Starting a peer mentoring program

A guide to connecting colleagues through mutual mentoring experiences.

together

an Absorb company

Introduction

Peer mentoring is a form of mentorship where colleagues guide one another. This is especially useful in workplaces where there aren't enough senior leaders or employees to mentor junior team members.

For that reason, matching peers to mentor one another is a convenient solution.

Here's everything you need to know about how peer mentoring, its benefits over other types of mentorship, success stories, and how to start one in your organization.

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What is peer mentoring?

A trusted network that holds you accountable to grow

Graham, a young account executive in the pharmaceutical industry, seeks to continue his professional development despite having already gained years of experience. He compiled a list of skills to work on, including objection handling, leadership, and organization. Graham's manager recommended he join the company's mentorship program, which he researched further before deciding to participate.

As an account executive in a field role, Graham felt isolated and jumped at the chance to connect with other professionals at similar stages in their careers. He registered as a peer in the mentorship program and was paired with James, a colleague in a different region. Six months later, they meet twice a month via Zoom to share insights and discuss industry developments. Graham values the relationship as an opportunity to stay accountable to his goals, gain new perspectives, and expand his professional network.

Valuable support from those working alongside you

Peer mentoring is when two people, like Graham and James of similar ages, experience levels, or career stages work together to help each other grow. The relationships are characterized by mutual accountability and knowledge sharing.

Peer mentoring relationships are less formal than traditional mentoring relationships between someone more senior and junior. But there is still structure so that each session is focused and mutually beneficial. In short, both parties should feel like they are getting something out of it.

Think of a peer mentor as a friend, coach, and companion. They provide support and advice and function as a resource for inspiration and new opportunities.

You may be wondering whether a peer mentoring program is right for your company. Let's look at the benefits and how to decide between a 1-on-1 or peer format.

Why should you run a peer mentoring program?

If you're new to mentoring programs, you might think the traditional 1-on-1 approach between a leader and junior employee is the best way forward. You're not wrong. Most first-time mentoring programs (also known as pilot programs) start off this way.

But if you've run a pilot program already, or you have a stable mentoring program up and running, peer mentoring could be the next evolution of employee development at your company.

Senior-to-junior or peer-to-peer? How to decide

To make things more clear, here are the common use cases we see at Together for 1-on-1 and peer programs:

When to start a **senior-to-junior** mentoring program	When to start a **peer-to-peer** mentoring program
• Investing in leadership development • Planning for succession • Developing high-potential talent • Organizing sponsorship programs	• During onboarding • Connecting remote teams • Supporting team accountability • Promoting collaborative learning • Facilitating networking

The common goal among senior-to-junior mentoring programs is that they want to prepare mentees for future roles. The only exception is reverse mentoring, where junior employees mentor leaders for the purpose of exposing leaders to new perspectives.

Peer mentoring programs, on the other hand, all seek to encourage community and mutual growth. It's a way to break down silos and get employees connected with each other when they might not otherwise.

Common goals for peer mentoring

Below are the common reasons we see companies launching peer mentoring programs.

Onboarding
When new employees join your organization, peer mentors can help them settle into the team and culture. Peer mentors show them around, introduce them to other staff members, and answer their questions. In this way, the peer mentor can be an onboarding buddy.

Connecting remote team members
It's common knowledge that when employees work remotely for prolonged periods, they're susceptible to feelings of isolation and disconnection from colleagues. Peer mentorship can help connect remote employees by providing a sense of community and support. This translates to more engaged and connected employees.

Accountability
Peer mentorship encourages supportive accountability (without micromanaging) by creating a space for peers to discuss their goals and check in with each other on a regular cadence. Additionally, it's hard to stay disengaged and avoid the hard work of realizing your goals when peers you consider role models share all that they're doing to hit their goals.

Networking
Peer mentoring can break down silos across an organization by connecting colleagues who normally wouldn't connect with one another. Commonly, there's a ripple effect in peer mentoring relationships where one peer says, "you should really meet so and so." In this way, one peer mentor turns into a network of supportive colleagues.

Examples of successful peer mentoring programs

Below, we outline three examples of companies leveraging peer mentoring successfully.

Bridgewater's culture of "idea meritocracy"

As one of the largest and most successful hedge funds in the world, Bridgewater has been built by its founder Ray Dalio with the goal of operating in what he calls an "idea meritocracy."
At Bridgewater, all opinions and ideas are shared freely and debated through a process of peer feedback and learning. Employees don't have to worry about hierarchy or politics; instead, they can focus on learning from each other in order to push the company forward.

Radical truth and radical transparency are part of the firm's management philosophy, with the aim to create an open and honest dialogue where the best ideas can rise to the top.

Buffer's onboarding buddy system

From the start, Buffer has focused on fostering an open and collaborative environment. As part of their onboarding program, new hires undergo a six-week immersion called Bootcamp to learn the ins and outs of the company's culture.

The buddy system is designed to help new hires get up to speed quickly by pairing them with three buddies—a leader buddy, a role buddy, and a culture buddy. This system allows for an open dialogue between newbies and experienced professionals, which helps build trust among team members and create a sense of belonging in a short amount of time.

Airbnb's peer mentorship program

With an extraordinary growth rate on its way to becoming the world's largest hospitality company, Airbnb has put a big emphasis on peer-to-peer learning within its organization to increase employee retention and drive innovation.

In line with their "Belong Anywhere" mission, they strive to create an environment of trust, support, and collaboration by focusing on "belonging through knowledge." This has been done in ways like peer mentorship, in which they reported a 10% sign-up growth just within the first year and continued to scale years after.

How to start a peer mentoring program

To start a peer mentorship program, you first need a plan and key goals. What is the purpose of your mentorship program, and what do you want employees to get out of it? Then, you decide how you will establish the program and glean its result.

Start an Evergreen program on Together

On the Together Platform, there are three ways to structure your mentorship program.

You can run a cohort program with defined start and end dates; an Evergreen program, where registration and pairing are always available; or a Groups program which is a cohort design but 1-to-many versus 1-to-1.

To enable peer mentoring relationships, you need an Evergreen mentoring program.

Program Cycle
What program cycle do you want?

	Cohort ⤴ Set a start and end date for your program, where users get paired once	**Evergreen** ↻ Allow users to pair on an ongoing basis, with no start and end date
Program Length	Fixed length — *ie. 4 months, 6 months, 12 months*	No implied end date
Registration Window	Fixed length — users are expected to register all at once	Always open
Matching Window	Fixed length — *ie. 2 - 3 week period*	Always open
Rematching Behaviour	Users only rematch if requested	Users can match and rematch with others at any point if they have the availabilty

- Evergreen programs do not have an end date; they run continuously.
- Evergreen programs have continuous registration, and users can register whenever they choose.
- Evergreen programs are always open to new pairings, users can start new and/or additional pairings whenever they choose.
- Evergreen programs will have users matching and rematching with a mentee/mentor at any point, as long as they have the availability to do so.

Make relevant pairings

At Together, our platform reduces the administrative work of launching mentoring programs.

One of our key features is our powerful pairing algorithm.
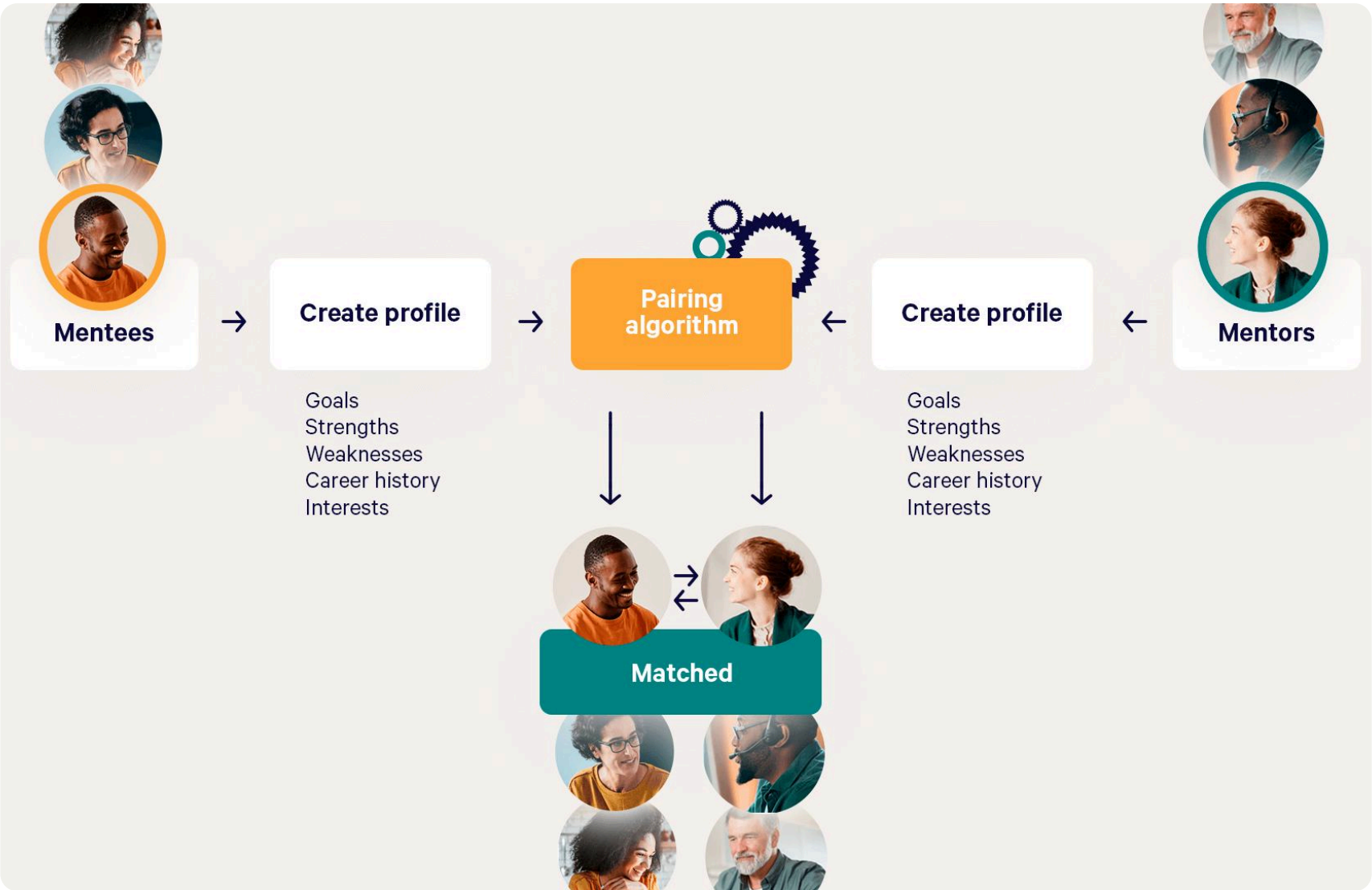
When you begin designing your program, you will build a registration questionnaire. The algorithm uses participant answers to match mentees and mentors together.

By default, we provide the most common questions. However, you can edit the questions and add your own.
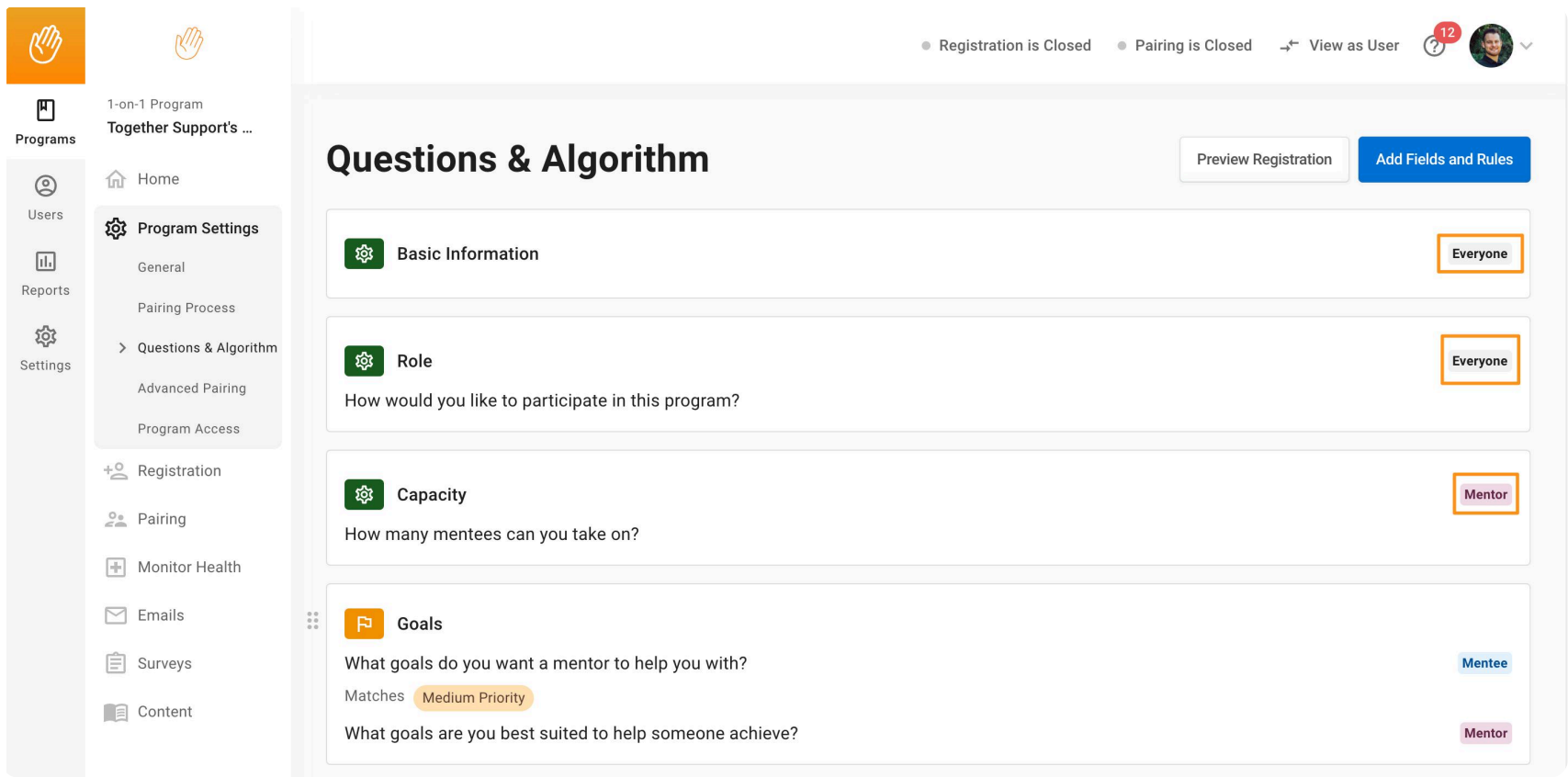
Depending on the goals of your program, the questions that determine pairing will be different.

The all-important red button on Together's platform is 'Turn on pairing'. When you're ready and have prepared your program for launch, click it and watch the magic happen.

If you want to be more involved in the pairing process, don't fret – there are a couple of different options to choose from.

- With admin-led pairing, you manually assign pairs, taking into account compatibility and any other preferences you've set.
- User-led pairing lets your participants submit preferences; you can manually or automatically approve the resulting pairs.

Don't be afraid of the pairing process running away without you; you'll be able to switch off pairing at any time, and no emails will be sent out until you've approved the final pairing draft.

Support mentoring relationships

Once pairing is complete, help peer mentoring relationships flourish by supporting them with templated session agendas, full of ice breakers, thought-provoking questions, and activities.

In addition, check in on how pairs are doing in the program and use survey tools offered within Together to gather helpful feedback from participants.

Encourage pairs to connect with other mentoring pairs

Since adding new perspectives is the key goal of mentoring, you should recommend that pairs connect with others participating in the mentoring program.

The key benefit of Evergreen mentoring programs is that participants can stop and start mentoring relationships wherever they want instead of having to wait for the next cohort.

# Use Together to launch your peer mentoring program

It's easy to set up and run a peer mentorship program through Together's mentoring platform.

Our platform is fully customizable to meet your teams' specific needs. From registration to reporting, Together handles every step of launching an impactful mentoring program.

Our guide on how to start a mentoring program breaks down everything you need to know as an organization when starting a mentoring program. And we've compiled the best practices from the first-hand experience of program administrators and the expertise of the Together team.

If you're ready to get started building a peer mentorship program for your organization, we can help. Find out how Together's mentoring software can work with you to create a successful mentoring program.

Continue learning
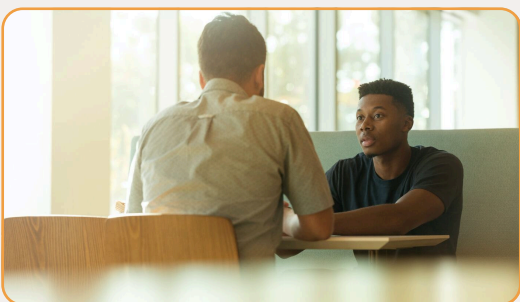
What is Peer Mentoring, and how does it work?

How To Be A Great Peer Mentor

Peer learning: 10 benefits to collaboration in the workplace

5 mentoring models [and which is best]

Round-Table: Mentorship Program Admins Share Best Practices

How do I promote my mentoring program?

About Together

Together empowers organizations to accelerate their employee learning and development through mentoring programs. With 1-on-1, peer, and group mentoring, we enable organizations to level up their employee development initiatives.

Organizations leverage mentorship programs to:

- Support diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging initiatives
- Prepare high potential employees to take on leadership roles
- Build communities of well-trained and experienced managers
- Set up new hires for success with buddy programs
- Build meaningful connections between your remote employees

HR and L&D teams love Together because our platform offers the best user experience for employees. They don't need to learn or download a new tool because our web-based platform integrates with existing email and calendar systems to make it as easy as possible to build meaningful mentoring relationships.

Each program is fully customizable, allowing administrators to white label their program with a custom URL and branding. Together's platform includes session agendas and resources that provide employees with cues and steps to support mentors and mentees at each stage of their development. In addition, Together's dedicated Support Team provides guidance every step of the way.

Some of our customers include

Teladoc HEALTH

Kellogg's

randstad

Discovery

HEINEKEN

NEW YORK LIFE FOUNDATION

Want to see how we can help you bring your mentorship program to life?

Book Demo