

I MENTORING/SPONSORSHIP

The most important aspects of a successful mentoring program are that it be formal and cross-cultural, that mentors and mentees be given cultural-competence training, and that there be checkpoints and metrics to assess success. Mentoring is absolutely key to [retention of high-potentials](#) from underrepresented groups, according to DiversityInc Top 50 data and interviews with several companies.

- **Formal vs. Informal:** All of the DiversityInc Top 50 companies now have formal mentoring (compared with 72 percent in 2005). They have learned that informal mentoring can't be controlled and can lead to employees' getting the wrong messages from disgruntled mentors. [Formal mentoring](#) means the company assigns and monitors pairs, creating cross-cultural (by race, ethnicity, gender, orientation and disability) pairings as much as possible to ensure bidirectional learning. It's also important to reach the maximum number of managers so the program has significant impact.
- **Cultural-Competence Training:** If mentors and mentees aren't aware of pitfalls, as demonstrated in our popular [Things NOT to Say](#) series, they can inadvertently offend each other and torpedo the relationship. For specific ideas on best ways to mentor women, see [Women Execs: What Was Your Best Mentoring Advice?](#)
- **Checkpoints and Metrics:** Without metrics to assess success, your organization has no way to understand what is working and what is not or to make the case for more resources for the initiative. The most successful metrics are engagement, retention and promotions compared with those not participating in the program, broken down by race, ethnicity and gender.
- **Sponsorship:** While you can't assign protégés, companies increasingly are mandating that their senior executives [must sponsor](#) at least one high-potential from an underrepresented group, and linking that to the executive's compensation.

Discussion Questions for Staff

» **What percentage of your managers is your mentoring program reaching? Are you able to include virtual mentoring to reach managers in remote locations?**

Assess whether your program has maximum impact or is just affecting a few people. If you have limited mentees, are you ensuring that those who are not invited to participate remain engaged?

» **How are you ensuring as many cross-cultural pairings as possible? What types of cultural-competence training are you offering mentors and mentees? What is your process if a mentor or mentee relationship isn't working out?**

Examine the racial/gender breakdown of your pairings and whether there is sufficient mix. Also factor in orientation and disability if possible. Assess the type of training you are offering and whether it is effectively eliminating cultural barriers. Examine the engagement, retention and promotion rates of mentees versus those who have not participated and share the results with senior management.

» **Have you considered sponsorship? If so, how are you encouraging your senior executives to find cross-cultural protégés?**

Do your executives understand the [difference between mentors and sponsors](#)? Are you exposing them to high-potentials from underrepresented groups? Are you giving them a toolkit or guidelines on effective sponsorship as well as cultural-competence training?