

**The 4-H Youth Development Mentoring Guidebook:
A Resource for New Employees**

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Introduction

Employee turnover has become a prevalent issue in the Cooperative Extension Service (Extension). Personal costs such as demanding job responsibilities, long workdays, and weekend obligations contribute to job dissatisfaction and lead employees to leave their Extension jobs (Lakai et al., 2012). Moreover, hiring a new Extension employee costs more than investing in retaining an employee (Strong & Harder, 2009). Many Extension employees start out with a lack of knowledge about the Extension organization and how it works (Safrit & Owen, 2010). Therefore, Extension can save money and current employees time by investing in programs that address factors that help to retain employees (Safrit & Owen, 2010).

When new employees start in the Extension organization, there are several skills and knowledge that need to be learned in a short amount of time. Many employees start their jobs with minimal knowledge of the Extension organization, therefore having no solid understanding of their jobs and responsibilities (Benge & Beattie, 2021; Hagerman et al., 2022). Another skill that current Extension employees highlighted as most important to learn in the first three years includes how to plan, implement, and evaluate programs (Brodeur et al., 2011). Brodeur et al. (2011) propose that training created for Extension employees be designed to scaffold these skills in order to help new Extension employees begin their careers. Having a mentor would help new employees develop those skills to help them become successful (Winton et al., 2019).

One solution that addresses these issues is creating mentorship opportunities for new employees to learn from experienced employees. Formal mentors with training are more effective in supporting new employees because they understand the information they need to know to get started. (Mueller, 2020) Starting out with a mentor gives new employees a designated person to ask questions to (Place & Bailey, 2010). Having a mentor can serve as a source to share job-related struggles to help when facing challenges (Winton et al., 2019).

How it Works

The 4-H Youth Development Mentoring Guidebook is a workbook to guide new 4-H Extension employees through experiences important to their Extension work, with the guide of a mentor. The Guidebook is designed specifically for the 4-H Youth Development activities in Illinois, but can be used with minimum adaptation in other states. The Guidebook activities include interviews with other Extension staff and collaborators, attending meetings, observing programs, and learning about program planning and implementation.

The Guidebook is designed for new 4-H employees to be paired with a mentor in close proximity to their location, which will allow in-person visits to the mentor's programs. Research on mentoring reveals that personality characteristics should also be considered in the pairing process (Place & Bailey, 2010).

Once paired with a mentor, the new employee and the mentor can determine which of the activities and interviews to complete. All Guidebook activities are designed to help new educators learn about all of the aspects of their job while having the support of their mentor. The new employee completes the activities in the Guidebook and then discusses them with the mentor. Learning about the Extension organization and programming skills are an important part

of the 4-H youth development program educator's job. Therefore, the activities in the guidebook are arranged to scaffold new educators through working in Extension and the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs.

The guidebook starts with a few introductory activities, allowing the new educator to network through interviews with their mentor and other employees in similar roles. Another set of activities is for the new educator to observe programs to learn about planning programs and take note of future ideas and strategies they would like to implement. After completing the previous activities, the mentee will be able to plan, implement, and evaluate their program and then receive feedback from their mentor.

Results to Date

The guidebook has been evaluated by four current Extension employees with varying years of experience working in Extension. All four employees discussed how the guidebook will be very useful for new employees and developing the skills required to be a successful educator. Additionally, the four evaluators gave suggestions for improvement to ensure the activities align with the Extension organization's current practices. The Guidebook is currently in use by five mentees in a kindergarten through high school afterschool program affiliated with Extension.

Future Plans

Our future plans are to make a virtual version of the Guidebook on an online platform to create a collaborative document that both the mentor and mentee could access with the most up-to-date information. If online, supervisors could also reference the Guidebook to see the extent to which the mentee has completed the activities or offer comments within the document. We also plan to use the same online format to update our pre-service teacher early career observation activities from their current paper copy version for the same purpose of multiple people (student teacher, cooperating teacher, teacher educator) accessing the information and offering comments.

Costs & Resources

The cost of the Guidebook itself is negligible. However, the activities within the Guidebook require in-person observations of activities and potential in-person interviews with individuals. The travel cost depends on the mentee's location and mentor coverage areas. However, the mentee could complete multiple activities in one trip to visit the mentor's area. Also relevant to cost and resources is the investment of the mentor's time. Many Extension employees discuss having a large workload and not enough time for all commitments. For a successful mentee/mentor partnership, the mentor will have to invest their time in working with the mentee, with their supervisor's permission, which could mean decreasing their program load.

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