

Minnesota NRCS Mentor Program

Program Guidelines

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mission

The mission of the Minnesota NRCS Mentor Program is to be an effective program that benefits both the employee and the employer by fostering career relationships and exchanging career information between the student or career mentor and student or career employee. This program will strategically target those who are interested in guidance, coaching, counseling, and confidence building throughout their careers. The program will initiate a bond between the student or career mentor and student or career employee that will expand the horizons and experiences of the entire workforce unit as a whole.

Objectives

- Develop a support system and peer network connection to assist employees with orientation/structure of our agency.
- Supplement employee advancement by providing them with the appropriate needed guidance.
- Improve the present job skills and abilities of employees, which will increase their productivity and potential for higher-level jobs.
- Increase staff morale and job satisfaction.
- Aid in retention and recruitment of employees.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student Or Career Employee

The student or career employee must be willing to make a one-year commitment to the Minnesota Career Mentor Program, once a student or career mentor has been assigned. The student or career mentor and student or career employee will meet face-to-face once a quarter as a minimum, maintain monthly contact via telephone or electronic mail, and will work together to develop a preferred way of interacting during this one year time frame.

The success of mentoring is dependent on both the student or career mentor and student or career employee. Student or career employee responsibilities include:

- Identifying and assigning priorities for needs and mentoring expectations;
- Doing a self-assessment of the skills they have and the ones they desire;
- Clarifying and defining goals so that they are both realistic and challenging, or developing action steps toward a goal they have already identified.;
- Developing a mutually approved agreement on student or career mentor/student or career employee expectations; being open and receptive to guidance, suggestions, and coaching; following through with agreed upon training, activities, initiatives, and program enhancement;
- Being honest and up front with the student or career mentor;
- Keeping the student or career mentor informed of changes in needs, expectations, or career goals;
- Asking questions so that a clear understanding is reached;
- Accepting the reality that needs and expectations change as one grows;
- Blending mentoring with other training approaches;
- Recognizing that this program is only a supplement for his/her own hard work and abilities, not a substitute; and
- Accepting decision-making responsibilities and the consequences of these decisions.

NRCS is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Student or Career Employee Characteristics

- Self-motivated and willing to take advantage of available opportunities including details and special assignments;
- Eager to learn new skills and abilities, or exhibit a desire to develop existing skills and abilities;
- A team player and able to cooperate and communicate with others;
- Promote diversity and be sensitive to cultural and gender differences;
- An active participant;
- Complete an evaluation upon completion; and
- Have fun!

Student or Career Mentor Definition

A student mentor is one who provides guidance during your years of formal education and through your first career conditional appointment.

A career mentor provides guidance to a new employee that has completed their formal education.

Role and Responsibilities of Student or Career Mentor

The student or career mentor must be willing to make a one-year commitment to the Minnesota Career Mentor Program, once a student or career employee has been assigned. The student or career mentor and student or career employee will meet face-to-face once a quarter as a minimum, maintain monthly contact via telephone or electronic mail, and will work together to develop a preferred way of interacting during this one year time frame.

The success of mentoring is dependent on both the student or career mentor and student or career employee. Student or career mentor responsibilities include:

- Serving as an advisor by listening, guiding, and providing nonevaluative feedback;
- Providing encouragement and guidance on training and development issues, as well as support on a personal level;
- Providing general progress yearly to the Minnesota NRCS Leadership (not a detailed report for reasons of confidentiality);
- Referring the student or career employee to his/her supervisor, EO Counselor, Civil Rights Coordinator, Employee Assistance Program, or Human Resources as appropriate when other counseling is needed;
- Being sensitive to student or career employee workload and keep employee supervisor apprised as applicable;
- Serving as a role model on how to conduct oneself in the professional world;
- Recognizing and validating signs of student or career employee professional growth and development;
- Being flexible and recognizing that mentoring relationships go through stages and changes over time;
- Encouraging and conveying a sincere belief in the student or career employee's ability to succeed;
- Providing constructive feedback on the student or career employee's actions, products, and skills;
- Helping the student or career employee network with individuals within NRCS, other agencies, and organizations;
- Providing suggestions for the student or career employee to demonstrate his/her skills;
- Recognizing that mentoring relationships can be short-term or long-lasting;
- Not giving up if the chemistry doesn't feel right at the first meeting; and
- Maintaining confidentially as appropriate.
- Complete an evaluation upon completion.

Student or Career Mentor Characteristics

- Promote diversity and be sensitive to cultural and gender differences;
- A good listener;
- A role model and resource person for the student or career employee;
- Ability to devote time for one-on-one discussion with student or career employee;
- Ability to provide constructive feedback to the student or career employee on career and personal issues; and
- Have fun!