Employment Mentoring Manual

National Research & Training Center
on Blindness & Low Vision

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Introduction

Approximately 40% of high school students who are blind/visually impaired attend a 4-year college—the highest rate of post-secondary school attendance among students with disabilities.[1] Unfortunately for many of these students, a college degree does not always lead to rewarding careers in their chosen professions. College students with visual impairments may lack a clear understanding of what specific careers require on a day-to-day basis. Students may also lack understanding about how their blindness could impact job seeking activities and on-the-job performance. Students will often graduate from college without having had the chance to get on-the-job experiences. Graduates may have difficulty finding employment or be underemployed.

To improve the employment success rate of graduates, one effective strategy is for students to connect with peer mentors in their field of study. Mentors can help students develop skills, knowledge, and motivation as they transition from college into employment.

The Mentoring Relationship

What is Mentoring?

A successful, supportive mentoring relationship exists between a young adult and, usually, an older person who has experienced some of the same situations the young adult is currently facing. The experienced mentor offers support, guidance, and assistance as the young adult progresses through a difficult time period or takes on a new role in life, such as finding employment after graduation from post-secondary school. Mentors act as guides to mentees in a structured, usually time-limited, one-on-one relationship that focuses on the needs of the mentee. Mentors should encourage

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[1] Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., & Knokey, A. (2009). *The post-high school outcomes of youth with disabilities up to 4 years after high school: A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

mentees to develop to their fullest potential, while at the same time guiding them to set and achieve realistic goals.

Benefits of Mentoring for Students with Blindness or Low Vision

College students who are blind can greatly benefit from connecting with mentors who are also blind and who have experience in the students' professional field of interest. Mentors and students can participate in career related discussions and activities to help students learn about job skills that are needed to be successful.
Mentors can:

- help students develop career related goals
- provide a job shadowing experience for students
- help with job seeking and job placement activities
- discuss blindness related topics specific to their career field
- provide information about accommodations on the job
- give tips for interviewing and disability disclosure
- coach how to network with professionals in their chosen field
- provide encouragement and support for the job seeking process

A mentoring relationship can increase the likelihood of students with visual impairments entering into a successful career in their field of choice after graduation from college. This manual will provide guidance for a successful mentor/mentee relationship, with sections relevant to mentors and mentees and suggestions for beneficial discussion topics and activities.

The NRTC Employment Mentoring Project

From January 2012 to January 2015, the NRTC conducted a research project with the mission to connect college students who were blind or visually impaired with mentors in the students' professional fields of interest. We assigned mentor and student pairs, and gave them the set of guidelines and recommendations listed herein. We then monitored student progress on areas such as job seeking skills and self-efficacy, job placement, and job satisfaction. Feedback from mentors and students involved with the

project was quite positive, and students and mentors reported finding the experience to be very rewarding.

Getting Started

Mentoring relationships can be very rewarding for both partners, and some may go on indefinitely. However, an initial, formalized mentoring relationship for a specific time in the mentee's life should begin with an established timeline, so that both the mentor and mentee have an understanding of the length of commitment involved. At the end of that established time, a continued, more informal relationship can be negotiated, if both parties agree. For example, in the NRTC mentoring project we established that mentors and mentees would work together for one year, just preceding and through the time the student graduated college.

When locating and selecting a mentor or mentee, the following issues may need to be considered:

- Do the potential mentors/mentees work in the same or a very similar fields? Will the job duties be comparable enough to require the same sets of skills and abilities? For mentees, how long has the potential mentor been employed in the field in which the mentee wants to work?

- Does the mentor/mentee live within easy traveling distance? If not, will a distance relationship be agreeable to both?

- What is the mentor/mentee's schedule like? Will they have free time that matches up with their partner's schedule for face-to-face or voice contact?

- Are the mentor/mentee's levels of vision loss similar? Will the mentor/mentee be able to share information about the same sorts of technologies and accommodations?

- What is the mentor/mentee's current highest level of education? For mentees, is the mentor's level of education similar to that which the mentee's career will require? For mentors, is the mentee close to a transition point where the mentor can provide the most assistance?

- For mentees, is the mentor currently employed, unemployed, or retired? Consider schedule as well as job shadowing opportunities this may affect.

Recommendations for the Mentoring Relationship

Recommended Responsibilities within the Mentoring Relationship

I. Mentors

- Maintain regular contact with mentee—ideally at least biweekly.
- Meet with mentee face to face if possible—ideally at least monthly.
- Provide a job shadowing experience for mentee, if possible.
- Engage in suggested discussion topics and activities with mentee.
- Provide valuable resources to assist the mentee in networking, finding and applying for positions, and preparing themselves for employment.
- Serve as a positive role model for mentee.
- Discuss the role of Vocational Rehabilitation in career services.

II. Mentees

- Maintain regular contact with mentor—ideally at least biweekly.
- Meet with mentor face to face if possible—ideally at least monthly.
- Travel to the mentor's job site to job shadow, if available.
- Engage in suggested discussion topics and activities with mentor.
- Work with mentor to set career goals and work toward accomplishing them.
- Talk with mentor about the role of Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Recommended Codes of Conduct

I. Mentors

- Get to know your mentee. Tell your mentee a little about yourself.
- Provide guidance based on your experience in finding and maintaining employment. Be positive, supportive, and enthusiastic!
- Set aside time for the mentoring relationship, and respond to correspondence from your mentee in a timely manner.
- Don't give personal advice of a controversial nature; for example: dating, politics, family matters.
- Think of ways to problem-solve together. Listen carefully and offer possible solutions without passing judgment.

- Respect the mentee as a unique individual, giving constructive feedback when needed. Avoid criticizing, preaching, or lecturing your mentee. Don't try to be a parent, disciplinarian, therapist, or anything else besides an effective mentor and friend.

- Remember that persons who are blind have different experiences and values, and accommodations are not one size fits all. Your mentee may have different, possibly more up-to-date, ideas of accomplishing tasks. By listening and asking the mentee to demonstrate their ideas, you may even learn a new trick or two!

- Be respectful of your mentee's time. Don't be late or miss appointments!

- Encourage mentees to discuss concerns and ask questions.

- Avoid complaining about your own problems to your mentee.

- Allow your mentee to share responsibility in the mentoring process. Don't try to take over your mentee's work or duties.

- Don't expect your mentee to agree with or align with your own personal beliefs or values.

- Don't pressure mentees to join any specific consumer group over another (i.e., ACB, NFB, etc.); allow room for personal choice.

- Contact the NRTC or other support organizations when you have questions or need support. NRTC: (662) 325-2001 or www.blind.msstate.edu or www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu

II. Mentees

- Get to know your mentor. Tell your mentor a little about yourself and your career goals.

- Be open to advice and guidance from your mentor.

- Be positive, enthusiastic, and willing to participate in discussions and activities.

- Set aside time for the mentoring relationship, and respond to correspondence from your mentor in a timely manner.

- Ask your mentor questions and be an active participant in the mentoring process.

- Respect your mentor as an individual.

- Be respectful of your mentor's time. Don't be late or miss appointments!

- Try to keep your relationship centered on employment and career oriented tasks. The mentor is not a therapist or substitute parent, but they can offer advice on a variety of job-related topics including communications, professionalism, and job seeking.

- Contact the NRTC or other support organizations when you have questions or need support. NRTC: (662) 325-2001 or www.blind.msstate.edu or www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu

Recommended Discussion Topics on Working with Visual Impairment

I. Accommodation Planning:

- Mentor can discuss with mentee what accommodations specific to their career are needed on a day-to-day basis, and the procedure for requesting accommodations on the job.

- Questions to Consider:

  a. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of blindness?

  b. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?

- Accommodation Ideas:

  a. Reading Printed Materials:

     i. Auditory versions of printed documents.

     ii. Braille formatted documents.

     iii. Reformatted document that displays as accessible Web page.

     iv. The Kurzweil-National Federation of the Blind (K-NFB) Reader, which takes a picture of a text document and reads the contents of the printed document in clear synthetic speech.

     v. Optical character recognition (OCR), which scans printed text and provides a synthetic speech output or text-based computer file. These are sometimes referred to as reading machines. It can be a stand-alone machine or a system attached to a computer.

     vi. Closed Circuit Television System or electronic magnification devices for persons with low vision.

     vii. Qualified human reader.

        viii.   Tactile graphic document.

b. Accessing Computer Information:

      i.   Screen reading software.

      ii. Computer braille display.

      iii. Computer magnification system.

      iv. Qualified human reader.

c. Writing Notes and Completing Forms:

      i.   Personal data assistants, note-takers, and laptops with speech output or braille display.

      ii. Digital recorder—for personal notes that can later be transcribed.

      iii. Brailler, or braille slate and stylus.

      iv. Electronic notes that can be reproduced onto a braille printer or embosser.

      v. Qualified human reader/scribe.

d. Accessing a Telephone:

      i.   Telephone light sensor, which is held over a phone line to indicate if a line is lit steady or blinking.

      ii. Talking telephone console indicators and message displays.

      iii. Talking caller IDs.

e. Accommodations for the workplace are not limited to technology; they can also be work or workplace modifications—location of desk, lighting of workspace, or assignment of some negotiable duties, for example. Discuss ways this can be addressed with employers.

f. Online resources:

      i.   Job Accommodations Network (JAN) - Contains information and examples of types of accommodations that may be necessary for certain jobs and disabilities. www.askjan.org

      ii. National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) - A listing of links to vendors who provide accommodation products and services. www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/information-and-resources/cl

      iii. ADA Fact Sheet - including accommodations, procedures for asking for accommodations, etc. www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_vision.cfm

II. Blindness Skills

- Mentor can discuss blindness skills needed which are specific to their career and suggest ways to improve blindness skills. Would mentee benefit from more blindness skills training (i.e., braille, cane skills)? If so, where can the mentee get this training?

- Questions to consider:

  a. Does the mentee read braille?

  b. Does the mentee use a cane, navigational aid, or dog guide, or a combination of these to assist with mobility?

  c. Is the mentee comfortable with their mobility method and their ability to travel independently?

  d. Does the mentee use or need GPS and wayfinding?

- Online resources:

  a. NTAC - A complete state-by-state list of Technology Act service providers: www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/information-and-resources/tasp

  b. NTAC - A list of Vocational Rehabilitation agencies by state: www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/information-and-resources/ncsab

  c. American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) - A database of assistive technology products: www.afb.org/prodmain.asp

  d. The Hadley School for the Blind - Offers a wide range of correspondence courses free of charge to individuals who are legally blind. Courses to work on blindness skills are under the headings of 'Independent Living' and 'Braille and Braille Readiness', and many other potential topics of interest can be found under other headings in this list: www.hadley.edu/showCourseListing.asp?program=ACE

     Also, check out the 'Seminars @ Hadley' and 'Access Past Seminars' links to find 1-hour audio podcasts on many related subjects: www.hadley.edu

III. Disclosure

- How and when should mentee disclose blindness in career related situations, (e.g., job interviews, conferences, etc.).

- Things to consider:

  a. Encourage mentee to practice effective communication of their disability, needs, skills, and abilities.

    b. If work or school information indicates blindness, discuss how to address this.

- Online Resources:

    a. Virginia Commonwealth University's Disclosure Decisions Fact Sheet. www.tiny.cc/disclosure-factsheet

    b. The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A workbook for youth with disabilities, available at www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure

    c. Youth, Disclosure, and the Workplace Why, When, What and How, available at www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/ydw.htm

IV. Social skills

- Mentor can discuss how he/she has been successful in social situations both at work and in day-to-day activities. Give mentee tips and advice on how to navigate different social situations - especially when first starting their job.

- Be sure to discuss the role of social media, especially with regard to how personal social media accounts can potentially impact employment.

- Online Resources:

    a. The Hadley School for the Blind - Some courses related to social skills are under the heading 'Independent Living': www.hadley.edu/showCourseListing.asp?program=ACE

    Under 'Seminars @ Hadley' and 'Access Past Seminars' links you can also find hour-long podcasts on topics such as jump starting your social life, dating, networking with Facebook, and more: www.hadley.edu

    b. The Hatlen Center for the Blind - A social skills checklist: www.hcblind.org/curriculum/social-skills-checklist

V. Transfer of technology skills

- Mentor/mentees can discuss what technology skills mentee has developed while in college and how these skills will transfer over to the work setting.

- Discuss getting up to date technology and training.

- Discuss using e-mail.

- Discuss using accessibility software.

- Online Resource:

The Hadley School for the Blind – Courses related to technology skills are under the heading 'Technology':
www.hadley.edu/showCourseListing.asp?program=ACE

Under 'Seminars @ Hadley' and 'Access Past Seminars' links you can also find hour-long podcasts on topics such as accessibility and technology: www.hadley.edu

VI. Transportation skills

- Mentor can discuss what public transportation options are available to get to and from work, grocery store, social events, etc.

  a. Discuss options together like: taxis, public transportation, carpooling, walking, hired and volunteer drivers, paratransit, and shuttles.

- Questions to consider:

  a. How has the mentor navigated the problem of transportation in their life?

  b. If the mentee has to move to a new area to get work, what strategies will he/she use to overcome transportation barriers?

- Online Resource:

  Transportation Guide from The NRTC available at:
  www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/transportation

Recommended Job Seeking Activities

I. Career Planning

- Mentor can help mentee develop career related goals.

- Questions to consider:

  a. What type of job does the mentee wish to obtain after graduation?
  b. What kind of specialties are there within the mentee's chosen career area? What are the requirements to get into these specialty areas?

  c. How soon does the mentee want to start work after graduation?

  d. What kind of work experience does the mentee have that relates to their chosen career area?

  e. Has the mentee signed up for services at his/her university's career center? These services can begin long before graduation.

- Online Resources:

  a. Career Advantage from the NRTC - This career exploration tool is free of charge and is available at: www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/online-employment-preparation

  b. AFB CareerConnect Job Seeker's Toolkit - CareerConnect's Job Seeker's Toolkit is an accessible, self-paced, and free online course that helps users develop skills and tools that last a lifetime. The course covers self-awareness, career exploration tools, the preliminary employment process, the interview, and maintaining employment. Mentors and mentees can use the toolkit as a way to work through the job seeking process together: www.tiny.cc/career-connect-toolkit

II. Job Shadowing

- Mentee can engage in a job shadowing experience, going to the mentor's place of work in order to participate in job related activities and observe mentor's work day.

- Possible activities:

  a. Use office technology, such as copiers, fax machines, etc.

  b. Observe mentor engaging in practice professions.

  c. Assist in daily work maintenance and organizing practices.

III. Job Seeking Skills

- Mentor can assist mentee in conducting online job searches and filling out online applications.

- Online resources:

  a. AFB Career Connect Conducting a Job Search - These articles will help you conduct a more efficient job search, with tips on organizing your work space, managing time effectively, and finding job leads. www.tiny.cc/career-connect-job-search

  b. Video: A Hire Vision - What Employers Want to Know About Hiring Visually Impaired Workers. www.tiny.cc/employer-perspective

- Filling out an on-line or kiosk application

a. Since many of these are not accessible, encourage the student to find a qualified reader/scribe to assist in filling these out without typing and spelling errors.

b. Discuss pros and cons of having Vocational Rehabilitation representative contact employers about non-accessible job application systems.

IV. **Job Placement Assistance**

- Mentor can guide mentee in networking activities needed for job placement.

- Mentor can help mentee identify Vocational Rehabilitation services available. A complete state-by-state list of contact information for Rehabilitation Service Providers is available on the NRTC website: www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/information-and-resources/ncsab

- Mentor can guide mentee in joining professional organizations.

- Mentor can help mentee contact the university career center to identify services available, especially identifying employers who are looking for workers with disabilities such as federal agencies and federal contractors through the workforce recruitment program at www.wrp.jobs/employers

- Online Resources:

  a. Career Advantage from the NRTC - This career exploration tool is free of charge and is available at www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/online-employment-preparation

  b. AFB Career Connect: Getting Hired - These articles help you navigate the path to a new job. In addition to interviewing tips, learn about when to disclose your disability, how to negotiate assistance on the job, and more. www.tiny.cc/getting-hired

  c. Employment Assistance Referral Network - The U.S. Department of Labor site seeks to match employers with job seekers who are disabled; it offers various types of technical assistance to those wishing to employ people with disabilities. www.askearn.org

  d. CareerOneStop - CareerOneStop assists job seekers with and without disabilities in finding employment through job banks, publications, and other resources. www.servicelocator.org

Resource Sheet for Job Seekers

ADA Fact Sheet – www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_vision.cfm Learn about requesting reasonable accommodations, undue hardship, and more

AFB Career Connect – www.afb.org/info/living-with-vision-loss/for-job-seekers/12 Find blind mentors, use career exploration tools in the job seeker's toolkit.

CareerOneStop – www.servicelocator.org Find job centers in your community

Disability Disclosure – The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A workbook for youth with disabilities, available at www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure.

Employment Assistance Referral Network – www.askearn.org The Department of Labor seeks to match employers with job seekers who are disabled.

Hadley School for the Blind – www.hadley.edu Free courses on topics: Finding employment, workplace skills, using technology, blindness skills, and more.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) – www.askjan.org Information and examples of accommodations for persons with disabilities on the job.

The NRTC on Blindness and Low Vision – www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu

List of vocational services by state – www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/information-and-resources/ncsab

Transportation Guide – www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/transportation-guide

Career Advantage (course) – www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/online-employment-preparation

Transition Activity Calendar – www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/consumers/tac

Online Career Expo – www.gettinghired.com Bridging the gap between job seekers and employers.