

SLAMentorship Program Student Guide

By Eliza Meketon

Plan Ahead

I know this sounds tedious and boring, and it is, but incredibly necessary if you want your program to even have a shot at being successful. Now I know that making google forms, sending 15 emails to the same people within a five day period sounds ridiculous, and while it is true that the initial feeling of importance and adulthood will eventually, disappear and all that you will be left with is a heap ton of unfinished drafts and a grotesque inbox, the feeling of having someone send you the “go ahead” to pursue whatever it is you need to get accomplished is what at the end of the day makes it all worth it. The thing that must be noted about making this mentorship program work is to come to the realization that at the end of the day this is just a really big, really annoying, an extended project and as we all know, projects need some ground work to be laid out first enable to make the transition processes smoother and more efficient.

You need to decide what your's and everyone else's role will be. Sure there will be times in which you will pull the majority of the weight, and sure, you will need someone to talk you off the ledge at times but you will soon find out that it is really all worth it. The difference you will make in these kid's lives will make you forget about all that monotonous paperwork. Most importantly though you will discover that you have allies that want you to succeed. This is not going to be easy and not all the pieces will fit together, but that is where scissors and a little glue come in handy. Maybe it will help you if you understand just how clueless I was when I walked into my personal

mentor's office and told her my original idea for my capstone. My idea took a completely different form in the beginning stages.

It was a little less thought out, a little less organized, and a little less realistic. Over the next couple months, I started to really trim the fat of my project. I learned that there really is something to finding out what you don't want, rather than what you do. You can get a lot more accomplished if you just give yourself some time to make alterations and changes. This brings me to next bit of advice which is that first ideas are never the ones you end up with.

Be Flexible

Even though the probability of you having to start from scratch each session is relatively low, the fact of the matter is, the chance of everything going your way every time is even more unlikely. There are going to be times in which only half of the mentors show up, times in which your mentees are so shy they barely utter a sentence, and times that no one really knows what to do. So relax, take a breath and objectively look at the situation and make a well-informed decision. In full honesty, this chapter should have been called "Keep your cool" because if you're anything like me and you need everything to go right for you not to have a total meltdown, then having things blow up in your face isn't going to be a fun rollercoaster ride for you.

Unfortunately, if you want to lead this, you are going to need to chill the frick down and just go with the flow. Every day I would come in with these huge expectations that the mentors and I would somehow change these fifth graders life in some big dramatic way. Now obviously we weren't able to completely change these

kids worlds, but what we were able to do is make these kids feel listened to, cared for, and happy for two hours every Wednesday, and that is something to truly be proud of.

Now being flexible is also imperative when working with these kids. Now middle schoolers are famously known for not doing what you want them to do, so your patience level is going to have to increase by about a thousand percent. Being there mentor means you're going to be spending quite a lot of time with these children, so you might end up developing a genuine relationship with them, and it might become difficult to discipline them and get them to focus on a task rather than play a game with you. However, you must be able to find a way to make sure that they are enjoying their time with you, but are also being productive and making the most of their time as well as yours. So if you end up having to make a game of ninja or online free time as a reward for getting an assignment done, then that, is just what you are going to have to do.

Do Your Research

As I have mentioned before, I have made several mistakes, but like Thomas Edison said when he was inventing the lightbulb "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." That sentiment right there is what is important to keep in mind when organizing this program. You will never fail to work on this program because just by trying in the first place, you have already completed the first step needed to succeed. The next step involves actually being truthful with the limitations of your skillsets. Meaning, that as perfect as you are, there are some things that you just don't know, such as teaching mentors peer mediations skills.

For this, you might be able to reach out to someone who works at Big Brother Big Sister, our school counselor, counselors at other schools, and so on. Luckily for you, we live in the golden age of information, meaning that all the stats, facts, and tips can be found in a million different ways.

I think the thing I regret the most is not asking enough people for help when I needed it. A lot of the time I felt really overwhelmed because people were asking me questions that I just didn't know the answer to. I was very stubborn and wanted to handle all the organization and issues by myself and I think that is what led to so many mishaps and unproductive sessions. Luckily for you, I made these mistakes so that way you wouldn't have to. I have created all the questionnaires, established roots at the middle school, and made all the necessary selection forms. The groundwork has been laid down and all that is needed to be done is work hard and try to make this program as an effective and helpful as possible.

Make Allies Because You Will Need Them

I think this is honestly one of the most important lessons that I learned over the course of this program is that no one really ever achieves anything alone. I was lucky enough to have a lot of people helping me to create this project and make it such a successful program. Not only did I have our school counselor on my side making sure that I stayed on task, but I also had my advisor helping me deal with the emotional struggles that I encountered during this very stressful process.

Most importantly though I had a friend and ally at the middle school named Ms.

Ironside who really helped me make establish roots at the middle school. I also had an amazing group of mentors who worked very hard and cared a lot about their mentees and made sure that they felt cared for and listened to.

Conclusion

In the end you will most likely make a lot of mistakes, but you will also make a lot of breakthroughs and impact a lot of lives in small, yet significant ways. I wish you the best of luck.

-Eliza

Link to Mentors Selection Form:

https://docs.google.com/a/slabeeber.org/forms/d/1d8ZF8L5joKo-UvAXonsZy_afqwXm8JiAurSXfpPyXK4/edit?usp=sharing

Link to Mentor Expectations Form:

https://docs.google.com/a/slabeeber.org/document/d/1bAA6bDPMd_345rlUz_nFkIr_L58rVUkFgxge1PHvyg/edit?usp=sharing

Link to Starting Mentor, Middle School Student, and Advisor Survey:

https://docs.google.com/a/slabeeber.org/document/d/11hWeMxFxsoMoZhipfnU7g1QCBR4T_Z7hUT_C6rbgzmo/edit?usp=sharing

Link to Ending Advisor and Middle School Student Survey:

<https://docs.google.com/a/slabeeber.org/document/d/1yPpBZRfmrC5GvxlxKVvzhUoU7tLzGT06ktbfEbd9X8/edit?usp=sharing>

Link to Daily Questionnaire:

<https://docs.google.com/a/slabeeber.org/document/d/1JbA-wUc1woa-HT4JAMloTBgHBcNQoghYKLFxhe69Uec/edit?usp=sharing>