

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Guidelines for Using Technology in Programming

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INTRODUCTION

Use of technology has been a mainstay of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) throughout its history. Changes in technology have guided the evolution of teaching, content, data collection, program evaluation, and reporting processes. With continued advances in communication methods and delivery of educational information, careful consideration has been given toward integrating technology into EFNEP in a more systematic way. In 2017 an EFNEP technology policy was released for systematically integrating new technology approaches into EFNEP. Since then, states have broadened their approaches and have successfully demonstrated their ability to conduct EFNEP in new ways without impeding the impact that EFNEP achieves through its legislatively mandated paraprofessional model.

These guidelines supersede previous EFNEP technology policy documents. This document is organized, as follows:

- Strategic Integration
- Definitions
- Program Integrity Requirements
- Program Technology Requirements
- Safety, Security, and Quality Controls – with special attention to programming for youth and children
- NIFA Approval
- Application Examples

State program coordinators are responsible for ensuring that these guidelines are followed and that the legislatively mandated peer educator (paraprofessional) model and program fidelity and integrity are maintained as they expand their use of technology in EFNEP.

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

Technology should be used as a tool to enhance EFNEP in ways that maintain program relevance and expand accessibility. When used strategically, technology can improve participant recruitment and retention while also providing research-based content through learner-centered delivery methods. Additionally, technology can provide valuable tools to facilitate program evaluation. In all cases, EFNEP should employ technology in ways that maintain fidelity to approved curriculum, center programming around learner engagement, and maximize use of the paraprofessional teaching model and relationship between educators and participants.

Technology can increase success of EFNEP recruitment and participant retention by expanding access and reducing barriers to attending EFNEP lessons. Barriers related to transportation, geography, child care, and disability may be alleviated by offering lessons through virtual technology tools. Offering virtual lessons alongside in-person options can increase valuable participant choice related to their preferred learning style and delivery format.

EFNEP delivery and content should maintain the same standards expected in face-to-face instruction. This includes using evidence-based curricula centered around the EFNEP core areas and applying learning principles proven to support measurable behavior change. Technology tools should be used in ways that are culturally responsive and helpful to participants who may require language and other accommodations. Active participant engagement is essential. While adjustments may be needed to communicate messages and visuals through virtual technology, core curricular elements of EFNEP remain consistent.

The required evaluation components of the EFNEP program, dietary recalls and food and behavior questionnaires, remain valuable measures of impact regardless of methods and tools used to engage participants. Behavior change targets should be similar regardless of the mode used to deliver EFNEP. Use of EFNEP evaluation tools contributes to the national data set for EFNEP participants and is a critical component of program continuity.

Participating learners and EFNEP partners are key informants for EFNEP work in all delivery modes. Their experience, knowledge and perspective should always be valued and incorporated into program planning. Maintaining strong community connections helps to build much-needed community understanding and cultural competence.

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are defined to add clarity and consistency in applying technology within EFNEP.

- **Content** - Concept, topic, or idea being taught
- **Curriculum** - Sequence of lessons taught to deliver the content with learning objectives, theoretical basis, and intentional design
- **Delivery** - Instructional strategies and methods
 - **Asynchronous** - Self-paced with no real time interaction
 - **Combination series** - Series of both synchronous and asynchronous lessons
 - **Synchronous** - Real time with person-to-person interaction
- **Evidence-based** - An approach to education that emphasizes the practical application of the findings of the best available current research that was rigorously evaluated
- **Lesson** - A structured period of instruction
 - **Required lesson** - Lesson needed for graduation (e.g. program completion)
 - **Make-up lesson** - Missed lesson completed outside of designated schedule
 - **Additional lessons** - Lessons that are not required for graduation
 - **Supplemental lessons** - Lessons that are outside of the core content related to specific needs
- **Self-paced** - Learner sets the schedule
- **Series** - Lessons delivered in a sequence
- **Social media** - Websites and applications that serve as tools for users to create and share content or to participate in social networking
- **Tools** - Instructional items used when teaching the content
- **Virtual lesson** - Lesson delivered online

- **Virtual tools** - Technology tools that are used in virtual lessons (such as video chat, virtual meeting platforms, polling, whiteboard)

PROGRAM INTEGRITY REQUIREMENTS

- Keep peer educators (paraprofessional staff) as frontline deliverers of EFNEP.
- Honor the knowledge and experience of low-income families and communities as essential to effectively reaching and teaching our nation's poorest families.
- Maintain adequate dosage and paraprofessional contact needed for optimal program outcomes.
- Operate from a learner-centered focus.
- Use innovative teaching techniques and hands-on learning to support and/or enhance programs.
- Use EFNEP's national data planning, evaluation, and reporting system – WebNEERS.
- Ensure curriculum and delivery are culturally relevant and appropriate.
- Respect copyrights of all content sources.
- Ensure that resources are accessible (508 compliant).
- Ensure validity and evidence-base through practical application of current research.
- Ensure high quality teaching through regular review and updating of the peer educator training protocol.
- Engage community partners and stakeholders in coordination and collaboration.
- Adhere to all accounting cost principles (allowable, necessary, reasonable and allocable).
- Meet all EFNEP eligibility requirements, including income eligibility and focus on families.

PROGRAM TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

- EFNEP integrity and program quality requirements, as well as program focus and policies – especially peer-led education – must be upheld, the same as for in-person programming.
- Participant engagement must be maintained in virtual settings to promote relationships and community.
- Dosage must be maintained at a level that is minimally equivalent to in-person programming.
- Continuation across fiscal years is subject to achieving outcomes consistent with in-person programming.
- Lessons must be based on an evidenced-informed curriculum and must use best practices for education delivery. Developmentally appropriate techniques and curricula should be used.

- Within legislative intent (EFNEP's low-income population), the use of technology should not create equity or inclusion barriers.
- Confidentiality and security guidelines must be complied with in accordance with university and USDA policies for adult, youth, and children audiences to protect participants, staff, and program content and data.
- Use of technology for programming must be reflected in the annual update and 5-year plan. Through the complement of education modalities used, the overall state EFNEP plan must also convey that it meets the needs of the most vulnerable EFNEP-eligible families.
- Coordinators are strongly encouraged to work with EFNEP colleagues in other states to further utilize or build upon technology strategies and procedures that are already underway.
- Technology-based delivery should be complementary to in-person delivery and not a replacement. Each university must also offer in-person delivery as part of its 5-year plan.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND QUALITY CONTROLS

A virtual environment can pose potential risk to EFNEP participants and EFNEP staff, alike. To limit such risks, safety, security, and quality controls should be implemented when delivering EFNEP virtually. Youth and children are especially vulnerable and require additional protections.

Protecting Privacy, Confidentiality, and Security

- All staff must be vigilant in protecting the privacy of the EFNEP audience which - as families, youth, and children with limited financial resources - are particularly vulnerable.
- All staff must follow USDA and university media release guidelines for photos, videos, and participants' posts, pictures, and voices (See USDA's Privacy Policy).
- All staff must follow any additional university policies relating to privacy, security, and technology – including the use of social media.
- Participants must always be allowed to opt in before being shown on camera; they are to have the choice whether or not to use their webcam.
- If not already organized by an agency partner, permission from parents/caregivers must be received before youth and children can be taught through a virtual format.

Quality Control

- Supervisors and university program leadership are responsible for carefully monitoring EFNEP content and for balancing the use of technology interactions to ensure that program fidelity, integrity, quality, and success are maintained or improved.
- Supervisors and university program leadership are responsible for determining methods and content to be used; final approval is the responsibility of university program leadership.
- Supervisors and program coordinators are to provide careful oversight to ensure appropriateness of content and use of time, and avoidance of web surfing.

- Special care should be given to avoid use of anything that is crude, derogatory, or offensive and to quickly remove such content when posted by others.
- Once online, information can take on a life of its own. Anyone using or contributing to EFNEP's online presence should be especially mindful of quality, appearance, accuracy, and tone.

Youth and Children Protections

EFNEP institutions should abide by their university's youth and children protection standards, rules, mandates, and/or guidelines. Additional guidelines are shared here to further protect minor participants (under the age of 18) and to provide guidance to staff, volunteers and others who provide or contribute to EFNEP programming to minors. EFNEP staff, external partners, and volunteers working with youth and children are expected to be familiar with and follow these procedures.

- **External Partner Expectations**
 - The hosting partner will ensure that adequate adult supervision is provided for the number of youth and children participating.
 - The partner is responsible for maintaining supervision of the youth and children at all times.
 - The partner will have emergency procedures in place and will be responsible for executing those procedures and communicating with parents/caregivers in an emergency. EFNEP personnel will follow the lead of the partner staff and will immediately inform their Extension leadership.
- **EFNEP Staff and Volunteers**
 - Staff will not be alone (meet one-on-one) with youth or children. Each class or group must include at least two adults.
 - Staff will not establish a relationship with a youth or child outside the class or group.
 - Staff will not communicate with participating youth or children through any means, including social media, unless there is parental/caregiver permission and another adult is included in all interactions.
 - Staff will follow State law regarding mandatory reporting for suspicion of child abuse and neglect.
- **Best Practice Suggestions for Youth and Child Protections in Virtual Lessons**
 - Do not record virtual meetings.
 - Virtual platform links should be shared via a private group chat, text or email with class/program members. Do not post links publicly and/or give access to people outside of the class.
 - If you use the "group chat," disable the "private chat" feature.
 - Be the last to leave the meeting. This will ensure all youth and children have signed out of the meeting.

NIFA APPROVAL

Unless otherwise noted, use of technology will be approved through the annual update/5-year plan review process.

Allowed – Distinctions for adult and youth/children participants are noted in the table below

- Synchronous
 - All synchronous lessons (*core, make-up, and supplemental*) delivered via technology platforms are allowed and are subject to the same guidelines as in-person programming.

- Outcomes must be similar in terms of behavior change and graduation rate.
- Synchronous/Asynchronous combination series
 - Half of the total number of lessons (including make-up lessons) must be synchronous (in-person or via synchronous technology). The remainder may be asynchronous.
- Asynchronous
 - Asynchronous lessons must be connected to educator-led discussion and/or follow up
 - Follow-up discussion may be led by volunteers and/or external partner such as a classroom teacher.
- The program must be able to track and document participation in asynchronous lessons.

Not Allowed

- Entirely asynchronous series

Case Specific Allowability

Contact NIFA’s National Program Leader that oversees EFNEP and National EFNEP Coordinator about other delivery approaches that you wish to use. Strong justification will be required and Federal approval must be secured before alternate approaches may be used. Examples are:

- Lessons where evidence-base is pending
- Lessons using untested delivery methods
- Combination series with asynchronous lessons exceeding half of the total number of lessons.
- Series in which each lesson has synchronous and asynchronous elements used to deliver core content

APPLICATION EXAMPLES

Technology use in EFNEP can vary from easy to implement to more complex integration with a range of associated costs. It is important to gauge capacity within the program to apply these tools in an effective and ethical way and to respect the copyrights of all content sources, including photos and curricula resources. When possible, reference the original source – usually through links or citations. Also be mindful of accessibility needs.

The following table shows an array of applications, using technology tools and platforms throughout the phases of program recruitment, delivery, retention, and evaluation at varying levels of complexity.

Use	Examples*
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media to reach and recruit new audiences* - Website promotion and sign-up forms - Electronic mailing list through partners
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Videos created by reputable sources that highlight concepts in the curriculum - Visiting websites like MyPlate.gov - Interactive searches using smart phones to emphasize how to find

	<p>reputable content or community resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive technology, such as quizzes, games, polls, and apps that reinforce content during classes - Integrating existing apps, such as Start Simple with MyPlate App from the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, WIC Shopper and Cooking Matters Apps, into lessons - Email/Text content that reinforce lesson concepts*
Delivery	<p>Synchronous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivering evidence-based curricula live on a technology platform such as zoom - May use technology tools such as polls, chat, videos, games, digital photos to enhance engagement <p>Asynchronous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self- paced online course (ex: Canvas or Moodle) - Recorded lessons streamed on various platform such as closed Facebook, private you tube, or sent via web link - Use of various tools such as social media, apps, direct message, or shared online spaces to facilitate engagement or monitoring of lesson comprehension
Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email/text message reminders for lessons* - Social media for engagement in between lessons* - App based engagement
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of various survey platforms to gather participant data. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualtrics - ASA 24 - Polls - WebNEERS native app* - WebNEERS direct data app link*

*** Items marked with an asterisk are for adult audiences only.**

Specific Examples – This list is not comprehensive or exhaustive

- **Approvable through the annual plan – as long as safety, security, and quality control guidelines are met.**
 - Use of technology for recruitment
 - Use of technology to reinforce lesson content or support in-class engagement
 - Synchronous series using evidence-based curricula that meet EFNEP integrity requirements
 - Delivery of a series with at least half of the total number of lessons via synchronous (live) technology platform or in-person and half of the lessons through recorded asynchronous platform, such as:
 - 4 lessons delivered live via zoom and 4 lessons taken self-paced via Moodle with follow up discussion in a closed chat space.
 - 4 lessons delivered in-person and 4 lessons delivered through a closed Facebook group with instructor follow up discussion
 - 5 lessons delivered live via hangouts and 3 lessons watched from a recorded zoom session with follow up discussion at the next live session

- 5 lessons delivered in-person and 3 asynchronous make-up lessons delivered as recorded Zoom lessons with follow-up discussion at next live lesson or via phone
- **Generally not approvable. To be considered as an exception, clear and compelling justification would need to be provided to the national office:**
 - More than half of the core lessons delivered asynchronously with participants following up with the peer educator for discussion (flipped classroom)
 - Delivery or evaluation using new technology tools or untested methods

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