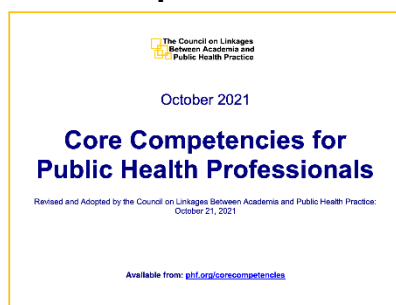


Determining Essential Core Competencies for Public Health Jobs: A Prioritization Process September 8, 2022

Public health organizations can be more effective when the competencies of their staff match the types of activities they do in their jobs. It is important that job descriptions include the competencies, in terms of both skills and knowledge, for success in a position. This is a good practice for all organizations and supports successful recruitment, hiring, and professional development.

Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals



The [Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals](#) (Core Competencies), a consensus set of knowledge and skills for the broad practice of public health, as defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services, offer health departments and other public health organizations a starting point for workforce development activities. Developed by the [Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice](#), the Core Competencies reflect foundational or crosscutting skills for

professionals engaging in the practice, education, and research of public health. Widely applicable to the variety of jobs found within the public health field, the Core Competencies can be used for identifying competencies to be included in [competency-based job descriptions](#).

Purpose of This Tool

For any position, critical Core Competencies will vary depending on the responsibilities and activities of individuals in that position. When developing a job description, it is important to determine which competencies are most essential for that position. This tool describes a process for prioritizing competencies for job descriptions using the 2021 version of the Core Competencies. A public health organization can use this process in a workshop setting to help engage staff members to identify and prioritize the competencies that they feel are most important for their roles. This process is grounded in the Core Competencies, and workshop facilitators should have a working knowledge of the Core Competencies for the process to be successful. Additional information about the Core Competencies is available at www.phf.org/corecompetencies.

Although this process can inform individual job descriptions, it was designed to be used for broader job categories. When used in this way, the organization should group the specific jobs present in the organization into categories based on similar responsibilities and activities, so that the competencies needed for the positions are likely to be similar. Competencies for each group can be identified, as can crosscutting competencies applicable across the organization, and tailored as necessary to ensure relevance to individual job descriptions. This offers an overview of important competencies needed within the organization to meet the current and

future challenges the organization is facing and provide services that will improve health within the community.

Materials

This tool contains:

- [2021 Core Competencies](#) (pages 9-10) – This list includes the competency statements that make up the 2021 version of the Core Competencies. The 2021 version of the Core Competencies contains 56 competency statements that apply across the public health workforce and across work settings. These competency statements are organized into eight domains.
- [Voting Guide](#) (page 11) – This guide details the number of competencies that can be selected and votes that each individual can cast within each [Core Competencies domain](#) as part of the prioritization process.

In addition, two supplemental files are available that can help support implementation of this process:

- Competency Selection Worksheets (Word) – These eight worksheets can be used to facilitate the prioritization process. There is a separate worksheet for each of the eight Core Competencies domains. The worksheets list the competencies from the 2021 Core Competencies that are included in each domain. They can be printed and distributed to workshop participants during Step 1 of the voting process. Participants can use the worksheets to indicate which competencies they feel are most important for their job category.
- Voting Template (Excel) – This template can be used by the workshop facilitator for tracking votes during the prioritization process and summarizing the results. *Tab 1: Instructions* contains instructions for using the template. *Tab 2: Tracking Votes* can be used to record the number of votes for each competency, the lists of the top 22 and final eight competencies selected, and any discussion notes. A separate spreadsheet should be used for each job category or crosscutting group. *Tab 3: Vote Summary* can be used to compare the number of votes for each competency across all job category and crosscutting groups. *Tab 4: Final Competency Lists* can be used to record the final eight competencies selected by each job category and crosscutting group.

For access to these files, please visit www.phf.org/DeterminingPHJobCompetencies.

Instructions for Use

This process is designed to help public health organizations determine essential Core Competencies for positions within the organization based on input from staff members who fill those positions. Through this process, the specific jobs present in the organization are grouped into categories based on similar responsibilities and activities, and representatives of these groups are asked to participate in a two-step voting process to identify the most important competencies for each job category. This two-step voting process asks participants to first select the most important competencies within each Core Competencies domain and then to select from that list the most essential competencies regardless of domain. The same voting

process is used by a leadership team, workforce development team, or other group composed of individuals with an organization-wide perspective to identify high-priority crosscutting competencies essential for all staff within the organization. All voting takes place in a workshop setting. The organization should plan to conduct a separate workshop for each of the job category and crosscutting groups, with workshops typically being about 2 hours long.

Preparing for the Workshop:

- Determine the purpose for engaging in this prioritization process and the specific question to ask workshop participants. For prioritizing competencies for job descriptions, the question may be: *Within your job category, what are the essential competencies (skills and knowledge) needed to support the work of [insert organization name] today?*
- Determine the job categories in which to group the staff of the organization. Job category groups can contain positions at various levels within the organization, but should bring together positions that engage in similar types of activities or projects, so that the competencies are likely to be similar. In deciding how broadly or narrowly to construct the groups, consider the costs and benefits of having more specific information compared to the time needed to prioritize competencies for multiple groups. Example job categories include:

Program Support	Individuals who support programs, but do not have direct patient contact (may include administrative staff, executive assistants, performance improvement staff, marketing and communications staff)
Patient/Customer Support	Individuals who serve patients or work in clinics or vital records (may include clerks, healthcare partners, clinic administrators, linkage to care staff, social workers)
Public Health Specialists	Public health and population-oriented program staff (may include planners, coordinators, trainers)
Data Drivers	Individuals who create or analyze data (may include epidemiologists, public health informaticians, researchers)
Healthcare Providers	Licensed staff who provide direct care to patients (may include physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants)
Directors	Individuals who provide broad vision and direction for the organization and its programs (may include directors, associate directors, administrative directors, program directors)

- Identify staff members who represent the job category groups and invite them to participate in the workshops. Each workshop should focus on a specific job category (or the crosscutting competencies) and should include a sufficient number of individuals who work in those positions to be inclusive and have a meaningful voting process. For a medium or large organization, 10-20 individuals may be a good goal number. Smaller organizations may wish to engage a smaller number of individuals or to lump positions into a few groups and meet with each of the small groups, rather than conducting

workshops. Each workshop typically takes about 2 hours, although workshop length can vary depending on the number of participants and level of discussion.

- Select a neutral facilitator(s) to conduct the workshop based on the steps described in *Conducting the Workshop*. Facilitators should have a working knowledge of the Core Competencies and the prioritization process and be able to engage the groups in discussion without imposing their views about priorities on the groups.¹

Conducting the Workshop:

- Provide participants with a brief overview of the Core Competencies, including the [skill areas represented by each of the eight domains](#) within the Core Competencies, to ensure that all participants have basic knowledge with which to engage in the prioritization process. This can be accomplished in-person or by webinar using a PowerPoint presentation.

- Guide participants through the two-step voting process.

Step 1:

- Beginning with Domain 1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills, using the [2021 Core Competencies](#) (pages 9-10), describe the competencies contained within the domain.
- Distribute the Competency Selection Worksheet for Domain 1. Each participant should receive a copy of the worksheet. The Competency Selection Worksheets are available as a supplemental file from www.phf.org/DeterminingPHJobCompetencies.
- Ask participants to select the most important competencies within the domain for their job category.

Domain 1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills
Describe factors that affect the health of a community
Access existing quantitative and qualitative data
Collect quantitative and qualitative data
Analyze quantitative and qualitative data
Manage quantitative and qualitative data
Use quantitative and qualitative data
Apply public health informatics in using data, information, and knowledge

- The number of competencies that can be selected varies by domain. Use the table below or the [Voting Guide](#) (page 11) to determine how many competencies can be selected for each domain. For example, for Domain 1, participants can select up to three competencies that they believe are the most important for their job category. If participants feel that the competencies within the domain are not relevant for their job category, they may select fewer competencies.

(Insert organization's question for participants)		Vote
Domain 1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills		
Describe factors that affect the health of a community		
Access existing quantitative and qualitative data		
Collect quantitative and qualitative data		
Analyze quantitative and qualitative data		
Manage quantitative and qualitative data		
Use quantitative and qualitative data		
Apply public health informatics in using data, information, and knowledge		
Assess community health status		

¹ Organizations who wish to engage in this prioritization process may benefit from working with an external facilitator who can manage the process and a content expert with expertise related to the Core Competencies who can provide background information, describe the domains and the 2021 Core Competencies, and answer participants' questions. The [Public Health Foundation](#) (PHF) provides these facilitation services to public health organizations. To discuss contracting with PHF for these services, please contact Ron Bialek at rbialek@phf.org or 202-218-4420.

- Instruct participants to make their own selections and to record them on the Competency Selection Worksheets.

Domain	Number of Competencies in Domain	Maximum Number of Competencies to Select/Votes per Participant
1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills	8	3
2: Policy Development and Program Planning Skills	7	3
3: Communication Skills	4	2
4: Health Equity Skills	7	3
5: Community Partnership Skills	5	2
6: Public Health Sciences Skills	4	2
7: Management and Finance Skills	13	4
8: Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills	8	3

- Count the number of votes for each competency to determine the three competencies within Domain 1 that received the most votes. Votes can be counted by having participants raise their hands to vote or by collecting completed Competency Selection Worksheets from participants.
 - Record the number of votes for each competency in the Tab 2 spreadsheet in the Voting Template. The Voting Template is available as a supplemental file from www.phf.org/DeterminingPHJobCompetencies.
 - Record the top three competencies for Domain 1 on a flip chart. Do not include the domain name or the number of votes on the flip chart.
- Repeat this process for each of the domains, using the [Voting Guide](#) to determine how many votes participants have and how many competencies should be selected within each domain.
 - Record all votes in the same Tab 2 spreadsheet in the Voting Template.
 - Record all of the top competencies selected on the same flip chart. When complete, the flip chart should list the 22 competencies that have been selected as most important for the job category.
- **Step 2:**
 - Using this list of 22 competencies, ask participants to identify up to eight competencies that they believe are the most essential for their job category.
 - Have participants place colored dots or draw checkmarks next to their selections on the flip chart.
 - Each participant gets eight votes that they can distribute as desired.
 - Count the number of votes for each competency to identify the top eight competencies that are most essential for individuals in the job category.

- **Dealing with a Tie:**
 - If voting during Step 1 or 2 results in a tie that affects the number of competencies that would be selected, facilitators should use their judgement to address this. Options for addressing this include conducting a tie-breaker vote or adding all of the tied competencies to the list.
 - With a tie-breaker vote, participants are asked to vote among only the competencies that are tied. This vote should be conducted at the time the tie occurs, before moving on to discuss the next domain.
 - Record the results of the tie-breaker vote in the same Tab 2 spreadsheet in the Voting Template as the results of the initial vote and add the appropriate competencies to the same flip chart.
 - If a tie-breaker vote is unsuccessful, facilitators may wish to simply add all of the tied competencies to the list.
 - A tie-breaker vote may be more appropriate in Step 1 of the voting process. Adding all of the tied competencies to the list may be more appropriate in Step 2.
- **Discussion:** Facilitate a discussion about this list of essential competencies and adjust the list as needed.
 - Ask participants questions such as:
 - *Is this list representative of the skills and knowledge needed by individuals in this job category?*
 - *Are there competencies on this list that surprise you?*
 - *Are there competencies that you expected to see on this list that are missing?*
 - *Do any competencies need to be added to the list or combined with similar competencies?*
 - Use the results of the discussion to adjust the list of competencies as needed.
 - It is fine to add, remove, or combine competencies based on the discussion, but try not to let the final list grow to more than about 10 competencies. The purpose of this process is not to identify any competency that may be relevant for a position, but to focus in on the most essential competencies for the position. The goal is a list of eight essential competencies.
- Repeat this process for each of the job category groups to identify essential competencies for that job category.
- Repeat this process with a leadership team, workforce development team, or other group with an organization-wide perspective to identify crosscutting competencies relevant for all staff within the organization.

Following the Workshop:

- Record any notes about decisions made in creating the competency lists in the Tab 2 spreadsheet in the Voting Template.
- Summarize the results of the votes for all job category groups and the crosscutting group in the Tab 3 spreadsheet in the Voting Template to enable comparison across groups.

- Document the final lists of competencies for all job category groups and the crosscutting group in the Tab 4 spreadsheet in the Voting Template to enable comparison across groups.

Using the Results

The lists of essential competencies identified for the job categories, along with the list of crosscutting competencies for the organization, can be used to incorporate competencies into job descriptions. These competency lists offer a starting point in terms of important foundational skills for the positions present within the organization. In prioritization activities, organizations must balance a desire for specificity with the time needed to complete the activity. It would be possible to conduct this prioritization process with more specific job category groups than those described in the example above and thus to develop competency lists even more specific to individual positions; however, this would require additional time and resources. The competency lists identified through this process should be considered in the context of each individual type of position and adjusted as necessary to capture the nuances of the position.

These competency lists are based on the 2021 version of the Core Competencies. In incorporating competencies into job descriptions, organizations may wish to list relevant individual competency statements from the Core Competencies or to develop brief phrases that capture the general intent of the competency statements.

Completing this prioritization process for several job category groups that well represent the staff of an organization can enable the organization to look across the groups to see which competencies are being prioritized and where there may be gaps. If the competencies prioritized by the staff members working in a position are very different from the competencies expected of those individuals by leadership, better communication and alignment of job descriptions with actual job responsibilities and tasks may be needed.

Other Potential Uses

The prioritization process in this tool has been presented as a way to identify competencies for use in job descriptions within public health organizations – identifying the most essential competencies needed by staff members to support the current work of an organization. The 2021 Core Competencies and a similar process could also be used in other workforce development activities, to prioritize competencies, conduct competency assessments, identify training needs, and develop workforce development plans. By varying the question asked of participants engaged in the process, organizations can focus in on the most critical competencies for their organizations in a variety of ways and look at current as well as future assets and needs.

Questions or Assistance

Technical assistance is available to support public health organizations in using this prioritization process. For questions related to this tool or additional information on obtaining assistance, please contact Kathleen Amos at kamos@phf.org or 202-218-4418.

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2021 Core Competencies: Competency Statements

Domain 1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills
Describe factors that affect the health of a community
Access existing quantitative and qualitative data
Collect quantitative and qualitative data
Analyze quantitative and qualitative data
Manage quantitative and qualitative data
Use quantitative and qualitative data
Apply public health informatics in using data, information, and knowledge
Assess community health status
Domain 2: Policy Development and Program Planning Skills
Develop policies, programs, and services
Implement policies, programs, and services
Evaluate policies, programs, services, and organizational performance
Improve policies, programs, services, and organizational performance
Influence policies, programs, and services external to the organization
Engage in organizational strategic planning
Engage in community health improvement planning
Domain 3: Communication Skills
Determine communication strategies
Communicate with internal and external audiences
Respond to information, misinformation, and disinformation
Facilitate communication among individuals, groups, and organizations
Domain 4: Health Equity Skills
Apply principles of ethics, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
Engage in continuous self-reflection about one's biases
Recognize the diversity of individuals and populations
Reduce systemic and structural barriers that perpetuate health inequities
Implement organizational policies, programs, and services to achieve health equity and social and environmental justice
Contribute to achieving and sustaining a diverse, inclusive, and competent public health workforce
Advocate for health equity and social and environmental justice
Domain 5: Community Partnership Skills
Describe conditions, systems, and policies affecting community health and resilience
Establish relationships to improve community health and resilience
Maintain relationships that improve community health and resilience
Collaborate with community members and organizations
Share power and ownership with community members and others

Domain 6: Public Health Sciences Skills
Describe systems, policies, and events impacting public health
Apply public health sciences in delivering the 10 Essential Public Health Services
Use evidence in developing, implementing, evaluating, and improving policies, programs, and services
Contribute to the evidence base for improving health
Domain 7: Management and Finance Skills
Describe factors that affect the health of an organization
Secure human resources
Manage human resources
Engage in professional development
Secure financial resources
Manage financial resources
Implement organizational policies, programs, and services to achieve diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
Manage programs and services
Engage in contingency planning
Apply critical thinking in decision making
Engage individuals and teams to achieve program and organizational goals
Facilitate collaboration among individuals, groups, and organizations
Engage in performance management
Domain 8: Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills
Create opportunities to achieve cross-sector alignment
Implement a vision for a healthy community
Address facilitators and barriers impacting delivery of the 10 Essential Public Health Services
Create opportunities for creativity and innovation
Respond to emerging needs
Manage organizational change
Engage politicians, policymakers, and the public to support public health infrastructure
Advocate for public health

Voting Guide

This guide details the number of votes that each individual can cast and competencies that can be selected within each domain of the [2021 Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals](#) as part of the prioritization process. For each domain, Step 1 of the voting process aims to narrow down the number of relevant competencies. Participants are asked to identify the top 2-4 most important competencies within each domain, with the goal number depending on the number of competencies within the domain. This results in a list of 22 important competencies, which is further narrowed to eight essential competencies through Step 2 of the voting process.

Domain	Number of Competencies in Domain	Maximum Number of Competencies to Select/Votes per Participant
1: Data Analytics and Assessment Skills	8	3
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4: Health Equity Skills	7	3
5: Community Partnership Skills	5	2
6: Public Health Sciences Skills	4	2
7: Management and Finance Skills	13	4
8: Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills	8	3
Total Number of Competencies After First Stage of Voting		22
Total Number of Competencies After Second Stage of Voting		8