

# New England Archivists (NEA) Mentoring Program Guidelines

Updated in 2023 from guidelines created 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 “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 were 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.

We would like to express our profound gratitude to the 2014 Mentoring Task Force, who created the original guidelines this 2023 update is based on. Their contributions to this program and document continue to guide this program into its second decade.

# Descriptions of group mentoring and NEA mentoring circles

## 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. The Mentoring Program administrator will run the program and assist the groups 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 based on their scheduling availability and

location, if the meeting can be in person, then their interests will be considered. The application survey for both mentors and mentees will help determine everyone's availability and interests. 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, which is 7 months. These meetings can be accomplished virtually or in person if there is enough interest.

## Expectations for Mentors

Mentors must complete an application survey. Applicants are selected and placed with a co-mentor and group based on their availability and interests or location, if applicable. A minimum of 2 years experience in the Archives field is required, as is the availability to commit to the program. The mentoring program administrator can be consulted if there is uncertainty about what role would suit an applicant best. Once matches are made, the application surveys will be shared with corresponding mentors to get an idea of their assigned group's schedules, interests, and goals before the initial meeting. They are asked to schedule the meetings, lead the group's discussions and activities, and share their personal experiences and perspectives with their circle.

When scheduling any meeting, it is the mentors' responsibility to consult the recommendations and holiday calendar that the NEA Inclusion and Diversity Committee (IDC) has created regarding religious or cultural holidays. This information is available in a continuously updated [Holiday Calendar for New England Archivists](#).

The Mentors are responsible for facilitating the conversations, driving discussion, fostering the participation of all mentees as appropriate, and setting expectations for the group. If the group is meeting in person, the mentors are responsible for securing in-person meeting locations. If the meetings are virtual, mentees will need to determine which communications platform, such as Zoom or Google Meet, will be accessible to all group members. Mentors are encouraged to share personal experiences, both successes and failures.

The mentors and mentees 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 Program Administrator of the NEA Mentoring Program for assistance with logistics, topics, or resources when needed. The program administrator should also be contacted when issues or concerns cannot be resolved within the group.

Because there are two mentors assigned to each circle, we strongly encourage co-mentors to connect prior to their circles starting in order to get to know each other, and 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 are personally responsible for setting their goals for the program, 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 and other tasks completed. Mentees are expected to provide constructive feedback during discussions, as well as accept it. They are expected to respond to scheduling surveys in a timely manner and should be committed to attending all meetings unless unable to. When it is not possible to attend, mentees should let their mentors know as soon as possible. Attendance is fundamental to a successful experience for all participants.

If difficulties arise, mentees should reach out to the mentors. If more comfortable, the mentor can reach out to the Mentoring Program Administrator for help. The

administrator can help with concerns about the group and provide guidance on how to move forward in a constructive way.

## Expectations for the NEA Mentoring Program Administrator

The Mentoring Program Administrator manages the application process and communications as well as provides program information to participants. The administrator assists mentors with brainstorming discussion topics and activities, as well as facilitating accommodations and logistics issues when requested. The program administrator also acts as a mediator when issues or concerns arise within a circle, both for mentors or mentees. When groups are done, the administrator manages the survey process and communications assessing the experience for both mentors and mentees.

## Code of Conduct

All participants in the Mentoring Program agree to abide by the [New England Archivists Code of Conduct](#).

## Program Timeline

The Program runs from January to July. It is recommended that meetings are held monthly between 1 and 2 hours. In August you can expect to receive an evaluation for feedback about the program.

## 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. It is essential that these conversations be kept private and should be in a supportive environment. The program administrator can provide ideas and resources, but 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. It is vital that all members of the group actively participate in discussions. When meeting virtually, be mindful of other participants' environment, as they may be at home, at work, or with family or co-workers nearby. This might mean making sure someone is comfortable before asking to share personal information, or not commenting on someone's living space.

### 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
- Publishing articles and other writing in the field
- 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 including cultural awareness and sensitivity.

### 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

## Further reading

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