



Methodology for NMRC Research Board Reviews of Mentoring Practices

This document describes the process that is used to identify and prioritize youth mentoring practices to be reviewed by the Research Board of the National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC). This process involves four steps as follows:

- Identification and Prioritization of Practices for Review
- Literature Search for Relevant Studies
- Determination of Study Eligibility
- Reviewing and Summarizing Available Evidence of the Practice's Effectiveness

1. Identification and Prioritization of Practices for Review

Candidate practices that are representative of the youth mentoring field are identified for review through multiple search strategies.

1. A literature search for youth mentoring practices that have been evaluated is conducted through the perusal of academic databases, relevant scholarly journals, and presentations made at the National Mentoring Summit.
2. An examination of what practices have been described and/or examined for effectiveness in systematic literature reviews and reference lists of existing meta-analyses of youth mentoring programs, including those reviewed by CrimeSolutions.gov in its review of mentoring as a [practice](#).
3. Existing and emerging practices identified by the NMRC in its needs assessment.
4. Nominations received through the relevant portal on the [NMRC website](#).

Identified practices are then prioritized for review based on the following considerations:

- Does the practice align with one or more of the areas identified as priorities in the latest needs assessment conducted by the NMRC (currently these are: Closure; Matching; Monitoring and Support; Cultural Perspectives in Program Design and Delivery; and Serving Special Youth Populations, in particular, youth in foster care, youth with mental health concerns, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, or youth with military families)?
- Are materials available to support implementation of the practice?
- Is the practice known to have been evaluated using a randomized control or quasi-experimental design with a relatively large sample of youth (i.e., 100 or more)?
- Has the effectiveness of the practice been evaluated in programs that fall within the scope of CrimeSolutions.gov?¹

- Is the effectiveness of the practice known to have been evaluated across different types or categories of program participants, program settings/structures, and/or outcomes?
- Is there an evaluation of the practice that has been published within the past 5 years?
- Has the practice been evaluated in the U.S. context?

NMRC Research Board staff, with oversight of the Research Board Chair, assess which of the above 7 criteria are met for each practice. Those practices meeting at least 5 of the criteria receive high priority for review. The order in which high-priority practices are reviewed is then determined using a random number generator (for example, if there are 10 high-priority practices at a given time, each practice is ordered 1 through 10 using a random process).

The ordered list of high-priority practices is then provided to staff of the organization responsible for primary responsibility for implementation of the NMRC (currently MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership) for review. At its discretion, NMRC staff may request that certain practices be elevated on the list for reasons such as ensuring that emergent needs of the field (as revealed, for example, through technical assistance requests submitted to NMRC) are addressed in a timely manner and that the field is exposed to new and emerging practices. The Research Board Chair makes the final determination of practice prioritization, informed by any such recommendations from NMRC staff.

2. Literature Search

For each program practice to be reviewed, a literature search is carried out by NMRC Research Board staff to identify potentially relevant studies. The search process consists of:

- 1) A keyword search in on-line reference databases (e.g., PsycINFO, ERIC, Web of Science);
- 2) A perusal of relevant academic journals, books (e.g., *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*), publications on mentoring from relevant organizations (e.g., Public/Private Ventures); presentations made at the National Mentoring Summit and other relevant professional meetings;
- 3) Contacting the youth mentoring listserv, NMRC Research Board members, current and past OJJDP mentoring research grantees, and authors of relevant studies identified through the other literature search methods; and
- 4) Review of the reference lists of retrieved articles or reports.

3. Determination of Study Eligibility

The next step in the process is to carry out a full determination of whether each identified study of a candidate practice meets eligibility criteria for review. Eligibility criteria are as follows:

- Study is experimental (participants are randomly assigned to receive the practice or not), quasi-experimental (participants who receive the practice are compared to group who do not), a meta-analysis in which effect estimates are compared across programs that do and do not include the practice, or a time series single group design and must be without serious design limitations. Measures of practice exposure that are utilized may include gradations of exposure to the practice (e.g., number of hours of training received). When findings are limited to

comparisons among qualitative variations in a practice (e.g., in the case of mentor support, whether staff initiate support contacts or rely on mentors to do so), a study will not be eligible.¹

- The study examines one or more outcomes that relate directly to one of the following areas: Crime, delinquency, or overt problem behaviors (including aggression, gang involvement, or substance use); victimization; risk factors for crime and delinquency (including school failure, psychological problems or mental illness, etc.); changes in behaviors or attitudes that are generally regarded as important influences on youth health, well-being, or development; the quality or duration of mentoring relationships (including attitudes or behaviors of mentors that have been linked to relationship quality or duration); or operational aspects of mentoring programs such as their reach, efficiency, or sustainability.
- Study is published in a peer-reviewed publication or documented in a comprehensive evaluation report.
- Study was published in 1990 or later.
- If the outcome evidence for the study is not likely to be sufficient for a classification of Promising, there must be evidence that the practice was implemented with a reasonable amount of fidelity.

Determination of each study's eligibility is made by NMRC Research Board staff; if determined to be eligible, the Research Board Chair reviews as well and confirms this status.

4. Reviewing and Summarizing Available Evidence of the Practice's Effectiveness

The eligible studies for each review are reviewed by two members of the NMRC Research Board. The scoring instrument used for these reviews can be found [here](#). In Part II of the scoring instrument, each study and its findings are rated on three dimensions: Design Quality, Outcome Evidence, and Practice Fidelity; in addition, Part I of the scoring instrument provides ratings for a fourth dimension of Conceptual Framework. The score for each of these dimensions is calculated separately, with a maximum score of 3 possible for each dimension. Together, these scores determine the evidence classification for the study as follows:

Class 1: Effective

The study must have scores of at least 1.75 for the outcome evidence dimension and at least 2 for each of the three remaining dimensions.

Class 2: Promising

The study must have a score of at least 1.5 for the design dimension and at least 1 for the outcome evidence dimension.

Class 3: Ineffective

The study must have a score less than 0 in the outcome evidence dimension and scores of at least 2.0 for the design and fidelity dimensions of practice effectiveness.

¹ In some instances, a practice of interest may be compared to a qualitative variation of the same practice with respect to its effects on outcomes that would be expected to be influenced only by the practice of interest (e.g., post-match training for mentors on sexual health topics in comparison to another topic such as peer relations with assessment of effects of the training on sexual health-related outcomes such as mentor feelings of efficacy for discussing these with mentees). In these instances, studies will be eligible so long as other eligibility criteria are satisfied (e.g., outcomes are within the required scope).

Class 4: Null Effect

The study must have a score for the outcome evidence dimension that is positive but less than 1 and scores of at least 2.0 for the design and fidelity dimensions of practice effectiveness.

Class 5: Insufficient Evidence

The study must have a score less than 1.5 for the design dimension or a score of less than 1 for outcome evidence dimension in combination with a score of less than 2.0 for the fidelity dimension or the design dimension.

The research base for the practice across all reviewed is then determined as follows:

Effective

Practice has strong evidence to indicate that it achieves desirable outcomes when implemented with fidelity.

Must have **at least 2** studies in Class 1 or 1 study in Class 1 and at least 2 studies in Class 2

Must have no studies in Class 3

Must have 0 or no more than 33% of studies (excluding those in Class 5: Insufficient Evidence) in Class 4

Promising

Practice has some evidence to indicate it achieves desirable outcomes.

Must not qualify as Effective

Must have at least 1 study in Class 1 or at least 2 studies in Class 2

Must have 0 studies in Class 3

Must have 0 or no more than 33% of studies (excluding those in Class 5: Insufficient Evidence) in Class 4

No Effects

Practice has strong evidence indicating that it has no effects or had harmful effects when implemented with fidelity.

Must not qualify as Effective or Promising

Must have **at least 2** studies in either Class 3 or Class 4

Insufficient Evidence

Current evidence is not sufficient to designate the practice as Effective or Promising or as having No Effects.

Must not qualify as Effective, Promising, or No Effects