Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals

Adopted April 2001

Prologue Revised August 2005

A collaborative activity of:

PHF
Public Health Foundation

HRSA
Health Resources and Services Administration
About the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice

The Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (Council) is comprised of leaders from national organizations representing the public health practice and academic communities. The Council grew out of the Public Health Faculty/Agency Forum, which developed recommendations for improving the relevance of public health education to the demands of public health in the practice sector. The need for this improvement, and for public health professionals to place a higher value on practice-specific training and research, was documented in the 1988 Institute of Medicine report *The Future of Public Health*.

**The Council’s Mission:**
To improve public health practice and education by fostering, coordinating, and monitoring links between academia and the public health and healthcare community, developing and advancing innovative strategies to build and strengthen public health infrastructure, and creating a process for continuing public health education throughout one’s career.

**Member Organizations:**
American College of Preventive Medicine ........................................... www.acpm.org
American Public Health Association ..................................................... www.apha.org
Association of Schools of Public Health .................................................. www.asph.org
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials ............................... www.astho.org
Association of Teachers of Preventive Medicine .................................... www.atpm.org
Association of University Programs in Health Administration .................. www.aupha.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ......................................... www.cdc.gov
Community-Campus Partnerships for Health ........................................ www.ccph.info
Council of Accredited Masters of Public Health Programs ....................... no website
Health Resources and Services Administration ..................................... www.hrsa.gov
National Association of County and City Health Officials ......................... www.naccho.org
National Association of Local Boards of Health .................................. www.nalboh.org
National Environmental Health Association ......................................... www.neha.org
National Network of Public Health Institutes ........................................ www.nnphi.org
QUAD Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations ........................ no website
Society for Public Health Education ...................................................... www.sophe.org

The Council is staffed by the Public Health Foundation and is funded through a cooperative agreement between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Association of Schools of Public Health.

For more information about the Council, please visit [www.phf.org/Link.htm](http://www.phf.org/Link.htm) or contact the Public Health Foundation at 202-218-4400.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Council ............................................................................................................................................. i
Prologue .......................................................................................................................................................... 1
Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals .................................................................................. 3
  Analytic/Assessment Skills ...................................................................................................................... 3
  Policy Development/Program Planning Skills ......................................................................................... 3
  Communication Skills .............................................................................................................................. 4
  Cultural Competency Skills ..................................................................................................................... 4
  Community Dimensions of Practice Skills ............................................................................................ 5
  Basic Public Health Sciences Skills ....................................................................................................... 5
  Financial Planning and Management Skills ............................................................................................ 6
  Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills .................................................................................................. 6
Assistance with Using the Core Competencies ......................................................................................... 7
The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals is a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for the broad practice of public health. It reflects the characteristics that the staff of a public health organization, collectively, should strive to possess in order to protect and promote health in its community. The competencies are designed to serve as a starting point for academic and practice organizations to assess training and workforce needs and to design curriculum and content for training and education programs. After receiving extensive feedback from many individuals in the public health field, the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (Council) adopted the list on April 11, 2001.

Development
The Council developed the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals to help strengthen public health workforce development. This list builds on ten years of work on this subject by the Council and numerous other organizations and individuals in public health academic and practice settings. The list has been cross-walked with the Essential Public Health Services to ensure that the competencies help build the skills necessary for assuring the delivery of or providing these services.

The list has also been reviewed by more than 1,000 public health professionals during a public comment period. The Council received feedback from reviewers via several mechanisms, including e-mail, focus groups, sessions at various conferences, and the Competencies website. The comments from public health professionals in a broad array of disciplines and practice settings have led to this consensus set of core competencies for guiding public health workforce development efforts.

Uses
These competencies are designed to foster workforce development by helping academic institutions and training providers to develop curricula and course content, and to evaluate public health education and training programs. The competencies are also used in practice settings as a framework for hiring and evaluating staff and assessing organization-wide gaps in skills and knowledge. Academic institutions and health departments nationwide—as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers for Public Health Preparedness, and the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Public Health Training Centers—have used the Core Competencies. The Core Competencies have also been included in objectives and recommendations set forth in Healthy People 2010 and the Institute of Medicine’s reports Who Will Keep the Public Healthy? Educating Public Health Professionals for the 21st Century and The Future of the Public’s Health in the 21st Century.

The Core Competencies have also served as the foundation for the development of more-specific sets of competencies that can be used in conjunction with the Core Competencies. (For a partial list of discipline specific competencies, please see page 7.) The Core Competencies were crafted to transcend the boundaries of specific disciplines and to help unify the public health profession. Therefore, this list of crosscutting competencies may not contain competencies that are specific to particular disciplines within the field. Moreover, because this list is meant to represent the core, it may not contain many skills that are necessary for the performance of certain jobs within certain practice settings. Individuals, employers, educators, and trainers should use this list as a starting point for developing a modified list of competencies that matches their needs. Whenever possible, as users integrate the Core Competencies into discipline specific sets, consistency of domain names should be maintained.
Organization
The competencies are divided into the following eight domains:

Analytic/Assessment Skills  Community Dimensions of Practice Skills
Policy Development/Program Planning Skills  Basic Public Health Sciences Skills
Communication Skills  Financial Planning and Management Skills
Cultural Competency Skills  Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills
Community Dimensions of Practice Skills  Basic Public Health Sciences Skills
Financial Planning and Management Skills  Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills

Skills and knowledge are listed first within each domain, followed by important attitudes relevant to the practice of public health. While attitudes may be more difficult to measure, they should be included in curriculum and content development efforts.

This effort of the Council focuses on core competencies as they apply to three job categories: front line staff, senior level staff, and supervisory and management staff. Definitions for these job categories are available at http://www.phf.org/competencies.htm. The Council acknowledges that these job categories are defined broadly and the lines of distinction between them are not always clear. However, the categories are meant to be flexible and adaptable to the evolving profession. While core competencies for clerical or support staff (e.g., clerks; dental, lab, or nursing assistants; data entry staff; etc.) are also important, they are beyond the scope of the current effort. The Council also recognizes that, in many public health settings, job category is often related to educational background. However, educational level and years of experience are not included in the job category definitions because they do not necessarily dictate function within an organization.

Levels of skill have been assigned to each competency based on the job category of the public health professional. The three skill levels are aware, knowledgeable, and advanced (formerly used the term “proficient”). The skill levels for each competency by job category represent the majority opinion of individuals who reviewed the list on the website. When two consecutive skill levels for a particular competency received nearly the same number of votes—a difference of 10% or less—from reviewers, the Council reports both skill levels to indicate that the actual level of skill falls along the continuum between the two. Although skill levels do vary by job category, all public health professionals should at least be aware of these Core Competencies.

Detailed lists of the Core Competencies by job category, skill level, and Essential Public Health Service are available online at www.phf.org/competencies.htm.

Period of Adoption
The Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice adopted the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals on April 11, 2001 for a three-year period. The Council determined that it would review the list for potential revision by April 2004. However, feedback from the field in early 2004 indicated that more examples of competencies use and a rationale for making changes were needed before a revision should be considered. The Council will continue to monitor the use of the Core Competencies and try to determine if sufficient evidence exists to require a revision of the list.

For more information on tools and resources to help you use the Core Competencies, please see page 7.
Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals

Analytic/ Assessment Skills

♦ Defines a problem
♦ Determines appropriate uses and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative data
♦ Selects and defines variables relevant to defined public health problems
♦ Identifies relevant and appropriate data and information sources
♦ Evaluates the integrity and comparability of data and identifies gaps in data sources
♦ Applies ethical principles to the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of data and information
♦ Partners with communities to attach meaning to collected quantitative and qualitative data
♦ Makes relevant inferences from quantitative and qualitative data
♦ Obtains and interprets information regarding risks and benefits to the community
♦ Applies data collection processes, information technology applications, and computer systems storage/retrieval strategies
♦ Recognizes how the data illuminates ethical, political, scientific, economic, and overall public health issues

Policy Development/ Program Planning Skills

♦ Collects, summarizes, and interprets information relevant to an issue
♦ States policy options and writes clear and concise policy statements
♦ Identifies, interprets, and implements public health laws, regulations, and policies related to specific programs
♦ Articulates the health, fiscal, administrative, legal, social, and political implications of each policy option
♦ States the feasibility and expected outcomes of each policy option
♦ Utilizes current techniques in decision analysis and health planning
♦ Decides on the appropriate course of action
♦ Develops a plan to implement policy, including goals, outcome and process objectives, and implementation steps
♦ Translates policy into organizational plans, structures, and programs
♦ Prepares and implements emergency response plans
♦ Develops mechanisms to monitor and evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality
Communication Skills
♦ Communicates effectively both in writing and orally, or in other ways
♦ Solicits input from individuals and organizations
♦ Advocates for public health programs and resources
♦ Leads and participates in groups to address specific issues
♦ Uses the media, advanced technologies, and community networks to communicate information
♦ Effectively presents accurate demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for professional and lay audiences

Attitudes
♦ Listens to others in an unbiased manner, respects points of view of others, and promotes the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives

Cultural Competency Skills
♦ Utilizes appropriate methods for interacting sensitively, effectively, and professionally with persons from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, ethnic and professional backgrounds, and persons of all ages and lifestyle preferences
♦ Identifies the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in determining the delivery of public health services
♦ Develops and adapts approaches to problems that take into account cultural differences

Attitudes
♦ Understands the dynamic forces contributing to cultural diversity
♦ Understands the importance of a diverse public health workforce
Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals

Community Dimensions of Practice Skills

♦ Establishes and maintains linkages with key stakeholders
♦ Utilizes leadership, team building, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills to build community partnerships
♦ Collaborates with community partners to promote the health of the population
♦ Identifies how public and private organizations operate within a community
♦ Accomplishes effective community engagements
♦ Identifies community assets and available resources
♦ Develops, implements, and evaluates a community public health assessment
♦ Describes the role of government in the delivery of community health services

Basic Public Health Sciences Skills

♦ Identifies the individual's and organization's responsibilities within the context of the Essential Public Health Services and core functions
♦ Defines, assesses, and understands the health status of populations, determinants of health and illness, factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, and factors influencing the use of health services
♦ Understands the historical development, structure, and interaction of public health and health care systems
♦ Identifies and applies basic research methods used in public health
♦ Applies the basic public health sciences including behavioral and social sciences, biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental public health, and prevention of chronic and infectious diseases and injuries
♦ Identifies and retrieves current relevant scientific evidence
♦ Identifies the limitations of research and the importance of observations and interrelationships

Attitudes
♦ Develops a lifelong commitment to rigorous critical thinking
Financial Planning and Management Skills

- Develops and presents a budget
- Manages programs within budget constraints
- Applies budget processes
- Develops strategies for determining budget priorities
- Monitors program performance
- Prepares proposals for funding from external sources
- Applies basic human relations skills to the management of organizations, motivation of personnel, and resolution of conflicts
- Manages information systems for collection, retrieval, and use of data for decision-making
- Negotiates and develops contracts and other documents for the provision of population-based services
- Conducts cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility analyses

Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills

- Creates a culture of ethical standards within organizations and communities
- Helps create key values and shared vision and uses these principles to guide action
- Identifies internal and external issues that may impact delivery of essential public health services (i.e., strategic planning)
- Facilitates collaboration with internal and external groups to ensure participation of key stakeholders
- Promotes team and organizational learning
-Contributes to development, implementation, and monitoring of organizational performance standards
- Uses the legal and political system to effect change
- Applies theory of organizational structures to professional practice
Assistance with Using the Core Competencies

Tools Available

www.phf.org/competencies.htm

Please see the Tools section to access resources designed to help academic and practice organizations use the Core Competencies. These resources include:

- A toolkit to help integrate competencies into education and training programs
- A framework for developing online competency-based training initiatives
- A sample competency assessment survey
- Presentations about the Core Competencies

www.TRAIN.org

TRAIN is the nation’s premier learning resource for all professionals who protect the public’s health. Visit www.TRAIN.org to search the database for courses that address the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals.

Examples of Use

www.phf.org/competencies.htm

You can review assorted examples from practice and academic settings of how organizations have benefited from the Core Competencies. Each example includes contact information. The examples are broken down into the following categories:

- Curriculum review and development
- Discipline specific competency development
- Workforce needs assessment
- Performance measurement
- Personnel system refinement

Other Competencies Lists

More than 45 sets of core and discipline specific competencies have been developed, which either build on or can be used with the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals. The list below provides just a snapshot of the types of competencies sets being used throughout the country.

Bioterrorism and emergency readiness  Health education
Public health law  Public health leadership
Environmental health  Preventive medicine
Genomics  Maternal and child health

More information about these competencies lists is available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Office of Workforce and Career Development (formerly the Office of Workforce Policy and Planning) website. See the Tools section of www.phf.org/competencies.htm for updated links to this and other resources.

Your Comments and Examples

The Council is seeking feedback about the utility of the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals from users in the field. Visit www.phf.org/competencies.htm to learn how to submit examples of ways you have applied the Core Competencies to your workforce development efforts. We also welcome comments about the usefulness and value or limitations of the competencies set.
Academic and practice organizations throughout the country are using the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals. The Core Competencies can help your organization to:

- Develop curriculum and course content
- Evaluate education and training programs
- Craft job descriptions and evaluate staff
- Assess gaps in knowledge and skills of individual employees and of the organization as a whole
- Develop discipline specific competencies sets to be used in conjunction with the Core Competencies

Visit [www.phf.org/competencies.htm](http://www.phf.org/competencies.htm) to view more information—including definitions and source documents, current challenges, and examples of use—and to submit your own examples. To search for courses arranged by Core Competencies visit [www.TRAIN.org](http://www.TRAIN.org).