



# Building Mentoring Programs within Your Community

## HIGHLIGHTS

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### Wondering what Tirza shared as the biggest benefit of ASCE's mentoring program?

The answer may surprise you as it is not steeped in ROI.

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### Thinking of the best way to start your mentoring program?

Automation is key, as is the development of touchpoints. Tirza shared 6 automated touchpoints that help keep the cost of the program low and sustainable.

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### Want a way to keep the mentor/mentee relationship active?

Six key expectations were revealed to help ensure the relationship doesn't drop off.

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### Looking for ways to build resources?

Tirza offered 6 resources that she added to her program based on mentee feedback.

## SPEAKERS

Tirza Austin  
(American Society of Civil Engineers) and  
Sean Marlin  
(TheCR)

## COMPETENCY

Content &  
Programming,  
Tools, and  
Community  
Management

## MATURITY

CMM1,  
CMM2, and  
CMM3

- **Background Tirza Austin.** Tirza is the Senior Manager of Online Communities for the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and has been for almost 4 years.
  - When Tirza first joined, the community was really struggling. Her focus was on re-launching the community through the creation of new programs.
- **Background ASCE.** This is the oldest engineering society in the US. They were founded in the 1800s.
  - They have 150,000 members in 177 countries.
  - Mentoring is extremely important to ASCE and it is very important to the profession. Civil engineers consider themselves civil servants. There is a professional engineer licensure, which is a 5 year program after they pass the licensure test. Mentor experience is included in this test. Therefore, mentoring was already important from a membership standpoint and a Board level, yet they still struggled to get the community off the ground.
  - One of the struggles they encountered was pivoting from in-person to virtual. They were able to re-position the mentoring program by pairing it with the online community.
  - In 2018, they had a Board directive to launch 9 new member-value programs. One was a mentoring program with the objectives of improving member value and increasing student/younger member retention.
    - Luckily, they had senior level support. However, they only had 2 months to launch it. Fortunately, Tirza had been preparing for this type of program.
    - Mentoring is difficult to do as there is not a great deal of ROI and it is difficult to prove value. That was a huge challenge.
    - They previously had a mentoring program that was run on the Mailer platform. It began in 2009 and was run by one of their committees for professional advancement. There wasn't a great deal of engagement, plus – as with many mentoring programs – there were more mentees than mentors. Consequently, the program was sunset in 2016.

**Perceived value of the mentoring program.** This is the biggest benefit of the program. Tirza likened it to an online dating example. The dating app is always there when you want a date, but you don't have to use it until you're ready. Most people think mentoring is a great idea, but they really have to commit to being in an active relationship. With mentoring, you get what you put into it.

- Tirza provided some of ASCE's metrics:
  - After 6 months, they had 4500 page views. These are members and non-members. The mentoring program helps them to attract new members. One was an NFL Quarterback looking to become a civil engineer as his next career. He contacted Tirza to learn about the mentoring program.
  - The Mentor Match microsite has received over 66,000 total page views.
  - Almost 1500 members have enrolled in the mentor program since the launch. There are 271 active mentors, 867 active mentees, 246 active relationships and 159 completed relationships overall.

- **Testimonials.** Tirza shared a few member testimonials. These testimonials successfully demonstrated that mentorship and community does shape lives. However, it is difficult to put a value on that and balance it with the resources needed to make it work. Nevertheless, the program has helped people to find jobs and receive promotions. It can be a life-changing program.



"This relationship has changed my idea of what mentorship has to look like and become an invaluable tool in my career development toolbox."



"My mentoring relationship has been great. I am glad that I have a mentor who is really helping to shape my future."

- **Create the setting for your mentor program.** Again, Tirza likened the matching of mentees and mentors to a dating site. People want to vet potential matches prior to engaging so that those involved can decide who they want to be matched with vs. being thrown together without any prior knowledge of each other.
  - The Mentor Program offers different types of matches, i.e. different fields that could be chosen. People can choose a 3-6 month relationship or a 6-9 month relationship or a 9-12 month relationship.
  - The Program stresses the need to be goal-oriented. Once the goal is accomplished, the mentor/mentee can evaluate whether or not to continue with the mentoring relationship.

➔ **Understand the importance of touchpoints.** ASCE's online community is hosted with Higher Logic, which has a mentoring module. This is how Tirza became responsible for the mentoring program. Given that there is so much automation, it made the maintenance of the program much lower. That helped with the sustainability of the program. For example, the use of automated emails reduces the amount of manpower needed to maintain the program:

- Mentor recruitment emails, i.e. replies to ASCE Collaborate Discussion (sent out once). It asks if they would like to share their experience by becoming a mentor.
- Once someone enrolls as a mentee, they are asked to check out the search directory for a mentor.
- A mentoring request is sent every 5 days. It lets the mentor know that he/she has been requested to be a mentor and to please schedule a kick-off call.

- If the mentor doesn't respond within 20 days, an email is sent asking if there is anything that can be done to help or if they would like to be removed from the program.
- Every 30 days, an email is sent to check-in on the mentoring relationship. It contains resource links and invites any feedback and/or questions. This is Tirza's favorite part. It pinpoints any problems that need her attention without a lot of work on her part, while also providing her with some great feedback.
  - Tirza has the ability to change the messaging every 30 days so that it is timely and relevant vs. sounding like a canned message.
- An automated email is sent within 10 days of the relationship ending. It invites the 2 parties to share their experience and asks them to complete a survey.

 **Set the expectations of your program.** The expectations for the program are laid out on the website. They also have a partnership policy in which they encourage mentors and mentees to complete the process together. This acts as their guide to ensure that stay on the same page. Many relationships drop off if the expectations aren't clear.

- Set the expectations for how many hours to meet and how many times to meet per month.
- Know who will initiate the meeting.
- Agree to meet until the date or goal is achieved.
- Agree on the communication platform to be used.
- Agree on who will provide the agenda and who will write the summary.
- Agree on the number of days after the meeting that the summary will be provided.

➔ **Build resources.** Fortunately, with the Higher Logic platform they were able to implement many of their existing community resources into the program. Accordingly, Tirza built-out a separate website that sits on their community platform, but stands as its own site. It has the mentor directory, a list of resources and various topic resources. Based on mentee feedback, this created other resources, specifically:

- A mentoring webinar.
  - Virtual roundtables on mentoring.
  - An email template that can be used by the mentee to facilitate contact with the mentor.
  - Talking points for a discovery call.
  - PowerPoint for how to use the platform.
  - Information on closing out the relationship.
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- **Share topic-related content with mentors/mentees.** Within the community, Tirza can share new blogs, new discussions, monthly virtual roundtables, etc. For instance, if there is a topic that mentees might be interested in, Tirza will share that with them. She leverages the topics stated within their mentoring profiles to help share community resources that would be of interest.

- The more touchpoints you can provide to keep engagement, the better. One touchpoint that Tirza initiated was a quarterly virtual meet-up. She typically asks the mentor and the mentee to lead the meeting, which provides a leadership opportunity for the mentee.
  - They use the Higher Logic registration module to run these meet-ups.
  - Tirza uses Microsoft Teams so that she is not using an event platform. Everything that they have created digitally within the pandemic has been performed through existing resources vs. using anything new. No bells and whistles keeps it low budget, which helps with ROI.
  - Tirza spends about 5 hours a week on the program answering emails from mentors/mentees, facilitating the matching portion of the program and checking in on the mentor/mentee relationships.
- The relationship doesn't have to follow that of a traditional mentor/mentee relationship, unless that is what the 2 parties agree upon. This is why the expectations are so important and need to be set out ahead of time. This flexibility within the program has been well received and appreciated.

- There are many benefits to leveraging community with mentoring and vice versa. First of all, the resources can be leveraged back and forth. Tirza stated that the community became more successful when the mentoring program launched because people came to the community to participate in mentoring. It gave them a reason to come to the community.
- Tirza warned that with digital platforms, if people can search and contact each other outside of the platform, you may or may not be accounting for how many people actually found themselves in a mentoring relationship based on active relationship status in the system. There could be people who are marked as active, but they are not. Or people may have found each other, emailed back and forth, but never went into the system to mark themselves as being in an active relationship.
- Tirza reports monthly to senior leadership on the following metrics:
  - Active mentors/mentees.
  - Active relationships.
  - Mentoring phone calls and how many attended each call.
    - Fortunately, senior leadership is not focused on the dollar value gained, but rather the perceived value. Accordingly, leadership doesn't hold Tirza to a specific ROI.
    - Tirza did look at how the community impacted business objectives. The one metric that was well received by the Board was: *"Of everyone that became a member in 2020, 60% of them participated in the online community."* That is a great deal of participation from new members. That wouldn't apply across the board, however. The amount of people who participated with their PDH is not 60%. The amount of people who attend the conference is not 60%. Therefore, it is a huge measure of the value to the membership as a whole, rather than specific programs that touch specific people.