Mentoring is the ART or act of being a teacher, guide, role model, motivator, and friend demonstrated through personal involvement and commitment.

MAYA 2001
Mentors

To deliver a Youth Program like ACES, which relies so heavily on volunteer efforts by museum staff, we believe that institutional buy-in is of primary importance. Staff members (mentors) must be as willing and dedicated to the program as the students. Our program requires that staff give one day a week (approximately 2.5 hours) to their student during the school year. During the summer months the amount of time increases to 10 hours spread over 4 days. A unique ACES feature is the long-term mentor/mentee relationship. For example a student who enters the program in 10th grade is assigned a mentor and can remain with that same person throughout the length of the 3 year program. Strong mentors are often invited by their students to graduation ceremonies, weddings, baby showers, sporting events and theater performances. The students become a part of the museum’s family and mentors often get to know the students families.

Border Crossing as Mentors

Working across boundaries of race, class, and age can be complicated. Mentors, staff, and students will frequently have different perspectives on the world. In order to be successful together we must all ask a lot of questions, and really listen to the answers. We are all different from each other and we must come together aware of that and interested to find connections. Human connections can go beyond those of race, social class, age and the workplace. I have found that people want to express who they are and it is important to engage in messy, confusing, sometimes painful dialogue about these differences in order to build real relationships.
Mentors often begin working with students, unsure of what students can learn from them, and also wondering how they will be able to relate to a student.

While reading, one day I came across a statement that began to answer that question for me. It read, "Community service is built on assumptions of relationships. We assume that it is both possible and appropriate for culturally diverse persons to move, although not without difficulty, into each others' worlds and to have a shared world as well." I was struck by this because it is something I have found to be very true. No--I will never completely know another person’s world. Each relationship has borders to be crossed and shared worlds to be developed. There are borders of race, class, gender, ability, age, emotion, and disease. My unique personal world is a sanctuary for me and a starting point to reach out and cross borders. I do not dissolve my world and melt it into someone else’s’, instead we interact, and find out about each other, enriching each other’s lives. Each time I interact with someone, and where we successfully cross our borders, we develop a shared world together. It is those links of shared worlds that change people, support people, and make an impact on people. I know that border crossing is essential and necessary to create harmonious communities and families.

Please Touch Museum’s Youth Program has an opportunity to cross borders all the time. It is messy and confusing and wonderful. Here’s one student’s response to the feeling of connections that he built during his time in ACES.

Hi, my name is Luis Santiago and with your support things can happen. When I was in the ghetto it started to get really rough for me because the drugs were multiplying in large numbers. People started fighting over drug money; people started to get more violent and my neighborhood was getting worse. I had nothing to do, the playground had no more summer league and it was getting really boring so I started hanging out with the wrong people and at the time my grandfather had just died. It was hard for me because my grand mom and grand pop were the one's who raised me since I was six month’s old. I thank them for being there for me. We soon moved out and I was a better kid because I moved away from all the kids who were doing bad.

I failed the 9th grade. Ever since I moved my grades starting getting high and I started playing baseball for my school. I'm a captain for my team and it's my 3rd year playing. I've worked in the Please Touch Museum 2–3 years and it's a great learning experience to work with kids and their mothers. I'd like to thank all the people in the museum that have been there for me especially Jennifer Arnold. She's been a great coordinator for the ACES program. Jennifer’s been a really big help in my life. Thanks for being there for me and always having me on task. She’s the only person that has come to my baseball game ever and she knows that I love her. Thank you for the support, Please Touch Museum. Thank You.

Luis Santiago
As for the actual agenda—that’s flexible. Make sure that the meeting is efficient and always spends some time answering mentor concerns. The mentors need a significant amount of support in order to stay motivated and to work successfully with students.

Mentoring Responsibilities and Tips

**Standards:** Each student should be held to “professional” standards. This means that mentors have the responsibility to hold high expectations for their students. Museums are amazing educational and safe environments. They are also professional worksites with tremendous opportunities to work with exceptional high school students. All of the high school students that come into the museum are capable of excellent work but in many areas of their lives a standard of excellence may not be expected. Therefore, in order to take advantage of our enriching environments and to help students excel, high expectations for student performance must exist within any museum youth program.

**Empowerment:** As a mentor it is important to remember that high expectations does not mean inflexibility or intolerance for mistakes. High school students will not always achieve up to their potential on the first, second, or third try. It is our responsibility to challenge and guide each student. Mentors must be available to give assistance on projects, observe the process, and celebrate even minimal accomplishments. It is important to try to find something that the student has done right and to praise that step before suggesting room for improvement. Avoid “dumbing down” a project that a student is having trouble with, instead try to break the work up into smaller, more manageable steps.

**Goals:** Students enrolled in Youth Programs should set SMART goals with their Youth Program manager/ coordinator or mentor. The National Mentoring Partnership describes a SMART goal as one that is:

Consider creating your own mentor manual that reflects the needs and interests of the mentoring program within your museum. This serves as an important source of information but also makes a physical statement to the mentor. I have found that it can help a mentor feel that this is a significant commitment. They have a responsibility to their student, and to the program. The mentor manual can be a tangible reflection of that commitment. It will help to have a manual that the mentor can consult in addition to coming to the program manager for support and to address their concerns.

All mentors have different responsibilities and abilities. Some people are very comfortable working with high school students however others are very new to the experience and will need more support. Each mentor should go through a basic orientation that clarifies the expectations for each student and mentor. In addition the mentors and Youth Program staff will need to meet frequently to stay up to date about how the students are doing. Create a combination of a group mentor meetings (a meeting every other month works well for Please Touch Museum) and individual meetings (these meetings should be more frequent and you should have contact with the mentors at least once every other week).

What to include in a mentor manual

Saybah Blawogel and chaperone Jamilah Thompkins build a “sand roach” as part of Road Rules 2003.
Specific: Do I know precisely what has to happen?
Measurable: How will I know if I’ve achieved this objective?
Attainable: Is it realistic or do-able?
Result-oriented: Will it really move me toward my goal?
Time-limited: Does it have a due date?¹⁴

Within the museum, students will be working on personal goals, work readiness goals and academic goals. Clearly track their progress and check in frequently to see when goals need to be revised, or re-directed. Student goals should be set by the student and adult working together and the opportunity to address the goal should happen through the work the student is doing with their mentor.

Projects: This is a great place for students to work on their goals! Each student should have a challenging project in their department which focuses on some aspects of their mentor’s job. The project should have a detailed learning plan, clarifying objectives and clearly explaining each step of the student’s project. The project should not interfere with the staff mentor’s time sensitive work but should impact the museum or department in some measurable way.

Supervision: Mentors have a responsibility for student supervision but that role is supported by the Youth Program staff. Mentors must try to keep track of their students. They should encourage students to come to their work station on time and ready to work. In addition they should pay attention to when their students leave for a break and return. Students come from school where they do not get the same amount of freedom during the day as they will within the work environment in the museum. This can be a difficult adjustment. If you show that you notice when your student is on time or when they return from break a little early—the student will realize that his/her attendance is important to the museum. Please set clear boundaries and expectations with your student right from the beginning. Explain that timeliness is important and clarify the time the student should be at their work station. When the student realizes that you understand what the rules are he/she may take timeliness more seriously. If mentors see a problem developing with attendance or lateness contact the Youth Program staff to discuss the situation.

Flexibility: This is one of the most important responsibilities of a student mentor. We are working with teenagers who are juggling school, families, friends, other programs, and the museum. For many students this is their first work experience. Many issues arise in the day-to-day working of the program and when the students are at your museum, no two days look the same! They lend a lot of energy and excitement to the museum and with that comes some inconsistency. A mentor’s flexibility is essential for the success of the program!

Communication: Mentors and Youth Program staff must be in constant communication for the program to be successful. Mentors and staff need to talk together about concerns, questions, ideas, or frustrations that arise. Youth Program staff should always be available to help with projects, troubleshooting, and brainstorming.