

Iowa Local Food Practitioner Peer Mentorship: Project Overview and Best Practices

The Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program received funds from the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program (NC SARE PDP) in 2016. Program staff used the funds to pilot a two-year **local food systems coordinator* peer mentorship project** (2017-2018). This overview highlights the background and structure of the pilot, and presents the best practices and resources developed.

Identifying the Need: Why This Program Was Developed

The Local Foods Program team invited experienced and beginning local food coordinators around Iowa to a facilitated learning circle in the fall of 2015. The team wanted to learn how to better support practitioners in these unique positions. The coordinators who attended expressed a need for peer and lived-experience support to help them build confidence and foster job retention.

New local food coordinators, especially those who are the first in their position, shared that they can often feel frustrated, isolated, and discouraged due to unclear expectations, differing priorities from stakeholders, and having no one else in their office or region with a similar position to talk to about their concerns.



Learning circle participants came up with the idea of creating peer-to-peer mentorship opportunities that matched experienced local food coordinators with less experienced ones. Recognizing that most local food coordinators are already over-worked and over-extended, our team set out to obtain funds to compensate mentors. We wanted the project to be mutually beneficial and fulfilling to both members of a mentorship pair.

Read the full overview of the learning circle and takeaways from this listening session in the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach publication, [Local Food Coordinators: Survey and Learning Circle Report \(LF 17\)](#), available as a free PDF download from the Extension Store (image at left).

**Local food coordinators support the development of local food systems by bringing together stakeholders, facilitating food systems planning and project management, and increasing community awareness through educational and promotional marketing.*

Project Overview

This project provided two one-year, one-on-one peer mentorship opportunities to support less experienced local food coordinators. Each set of mentorship pairs took part for one year, in 2017 and 2018. We encouraged coordinators to apply who identified themselves as under-resourced. The project team identified the following objectives and potential benefits for participation in the project:

Objectives

- Beginning local food coordinators increase capacity and knowledge.
- Network of local food practitioners in Iowa grows and strengthens.
- New relationships develop among people participating in the local food network.
- Turnover in local food coordinator positions declines, due to an increase in support and confidence in their role.

Potential benefits

- Mentor: leadership and networking opportunity, compensation for their time, the opportunity to directly influence the capacity of local food systems in the state and share their unique knowledge.
- Mentee: feeling of connectedness, direct feedback and troubleshooting advice for current projects and interest areas, opportunity to learn directly from someone in Iowa, as opposed to more general (i.e., online) resources and trainings.

The project team recognized that peer mentors are often over-extended in their positions. They worked to set up reasonable expectations for mentors to be able to participate in the project. They used grant funds to compensate each mentor \$1,000 for their participation for the year.

From the Iowa learning circle and research on other successful peer mentorship programs, the team created the following expectations and time commitments for the pilot:

Mentor expectations

- Commit to approximately 25 hours of direct support time for the mentee for the year, including:
 - Initial 30-minute phone call to introduce themselves, set up expectations, and schedule (or figure out how they will navigate scheduling) future calls.
 - Twelve (one per month) one-hour advising video conference calls with their mentee.
 - Eight hours of face-to-face meeting time during the year. Depending upon distance, they could opt for two in-person meetings or a one day "job-shadow" or project work session.
 - About 4.5 hours for whatever type of additional support they determined with their mentee. Examples: additional phone calls, prep time for monthly calls, reviewing grant applications, helping mentees prep for an event, introducing them to helpful contacts via phone or email, etc.
- Support mentees in building professional relationships. Connect with them at events that both plan to attend (e.g., say hi at RFSWG meetings and introduce them to others they may not have already met). Share information on conferences, field days, or regional meetings they might benefit from attending.

- Loosely keep track of hours spent supporting mentee. This helps the project team determine whether the length and time commitments for the project are excessive, just right, or not enough.
- Maintain confidentiality, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- Complete final evaluation of the mentorship experience for the Local Foods Program.

Mentee expectations

- Commit to a one-year program with monthly one-hour video conference calls and a one-day, face-to-face meeting (could include job-shadowing or be combined with an event).
- Initiate scheduling and come prepared to their monthly calls with information necessary for a productive conversation.
- Create an outline with mentor of topics to cover each month and overall goals for the year. Mentees could use the Mentorship Tracking Tool (see Appendix X) to help with this. The tool will also help mentees evaluate the project year.
- Actively communicate to the Local Foods Program staff any challenges they face within the peer mentorship process.
- Complete post-mentorship interview/survey to help inform and improve future mentorship projects.
- Maintain confidentiality, unless otherwise agreed upon.

These expectations left room for plenty of flexibility within each mentorship relationship. At the learning circle, local food coordinators emphasized that space for conversation was most important. The Local Foods Program provided the mentees with skill-building opportunities through other avenues during these two years. Therefore, the mentorship project focused on providing them with a professional sounding-board and a way to build relationships within the local foods community in Iowa.

To this end, the project team wanted to ensure that the time the pairs spent together didn't feel like it had to focus on nitty-gritty project development. They hoped to allow for emotional check-ins and troubleshooting issues that may have arisen in their work that month.

The project coordinator, Caitlyn Szymanski, created a "Getting Started Guide" for mentorship pairs that suggested a structure to help guide initial conversations. This guide provided a framework for ongoing conversations but did not mandate conversation topics. *(See Appendix A for a copy of this guide.)*

Mentorship project coordinator responsibilities and calendar tasks

The project coordinator created, managed, and oversaw the day-to-day structure and support for the program. The following annual calendar highlights the key tasks and responsibilities carried out each mentorship cycle.

Timeline	Tasks
Two months prior to start of each one-year mentorship	<p>Announce and distribute call for mentee applications. <i>(To view the application used in this project, see Appendix B.)</i></p> <p>Once application period ends (the team used a three-week open period, as the form was quite simple), confirm with applicants and notify them of next steps.</p>
One month prior to start of each one-year mentorship	<p>Review mentee applications. Neither of pilot years had a competitive application process as the project was able to fund mentors for all applicants.</p> <p>Establish best-fit mentorship pairs based on mentee position type, employer, location, and job responsibilities/areas of focus. Consult with other team members for recommendations on potential mentors.</p> <p>Once best-fit pairs are confirmed, contact the potential mentor to invite their participation. None of the best-fit mentor matches we invited ever turned down the request. This made the matching process relatively short and simple.</p> <p>Call mentees to notify them of the match. Take this time to also remind them of the timeline and expectations. Remind them that the project coordinator is a resource for them – particularly if they experience any issues or challenges with their mentor. Let them know that a “Getting Started Guide” will arrive via email to guide them and their mentor through next steps. <i>(See Appendix A for the guide created and distributed for the pilot.)</i></p>
Mentorship: Month 1	Send introductory email connecting mentor and mentee, along with PDF copy of the “Getting Started Guide.” Remind them to schedule their first introductory call and first mentorship session as soon as possible.
Mentorship: Month 4	Check in via phone with the mentees to see how things are going and whether they need any additional support.
Mentorship: Month 7	Check in via email with both the mentor and mentee. Remind them that if they haven’t already discussed how to use their in-person mentorship time, they should consider planning that now.
Mentorship: Month 10-11	Contact mentee to see how things are wrapping up and if they are on track to use all of their mentorship hours before the 12 months are complete.
Mentorship: Month 12	<p>Check in via phone with both the mentor and mentee. Ask them for any informal feedback about how to improve the program and if they are going to be able to complete the mentorship hours before the end of the month. If not, work with them to establish an adjusted timeline.</p> <p>Remind mentor to submit a final invoice when they have finished their commitments.</p> <p>Put mentorship pairs in contact with the project evaluator for timely evaluation at the completion for the program.</p>

Program Evaluation

To assess the effectiveness of this new project, ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program team evaluator Arlene Enderton created an evaluation plan that included pre- and post-test surveys. The pre-test, administered online through Qualtrics, included baseline survey questions related to the intended outcomes of the overall grant, which also were embedded in the mentee application process.

The post-program evaluation included two components. One was another online survey through Qualtrics that mentees completed after their mentorships ended. This survey revisited the baseline pre-evaluation questions and added a few others. The other component was an individual 20-minute phone interview with the mentors and mentees after program completion. The evaluator used a common interview template and a semi-structured interview style. She conducted the interviews over the phone and took extensive notes; she did not record the interviews. The interviews were confidential, except for three questions, which were identified beforehand. *(See Appendix C for copies of both the online and phone post-evaluation interview surveys.)*

The following are highlights from the meta-results from both year's post-evaluation surveys:

- Mentors and mentees overwhelmingly found benefit in the mentorship program and expressed the hope that it can continue.
- For the most part, interviewees believe the mentorship program should continue as is. However, they did share a few ideas to consider if the program continued:
- Give mentors more information about their mentee prior to the start of the program, to help them understand their mentee's needs.
- To the extent possible, pair mentees who are in the extension system with mentors who are also in the extension system.
- Provide an opportunity for mentees and mentors to meet other pairs who are going through the mentorship at the same time.
- Make the requirement to meet face to face optional for pairs who are not geographically close.

(To see the full Peer Mentorship Program Evaluation Results Report, see Appendix D.)

In addition to the formal evaluation plan, the project coordinator also gathered feedback through informal opportunities, such as during quarterly telephone check-ins with the mentorship pairs.

Best Practices

Best practices that emerged from the two-year project include:

- **Offer flexibility in how the mentorship time is utilized.** Although a few of the mentees found the openness of the arrangement too loose at times, most of the mentorship pairs valued the ability to determine the timing and objectives of their time together. Local food systems workloads can vary by season, so most participants valued the ability to skip a call one month and make it up during a less busy time, so they had time to prepare. And without the expectation to accomplish certain rigid goals during each conversation, pairs had space to talk about an unexpected challenge or share personal updates with each other. This fostered a more personal relationship.
- **Offer to pay mentors in increments throughout the year.** Paying mentors in installments makes it possible for those who work for small nonprofits to participate. A one-time payment at the end of the year is more difficult to manage financially.

- **Consider mentor’s place of employment, personality, and gender/racial/other identity preferences in making a match.** The ideal mentor match wasn’t always possible, given the limited number of experienced local food coordinators in Iowa. So the program coordinator had to determine which factors would most contribute to a positive mentorship experience for each mentee. Evaluation results showed that while some mentees appreciated being matched with a mentor in the same type of organization (extension, nonprofit), others found being matched outside of their organizational structure useful as well.
- **Emphasize that a mentorship is not technical assistance.** A few of the mentees or their supervisors expressed on their application and in initial conversations that they wanted a mentor with a specific skill or area of expertise (e.g., farm to school, food hubs, farmer networking). Some asked for a specific individual to be their mentor. On paper these matches looked good, but in practice, they often turned out to be less beneficial. Feedback showed that these matches didn’t go beyond surface-level technical assistance conversations. They did not appear to take advantage of the sounding board and thought-partner aspect of the relationship that many other mentees found so valuable.

Conclusions

Peer mentorship can play a critical role in the ongoing growth and development of novice local food system practitioners. During this two-year mentorship project, several other state extension units and community food system non-profits contacted the project coordinator about developing similar mentorship programs. This supports the conclusion that peer mentorship opportunities in food systems work have been identified nationally as an important tool for nurturing leadership and collaboration in this work.

Based on evaluation results, this mentorship project was very useful to participants, and it produced the outcomes expected. Offering an organized mentorship program, as opposed to encouraging people to find a mentor on their own, ensures that new local food coordinators receive personalized support, networking opportunities, and professional development. Project staff strongly recommended that peer mentorship opportunities, even in an abbreviated form, continue in Iowa after the grant funding concludes.

Acknowledgements

Prepared by Caitlin Szymanski, program coordinator, and Arlene Enderton, program evaluator, of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program (formerly Local Foods).



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Appendices: Materials and Resources Created for the Peer Mentorship Program

Appendix A: Mentorship Getting Started Guide sent to project participants.

The following guide was given to the peer mentorship pairs after the coordinator's introductory call with them. It was updated each year based on any feedback or new resources that became available.

Getting Started Guide: 2018 Local Food Coordinator Peer Mentorship Program

This program is possible due to funding from a NCR-SARE PDP grant as well as from the ISU Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program.

Support:

During your mentorship, do not hesitate to contact the program coordinator at any time with questions, comments, or concerns. I look forward to otherwise being in contact with the mentee quarterly to check in about how the relationship is going and whether I can provide any additional resources and to make your experience even more effective.

Below are information and tips to help you get started with framing your mentorship in the best way that will work for both of you. This guide is meant to be a general starting point. If you would like more detailed suggestions for structure on how to use your time effectively, feel free to contact the program coordinator for support in this.

Mentorship time frame: 02/01/2018 to 01/31/2019

Please have your preliminary introduction call (30 minutes) and first hour-long monthly mentoring call completed by 2/28/18. Please complete your last monthly call and final evaluation survey by 1/31/19. Beyond these deadlines, we trust the need for flexibility – if you need to have a two-hour call one month as it makes sense for your goals and then skip a call later in the year, that is totally okay! As long as over the course of the year you are fulfilling the overall expectations of the program (referenced in the last section of this guide) and are meeting each other's expectations, we are supportive of whatever timeline and schedule on a monthly basis works for your relationship.

Introductory phone/video call

Please schedule a time within the next few weeks to have an introductory call. Things to discuss during this time might include:

- Setting up your first and future monthly calls. Does a set date (third Tuesday of the month at 3 p.m.) work best, or will you schedule your next meeting at the call before it?

***When possible, we strongly encourage you to use videoconferencing software to make your conversations more intimate and to more easily engage and present in the conversation. So, try scheduling your calls when you both will have access to a computer. If neither of you has access to free video-conferencing software, contact Caitlin who can schedule your meeting times through her Zoom account for you (she will not need to be present for the call to take place).

- Articulate which mode of communication between calls works best for both of you. *Do you respond easier to email or phone calls?* For mentors, please articulate expectations for getting back to your mentees about questions– i.e., can they under normal circumstances

- count on you to respond within three days/one day/same day if they send you an email?
- Both mentor and mentee share with each other a brief overview of why they are participating in this program and for the mentee to articulate again what they hope to learn/get out of this experience. Mentor, feel free to share and reflect on your experience as a new local food system practitioner. Were there things that you wish you had known/had a mentor for?
 - Reiterate confidentiality. Mentors, this is your opportunity to let your mentee know that you are willing to be a sounding board for projects as well as any interpersonal conflicts in their workplace, knowing that you will not share the information with anyone else unless you have explicit permission. (The obvious exception you would need to make is reporting if there is information disclosed of harm being done to the mentee or anyone else. If such an issue arises, please be in touch with Caitlin, who can provide support for this situation.) The mentors will not share specific information with the mentee's supervisor nor evaluating his/her performance. Similarly, mentees affirm that if the mentor gives you examples from their experiences where names or other specifics may be included, you too will make sure to keep this information between the two of you.

First monthly phone call: the following are all suggestions for getting you started. Feel free to talk about/spend your time in whatever way works for both of you.

- Spend first 20 minutes or so talking about expectations and goals.
 - Mentee and mentor share about mentorship experiences (or other relationships with those who have more expertise or power than you): what worked/didn't work for them. How do you like to receive feedback? Discuss your expectations for the relationship.
 - Discuss how you would like to set goals for the year. Mentees, what would you like to accomplish during your time together? Will you have monthly topics that change, or will you have longer-term goals or focused topic areas? Is there a specific project you would like your mentor's support with? **Please create a written outline of your overall goals for the year and topics to cover each month. This document will also serve to evaluate the mentorship.** It is more than okay for these goals to be revised over the year, so don't feel like you must explicitly cover what you outline today. This activity is only to support you in tracking and creating an initial road map for what you might discuss on your later calls.
 - How will you structure your calls? Will the mentee send the mentor an agenda for what they would like to talk about ahead of time (if so, same day, a few days prior?)

Subsequent monthly phone calls:

- Spend the first 10 minutes checking in with each other. Mentors: ask your mentees what is going well in their job right now and what could be better. Are they facing any current challenges? Have they had any recent successes or "aha moments?"
- Every few calls, take the time to reflect on your progress toward the goals that you set out to accomplish at the start of your mentorships. Do any of these goals need to be adjusted? If you are not making as much progress as expected, is there a better way for you to organize or use your time together?

Overview Checklist: *Are we on track?*

During the first month:

- Introductory email initiated by mentee** to set up a time for a preliminary phone call with

mentor. (Completed by 2/14/17)

- Preliminary phone call took place** – we have established how we will structure our time together, at least initially, and have set up our first monthly call. (Completed by 2/28/18)
- First monthly mentorship call took place. We have a good idea of what our overall goals are for the year and what the first few steps will be in our upcoming calls. We created a written outline of topics to cover each month along with our overall goals for the year. (Completed by 2/28/18)

After six months:

- We have decided how we will use our in-person time together** this year if we haven't already done so (8 hours budgeted of mentor's time).
- Mentor has been keeping track of hours.** If I felt behind on this, I have now caught up.
- We took 15 minutes to have a mid-year check-in including reviewing our initial goals.** Are we still on track to meet them? Do we need to revise them or the scope of topics? Do we both feel like our expectations are being met? We addressed any challenges and made plans for revising our goals for the second half of the mentorship.

January 2019:

- We are on track to complete all mentorship activities by 1/31/2018.
- We have completed our final evaluation survey for the program.** If I have additional feedback that was not captured in the survey, I know I can be in-touch with Caitlin Szymanski, program coordinator, directly.

Mentor and Mentee Expectations for the Year

Mentor agreed to the following expectations:

- Able to commit about 25 hours of direct support time for your mentee throughout one year.
 - Initial 30-minute phone call to introduce yourselves, set up expectations, and schedule (or figure out how you will navigate scheduling) future calls.
 - 12 (one per month) one-hour advising phone calls with your mentee.
 - Ideally 8 hours of face-to-face meeting time during the year. Depending upon your location to each other, you may decide on two in-person meetings or a one day "job-shadow" or project work session.
 - About 4.5 hours for whatever type of additional support you determine with your mentee (e.g., could be additional phone calls or your time to prep for one of your monthly calls, reviewing grant applications, helping them prep for a meeting, taking the time to introduce them by phone or email to helpful contacts, etc.)
- Support them whenever possible in building relationships and connections. Take the time to connect with them at events you both attend (say hi at RFSWG meetings and introduce them to others they may not have met) and share resources you come across, such as conferences, field days, regional meetings, etc.
- Loosely keep track of hours spent supporting mentee. This will help us determine in future years if the length and time commitments we request of mentors are excessive, just right, or not enough.
- Maintain confidentiality, unless otherwise agreed upon.
- Complete final evaluation of the mentorship experience for the Local Foods Program.

Mentee agreed to the following expectations:

- Commit to a year-long program with monthly one-hour phone calls and a one-day face-to-face meeting (could include job shadowing or be combined with another event).
- Initiate scheduling and come prepared to your monthly calls with information necessary for a productive conversation.

- Create an outline with your mentor of topics to cover each month and overall goals for the year. You can use the Mentorship Tracking Tool chart at the end of this document to help you with this. This outline will also serve to help you evaluate your year.
- Actively communicate to the project coordinator any challenges in the peer mentorship process.
 - Complete post-mentorship interview and survey to help inform and improve mentorship project management in the future.
 - Maintain confidentiality, unless otherwise agreed upon.

Mentorship Tracking Tool: Use this chart to track your goals, progress, and accomplishments			
Mentorship component	Projected topics to discuss	What you actually discussed/got out of the conversation	Notes (follow up for next call, etc.)
Preliminary call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will you have your calls? • Discuss confidentiality. • Best way to reach each other between calls? • Brief overview of why you are each participating in this program. • Review each of your expectations. 		
Call 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start to discuss broad goals and create roadmap for the year. 		
Call 2			
Call 3			
Call 4			
Call 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in about how you might use the 8 hours of in-person time if you haven't already. 		

Call 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halfway point check in to review goals, how things are going, and how you would like to spend the next six months. 		
Call 7			
Call 8			
Call 9			
Call 10			
Call 11			
Call 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the year and celebrate all your work together! • Ways to stay connected in the future? 		
8 hours of in-person time			
4.5 hours of additional assistance (extra phone calls, review of grants, etc.)			

Appendix B: Copy of Mentee Application (includes embedded pre-evaluation questions).

The following mentee application was created as an online Qualtrics form so that the information could easily be collected and evaluated. The coordinator also let applicants know that they could request to fill out this application in paper or Word document form if they preferred.

Local Food Coordinator 2017 Peer Mentorship Program

Thank you for your interest in applying to be a mentee in this local food coordinator peer mentorship program! Please read through the following background information before proceeding to the application on the following page.

This peer mentorship opportunity is supported by the Local Foods Program at ISU Extension and Outreach through an awarded 30-month North Central SARE PDP grant.

Goals

The main goal behind the Local Food Coordinator Peer Mentorship Program is to provide no-cost, personalized mentoring assistance for one year to novice local food coordinators and practitioners in Iowa. In 2015, the Local Foods Program conducted a learning circle with 23 local food coordinators and supervisors to learn more about the resources and support needed to help local food coordinators better succeed and grow in their roles. The idea for this program was one of the suggestions put forth at the learning circle, as peers were cited as being highly valuable sources for support and education. It is our hope that by offering this opportunity, we can help continue to support place-based learning and collaboration efforts that grow the leadership for social change in our community food systems.

Objectives

- Increased capacity and relevant knowledge among beginning local food practitioners.
- Network of local food practitioners in Iowa grows and is strengthened.
- New relationships develop among people participating in the local food network.
- Decreased turnover of local food coordinator positions due to increase in support and confidence in role.

Benefits

- Mentor: leadership and networking opportunity, compensation for their time, having the opportunity to directly shape the influence of a local food coordinator in helping to build community food systems.
- Mentee: feeling of connectedness, direct feedback and troubleshooting advice for current projects and interest areas, able to learn directly from someone in Iowa as opposed to general resources and trainings.

Who should apply?

- Any local food coordinator (by official name or who self-identifies as one) is able to apply. Preference will be given to local food coordinators who are the least experienced and who identify as under-supported or resourced.
- Those who can meet the following expectations of a mentee:
 - Commit to a year-long program with monthly one-hour phone calls and one-day face-to-face meeting per year (could include job shadowing or be combined with another event).
 - Create an outline with mentor of topics to cover each month using a template based on

- initial meeting. This document will also serve to evaluate the mentorship.
- o Actively communicate to the project coordinator any challenges in the peer mentorship process.
 - o Complete post-mentorship interview/survey to help inform and improve mentorship opportunities going forward.

Please submit or return your application no later than December 22, 2017.

2018 Peer Mentorship Mentee Application

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Employer:

Office address where you spend most of your work time:

Position name and brief description of duties for current position (feel free to just attach your job description or plan of work if that is easier):

Are you full-time or part-time in your position?

What counties/geographical area do you support in your local food coordinator position?

How long have you been in your position?

Were you involved in local foods/food system work before your current position? If so, in what capacity?

Is your supervisor supportive of you participating in this program (i.e., will they allow you to count mentoring conversations as part of your work hours?) If no, please explain.

While it is our hope that this mentorship will allow opportunities to get general advice on growing your network, voice, and better understanding of the Iowa local food system, we also hope it will help you address key project areas and challenges you are currently facing. **Please share in a paragraph or two the particular food system sectors/projects (e.g., local food procurement in institutions) or professional skills (e.g., talking with stakeholders) for which you are seeking an experienced mentor.** **Please note that we cannot guarantee to meet all the criteria, because the program depends on the availability of mentors with appropriate expertise.*

What specific outcomes are you hoping to get from this mentorship opportunity?

Are there any considerations that we should be aware of, including any potential barriers for participating in this program?

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=not supported at all and 5=very supported, how supported do you feel in your network of peers (RFSWG or other local food practitioner network)?

Rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1= Strongly DISAGREE and 5= Strongly AGREE:

- o I know how to get ahold of people in the RFSWG network if I want to.
- o I feel comfortable reaching out to people in the RFSWG network.
- o I trust people in the RFSWG network enough to collaborate with them on projects or grants.
- o I know people in the RFSWG network I can socialize with outside of work.

Please rate the following statement from 1 to 5 where 1=not confident at all and 5=very confident

- o I can do the majority of my job responsibilities well.

Thank you for taking the time to apply for this mentorship opportunity! I look forward to being in touch with you after the application period ends.

Appendix C: Copy of the Post Program Participation Evaluation Questions.

Our evaluator created and administered two separate post-mentorship evaluation as part of this program. One was an online survey that only the mentees completed (many of these questions followed up from the pre-evaluation questions that were part of the mentee application). The other was a phone interview conducted by the evaluator individually with both mentors and mentees.

Below is a copy of the online survey questions that were completed by the mentees at the completion of the program:

Local Food Coordinator 2017 Peer Mentorship Program Follow-Up

This peer mentorship opportunity is supported by the Local Foods Program at ISU Extension and Outreach through an awarded two-year North Central SARE grant. We are inviting you to take this brief survey to complete our evaluation of the 2017 mentorship program. Your answers will be compared with answers you gave in the application.

First and last name

In your application for this mentorship, you explained that you'd like to see the following outcome:

Please describe how well you think that outcome has been met through the mentorship. If your goals for the mentorship changed, please indicate how.

Q17 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=not supported at all and 5=very supported, how supported do you currently feel by your network of peers (RFSWG or other local food practitioner network)?

	Not supported at all 1 (1)	2 (2)	Moderately supported 3 (3)	4 (4)	Very supported 5 (5)
How supported do you feel by your network of peers? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19 Rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1= Strongly DISAGREE and 5= Strongly AGREE:

	Strongly Disagree 1 (1)	2 (2)	Neither agree nor disagree 3 (3)	4 (4)	Strongly Agree 5 (5)
I know how to get ahold of people in the RFSWG network if I want to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(1)					
I feel comfortable reaching out to people in the RFSWG network. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust people in the RFSWG network enough to collaborate with them on projects or grants. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know people in the RFSWG network I can socialize with outside of work. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Please rate the following statement from 1 to 5 where 1=not confident at all and 5=very confident:

	Not at all confident 1 (1)	2 (2)	Moderately confident 3 (3)	4 (4)	Very confident 5 (5)
I can do the majority of my job responsibilities well (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1=not likely at all and 5=very likely,

	Not at all likely 1 (1)	2 (2)	Moderately likely 3 (3)	4 (4)	Very likely 5 (5)
How likely would you have been to have sought out a mentorship without this program? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How likely would you have been able to pay for this mentorship without grant funding (around \$1,200)? (4)



Thank you for your response! The data you shared will help us understand the impacts of the mentorship program.

Below is a copy of the post-mentorship phone interview evaluation questions:

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed regarding your experience with the local food coordinator mentorship program. The purpose of the interviews is to learn about the impacts of the program and learn how we can improve the program for the next group of mentees and their mentors. The results will be shared publicly and with our funders. The information you share will be kept confidential, meaning I will not associate your name with the information you share, except for the last few questions. I'll identify the non-confidential questions when we get to them. The non-confidential questions will be used to write success stories, which will be shared publicly. We'll let you review those stories before they'll be published.

The interview will take about 20 minutes. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

1. Could you please start out by describing what you did with your mentor/mentee?
 2. How well matched did you feel with your mentor/mentee?
 - a. Do you feel you were matched with a mentor who was equipped to help or teach you with your specific needs?
- OR
- b. Do you feel you were matched with a mentee whom you were equipped to advise?
 3. Has the mentorship expanded or deepened your network of peers in any way? If so, please describe.
 4. As a result of the mentorship, do you think about your work or your role any differently now than before?
 5. Did the mentorship have any impact on how satisfied you feel in your job? If so, could you please describe?
 6. Was there anything about the mentorship itself or how the program was run that could have been improved? If so, how?

Questions that are NOT confidential. These will be used in writing success stories:

1. As a result of the mentorship, are you doing anything differently or in a different manner in your work than before?
2. What aspects of your mentorship relationship did you find most beneficial?
3. Now that the mentorship is officially over, do you anticipate continuing to work with your mentor/mentee into the future? If so, how?

Appendix D: 2017 Program Evaluation Results Report

2017-18 Iowa Local Food Coordinator Mentorship Program Evaluation Report

By Arlene Enderton, March 2019

Introduction

In 2017, the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Local Foods Program received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Professional Development Program (SARE PDP) grant to increase the capacity and improve retention of local food coordinators in the state. The funding supported a year-long mentorship program, among other things, through which less experienced local food coordinators were paired with more experienced local food coordinators. The pairs met monthly face to face, online, or via phone over the course of a year to help mentees work toward their goals.

The program was offered in 2017 and 2018. Three mentorship pairs completed the program in 2017, and four pairs completed the program in 2018 (two mentees had the same person mentor them in 2018). This report shares some of the outcomes of the program, along with recommendations to improve the program in the future.

Table 1: All participants but one were interviewed for the evaluation.

	# interviewees/Total #	
	Mentees	Mentors
2017	3/3	3/3
2018	4/4	2/3
TOTAL	7/7	5/6

Methods

Arlene Enderton, the Local Foods Program evaluator, interviewed five of six mentors and seven of seven mentees who participated in the mentorship program. She interviewed 2017 participants in January 2018 and participants from 2018 in January 2019. She used a common interview template and a semi-structured interview style. She conducted the interviews over the phone and took extensive notes during the interviews; she did not record the interviews. The interviews were confidential, except for three questions, which Enderton identified beforehand. Local Foods Program staff used the data from these questions to write a success story for 2017, and may do so again with the 2018 data.

Enderton used NVivo software to code the data for themes, which are described in this report.

Results

The following themes emerged from the interviews:

The mentorship program increased mentees' job satisfaction.

Mentees described the mentorship in very positive ways. All but one said the program contributed to increasing their satisfaction in their jobs. They said they felt more confident, supported, validated, focused, and connected because of the mentorship program. As a result, six of seven mentees said the mentorship helped them feel more satisfied in their jobs. One mentee entered the mentorship program with six goals, five of which she met during the year.

Mentors and mentees were well paired.

Ten of 12 interviewees said the program staff paired them well with a mentor or mentee. Most mentees agreed their mentors were highly experienced and able to advise and guide them. One mentee described her mentor in this way: "My mentor was awesome! She had so many years of experience, so she made it so easy for me. Whenever I had a concern [...] she had more than enough advice to help me with it. To say I'm lucky is an understatement."

Two interviewees expressed doubt that their mentor or mentee was the best match. In one case, a mentee believed that if he/she had understood his/her own job better at the time of filling out the application, he/she could have better expressed his/her needs, which would have allowed the program coordinator to better select a mentor. The other who expressed doubt felt he/she was able to offer advice on certain aspects the mentee's job, but not others.

The mentorship helped participants clarify their roles.

Five interviewees said the mentorship program helped them to clarify their role. Surprisingly, two of the five were mentors, rather than mentees. One mentor explained why: "You are trying to make explicit what's implicit. In helping [the mentee] understand his/her work; we had to make our work clearer. Working with someone makes you explain why you do what you do."

One mentor said he/she wrote out a calendar of his/her events as a way to demonstrate to his/her mentee what he/she does throughout the year, which caused him/her to reflect on his/her own work and clarify what he/she was doing.

As for mentees, three felt more focused in their work because of the mentorship. One said, "This mentorship helped me figure out what areas I need to pursue and what to say no to. I am more focused, more prioritized... [I'm experiencing] less of feeling really busy and not getting anything done."

Mentor pairs created plans of work together.

Three of six mentors said they helped their mentees develop plans of work; one of these mentors had never made one before. In February 2017, this mentor attended the Local Food Leader training and learned about plans of work, which prompted him/her to create one and help his/her mentee do the same.

One mentee created a plan of work with help from his/her mentor and shared it with his/her supervisor, who saw its utility and decided everyone in their office should do the same.

The mentorship program allowed for mutual learning.

Four of 12 interviewees described the mentorship as beneficial to the mentee and the mentor. One mentee said, "It wasn't just for me. I helped her out, too, with problems she had, so it went both ways." Another described her relationship with her mentor as working with an equal.

Working in the extension system adds a layer of complexity to local food coordinator work.

Most (9 of 13) mentors and mentees worked for ISU Extension and Outreach. Extension is a complex system and hard for newcomers and outsiders to understand. One mentor, who doesn't work for extension, described how hard it was for him/her to understand his/her mentee's work in Extension: "It took us awhile to get my head wrapped around the scope of his/her work and where to focus and how can I help zero in on his/her needs. [Local food planning is] part of my mentee's work, but not the whole of his/her Extension work. He/she has all these extension responsibilities, but I don't live in that world."

Another interviewee found a lot of satisfaction in helping a new extension employee navigate the

system, believing she could not only help the mentee become a better local food coordinator, but a good extension employee as well. “When you are in the same system [...] there is more intimacy and commitment, because you are on the same boat. If you are with a non-extension mentee, they won’t have the same resources or tools, and their community is different.”

Most interviewees liked the “loose” structure of the mentorship; a few were uncomfortable with it.

Interviewees described the structure of the mentorship program as “loose,” “flexible,” “open,” “hands-off,” and “ambiguous.” Seven interviewees brought this topic up without prompting, showing that the structure was distinct.

Their feelings toward this structure varied. Most appreciated the flexibility, because it allowed them to plan a mentorship specific to their needs. One mentee said, “The program allowed us to take on the responsibility ourselves and take on the discussion, which was helpful, because we are both busy people. The flexibility worked out well and there were lots of directions we could go, and we could schedule around [busy time or events].” Another mentee believed the mentorship wouldn’t have worked had it been more structured, “Our work is so varied, and I can’t imagine making it work if [the mentorship] was structured.”

For a few, this “loose” structure was out of their comfort zone. Two interviewees said they were skeptical or apprehensive, because they started the mentorship without an agenda or objectives, but both felt it worked out well once they started meeting.

While everyone agreed their mentorship experience was great, they suggested giving future mentorship pairs a little more guidance. Ideas including having mentees take an assessment at the beginning of the mentorship to help the mentor understand the mentee’s needs, or simply briefing the mentor on the mentee’s background beforehand. Another suggested extending the mentorship to a two-year program, to allow time at the beginning to get to know one another and assess needs.

Interviewees were mixed in their preference to be paired with someone who is geographically close.

Only one of the seven mentorship pairs worked in the same geographic region. The pair that worked in close proximity was able to meet face to face every month for the mentorship, but also used the time to collaborate on upcoming projects and events in their region. This pair believed this was a great advantage, because they work with many of the same producers and buyers.

Distance created a challenge for some pairs, while others saw it as an advantage. Two pairs expressed they would have liked to meet face to face more often, perhaps to job shadow or observe one another’s work. One mentor said, “If [my mentee] had been somebody closer, it would have been easy to go to a program and watch and provide feedback. Being in the corners [of the state], it didn’t work.” Another suggested the mentorship program make the requirement to meet face to face optional, because of the difficulty of doing so when pairs work in different parts of the state.

In contrast, other pairs saw advantages to being paired with someone working in another part of the state. One said, “When you are so focused on hyperlocal work, it’s nice to have a relationship farther away.” Distance also gave the advantage of allowing people to get to know someone else who they likely would not have otherwise gotten to know on a deep level, hence expanding their networks.

One disadvantage of distance is that distant pairs expressed they did not expect to collaborate on joint projects after the mentorship ended, because they are working in different regions. However, they all said they expected to continue collaborating in terms of sharing ideas and resources. Hence, these mentorships are leading to a different kind of collaboration going forward.

Mentees’ sense of connection to the RFSWG network increased during the time of the mentorship.

The mentees were asked to rate their agreement with a series of questions before the mentorship and after to measure their sense of connection to the Iowa Regional Food System Working Group (RFSWG), a network of local food practitioners that meets face to face four times a year. By every measure, mentees’ sense of feeling connected and supported increased, on average, by one point on a five-point scale (Figure 1). These improvements may not be attributable exclusively to the mentorship program, because some may feel more supported through increased time on the job. However, interviews showed that the mentorship program certainly contributed. One mentee said, “Through this mentorship, I have definitely gained support and camaraderie.”

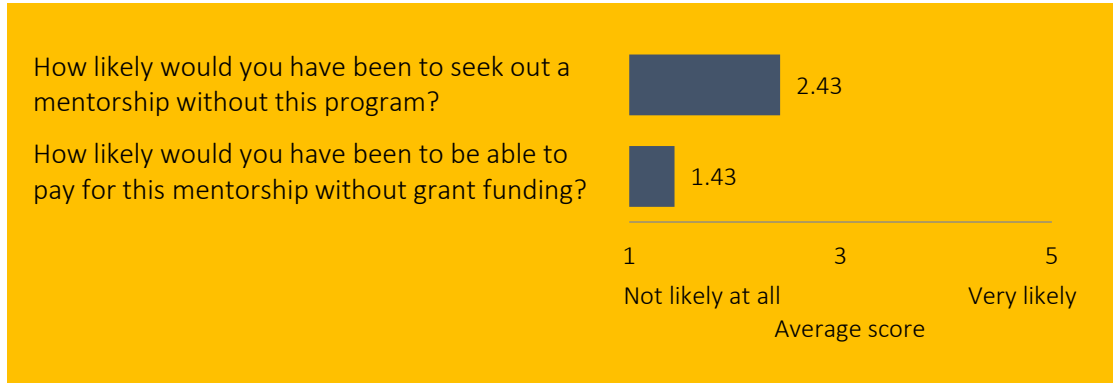
Figure 1: Mentees feel more supported and connected following the mentorship program.



Mentees were not likely to be mentored without the grant-funded program.

Mentees indicated they were not likely to seek out a mentorship without the program (Figure 2). Even if they had found a mentor on their own, they would have been even less likely to be able to pay the mentor. While some mentors might donate their time because they find value in mentorship, others are not able to do so, because they receive pay to work only on specific tasks or projects. Hence, paying mentors allows more people to participate as mentors.

Figure 2: Without the grant-funded mentorship program, mentees likely would not have sought out a mentor or been able to pay for their mentors' time.



Conclusions and recommendations

Mentors and mentees overwhelmingly found benefit in the mentorship program and expressed the hope that it can continue.

For the most part, interviewees believe the mentorship program should continue as is. However, they did share a few ideas of how to improve the program for the next group:

- Give mentors more information about their mentee prior to the start of the program, to help them understand their mentee's needs.
- To the extent possible, pair mentees who are in the extension system with mentors who are also in the extension system.
- Provide an opportunity for mentees and mentors to meet other pairs who are going through the mentorship at the same time.
- Make the requirement to meet face to face optional for pairs who are not geographically close.

Offering an organized mentorship program, as opposed to encouraging people to find a mentor on their own, ensures that new local food coordinators receive personalized support and professional development. The Local Foods Program should begin to plan how to fund such a program now, so it can continue to offer the program after grant funds end.