

# **EFNEP/FSNE Mentoring Program\***

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## **EFNEP/FSNE Mentoring Program**

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## **1. Introduction to the Mentoring/Coaching Program**

An important component of any successful organization is the manner and style in which new people are brought into the organization and how they learn or are taught their responsibilities within the organization. In EFNEP and FSNE there have been many situations in which informal mentoring has taken place. As new people have come into positions and as FSNE has grown, coordinators have learned a lot from one another. There has been a great willingness to share experiences and expertise to assist one another in operating effective programs.

At this time, EFNEP and FSNE can benefit from a mentoring program in which new state coordinators are paired with a mentor who can guide them through situations and issues important to establishing and operating an effective nutrition education program. Another form of mentoring can take place when individuals are willing to share expertise on a specific subject. The program leaders/coordinators will continue to encourage this kind of mentoring also.

This manual will provide some basic information about mentoring, suggest some ways to get started in a mentoring relationship, and provide some ideas for mentoring activities.

Mentoring relationships are a very personal experience. They take time, energy, and effort from both parties. EFNEP and FSNE would like to encourage new coordinators to find a mentor to assist them in their new position. Most people have found that a mentor within their own region, especially FSNE region, works best. In this situation, there is more opportunity for you to have face-to-face contact with your mentor. Finding a mentor is the first step. One way to do this is to meet several people at the first regional or national conference you attend. Mentoring relationships are often based on good chemistry or relations between individuals. Think about the people you met that made you feel comfortable and at ease. Perhaps a specific individual will come to mind. You may want to then visit by phone with these individuals about a specific issue. When you have identified someone you would like to be your mentor, call and ask them if they would consider a mentoring relationship with you and refer them to this resource for some guidelines and definition of the commitment they would be making. If they agree, you can begin with some suggestions included in this document.

While mentoring and being mentored is a personal process, the information here can act as a guide. It is designed to give you choices. It is important to build a relationship that can provide satisfaction for both the mentor and mentee. The mentoring process will depend a lot on the experiences of both individuals.

The information shared here is a suggested structure and outline. It is important to be flexible to meet the needs and issues of the person being mentored. Mentoring programs work best when there are some guidelines and suggestions, but not specific

prescribed activities. The activities undertaken and the length of the mentoring relationship will vary with each mentoring pair.

## **2. What Can a Mentoring Program Do?**

What can participating in a mentoring program do for you? It can assist you in learning more about EFNEP/FSNE from experienced, knowledgeable practitioners. According to the National Mentoring Partnership ([www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)), a mentor can provide advice, access, advocacy and accountability.

- A. Mentors can offer advice on a variety of topics and situations. Advice from an experienced coordinator can be of assistance in evaluating options and choosing a course of action. Discussing situations with a knowledgeable colleague can assist you in making more informed and better decisions.
- B. Mentors can provide access to individuals and resources. They can assist a new coordinator by welcoming/eliciting their input in region teleconferences and meetings. They can introduce them to other coordinators at regional/national conferences. The mentor can connect the new coordinator with another individual who has expertise in the subject of interest.
- C. Mentors can also be advocates. They can share information about the mentee's experience and expertise with others. They can recommend the skills and experience of their mentee to others.
- D. Mentors can assist with accountability. They can work collaboratively to set goals and check progress on those goals. In EFNEP/FSNE they can also address program accountability and assist in understanding these complicated issues.

## **3. Role of the Mentor**

The mentor is a key component of any mentoring program. The mentor provides valuable assistance to the person being mentored. If a person has not been a mentor in the past, they may want to take time to learn more about mentoring. At the end of this section, there are some suggested readings and websites for more information. In EFNEP and FSNE, a mentor can evaluate, coach, counsel, motivate and facilitate actions and learning.

New coordinators will be encouraged to complete the assessment tool which is based on the Core Competencies for State Coordinators at <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/food/fsne/corecomphtml/CoreCompetency.html>.

This assessment could be shared with the mentor, so the mentor has an idea of the strengths and experiences of the mentee. This will assist the mentor in evaluating the experiences of the mentee and will help with the goal setting process.

The main role of the mentor is to coach/counsel/motivate the person whom they are mentoring. Coaching is sometimes used in place of mentoring. Coaching another includes working with the strengths of the individual and encouraging them continue their journey of facing new challenges. Counsel involves talking and discussing

issues, provides guidance and opinions about options to choose. Motivating becomes important when the mentee feels challenged or overwhelmed by the tasks at hand.

The mentor can also facilitate learning and experiences which will assist the mentee in understanding the tasks involved in their position.

In this project, the mentor can also provide valuable feedback to the Program Leader/Coordinator in how the process worked and ideas for continuing the program in the future.

Suggested Readings for Mentors:

- A. [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org) focuses on mentoring youth, but has a self-study guide on how to be an effective mentor. Click on Be a Better Mentor button.
- B. Wadsworth, Emily M. (2002) *Giving Much, Gaining More*, Purdue University Press.
- C. <http://mentoringgroup.com> has articles about mentor and monthly tips for mentors.

#### **4. Role of the Person Being Mentored**

The person being mentored, or the mentee, needs to be very involved in deciding what skills and experiences are important to them. It is important to work with the mentor in defining the skills and experiences you already have and the ones you would like to learn more about. It is important to keep an open mind and approach tasks with a willingness to learn. It is also important to meet your needs. If, during the process, an issue comes up that is not an activity that you had chosen to work on with your mentor, you need to be flexible and discuss the issue with your mentor and perhaps readjust goals for the mentoring relationship. In order to meet your needs, you must have open communication with your mentor and keep them informed of changing situations in your program.

#### **5. Setting Ground Rules or Contract for Working Together**

It is important in the beginning of a mentoring relationship to set some ground rules. First, it would be appropriate to set three to five goals that you would like to accomplish. The goals can be expressed by either party, or can be the result of a brainstorming session. If the mentee has completed the Core Competencies assessment, this could be used to set some goals.

At this point, it is also good to set some ground rules such as frequency of communication, type of contact (telephone, email, mail, etc.) and possibly a commitment on how long to work together. These can all be re-negotiated as needed, but it is important to start out with agreed upon expectations.

Example: The mentoring pair may choose to communicate by email once per week on goal related activities. They may choose to have a telephone conversation once

per month. The length of time they are going to work together is until the end of the federal fiscal year and report period for FSNE. There may be more frequent email contact when one or another has a question or an issue they would like to discuss.

Goals: After reviewing the rest of the information included in this information, the mentee chose to complete the Core Competencies assessment tool and shared with her mentor. They also reviewed job descriptions and discussed past experience and what each of them wants to achieve in this process.

Three goals were settled upon:

- A. Ensure program guidelines are followed. The mentee is new to FSNE and wants to review program guidelines and also has some ideas for future program that she would like to structure within the guidelines.
- B. Ensure compliance and financial accountability and reporting. The mentee wants to review the budget and match processes. She also wants to prepare for an audit which will happen in the next year.
- C. Strengthen the program coordinator relationships with program leaders, assistant directors and directors. The mentee feels there is a need for further communication about program operation and impacts so administrators have a better understanding of FSNE and the impact on Extension and clientele.

## **6. Choosing Activities to Work on Together**

The first and most important activity for the mentoring pair is to build a relationship. Learn about one another. What do you enjoy in your work and your life? What experiences do you share with one another? What are some differences?

Set goals using any or all of these techniques:

- Review job descriptions—how are they similar and how are they different?
- Mentee completes Core Competencies assessment and shares with mentor.
- Brainstorm a list of issues or topics to address.

Make plans to visit the mentor in his/her state if time and funding permit. Experienced coordinators state that this is one of the most useful experiences for new coordinators. If it is not possible to visit your mentor, perhaps a visit to a coordinator in an adjoining state would be feasible. The mentor may be able to facilitate the visit. The experience of seeing a program in another state, discovering how the state program is set up and how it operates is extremely valuable. The visit may assist you in identifying issues to discuss in the mentoring process.

Another suggestion is to plan to meet your mentor at a professional conference. Opportunities may include Extension or Food and Nutrition Service regional or national conferences, Society of Nutrition Education conference, Priester Health conference, American Dietetic Association conference, etc. This personal contact will assist both members of the pair to feel more comfortable with one another. It will also give you both the opportunity to learn more about one another.

It is important for the mentee to put into effect the information and the processes she is learning. Usually, this will not be difficult to do. If the goals you have chosen meet the needs of yourself and the program, the information will be used in a timely manner.

## **7. Using the Core Competencies as a Framework**

Some new coordinators will have a list of specific goals they would like to accomplish. Others may need some guidance or direction. The *Core Competencies for State Program Coordinators*, [http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/food/fsne/pdfs/coordinator\\_core\\_competencies.pdf](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/food/fsne/pdfs/coordinator_core_competencies.pdf) can assist new coordinators and their mentors determine goals and activities for the mentoring process. The six core competencies could be ranked in the order of importance to the mentee. Specific tasks under each can be chosen for further discussion.

In this discussion, each competency will be reviewed and a couple of suggestions for tasks will be made. No specific direction or activity will be suggested with these; they are just a list of possible topics. The idea is to assist mentors and mentees with generating possible topics for the pair to focus on. Mentoring is a very individual and personal process. Use the ideas suggested in this discussion, or choose ones of your own. Each topic or goal can be handled with the depth needed.

## **8. Practice Shared, Principled Leadership**

Leadership is a key role in the state coordinator position. Leadership is a skill which develops over time. A new coordinator provides leadership for the staff as well as the program.

Tasks to focus on include:

- Interpret/set/apply policy and procedure.
- Facilitate and model teamwork.

## **9. Provide Leadership for Statewide Programming**

As a state coordinator with EFNEP or FSNE, your major responsibilities will include many of the tasks included under this competency. Here is where we begin to get into the day-to-day operation of the programs. There are many components, including program planning, culturally sensitive programs, curriculum decisions, and compliance issues.

Tasks to focus on include:

- Ensure program guidelines are followed.
- Oversee curriculum identification and development.
- Coordinate program evaluation.

## **10. Create an Environment in which Staff can Thrive**

There are many models for staffing EFNEP and FSNE programs. Each state approaches the staffing situation in its own manner. The state coordinator is responsible for the overall creation of this environment; however, some of the tasks involved may be shared with other staff members.

Tasks to focus on include:

- Facilitate staff training.
- Facilitate staff development.
- Provide for performance management.

## **11. Practice Stewardship of all Resources**

Stewardship means “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*). This competency includes conducting, supervising and managing resources, including fiscal, personnel and materials.

Tasks to focus on include:

- Develop budgets.
- Monitor budgets.
- Ensure compliance and financial accountability and reporting.

## **12. Promote Synergistic Collaborations**

It is important to work with other individuals and agencies with similar goals. Collaborations with others can be a way to accomplish program goals and to serve families more effectively.

Task to focus on include:

- Establish/build relationships with partners with similar goals.

## **13. Communicate Program Value with a Passion**

When the Core Competencies committee met, the facilitator and observers recognized that when the coordinators discussed EFNEP and FSNE, there was a sense of excitement, pride, and commitment. They felt it important for the committee to bring those qualities into this last competency. The word “passion” was chosen to try to capture our emotions about the work we all do.

This competency discusses the need to communicate both internally and externally. At this point it is critical to build relations with program leaders, assistant directors and directors to assist them in understanding the scope and impact of EFNEP and FSNE.



Tasks to focus on include:

- Communicate successes internally and externally.
- Communicate program impact.
- Oversee development of marketing tools.
- Strengthen the program coordinator relationships with program leaders, assistant directors and directors.

## 14. Review Progress and Process

In the beginning of the mentoring relationship you probably discussed a timeframe for working together. As the end of the time approaches, you will both want to review your progress as a team and individually. If your goals have not been reached, you may choose to continue the mentoring relationship. Or, you may choose to continue a relationship as colleagues on another level.

It is usually very useful to have some kind of closure in a mentoring relationship. Since the mentoring process is very individual and personal, the type of closure you choose will also be unique. Some mentoring pairs choose to celebrate when they are together. Others will exchange cards or small gifts of appreciation. Whatever you choose, make it appropriate to the relationship you shared.

It would be helpful to the National Program Leader, Helen Chipman, to receive some feedback on the mentoring program from both the mentor and the mentee. Please take a few moments and let her know how the mentoring process worked for you. Offer ideas and suggestions on how to improve the process for new coordinators. Your time on these comments will be much appreciated. Please forward comments to: [hchipman@csrees.usda.gov](mailto:hchipman@csrees.usda.gov) .

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