

Workplace mentoring:

A quick guide for employers

A guide developed by Social Ventures Australia (SVA) as part of the [Employer Innovation Lab](#), a targeted program to increase workforce participation of young people facing barriers to employment.

What is workplace mentoring?

Mentoring is a professional relationship between a more experienced person (the mentor) and a less experienced person (the mentee), designed to support the mentee's development and confidence at work.

A mentor can provide two types of support:

- Career guidance, helping the mentee grow skills, navigate opportunities, and build networks.
- Personal support, helping the mentee feel more confident, capable and connected at work.

Mentoring can be formal (with training, structure, and regular check-ins) or informal (peer-based or experience-based support). Programs may be one-on-one, or group based.

This isn't a supervisory relationship – the mentor doesn't have authority over the mentee. Instead, their role is to listen, guide and support. Mentors can also open doors by making connections and offering sponsorships.

Mentoring vs coaching:

- Coaching is short-term and task-focused, helping someone improve specific skills or performance.
- Mentoring is broader and longer-term, supporting confidence, career growth and connection. They're different but can work well together.

Why mentoring matters



What are the benefits?

Workplace mentoring delivers practical outcomes for everyone involved:

- **For the mentee:** faster skill development, greater confidence, better promotion prospects, and stronger job satisfaction.
- **For the mentor:** renewed purpose, enhanced leadership skills, and personal growth.
- **For the organisation:** improved staff retention, increased engagement, and a stronger culture of learning and inclusion.



What research says

Research strongly supports workplace mentoring as a way to retain and support young employees. Here's what evidence shows:

- A range of models (like group mentoring or e-mentoring) can work, but one-on-one mentoring often has the biggest impact.
- A 'constellation' of mentors (e.g. multiple mentors across areas) can increase support and flexibility for mentees.
- Mentoring is especially helpful for those who may struggle with workplace expectations, literacy /numeracy, or confidence.

- Shared values, interests, and communication styles are more important than matching on demographics like age or background.
- Cultural awareness matters; mentors should understand and respect cross-cultural differences.
- Female mentors can be particularly supportive for mentees in male-dominated industries.
- Mentoring doesn't work when mentors are unavailable, unclear in their guidance, or set unrealistic expectations.



Tips for setting up a mentoring program

If you're building a mentoring program, start with these five steps.



Planning & set up

- Do a needs assessment and get buy-in from middle and senior management.
- Check that the program fits your existing HR systems and values.
- Nominate a staff member to coordinate and support the program.



Training mentors

- Provide simple training session or toolkit to guide mentors.
- Focus on listening, goal setting, feedback, and setting boundaries.
- Make it practical and focused on real workplace challenges.



Recruiting participants

- Decide who the program is for (e.g. new hires, young staff, return-to-work employees).
- Set clear screening criteria.
- Invite and confirm participants.



Monitoring & evaluation

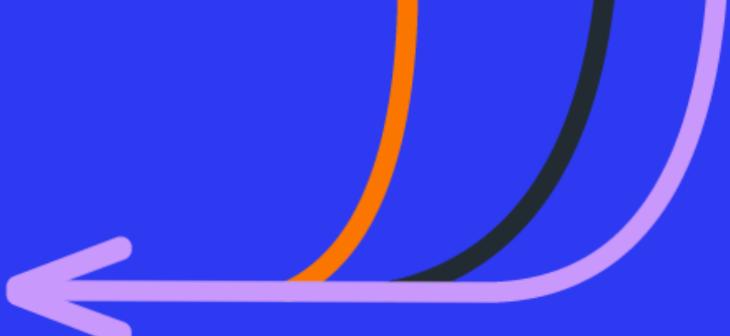
- Check-in regularly using surveys or informal chats.
- Track outcomes like satisfaction, retention or performance.
- Create a clear process for resolving issues if mentoring stalls.
- Use feedback to tweak and improve the program over time.



Matching mentors & mentees

- Match people based on shared goals, communication styles, and preferences.
- Avoid focusing only on age or background, values and fit matter more.
- Record expectations, roles, and communication preferences clearly.

Further reading



- [How Consep's Young Starters program is building careers.](#)
- [Leading to unlock potential \(2022\). A user-friendly guide by Employment & Workplace Relations \(Australia\).](#)
- [Peer mentoring handbook. The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania. A user-friendly guide to set up a mentoring program.](#)

This guide is developed for the SVA Employer Innovation Lab, drawing on high-quality academic and non-academic sources. It is part of a broader suite of support from the SVA [Employer Innovation Lab](#). If you're designing your mentoring program or want tailored advice, reach out to our team careerladder@socialventures.org.au.