



MLDC Research Areas

Definition of Diversity
Legal Implications
Outreach & Recruiting
Leadership & Training
Branching & Assignments
Promotion
Retention
Implementation & Accountability
Metrics
National Guard & Reserve

This issue paper aims to aid in the deliberations of the MLDC. It does not contain the recommendations of the MLDC.

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Mentoring Programs Across the Services

Abstract

Concern about the career advancement of female and minority servicemembers cuts across several MLDC charter tasks. One of the ways in which organizations, including the Services, address issues of career advancement and demographic diversity is through the development of mentoring programs. During the November 2009 MLDC meeting, Service representatives presented briefings that addressed the role of mentoring programs in improving the diversity of future leadership in their Services. This issue paper summarizes the information provided in those November briefings and adds supplemental, publicly available information on the Service programs. Overall, the briefings and supplemental information showed that the Services believe that mentoring can address diversity by providing all members with equal access to mentors, and both the Navy and the Coast Guard clearly connect their mentoring programs to their diversity strategies. The briefings and supplemental information also showed that, across the Services, mentoring programs varied in terms of their level of development and degree of formality for mentoring relationships. Perhaps most importantly, we do not know whether and how the Services' mentoring programs are meeting either their goal of supplying equal access to mentors or their ultimate goal of improving the career advancement of all servicemembers—women, minorities, and white men alike.

Several charter tasks for the MLDC focus on demographic diversity and career advancement, including servicemember access to assignments designated for high-potential leaders. One of the main reasons why organizations establish and support mentoring programs is to help personnel develop and advance in their careers, which includes positioning themselves to be selected for these “career-enhancing” assignments.

During the November 2009 MLDC meeting, Service representatives presented briefings that addressed the role their Services' mentoring programs play in improving the diversity of future leadership.¹ This issue paper (IP) provides an overview of the briefings and of supplemental, publicly available information about the Services' mentoring programs. It summarizes the mentoring programs in terms of the following:

- goals and assumptions
- features (i.e., tools and activities)
- measures of effectiveness.²

Formal Versus Informal Mentoring

The information presented in this IP shows that the Services rely on a mix of formal and informal mentoring programs. Because there has been some debate over the relative effectiveness of the two approaches to mentoring, we begin with a discussion of what is known about formal versus informal mentoring.

As noted in a previous IP (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010), there has been concern by policymakers, organizational leaders, and researchers that women and racial/ethnic minorities lack access to high-quality mentoring relationships. Given this concern, many organizations have created formal mentoring programs to ensure that these employees, who may not be well represented among leaders and managers in many organizations, have access to mentors who can help them advance their careers (Riche, Kraus, & Hodari, 2007).

There has also been concern that formal mentoring relationships are not as beneficial to mentees as informal mentoring relationships. Research shows, however, that both formal and informal mentoring relationships can provide many benefits to both mentees and mentors (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010). Although some research suggests that informal mentoring relationships are more beneficial than formal mentoring relationships (e.g., Ragins & Cotton, 1999),

other research suggests that the distinction between informal and formal mentoring relationships is not so clear-cut. For example, the formality of a mentoring relationship may not be as important to a mentee's work attitudes as are other factors, such as a mentee's satisfaction with his or her mentoring relationship (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Thus, well-designed, formal mentoring programs can provide mentoring relationships that are more beneficial than some informal mentoring relationships. Because of space limitations, we do not provide a detailed discussion of effective practices for developing and maintaining formal mentoring programs in this IP. However, interested readers can find such a discussion in the appendix.

Mentoring Programs in the Services

All of the Services have official, Service-wide mentoring initiatives that receive top-down support from senior leadership. Senior-level support for mentoring usually comes in the form of approved documents, such as instructions, letters, and directives. These documents typically include the way in which the Service defines *mentoring* and the goals for the mentoring program, such as maximizing the career potential of servicemembers and improving retention in the Service. To develop and implement mentoring programs Service-wide, the Services rely on a variety of mentoring tools, such as mentoring websites, to help servicemembers access information about mentoring and establish mentoring relationships. In addition to their Service-wide mentoring programs, the Services also rely on associations, such as affinity groups, and mentoring programs for specific communities or career fields.

The Air Force. The formal mentoring program in the Air Force is a supervisory mentoring program, as mandated by Air Force Instruction 36-3401 (U.S. Department of the Air Force, 2000). That is, supervisors or raters are directed to act as the primary mentors for the airmen immediately below them in the chain of command. The Air Force briefing to the MLDC included four goals for the mentoring program:

- “Help Airmen reach their maximum potential”
 - “Prepare Airmen for increased responsibility”
 - “Develop adaptable and competent future leaders”
 - “Improve the operational environment”
- (Sitterly, 2009, p. 11).

The first two goals directly focus on benefits for individual airmen, whereas the last two goals are more focused on benefits for the Air Force as an organization. The MLDC briefing also linked mentoring of all airmen to the development of diversity-related institutional competencies (Sitterly, 2009).

The only mentoring tool that appears to be Air Force-wide is the web-based My Development Plan, which includes My Enlisted Development Plan for enlisted personnel and My Officer Development Plan for officers (Petcoff, 2010).

This tool allows airmen to share their records, career plans, and other relevant information with supervisors (i.e., primary mentors) and other mentors of their choosing. Airmen and mentors can also use the tool to directly communicate with each other through an online journaling feature. Furthermore, airmen can use a networking feature in My Development Plan to search for mentors who have a My Development Plan account. If an airman finds a potential mentor who does not have an account, a message is sent to the potential mentor to ask him or her to set up an account. Overall, My Development Plan shows promise as a flexible mentoring tool, but we have yet to see evidence of its use or effectiveness, which is not surprising because the tool was launched only recently (Petcoff, 2010).

The Air Force briefing did not include any reference to measuring the effectiveness of the Air Force's mentoring programs, and the Air Force mentoring instruction does not indicate that there is any formal training for mentors or that there is any requirement that the program be monitored to ensure that the stated goals are being met. Although we did notice that an Air Force in-house survey called the Unit Climate Assessment Survey solicits information about mentoring—“Mentoring has improved my Air Force experience” (U.S. Department of the Air Force, n.d.)—we do not know how the Air Force uses responses to this item to evaluate its program.

The Army. The Army's current mentorship effort (which was launched by senior leadership in July 2005) is based solely on informal relationships: The Army leadership views mentoring as a “voluntary developmental relationship” (Horne, 2009, p. 18). Thus, junior members of the Army are not required to enter mentoring relationships via the Army-wide mentoring program, and, unlike leaders in the Air Force, Army leaders are not explicitly directed to mentor all of their direct subordinates. Army leaders are, however, expected to voluntarily mentor more-junior members.

The overarching goal of the Army's current mentoring strategy is to provide the means for Army leaders to “leave a legacy” (U.S. Department of the Army, 2005, p. 3). Although the Army's mentorship handbook did not state any goals specific to equal opportunity or diversity,³ the Army briefing at the November 2009 MLDC meeting indicated that the current mentoring program was designed to be open to the “Total Army Family,” including active-duty members, reservists, National Guard members, retirees, veterans, Army family members, and Department of the Army civilians and contractors (Horne, 2009, p. 18).

The Army primarily distributes information about tools for mentoring through its mentoring website (<http://www.mentorship.army.mil>). The website includes both general materials on mentoring and Army-specific materials, such as the Army mentorship handbook (U.S. Department of the Army, 2005). The handbook includes samples of two forms that mentors can use to add more formality to the

mentoring relationship: a mentorship agreement, which is a contract stating terms for the relationship at the outset, and an individual development action plan, which is used to set goals for the mentee's development and to provide a way for the mentor to assess the mentee's current level of professional competence. In addition to these mentoring resources, the website also provides access to an online mentoring program for anyone with an Army Knowledge Online account. In terms of use of the online mentoring program, Horne (2009) reported that white male enlisted soldiers have been the largest group of users of the web-based mentoring application.

Horne (2009) also briefed the MLDC on mentoring-related findings from the *Fall 2007 Sample Survey of Military Personnel* (U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2007). Results from the survey indicated that 67 percent of officers and 56 percent of enlisted soldiers reported that they currently have a mentor or had a mentor while in the Army. Of those who had a mentor, about 80 percent of officers reported that their mentors were commissioned officers and about 80 percent of enlisted soldiers reported that their mentors were noncommissioned officers. More than half of both officers and enlisted soldiers with mentors reported that their mentors were higher in rank but were not their senior raters. Although a majority of Army officers and enlisted soldiers reported having mentors, there is unmet demand: About a quarter of both officers and enlisted soldiers reported that they never had a mentor but would have liked to have had one.

The Coast Guard. The Coast Guard provides top-down support for its mentoring program via an official document, Commandant Instruction 5350.24C (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006b). This document states that mentoring is one of the Coast Guard's 28 leadership competencies. As such, the Coast Guard's Office of Leadership and Professional Development directly oversees the mentoring program. The Coast Guard has directly linked mentoring to its diversity strategic plan (U.S. Coast Guard, 2009). As part of the goal to "ensure equitable hiring and career opportunity for all employees," one of the Coast Guard's objectives is to "establish an effective mentoring and counseling network so all members (active duty, reserve and civilian) have guidance while navigating their careers" (U.S. Coast Guard, 2009, p. 14). Associated with this objective is a performance measure, which is defined as the "percentage of individuals participating in mentorship programs, counseling networks and results achieved" (U.S. Coast Guard, 2009, p. 14). According to Engrum (2009), the alignment between diversity and mentoring is evident from the partnership between the Coast Guard Diversity Staff and the Career Management Branch of the Office of Personnel Management Division in the Personnel Services Center.

Like the Army, the Coast Guard relies greatly on its mentoring website (<http://www.uscg.mil/leadership/mentoring/>) to disseminate information about mentoring

and to provide access to an online mentoring toolkit to help individuals establish mentoring relationships. This mentoring toolkit includes mentoring guides, survey tools that potential mentors and mentees can use to evaluate how effective they would be in mentoring relationships, and a matching tool that allows mentees to match their professional profiles to those of potential mentors. The matching tool uses an "alignment of competencies, areas of expertise and learning needs" to match mentees with potential mentors (Triple Creek, Inc., n.d.).

Like the Air Force's My Development Plan, the Coast Guard's Individual Development Plan (IDP) provides a way for servicemembers to convey career goals and accomplishments to mentors. Unlike what we have seen from the other Services, the Coast Guard's IDP instruction makes it explicit that first-term enlisted and junior officers must complete their IDPs (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006a). The Coast Guard's IDP is designed to

- "Aid in the effective integration of new personnel" into the Coast Guard
- "Enhance job skills"
- "Reinforce expectations of the chain of command"
- "Promote focused communications on career and personal development to support every individual in reaching their full potential" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2006a, p. 1).

The Coast Guard uses at least one survey, the *2008 Coast Guard Organizational Assessment Survey*, that includes questions about professional development, including mentoring (U.S. Coast Guard, n.d.). However, we have not seen any of the results from that survey. Furthermore, we do not know whether the performance measure for mentoring cited in the Coast Guard's diversity plan has yet been implemented. That is, we do not know whether the Coast Guard has measured the "percentage of individuals participating in mentorship programs, counseling networks and results achieved" (U.S. Coast Guard, 2009, p. 14).

The Marine Corps. Like the Air Force, the Marine Corps explicitly directs supervisors to mentor those immediately below them in the chain of command (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2006a). Thus, the overarching goal of the Marine Corps mentoring program (MCMP) is to provide every marine with a mentor. According to the *Leadership Mentoring Log* (n.d.), the mission of the MCMP is to

- "Empower junior leaders to positively affect the development of subordinates"
- "Facilitate genuine concern between the mentor and Marine mentee"
- "Increase unit cohesiveness"
- "Establish a covenant between leader and subordinate, both committing to personal and professional excellence"
- "Ensure accountability, responsibility, and evaluation of both the mentor and Marine mentee" (p. 1).

Like the other Services, the Marine Corps uses a website (<http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/mentoring/>) to distribute information about the MCMP. The Marine Corps does not, however, appear to have web-based mentoring programs or interactive tools. Instead, the Marine Corps provides documents, such as mentoring guides and instructions, on its website. In these guides, such as the *Marine Corps Mentoring Program (MCMP) Guidebook* (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2006b), mentors and mentees are given information about how to initiate and sustain mentoring relationships. In the instructions, mentors and mentees are directed to meet at least once a month and to monitor progress toward meeting the mentee's career-development goals. Although there are several such directives in approved Marine Corps guides and instructions, it is not clear whether or how compliance with the directives is monitored.

The November 2009 Marine Corps briefing to the MLDC included some findings related to mentoring from the *2007 Marine Corps Climate Assessment Survey* (Department of the Navy, 2007). Responses to the statement, "My mentor has had a positive impact on my life in the Marine Corps," yielded interesting results: According to the Marine Corps briefing (U.S. Marine Corps, 2009), less than 50 percent of respondents across all race/ethnicity groups agreed with this statement. The survey only asks respondents to answer yes or no, so it is unclear how strongly respondents disagreed with this item. However, the rate of disagreement is a clear indication that the Marine Corps should examine its current supervisory-based mentor system in order to improve the quality of mentoring given to marines.

The Navy. The Navy's November 2009 briefing to the MLDC highlighted the Navy's current efforts to create a cohesive mentoring strategy. The Navy has recently focused its mentoring program on the following five areas:

- chain of command
- enterprises/communities
- Navy affinity groups (e.g., National Naval Officers Association)
- social networking
- one-on-one mentoring (both formal and informal).

According to Barrett (2009), the Navy has well-established affinity groups, a structure for career planning, effective one-on-one mentoring, and leadership's commitment to implement mentoring programs in all of the naval enterprises/communities. The Navy's current mentoring strategy is thus a hybrid of formal and informal and voluntary and mandatory mentoring programs and tools. Evidence of the current Navy-wide commitment to mentoring comes from NAVPERSCOM Instruction 5300.1, which is a

Navy-wide mentoring instruction and guide (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2009). This instruction is very similar to a slightly older Navy aviation mentoring instruction, NAVAIR Instruction 5300.3 (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008). The stated goals of the Navy-wide mentoring program focus on creating a formalized method to develop leaders, retain talented individuals, and "support the Navy's diversity initiatives" (U.S. Department of the Navy, 2009, p. 1).

The Navy briefing to the MLDC also provided some specific examples of more-recent Navy mentoring initiatives: the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) eMentor Program, Navy Women eMentoring, and the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE) Mentoring Program. The SWO eMentor Program is a voluntary mentoring program for the SWO community. It uses a web-based application, including a web-based mentor-mentee matching tool that mentees can use to find mentors. The Navy Women eMentoring program is a pilot program started in October 2008. Like the SWO eMentor Program, the Navy Women eMentoring program has a web-based matching tool. According to Barrett (2009), this mentoring program has been quite popular. Finally, the NAE Mentoring Program is a formal, voluntary mentoring program that includes screening and selecting of would-be mentors, a full day of training for mentors, and follow-on training sessions for mentors to stay proficient in mentoring. Unfortunately, we have not seen evidence of how mentors develop their mentees after going through the mentor training.

Overall, the Navy appears to be creating multiple mentoring programs across naval enterprises/communities. In contrast to the mentoring programs in most of the other Services, some of the Navy mentoring programs require mentors and mentees to sign mentoring-relationship contracts and to have a minimum number of meetings per month. However, as is the case with some of the other Services, we have not seen much evidence of the effectiveness of these programs. The Navy ARGUS surveys may include questions about mentoring, but we were not provided relevant survey data. Thus, we cannot speak to the level of effectiveness of the Navy's recent effort to support its goals for diversity through mentoring.

Summary

To summarize the information presented above and to help the reader see similarities and differences across the Services' mentoring programs, Table 1 captures all of the goals and assumptions, features, and measures of effectiveness currently in use and shows which apply to each Service. An "X" for a given Service means that we have evidence that at least one mentoring program in that Service has that goal/assumption, feature, or measure of effectiveness. Similarly, the lack of an "X" means that we did not find evidence of that goal/assumption, feature, or measure of effectiveness in that Service's mentoring programs.

Table 1. Comparison of Goals and Assumptions, Features, and Measures of Effectiveness Across the Services' Mentoring Programs

	Air Force	Army	Coast Guard	Marine Corps	Navy
Goals and Assumptions					
Mentoring improves career potential of mentees	X	X	X	X	X
Mentors and Service benefit from mentoring	X	X	X	X	X
Equal access to mentors/everyone should have a mentor	X	X	X	X	X
Mentoring is part of diversity strategy			X		X
Features					
Development plans include mentoring tools	X	X	X		
Mentoring handbook/guide	X	X	X	X	X
Mentoring websites	X	X	X	X	X
Web-enabled mentoring tools	X	X	X		X
Supervisor directed to mentor all subordinates	X			X	
Formal guidance for mentoring relationship (e.g., how often mentors and mentees should meet)				X	X
Mentors are screened and trained					X
Mentor-mentee matching tool provided			X		X
Contract has to be signed					X
Measures of Effectiveness					
Survey questions about mentoring	X	X	X	X	X

Conclusions

Based on our summary of the Service presentations to the MLDC and the supplemental information we could access, we conclude the following:

- The main way in which the Services' mentoring programs are intended to affect diversity is by trying to ensure that all members—regardless of demographics—have the same access to mentors.
- Only the Navy and the Coast Guard explicitly tie their mentoring programs to their diversity strategies.
- Across the Services, mentoring programs vary in terms of their level of development and the formality of the mentoring relationships.
- We do not know whether, how, or to what extent most of the programs are meeting either the direct goal of supplying equal access to mentors or the ultimate goal of improving the career advancement of all servicemembers—women, minorities, and white men alike.

Endnotes

¹Prior to the November 2009 MLDC meeting, the MLDC sent a letter to the chiefs of the Services asking them to send representatives to brief the MLDC on issues of career advancement at the November meeting. One of the questions the Services were asked to answer was how their mentoring programs function to improve the diversity of future leadership.

²The purpose of this IP is to provide straightforward descriptions of the Services' mentoring efforts and to underline similarities and differences among them. The IP is not meant to be a comprehensive review of all of the Services' current efforts to develop and maintain mentoring programs. Furthermore, the focus of this IP is on mentoring programs offered by the Services themselves, not by organizations affiliated with the Services. For example, officers may receive mentoring from The ROCKS Inc., a nonprofit organization of active-duty, reserve, and retired Army officers and family members who are dedicated to providing networking and mentoring services

to the officer corps. Although such organizations provide valuable mentoring services to servicemembers, they are not part of the Services themselves.

³The Army's diversity strategy is currently being developed. Therefore, we do not know for sure what role mentoring will play in the strategy.

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