

Service Provider Interpersonal Skills TOOLKIT

Introduction

As a service provider you are often called upon to provide technical expertise to farmers. In some cases there may be issues related to the farmer(s) interpersonal skill development which are posing management challenges.

This Toolkit is designed to help you, the service provider, better understand farmer development and support you in an effort to help farmers with interpersonal skill development by acting as a guide, rather than an expert. The Toolkit is divided into four parts which include a farmer typology, tips for acting as a guide, a consultation checklist, and resource list. The typology and tips remind you about helpful ways to engage with farmers. The checklist includes prompts and space for notes in your one-on-one consultation. The resource list includes both physical copies for distribution and online links. The resources are designed to assist farmers in self-directed skill development.

This is a Toolkit that guides you from the starting point of effective inquiry to the end point of making an action plan. Use it to help farmers assess their challenges, lead them through a process of inquiry and develop a strategy to tackle the problem.

Farmer Typology

The typology is designed to help better understand farmers. It takes a holistic approach by incorporating three tools; the development stages, development cycle and learning stages. Each of these is detailed below and followed by examples of how they can be employed in consultations.

Development Stages

Farmer development stages describe an approximate trajectory for farmers from the initial stage of exploring farming as a career, to having full-fledged careers and making adaptations. The stages range from “prospective” to “refining.” These stages are not limited to the first 10 years of farming rather they can be thought of as phases through which a farm progresses.

What is the farmer’s stage of development?

Prospective farmers have not begun to farm independently.

"Recruits" might consider a career in production agriculture, for example students in vo-ag high schools,

"Explorers" are investigating a farming future, and may be gathering information, for example first-year apprentices.

"Aspiring" actively committed to becoming a farmer through engagement in training and planning. These may be young adults who have grown-up working on their family farm or on farms nearby.

Beginning farmers fall into several categories based on their stage of commitment and their competency in various aspects of farm management.



Understanding a farmer’s stage of development is crucial in helping to guide them to the appropriate resources for their chosen farming path.

Prospective	Start-up	Establishing	Strategizing	Refining
"Prospective farmers" have not begun to farm independently.	"Start-ups" have been farming for three years or less. Their land access may not be fixed and their markets and enterprises still in development.	"Establishing" farmers are investing in infrastructure and have chosen markets and enterprises	"Re-strategizer" farmers are making adjustments to their business. These farmers are accessing advanced mentorship, financial analysis and strategic advising.	"Refining" farmers have likely gone through at least one "re-strategizer" phase. Their business is established and stable. They may or may not be in their first 10 years of farming.

Using the Typology to Learn More

Below are some helpful questions to pose to farmers. Organized by development stage you may find that questions may be pertinent to one or more stages.

Prospective farmers

Has this farmer identified their readiness for a farming career? What experience(s) do they bring to it?

Has the farmer done any type of self-evaluation? (personality test, farming aptitude test)

Has the farmer participated in a business planning or training program?

How do the farmer's intended enterprise draw on their existing skills?

Does this farmer bring transferrable skills to farming?

Start-up farmers

How does this farmer describe their goals for the farm?

How is this farmer approaching balancing the demands of work, personal health and family life?

How much time is dedicated to farm start-up versus interests, off-farm job, family or other concerns?

Is the farmer employing transferrable skills?

Does this farm have an annual evaluation & planning process?

Establishing farmers

How has this farmer approached growth, debt management, commitments to family, community and off-farm job?

Does this farmer have employees, apprentices or others for whom they are a supervisor?

Has this farmer determined ways to make decisions and manage their time that they view as effective?

Strategizing farmers

How is the farmer approaching the challenges associated with changes to their business?

Are these changes calling for acquisition of new skills or support?

Does the farmer need help to modify the ways they make decisions or manage their time?

Has this farmer evaluated their goals?

Refining farmers

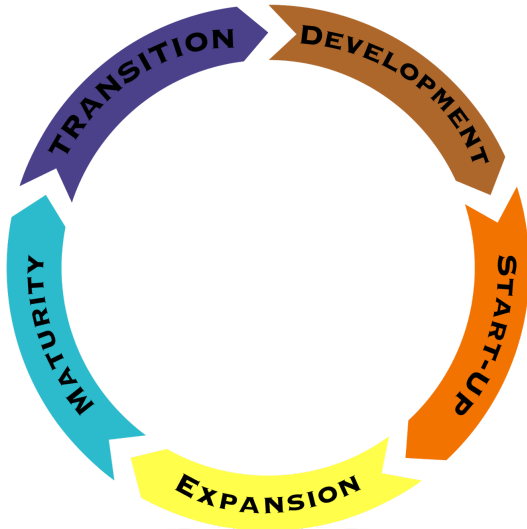
How are these farmers being supported?

Are there skills or knowledge that this farmer still needs?

Is the farmer interested in sharing their best practices with others?

Development Cycle

The Development Cycle combines the personal and business development cycles. It may be useful to consider how formative experiences may influence your own perspectives in one-on-one consultations.



Personal	Business
Development <i>Birth - 18 Years</i>	Seed Stage Focus is on the launch
Start-Up <i>18 Years + Post College or Training</i>	Making It Focus is on growth
Expansion <i>18 Years - 50 years</i>	Taking Charge Focus is on “team building” through employees, partnerships or marriage..
Maturity <i>50- 70 years</i>	Sustain & Produce Focus is on Quality of Life
Transition <i>50+ Proto Retirement</i>	Sell, Retire, Reinvent Focus is on transitions

Development How do formative experiences influence this farmer’s perspective of farming?

Start-up Is this person bringing skills acquired in other jobs or training to the farm?

Expansion Has this farm expanded their team through marriage, partnership or employees?

Maturity Have the goals of these farmers evolved?

Transition What will be the legacy of these farmers?

Learning Stages

What is the farmer’s learning stage?



Farmer learning stages describe the level of skill and competence in relationship to a task or enterprise. Based on the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition, the learning stages range from “novice” to “expert.”

After the farmer states their area of focus for the meeting, use some of the inquiry prompts to learn more. How do you perceive the farmer’s learning stage with respect to the area of focus? More importantly, how does the farmer self-assess his or her learning stage with respect to the area of focus?

Novice	Advanced	Competent	Proficient	Expert
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	Beginner			
<p>A novice has limited exposure to the strategies related to communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management in the context of farming.</p> <p>This group may include both farmers and farm workers in the first 5 years of farming.</p> <p>This group may also include new farmers who have had other career experience that did not draw deeply on the four skill areas.</p>	<p>An advanced beginner has developed some skills in communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management in the context of farming.</p> <p>This group may include farmers, farm workers and farm managers. It may also include new farmers who had other employment experience that required them to develop in the four skill areas.</p>	<p>Someone who is competent has gained experience in communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management in the context of farming.</p> <p>This group may have explored various approaches to the skill areas and is beginning to find what works for them.</p> <p>This group may include farmers, workers and managers. It may also include new farmers who had previous experience that helped them to develop strengths in the four skill areas.</p>	<p>Someone who is proficient has gained experience, implemented and evaluated tools in communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management.</p> <p>This person is ready to share this information with others, and hone their skills further.</p> <p>This group may include farmers, farm workers and farm managers who have developed strengths in the four skill areas within the course of their farming career.</p>	<p>An expert has tried and true techniques in communication, decision making, goal setting, or time management.</p> <p>This person models good behavior for their employees and integrates teaching these skills into their day-to-day operations.</p> <p>In general this group will not include beginning farmers in their first 10 years.</p>

Using the Learning Stages

Novice - This group may need specific examples of how each skill area can impact the viability of their business. For instance, communication can impact your choice in market channel. A shy farmer may use their weekly farmer's market to test out how they engage with customers to sell their products. This may help them improve their communication skills in a low-risk manner and prepare them to be skilled enough to make a successful pitch to a wholesale market and be better able to maintain that relationship.

Advanced Beginner - This group may have a sense of how the four skill areas can impact their success. A self-assessment may be helpful to this group in identifying what aspects of the four skill areas are challenging for them and the existing resources to improve.

Competent - This group may have a sense of how the four skill areas can impact their success. A self-assessment may be helpful to this group in identifying what aspects of the four skill areas are weak links for them and the existing resources to improve. For instance, time management may be an increasing concern as the demands of their farm change. This could be due to their farm team expanding or their market channels changing. In conversation it might help to ask the farmer to identify how their area of focus

has challenged them on aspects of the farm they thought were running well.

Proficient - This group is ready to take the tools and skills they have developed and begin to actively model and teach these skills. They may need resources to help them improve their teaching techniques such as a better understanding of adult learners.

Expert - This group may be best served by opportunities to teach and share their experiences with other farmers. You might consider asking them to mentor other farmers or be a speaker at an event where their expertise can be highlighted.

Tips for Acting as a Guide

Your Role as a Guide:

An effective guide is an active listener. In an active listening situation, the guide gives their full attention to the speaker. Your primary goal is to hear what brings this person to the situation, letting them know they are heard, understood and safe.

How can you help the farmer frame the central question(s) they need to ask?

Expectations

At the start of your consultation it may be helpful to share your expectations for the meeting. These may include; the duration of the meeting, cell phone off during the meeting, what you anticipate can be accomplished, who might take notes, whether you anticipate a follow-up visit.

You may consider asking, *“For you to consider this time well spent, what do you need to leave here with?”*

Inquiry Prompts

Active Listening Skills	Tips to Encourage Sharing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask Open-Ended Questions- see <i>Tips to Encourage Sharing</i> (at right) ● Restate- “Let me see if I’m clear about this, ---” I heard you say, “_____” Is that accurate? ● Summarize- “So it sounds to me as if...” ● Minimal Encouragers- Prompts such as “umm-hmm,” “Oh,” “I understand,” “Then?” ● Reflect- Instead of just repeating, reflect the feelings of the speaker, “This seems really important to you.” ● Emotion Labeling- “Are you feeling frustrated...worried...anxious...” ● Validate- Acknowledge the feelings, problems & issues the speaker is facing. “I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue.” “I’m sorry that happened to you.” ● Clarify- “Am I understanding you correctly?” “Could you tell me more about the sequence of events?” ● Silence- allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange or diffuse difficult interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I’d like to hear your thoughts on this topic ● It would be helpful to hear your perspective ● What have you been thinking about while waiting for this conversation to take place? ● What do you think would happen if you...?” ● What do you want to see happening differently? ● If you could change anything, what would it be? ● Tell me more about.... ● You said, “_____” Can you say more or explain? ● When you use the word “_____” what do you mean? ● What matters to you most? ● Can you say more about your concern with “_____” ● What is it that concerns you about this? ● What leads you to say that? ● What information might you need that would help you understand my concerns.

Effective Listening Techniques

- Stop talking
- Empathize with the other person
- Ask questions *see Tips to Encourage Sharing* (above)
- Concentrate on what he/she is saying
- Don't interrupt
- Look at the other person
- Get rid of distractions
- Get the main points
- React to ideas, not the person
- Don't argue mentally
- Note facts & evidence
- Listen for what is not said

Use the Difference in Rate: You can listen faster than the speaker can talk, speech is about 100 to 150 words per minute; thinking is 250-500.

Use the rate difference to improve how you are listening by:

- Look at the other person- observe their face, mouth, eyes and hands.
- Observe the speaker's facial expressions, movements and gestures
- Is the speaker's tone conveying feelings of confidence, anger, confusion, sadness or other feelings that add meaning?
- What is the speaker's emotional reaction or attitude?

Words & Phrases to Avoid

“WHY”

Asking “why” something happened or “why” a particular decision was made can be tempting. This approach can trigger a defensive answer which may distract from assessing the situation. Try one of the other Active Listening Skills (see above) instead.

“I know what you mean” OR “I’ve heard that before” “That happened to me once...” OR “In my experience...”

These phrases are barriers to communication and convey assumptions that the farmer might take as a cue(s) to stop talking.

“BUT” or “HOWEVER” or “SHOULD” or “COULD” or “WOULD”

These are phrases which can often draw attention back to you (the listener) as an active listener your goal is to have the attention remain with the speaker.

It may be helpful to try substituting “AND” in places where you might normally use a “BUT.”
For example, *“This business plan is so helpful in giving me an idea of your farm goals AND I’ll need additional information to assess whether our programs are the right fit for your funding needs.”*

Next Steps What are you trying to Accomplish?

Brainstorming

A group creativity technique to generate a large number of ideas for the solution of a problem. This technique can be useful in helping a farmer or farm team to explore new approaches.

Guidelines

1. Generate 10-20 ideas. No idea is crazy, say anything (the craziest idea can become the root of a valuable strategy).
2. Don't discuss or critique ideas during brainstorming.
3. Every idea met with the response, "Yes or" OR "Yes and....."
4. Include all stakeholders – encourage and draw out
5. Suspend assumptions and disbelief

Next Step: Analysis

Analysis

1. How big is this decision? The bigger the decision, the more time, tools and discuss may be needed.
2. What are some strategies that could be used for solving the problem? Ask farmer to list 5. *These could be decision making tools listed in the Toolkit.*
3. For this strategy to be successful what does it have to accomplish or serve?
4. As a follow-up question at the next meeting - How does this decision hold up?

Feedback

As a guide, your role is to help the speaker clarify their thoughts and in doing so identify possible solutions. Feedback can be helpful. However it might redirect the conversation away from the speaker finding a direction that best suits them. Before offering feedback, clarify whether your feedback is meant to offer insight or add context to the speaker's point of view. Questions such as;

- *"What ideas do you have to address this?"*
- *"Is there a specific way you would like my help?"*
- *"Have you seen someone else facing this? How did they approach it?"*

Ask before you share pertinent information, observations, insights and experiences.

"I have some information that might help with that, would you like to hear it?"

If the answer is yes, then keep these tips in mind. Keep the feedback loop open so there is opportunity for the farmer to correct what you may have misheard.

Limit Your Focus- Pick two or three points of improvement to discuss.

Prepare your Thoughts- reflect on what has been said, what you have heard. Jot down some themes. Link these to specific statements so you can check for accuracy. *"Because I heard you say ____, I might suggest ____ tool."*

Keep it Positive- start off your feedback with something positive. "I like what you've said and I'd like to add.."

Focus on Improvement- what concrete things can the farmer do to change their situation in a positive way? "I suggest that you spend 30 minutes each day on recordkeeping. This will help us figure out your yields"

Use "I" Statements- "I'd like to hear what you have to say. Right now I need to ____ . Could we schedule additional time to talk?"

Referrals

It may be appropriate to make a referral to another Agricultural Service Provider, local counselor, or other resource.

Effective Referrals -

To ensure you have a good sense of the support this person has explored or is currently receiving it is a good idea to ask, “*Who else have you been in touch with?*”

- **Ask for Permission-** “Would it be okay if I call _____ and give them your contact information?”
“Would you like me to introduce you to _____ through email so you two can discuss the situation?”
- **Explain the referral-** What the agency/organization do. Why or how will calling them be helpful. What can be offered pertinent to the farmer’s situation. Suggest the farmer write down their thoughts prior to making contact.
- **Know your limits-** It may be there is not a referral to make, consider what is the best use of your time and the farmer’s time in addressing the area of focus and outcome desired.
- **Get to know the Network-** The Beginning Farmer Resource Network of Maine’s (BFRN) website is a great place to start. By getting to know who works in what areas you can avoid making “dead-end” referrals which will jeopardize your relationship with farmers.
- **Verify the need-** restate what need you heard the farmer articulate and ask “Is this accurate?” Ensuring that you understand the needs of the farmer is key to providing an effective referral.

Types of Referrals

- **Self** - In this case you are aware of a resource that will be helpful to a farmer. You can give the farmer the organization’s web address as well as contact name and information for the appropriate staff person.
 - Consider the farmer’s level of competency and/or personality. If the farmer is a *novice* or you feel the farmer could use the support consider bridging the referral with an email of introduction.
- **Provider** - In this case the service provider makes contact with an agency representative and explains the nature of the farmer’s situation. The service provider asks the agency to make contact with this provider.
- **Research** - In other cases you may need to do more research prior to making a referral. If this is the case be sure to clearly explain the timeline in which you’ll do this research, how you’ll communicate the results to the farmer and in what timeframe you anticipate having this research and referral complete.

Following Up

- You’ve told me you’d like to have “_____” done, by when would you like to have it done? What resources do you need to make it happen? Should you “do it”, or “delegate it.” Ask the farmer about how they prioritize tasks, if appropriate introduce Consider using the Action Plan tool in the toolkit. You can provide the farmer with a copy so it can be filled out during the consultation.
- If the farmer was unable to complete an action item.
 - Set a timeline or time frame--work with them on setting a realistic deadline.
 - Consider if something else needs to be done or learned first that is affecting completion of the action item.
 - Ask, “what motivates you?” Consider if follow-up can incentivize them to complete the task.
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The conversation in the follow-up can be based on the action plan and using it to check in and learn more.

If...	Then...Resources in Toolkit to Consider
<p>If...Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ladder of Inference ● Passive, Aggressive & Assertive Communication ● Using “I” Statements ● Bulletin #6103, Effective Communication ● Bulletin #6102, The Art of Great Meetings ● Non-Violent Communication Tips & Tools ● Community Mediation: https://www.voanne.org/mediate ● Communicating with Your Elders about Farmland Transfer: http://landforgood.org/communicating-elders-farm-transfer/ ● Free Personality Tests -https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_51.htm ● Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. ● Thanks for the Feedback How to Have Difficult Conversations by Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone ● Taking the War Out Of Our Words: The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication by Sharon Strand Ellison ● Words that Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence by Shelle Rose Charvet ● Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives by Peter H Johnston (How to engage children with more productive talk and to create more supportive learning environments.) ● How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids will Talk by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish
<p>If..... Decision Making</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action Planning Template ● Bulletin #3010, Record Keeping for Profit ● Bulletin #6105 Thinking Better Together: Making Better Decisions in Groups ● Square: https://squareup.com ● AgSquared: http://www.agsquared.com
<p>If.....Goal Setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarifying Values Worksheet ● Goal Setting Handbook ● Bulletin #6107 Vision, Mission, Goals & Objectives . . Oh My! ● Maine Farms for the Future (after 3 years of farm ownership): http://www.maine.gov/dacf/ard/business_and_market_development/farms_for_future/index.shtml ● MOFGA Farm Beginnings: http://www.mofga.org/Programs/MOFGAFarmBeginnings/tabid/2873/Default.aspx ● Introduction to Whole Farm Planning: http://misadocuments.info/WholeFarmPlanning_complete.pdf ● Whole Farm Planning by Elizabeth Henderson & Karl North ● Organic Farmer’s Business Handbook by Richard Wiswall

If.....Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Time Management & The Eisenhower Box● Action Planning Template● Communication Management (TBD)● Priority Setting● TickTick https://ticktick.com/● To do list app https://en.todoist.com/windows