**DOCUMENT PURPOSE:**

This document provides a detailed step-by-step guide of the activities, tools, and resources associated with building a competency model within the NIH construct.

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| **TIMEFRAME** | **ACTION**  **(Numbers do not necessarily dictate order)** | **DESCRIPTION/DETAILS** | **TOOLS, SAMPLES, and RESOURCES** | **NOTES** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PHASE I:**  **PLANNING AND SCOPING WITH PROJECT SPONSOR** | | | | |
| **PURPOSE OF PHASE:** | The purpose of this phase is to meet with the project sponsor to discuss their goals in using competencies and how to build and validate a competency model that best fits the needs of the organization. | | | |
|  | 1. Conduct a pre-building/validation meeting with the project sponsor | During this time you will:   * Determine the sponsor’s end objectives (Why do they want to implement competencies?) * Determine the types of competencies to include in the model (technical, non-technical, leadership & management) * Discuss barriers/limitations (timeline, resources, etc.) * Collect key notes and takeaways * Discuss the next steps | Additional suggested questions may include:   * + What external factors are affecting the organization?   + What are the pain points?   + Is the partnership being requested by the sponsor or is it something that they are being directed to do.   + Is there a particular problem they are trying to solve with competencies?   + Is there a desired future state? | Each engagement will be different depending on the sponsor’s expectations, needs and time available. |
|  | 1. Prepare for the validation meeting by researching current factors that may affect how the competency model will be used in the organization | * Pull or request a staff-list to gain understanding of the population you will be working with (e.g., grades, supervisory status) * Review discussion with sponsor and relate pain points and future activities to specific competencies or types of competencies |  |  |
| **PHASE II:**  **COMPETENCY MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND SOURCE DOCUMENTS** | | | | |
| **PURPOSE of PHASE:** | The purpose of this phase is to research source documents associated with the positions, job series and/or job functions included in the competency model and create a draft competency list for validation by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). | | | |
|  | 1. Research Previous NIH competency models and available information. | * Search to see if there are any historic competency models already developed by either NIH OHR, and OD Office, or another IC * Research if there are any NIH level models * If there is an existing model, create a crosswalk of the old model to the current NIH competency dictionary | * [NIH Competency Models](https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/occupation-specific/default.htm) * [NIAID Competency Intranet Site](http://inside.niaid.nih.gov/topic/humanResources/competencies/function/Pages/default.aspx) |  |
| 1. Research non-NIH Competency Models. | * Look to see if there have been successful efforts outside of NIH to develop competency models for the given function (*e.g., Contracting FAI competency models*) | * [OPM](http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/competencies/) * [HHS](http://hhsu.learning.hhs.gov/competencies/comps-index.asp) * [Federal Acquisition Institute](https://www.fai.gov/drupal/humancapital/human-capital-planning#Comp) |  |
| 1. Acquire and analyze source documents for competency research. | * Scan source documents for evidence of requirements and behaviors and log them in a source document matrix. Utilize the source document matrix to build a draft competency list. * To develop a list of competencies analyze the following: * Position Description (HR CARDS) * PMAP * Job Announcement * Job Analysis (HR CARDS) * Job Assessment Questionnaires * Prior/Related Competency Models * Federal or other certification requirements | * [PD LIST HR Classification and Recruitment Document System (HR CARDS)](http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrsystems/staffing/pdlibrary/default.htm) * [Competency Source Document Matrix (Appendix 1)](#Appendix1) * [NIH Competencies Dictionary](http://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/core/default.htm) | The source documents are where you will pull out the relevant competencies. Use the NIH competency dictionary to see what competencies are available to use and the key behaviors associated with each.  The HR CARDS system is a centralized location available for position descriptions.  NOTE: When requesting PMAPS, indicate that you do not need the “cover sheet” which indicated the employee’s PMAP rating. You only need the PMAP elements for the employee. |
| 1. Research partner organization Vision/Values/Functions. | * View the organization webpage (internal and external) to see the office’s official work statement and what they see as important. Information can also be obtained from strategic plans or other documentation, if available. * Add competencies to the source matrix and draft list that would advance the vision and values of the organization. |  | Gain an understanding of the primary function of the organization.  Are there specific issues affecting the organization now? In the future? |
| 1. Create a source document matrix. | * Create a Source Document Matrix to capture and document all sources used to create the draft competency list. | * [Competency Source Document Matrix (Appendix 1)](#Appendix1) | The competency source document matrix will allow you to link each competency to the source(s) that support its inclusion in the model. This will be important as we must be able to justify why the competency is being suggested and what was used as the source. |
| 1. Create draft competency list based on source documents. | * Use the source documents to create a draft competency list that represents the competencies listed in all the source documents. | * [NIH Competencies Dictionary](http://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/core/default.htm) * [Sample Competency List (Appendix 2)](#Appendix2) | Based on the data available in the research on the function, develop a competency model using the competencies in the NIH dictionary. The initial draft model will likely include more competencies than the final model, since its purpose is to give the validation team a starting point for their discussions. |
| **PHASE** **III:**  **VALIDATION OF THE COMPETENCY MODEL** | | | | |
| **PURPOSE of PHASE:** | The purpose of the validation phase is to gain input on the draft competency list by a group of subject matter experts (SMEs) who perform or supervise the work/functions that the model covers. | | | |
| Prior to the validation meeting | 1. Set a date, time and location for the validation meeting. | * Coordinate the date and time with the project sponsor. The desired size of the validation team usually ranges around 7-10 participants, but can vary based on the size of the organization. See *SME Criteria Document* for more information. | * [SME Criteria Document (Appendix 3)](#Appendix3) | It is recommended that there be at least two facilitators to facilitate the discussion and capture detailed notes.  Recommended best practice is to schedule two (2) 90–120 minute meetings approximately one week apart. You may or may not need both of these meetings depending on the number of competencies, complexity of the model, and validation team dynamics. |
| 1. Send validation session meeting request to all identified validation participants. | * The project sponsor will identify the validation participants based on the *SME criteria document*. * Once the participants have been identified by the project sponsor, arrange to send a calendar invite to each validation participant nominee, informing them of their contribution expectations. | * [SME invite from leadership sample (Appendix 4)](#Appendix5) | It will be helpful to attach a draft meeting agenda and draft competency model if available. |
| 1. Prepare validation meeting materials. | * Agenda * Competency Program Overview Slide Deck * Draft Competency List * Source Document * Sign-In Sheet * NIH Proficiency Scale | * [Competency Source Document (Appendix 1)](#Appendix1) * [Sample Competency List (Appendix 2)](#Appendix2) * [Validation Meeting Agenda Sample (Appendix 5)](#Appendix5) * [NIH Proficiency Scale (Appendix 6)](#Appendix6) | The sign-in sheet should be archived for the future; when the time comes to revalidate the model, it will be helpful to recall who participated in the initial validation. |
| 1. Have a conversation with a sponsor/SME/stakeholder you have a working relationship with to | * You may want to have a brief conversation with someone close to the organization to gauge if there are any current hot issues, pitfalls to avoid, or any political issues that may come up or may influence the validation session. |  | This conversation will provide you with a backstory, help to identify potential pit falls, and/or identify supporters/detractors. |
| During the validation meeting | 1. Conduct the competency validation meeting. | * During the validation meeting the facilitator will present the group of SMEs with the draft competency list and the group will review and validate each competency to discuss if each competency should be included in the final competency list/model. * Be sure to have someone capture detailed notes/minutes from the validation session. These are especially helpful if the sponsor is not part of the validation team and later questions any of the decision process. * The final product from this phase will be a validated competency list. |  |  |
| After the validation meeting | 1. Send follow-up e-mail to all validation participants. | * Send an e-mail to all validation meeting participants thanking them for their time and asking them to review the final competency list that they validated one last time. * Allow the group a week to review the list and provide any final comments or input, be sure to attach the meeting notes/minutes and the final competency list that the group agreed on during the validation session. |  |  |
| 1. Collect any post-validation feedback. | * Address any feedback received after the competency model validation from the group. |  | Post-validation feedback may need to be incorporated into the final model. Be sure to get approval from all SMEs (may be via email or in person) prior to incorporating any changes to the model after the validation session. |
| 1. Finalize competency model and meet with or send to sponsor for final approval. | * After a week has been given to the SME validation team for them to provide comments/feedback on the competency list, finalize the model and provide to the project sponsor(s) for their final input and approval. |  | The project sponsor typically has the “last say” with the model and needs to provide their approval of the final competency model. |

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**Appendix 1: Sample Source List and Matrix**

| **Sources** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. 2006 NIH Competency Model | 1. Job Analysis GS-7 | 1. PD GS-9 |
| 1. Current OPM Competency Model | 1. Job Analysis GS-9 | 1. PD GS-12 |
| 1. Behavioral Interview Guide | 1. Job Analysis GS-9 FPL 12 | 1. PD GS-13 |
| 1. Job Announcement GS-7 | 1. Job Analysis GS-13 | 1. PMAP GS-7 |
| 1. Job Announcement GS-9 | 1. Assessment Questions FPL 12 | 1. PMAP GS-9 |
| 1. Job Announcement GS-9/11/12 | 1. Assessment Questions FPL 13 | 1. PMAP GS-12 |
| 1. Job Announcement GS-13 | 1. PD GS-7 | 1. PMAP GS-13 |
| 1. OPM Position Classification Flysheet |  |  |

| **Competency** | **Definition/Interpretation** | **Sources** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Financial Management | Applies critical financial concepts and practices to establish and maintain realistic budgets. | * 1 - NIH Model * 2 - OPM Model * 4-7 all Job Announcements * 11-12 Job Analysis GS 12-13 * 15-18 all PDs * 21-22 PMAPs GS 12-13 |
| 1. Leveraging Technology | Seeks out ways to employ technology to optimize organizational and individual performance. | * 19-22 - all PMAPs * 3 – Interview Guide * 13-14 - Assessment Questionnaire |
| 1. Competency Name | Competency Definition | * Source 1 * Source 2 * Source3 |
| 1. Competency Name | Competency Definition | * Source 1 * Source 2 * Source3 |

| **Additional *Technical* Competencies to be Considered** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Competency** | **Definition/Interpretation** | **Source** |
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| **Additional *Non-Technical* Competencies to be Considered** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Competency** | **Definition/Interpretation** | **Source** |
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**Appendix 2: Position X Draft Competency List**

**[Office/Function Name]**

The following is an outline of the proposed [Office/Position/Function] Competency List. The subsequent pages include more detailed competency definitions and key behaviors.

**Technical Competencies**

1. Acquisition Management
2. List all proposed Technical Competencies here

**Non-Technical Competencies**

1. Advisory Assistance
2. List all proposed Non-Technical Competencies here

**Core Competencies**

1. Communications
2. Customer Service
3. Decision Making
4. External and Organizational Awareness
5. Interpersonal Relations
6. Problem Solving

**Technical Competencies and Key Behaviors**

1. **Acquisition Management**

Manages post-award contract activities through contract close-out.

**Key Behaviors**

* Serves as primary point of contact concerning contractual matters.
* Works closely with customer/partner to ensure terms of contracts are fulfilled in compliance with the terms of the contract and applicable laws and regulations.
* Plans, directs, coordinates, and manages the various contracting functions, including administering, modifying, closing out and terminating contracts.

1. **List all proposed Technical Competencies followed by their definitions and key behaviors**

**Non-Technical Competencies and Key Behaviors**

1. **Advisory Assistance**

Provides appropriate guidance, feedback and resources.

**Key Behaviors**

* Seeks information to understand problems, expectations, and needs of clients in assigned area.
* Provides accurate and timely guidance.
* Provides ‘resolution-based’ information when identifying problems and recommending solutions.
* Supports leadership and staff by planning, preparing, organizing and managing information and materials.
* Facilitates submissions of required documentation and in the appropriate format.
* Serves as an advisor and resource to improve process, designs, functionality and management.
* Explains documentation and policy requirements and limitations to managers.

1. **List all proposed Non-Technical Competencies followed by their definitions and key behaviors**

**IC Core Competencies and Key Behaviors**

1. **Communications**

Delivers clear, effective communication and takes responsibility for understanding others.

**Key Behaviors**

* Clearly and effectively conveys information verbally.
* Asks appropriate questions.
* Organizes, expresses, and communicates ideas clearly in writing.
* Listens actively; asks clarifying questions and summarizes or paraphrases what others have said to verify understanding.
* Ensures that regular communication occurs based on the needs of the work, the individual, management or the situation.
* Uses analogies, visuals, and other techniques to tailor communications to specific audiences.
* Identifies and uses effective communication channels and methods (e.g., presentations, electronic dissemination, social media).
* Utilizes skill in presenting information, analysis, ideas and positions in a clear, succinct, accurate, convincing manner, as is appropriate with the audience.

1. **Customer Service**

Demonstrates a commitment to public service; serves and satisfies internal and external customers; holds self accountable for quality outcomes.

**Key Behaviors**

* Establishes and maintains credibility with the public, partners, customers, and co-workers.
* Works with customers to assess their needs in an effort to meet/exceed requirements and expectations.
* Conveys a positive attitude when interacting with customers and staff.
* Identifies opportunities to improve customer service and satisfaction.
* Understands customers and takes a proactive approach to meeting their needs in an effective and timely manner.
* Engages the customer as a partner in delivering service.
* Makes use of specialized knowledge to assist customers in resolving problems.
* Uses ‘non-technical’ language skillfully to ensure effective communication with customers from all levels of understanding.
* Recognizes that customer feedback is an opportunity to improve performance, and identifies the need for any changes in service delivery.
* Builds and maintains effective working relationships and partners with customers.
* Balances interests of a variety of customers.
* Sets, commits to, and maintains high standards for quality work and responsiveness in providing administrative services.

1. **Decision Making**

Obtains information and identifies key issues and implications to make informed, objective decisions.

**Key Behaviors**

* Approaches a complex task or problem by breaking it down into parts and considers each part in detail.
* Seeks information about alternatives and chooses an option that meets a goal, solves a problem or avoids a risk.
* Actively looks for discrepancies and inconsistencies in available information.
* Considers the costs, benefits, risks, and chances for success, when making a decision.
* Draws sound, fact-based conclusions, particularly when under pressure or faced with ambiguity.
* Makes informed, timely and effective decisions, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information, and consulting others, when appropriate.

1. **External and Organizational Awareness**

Identifies and understands how internal and external issues (e.g., economic, political, social trends) impact the work of the organization.

**Key Behaviors**

* Demonstrates an understanding of the organization’s functions and responsibilities.
* Considers organization’s capabilities, mission, vision, values, and strategic goals and objectives in work efforts.
* Knows capabilities, capacities and constraints of the organization.
* Reviews external information and news to learn about political and social issues that might affect the organization.
* Identifies individuals who have the technical expertise to respond to inquiries on specific topics.
* Escalates issues that warrant immediate attention in an effective and timely manner.
* Uses discretion when handling sensitive matters/content.
* Keeps current on formal and informal reporting relationships.

1. **Interpersonal Relations**

Develops and maintains effective relationships with others; relates well to people from varied backgrounds and in different situations; shows understanding, courtesy, tact, empathy, concern, and politeness.

**Key Behaviors**

* Relates to people in an open, friendly, and professional manner.
* Cooperates and works to gain support and commitment from others when performing tasks.
* Discusses subjects in a constructive manner, with all levels of staff.
* Fosters cooperation, collaboration, and communication to facilitate consensus and accomplish tasks.
* Demonstrates diplomacy by approaching others about sensitive issues in non-threatening ways.
* Fosters an environment conducive to open, transparent communications among all levels.
* Notices and accurately interprets what others are feeling, based on their choice of words, tone of voice, expressions, and other nonverbal behavior.
* Presents oneself in a professional manner to maintain image and credibility.

1. **Problem Solving**

Identifies problems and uses logic, judgment, and data to evaluate alternatives and recommend solutions to achieve the desired organizational goal or outcome.

**Key Behaviors**

* Identifies and evaluates problems and possible causes to determine root causes and impacts.
* Generates solutions, taking into consideration political, organizational and individual realities.
* Identifies options for solving a problem and evaluates the relative strengths and weaknesses of each option.
* Uses a logical method for organizing and analyzing information.
* Researches issues thoroughly.  Does not jump to quick conclusions or formulate opinions based on incorrect assumptions, or inaccurate/incomplete information.
* Uses expertise in policies and procedures to identify problems, and makes recommendations for addressing these via communication, job aids, training, etc.
* Coordinates with others within his/her network, subject-matter experts and/or additional senior staff to interpret administrative policies, offer advice and solve related problems.

**Appendix 3 - Subject Matter Expert (SME) Selection Criteria Document**

The following information provides some guidance around the role of the subject matter expert (SME) and other participants in validating competencies and related information/ materials. This document **focuses on three issues** that one should be aware of and/or consider when choosing SMEs: 1) the type of participant; 2) level of participation; 3) document participation.

1. **Type of Participant**: Invite and involve incumbents to the job, and top performers, across grade levels (higher and lower grades).

* There two roles that participants can play in validation: **1)** Job incumbents/ supervisors (‘*respondents’)* who participate in interviews or complete a structured survey; and **2)** *SMEs* who provide guidance regarding the development of measures (surveys and rating scales), assist in data collection, and link tasks to competencies.
* In selecting SMEs/respondents it is important to ensure that the group(s) selected is representative of the population of the role(s)/function(s) being discussed.
* Participants are typically high performing job incumbents and supervisors who possess both content knowledge and a clear understanding of the job/functions (recommend at least one year of recent experience in performing or supervising in the function).
* Participants consider including one SME at the “entry level.” Having only expert participants can result in information that is not reasonable for a minimally qualified person.
* Participants should also be representative of the population of the function being discussed in terms of demographic representation (e.g., gender, race, grade, education, age, tenure).

1. **Level of Participation:** Ensure there is sufficient level of representation for the roles/function(s) being discussed.

* Typically the number of SMEs range from 7-8 participants. However, this number serves as a guideline and the true number may depend on other factors such as the resources available.
* To get a sufficient level of representation you would have to look at characteristics of the population for the function and based on those characteristics, select sample representatives of the population. The numbers/percentages would dependent on developing a sampling plan using sampling methodology.

1. **Document Participation:** Capture those who participate in the process (sign in sheets to each meeting, sign off on the final documents).

* For SMEs, use a SME Qualifications Form for each participant that outlines basic organization employment information (e.g., name, agency, job title); demographic information (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity); description of experience related to the function; and the amount of time and work experience related to the function. Sign-in sheets can also be used for each meeting to maintain an accurate record of the validation process.
* For job incumbents/supervisors who are surveyed, background information such as education level, age, ethnicity, gender, current work assignment, etc. should be captured on the questionnaire.

**Appendix 4 – SME Invite from Leadership Sample**

Good morning,

On [day and date], we will be participating in a [position/function titel] Competencies Validation Session which will be facilitated by [your name or office].  You have been selected as a subject matter expert for this process to help [organization] leadership determine which competencies should be included in the competency model.

During the validation meeting, we will review and validate non-technical and technical competencies associated with our work. Your expertise is critical to ensure that we have the most comprehensive list that accurately reflects the critical competencies needed for staff to be successful in their work roles.

To prepare for this meeting, we ask that you please review the attached draft competencies list.  The attached list includes a proposed breakout of the technical and non-technical competencies based on a review of our position descriptions, job announcements, past competency model, and other resources.

The focus of the validation session on [date] will be on the following questions related to each competency on the attached list:

* Does the competency provide information, focus, and clarity around what is needed for staff to successfully perform the work in this organization?
* Will the competency provide employees with the knowledge necessary to perform their jobs successfully and accomplish their duties?
* Will the competency help clarify requirements for employees and guide their professional development?
* Does the competency allow us to grow (for whatever the future holds technically and as an organization)?

Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Regards,

[Name]

**Appendix 5 – Validation Meeting Agenda Sample**

**Competencies Validation Meeting**

**Date: TBD**

**Time: TBD**

**Location: TBD**

**Meeting Agenda**

1. Introduction of Participants – 5 min
2. Program Overview & Goals of the Validation Session – 20 min
3. Review and Discuss the draft competency lists – 90 min (with a 10 min break)
4. Next Steps – 5 min

**Focus Areas**

During the validation meeting, participants will be asked to consider the following questions when evaluating and providing feedback on the draft list of competencies:

* Does the current list include the particular **competencies** needed for staff to **successfully perform the work** of our organization?
* How will the work of staff in this job function change in the **future**? What will this mean for the **types of competencies** staff will need to be successful?
* Consider **top performers** (inside and outside of your office). What **differentiates** them? Makes them successful?
* What would you **look for in a new hire**; what are those characteristics critical for success in the position?
* Are the definitions clear for employees to **gauge how proficient** they are in each competency? Will the competency help to **guide development**?

**Appendix 6 -** **The NIH Proficiency Scale**

The NIH Proficiency Scale is an instrument used to measure one’s ability to demonstrate a competency on the job. The scale captures a wide range of ability levels and organizes them into five steps; from “Fundamental Awareness” to “Expert.”

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Proficiency Level** | **Description** |
| 1 | ***Fundamental Awareness*** (basic knowledge) | You have a common knowledge or an understanding of basic techniques and concepts.   * Focus is on learning. |
| 2 | ***Novice*** (limited experience) | You have the level of experience gained in a classroom and/or experimental scenarios or as a trainee on-the-job. You are expected to need help when performing this skill.   * Focus is on developing through on-the-job experience; * You understand and can discuss terminology, concepts, principles, and issues related to this competency; * You utilize the full range of reference and resource materials in this competency. |
| 3 | ***Intermediate*** (practical application) | You are able to successfully complete tasks in this competency as requested. Help from an expert may be required from time to time, but you can usually perform the skill independently.   * Focus is on applying and enhancing knowledge or skill; * You have applied this competency to situations occasionally while needing minimal guidance to perform successfully; * You understand and can discuss the application and implications of changes to processes, policies, and procedures in this area. |
| 4 | ***Advanced*** (applied theory) | You can perform the actions associated with this skill without assistance. You are certainly recognized within your immediate organization as "a person to ask" when difficult questions arise regarding this skill.   * Focus is on broad organizational/professional issues; * You have consistently provided practical/relevant ideas and perspectives on process or practice improvements which may easily be implemented; * You are capable of coaching others in the application of this competency by translating complex nuances relating to this competency into easy to understand terms; * You participate in senior level discussions regarding this competency; * You assist in the development of reference and resource materials in this competency. |
| 5 | ***Expert*** (recognized authority) | You are known as an expert in this area. You can provide guidance, troubleshoot and answer questions related to this area of expertise and the field where the skill is used.   * Focus is strategic; * You have demonstrated consistent excellence in applying this competency across multiple projects and/or organizations; * You are considered the “go to” person in this area within NIH and/or outside organizations; * You create new applications for and/or lead the development of reference and resource materials for this competency; * You are able to diagram or explain the relevant process elements and issues in relation to organizational issues and trends in sufficient detail during discussions and presentations, to foster a greater understanding among internal and external colleagues and constituents. |