

Appendix E: Mentor Interview Protocol Year 2 (Spring 2023)

Background (do not read to participant):

Mentor semi-structured phone interviews will take place at the end of year 1 of implementation and at the end of year 2 of implementation. Targeted length for each interview is 45 minutes. This is the script for the interview at the end of year 2. Interviews are intended to be semi-structured and conversational to provide additional insight into E-STAR mentoring. This protocol will be used to guide the conversation, and the suggested probes may be used as necessary, but we do not expect all probes to be asked of all interviewees.

Introduction

My name is [NAME], and I’m a researcher at Abt Associates. Thank you for speaking with me today.

As you may recall, my team is conducting an evaluation of the Team Nutrition Enhanced Strategies, Training, Action Plans, and Resources (or E-STAR) Program for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

Now that E-STAR is in its second and final year, my team is contacting E-STAR mentors to learn about how things have gone in the second year of the program.

As we go through this interview, if there are questions to which you do not know the answer, or you wish to not answer, feel free to say you would like to skip the question. Please know that your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may choose to end the interview at any time. As a thank-you for your time today, we will send you a \$20 gift card.

After this interview, we will summarize your responses with those provided by other mentors, in a final report for FNS. We will not use names in the report or identify individual respondents.

This call should take about 45 minutes.

With your permission, we would like to record the discussion to ensure that our notes accurately reflect your responses. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Yes
No

Great, thank you for speaking with me, [MENTOR NAME]. Before we begin, do you have any questions about the project in general or what we will be discussing today?

Interview questions

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First, let's talk about how your experience as an E-STAR mentor has gone over the past year.

- 1. Tell me about your overall goals for the E-STAR mentoring. How have your goals changed over the past year?**
 - a. Probe: How do you see your role as a mentor in supporting your manager mentees? How has this changed over the past year?*
 - b. Probe: What do you hope your manager mentees will get out of the mentoring? How has this changed over the past year?*

- 2. Can you provide a brief description of a typical session you held with your mentees over the past year? How is this different from the previous year?**
 - a. Probe: Have your mentoring sessions been held in person? Over the phone? Via webinar, skype, or video chat? If in-person, then where do you meet? Is one way more effective than another?*
 - b. Probe: Leave this very open ended, but probe about structure, length, frequency, topics covered; how they addressed the Action Plan goals – How do mentors track progress between sessions?*
 - c. Probe: Did you have specific goals for each session? How much preparation (if any) did you do prior to each session?*
 - d. Probe: How did you end each session? What were the expectations for the mentee?*
 - e. Probe: How much did sessions vary between mentees? How much did sessions vary from session-to-session for the same mentee? (Think of variation in terms of structure, length, frequency, topics covered, goals, etc.)*

- 3. Were you able to meet with your manager mentees on the schedule you planned? Why or why not?**
 - a. Probe: How, if at all, did you need to adapt your schedule?*
 - b. Probe: Have you experienced any challenges related to adhering to schedule; technical challenges?*
 - c. Probe: Have there been any challenges connecting with the manager mentees for mentoring sessions?*
 - d. Probe for facilitators and barriers on mentor's end and on manager mentees' end to holding mentoring sessions as planned.*

- 4. What were some of the more common topics you covered during your mentoring sessions? What have your manager mentees needed the most help with?**
 - a. Probe for topics more related to content (e.g., meal quality knowledge/skills) vs. training their food service staff.*
 - b. Probe for changes from year 1 to year 2.*
 - c. Probe: How did you determine what manager mentees needed the most help with? When is this determined (e.g., at the first mentoring session, at the end of a session for the next session, as needed when mentee asks for help with something)?*

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- d. *Probe: Were you able to cover the topics you planned during your mentoring sessions?*
 - i. *Probe: How, if at all, did you need to adapt your topics?*
 - ii. *Probe for facilitators and barriers on mentor’s end and on manager mentees’ end to covering topics during mentoring sessions as planned.*
5. **To what extent were your mentees engaged in the mentoring process over the past year?**
 - a. *Probe: What does “engagement” look like? How did you know if a mentee was truly engaged?*
 - b. *Probe: Did the extent to which mentees were engaged change from year 1 to year 2? If so, how? Why?*
 - c. *Probe: Did you engage with your mentees outside of regularly scheduled mentoring sessions? If so, please describe how and for what reasons.*
 - d. *Probe: Did the extent to which mentees were engaged vary across the mentees you work with? If so, how? Why?*

Now let’s think more specifically about your mentees’ **Action Plans**.

6. **How focused were your mentoring sessions on those Action Plans? How was the content of your mentoring sessions directly linked to, or aligned with, the mentee’s Action Plan and SMART goals?**
7. **Were your mentees able to completely implement their Action Plans and reach their SMART goals over the past year? Why or Why not?**
 - a. *Probe for facilitators and barriers to achieving goals and completing implementation of Action Plans.*
 - i. *Probe for examples of successful Action Plan implementation.*
 - ii. *Probe for any challenges mentees faced when executing their Action Plans.*
 - b. *Probe: How have the mentoring sessions helped mentees achieve their SMART goals, if at all (consider mentor session content, peer-to-peer learning, collaboration with partners)?*
 - i. *Probe: In what areas have mentees needed the most support in executing their Action Plans?*
 - ii. *Probe for specific examples of when mentoring directly helped a mentee implement their Action Plan/reach a SMART goal.*
 - iii. *Probe for specific examples when mentoring may not have been sufficient to overcome challenges related to the Action Plans/ SMART goals.*
 - c. *Probe: Were the mentees motivated to implement their Action Plans and train staff? Did they embrace change or were they resistant to it? Did this change over the past year compared to the previous year? Why or Why not?*
8. **Did your mentees’ Action Plans change over the past year? Why or why not?**
 - a. *Probe: What types of changes were made?*

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- b. *Probe: When were the last changes made? Did mentees have enough time to implement these changes?*
- c. *Probe for whether response applies to all mentees. How common were changes to Action Plans?*

Now, I'm going to ask you to describe more specific experiences you've had as an E-STAR mentor. You don't have to provide specific names when answering these questions, and please know that I will keep this information confidential to the fullest extent possible.

9. Describe a time in the past year when your mentoring session went very well. What do you credit with making it a positive session?

- a. *Probe: Can you describe any other factors that helped make your interactions with a mentee successful?*

10. Describe a time in the past year when your mentoring session did not go well or as you planned? What went wrong? What might you try next time?

- a. *Probe: Can you describe any other factors that make successful interaction with a mentee difficult? What challenges have come up with your mentees? How were they handled, and how was advice given?*

11. Can you share any examples of how your mentees' work practices changed over the past year?

- a. *Probe for examples of things that have changed – related to manager mentees' responsibilities AND related to food service staff responsibilities.*
- b. *Probe for examples of things that haven't changed. – related to manager mentees' responsibilities AND related to food service staff responsibilities.*
- c. *Probe: [IF NO/DON'T KNOW] I understand that you may not have observed your manager mentees directly, but do you have any evidence from your conversations with them that would indicate that they're doing things differently? If so, what?*

We'd like to end by asking you to think about your E-STAR mentoring as a whole over the past year.

12. What have been the most successful aspects of the mentoring sessions?

13. What are the greatest challenges or barriers you've faced in mentoring the manager mentees?

14. Did your mentoring approach change at all from year 1 to year 2? If so, how, why? Did these changes improve the mentoring process? If so, how?

15. Do you think your manager mentees will continue to implement their Action Plans to improve school meal quality once the two-year E-STAR program is over?

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- a. *Probe: What additional supports might managers need going forward to continue to develop and implement Action Plans to improve school meal quality?*

16. What other things about your E-STAR mentoring experience would you like to share today?

Closing

Thanks for all your help today. It's been a pleasure speaking to you and learning about your experience as an E-STAR mentor. We appreciate your insights and wish you continued success in your work! Before we end the conversation, can you provide me with your full name and e-mail address, so we can send you a gift card to thank you for your time?

[COLLECT INFORMATION]

Thank you again, and have a great day!

This information is being collected to assist the Food and Nutrition Service in understanding the E-STAR training program as implemented. This is a voluntary collection and FNS will use the information to inform future iterations of E-STAR. This collection does not request any personally identifiable information under the Privacy Act of 1974. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-0524. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 45 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, 5th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22306 ATTN: PRA (0584-0524). Do not return the completed form to this address.