United States Department of Agriculture

New Mexico Mentoring Program

Prepared by the

NRCS New Mexico
Civil Rights Committee

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Mission

One mission of the New Mexico Civil Rights Advisory Committee is to develop, oversee, review and provide program maintenance for a successful New Mexico Mentoring program.

Vision

Diverse and successful Mentoring partnerships that provide a connection to experience, knowledge, trust, diversity, and improved personal and professional work environments.

Introduction

The history of Mentoring can be traced back thousands of years. Men and women plotting the paths of their lives and careers have long sought the wise and experienced counsel of a confidant, one whose judgment was valued and lasting.

Webster defines a Mentor as a wise and trusted counselor, teacher, and an experienced individual who helps an employee grow and succeed. The relationship requires the investment of time and self; giving but receiving as well. Mentoring offers the chance to expand the horizons of others by providing insight and guidance based on one's real-life work experiences. Mentoring is available to ALL Employees. It is a trusted relationship whereby freedom of expression and opinion is honored yet never compromised.

To become a Mentor you must evaluate your entire career. Perhaps your first day on the job was full of apprehension, anxiety, and the desire to do well matched against the fear of failure. Then, slowly but surely, you began to "learn the ropes" from those who trained you. Eventually, you gained the confidence and expertise necessary to accomplish the job. A Mentor provides that extra opinion needed to gauge one's desires and hopes in order to succeed.

Each of us needs guidance periodically throughout our careers. If a Mentor's advice proves beneficial even to one employee, the process is a success. That success also benefits the Mentor and the agency.

The opportunities to Mentor are many. Consider the path your career has taken and if you are interested in sharing some advice for the enhancement of all concerned, consider being a Mentor.

Program Goals

The goals for the NRCS Mentoring Program compliment NRCS organizational objectives to:

- Improve leadership and organizational skills.
- Help employees achieve full performance potential.
- Acclimate new employees to NRCS culture and the organization.
- Develop and retain highly skilled, knowledgeable employees.

What is Mentoring

Mentoring is a partnership between an experienced employee (the Mentor) and an employee who desires additional personal or professional knowledge (the Mentee). The Mentor is willing to guide, support, answer questions, provide referrals, and share experiences with the Mentee. The partnership is based on trust and confidentiality.

What do Mentors Do

- Provide confidential counseling to employees outside of their chain of command.
- Provide encouragement and guidance on training and development issues, as well as support on a personal level.
- Be reasonably accessible and willing to make and receive some calls.
- Refer the Mentee to his/her supervisor, EO Counselor, Employees Assistance Program, or Human Resources Office as appropriate when other counseling is needed.
- The Mentor should not interfere with supervision or workload of Mentee.
- Serve as a role model on how to conduct oneself in the professional world.
- Devote time to one on one discussion with the Mentee.
- Recognize and validate signs of Mentee professional growth and development.
- Stay flexible. Mentor relationships vary across organizational settings and Mentee needs change.
- When appropriate,
- Encourage and convey a sincere belief in a Mentee's ability to succeed.
- Provide advice, constructive feedback on the Mentee's actions and products, formal and informal instruction.
- Introduce the Mentee to people who can help.
- Provide suggestions for the Mentee to demonstrate her/his skills.
- Recognize that Mentoring relationships can be short term or long lasting.
- Do not give up if the chemistry does not feel right at the first meeting.
- Touch base regularly by e-mail, phone, etc.
- Maintain confidentiality. Nothing kills trust in a Mentoring relationship faster than a breach of confidence.
- Pick up on cultural and gender differences and be sensitive to these differences.
- Have fun.

Do You have what it takes to be a Mentor

Do you have the time and commitment to build a partnership with a Mentee? And are you willing to share you experiences in:

- Life
- Work
- Career changes
- Parenting
- Special skills

Mentor Responsibilities

The Mentor will support the role of the supervisor in all interactions with the recipient. The Mentor will not take on the role of an EO Counselor or receive grievances from the recipient. The Mentor will not answer personnel questions. The Mentor may make recommendations to seek advice from others.

The Mentor will arrange for personal visits whenever feasible and necessary. The Mentor will control costs of Mentoring activities as much as possible.

Incentives

After each fiscal year, the Civil Rights Advisory Committee will review annual evaluations and may recommend an incentive award, such as Mentor of the year, special achievement award or time off award as deemed appropriate.

Mentoring is Not

- A replacement of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Civil Rights Program, Career Counseling or other personnel programs.
- Special treatment, preferential promotion or sponsorship.
- Top-down, driven by the Mentor. The partnership is driven by the needs of the Mentee and the Mentee makes the decisions.

Eligibility

Employees can voluntarily apply to become a Mentor or Mentee in the New Mexico NRCS Mentor Program. Individuals can be both Mentors and Mentees. Mentors should have some or all of the following characteristics:

- Positive attitude
- Self-motivated
- Good role model
- Respected
- Good listener
- Available time to devote to one-on-one discussions
- Secure as an individual
- Trustworthy

- Committed to the employee's career and concerns
- Committed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Sensitive to the needs of others
- Knowledge of how the organization works
- Varied work experience

Mentor applications will be reviewed and selections made by the State Conservationist with advice from the State Administrative Officer. It is also recognized that some individuals may be sought out to a great extent, and therefore could incur a large workload related to this program. For this reason, the intent is also to manage the request for Mentors as much as possible in order to prevent undue burdens on any one individual.

What do Mentees Do

- Define personal and career goals, as well as expectations from a Mentor and the Mentor program.
- Actively participate in and take full advantage of activities and services available from the Mentor program.
- Accept responsibility for his/her decisions.
- Maintain communication in an honest and open relationship with Mentor, and be prepared with questions and goals for interaction with the Mentor.
- Recognize that this program is only a supplement for his/her own hard work and abilities, not a substitute.

What can Mentors and Mentees do Together

Talk together about:

- Past experiences
- Goals
- Plans
- Skills-present and desired
- Career paths
- Useful problem solving strategies
- Struggles and successes
- Expectations from the Mentoring relationship
- Preferred ways of interacting
- The fact that the relationship may change and end one day
- Agree on how the relationship will work. Outline expectations about the frequency and type of contact.

- Attend meetings, conferences, and other events together whenever possible.
- Work together on projects.
- Have the Mentee observe the Mentor handling challenging situations.
- Role-play situations faced by the Mentee.
- Exchange and discuss written materials such as a document written by the Mentee or an article valued by the Mentor.
- Co-author a publication.
- Interact with other people including persons who could be of help to the Mentee and other Mentor-Mentee pairs.

Responsibility

Overall

The State Conservationist will be responsible for the overall implementation and evaluation of the program. The New Mexico Civil Rights Advisory Committee will provide oversight of the Mentor Program.

Mentor

The Mentor will support the role of the supervisor in all interactions with the recipient. The Mentor will not take on the role of an EO Counselor or receive grievances from the recipient. The Mentor will not answer personnel questions. The Mentor may make recommendations to seek advice from others.

The Mentor will arrange for personal visits whenever feasible and necessary. The Mentor will control costs of Mentoring activities as much as possible.

Mentee

The Mentee must realize that the success of the program is ultimately the responsibility of the Mentee. The Mentee must take the initiative in realizing the full potential of this program, and of his or her career.

The Mentee will not attempt to circumvent normal supervisor/employee interactions or decisions through this program. The Mentee will not attempt to file EO/CR complaints or grievances through the Mentor.

Supervisor

The supervisor will support the role of a Mentor or Mentee under their supervision as defined in this Manual or in any other directives issued by the State Conservationist. Supervisors need to recognize that if any of their employees are assigned a Mentor, it is in no way a reflection on them as a supervisor. Supervisors will assure that new employees are informed of the Mentor Program.

Selection of Mentors and Mentees

Guidelines Related to Selection and Interactions

- Confidentiality of applications and other material related to the selection process will be maintained. In addition, the discussions of Mentors and Mentees must be kept confidential.
- Mentees should request Mentors who are not in their direct line of supervision. Supervisors will continue to provide career counseling as before.
- Because of the complexity of interpersonal interactions, the normal changes in personal workload demands, and other possible conflicts associated with this type of activity, Mentor/Mentee assignments can be terminated at any time by either party. It is important for anyone involved to realize termination of an assignment does not necessarily reflect on an individual's personality or desirability as a Mentor or Mentee.
- Many of the interactions necessary for this program can be carried out over the phone. Personal meetings are encouraged when arranged in conjunction with normal work assignments, other meetings, training sessions, etc. The State Conservationist fully supports all Mentoring activities as long as they do not interfere with the performance of an employee's official duties.

Mentors

Volunteers interested in becoming Mentors will complete a **Mentor Volunteer Application** and forward to the State Administrative Officer for consideration. The applications will be reviewed and forwarded to the State Conservationist for selections. Based on the selections, a Mentor Pool will be posted at the Civil Rights Advisory Committee website.

Mentees

All employees who wish to be Mentees will complete a **Mentee Application** and forward to the State Administrative Officer for review and recommendation of assignment to the State Conservationist. The State Conservationist will review the recommended assignments and make the final decision. The Mentee, the supervisor, and the Mentor will then be notified.

Why be a Mentor or Mentee

- Reach your full potential, both professionally and personally
- Share knowledge and experiences
- Build listening and communication skills
- Build understanding of gender, racial, and ethnic diversity
- Improve the work environment

Relationship

Trust, friendship, and honesty are key ingredients to a Mentoring relationship. It is, after all, a situation to foster career development. Whether contact is made in person, by telephone or by mail, each participant is encouraged to contact the other.

A Mentoring relationship will last a short or long period of time, as long as it remains viable and beneficial. Changes of circumstances such as transfers, retirements, and separations keep Mentoring relationships under constant reevaluation. Such changes may result in emotions that range from excitement to resentment, joy to anger, and optimism to cynicism. Knowing when and how to fine-tune the Mentoring relationship is the key to making it work.

Participation

All employees may voluntarily participate in the Mentor program by submitting the appropriate application to the State Administrative Officer, who is an Advisor to the New Mexico Civil Rights Advisory Committee.

Applications for both Mentors and Mentees are located at the New Mexico Civil Rights web page at: http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/about/eeo/civilrgt.html.

Program Evaluation

Periodically, Mentees and assigned Mentors will complete an evaluation using the **Mentor Program Evaluation Form**. Evaluations will be reviewed and utilized by the Civil Rights Advisory Committee to monitor the over-all effectiveness of the program and recommend any needed changes in its administration to the State Conservationist.

Conclusion

Mentoring is not to be entered into lightly. It takes dedication, time, honesty and sincerity. That is just to get started! Once a relationship has been formed, effort to keep it on track is demanding yet rewarding. Even the best of efforts are not enough at times and the relationship must be severed for the good of the Mentor, the employee, the Mentee and the agency.

But instead of the end, a new beginning could appear, and again, the cooperation of all three ingredients is required: employee, Mentor, and agency. The employee can develop the relationship with a new Mentor and the process is again revived.

The Mentor is held in esteem, one that can be depended on for straight forward advice regardless of its potential effects. The advice will provide a foundation for sound decision making by the employee. After all, this is what Mentoring is all about.