NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT
COMPETENCY MODEL OVERVIEW

Introduction

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) uses competency models as workforce and employee development planning tools. A competency model describes the competencies (i.e., skills and knowledge) required to perform the duties of an occupation/role. Using these models, NOAA can conduct workforce planning and individual managers can identify and prioritize their employees' developmental needs. This planning will ensure that NOAA is able to recruit, develop, and maintain its workforce with the competencies required for mission success. This document addresses commonly asked questions about competency modeling and its uses. For further information on the competency-based approach to workforce planning, please review the NOAA Workforce Planning Policy and Design Document.

Questions and Answers

What is a competency?

A competency is a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully.

What is a competency model?

A competency model is grouped competencies required in a particular job. It represents the most critical knowledge, skills, and behaviors that drive successful performance. They are described in behavioral terms, using behavioral indicators so that the competencies are recognized when demonstrated. Together these characteristics reflect the purpose of the job.

Typical elements of a competency model include competency titles with definitions, behavioral statements describing the competency in action, and supporting knowledge competencies applicable to the job or occupation. (See example below):

Competency Title: Customer Service

Definition: Responds to customer's needs in a manner that provides added value and generates significant customer satisfaction.

Behavioral Indicators:

- Demonstrates understanding of internal and external customers and their needs
- Identifies and utilize the appropriate resources to respond to customer's needs
- Builds credibility and trust through open and direct communication
- Ensures that customers' issues and concerns are given highest priority

Competency models are important because they provide road maps for the range of behaviors that produce optimal performance. It helps organizations communicate performance expectations, teams and individuals align behaviors to key organizational strategies, and employees understand how to achieve expected performance standards.

How are competency models developed?

Competency models are developed in accordance with the Department's Guidelines for Competency Model Development, which include a schedule of foundational or standard Department-wide competencies. NOAA then identifies the primary technical competencies associated with the occupation, also linking sample tasks to each competency. Studies are conducted in the following phases:

Phase 1: Develop Draft Model Review of occupational resources and literature from government, educational, professional and commercial sources, and, review of HR documentation, including position descriptions, job analysis records, and published vacancy announcements to define performance criteria and develop a comprehensive draft task and competency listing.

Phase 2: Confirm Draft Model DOC Analysis Worksheet for rating the importance and frequency of identified tasks administered to subject matter expert (SME) groups. Tasks are assessed and assigned based on their reported importance or performance frequency. Tasks are then grouped in competencies and the draft model further reviewed.

Phase 3: Validate Draft/Develop Final Model Occupational SME focus group assembly to refine and validate final model as required by the Uniform Guidelines.

How will competency models be used?

Competency models and the data they provide help organizations better prepare for the future. It is an effective tool for performing gap analysis to assist in succession planning, knowledge management and transfer, employee development, and work or organizational change. Specific examples include:

- Identifying talent gaps and filling them effectively
- Prepare for routine losses of expertise

- Develop and maintain strong leadership
- Address skills needed to meet complex challenges
- Identify, develop, and select successors who are the right people with the right skills
- Motivate and retain top leadership

Training and Development

- Identify existing competencies
- Evaluate and assess current employees to determine existence of competency gaps and surpluses
- Use coaching, mentoring, training, and recruitment methods that match personnel requirements and future needs
- Individual developmental planning

Workforce Planning

- Identify current and future human capital needs including workforce size, distribution, and competencies needed to achieve the mission
- Redeploy or temporarily rotate staff to fill some of the gaps
- Reorganizing or restructuring positions or organizations to make better us of existing resources and match skills to functions

Completed Models
Accountant Competencies
Acquisition Competencies
Budget Analyst Competencies
Cartography Competencies
Electronics Engineer Competencies
Economist Competencies
Fish Biologist Competencies
General Administration Competencies
Human Resources Assistant Generalist Competencies
Human Resources Specialist Competencies
Hydrographic Survey Competencies
Hydrologist Competencies
IT Security Competencies
IT Specialist Competencies
Management-Program Analyst Competencies
Meteorologist Competencies
Oceanography Competencies
Physicist Competencies
Safety and Occupational Health Specialist Competencies

Foundational Competencies
Leadership and Management Competencies