

Workforce Planning Toolkit

Competencies Overview

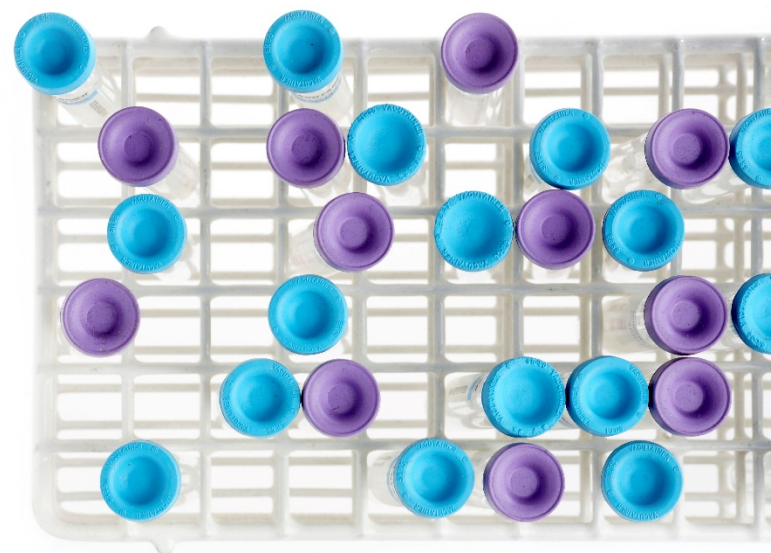



Table of Contents

3	Introduction
4	The Value of Competencies
5	How to Use This Tool
6	How Competencies Help Supervisors
7	How Competencies Help Employees
8	Performance and Competencies
9	How Competencies are Used in Other Organizations
10-14	How to Implement Competencies and Build Models
15	Create Your Own

Introduction

Welcome to the Competency Overview.



This toolkit was developed to introduce you to competencies, discuss their benefits, and to provide you with information as to how they can benefit your organization.

How are competencies being used at NIH?

There are many uses for competencies throughout the human capital lifecycle which include strategic workforce planning, recruitment and selection, performance management, engagement and retention, learning and development, and succession and transition planning.

NIH is using competencies to better define organizational and individual requirements and to:

- Define what success looks like in a position; clarify expectations
- Identify hiring needs proactively based on competency gaps
- Find the most appropriate pool of candidates
- Assist organizations with offering learning and development activities that clearly align with strategy and business needs
- Assist employees in creating Individual Development Plans (IDPs) based on self assessments to target development that links to organizational goals.

What is a Competency?

Competencies encompass knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), combined with other personal characteristics such as values, initiative, and motivation that contribute to successful individual and organizational performance. Competencies are not only about what you know, but how you apply what you know. Competencies are supported by key behaviors that describe ways the competencies may be demonstrated in the workplace

Why is NIH Using Competencies?

The workplace and the workforce are changing; leadership must consider what is essential for staff to achieve the organization's mission. Staff must think differently and have a broader focus. Competencies help align individual behaviors and skills with the strategic direction of the organization.

Investing in competencies can improve: 1. recruitment and hiring; 2. career development of NIH employees; and 3. strategic organizational planning. One aspect is to develop vacancy announcements that more clearly state the competencies that NIH expects employees to possess. Competency development is also essential to developing behavioral-based interview guides, which in turn will allow hiring officials to better select talent from a pool of job candidates. Overall, the use of competencies will result in better recruitment of talent that will improve the quality of the NIH workforce. Developing competency based tools will also support the career development of NIH employees. Assessment tools highlight the areas in which employees are most proficient and areas in which they can focus developmental activities. Finally, managers and supervisors who understand the competency gaps within their organizations will be able to strategically address these gaps.

The Value of Competencies



How can Competencies help me?

ICs can systematically identify their competency gaps in occupational areas. In turn, this can lead to more focused hiring decisions and succession planning, better strategic assignment (alignment) of tasks and functions; and cost-effective training that is tailored for employees who have common needs.

Benefits of using Competencies in the Organization

- ✓ Provides a **common language** for describing workforce needs as they relate to the mission and strategic objectives of the organization.
- ✓ Establishes and **communicates expectations** for the specific behaviors that contribute to successful job performance.
- ✓ Encourages employees to be accountable for their professional development; Focuses learning on **clearly identified development needs**.
- ✓ Provides a baseline and opens the door for professional development and performance **conversations** between employees and supervisors.
- ✓ Identifies strategic, **targeted** and realistic learning and development objectives/needs.
- ✓ Promotes understanding of the competencies expected for a move into a new job; including becoming supervisors/managers or changing careers.
- ✓ Identifies strategic, targeted and realistic learning and development objectives/needs to support a strongly sustaining organization with a defined **succession strategy**.
- ✓ Identifies minimum requirements for new hires (interviewing tool); Can be used as a basis for behavioral based interviewing.
- ✓ Focuses staff on selected aspects of performance to achieve the mission and organization's objectives.

How to Use This Tool



The right tool for the right job.

This tool is just one component of a larger workforce planning toolkit with many tools, processes, and case studies to assist you as you implement workforce planning in your organization. Make sure and explore the entire toolkit for other tools that might be helpful.

How to Decide Whether Competencies Would Benefit Your Organization

The objective of the tool is provide you with a resource that will help you understand the benefits of competencies and provide you with the basic steps of implementing them in your organization. While there are many uses of competencies, the tool will focus on using them primarily for employee learning and development and to reinforce organizational culture.



How Can Competencies Help Supervisors?



How can supervisors benefit from competencies?

Competencies are another tool in the supervisor's toolbox that can offer a multitude of benefits and can assist the supervisor.

Competencies help supervisors to better:



- Screen prospective employees during the hiring process, which results in better hiring decisions.
- Discuss with employees their strengths, areas for growth, training, and developmental activities.
- Distribute work more efficiently by using the knowledge of employees' proficiency levels.
- Acquire training and development opportunities systematically and efficiently, e.g., develop training partnerships between organizations, bringing tailored training to employees, etc..
- Determine what type of skill sets are needed in the future, which helps support succession planning.

How Can Competencies Help Employees?



How can employees benefit from competencies?

There are many benefits to using competencies in your organization that can offer many benefits to employees.

Competencies help employees to:

- ❑ Understand the competencies expected in their job, the key behaviors they should demonstrate, and the steps needed to increase their proficiency levels.
- ❑ Discuss with their supervisors the employee's strengths, areas for growth, and suggested training, and developmental activities.
- ❑ Focus on specific training and development opportunities that will help them grow and strive for excellence.
- ❑ Understand the competencies they would be expected to have to move into a new job, particularly for employees who are interested in becoming supervisors and managers or in changing careers.

Performance and Competencies



How can competencies improve performance?

Competencies should assist the employees in improving their performance – there is a natural progression, a natural link, because as employees are focusing on improving their competencies and focusing on developing their career, there's likely to be a correlation in how they're performing.

What is the relationship between performance and competencies?



As employees increase their proficiency levels, their performance outputs should generally be expected to improve.

Typically organizations whose employees have high proficiency levels tend to be organizations that would be expected to have superior organizational performance.



However, there are other factors that can influence this.



An individual may possess the required knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors but may be performing at a lower level than expected due to various factors, e.g., personal problems, lack of focus, job dissatisfaction, negative reaction to organizational change, lack of organizational resources, etc.

How Competencies are Used by Other Organizations?



Are competencies only used in the government?

Competencies are not a new nor are they a passing fad. Many multinational and industry leading organizations have come to realize the numerous and positive benefits of competencies over the last few decades.

Both public and private organizations use competencies:

For many years, competencies have been used effectively in both the private and public sectors.

They play a key role in organizational development and improvement by articulating the capabilities required for individual and organizational performance. Competencies serve as a solid foundation for human capital areas such as recruitment and hiring of talent, job assessment, employee development and training, performance management, career planning, and succession planning.

Depending on the organization's choice, it can choose to apply competencies to all of these human capital areas or some of them.

Competencies may be incorporated into position descriptions, interview guides, hiring criteria and methods, assessment processes, individual development plans (IDPs), performance management processes, and employee development opportunities, e.g. training.

Implementation Process



How do I implement competencies?

If you have decided that competencies will benefit your organization, implementation is next. In general, there are eight basic steps to develop and implement competencies in your organization. While these eight steps apply to using competencies specifically for employee learning and development, please remember that there are many other uses for competencies once you have developed the model.

Competency Implementation Steps

1. Select a pre-developed NIH model or build your own
2. Validate the model with SMEs
3. Introduce the model to the employee population
4. Employees conduct self-assessment against the model
5. Supervisors assess direct reports against the model
6. Employee/supervisor post assessment conversations
7. Employee creates individual learning plan (IDP)
8. Employee pursues approved learning activities in IDP



“While the tool focuses on implementing competencies for **employee learning and development**, competencies can also be used for **recruitment and hiring of talent, job assessment, career planning, and succession planning**.”

The Value of Competency Models



How can a Competency model help me?

Competencies have many uses throughout human capital activities, and developing a model specific to your organization and its leadership, with buy-in from those who will be utilizing the model, will prove to be even more beneficial than using a list from another organization or one that has not been recently validated.

Benefits of Developing a Competency Model

- ✓ Provides a **common language** for describing workforce needs
- ✓ Establishes and **communicates expectations** for the specific behaviors that contribute to successful job performance
- ✓ Defines what **differentiates a high performer** from a minimal performer in a given job or role
- ✓ Provides a framework against which to **measure organizational proficiency** and capability gaps
- ✓ Involves employees in defining their environment; **encourages engagement and buy-in**
- ✓ Encourages employees to be accountable for their professional development; Focuses learning on **clearly identified development needs**
- ✓ Identifies **technical and non-technical requirements** for new hires (interviewing tool); can be used as a basis for behavioral based interviewing

Summary of Process



How do I build a competency model?

Building the competency model most often starts with a research approach. However, the process should also include the flexibility to add competencies and behaviors to the model to ensure that it reflects the organization's values and strategic direction.

Collecting input from the project sponsor/leadership, HR documents, and employees and managers who are doing the day-to-day work will provide a well-rounded view of the needs and expectations of a particular role or job.

Competency Model Development Process

1. Plan and scope with the project sponsor
2. Utilize source HR documents, benchmarking, and employee and manager interviews to build a draft competency model
3. Validate the competency model with a diverse group of Subject Matter Experts
4. Finalize the model with approval from the project sponsor



While this tool guides you through the basic process and provides sample resources, a practitioner will benefit from formalized training, such as the *Workitect* “Building Competency Models” three day workshop.

How the Model Can Be Used



What's next after the model is finalized?

To provide the most value to your organization, you want to make sure the project sponsor knows how their leadership team and individual employees will be able to use the model, both as a stand-alone tool and to integrate with and improve other human capital activities.

Once the model is finalized and shared with staff, it can be used to:

- ❑ **Unite employees** around common organizational goals, expectations, and measures of success
- ❑ Provide **prospective and onboarding employees** with a written roadmap of technical as well as non-technical skills and behaviors required for success in the job or role
- ❑ Provide **current employees** with a better understanding of the competencies expected in their job, the key behaviors they should demonstrate, and the steps needed to increase their proficiency levels
- ❑ Conduct **assessments of employees' proficiency**, with input from employees and their supervisors, that will then be used to identify individual training needs, organization-wide capability gaps, and succession planning needs
- ❑ Target individual and organizational **training and development opportunities** to competencies in the model
- ❑ Inform the **development of tools** for other Human Capital activities (e.g., competency-based interview guides for recruitment and selection, competency-based PMAP elements for performance management)

Frequently Asked Questions



Developing competency models is an art, not a science.

Many decisions about what to include or not include in the competency model will be driven by the political and cultural environment of the organization, as well as how the sponsor plans to use the competency model.

❑ Is there an optimal number of competencies in a model?

No. This is a common question and customers are often looking for guidance in this area. Your response should be, “as many as are needed to fully capture the aspects of the job and work environment.” Keep in mind how many competencies will be feasible for the employees to absorb and how many can be focused on for developmental activities.

❑ Do we need to include technical, non-technical, and leadership competencies?

Depending on how the model will be used, the sponsor may choose to include only a subset of competencies. For example, a Leadership & Management model may be desired to unite expectations for all team leads and branch chiefs across a diverse organization with very different technical functions.

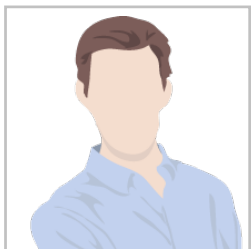
❑ What if a competency we need is not in the NIH Competency Dictionary?

The NIH Dictionary should be inclusive of all Non-technical and Leadership & Management competencies your SMEs will identify. However, many technical areas are not yet represented. Contact a [Competencies POC](#) for guidance on writing competencies and proposing them for inclusion in the NIH Dictionary.

❑ Do I need to find a reference of a competency in an HR document to include it in the model?

Not necessarily. Many organizations choose to include competencies such as innovation or adaptability that are aspirational and describe how they *want* the unit to function in the *future*. If the competency is not currently in the PMAP or Division/Office strategic plan, you may be able to engage the sponsor in a discussion about including it in those documents in the future.

Create Your Own Competency Model



Now it's your turn.

Now that you understand some competency basics and what they can be used for, it's time to create your own competency model! [Refer to the corresponding Power Point tool in the toolkit for additional background and detailed descriptions of each step in the process.](#)

Although every organization's needs are different. The tool will provide you with some basic steps for developing and implementing competency models in your organization.

Good luck!

