of findings also include robust information about the context and methods of those doing the programmatic work, so that others may learn from or replicate their approaches.

- Improve measurement techniques and leverage technology to unlock the "black box" of mentoring relationships. Natural language processing and text analysis, improved qualitative coding, behavioral observations, and other techniques can help us understand mentoring at a deeper level. Moving beyond simple surveys to understand what's happening in relationships will help move the field forward.

- Commit to growing your understanding of and skills for working with communities facing adversities and experiencing marginalization. This is especially true in the use of concepts and language that demonstrate an understanding of those communities (e.g., understanding the definitions and use of SOGIE data and the concept of fluidity when studying mentoring of LGBTQ+ youth). As with mentors themselves, mentoring researchers should come from a place of cultural humility and responsiveness and ensure they do no harm in how they design, conduct, and communicate about their work.

For Intermediary Organizations

- Collaborate with researchers to turn new knowledge into practical tools and trainings for program staff and mentors — encouraging funders to support applied research is critical to this agenda.

- Encourage both programs and funders to commit to rigorous research methodologies so that our field can build stronger evidence and increase contributions to the peer-reviewed scientific literature.

- Provide educational opportunities to policymakers and philanthropic investors so that they can better understand how mentoring can best be applied to social challenges and when other solutions may need to compliment or enhance mentoring efforts. Helping them make wise, appropriate investments in mentoring is essential to growing this movement in achievable ways.

- Engage communities and facilitate public-private partnerships to identify and address mentoring gaps and evaluate progress in meeting collective goals over time.

- Invest more time and energy into the contexts of mentoring that forms naturally, including expanding research on strategies to grow mentoring relationships organically in institutions and communities.

- Support continuous program improvement efforts so that by the time a program rigorously evaluates its outcomes, it is providing the best services it can.

And for all stakeholders in the mentoring movement, we ask that you commit to promoting and encouraging investment in research that emphasizes human-centered outcomes. While we all want young people to succeed, what is most important is that they feel *loved*, *cared for*, and *whole*. Feeling secure in these ways is the starting point for any success in life. If we can invest in and prioritize those human-centered outcomes of connectedness and belonging, the more concrete achievement-related outcomes will follow because we will have built a not only a better set of mentoring services, but a culture and society that nurtures every young person and values what they uniquely have to offer the world one mentoring relationship at a time.

MENTOR

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