

Transition to Organic Partnership Program Mentorship Handbook

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Purpose and Mission	1
Program Contact Information	2
What is Mentoring	2
Benefits for Mentors	4
Benefits for Mentees	4
The Mentor's Role	5
The Mentee's Role	6
Group Mentoring and Multiple Mentees	8
Mentorship Timeline	10
Guidelines for Meetings	11
Mentorship Progression	14
Mentorship Code of Conduct	16
Grievance Policy and Procedure	18
Sources	20

Introduction

This mentorship handbook has been created for the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) mentorship program. Intent of the handbook is for use by both mentors and mentees. The handbook contains guidelines, policies, and resources that will help develop a sound relationship and partnership between mentor and mentee. It provides support and guidance for both mentor and mentee professional development and resources to aid in the growth of teaching and learning.

Purpose and Mission

The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is investing up to \$100 million over five years in cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations who will partner with others to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic producers. AMS is building partnership networks in six regions across the United States with trusted organizations serving direct farmer training, education, and outreach activities.

TOPP will:

- Connect transitioning producers with mentors
- Build paid mentoring networks to share practical insights and advice
- Provide community building opportunities to include:
 - Train-the-mentor support
 - Technical assistance
 - Workshops and field days covering topics including organic production practices, certification, conservation planning, business development (including navigating the supply chain), regulations, and marketing
- Help producers overcome technical, cultural, and financial shifts during and following certification
- Engage educational and training institutions (including crop advisors and extension agents) on organic workforce training and education and future human capital planning

TOPP is a collaborative effort involving many partners working together towards a common goal. The TOPP partnership network covers six regions: the Mid-Atlantic/Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Plains, Northwest, and West/Southwest.

Mission of the Mentorship Program

The TOPP mentorship program builds connections between experienced organic producers and producers transitioning to organic, supports the transition process, and creates a stronger network of organic producers across the country.

Through mentoring relationships, experienced producers pass on their knowledge, resources, and experience, cultivate curiosity and enthusiasm for organic production, and share their passion for organic agriculture with a greater audience. Transitioning producers receive a wealth of support, guidance, and development through mentorship, and together with their mentors form a strong network of organic producers across the region.

In the TOPP mentorship program, certified organic producers serve as mentors for producers transitioning to organic, providing guidance through one-on-one support virtually and/or in person, on the farm and off, and will offer resources and further support through networks. Mentors support their mentee, the transitioning producer, through the transition to organic process and during the mentee's first year of certification.

Program Contact Information

Access the TOPP website at www.organictransition.org to find the contact information for your region of TOPP. The website also has additional mentorship resources, toolkits, guides, and a calendar of events.

What is Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship that offers opportunities for mentors and mentees to learn from each other. It is more of an exchange than a one-way giving of advice. At the heart of mentoring is a relationship based on trust and mutual regard, where one individual uses their expertise and knowledge to support the development of another individual.

A mentoring relationship helps learners gain skills faster than they might otherwise learn on their own. Mentoring tends to be very relational between the mentor and mentee and often involves a more holistic approach by focusing on the learner's future and broader skills for personal and professional development.

Mentoring provides:

- A safe space to explore options and plan future action
- A place to be supported and challenged
- A sounding board
- A source of advice and guidance
- New perspectives
- An ongoing relationship that can last for years

The TOPP mentorship program is largely focused on relational learning between mentor and mentee, learning from experience and working through challenges together. Mentors will share their experiences, advice, challenges, successes, and resources from years of organic production, while mentees, the transitioning producers, develop goals for the mentorship and work through challenges and celebrate successes of the transition experience. In particular, the mentorship program will focus on transitioning to organic production topics, such as agronomy, market availability, transportation, recordkeeping, and operation management. Particular and specific certification guidance will come from outside of mentorship, from additional technical assistance providers. This additional service will be provided free of charge to mentees and encouraged to be used in conjunction with the mentoring.

The mentoring relationship can be a very powerful and positive experience. It enables and develops a greater sense of confidence, enhancing the professional and personal skills of both individuals. For a mentoring relationship to be successful, it needs to be built upon strong foundational principles.

The following principles make for strong mentoring relationships and learning experiences:

Communication

- Listen actively
- Repeat back what you hear and ask questions
- Get to know each other personally, as appropriate
- Follow communication plan and respect modes of communication
- Speak up if the mentoring relationship is not working for you and suggest changes to make it a positive and useful experience
- Communicate with Mentorship Coordinator about any concerns, questions, or suggestions

Enthusiasm

- Exhibit enthusiasm for organic production
- Regularly provide positive feedback
- Be open and appreciative
- Use positive language and encouraging support, free of judgment

Patience

- Navigating relationships is a journey and takes courage, give yourself grace as you learn about each other
- Be present in the moment: it is easy to multitask, so be honest and set time limits on conversations if needed and state such as the start of the conversation
- Recognize you won't know everything, utilize and share outside resources when helpful

Commitment

- Fulfill meeting and program requirements
- Come prepared for meetings
- Communicate changes to schedules in a timely manner
- Avoid making promises
- Build trust and rapport with each other

Respect

- Discuss and respect personal boundaries
- Maintain confidentiality: conversations should be kept between the two of you unless specifically given permission to share
- Understand and respect roles and responsibilities of both parties

Find resources and toolkits for many of these principles in the TOPP resource library. We recommend spending time exploring these skills and principles, and assessing yourself for where you may need support and growth with these skills. The training and onboarding process of this mentorship program will include activities and resources to help you identify and build up these skills.

Benefits for Mentors

Mentoring has a clear and positive impact on the mentee; however, it also benefits the mentor personally and professionally as a producer. Becoming a mentor builds lasting relationships with others, enhances the mentor's own job satisfaction, and provides opportunities to reflect on motivations and values towards agriculture. By participating in mentorship, mentors will:

- Develop skills and new perspectives, including interpersonal skills, questioning, self reflection, and creative thinking
- Share the knowledge and experience gained from years of working in the field
- Contribute to a broader organic production network and growth in sustainable agriculture
- Gain understanding of the realities and challenges of today's transitioning producers

Benefits for Mentees

Mentees largely benefit from a mentoring relationship, one in which they can discuss challenges, brainstorm solutions, and learn from the real-life experiences of their mentor. Mentees will gain the knowledge needed for successful transition to organic, and will become involved with networks of organic producers, as well as learn from additional resources. By participating in mentorship, mentees will:

- Receive advice and guidance from an experienced organic producer mentor
- Increase self-awareness, motivation, and confidence both personally and professionally as an organic producer
- Gain greater clarity of purpose and productivity
- Increased organizational knowledge and know-how
- Improve skills, including with interpersonal, operation management, and broader organic production
- Focus and prepare for the future of organic production

The Mentor's Role

A mentor is a person who provides guidance, advice, or direction to someone who is willing and desiring growth and development. In the TOPP mentorship program, the mentor is an experienced organic producer providing guidance to a producer transitioning to organic. In addition to the specific qualities required for TOPP mentoring, there are some specific qualities that make for an effective mentor across mentorship programs.

Qualities of a Mentor:

Lays the Groundwork

Works to develop mentoring relationships based on mutual trust and respect, with clearly defined boundaries. Mentors help to establish the ground rules for the mentoring relationship.

Communicates Effectively

Uses active listening, questioning, summarizes mentee's ideas, and responds. Mentors give and receive constructive feedback. They encourage their mentees and celebrate successes.

Provides Guidance

Challenges ideas, poses questions, and offers fresh perspectives. Mentors share their own questions, mistakes, and learnings. They research solutions for mentees and refer mentees to additional resources. They help to structure conversations based around mentee's goals.

Builds Connection

Cares about their mentee as a person, not just as a producer. Mentors build rapport with their mentee, getting to know them personally and professionally. They monitor the mentoring relationship and ensure it is meeting the needs of both parties.

Spokesperson for Organic Production

Encourages respect for stewardship, conservation, and ecological agricultural practices. Mentors convey the realities (both satisfactions and frustrations) with organic production and encourage respect for what it takes to make organic production a career.

Mentor Qualifications and Expectations

In the NW TOPP mentorship program, mentors have other qualifications and expectations they must meet to remain in the program. For NW TOPP, qualified mentors have prior knowledge, skills and experience including:

- Currently certified organic producer with at least 3 years of organic production experience or retired producer with at least 3 years of experience with organic certification
- Fluency in the primary language of their mentee
- Preferred experience in a teaching or mentor role

Qualified mentors have the capacity to meet mentorship expectations including:

- Ability to fulfill the time commitment of mentorship including communication, site visits (virtual or in person), and researching solutions
- Access to appropriate technology for communication
- Willingness to engage in problem solving, and a desire to give-back to the farming and/or ranching community
- Strong understanding of the rules, challenges, and benefits of organic production and becoming certified organic

Additionally, mentors must meet the required expectations every year they participate. In a mentorship year, mentors will:

- Commit to 45 hours per yearly program cycle (optional additional hours with additional mentees)
 - Includes 2 operation visits per year (one at mentor operation and one at mentee operation, virtual or in-person)
 - Includes at least 3 meetings during growing season with mentee
 - Includes mentor training and end-of-year meetings
 - Recommended attendance with mentee at an agricultural event (conference or other educational event)
 - Suggested to present at and/or host an educational event (virtual or in person)
- Co-create agreement with mentee to support the structure of their experience during onboarding, including:
 - Communication plan
 - Learning objectives
 - Meetings plan
- Communicate timely and consistently with mentees and program staff
- Participate in mid-year and year-end mentorship evaluations
- Receive compensation for their mentorship
- Note: Mentors are not expected to ‘work’ on mentee operations

The Mentee’s Role

Mentees are producers transitioning to organic and intending to certify their operation, or an operation they manage, as organic. Mentees play an important role in the mentoring relationship by providing the topics and goals on which the mentorship is built, taking responsibility for their learning, and having an active desire to learn and grow alongside their mentor. Some specific qualities and actions are needed by the mentee for a mentorship to be successful and fruitful.

Qualities of a Mentee:

Creates the Goals, Agendas, and Topics

Sets goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-sensitive to help frame the mentorship. Mentees should create agendas for each meeting with their mentor and develop the topics they wish to discuss. Goals will help to define the parameters of the mentoring relationship.

Owns Their Learning

Makes decisions on their learning and guides the mentor in the direction of learning they wish to take. If mentees appreciate the advice of the mentor, apply it, and come prepared to discuss the outcome at meetings. Takes action on agreed-upon tasks within the negotiated timeframe and identify areas in need of support.

Communicates Effectively

Clearly communicates needs and aspirations to the mentor, helping to focus discussions and problem solving. Mentees actively listen to their mentor and show gratitude for their time and dedication.

Open to Feedback, Growth, and Changes

Accepting of new perspectives and insights, mentees must have a growth mindset where they are ready and open to learn and change. Mentees accept and offer feedback to and from their mentor.

Respect the Mentoring Relationship

Uses any contacts and confidential information sensibly, seeking permission from the mentor when using their name or details. Mentees build rapport with their mentor, getting to know them personally and professionally as a producer.

Mentee Qualifications and Expectations

In the TOPP mentorship program, mentees have other qualifications and expectations they must meet to remain in the program. For TOPP, mentees are defined as producers and employees/managers who have at least two years of owning/operating and/or equivalent experience, and are:

- Planning to transition an existing operation to organic,
- In the process of transitioning an operation to organic,
- Adding new organic acreage,
- Adding new scopes of organic certification,
- And/or starting a new certified organic operation

Mentees have the capacity to meet mentorship expectations including:

- Intend to become certified organic
- Ability to fulfill the time commitment of mentorship including communication, meetings, and site visit (virtual or in-person)
- Reliable access to a means of attending site-visits
- Access to appropriate technology for communication
- Cultivate curiosity about organic production

Additionally, mentees must meet the required expectations every year they participate. In a mentorship year, mentees will:

- Commit to about 40 hours of mentorship per yearly program cycle
 - Includes 2 operation visits per year (one at mentor operation and one at mentee operation, virtual or in-person)
 - Includes at least 3 meetings during growing season with mentor
 - Includes mentee onboarding and end-of-year meetings
 - Recommended attendance with mentor at an agricultural event (conference or other educational event)

- Create Mentor/Mentee agreement to support the structure of experience
 - Communication plan
 - Learning objectives
 - Meeting plan
 - Self-certify intent to develop Organic System Plan and apply for organic certification
- Communicate timely and consistently with mentor and program staff
- Participate in mid-year and year-end mentorship evaluations

Group Mentoring and Multiple Mentees

Mentors have the option to match and mentor more than one mentee if they wish. There are two different options for mentoring multiple mentees: Multiple Individual Mentorships and Group Mentoring. Having multiple individual mentees means meeting the same mentorship commitments for each mentee, whereas group mentoring is focused on providing mentorship in a group setting.

Multiple Individual Mentorships

Mentors have the option to match with more than one mentee for individual mentorships if they have the time and bandwidth available, as determined by the mentor and mentorship coordinator. If a mentor does choose to have more than one mentee, it may be possible for mentees to experience some parts of the mentorship together as a pair or small group. Differing from group mentoring (see below), multiple individual mentorships remain primarily one-to-one mentoring, with the option of occasional group learning sessions to enhance the peer learning experience.

Time Commitment

With multiple individual mentorships, mentors will conduct mentorship through one-on-one meetings and visits, and may plan occasional group learning experiences. Mentors will be expected to provide the same 40 hours of mentorship time for each of their individual mentees, and will complete 5 hours of annual mentor training no matter the number of mentees.

Compensation

Mentors will receive double their stipend for an additional mentee. After 3 or more additional mentees, the stipend will be slightly reduced to account for overlapping programmatic requirements (evaluations, check-ins, and training). Contact your region's mentorship program for specifics on compensation.

Group Mentoring

Group mentoring is an option when two or more mentees that share similarities with their operations are paired with the same mentor and meet together with their mentor as a group for their mentoring sessions. Group mentoring can also be thought of as cohorts, wherein a cohort of mentees come together for each of their mentoring sessions with the same mentor. In group mentoring, mentorship is designed as a group activity for the majority of mentoring sessions.

Mentoring sessions include monthly meetings, operation visits, educational events, and meetings with the mentorship coordinator (such as onboarding and end of year review session).

Group mentoring will be offered in cases when multiple mentees sharing a similarity between operations all express interest in mentoring within a similar timeframe, and/or there is a lack of qualified mentors that match with the mentees sharing this similarity. For example, if only one qualified mentor is available for a certain crop, but multiple mentees that all produce this crop are interested in mentorship, then mentees may be grouped together with that one mentor, and the mentor would conduct mentorship through a group setting. Group mentoring will be utilized at the discretion of the Mentorship Coordinator and mentor and will always be optional for the mentor. The Mentorship Coordinator will discuss group mentoring as an option with the mentor before initiating it.

Time Commitment

For group mentoring, mentors will be expected to commit a minimum of 65 hours per mentorship year. The 65 hours include the same amount of group mentorship time as given in individual mentoring (40 hours), 5 hours of annual mentor training, and 10 hours to spend individually with each mentee.

In a mentorship year, group mentors will:

- Commit to a minimum of 65 hours per yearly program cycle (12 months)
 - Includes 5 hours of annual mentor training
 - Includes 40 hours of direct group mentorship
 - Includes 10 hours of one-on-one mentee time for each mentee (with minimum of 2 mentees)
- If three or more mentees join the group mentoring cohort:
 - Mentors will commit an additional 10 hours per each mentee that joins

Compensation

Group mentors will receive a base stipend for a cohort of two mentees, and will receive additional compensation for each additional mentee that joins the group mentoring cohort. Contact your region's mentorship program for specifics on compensation.

Mentorship Timeline

A mentoring relationship will begin when the mentee is transitioning to organic. The duration of transitioning can vary greatly. It could be as short as one year, or it could last for many years. As long as the mentoring relationship remains positive, beneficial, and constructive, it is recommended for the mentorship to continue through the transition time, certification process, and for one year after certification.

If at any time the mentor or mentee needs to end the mentorship or withdraw from the program, the mentor or mentee may do so by contacting their region's mentorship program and providing 30-days notice.

Training

There is required training for both mentors and mentees. All training must be completed to begin mentorship, and continuing education will need to be completed annually thereafter. Initial training needs to be completed within the first month of acceptance into the program.

Matching

Once the Mentorship Coordinator has identified a match between mentor and mentee, the mentor and mentee will have an initial phone call together to ensure the match feels like a good fit. After, both the mentor and mentee will complete a short confidential evaluation on their potential match, and the Mentorship Coordinator will make sure the match will work for both parties. If both parties express their wish to move forward with the match, then the mentorship will officially begin.

Onboarding

Mentors and mentees prepare for mentorship onboarding by completing goals and communication plans, and together meet with the mentorship coordinator to develop agreements for the mentorship year.

Meetings

Meetings happen throughout the mentorship year. It is recommended for meetings to occur **monthly**, however with the demands of the production season, we understand that may be challenging. It is required to have **at least three** meetings during the production season, and monthly meetings in the off season.

Meetings can happen virtually, in-person, over the phone, or through whichever mode of communication you have agreed upon in your communication plan.

See the Guidelines for Meetings section to find more information on structure of meetings and ideas for topics to discuss.

Operation/Farm Visits

The mentor is expected to visit the mentee's operation at least once during a mentorship year, and the mentee is expected to visit the mentor's operation at least once during a mentorship year. Travel time is included in the mentorship year time requirement. We are not able to provide reimbursement for mileage.

Virtual options: if geographic location does not allow for in-person visits, virtual visits are an option. This must be discussed in advance with the Mentorship Coordinator, ideally during onboarding when making a meeting plan for the year. If virtual visits become necessary due to unforeseen circumstances, please discuss your plan with the Mentorship Coordinator.

End of Year Review

At the end of the mentorship year, both mentor and mentee will complete self-assessments on their experience in the program. Together, the mentor, mentee and the Mentorship Coordinator

will meet to discuss their experiences during the mentorship year and look ahead at the option of continuing the mentorship.

Educational Event(s)

It is recommended for the mentor and mentee to attend at least one educational event together during the mentorship year to share in joint learning. Educational events could include an agricultural conference, field days, workshops, and/or webinars. The mentorship coordinator will notify all mentors and mentees of educational event opportunities regularly.

Program Check-ins

The mentor and mentee will separately check in with the mentorship coordinator during the mentorship year. Check-ins may be short email or phone calls during times of the year when mentor and mentee are busy and may be longer phone calls or virtual meetings when more time is available. The check-ins will be a space for the coordinator to hear updates on the mentorship, a chance for the mentor/mentee to ask questions, and an opportunity to discuss mentorship plans moving forward.

Evaluations

Both mentors and mentees will participate in mid-year and year-end evaluations. These will either be written or verbal surveys.

Guidelines for Meetings

Meetings are central to the mentorship experience, allowing discussion of experience, giving, and receiving feedback, exploration of issues and talking through options for future action and development. The mentor acts as the facilitator through skillful questioning, a non-directive, non-judgmental approach, and the use of different strategies.

Mentors help their mentees explore choices and consequences, identify, and face up to challenges, generate creative solutions, plan courses of action, and reflect upon and learn from successes and failures.

Mentees on the other hand bring the agenda for the meeting, have goals in mind for each meeting, and ensure the feedback from the mentor is following the path of learning they wish to take. In meetings, mentees reflect on actions taken since the last meeting, and set goals and action items to meet by the next meeting.

Meetings in general are meant to:

- Review experience
- Give feedback
- Identify strengths and achievements
- Identify weaknesses and areas for development
- Explore options

- Teach and learn specific skills and techniques
- Engage in discussions
- Discussing and sharing resources
- Identify and agree on support needs
- Set targets for future action

Structuring Meeting Discussion

Generally for meetings, a helpful structure can be to look back, be present, and look ahead. This includes looking back on goals from the previous meeting and relevant experiences since last meeting, discussing thoughts and ideas that come up in the present moment while meeting, and looking ahead at goals, action items, and support needed until the next meeting. Here are ideas to expand on this structure:

1. First, look back on recent experience and reflect on goals and action items set during the previous meeting. What have you accomplished? What went well? What hasn't worked? Where do you need to refocus?
2. Discuss present experience. What thoughts have arisen now in light of what's been discussed and raised? What obstacles might there be and how can they be overcome?
3. Discuss future options, explore goals for future action, and discuss ways to meet the needs identified. Identify action items to accomplish before the next meeting. Agree on support needed until the next meeting.

Topic Guidance for Meetings and Mentorship

The focus for TOPP mentorship is transitioning to organic and organic certification, and all meetings and discussions should surround this theme. Mentees will identify their primary goals and areas in need of support in order to transition to organic, and mentors will provide the advice and support of which they are knowledgeable to help guide their mentees. In the transition to organic experience, learning viable and sustainable organic production practices is critical for success. Within organic production are many different topics that can be discussed during mentorship, including organic agronomy, market availability, farm viability, transportation, resource identification, recordkeeping, organic system plans, preparing for inspections, and strengthening conservation and biodiversity on the operation.

Specific and technical certification topics and questions will need to be referred to certifying agencies and technical assistance. Mentors may share personal experiences with certification, Organic System Plan development and recordkeeping, however, specific and technical certification topics should be referred to certification agencies, technical assistance resources, or the mentorship programs staff. Although mentors have gone through the certification process, they may not be knowledgeable of all National Organic Program requirements and regulations, and so it will be best to refer specific and technical certification questions to trained professionals to ensure the accuracy of the guidance provided.

Certification specific topics to refer:

- Technicalities and particulars of an Organic System Plan, especially in regards to a specific certifier
- Specific recordkeeping requirements
- Certifier specific organic inspections requirements
- National Organic Program regulations and standards

If you experience confusion about a topic or if you are unsure if you should be answering a question:

- Reach out to your mentorship program staff! Mentorship program staff can help with clarifying whether you are qualified to address a topic, and direct questions to the correct resource or technical assistance provider.
- Make use of technical assistance resources! Technical assistance will be offered free of charge in addition to the mentorship, with the goal of providing guidance on certification topics. Certification agencies, extension offices, NRCS, and other agricultural organizations have technical assistance available.

Mentors should stick within the topics they know well and can provide reliable, consistent, and quality advice. Don't provide guidance on a topic you are not knowledgeable about. Acknowledge this is a topic best discussed with a different person or resource, and conduct research and/or outreach for resources to help with answering the question. Reach out to the Mentorship Coordinator if you are unsure of how to approach a topic.

Topic ideas to discuss during mentorship:

- Organic production practices
- Transition strategies
- Organic agronomy
- Market availability
- Transportation
- Sharing of resources
- Farm viability
- Conservation and biodiversity practices
- Personal experience with recordkeeping and organic system plans
- Preparing for organic inspections

Certifier Neutrality

Transitioning producers participating in the TOPP mentorship program can apply for certification with any certifier of their choice. Transitioning producers have free choice in choosing whichever certifier they want. Because of this, all mentorship discussions need to maintain certifier neutrality. The Organic Integrity Database lists all certifiers, the states they service, and the certification scopes they certify. Go to <https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity> to access the database and search for certifiers.

Mentorship Progression

Over time, the mentorship will progress through different stages. In the beginning both parties in the mentorship will be getting to know each other and learning about each other's production practices and operations. As mentors and mentees develop their relationship, they will fall into a time of meeting regularly, setting goals, and working on challenges as they arise.

The mentorship may continue for months or years depending on the duration of the transition and certification experience of the mentee, and depending on the wishes of both parties. The mentorship will come to a close with an ending stage.

Beginning the Mentorship

The beginning of the mentorship is a critical time for getting to know each other personally and professionally, and building rapport and trust in the mentoring relationship. The mentorship will begin with onboarding facilitated by your mentorship program staff. During onboarding, mentees will share their initial goals for the mentorship, and together with mentors will co-create an agreement including a communication plan, agreement on confidentiality, and plan for meetings.

Beginning the mentorship includes:

- Onboarding to establish goals and plans for the mentorship year
- Initial meetings to get to know each other
- Activities and meetings to build rapport and trust
- Creating plans to meet goals
- May include visits to each other's operations depending on time of year

During onboarding, a time and date will be set for the next meeting between mentor and mentee. For the first few meetings, focus on building the relationship, developing communication patterns and styles that work for both parties, and creating plans for meeting the mentee's goals. Identifying and discussing each other's strengths and weaknesses may be helpful for providing insight into where each of you will need support and will be able to provide greater guidance.

The first few months of the mentorship is a great time to visit each other's operations and learn more about the challenges and successes each of you have faced with organic production.

Continuing the Mentorship

Once the initial goals have been identified, some plans put in place during mentorship meetings, and both mentor and mentee feel like they are comfortable with each other, continue to have monthly meetings if possible, and discuss ongoing successes, challenges, and strategies. At the end of each meeting, set action items and goals to achieve by the next meeting, and ensure you check in on those items at your meetings.

- **Mentees** will need to ensure the mentorship is continuing in a direction that is helpful, supportive, and challenges their learning. If the mentorship seems to go off track, be

open and honest about what you need from the mentor, provide feedback, reflection, and express what you need for the mentorship to be productive once again. As the mentorship continues, mentees will:

- Be proactive
 - Come to meetings with an agenda
 - Reflect on mentoring sessions
 - Aim to integrate learning from each session
- **Mentors** will ensure meetings continue regularly, and will help to facilitate the learning of the mentee. Ask questions to push the mentee in their thinking, reflect on the mentee's goals and aspirations, and research solutions to problems the mentee has encountered. It is the role of the mentor to make sure meetings are continuing even through busy times of the year, and that communication does not drop between the two of you. As the mentorship continues, mentors will:
 - Actively listen
 - Ask exploratory questions
 - Challenge appropriately
 - Be empathic
 - Respect the mentee's agenda
 - Provide shape and purpose in the conversations
 - Have a genuine desire to support the mentee
 - Not superimpose own trajectory/path on the mentee
 - Be in touch with the realities of transitioning producers

The middle time of the mentorship may continue for just months, or for several years, depending on the needs and interests of both parties. If it does continue for more than a year, the mentorship coordinator will schedule at least two meetings every year with the mentor and mentee together to reflect on the mentorship, address learning goals, and ensure the mentorship is meeting the needs of both parties.

At the end of each mentorship year, the mentorship program staff will meet with the mentee and mentor together to reflect on the previous year and make plans for the upcoming year. This could be the point at which the mentorship comes to an end if both parties have agreed, or if otherwise needed. The mentorship may also continue until one year after the mentee receives certification, if both parties continue to find the relationship fruitful.

Ending the Mentorship

Once the mentor and mentee have decided to end their mentorship, a last meeting together and a last meeting with the mentorship program staff should be scheduled. These last meetings should be celebratory, celebrating the successes of the mentorship, and successes of the individual mentors and mentees.

During these meetings, review the original objectives, review learning and progress, celebrate achievements, look at what still needs work, and share goals for the future. Additionally, take some time to identify the next steps for your relationship together.

Consider these questions: will you continue to stay in touch? If so, in what ways? If not, then how can you acknowledge and show gratitude for each other as you part ways?

During the mentorship review session with the Mentorship Coordinator, you will be asked to look back at your mentorship experience as a whole. Your input and insight will help to improve the program moving forward.

Steps to end the mentorship:

- Discuss ending with your mentor or mentee and establish timeline for when mentorship will end
- Notify your mentorship program staff of wish to end and timeline for ending
- Have a last meeting with your mentor or mentee and reflect on and celebrate successes of the mentorship
- Participate in mentorship review session with program staff
- Complete final program evaluation
- If your mentor or mentee does not agree with your wish to end the mentorship, contact program staff to discuss next steps

Mentorship Code of Conduct

The Northwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) values community building, communication, integrity, and respect. As a facilitator of relationships between mentors and mentees, between mentors and the program, mentees and the program, and community members across the country, TOPP expects all participants to adhere to the following Code of Conduct.

If any member of the community is unable or unwilling to adhere to the Code of Conduct, TOPP retains the right to ask the individual to depart the program.

All participants of TOPP mentorship program, including mentors, mentees, staff, and partners will follow this Code of Conduct as outlined below:

Respect Others

- Create a fair, collaborative, inclusive, and respectful environment for all
- Value and respect contributions of other participant, partners, and staff
- Treat each other with respect, civility, and courtesy
- Challenge ideas, not people
- Listen without judgment
- Take responsibility to create a respectful and supportive environment

Display Integrity

- Meet program expectations
- Respond promptly, courteously, and appropriately to requests for assistance or information
- Demonstrate commitment to a culture where all participants cooperate and collaborate to achieve the best outcomes
- Show up prepared for meetings and visits

Maintain Confidentiality

- Create a safe space to try out ideas, give feedback, and share concerns
- Adhere to the confidentiality agreement on the mentor-mentee agreement
- Protect privacy of participants, do not share private information about any other participant, unless you have received participant's approval to share

Avoid Conflicts of Interest

- Practice unbiased mentorship
- Maintain communication and transparency about any potential conflicts of interest
- Discuss conflicts of interest that arise with the Mentorship Coordinator

Manage Boundaries

- Use conflict management skills, together with respect and courteous verbal communication, to effectively manage disagreements
- Recognize that differing social and cultural standards may mean that behavior that is acceptable to some may be unacceptable to others
- Maintain professional boundaries
- Express personal boundaries and level of comfort with different types of interactions

Understand Limitations

- Acknowledge the bravery in asking for more and acknowledge when there is a limit to knowledge
- Understand your own level of expertise and limit yourself accordingly
- Seek out additional resources beyond mentorship when needed
- Refrain from providing any medical, therapeutic or legal advice that you are not certified to give

Report Conduct Violations

- Recognize when you or others are being disrespected and the code of conduct is not being followed
- Address the behavior directly with the person that is violating the code of conduct, if appropriate
- Bring the situation to the attention of the TOPP mentorship program staff or your Regional Lead

It is TOPP's policy that communication between mentors and mentees is open and honest at all times. Mentors and mentees may also come forward and discuss their problems directly with TOPP staff in order to resolve issues quickly and efficiently.

Grievance Policy and Procedure

TOPP mentors and mentees with a mentorship related problem, question, or complaint should first discuss it with their mentor or mentee. At this level, participants usually reach the simplest, quickest, and most satisfactory solution. If the problem is not resolved or is serious in nature, it should be brought to the attention of the mentorship program staff.

Open Door Policy

It is TOPP's policy that communication between mentors and mentees is open and honest at all times. Mentors and mentees may also come forward and discuss their problems directly with TOPP staff at any time in order to resolve issues quickly and efficiently.

Filing a Formal Complaint

TOPP takes the quality of our programming seriously. If a participant believes a series issue exists that adversely affects their participation in the program or violates the provisions of the Code of Conduct, they may file a formal complaint using one of the following methods:

- Phone call to the mentorship program staff
- Email to the mentorship program staff
- To file a complaint or concern about your program staff, call or email your regional lead

Depending on the nature of the issue, TOPP staff will take appropriate action in a timely manner to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all participants.

Conflict Resolution Protocol

If conflicts should arise between mentors and mentees, all parties must agree to utilize good communication, active listening, and empathy. When a conflict arises, contact the mentorship program staff immediately to alert them to the nature of the conflict. Mentees and mentors may engage in facilitated discussions with the mentorship program staff to describe the nature of the conflict directly and work towards a mutually agreeable solution.

If either party does not feel comfortable discussing the conflict directly, or a resolution is not found in the initial conversation between the mentor and mentee, the mentorship program staff will be brought in to help facilitate the conversation, as necessary. If the nature of the conflict is such that TOPP staff is unable to facilitate the conversation, professional help will be sought by TOPP.

Corrective Action Policy

TOPP will utilize the following corrective action policy to give feedback to mentors and mentees about their performance where it falls short of expected standards or to address misconduct. The following steps will be taken:

1. **Verbal warning:** TOPP staff may verbally warn mentors and mentees that performance or personal behavior is unsatisfactory and if not corrected could lead to additional disciplinary action. If any participant feels threatened or unsafe by another participant, then mentorship pairing will end immediately, TOPP staff will address the concern directly with the participant, and mentor/mentee may be re-matched if appropriate.
2. **Facilitated conversation with TOPP staff and/or mentorship re-matching:** If behavior/issue is not resolved following the verbal warning, either mentor or mentee is expected to reach out to the mentorship program staff. A facilitated conversation may be scheduled with all parties to work towards a mutually agreeable solution. If a conversation between parties is not appropriate due to the nature of the concern, then the mentorship pairing will end and mentor/mentee may be re-matched if appropriate.
3. **Disciplinary action:** If mentor and/or mentee participate in a facilitated conversation and the behavior/issue is not resolved, TOPP staff retain the right to determine the appropriate level of discipline to be administered, up to and including termination of the mentorship. TOPP staff will provide written notice of the chosen disciplinary action to the participant.

The following types of behavior are examples of typical grounds for disciplinary action:

- Performing mentorship duties while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Attendance and/or tardiness problems
- Breach of the confidentiality agreement
- Violating the code of conduct
- Breach of the mentor or mentee contract
- Theft from the mentor or mentee operation, its employees, or clients
- Discrimination or sexual harassment

This list is provided as a general guideline for illustrative purposes only and does not restrict TOPP staff's ability to discipline or discharge any participants for any reason it deems appropriate.

Mentorship Re-Matching

If a mentor or mentee is discharged from the program, or if a mentorship pairing does not work out after facilitated conversation with program staff, the option to be re-matched with another mentor or mentee is possible, depending on the nature of the issue or conflict. The mentorship program staff will decide if a re-match is possible and will facilitate the re-match process.

Mentor Grievance and Pay

If a mentor is discharged from the program before the mentorship year has ended, or if their mentorship pairing ends mid-year, they will receive prorated pay for the time spent mentoring. Prorated pay will be determined by months spent mentoring. If the mentor is discharged or the mentorship pairing ends mid-month, the prorated pay will be rounded up for the month.

Confidentiality

We value each person's right to be treated with respect and their personnel matters to be managed with the greatest care to preserve confidentiality. However, some infractions such as sexual harassment, physical and/or psychological threats, or behaviors that threaten a person's safety may require involvement of additional resources. Even then, we will manage each scenario with discretion.

Sources

Academic Senate for California Community Colleges,
indd.adobe.com/view/publication/f331cd50-6486-40de-8805-0cd1c8074865/w9ru/publication-web-resources/pdf/Mentorship_Handbook_211027_8in_media.pdf

Imperial College London, *Guidance for Mentors and Mentees*,
imperial.ac.uk/staff-development/people-and-organisational-development/coaching-and-mentoring/mentoring-at-imperial/further-information/guidance/

Mentoring Complete, *The Mentoring Code of Conduct: Do You Need It?*
get.mentoringcomplete.com/blog/mentoring-code-of-conduct

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, *Mentor Training Toolkit*,
<http://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/mentortoolkit.pdf>

Quivira Coalition, *New Agrarian Program Mentor Handbook*,
issuu.com/quiviracoalition/docs/nap_2021_mentor_handbook

Quivira Coalition, *New Agrarian Program Grievance Policy*, 2020

Together Platform, *Mentor Handbook*, togetherplatform.com/handbook/mentor

West Yorkshire Mentor Guide, online.flippingbook.com/view/151486/4/

University College London, *Mentoring Handbook*,
ucl.ac.uk/human-resources/sites/human_resources/files/ucl_mentoring_handbook_website.pdf