

**FINAL REPORT**

**THE MENTORING  
PROJECT:  
SUPPORTING THE CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTS**

**JULY 2011**

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## ***Overview***

To realize its vision of a robust and resilient Ontario cultural sector, Cultural Careers Council Ontario (called CCCO throughout this report) supports the people who work in the cultural sector through life-long career development and business skills training.

Previous study and research by CCCO showed that a lack of business skills serves as a barrier to many artists, holding them back from fully realizing their economic potential. In a study commissioned from Ipsos Reid (*Enriching Our Work In Culture*, 2008), CCCO demonstrated that artists may be likened to micro-businesses or entrepreneurs in that they require skills to research, develop and create products or services, as well as to promote, market, finance and manage their art and that they felt they needed more training in business skills.

However, highly trained in art, artists feel that generic business training programs are not relevant to their activities and are not meeting their needs. As creative entrepreneurs, they respond well to and often prefer experiential programs (such as mentorship, internship and apprenticeship). Other research by CCCO has shown that other jurisdictions (e.g. Quebec, England, Australia) have identified experiential programs such as mentorship as important tools to address the gap in cultural leadership and business skills through strategies that combine workplace and theoretical learning.

Given these premises, CCCO developed a pilot project to extend and enhance its business education opportunities by developing a mentorship program to link professional artists with mentors from the business community in order to address the specific business skills needs of the artist being mentored. CCCO worked with a local community arts council, Arts Etobicoke, a previous partner in learning programs, to develop, promote and assess the program.

This report examines the pilot project, its results and makes recommendations for the future.

The pilot project was supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture through its Cultural Strategic Investment Fund.

## ***The Pilot Project - Research***

CCCO began the initiative by researching mentoring programs in general and mentoring programs for artists or cultural workers that address general business skills as opposed to specific artistic skills. Because there are many practical guides to mentoring and it is a common and well regarded technique, CCCO looked at the features of successful mentoring programs and specifically examined a United Way Toronto program for executive directors (One to One), Business Mentors New Zealand which focuses on mentoring for small businesses, and several other examples of formalized business mentoring in the United Kingdom.

Although there are many informal examples of mentoring between individuals, formal business mentoring is used more typically in the arts and culture sector for professional development for arts leaders or managers (e.g. Mentorat Culturel in Quebec, run through the Conseil quebecois des ressources humaines en culture; or Mentor Connection Service at the Arts Alliance of Illinois) than for artists. CCCO was able to find one mentoring program which has been formalized for immigrant artists (New York Foundation for the Arts).

The best documented example of mentoring program for creative entrepreneurs is at NESTA (in England, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) which has developed two programs, one specifically for video games entrepreneurs and the other for creative businesses.

Mentoring programs all work from a similar premise:

Mentoring is a supportive relationship with someone who enhances the abilities of his/her partner in work, career or behavioural issues.
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The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines mentoring as “the passing on of support, guidance and advice whereby someone learns the tricks of the trade from an experienced colleague.” Individuals feel isolated and do not have time to sit back and reflect, so mentoring provides an important second opinion, constructive feedback from an individual experienced either in your business or your field of interest. A mentor is not a consultant, but instead gives someone a different perspective to encourage the person in their role as decision-maker. Mentoring is confidential, can be formal or informal. Unlike coaching which is usually of short duration, mentoring is a relationship that can last a long time.

The mentoring relationship can help mentorees find business direction, access networks and contacts, improve communication, technical and managerial skills, and build confidence.

Mentoring is considered a cost-effective learning strategy which supplies ‘just in time’ individualized learning. Programs can become self-sustaining in that mentorees themselves often become mentors to the next generation. Research also notes that mentoring is essentially a qualitative exercise – deepening knowledge and confidence – rather than a quantitative exercise and that it focuses on individual knowledge development.

Matching can be done by variety of ways, but the quality of the relationship is the most important factor.

All programs consulted showed that the mentoree drives the agenda, but both mentor and mentoree share attributes. Good mentors are described as open, facilitative, patient, tolerant, reflective and accessible. Mentorees are described as open to learning, curious, committed, people and goal-oriented, demonstrating initiative and assertiveness. NESTA’s research showed that voluntary formalized mentorships have a successful record and that people appreciate the chance to give something back.

While matching is an important factor in the success of the relationship, in informal mentoring the mentoree typically seeks a friend or colleague. But in formal mentoring programs matches can be made in a variety of ways – by business sector, personality attributes, learning styles, and business skills. Training or coaching of mentors and mentorees helps to deepen the relationship. It is important for administrators of mentoring programs not to over-intervene but instead to let relationships grow on their own. NESTA described administration as a “light touch” so that the relationship between mentor and mentoree develops in a natural and confidential manner.

While mentoring can and should be a flexible process, at the same time it benefits by setting out clear expectations.

Roles and responsibilities must be established early with a clear set of objectives and commitment agreed to by both sides, and there is a need to recognize the possibility of risk and make sure there is a policy for terminating relationships where necessary.

These considerations were consistent with CCCO’s own work on mentoring, reflected in its online publication *GetMentored*, which provides tips and case studies especially helpful for those getting into the cultural sector.

### ***The Pilot Project - Program Design***

The pilot project had two goals:

- to understand how supportive relationships between artists and business people can help creative workers build some of the entrepreneurial skills they need
- to bridge the two sectors (arts and business) and create mutual respect and understanding

The program was designed to reflect the research and addressed to working artists with specific business challenges. It spelled out the time commitment (two hours per month),

the limited duration (six months) and the need for an orientation session. The application was designed to get the artists to provide business information and to think in terms of business and entrepreneurial issues and skills.

CCCO and Arts Etobicoke targeted their lists to individual artists in the area including the Arts Etobicoke membership. Both organizations also sent out bulletins and announced the program on their websites. Two public information sessions were held, both to inform artists about the program and sound out artists about what they wanted. The announcements were then picked up by other organizations including the city of Mississauga. Applicants came from across the GTA.

The application process was augmented with reviews by CCCO and Arts Etobicoke staff and then personal interviews. Five artists were chosen, based on their ability to identify their business issues, the range of art forms, and whether their business was at a stage where it could benefit from a business mentor.

Mentors were sought in different ways but always based on the business issue and skill gaps identified by the mentorees. All candidates were given the opportunity to propose mentors but only two did so. (MaRS, the Toronto-based science and technology incubator, considered this an unusual step. However, CCCO found no difference in how mentors reacted to the opportunity.) One artist was quite adamant that the mentor not be from the same industry. In all cases, CCCO sought mentors who had the expertise needed by the mentorees. All mentors were told the timeline (12 - 14 hours over 5 - 6 months) and that it was a voluntary commitment. All but one of the mentors had previous mentoring, teaching or coaching experience and two of the five were from altogether different industries than culture.

Mentoring matches were as follows:

- Lawyer Annette Frymer was matched with visual artist Sonja Hidas who wanted to understand legal and professional issues as she moved to more community-based projects

- Film and television composer John Welsman mentored Vikas Kohli, a music producer and emerging film composer with his own recording studio who wanted business information about and an overview of Canadian production
- Cultural consultant Jerry Smith mentored theatre producer Heather Dick who wanted to develop her business plan for a theatre company and strengthen her place in the local Lakeshore community
- Anthony Reyes, marketing manager, worked with musician Joan Watson (one of the founders of the True North Brass) on marketing issues. (This was a second match as the first mentor had to pull out because of a work conflict.)

A fifth team - a marketing executive matched with a visual artist who was interested in entering a new target market – did not complete the term. For purposes of this report and public reporting, we will only identify the four teams.

CCCO initiated each match with an introductory meeting. This was an opportunity to provide an orientation to the program and supply a workbook or manual (*GetMentored*) for training and case study purposes. CCCO also gave each team 24 hours to reflect on the likelihood of the 'fit' or chemistry of the match and decide whether to accept or decline, without penalty. Every team chose to go ahead.

### ***Evaluation: Mentoring Teams in Action***

After the teams were set up, CCCO administration took the 'light touch' approach advocated in other mentoring programs. In the orientation meeting, CCCO encouraged teams to develop written guidelines, timelines, objectives or topics over the course of the meeting and then CCCO let the relationships develop and build naturally and confidentially after that. CCCO monitored their progress by checking in twice via email and telephone after the first official meeting, sent email tips about mentoring issues and pitfalls, sent tips about closure, asked participants to fill in an evaluation, and then to attend a collective debriefing session after all the teams had finished. While the evaluations and de-brief were useful to gather opinions, the sample is simply too small to form anything but impressions.

**Matches:** All mentorees found that the expertise of their mentor matched their needs. The notion of artists recommending their own mentor made this project different from others and it was appreciated. As one artist put it, *“Selecting a mentor is not easy. I think it’s very important for the artist to be able to clarify his/her needs and with this knowledge to suggest a mentor with whom to work. If the artist ... doesn’t know whom to call, then CCCO could assist with the search via a database of potential mentors.”* For mentoring teams who didn’t know each other, the introductory meeting process was a useful gauge of the future viability of the partnerships. As one of the mentors put it, *“the consultation lunch where I met my potential mentoree was a good opportunity for both of us to mutually assess if we were the right ‘fit’ for one another.”*

One team had to be re-configured after the mentor’s work demands increased and she could not continue. A second team proceeded for several sessions, but then broke down as the artist found that struggling with an artistic block was all-consuming and made it too difficult to consider business questions.

**Monitoring:** Mentors in three of the four ongoing teams all had previous mentoring or teaching experience which may explain why they appreciated the ‘light touch’ administration; while they all expressed their comfort that they could call on CCCO when needed, they didn’t really feel that need.

Although most teams found the monitoring check-ins unnecessary, they proved to be useful in two cases. The relationship of one team broke down because the mentoree could no longer concentrate on business issues. Despite intervention, the artist felt unable to continue and CCCO staff had then to communicate that to the mentor. In the second, the team found that they had different learning styles. The mentor had a very laid-back “hands-off” style but the mentoree needed more accountability built into the process with clearer demands, deadlines and timelines. After discussion and intervention by CCCO, the relationship was able to get back on track.

Although they appreciated the materials CCCO provided, most felt they were not needed and didn't consult them. In Joan Watson's case, this was a detriment: *"Materials were helpful but we didn't refer to them as much as we should have so neither we nor the mentor were quite as business-like."* In this case, CCCO's mid-term intervention *"was helpful and supportive. The documents were helpful to start but more direct coaching about how to use the mentorship program would be very helpful."* Heather Dick also noted that the materials were good but felt that she had to research other mentoring agreements to get a fuller picture.

**Written Deliverables:** All the teams initially developed written agreements about the timeline, topics and expectations. However, in reality the schedule was often more flexible and the topics developed as issues were identified by the mentoree. Timing of meetings was similarly flexible: teams reported that they often met over the telephone or via email as needed although the amount of time spent still amounted to two hours or so a month. Only one of the teams went so far as to develop very clear objectives and report-back deadlines. But as Jerry Smith, the mentor in that case, noted *"Early on we established the point of homework which ... was the starting point for the subsequent session. Once the homework was covered, we were comfortable moving back and forth between early discussions and new ideas."* Vikas Kohl noted: *"I did initiate an email 'agreement' so that we both had the same expectations of how to schedule meetings and what to discuss. I think it was good to have the formality in case things got messy. It wasn't needed in this case. There is the risk that informal meetings cannot deal with the issues that the mentoree wants to discuss. Although at times we did get off topic, I never felt that new topics were irrelevant to me. If anything, it just highlighted the amount of experience and knowledge there is to transmit."*

**Facilitating discussions:** Teams used different methods to facilitate discussion. Artist Sonja Hidas said: *"Lots of things I consulted on, and then as issues came up, I called [my mentor] up."* John Welsman and Vikas Kohli used scenarios. When Kohli was asked *"to pitch for a gig by a producer, John pointed out how to do it, how to talk, the subtleties, smoother ways of doing things."* But as one mentor discovered, clarity about

each other's learning styles is key: *"I think the challenge in the beginning was when I was still learning what type of coaching works best for my mentoree. The process changed for me as I'm more of a hands-off type mentor versus a micromanager. I realized my mentoree needed a bit more hands-on guidance. Learning about each other and how best we work together is the key first step to take and understand."*

Mentorees and mentors used similar words to describe the traits they appreciated in each other: *"confidence and directness," "sensitivity to the creative process," "kindly supportive advice, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and compassionate," "clear-thinking, well-organized and with lots of energy," "openness and willingness to learn the business side of the industry," "intelligence and a capacity/appetite to learn."*

**Timing:** All the teams met for about two hours a month over a six month period which research suggests is the minimum time for a mentorship to have impact. In the lives of busy professionals, an important feature of the process was not wasting each other's time. According to Vikas Kohli, *"Although I would love more time, I don't believe myself or my mentor would be able to afford it."* It is also clear that the first few meetings are 'getting to know you' meetings with, as Joan Watson put it, *"a huge learning curve as the mentor got to know our product."*

**Impact:** The mentoring process clearly has had an impact on the skills, knowledge and confidence of the mentorees. The learning is very individual and customised as can be seen when one enumerates the skills and knowledge covered:

- Kohli – I learned *"communication skills with clients, discussions about technology and contracts"*
- Watson – Technical and marketing skills. *"Our initial concern was our new website. Our mentor visited the site and advised us on approach, look, logo and ways to focus on specific audiences. We have a number of projects on the go and he was great in helping us to know what style to use and how to prioritize these to be doable."*

- Watson – Also, strategic planning. *“Helped us work through our website, understand new target audiences, made changes to strengthen our marketing online.”*
- Dick – *“Job descriptions, policies and organizational structure. Got me to open my mind and look at setting goals for a new start.”*
- Hidas – *“I changed some things in my practice. I feel I’m getting help with attitudes and confidence. She helped me in negotiating and in tactics.”*

All the mentorees described the usefulness of learning about new contacts or associations from mentors and the value of doing this in a real-life setting. Kohli put it well for all the mentorees: *“I found the real-life examples to be the most useful learning,”*

Watson noted that some of the time in the beginning was spent trying to translate business concepts to the arts. *“We needed to get to know the terminology he was speaking in – business parlance, marketing terminology, website and technical opportunities. Artists don’t tend to read or relate to business in the same way as business people.”* She described herself as needing more structure and more help from CCCO in these areas at the beginning.

Teams described the benefits in very clear ways consistent with the research, using phrases like the value of “personal reflective time”, growth in personal confidence, *“the structured opportunity of brainstorming and planning with feedback and support”*. Kohli noted how important the impact of role models can be: *“i believe John is an interesting example of calm communication, savvy business and musical craftsmanship. All of those things are areas for me to emulate.”*

Mentoring had a two-way impact, an important consideration in a voluntary program. Annette Frymer *“learned more about the world of visual arts and various opportunities open to them. I appreciated being able to share my business understanding in a way that had a direct impact on assisting Sonja in her work.”* John Welsman felt that *“our relationship is such that I know I can pick up the phone any time and ask [Vikas] for help*

*or information in the areas he has expertise in, [mainly] that of the financial world and investing, which I know will be helpful.”*

Perhaps one of the most important benefits is that all the teams feel that have created ongoing relationships. Hidas spoke for herself and Annette Frymer: *“We have agreed to continue our relationship by discussing issues when needed as friends,”* a point made by John Welsman who said *“I feel that Vikas and I can now come together as professional colleagues.”* Anthony Reyes has offered *“to continue helping us with any questions we have,”* said Joan Watson. *“He took on ownership of our goals and the work we do and has offered to be an ongoing advisor.”* Jerry Smith went further: *“I have agreed/offered to continue the relationship [with Heather Dick] by joining her steering committee. The relationship has changed rather than ended. I have joined her steering committee – as one of a group of equals.”*

### ***Recommendations for CCCO***

Although the sample may be small, the overwhelming support for mentoring as a way to build individual knowledge is clear. As Joan Watson said, *“This is a wonderful opportunity and I can see it growing in popularity. I think the arts need mentorship in a big way. I truly believe in apprenticing in the arts and mentors are a wonderful way to move forward and learn with confidence.”*

Mentorees described changes in confidence, skill levels and business knowledge. Mentors felt they received benefits from getting to know other sectors and seeing the changes that their business knowledge could add to the arts or to an individual’s practice. Good mentoring relationships may continue long after the end of the formal term.

Mentoring has the potential to be an ongoing CCCO program with relatively light administrative needs after the matches are made. The program also has the potential

to be self-sustaining as successful mentorees with an understanding of the process have an interest in becoming mentors themselves.

**Recommendation #1**

**Given the overwhelming support for the value of mentoring on the skills of individual creative entrepreneurs and the relatively inexpensive administrative costs, CCCO should continue to explore mentoring as the basis for an ongoing program to support the skill needs of creative entrepreneurs.**

This first pilot was targeted towards artists with business capacity and an ability to articulate business issues. CCCO has already received funding towards the next logical step in testing the concept – with leaders of creative business enterprises from the cultural industries. It may also be helpful to explore how mentoring can facilitate the integration of newcomer artists in Ontario. CCCO should also consider how mentoring could be added as a benefit or extension to existing CCCO business training programs; for example, in The Business of Art series one business person might mentor a small group of artists as they carry out their business plans. CCCO should also consider wider tests of the concept in order to determine if it is possible to quantify the economic impact of successful mentoring relationships.

**Recommendation #2**

**In order to prepare all participants or potential participants, CCCO should make training of mentors and mentorees a bigger component in the next test of the concept. CCCO should consider developing a half-day workshop that addresses mentoring definitions, tips and facilitation techniques, creating shared goals and expectations, how to overcome potential pitfalls, etc.**

While the balance between administration costs and potential participant benefit makes the potential of this program appealing, nonetheless training requirements must be addressed in the next iteration. The fact that mentors in four of the teams had acted previously as mentors or teachers made the program easy to run. But mentors new to the process or recruited from other industries will need training, and both mentors and mentorees need to be clear about how to outline shared expectations, what processes

can facilitate conversations and what techniques can overcome potential pitfalls. Preparation needs to be more extensive and case studies from real-life successful mentorships as well as some role-play should be incorporated into training.

For artists, it may also prove valuable to include in this opening workshop a self-assessment checklist about business issues they want to explore so that language and terminology issues can be captured and dealt with earlier in the process.

**Recommendation #3**

**CCCO should consider extending the reach of mentoring to other arts councils or arts service organizations in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in order to expand recruitment of mentors and mentorees.**

Partnering with Arts Etobicoke not only gave CCCO the benefit of another perspective in designing and evaluating the program, it also gave the program a broader reach. Not only did the organizations put out their own newsletters and promote the program on their websites, but the Arts Etobicoke information was picked up by AE's local partners in the Lakeshore area and in Mississauga. For a local arts council, it gave added benefit to membership and a wider audience. AE also participated in evaluating applicants to the program, in suggesting potential mentors and in final evaluations. The whole program benefitted by their knowledge. There are other arts councils in the GTA and arts service organizations (membership-based organizations) whose artist constituencies could also benefit. CCCO should create a promotional campaign to reach those organizations and develop information sessions about the benefits of mentoring with the executive directors of such organizations in order to expand the reach of the mentoring program.

**Recommendation #4**

**In any implementation of a mentoring program, CCCO should consider how to provide and describe clear benefit to the mentors.**

Mentors in this current program described some of what attracted them initially – giving back, getting to know another field (Frymer), the possibility of reverse learning from a younger generation (Welsman), the chance to reflect on careers and skills. Identifying benefits like these will help in securing wider recruitment of mentorees. Opportunities for learning (e.g. mentor training) and networking should also be built into the program and promoted as benefits for mentoree.

**Recommendation #5**

**In addition to email and telephone check-ins with mentoring teams, CCCO should consider adding a collaborative face-to-face check-in mid-way through the process to ensure both parties are comfortable with and clear about shared expectations.**

CCCO abided by the ‘light touch’ notion advocated by NESTA but it must be asked if the breakdown of one team could have been salvaged through a collaborative face-to-face check-in. While there is no guarantee, it does provide another vehicle for checking expectations and progress in a way which can be seen as facilitative rather than interventionist.

## ***Summary***

Mentoring has the potential to be an important addition to CCCO’s professional development roster. It allows CCCO to offer learning for individual creative entrepreneurs which is tailored to their needs and to build contacts outside the sector; it has the added appeal of being administratively inexpensive. The great value of mentoring is in the building of long-term relationships that support learning for cultural workers based on real-life business issues.