

UF/IFAS Extension Mentoring Roles and Responsibilities¹

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Overview

There is an old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Similarly, it takes a whole organization to help with the professional development of a new agent. The goal of the UF/IFAS Extension Mentoring Program is to establish faculty partnerships through the mentoring program that will contribute to a strong Extension educational program and a smooth transition into the organization (N. Place, personal communication, 2013).

Mentoring is not the sole responsibility of the assigned mentor; county and state faculty are available to support protégés as they go through their first year as a UF/IFAS Extension agent. This publication provides information about the mentoring roles and responsibilities of protégés, County and District Extension Directors, and the state Extension specialist. Additional information about the benefits of mentoring, the stages of a mentoring relationship, and tips for success can be found in [Using Mentoring as a Part of Professional Development](#) (Lamm & Harder 2008), EDIS Document AEC 401/WC082.

Protégé

A protégé is any new county faculty member in his or her first year of employment with UF/IFAS Extension who has been provided the opportunity to advance professionally under the guidance of an assigned mentor. Being a protégé

is not a passive activity; rather, it requires a willingness to learn and accept constructive criticism.

Protégés agree to:

- Take ownership of the mentoring relationship
- Complete a biographical sketch form
- Identify and communicate their needs and desired level of interaction
- Maintain contact (via telephone, e-mail, Polycom, etc.) throughout the mentoring relationship; seek help when needed
- Meet their mentor face-to-face at least twice a year (once in each county)
- Participate and contribute to meetings, new agent training, professional development, and other learning opportunities as they present themselves
- Create and maintain a mentoring file

Mentor

A mentor is a county faculty member whose expertise and leadership have led him/her to be identified and officially asked to serve in a mentoring capacity for new faculty. Mentors agree to take on the responsibility of helping their protégés increase their knowledge in a variety of areas. The following lists reflect findings from published (Place

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& Bailey 2006) and unpublished (Harder & Bengé 2008) research on the elements of successful mentoring.

Mentors agree to:

- Complete the UF/IFAS Mentor Training course
- Initiate contact with the new agent within the first two weeks of being assigned as mentor and maintain contact throughout the designated mentoring relationship of one year
- Accept and act upon new agent's assessed level of mentoring identified on the biographical sketch form
- Maintain contact (via telephone, e-mail, Polycom, etc.) throughout the mentoring relationship; provide help when needed
- Meet their protégé face-to-face at least twice a year (once in each county)
- Be available as a resource to the new agent, as well as assist in locating other needed resources
- Communicate with District Extension Directors or County Extension Directors on how the relationship is going; seek help when needed
- Encourage the new agent to participate and contribute to meetings, professional development, and other learning opportunities as they present themselves
- Create and maintain a mentoring file

Mentors help their protégés to:

- Understand how to develop, deliver, and evaluate programs
- Develop an advisory committee and recruit members
- Work with and manage volunteers
- Understand how to balance work and personal life
- Understand the structure and culture of UF/IFAS Extension
- Participate in the appropriate professional associations
- Participate in the appropriate District program planning teams

UF/IFAS Extension County Director

CEDs will work with their UF/IFAS Extension District Director (DED) to find a mentor *immediately* following approval of any new hires within their county. This responsibility should be taken care of as soon as possible to ease the new agent's transition into Extension. Anecdotal evidence suggests the first month of employment is filled

with many questions, and delays in assigning a mentor may increase the new agent's stress and frustration during this period. CEDs may find it helpful to discuss potential mentors with their DED as soon as a position is posted in order to expedite the process once a hire is made.

The CEDs for the mentor and the protégé must be supportive of the mentoring relationship. Both CEDs should hold their employees accountable for participation in the mentoring program. It may be helpful to schedule periodic updates with the mentor/protégé to discuss how the relationship is going. CEDs that pro-actively encourage participation may be rewarded with improved performance by protégés and increased confidence of mentors (Cooper & Miller 1998; Place & Bailey 2006).

UF/IFAS Extension District Director

DEDs (see Appendix A for contact information) will work with their CEDs to ensure a mentor is assigned to each new agent *immediately* following approval of any hires within their district. The DED will contact the potential mentor, confirm willingness to serve, and send confirmation letters to the mentor and protégé, with copies to the appropriate CEDs, the state Extension specialist, and the state Program Leader. This will enable accurate record keeping at the state level and is necessary for program evaluation. They will provide administrative support to the mentors, protégés, and their CEDs during the mentoring time period. DEDs confirm, by mail, the successful completion of mentor training.

State Extension Specialist

The state Extension specialist (see Appendix A for contact information) responsible for coordinating the mentoring program will:

- Facilitate the development and coordination of training programs and Web modules for mentors
- Provide mentoring information for new faculty
- Be available as a third-party if issues arise

Summary

This publication provided a description of the roles and responsibilities of key people involved in the mentoring process. Additional resources to consider utilizing as a mentor or protégé include program leaders, regional specialists, and the Program Development & Evaluation Center (PDEC). Working together, it will be possible to make the UF/IFAS Extension Mentoring Program a supportive and enjoyable experience for new agents for years to come.

References

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Appendix A

Table 1.

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