



## **NUTRITION EDUCATOR COMPETENCIES FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

In recent years, there has been an increased demand and need for nutrition education, globally, nationally and locally. While there may be no international standard definition of nutrition education, the need for qualified nutrition educators who can promote healthy individuals, communities, and food systems is widely acknowledged. The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) has been a leader in developing effective nutrition education and nutrition educators as far back as 1987 when the first competencies were issued by the society.

Recognizing the need for updated nutrition education competencies that reflect current research and professional opportunities, an SNEB Task Force was established in 2011 to explore the best way forward. With continued input and review by the SNEB Board of Directors, general membership and the Division of Higher Education, a decision was made in 2013 to develop foundational competencies for nutrition educators around the world. Over the course of two years, the Task Force developed a set of competencies involving ten focus areas of knowledge and skills. These competencies were presented at an open hearing and distributed to members at the 2015 SNEB Annual Conference and later through listservs for feedback. Comments were reviewed and incorporated into the final document. The Board formally adopted the competencies in January 2016.

These competencies articulate the foundational knowledge and performance skills nutrition educators need for the development, implementation and evaluation of effective nutrition education. The ten theme areas, and the more specific competencies under each of these, provide a practice guide for a well-rounded

nutrition educator. The competencies may be used for individual professional development, curriculum and program planning for educational institutions, training within extension or other programs, or preparation for capacity development at the country level.

SNEB believes these competencies can provide the basis for our continued efforts to promote and provide expertise in nutrition education. As a society valuing informed and evidence-based practice, SNEB encourages moving these competencies into actions to empower ourselves, our communities, and our larger efforts in nutrition education to promote equitable and sustainable health and well-being in the different regions of the world.

The SNEB leadership would like to acknowledge the following Task Force members who developed the set of competencies: Sarah Ash, PhD; Melanie Tracy Burns, PhD, RDN; Isobel Contento, PhD; Kirsten Corda, PhD; Diane Dembicki, PhD; L. Suzanne Goodell, PhD, RDN; Melissa Olfert, DrPH, MS, RDN; Gina Pazzaglia, PhD, RDN; Jane Sherman, Dip.Ed., MA, MA, BPhil; and Jasia Steinmetz, PhD, RDN. We also thank the following individuals from other professional organizations who reviewed the document and provided helpful comments: Roy Ballam, BA, MA, International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE); Nancy Chapman, MPH, RDN, American Public Health Association (APHA) and Carolyn Woods Flynn Gunther, PhD, American Society for Nutrition (ASN).

Permission to copy not required, distribution encouraged.

# NUTRITION EDUCATOR COMPETENCIES FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Use this list to assess your current knowledge and skills, identify areas for professional growth and create a plan for developing as a nutrition education professional. This can also be used to create position descriptions and staff evaluation tools, plan training and education opportunities in addition to designing, refining and evaluating course content. Address questions about the SNEB Nutrition Educator Competencies to [info@sneb.org](mailto:info@sneb.org), 800-235-6690 or 317-328-4627.



## Basic Food and Nutrition Knowledge

- 1.1. Describe the basic structures and functions of the essential nutrients and identify examples of significant foods and food group sources for each.
- 1.2. Explain the background, purpose, and components of the appropriate national or international nutrient references (e.g., US Dietary Reference Intakes).
- 1.3. Explain the background, purpose, and components of the appropriate national or international dietary guidelines, including the associated food guidance systems (e.g., the US Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate).
- 1.4. Explain how to use food labeling to evaluate the appropriateness of a food.
- 1.5. Explain the dietary prevention of, and management approaches associated with, the major diet-related public health issues.
- 1.6. Describe the basic types of approaches used by researchers to study diet-health relationships and describe their advantages and limitations.
- 1.7. Critically evaluate the claims associated with a research study finding, food product, dietary supplement or eating style based on the nutrition educator's knowledge of nutrition and the approaches used to study diethealth relationships.
- 1.8. Critically evaluate the source of materials that provide nutrition information.



## Nutrition Across the Lifecycle

- 2.1. Identify the primary dietary issues for each phase of the life cycle.
- 2.2. Use information from the appropriate national or international nutrient references and dietary guidelines to make dietary recommendations for each phase of the life cycle.

## Food Science



- 3.1. Describe the functions of food ingredients and food processing techniques and their effects on the nutrient content of foods.
- 3.2. Describe the basic types of culinary practices, including the scientific basis for how flavor, texture, and appearance of foods are created or maintained during food preparation.
- 3.3. Describe the potential sources of food contamination and the best practices associated with the safe handling of food.
- 3.4. Explain how to plan, select, prepare, and manage foods to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, communities and the food system.

## Physical Activity



- 4.1. Describe the background, purpose and appropriate national or international physical activity guidelines (e.g., the US Physical Activity Guidelines).
- 4.2. Describe the benefits of regular physical activity as a means of prevention and management of public health issues including chronic diseases.
- 4.3. Identify physical activity opportunities in daily living.

## Food and Nutrition Policy



- 5.1. Describe the roles of government agencies in regulating the manufacturing, labeling and advertising of individual foods and dietary supplements
- 5.2. Describe the roles of government agencies in regulating food systems and the food supply.
- 5.3. Describe the history, purpose and funding of key pieces of legislation that authorize programs supporting nutrition education, research, and food assistance to address malnutrition and food security and to promote health.

5.4. Describe the history and current roles of governmental and nongovernmental organizations that develop and implement nutrition education programs and related health promotion or food security activities.

5.5. Describe ways to collaborate with community members and other professionals to create communities and settings in which healthy food options are easy, affordable, and desired and unhealthy foods are less prominent and less desired.



## **Agricultural Production and Food Systems**

6.1. Describe differences in agricultural practices and their potential effects on food choices and food availability.

6.2. Explain the effects of various food processing, packaging, distribution, and marketing practices on food availability, food choices, and nutritional value as well as the amount and types of additives, contaminants, and pathogens in foods.

6.3. Explain the relationships between natural resources (e.g. soil, water, biodiversity) and the quantity and quality of the food and water supply.

6.4. Describe ways to collaborate with other stakeholders to promote policies supporting systems that produce healthy food.



## **Behavior and Education Theory**

7.1. Describe the biological, psychological, social, cultural, political, and economic determinants of eating behavior, and the associated opportunities and barriers to achieving optimal health and quality of life.

7.2. Describe the major psychosocial theories of behavior and behavior change and apply them to eating behavior, and behavior change.

7.3. Describe the major theories of teaching and learning and apply them to nutrition education.



## **Nutrition Education Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation**

8.1. Assess the nutritional and behavioral needs of the population (to establish behavior change goals).

8.2. Determine the behavior change goals of the program.

8.3. Identify the theory-based mediators and facilitators of behavior change, using a participatory approach, including social and environmental influences.

8.4. Select the appropriate theoretical models or frameworks.

8.5. Develop educational objectives based on the identified theory-based mediators of change from a theoretical model or framework.

8.6. Design or select theory-based behavior change strategies or techniques that would be effective in achieving the objectives and are appropriate for diverse audiences.

8.7. Design or select strategies, activities and materials that match the objectives and are appropriate for diverse audiences.

8.8. Apply inclusive participatory approaches that enable the target population to effectively communicate, share experiences, identify personal needs, and manage personal food behaviors.

8.9. Develop a timeline and budget for program development, implementation, and evaluation, including personnel, supplies, and overhead costs.

8.10. Design process and outcome evaluation plans, based on behavior change mediators and program objectives, using appropriate data collection methods.

8.11. Revise the program based on process and outcome evaluation findings, as appropriate.

## **Written, Oral, and Social Media Communication**



9.1. Communicate effectively in written, visual, and oral form, with individuals, the media, and other groups, in ways that are appropriate for diverse audiences.

9.2. Facilitate communication from and between clients so they can express their beliefs and attitudes, define needs, and share experiences.

9.3. Engage and educate through simple, clear, and motivational language appropriate for diverse audiences.

9.4. Advocate effectively for action-oriented nutrition education and healthy diets in various sectors and settings.

## **Nutrition Education Research Methods**

10.1. Analyze, evaluate, and interpret nutrition education research and apply it to practice.

