

Mentoring in Higher Education IT, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUGUST 2019

Key Findings

- **Seventy-one percent of higher education IT mentors and 86% of mentees (or protégés) reported that mentoring had made a moderate or great contribution to their professional development.** About 60% of higher education IT mentors have aspirations for IT executive leadership. Fifty-one percent of mentees were in mentoring relationships described as “senior executive mentor, aspiring executive mentee,” suggesting that mentees view mentoring relationships as a pathway to executive leadership. The most frequently cited benefit of mentoring (cited by around 70% of CIOs, managers, and staff) was having a “safe space/sounding board for problems and challenges.”
- **Forty-one percent of those surveyed want to be in a mentoring relationship but are not currently in one.** Overall, more higher education IT employees are engaged as mentors than as protégés, and few employees have no interest in engaging in a mentoring relationship.
- **One-third of all mentoring relationships developed from mentee requests.** This finding suggests that the responsibility likely is placed on mentees to initiate the relationship, which could contribute to the low numbers of higher education IT employees who are mentees and the high numbers of employees who desire to be in a mentoring relationship but are not.
- **Women are active in mentoring relationships at rates similar to those of men.** Although women are in the minority among higher education IT employees, their rate of engagement in mentoring indicates a strong need among this underrepresented population.
- **Women (31%) and men (34%) served as mentors at similar rates, and mentoring relationships most often are between members of the same gender.** Same-gender mentors can offer specific guidance and support in a male-majority field, but mixed-gender mentoring can contribute to a more inclusive working environment due to male mentors engaging with and promoting their female mentees.
- **Fifty-one percent of Millennial employees were not in a mentoring relationship but wanted to be.** Millennials expect to engage in mentoring within their workplace. To attract, retain, and grow talent, higher education IT needs to enable mentoring relationships for Millennial employees.

- **The majority of mentors (57%) and protégés (82%) work at the same institution.** CIOs had the largest percentage of mentees and mentors working at another institution or outside higher education IT, likely due to career pathways of CIOs and the cross-institutional relationships that develop through their careers. Smaller institutions and BA and AA institutions, compared with other institution types, had larger numbers of mentees working at another institution, likely due to their smaller IT departments.
- **Forty percent of all mentoring relationships were characterized as peer mentoring, followed by mentees who aspire to executive positions and who have current executives as mentors (31%).** Peer mentoring can be a means for employees at the same career stage to support each other in their career goals. Engaging in a mentoring relationship may also be perceived as a pathway to IT executive leadership, attesting to the perceived importance of mentoring among higher education IT employees.
- **A majority of mentors (74%) and mentees (65%) met either once a week or once a month.** Navigating appropriate time frames for mentoring meetings may depend on the individual needs of both parties but should be incorporated into employees' workflow.

Recommendations

- **Encourage and sustain mentoring at your institution by communicating its value and how relationships are a catalyst for change for both mentors and protégés.** Higher education IT professionals are already sold on the value of mentoring, but fewer are engaged in mentoring relationships than wish to be. Emphasize with employees that mentoring can occur casually and organically with established professional networks and can be facilitated through attendance at networking events (such as conferences). Tap into the potential on your campus.
- **Cultivate partners to aid in establishing mentoring programs.** Work with HR within your institution, collaborate with professional associations and consortia outside your institution, and explore interest among nearby institutions and corporations to pilot cross-organizational mentoring.
- **Encourage potential mentors to seek out protégés.** The responsibility of seeking a mentoring relationship should not fall solely on would-be protégés. This responsibility of seeking a mentor may create barriers to successfully engaging in mentoring relationships or decrease opportunities among young or newly hired staff. Potential mentors should seek out mentees by using both formal and informal means.
- **Create formal mentoring programs to enable employees to engage in personal and professional development guided by the structure of the organization.** Formal programs offer the opportunity to help protégés and mentors gain a better understanding of organizational culture, broaden their perspectives, increase leadership skills, and increase levels of employee engagement and retention.
- **Prioritize mentoring for underrepresented groups in higher education IT.** For women, ethnic minorities, and Millennials, this is particularly important if higher education IT seeks to increase

diversity, increase retention, grow its own leaders, and ensure a workforce that is able to fill the gaps stemming from looming Baby Boomer retirements.

- **Be open to developing a mentoring relationship with someone who differs in ethnicity, gender, or age—it can increase insights and perspectives on others’ experiences in the workforce.** It may also increase retention and job satisfaction among underrepresented groups in the higher education IT workforce. Reverse mentoring may offer substantial insights into other generations’ perspectives and skill sets.
- **Look outside your institution and engage with your professional network in order to cast a wide net for mentoring opportunities.** When seeking a mentor or protégé, consider someone outside your institution. Such individuals can offer unique and fresh perspectives without fear of reprisal for honest communication regarding careers and organizational challenges.
- **Consider group or peer mentoring as an option.** If a one-on-one relationship can’t be initiated, consider peer mentoring with colleagues sharing the same experiences, challenges, and goals. Group mentoring may be helpful for cohorts of employees who wish to be engaged in a more collaborative mentoring process, and it can maximize the time of senior institutional leaders who seek to mentor.
- **Use technology to maximize available mentoring relationship opportunities.** Taking advantage of platforms such as Skype, Zoom, Hangouts, or other digital tools can create and facilitate connections and build and support rapport when faced with geographic or scheduling barriers.
- **Identify the time frames for meeting with your mentor or protégé that work for both of you.** There’s no hard and fast rule for how often mentors and protégés should meet. Negotiate this time on the basis of need and other responsibilities. Keep in mind, however, that more frequent meetings are generally associated with more successful mentoring relationships.