

THE EXTENSION MENTORING PROGRAM FOR NEW AGENTS

REFERENCE GUIDE

**New Mexico State University
Cooperative Extension Service**



All About Discovery![™]
Cooperative Extension Service
College of Agricultural, Consumer
and Environmental Sciences

Acknowledgements

Extension materials reviewed and used for the creation of the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Mentoring Program and this desk reference guide were from the following states: Texas, Kentucky, North Carolina and Wyoming.

Notes

Throughout this document will be reference made to NM CES and Cooperative Extension. Note that both of these terms refer to the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service.

“Mentee” always refers to the new agent who has been hired and who has been assigned a mentor.

“Mentor” always refers to the experienced agent who provides the mentoring.

“Mentoring Program Director” refers to the coordinators of the NM CES mentoring program.

Teresa Dean and Patrick Kircher are the current 2017-2018 Western Extension Leadership Development (WELD) Interns representing NM CES. As part of the program WELD Interns are tasked with taking on a leadership experience that they plan and implement. Something Teresa and Patrick have discussed and wanted to address was how do we help young or new agents traverse the maze of extension and help them stayed engaged and find contentment in this profession. One thing we wanted to tackle was some type of mentorship program that would pair young(new) agents with a seasoned agent to help them:

1. Establish a relationship with someone in the program that they felt comfortable going to with questions and advice
2. Demonstrate to them what a successful program looks like
3. Help them learn how to navigate county politics and office dynamics
4. Help them learn how to manage life and work so we don't overwhelm them, burn them out and then loose them.

This is a totally volunteer program. Jon Boren is in support of what we are doing. Teresa and I will be coordinating pairing you up with a new hire and following up to see how things are going and if you need additional resources to make this successful. Our goal is to see new hires find their stride in the NMSU system and provide the best service possible to their clientele. As you all know, we are successful as a system when our folks have the tools to do their job and find pleasure in what they do.

THE EXTENSION MENTOR

The goal of Mentoring in Extension is to provide a professional, educational and personal support system for new employees of the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service. Each new employee will benefit from the guidance of an appointed “mentor”.

According to Chip R Bell in his article, “Mentoring as Partnership”, *a mentor is simply someone who helps someone else learn something that he or she would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all if left alone.* This results in a power-free relationship. Mentors are not power figures. Mentors are learning coaches- sensitive, trusted advisors. The relationship between mentor and mentee is based on support because the managerial supremacy does not exist.

The role of the mentor should be perceived as a coach who has strong respect and concern for the mentee. The major contribution made by the mentor is his/her willingness to devote time and energy on behalf of the mentee. Every mentor has a specific body of professional knowledge and skills to share. The knowledge that the mentor has must be transformed into a relationship that will meet the mentee’s maturity and experience level. There are several support groups that will help the new employee get a successful start in his/her Extension career. This partnership includes the immediate supervisor, the District Director, the co-workers and the appointed mentor.

The immediate supervisor will help the new employee become acquainted with the basic Extension policies, procedures and employee guidelines that all Extension employees must follow. Extension philosophy and overview of program planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting and interpretation will also be addressed by the supervisor. The supervisor and employee together, with the input of others, will set forth a professional development plan to aid the new employee in their continued success.

District Directors will assist the employee in becoming familiar with the program development in Extension including current programming efforts and initiatives. They will be the new employee’s key resource for programming contacts and resources. They will also provide input to the supervisor on the employee’s professional development plan.

Co- workers will assist the new employee in becoming acquainted with the office, working relationships, and job responsibilities. Other topics will be covered to help the new employee become acquainted with the Extension program and initiatives.

The mentor will support the new employee with advice, feedback, focus and support in learning new job responsibilities and getting acquainted with the organization. The mentor will provide an opportunity for the mentee to ask questions, test ideas, and talk about challenges and solutions.

Through positive support and experiences, new employees will build their knowledge, skills and abilities that will facilitate them becoming an integral part of Extension.

MISSION STATEMENT

Beneficial knowledge and organizational values are communicated to new employees through caring professional partnerships. This helps them become productive Extension faculty who will enhance the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service to improve the quality of life for the citizens of New Mexico.

PHILOSOPHY

The five statements listed below communicate the philosophical foundation of the mentoring program. Simple statements that yield profound outcomes when integrated into the mission, objectives, procedures and experiences of a mentoring relationship.

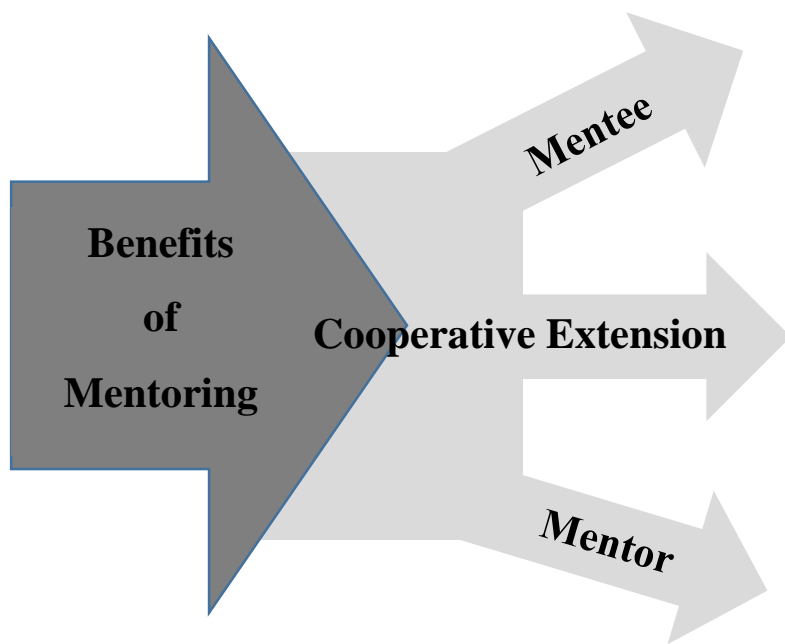
1. Mentoring is a partnership.
2. Mentoring is a nurturing, professional relationship.
3. Mentoring is communicating with each other.
4. Mentoring enhances development of the employee.
5. Mentoring benefits the mentee, the mentor, and the organization.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of mentoring in Extension is to provide a professional, educational and personal support system for the new employee called the “mentee.” Achieving this goal will enhance the mentee’s job performance by:

- Identifying resources and resource persons for the mentee.
- Educating the mentee in all organizational philosophy, goals, policies, and values.
- Sharing skills and knowledge of an experienced and successful Extension professional to meet the need of the mentee.
- Strengthening the mentee’s leadership skills and self-confidence.
- Fostering open communication and dialogue.

By accomplishing these objectives, mentees will experience an easier transition into the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service, thus accelerating the productivity of the mentee and enhancing the effectiveness of Extension.



- Supportive atmosphere
- Informational-technical and process skills
- Non-evaluative feedback
- Organizational values and norms
- Sense of competence and worth
- Opportunity to be successful
- Importance of taking responsibility for requirements of the position

- New employees become competent sooner
- Continuity of organizational culture
- Less job turnover (\$\$)
- Increase teamwork
- Increased productivity

- Develop positive and secure self-image
- Give something back to the organization
- Pass on knowledge and ideas to next generation of staff
- Sense of accomplishments through mentee's success
- Help organization's goal

MENTORING PROCESS GUIDELINES AND CONSIDERATIONS

The following general guidelines will apply to each mentoring relationship and should be understood by both the mentor and mentee.

- Mentors are chosen by the Program Coordinators (Patrick Kircher and Teresa Dean) based on recommendations made by supervisor(s).
- Commitment to the formal mentoring relationship is one year.
- The mentor should contact the new mentee within the first week after the relationship has been determined.
- A face-to-face visit should occur between the mentor and mentee with the year.
- Mentors and mentees should correspond frequently either by phone, Zoom, e-mail, in person, etc. It is the responsibility of both participants to make sure that this communication occurs.
- The mentor may recommend that the mentee work with other professionals with approval of appropriate supervisor(s).
- The mentor and appropriate supervisor and/or program coordinators will communicate on the progress of the mentee throughout the process.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MENTOR

Mentors should be prepared to devote time and energy to the relationship. The most important factor in mentoring is the mentor's willingness to give time and attention to the mentee. You accept great responsibility in this close, trusting relationship. Pitfalls can be averted by honest, open communication that establishes ground rules and clarifies the concerns of the new mentee.

The following are some things the mentor should DO in the mentoring relationship:

- Review your Mentee's Biographical Sketch to learn more about his/her interests and background.
- Take responsibility to initiate the relationship.
- Foster creativity and independence.
- Set aside time for the mentoring process and keep all appointments.
- Display professional behavior and dress.
- Schedule meetings and feedback sessions with planned topics.
- Be positive, enthusiastic and supportive.
- Be a good listener.
- Establish open and honest communication and a forum for idea exchange.
- Maintain confidentiality! If something concerning the mentor or mentee needs to be discussed with others, it should first be discussed within the mentoring relationship.
- Be flexible on meeting times and places.
- Offer to share resources, expertise and experiences.
- Provide opportunities for the mentee to talk about concerns and ask questions.
- Invite the mentee to meetings or activities, as appropriate.

The following are some things mentors should AVOID in the mentoring relationship:

- Criticize.
- Try to solve all their problems.
- Try to give advice on everything.
- Encourage mentee to be totally dependent on you.
- Complain about your own problems.
- Be too busy when the mentee needs your friendship or your support.
- Take responsibility for the mentee's program or duties.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MENTEE

Remember, a mentor is a supportive friend with a strong respect and concern for the professional development and success of their mentee. Plan to devote time and energy to build this relationship. Upon completion of the formal mentoring process, you should complete the Mentoring Program Evaluation and email to the program coordinators.

The following are some things the mentee should **DO** in the mentoring relationship:

- Review your Mentor's Biographical Sketch to learn more about his/her interests and background.
- Establish open and honest communication and a forum for idea exchange. Maintaining confidentiality between the mentor and mentee is essential! If something concerning the mentor or mentee needs to be discussed with others, it should be discussed first within the mentoring relationship.
- Understand what you want from the mentoring relationship and communicate your goals and aspirations to your mentor. Balance a personal and professional relationship with your mentor.
- Understand that you have to give as well as receive from the relationship.
- Act on your mentor's advice when you feel it is applicable to your situation. Follow up with resources/references that your mentor gives you to find answers to questions or needed information.
- Keep all scheduled appointments with your mentor and display professional behavior and dress, as appropriate.
- Be aware that as an Extension employee you are a professional- 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Arrange frequent contacts with your mentor through telephone, Zoom, e-mail, face-to-face, etc.
- Be flexible on meeting times and places.
- Be realistic, maintain positive attitude.
- Be ambitious and enthusiastic.

The following are some things mentors should **AVOID** in the mentoring relationship:

- Ask for advice on everything. Have a purpose in each request.
- Ask your mentor to act in your place or tell you precisely what to do.
- Rely on your mentor to give or seek answers to all of your questions/requests.
- Complain about other people or missed opportunities in an unprofessional manner.
- Commit yourself to obligations you cannot keep.
- Cancel meetings/visits with your mentor at the last minute.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DISTRICT EXTENSION DIRECTOR

The role of the District is critical to the success of the mentoring relationship and to the mentoring program as a whole. The District Director is involved in the following ways:

- Supports the mentoring process as it becomes a more formalized mechanism within the Cooperative Extension's process.
- Encourages agents with five (5) or more years of experience become mentors.
- Encourages new agents to seek guidance from the mentors.
- Works with mentoring program coordinators to assign mentors to new agents.
- Confirms pairing of mentor and mentees.
- When appropriate, works with the mentor and/or mentee to resolve any concerns or address issues that are of confidential nature.
- Provides input to the mentoring program coordinators for ongoing evaluation and improvements of the mentoring program.
- Considers the mentor's involvement, time and commitment to the Extension Mentoring Program when conducting mentor's (agent's) annual performance evaluation.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTOR

The role of the County Extension Director is also critical to the success of the mentoring relationship and to the mentoring program as a whole. The County Director is involved in the following ways:

- Encourages agents with five (5) or more years of experience become mentors.
- Provides the mentoring program coordinators with suggestions for who to contact about becoming a mentor.
- Follows up with the new agent by including the mentoring process as a topic for discussion. Example: How is it going with your mentor? Are you and your mentor meeting in a regular basis?
- Supports agents who agree to be mentor by allowing them time to spend with their mentees, and understand that mentor's need to be out of the office more than usual to meet with their mentee.
- Encourages new agent to seek guidance from mentor.
- When appropriate, works with the mentor and/or mentee to resolve any concerns or address issues that are of confidential nature.
- Provides input to the mentoring program coordinators for ongoing evaluation and improvements of the mentoring program.
- Considers the mentor's involvement, time and commitment to the Extension Mentoring Program when conducting mentor's (agent's) annual performance evaluation.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR MENTOR

Communications

- Discuss importance of evaluations after program delivery to if your planned objectives were met.
- Share newsletters with mentee
- Share news articles you prepared
- Share a radio/TV tape or invite to next taping
- Invite the mentee to see you conduct a program
- Share your perspective on office communications, teamwork, conflict, etc.
- Discuss appropriate attention to phone and email messages
- Emphasize importance of reviewing daily planning (calendars)

Program Development

- Invite to an advisory committee meeting
- Invite to attend a volunteer meeting
- Invite to a program of the mentee's interest
- Share successes and failures in programming
- Share program announcements with mentee
- Share key contacts and resource persons
- Support creativity and energy of mentee, particularly as they relate to programming
- Share programming resources
- Invite to attend planning meeting
- Discuss importance of evaluating impact of programming efforts
- Discuss programming for reaching underserved audiences and those with special needs
- Explain importance of and how to network with other agencies/organizations
- Discuss importance of understanding local power structures and relationships
- Discuss importance of "sign in" attendance rosters for reporting
- Discuss importance of surveying audience for reaching audiences' needs

Personal Effectiveness

- Discuss protocol/informal rules in Extension
- Discuss support services at NMSU
- Share your time management techniques
- Share your perspective on maintaining balance with work/family
- Discuss importance of community involvement
- Identify professional associations/upcoming dates and invite to join/attend
- Encourage mentee to apply for awards
- Discuss professional image

Working with County Commissioners' Court and Other Key Officials

- Elected officials
- Appointed officials

- County Commissioner scheduled meetings dates and times

Managing Resources in the Extension Office

- Telephones
- Secretary
- Shared equipment
- Vehicles
- Meeting rooms
- Office hours

Budget and Budget process

- Access to local funds
- Reimbursement of expenses

Local Extension Program Orientation

- Staff meetings/office conferences
- County Agents' roles and responsibilities
- County Director's responsibilities
- 4-H Agents responsibilities
- County demographics and background information
- County organizations, collaborators and key leaders
- Office filing system
- Postal mail guidelines
- Working with local media
- Civil Rights
- State Contact Reporting System
- Plan of Work
- Impact Reporting

EVALUATION OF MENTORING IN EXTENSION

Evaluation of the Extension Mentoring Program will take place at different intervals during the year-long mentor assignment so as to ensure a productive mentoring relationship is established and effective.

Within the first 30 days of the mentoring assignment, the mentoring program coordinators will check in with both the mentor and the mentee by phone or email. The purpose of the check-in is to verify the initial contact has been made and progress is being experienced.

At the 3-month and 6-month marks with the year-long mentoring assignment, program coordinators will email a short online survey to the mentors and mentees to check on their progress and to determine if any changes are needed. Program Coordinators will work with the respective County and District Director if changes need to be made.

A mentoring process exit conference will be conducted at the conclusion of the one-year formal mentoring process and will include the program coordinators, mentor and mentee. The Mentoring Relationship Evaluation should be completed and submitted to the program coordinators. Copies the Mentoring Program Evaluations completed by the mentor and mentee will also be attached to the Mentoring Relationship Evaluation.

The purpose of these evaluations are two-fold. First, the Mentoring Committee, Mentoring Program Coordinators, District Directors and County Directors want to determine the degree of success in achieving program objectives. Secondly, these groups also make it more effective and impactful. The evaluations will be reviewed by the Mentoring Committee to provide direction for future program changes.