ABSTRACT

It is the position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior that to improve the health of individuals, communities, and food systems, it is essential that nutrition educators meet each of 6 content competencies (basic food and nutrition knowledge, nutrition across the life cycle, food science, physical activity, food and nutrition policy, and agricultural production and food systems) and 4 process competencies (behavior and education theory; nutrition education program design, implementation and evaluation; written, oral, and social media communication; and nutrition education research methods). These competencies reflect the breadth of the nutrition education field and are grounded in peer-reviewed research. The rationale and evidence base for these competencies are presented. They are designed for educational institutions to plan curricula and programs; public, private, and nonprofit organizations for training; individuals for professional development; and policymakers and advocates to inform strong, comprehensive nutrition education policy.

Key Words: competencies, food and nutrition educators, nutrition professionals, professional development, nutrition education policy and practice (J Nutr Educ Behav. 2023;55:3−15.)

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INTRODUCTION

It is the position of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) that to improve the health of individuals, communities, and food systems, it is essential that nutrition educators meet each of 6 content competencies (basic food and nutrition knowledge, nutrition across the life cycle, food science, physical activity, food and nutrition policy, and agricultural production and food systems) and 4 process competencies (behavior and education theory; nutrition education program design, implementation and evaluation; written, oral, and social media communication; and nutrition education research methods). These competencies reflect the breadth of the nutrition education field and are grounded in peer-reviewed research.

The SNEB, which has been at the forefront of strengthening nutrition education around the world since its founding in 1967, defines nutrition education as

Any combination of educational strategies, accompanied by environmental supports, designed to motivate and facilitate voluntary adoption of food choices and other food and nutrition-related behaviors conducive to health and well-being and delivered through multiple venues involving activities at the individual, institutional, community and policy levels.1

The need for evidence-based, outcomes-driven nutrition education programming has never been more important, as it is central to improving well-being and reducing the risk of chronic disease, obesity, and malnutrition worldwide.2−6 In the context of this position paper and its associated competencies, SNEB—an organization specifically dedicated to advancing the field of nutrition education—defines nutrition educators as those who both develop and deliver effective nutrition education programs.
programs. They go beyond implementing existing programs and have the capabilities to assess the needs of a target population and successfully design, implement, and evaluate interventions grounded in behavior change theories and models that they, or others, can use. Competencies for professionals in fields that engage nutrition, such as dietetics education,10 food science,11 food system education,12–13 public health nutrition14,15 and health education16 are available or being developed, as are those for paraprofessionals.17 The only competencies for the training of nutrition educators specifically were those published by SNEB in 1987.18 However, advances in social and behavioral communication and nutrition education research, along with the ever-expanding scope of practice, such as the importance of working toward ecologically sustainable and socially just food systems, as well as supportive environments and policies, prompted SNEB to update these competencies. Therefore, this paper aims to describe the development of, and rationale and uses for, the revised SNEB Nutrition Educator Competencies for Promoting Healthy Individuals, Communities, and Food Systems. These competencies provide the “what,” “why,” and “how to” for professionals to ensure they are equipped with the necessary components to facilitate change. Incorporating the SNEB nutrition educator competencies into the training of nutrition educators, both new and in continuing education will give them the knowledge and skills necessary to be relevant and effective in today’s dynamic and complex food and nutrition environment.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NUTRITION EDUCATION COMPETENCIES

Before providing a rationale for them, we briefly review the history of SNEB creating nutrition educator competencies. In 1987, SNEB approved a set of competencies for the academic preparation of nutrition education specialists based on the results from surveys of 929 state and local nutrition education coordinators and 65 academic institutions that trained nutrition educators. A SNEB committee, which included representatives from the American Dietetic Association, the American Home Economics Association, and the Faculties of Graduate Programs in Public Health Nutrition, organized the responses into 5 categories: food and nutrition content, eating behavior, behavioral and educational theory, research methods and program evaluation, and design and delivery of nutrition education. These were published as recommended guidelines that academic institutions could use for degree program planning.18

In the decades that followed, the important role of nutrition in health promotion and disease prevention had become even clearer as rates of diet-related chronic diseases had increased. In addition, research in the field—with substantial contributions by members of SNEB itself—has developed a better understanding of the psychosocial determinants of behavior change and the elements of effective nutrition education; hence, the necessity for nutrition educators to have a solid foundation not only in food and nutrition science but also in behavior change theory.3,19–23

The scope of nutrition education was also expanded to include the role of physical activity.2,24,25 In addition, there was a recognition of the nutrition educator’s role in providing guidance for eating patterns that promote a sustainable and just food system and individual and community health.26 Finally, there was recognition of an increased likelihood of behavior change when nutrition education is conducted alongside programs to increase food access and changes to the food supply;24 require knowledge of food policy and systems.26,27 Given these reasons, the decision was made to update SNEB’s nutrition educator competencies and reconsider the opportunities for their use.

In 2010, SNEB established a task force of academic professionals, researchers, and practitioners with international representation to revise the original guidelines. After soliciting extensive input from SNEB members and key members of nutrition and public health-related professional organizations, including the American Public Health Association, the American Society for Nutrition, and the International Federation for Home Economics, the task force expanded the original 27 competencies that had been organized into 5 categories, to 45 competencies organized into 10 categories, with 6 focused on content and 4 on the process. In addition, all competencies were rewritten as learning outcomes and written in generic language to make the competencies applicable internationally. They were distributed electronically to all members of SNEB worldwide and at an open hearing at an annual meeting to solicit feedback. After revisions, the competencies were approved by the SNEB’s Board of Directors in 2016 (Table). The companion Concept Model (Figure) captures how the competencies are integrated within a sociocultural and the role of the educator in developing and delivering effective nutrition education to a diverse population across the lifespan.

RATIONAL FOR THE NUTRITION EDUCATION COMPETENCIES

Each of the 10 competency categories is grounded in the research literature and evidence-based practice, as described below. In addition, since completing the competencies in 2016, there have been changes in the world and the field of nutrition education. Thus, as appropriate, recognition of these changes and how they relate to the competencies are included.

Content

To be effective in today’s complex food and information environment, it is crucial that nutrition educators have a thorough grounding in basic food and nutrition sciences and nutritional needs across the life cycle, as well as recognition of the complementary role of physical activity in promoting health. It is also crucial that nutrition educators understand the interactions among nutrients,
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<th>No.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Basic Food and Nutrition Knowledge</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Describe the basic structures and functions of the essential nutrients and identify examples of significant foods and food group sources for each</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Describe the background, purpose and appropriate national or international physical activity guidelines (e.g., the US Physical Activity Guidelines).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Explain the background, purpose, and components of the appropriate national or international nutrient references (e.g., US Dietary Reference Intakes).</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Describe the benefits of regular physical activity as a means of prevention and management of public health issues including chronic diseases.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>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).</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Identify physical activity opportunities in daily living.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Explain how to use food labeling to evaluate the appropriateness of a food.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Food and Nutrition Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Explain the dietary prevention of, and management approaches associated with, the major diet-related public health issues.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Describe the roles of government agencies in regulating the manufacturing, labeling and advertising of individual foods and dietary supplements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Describe the basic types of approaches used by researchers to study diet-health relationships and describe their advantages and limitations.</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Describe the roles of government agencies in regulating food systems and the food supply.</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>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 diet-health relationships.</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>Critically evaluate the source of materials that provide nutrition information.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Nutrition across the Life Cycle</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Identify the primary dietary issues for each phase of the life cycle.</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Agricultural Production and Food Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Use information from the appropriate national or international nutrient references and dietary guidelines to make dietary recommendations for each phase of the life cycle.</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Describe differences in agricultural practices and their potential effects on food choices and food availability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Food Science</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Describe the functions of food ingredients and food processing techniques and their effects on the nutrient content of foods.</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Explain the relationships between natural resources (e.g. soil, water, biodiversity) and the quantity and quality of the food and water supply.</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Describe ways to collaborate with other stakeholders to promote policies supporting systems that produce healthy food.</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
<td>Describe the potential sources of food contamination and the best practices associated with the safe handling of food.</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
<td>Explain how to plan, select, prepare, and manage foods to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, communities and the food system.</td>
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(continued)
foods, cultures, social determinants of health, and the food system—including agricultural practices—that form the basis of food guidance recommendations for the public and food policy.

Basic food and nutrition knowledge. Today’s food environments have become extremely complex, with an ever-increasing array of products. According to the US Department of Agriculture, approximately 20,000 new foods and beverages are introduced in the US each year. As a result, food-related decisions have become increasingly more difficult. Unfortunately, at the same time, sources of nutrition-related information have also increased, with traditional health care providers, government agencies, and other reliable sources competing for the public’s attention with often questionable health-related websites and bloggers. It is therefore not surprising that surveys of consumers have found that a large proportion believes that there is a lot of conflicting information about what they should eat or avoid and that this conflicting information makes them uncertain about the choices they make.

As a result, it is critical for nutrition educators to have a strong knowledge-base of nutrition science and a clear understanding of how nutrition research is conducted to critically evaluate new research studies and put these scientific findings into proper and accurate context for the public. A thorough understanding of the role of healthy dietary patterns in promoting health and reducing the risk of disease is also essential. With high rates of chronic disease and obesity worldwide and continuing concerns regarding food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition, nutrition educators need to understand the evidence-based approaches to preventing diet-related health conditions. Finally, a comprehensive understanding of the rationale and recommendations associated with government guidance, including food-based dietary guidelines and food labeling, is critical for nutrition educators to effectively incorporate this guidance into their nutrition education materials, programs, and advocacy.

### Table 1. (Continued)

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<td>7.</td>
<td><strong>Behavior and Education Theory</strong></td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>Design or select strategies, activities and materials that match the objectives and are appropriate for diverse audiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>Apply inclusive participatory approaches that enable the target population to effectively communicate, share experiences, identify personal needs, and manage personal food behaviors.</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>Describe the major psychosocial theories of behavior and behavior change and apply them to eating behavior, and behavior change.</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>Develop a timeline and budget for program development, implementation, and evaluation, including personnel, supplies, and overhead costs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Describe the major theories of teaching and learning and apply them to nutrition education.</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>Design process and outcome evaluation plans, based on behavior change mediators and program objectives, using appropriate data collection methods.</td>
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**Written, Oral, and Social Media Communication**

Communicate effectively in written, visual, and oral form, with individuals, the media, and other groups, in ways that are appropriate for diverse audiences. Facilitate communication from and between clients so they can express their beliefs and attitudes, define needs, and share experiences. Engage and educate through simple, clear, and motivational language appropriate for diverse audiences. Advocate effectively for action-oriented nutrition education and healthy diets in various sectors and settings.

**Nutrition Education Research Methods**

Analyze, evaluate, and interpret nutrition education research and apply it to practice.
Nutrition across the life cycle. Nutrient and food requirements change over the course of a lifetime. To be effective, nutrition educators must tailor programming to the specific dietary needs of the intended audience and use evidence-based recommendations. Therefore, knowledge of life stages, the biochemical and physiological changes associated with each stage, and national and international recommendations are critical for nutrition educators to advise and guide consumers toward healthful dietary choices. For example, the myriad biochemical and physiological factors associated with pregnancy and lactation create unique nutritional needs during this time of a woman’s life, just as aging alters requirements for older adults.

Food science. The percentage of calories from food eaten away from home has risen steadily worldwide over the last several decades. These foods are typically lower in many vitamins, minerals, and fiber and higher in fat, sodium, and calories, and their frequent consumption has been linked to adverse outcomes, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and an increased risk for all-cause mortality. Because nutrition educators play an important role in helping the public learn how to select and prepare foods that are good tasting and safe, as well as healthful, it is vital that they have a sound understanding of the fundamentals of food science and adequate culinary or food preparation skills to help people put dietary recommendations into practice. Nutrition educators also play a key role in enhancing the public’s food literacy, which is generally described as basic knowledge about food and nutrition; food skills in food planning, purchasing, management, and preparation; confidence in these skills; and food decisions that reflect personal health, cultural norms, and concerns for the environment. In addition, today’s complex food market is increasingly dominated by highly processed foods. Thus, it is crucial for nutrition educators to help the public distinguish between basic, processed, and ultraprocessed foods and understand their differing impacts on health and the environment. Finally, approximately 48 million people in the US and
600 million worldwide suffer preventable foodborne illnesses yearly, with associated annual mortalities of approximately 3,000 and 420,000, respectively. Thus, it is very important that nutrition educators are knowledgeable about food safety practices.

**Physical activity.** Research has clearly shown that physical activity is directly related to optimal health. Therefore, it is incumbent on nutrition educators to know the physical activity guidelines for daily living as outlined in national and international documents. Including physical activity knowledge with nutrition educator competencies is appropriate because diet and physical activity are complementary in promoting health and preventing chronic disease. In addition, encouraging physical activity alongside dietary behavior change may produce better health outcomes than targeting either one individually.

**Food and nutrition policy.** Food and nutrition policies influence food availability, accessibility, safety, and cost, making it vital for nutrition educators to understand the policy to effectively facilitate changes in eating behaviors.

Government agencies regulate the manufacturing, labeling, and advertising of food and dietary supplements. Agencies worldwide, including the US Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration, regulate food safety, provide consumer resources for food safety, and regulate and provide resources for other aspects of food, such as defining food insecurity and providing dietary guidance. Research suggests that the public is not always aware of these regulations and resources, for example, when reading food labels or purchasing supplements. Therefore, nutrition educators must understand the food-related laws to appropriately incorporate the associated benefits and drawbacks into their programming. On a larger scale, governments regulate the food system and food supply. Crisis such as the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, climate change disruptions, and political unrest have exacerbated existing food supply chain challenges, which are likely to continue. Situations such as these increase the importance of nutrition educators’ understanding of the government’s and civil society’s actions that work to provide everyone with adequate access to nourishing food. Governments authorize programs to support nutrition education, research, and food assistance to increase food security and promote the health of their people. Understanding these programs enables educators to take full advantage of government-funded opportunities and combine nutrition education with food safety net programs. Government-funded research and monitoring data also generate important findings that can be used to inform consumer-based nutrition education and health communication messages.

For over a century, government and nongovernmental organizations have developed and implemented nutrition education programs to promote health and increase food security, with many of the nongovernmental programs connected to food safety net programs and thus adhering to government policies. Nutrition educators can develop and implement future programs that learn from and build on this history by understanding these programs and what has made them effective. One role of nutrition educators is to collaborate with community members and other professionals, organizations, and government agencies to bring about policy changes and serve as advocates for, and create, an equitable and just food system in which healthy food is the easy, affordable, and desired choice and unhealthy food is less prominent and less desired. To this end, the largest US Government-funded nutrition education program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education, now mandates the inclusion of policy, system, and environmental change interventions. Internationally organizations also emphasize the importance of environment and nutrition education policy. Policy, system, and environmental change as part of nutrition education is a relatively new area for program delivery in nutrition education. The use of policy, system, and environmental change has expanded over the last decade and is expected to continue to expand into the future. To create such interventions, it is essential that nutrition educators understand how food policies influence communities and the environment as part of a social ecological framework and develop the skills to work in collaboration with others.

**Agriculture production and food system.** Developing food systems that promote public health and ecological sustainability is receiving increasing attention from governments, international organizations, and businesses. Continual increases in consumer demand for organically grown food in the US, and the relationship between green-labeling and consumer behavior worldwide, reflects public interest as well. Therefore, it is critical that nutrition educators can identify and describe various certifications and labels related to agricultural practices, such as organic, non-GMO, and natural, and discuss the benefits and disadvantages in the context of their communities.

About 77% of the calories purchased by US households are processed, with about 16% being moderately processed and about 50% being highly or ultraprocessed. Because our food supply consists largely of processed foods, it is imperative for nutrition educators working with the public to be knowledgeable about the ecological, social, and health implications of this processed food, as well as to understand how these processed foods are packaged, distributed, and marketed. It is critical for nutrition educators to be able to describe the roles of food additives and identify potential contaminants and pathogens that can be introduced as food moves through the supply chain.

In addition, our current food supply impacts climate change and environmental pollution. Agriculture and the food sector produce 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions, pesticides threaten surface water on a global scale, and meat production puts an excessive burden on resources.

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such as land to produce crops for animals to eat. A comprehensive understanding of these issues is necessary for nutrition educators to appropriately target food-related behaviors that will help to sustain our ability to produce food in the future. The National Nutrition Research Roadmap (2016) declares that when nutrition research addresses societal, environmental, and economic challenges, this can develop and maintain a healthy, affordable, safe, and sustainable food supply. This necessitates nutrition education professionals having a broad food system view. Finally, agriculture and food systems competencies are essential for nutrition educators as they will be increasingly called on to be leaders and advocates for food system practices that promote public and planetary health in the coming decades.

Nutrition Education Process

In addition to a thorough grounding in food and nutrition-related content, nutrition educators need to understand that many factors are involved in motivating and facilitating behavior change and how nutrition education is designed, delivered, and evaluated.

Behavior and education theory. Effective nutrition education programming requires understanding the complex interactions among biological, psychosocial, cultural, and environmental factors influencing food choice behaviors, eating patterns, and behavior change theories. Nutrition education is more likely to be effective when it focuses on specific behaviors or practices and addresses the influences on behavior change, usually referred to as determinants or mediators. Psychosocial theories of behavior and behavior change, derived from evidence, describe the relationships of these determinants or mediators to behavior change. These theories thus provide foundational frameworks for understanding and predicting behavior change. Addressing the appropriate determinants, suggested by theory and justified by evidence, increases the likelihood of effectiveness. Thus, it is essential that nutrition educators are familiar with various psychosocial theories and skilled at selecting and applying them to design effective programs. It is also essential that they understand how to integrate these theories into a social ecological framework of change so that programs address a range of influences on behavior change.

In addition, understanding teaching and learning theories are important because how even well-designed education is delivered will greatly impact behavior change. Teaching is not the telling of food and nutrition information but reflects the larger enterprise of educating, defined as anything done to facilitate learning. This typically means a scaffolded series of educational activities from activation of motivation to skill building to application. Learning theory takes many forms, and the choice may depend on the nature of the audience. An integrated approach is likely to be most useful for nutrition education, emphasizing active, hands-on, and cooperative learning that also considers participants’ learning styles and sociocultural backgrounds. These theory-based approaches have been adapted for effective use in nutrition education programs that increasingly involve digital settings. An ability to apply these theories to various audiences will enable nutrition educators to maximize the effectiveness of nutrition education programming, delivered both in-person and virtually.

Nutrition education program design, implementation, and evaluation. Given the complexity of health promotion, many researchers recognize the importance of using a systematic process for developing behaviorally-focused nutrition education programs and appropriate psychosocial theories as frameworks. It is imperative that the nutrition educator understands and is skilled in applying a systematic approach as it can maximize the potential for success of the program and conserve resources. Such a process begins with identifying the nutritional and behavioral needs of the population to establish behavior change goals of the program. This is followed by a careful assessment of the audience, using an inclusive, participatory approach and research evidence, identifying the determinants or mediators from the psychosocial theory that can serve as motivators and facilitators of the program’s behavior change goals to ensure that the nutrition education is appropriately targeted. A theoretical framework based on these assessments will guide the development of the program. It is important to identify appropriate theory-based behavior change strategies (also referred to as behavior change techniques or behavior change methods) from which to state educational objectives for the program. These educational objectives guide the development of activities. Educational activities are best created and sequenced on the basis of principles of instructional design and learning theory. Behaviorally focused and theory-based systematic processes have been successfully used to develop nutrition education programs that focus on diverse groups.

A similar process can be used to develop environmental support components.

Following program design, the use of delivery methods that enhance motivation, inspire participants, and facilitate behavior change is vital for nutrition education programs to be effective. Nutrition education often involves working with groups in various settings, such as schools, public health departments, and community centers. Effective communication skills and educator dynamism, passion, and trustworthiness are essential, as noted under the communication competency. In addition, well-designed, cooperative learning activities enhance meaningful learning and behavior change.

Community nutrition education programs in the US such as Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education, and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children and those in many other countries that serve large
targeted communities encourage participatory approaches. Thus, effective group facilitation skills will enable nutrition educators to implement such approaches by promoting respectful group discussion and dialog and creating a safe learning environment with hands-on activities that assist the target audience in identifying personal needs, sharing experiences, setting goals, and managing personal food behaviors.120–122

Increasingly, nutrition educators are implementing these skills through technology-based programs. Being culturally competent is also vital for the nutrition educator, given the increased population diversity within the US and many other countries worldwide.133,134 Considerations of diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential in all programming, as well as understanding how structural racism impacts the development and implementation of nutrition education.135

Nutrition educators are also called on by their stakeholders to evaluate their programs to provide evidence of effectiveness.61 Thus, it is incumbent on nutrition educators to know how to conduct outcome or impact evaluations based on the behavior change goals of the program, determinants or mediators of behavior change, and program objectives that are appropriate to the scale of the program.55,136,137 It is also important that they know how to conduct process evaluations, which provide information on the extent to which the program was implemented as planned, how completely the educator delivered it, and how fully the audience received the program.138–140 In addition, understanding and skills in managing timelines and budgets will ensure the appropriate implementation and evaluation of programs.

Written, oral, and social media communication. Nutrition education goes beyond the didactic presentation of nutrition information and includes communicating with individuals and groups to engage, motivate, and educate to promote healthful eating120,141 and other health-related behaviors. This involves nutrition educators delivering memorable and personally meaningful messages and using clear, straightforward, and culturally based language appropriate for diverse audiences.120,141,142 Nutrition education is increasingly being communicated through social media and other electronic technology-based channels such as email, text messaging, internet-based programs, blogs, posts, or applications, in addition to written and oral means.143,144 Educator characteristics, such as credibility, trustworthiness, cultural competence, and dynamism, influence how well audiences receive nutrition education.120,121 Educational materials, whether in print or digital, are more effective when well-designed and attractive.120,145 In addition, communication is not a 1-way street from educator to audience and involves audience members communicating with each other and with the educator in multiple verbal and nonverbal ways.121,146

Thus, it is essential that nutrition educators be effective communicators to encourage program participants in group settings, whether in-person or virtually, to share interests, experiences, and approaches for promoting success and overcoming barriers when changing behavior. This facilitation role is important because program participants and educators may come from racially, ethnically, and sociodemographically different backgrounds.142,147 Given the rise in importance of communicating through various forms of technology-based media, nutrition educators are expected to be skilled in using these media for nutrition education as well, taking into account the cultural differences in how people communicate.143,148–150

**Nutrition education research methods.** Nutrition education is an evolving field, with quantitative and qualitative nutrition education research driving the development of best practices.5,9,24,151 Therefore, practitioners must be knowledgeable about these research methods, including their advantages and limitations. They need to understand data collection, manipulation, and interpretation to critically read research publications, appropriately analyze and synthesize research findings, and place findings in the context of existing literature to appropriately identify and use the results to develop and evaluate educational programming.152

**USES OF THE COMPETENCIES**

The nutrition education competencies are intended for use in various settings and circumstances. Some examples are listed below.

1. Educators in academic programs in nutrition, nutrition education, dietetics, and public health nutrition serve as guidelines for planning curricula to provide training for their graduates to act effectively as nutrition educators in various settings.

2. For current nutrition educators to plan and guide areas of professional development.

3. For others outside the field of nutrition education, such as those in health care or community and school settings, to complement their professional development.

4. As a guide for public, private, and nonprofit sectors to create and disseminate workforce training, professional development, and continuing education opportunities.

5. As a guide for policymakers and advocates to help plan stronger, more comprehensive nutrition education policy.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

Use of the SNEB nutrition education competencies for promoting healthy individuals, communities, and food systems in the training of nutrition educators, both new and in continuing education, can create a workforce with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop, implement, and evaluate effective nutrition education approaches that will help to significantly improve the health of our
people, our communities, and our planet. Use of the competencies will also advance nutrition education research, policy, and practice.

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ORCIDs

Isobel Contento: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7941-1122

Melissa D. Olpert: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6686-3891

Pamela A. Koch: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7300-908X