

# **NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVISTS (NEA) MENTORING PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

By NEA Mentoring Task Force Members  
(2014-2015)

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## NEA MENTORING PROGRAM INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

New England Archivists (NEA) is a regional organization of people who organize, describe, preserve, and provide access to historical records in a variety of formats. As a collective, NEA offers educational opportunities and provides venues for professional and volunteer archivists to gather and share experiences with colleagues. The Roundtable for Early Professionals and Students (REPS) was founded in 2013 as a subgroup of NEA. REPS “aims to provide a forum for discussion and professional growth among those members of the New England Archivists who are just beginning their archival careers.” In 2013, with the support of several experienced NEA members, the REPS leadership piloted a mentoring circle program for members of the roundtable. Leaders in the group felt that the exploration of a more formal mentoring program, with the support of the larger NEA group, would be in line with their overarching goals.

While many models were considered for a formal mentoring program, the REPS leadership felt strongly that the relatively unusual mentoring circle model would “generate an environment where a diverse group of experiences will be shared in order for participants to learn from one another and push the archival discipline forward...[and that] circles will encourage more mentoring circles, which will help ensure professional and personal growth opportunities for all NEA members.” A mentoring circle is a group of individuals that meet (virtually or in person) on a regular basis for an agreed amount of time during the mentorship period. During the 2013 pilot, the REPS leadership indicated that the mentoring circle’s main objective would be to have “mentors assist mentees with setting and meeting professional goals.”

Over the course of the pilot year, three mentoring circles were established by the REPS leadership following an application call and matching process. Each circle was led by a team of two mentors, members of the NEA community with differing levels of experience, with 4-5 mentees from the REPS membership participating. The circles were supported by liaisons from the REPS leadership, who were responsible for communication with participants and scheduling of meetings. The circles met approximately monthly throughout a 9-month period, including occasional meet-ups with participants from other circles. In the pilot year, the mentors were selected from among members of the NEA network. The application process for mentees included a short series of questions about mentoring experience and interest.

Given the success of the pilot year, the ongoing continuous need for mentorship, and the interest in exploring a more formal mentoring program for NEA as a whole, the REPS liaisons worked with the NEA Executive Board to establish the NEA Mentoring Task Force. The Task Force was established in June 2014 and its main goals are to explore the mentoring circles model further during a second year and to open participation to all NEA members.

Mentoring circles are models that help both senior and junior members of the NEA community meet professional goals by networking, developing needed skills, and receiving support and guidance. This type of mentoring, where one or two senior mentors meet with a small group of mentees, has been well received in a diverse number of settings, and is not a model currently offered through other archival professional associations. In 2014 the Mentoring Task Force formally adopted “NEA Mentoring Program,” as the name of the program moving forward. While

mentoring circles are the primary model in the NEA program, the group felt the name was sufficiently inclusive to include other mentoring models in the future as appropriate.

Thus, these NEA Mentoring Program Guidelines are intended to set expectations of participation and support for both mentors and mentees. NEA does not provide specific guidance on what the mentoring circles will do or discuss. These guidelines will provide direction for the mentoring circles overall, as well as ideas and resources for a successful experience of group mentoring.

## **DESCRIPTION OF GROUP MENTORING/ MENTORING CIRCLES IN THE NEA MENTORING PROGRAM**

### ***Definition and Goals***

A mentoring circle is a group of professional colleagues who meet together on a regular basis for an agreed upon length of time. Participants may act as mentors or mentees.

The group serves to support mentees in:

- 1. Setting important career and personal development goals.**
- 2. Building competence and character to reach those goals.**
- 3. Fostering connections with people in their professional field.**

The group serves to support mentors in:

- 1. Expansion of a professional network.**
- 2. Gaining a fresh perspective from someone newer in the field.**
- 3. “Paying it forward” professionally.**

The circle serves to facilitate the exchange of experiences, challenges, and opportunities for the purpose of enhancing perspective, self-confidence, communication skills, leadership practices, and commitment to one's career. Each circle is assigned a liaison to assist the circle with meeting its goals.

### ***Mentoring Circles***

Circles foster multiple mentoring relationships both between the mentors and the mentees, as well as the peer mentoring relationships among the mentees and mentors themselves. Circles will typically consist of four to six mentees and two mentors. Both mentors and mentees are matched to a circle depending on their interests and goals. The application process and an initial survey will help determine everyone's interests and support the initial matching. In the first few meetings, members are likely to spend some time getting to know each other, as well as discussing their goals and how they could be accomplished. The aim is to meet for 1-2 hours once a month for the length of the program.

***Expectations for Mentors***

Mentors are identified through the application process, but are selected based on their interest and support of mentoring those individuals early to the profession. They are asked to lead the group's discussion and activities, and to share their personal experiences and perspectives with their circle.

Mentors are responsible for facilitating the conversations, driving discussion, fostering participation of all mentees as appropriate and setting expectations for the group. The mentor and mentee should have open lines of communication and are encouraged to work together outside of the group as questions arise. Mentors are also expected to communicate with the liaisons of the NEA Mentoring Program in scheduling meetings, for logistical or other arrangements, or when issues or concerns cannot be resolved within the group.

Because there are two mentors assigned to each circle, we encourage co-mentors to connect prior to their circles starting in order to get to know each other, discuss personal facilitation styles, and expectations. Mentors should consider their co-mentor as a partner in this endeavor, a resource, and even a peer mentor throughout their time together leading a circle. For example, co-mentors might discuss together the topics that their circle will discuss throughout the program, how to encourage a quiet member to participate, or even their own career challenges.

***Expectations for Mentees***

Mentees join the circle prepared to contribute as much as they hope to gain from the circles, with the understanding that mentoring is a self-directed process. Mentees take responsibility for setting personal goals, crafting their own agendas for discussion in the group, and sharing those ideas with their mentors and fellow mentees. They are expected to come to the group prepared, with discussion ideas identified or readings completed, and to share their experiences or provide feedback during the discussion. Mentees can also help in scheduling meetings and supporting the coordination of logistics for meeting.

If difficulties arise, reach out to the mentors or your Mentoring Task Force liaison for help. They can help with concerns about the group, and provide guidance on how to move forward in a constructive way.

***Expectations for Liaisons***

Liaisons are volunteers from the NEA Mentoring Task Force who take on support roles in their assigned circles. Liaisons provide program information to participants and keep the Task Force up-to-date on circle activities. They also assist mentors with logistical tasks, including scheduling meetings (Doodle polls are helpful) and act as mediators when issues or concerns arise within a circle. Liaisons may help mentors brainstorm discussions and activities as requested.

***Program Timeline***

TBD: ~ seven to nine months

Depending on the aim and needs of the circle they may meet more or less frequently.

***Attendance Policy***

The NEA Mentoring Program was envisioned with the full participation of mentors and mentees in mind. Mentoring relationships develop over time and you should consider regular participation as the foundation by which these relationships are fostered. We wish to avoid cancelling meetings altogether.

**Mentees:** We ask that mentees prioritize your mentoring meetings, and miss no more than 1-2 non-consecutive meetings throughout the duration of this program. Barring an emergency, the first meeting is mandatory. Though we all juggle many obligations, professionally and personally, we ask that you prioritize these conversations and be flexible in your availability and scheduling. Should missing a meeting be necessary, please be in touch with your circle liaison and mentors in advance. We would like you to be mindful that there were limited spots in the NEA Mentoring Program for mentees and we have a wait list of applicants. In the event that you miss more than two meetings, you may be asked to withdraw from the program.

**Mentors:** Like mentees, we ask that you prioritize your participation in mentoring meetings, and miss no more than 1-2 non-consecutive meetings throughout the duration of this program. Barring an emergency, the first meeting is mandatory. Though we all juggle many obligations, professionally and personally, we ask that you prioritize these conversations and be flexible in your availability and scheduling. Should missing a meeting be necessary, please be in touch with your circle liaison and co-mentors in advance. It may be possible to schedule a guest mentor on a meeting by meeting basis, so the earlier we can plan for an absence, the better.

***First Meeting Suggestions***

- Expectations and Roles
  - participation and confidentiality
  - support of the mentoring circle in meeting goals
- Introductions of Mentors and Mentees
  - include past positions
  - motivation to join the profession
  - aspirations, goals, and interests

***Expectations for Discussions***

The mentoring circle's conversations will vary based on each group's dynamic but the focus should be on career growth, facing challenges, and solving problems. These conversations should be kept private and should be in a supportive environment. The group will work with your Mentoring Task Force liaison to coordinate the schedule, and though they may provide you with

ideas and articles to help start your initial conversation, they expect that the mentors and mentees will set and drive the discussions themselves. All participants should be willing to give and get professional and personal support from the other members of the circle.

The group provides accountability to each other and should be a confidential environment. Mentors will help guide, and promote productive discussions in the circle to ensure all members of the group have an opportunity to participate.

Discussion Resource: Chandler DE, Hall DT, Kram KE. How to be a Smart Protégé: Eight tips for setting up a network of mentors. August 7, 2009.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405297020393750457425214185289888.html>.

***Possible Themes for Discussion***

Updates from the group  
Career skills development  
Challenges faced during work  
Learning to network  
Career planning / setting personal goals  
Negotiation skills  
Promotions  
Professional development  
Professional service and leadership  
Defining what success means to you  
Managing up, down, and sideways  
Time management  
Work/life balance  
Balancing family and career  
Identifying individual strengths and weaknesses  
Sharing lessons learned in the workplace  
What you hope to gain from participating in the Mentoring Circle  
Hiring: how to manage being on your first job search committee  
Learning how to promote yourself

**STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN GROUP MENTORING**

Group mentoring should provide personal and professional support and guidance, as well as self-reflection and satisfaction, for every member of the group. The most important component of success in this setting is to establish from the first meeting a firm commitment, a willingness to invest time and energy, and clarity about the expectations. This should be done by the circle's mentors and agreed upon by mentees.

As the year progresses, the challenges are to maintain contact and use meeting time efficiently and productively, as well as to ensure that all participants are participating fully. A mentoring group develops over time, as relationships take time to establish.

A successful mentoring group will:

- Establish group norms when the circle first meets
- Set clear goals, needs, and expectations
- Define and agree upon availability
- Focus on learning (and teaching)
- Connect members to people and/or resources that can contribute to the group objectives, network and collaborate with group members and/or their colleagues/friends
- Develop professional skills
- Provide constructive feedback
- Encourage self-reflection
- Foster development of trust, understanding, confidentiality, and empathy with fellow group members

Participants in a successful mentoring group will:

- Be at ease with one another
- Be honest with one another
- Be willing to ask for and seek help/advice
- Promote and encourage each other
- Be patient and kind
- Establish and maintain good communication
- Build and maintain relationships
- Listen to one another with an open mind and be nonjudgmental
- Stay in touch and respond to one another in a timely manner
- Be approachable and accessible

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