

Chapter 2: What Do You Offer and Who Do You Want? Writing Your Mentor Site Description

Resources:

- [Zoom Recording](#) from fall 2020 NAP Mentor Training
- [New Agrarian Apprenticeships](#) page on the Quivira Coalition website
- NAP contributed to the National Ag Apprenticeship Learning Network (now known as F.I.E.L.D. School) Mentor Toolkit and Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit. Some material in the NAP Mentor Toolkit was originally published in these national creative commons publications. We encourage you to look over these resources, which bring together insights and best practices from apprenticeship programs throughout North America.
 - [Supporting Mentors to Teach Next Generation Agrarians](#)
 - [Ag Apprenticeship Toolkit](#)

What do you want to offer?

You've decided to leap into mentoring an apprentice, so now it's time to consider what you want to teach. It isn't just hands-on skills you'll offer, you're also sharing your land management philosophy, what you choose to raise and why, and immersing your apprentice into the daily rhythm and seasonal challenges of a ranch or farm such as yours.

Before writing your application or seeking applicants, take time to answer some of the following questions. We strongly encourage you to write your responses: these become the foundation of your site description. They'll also help you:

- Clarify what you most want and need in an apprentice, and how you see that person fitting into your operation.
- Determine what questions you want to ask in interviews
- Identify any skills you absolutely require an apprentice to have, in order to apply

More than likely, many of these questions will have been explored in your application to mentor with NAP. It's useful to revisit them, in case anything has changed in your operation, and as you learn more about NAP mentor requirements you may have new ideas.

There's another benefit to spending time clarifying details regarding your operation. The more potential applicants know about what they are signing up for, the more likely you'll receive applications from people truly interested in what *you* do, not just people looking for a chance to work anywhere with anyone. The effort you put in now, to really dive into who you are and what you do will save you from wading through too many applications from people who aren't right for you, and lessens the

chance that you'll hire someone who isn't happy with what they are learning at your ranch or farm.

Read a few of the [current mentor site descriptions in NAP](#) for inspiration and ideas.

Description and History

Start by writing a page or so about your ranch or farm. Stick to basics; later in the process we'll ask about your philosophy and values as they relate to your work.

- What do you produce?
- Describe your location, basic climate, ecosystem and region
- What are your main focuses and areas of agricultural expertise?
- When did you start your operation?
- Why did you start it (or choose to continue if you inherited)?
- How has your ranch or farm evolved over time -- how is it different now from when you began?
- What is your community like? if you are remote or rural, describe how far it is to a grocery store, hospital, etc. Isolation has been a big factor for apprentices new to agriculture and rural life

Philosophy, Mission, Values

Consider the importance of working with a like-minded apprentice, someone who shares or at least is curious about your philosophy with land and animals. Even if you welcome someone different from yourself, making clear how your values play out in your management can help applicants either choose your site or realize that isn't a good educational fit for them and they'll choose otherwise.

- What's your philosophy, your land ethic--what guides your practices? For some it's permaculture, Holistic Management, food access and direct marketing, maybe soil health goals--young people want to know this about you and your operation
- How do you define land health?
- How would you describe your management style with land? Animals? People?
- What are the most important considerations in your everyday work?
- What are your top values?
- What are your top goals for your operation?
- Why do you care deeply about what you do?

What They'll Learn and Who is Mentoring

- What are you most excited to teach/share?

- Write a few sentences about each person who will be a mentor to apprentice or intern --your background, family, what is most important to you about what you do
- What will they DO no matter what-- what are the daily and seasonal tasks they will definitely do. Example: on a cow-calf ranch, they will learn about health issues with newborns and mother cows, calving distress, etc.
 - *These are the foundation of your educational offering--they are built-in learning opportunities*
- What specifically can the apprentice expect to learn while on your operation? Do you have a large hay operation? Low-stress livestock skills? Soil health? Monitoring? Direct sales? Basic business skills like quickbook?
- Do you want to include them in business conversations and decisions, introduce them to some management-level issues? Some people want to teach these things, others don't or the business structure makes it hard to include an apprentice in such things

Now that you have fleshed out what you do and what you want to teach, you can draft a description that will appeal to the kind of person you'll be happy to see and excited to mentor. The NAP Coordinator can help you write your description once you have these details.

Next Steps:

Above, we dove into the core of what you do and why you want to mentor. Now it's time to clarify nuts and bolts details, as these elements are also part of your site description.

- **Start/end date:**
 - Consider your production calendar and build some cushion into start and end so you have time to do both orientation and a celebration/exit interview
 - **Start Date:** By what date do you need an intern/apprentice to be fairly useful? Plan your start date to be a week to 10 days before that, to orient the person to your operation and location.
 - **End Date:** NAP apprentices end their apprenticeships formally in November at the annual Quivira Conference.
 - The apprenticeship is officially 8 months in length, but if you need them to come a little earlier or stay later, that is something to consider and make clear in your description.
- **Compensation:** NAP requires mentors to pay a monthly stipend, and provide housing and some form of partial board. You are also required to

carry Workers Compensation insurance.

- **Room and Board**
 - Describe the housing you offer: are utilities and internet covered? Are there laundry facilities? Will they need to drive from housing to work every day? What's your policy on apprentice bringing pets, spouses, having visitors, cleanliness in housing, etc?
 - Board: do you offer the midday meal? Is it a food stipend paid monthly and if so, what's the amount? Or do you provide food from your operation?
- **Stipend**
 - NAP sets a minimum stipend but you are welcome and encouraged to pay more than this. Be sure to clarify the amount, or the stipend range if you are basing it on incoming experience level of the apprentice
 - Payroll: NAP apprentices are considered employees. This is covered more fully in later chapters but be prepared to set them up on payroll, so you can withhold income tax, Social Security and Medicare, and pay your portion of Social Security and Medicare.
- **Other things to clarify:**
 - Time off: The best thing you can do for YOU is to give THEM a day off! this really helps with attitude and wellbeing so good to give apprentice a regular day off. At NAP at least 1 regular day off a week is required, and an additional week of time off for family functions, workshop attendance, etc. is recommended and to be discussed with mentors at least a month in advance and accommodated if possible.
 - Are there skills that the apprentice **needs** to have (e.g. driving a stickshift, horsemanship skills, ability to lift 50 pounds, exposure to allergens, etc) vs. **desired** (examples: Spanish speaker, backing up trailer).
- **Photos!** Many applicants will be curious to see what your landscape, buildings, dogs, tractors and you look like. NAP includes photos in the site descriptions. Here are some photos to consider providing:
 - The mentors
 - People doing things that apprentices will be doing often (example- don't show horse pictures if you don't let apprentices ride)
 - Landscape - what does your operation look like? Give a sense of your place.
 - Livestock, trees, crops
 - Apprentice housing

Some final thoughts

It may seem like overkill, all this thinking and writing and planning. You may not have thought about what you do, and why you do it for some time. An apprentice will come to you not only to learn how to grease a tractor, put up hay, and keep livestock healthy, but also to learn what makes you tick, what keeps you going, and why you are willing to work this hard. Communicating these things in your description will draw the right person to your apprenticeship.