Competency Implementation Guide

Purpose of This Tool:

This tool will assist you with understanding and implementing competencies in your organization.

The tool will:

- **Introduce you to competencies**
  - Definition of a competency
  - Anatomy of a competency
  - Benefits of using competencies in your organization
  - Competency types
- **Explain how to implement and use competencies in your organization for learning and development purposes**

Competencies, A General Overview

General Overview:
What are Competencies?

Competencies - encompass knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) *combined* with relevant personal characteristics to successfully perform in your job/role.

WHAT

Technical

…..you need to know

HOW

Behavioral

…..you apply what you know
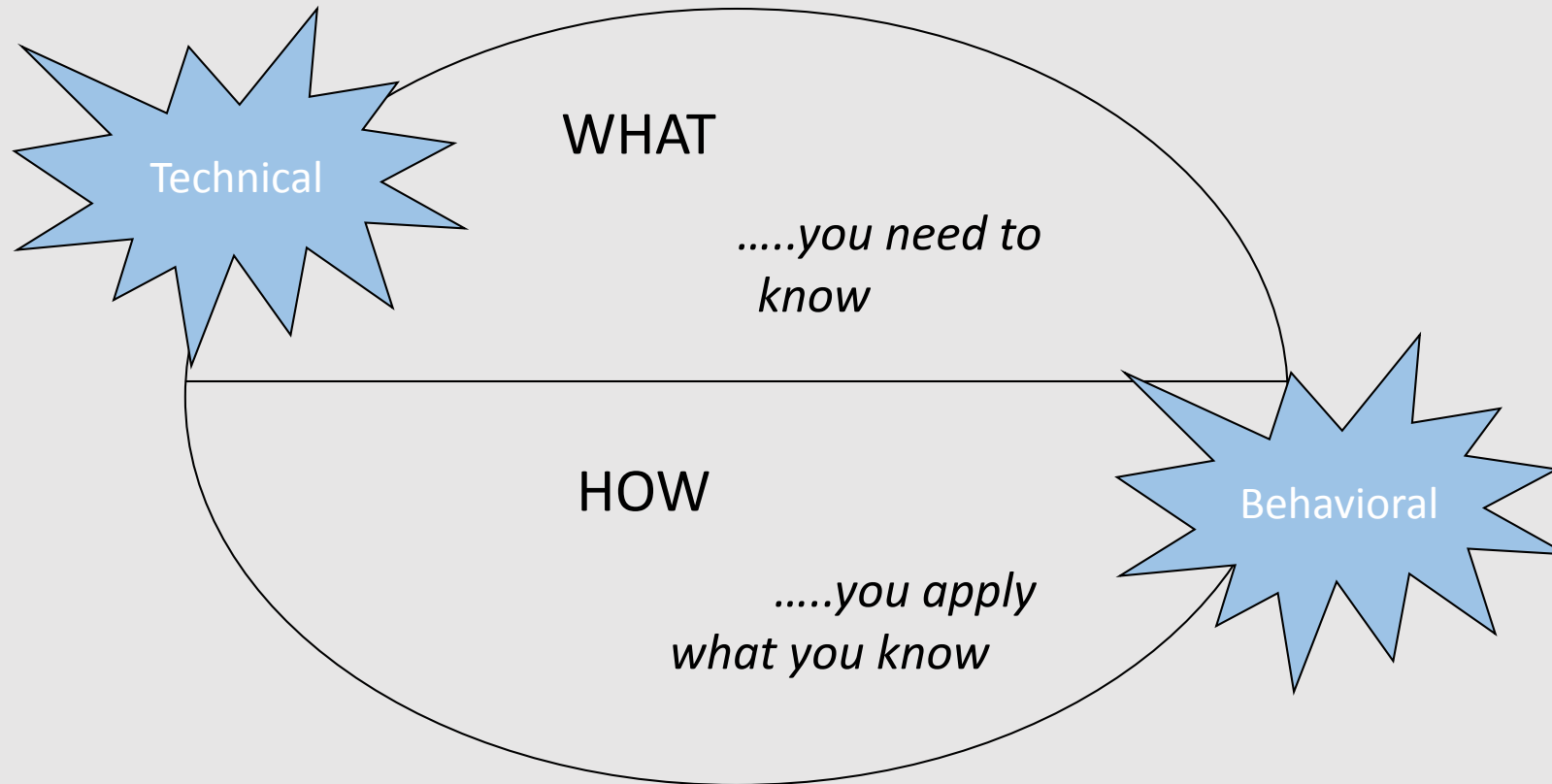
Competencies describe the observable, measurable, key behaviors or actions that can be seen when a job is being done.

General Overview:
Anatomy of a Competency

A competency has three parts: **Title**, **Definition**, **Key Behaviors**.

Title:	Definition:
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.
- Takes specific actions to meet/exceed customer requirements and expectations.
- Conveys a positive attitude when interacting with customers and staff.
- Identifies opportunities to improve customer service and satisfaction.

Key behaviors are __examples__ of observable actions that an employee could be expected to demonstrate in successfully performing his/her work.

General Overview:
Benefits of Using Competencies in your Organization

Competencies offer multiple benefits to an organization and its workforce.

Benefit	How?
Define Capabilities	Provides a **common language** for describing workforce needs as they relate to the mission and strategic objectives of the organization.
Clarify Expectations	Establishes and **communicates expectations** for the specific behaviors that contribute to successful job performance.
Support Learning	Encourages employees to be accountable for their professional development; Focuses learning on **clearly identified development needs**.
Improve Conversations	Provides a baseline and opens the door for professional development and performance **conversations** between employees and supervisors.
Identify Realistic Goals	Identifies strategic, **targeted** and realistic learning and development objectives/needs.
Increase Awareness	Promotes understanding of the competencies expected for a move into a new job; including becoming supervisors/managers or changing careers.
Sustain the Organization	Identifies strategic, targeted and realistic learning and development objectives/needs to support a strongly sustaining organization with a defined **succession strategy**.
Support Management of Employees (Manager's Toolkit)	Managers can use Competencies to: Identify minimum requirements for new hires (interviewing tool); Articulate and standardize expectations; Capture knowledge from retiring employees; and Focus staff on selected aspects of performance to achieve the mission and organization's objectives.

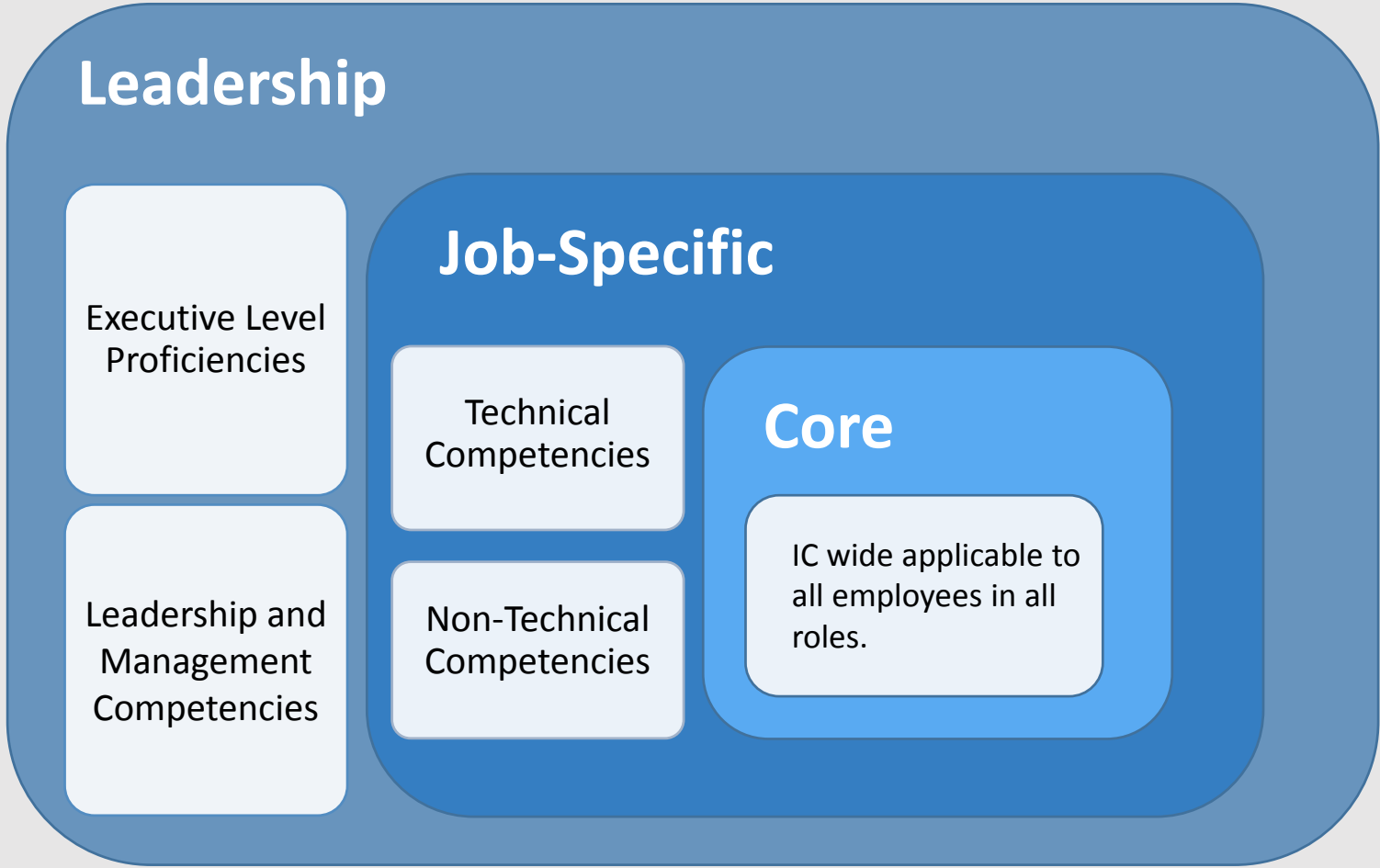# General Overview:
Additional Benefits of Competencies

Benefits for the Organization:

- Ensures that organization-funded training and professional development activities are cost-effective, goal-oriented, productive, and are approached in a systematic manner
- Establishes expectations for performance excellence
- Defines what success looks like
- Can reduce potential turnover caused by miscommunication of job expectations
- Improves communication between employee and supervisors
- Can promote internal employee mobility
- Establishes a framework for constructive feedback by supervisors
- Outlines employee development and promotional paths within the organization
- Reinforces organizational strategy, culture, and vision

Benefits for the Employee

- Sets clear performance expectations for employees, enabling them to make better decisions and work more effectively
- Gives employees insight into the overall strategy of their team, department, and organization, leading to greater engagement and motivation
- Enables employees to be more proactive beyond their individual roles, by learning additional competencies that are valued by the organization
- Provides clear direction for learning new job skills
- Offers a reference resource for day-to-day requirements
- Increases the potential for job satisfaction
- Provides a mechanism for the recognition of employees' abilities
- Supports a more specific and objective assessment of their strengths and specify targeted areas for professional development
- Provides the basis for a more objective dialogue with their manager or team about performance, development, and career related issues.

General Overview:
Competency Types

Leadership

Executive Level Proficiencies

Leadership and Management Competencies

Job-Specific

Technical Competencies

Non-Technical Competencies

Core

IC wide applicable to all employees in all roles.

General Overview:
Competency Types, Cont.

❑ **Core Competencies**:
- Support the Institute/Center's desired culture and promotes the mission/vision of the entire organization
- Required of all employees regardless of job function
- Represent the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of all employees to perform in any occupation and/or function
- Determined by Senior/Executive leadership of the Institute/Center

❑ **Technical Competencies**:
- Represent the skill sets required for specific functional areas
- Are the very specific skills related to the technical demands of the organization that help you complete your specific tasks
- Are the competencies related to "*what gets done*"

❑ **Non-Technical Competencies**
- Are the "softer" behavioral/cognitive skills needed to be successful in your role
- Not directly related to the control of technical proficiency
- Help define and drive cultural and interpersonal aspects of work behavior
- Foundational competencies such as "Accountability" and "Leveraging Technology" which can be applied across any or all occupations
- Are the competencies related to "*how things get done*"

General Overview:
Competency Types, Cont.

❑ **Leadership and Management Competencies**:

- Represent the essential competencies necessary to be a successful and effective leader and/or manager within the Institute/Center

- Based on "official" position of leadership within the organization

    - Office/Division Directors

    - Branch Chiefs

    - Team Leads

❑ **Executive Level Proficiencies**:

- These proficiencies are designed to identify the skill sets of the top levels of management and can be used as a guide for individuals aspiring to reach these positions (e.g., IC Director, Deputy IC Director, Scientific Director, Extramural Director, or Executive Officer).Based on "official" position of leadership within the organization

General Overview:
Potential Applications of Competencies

❑ **Individual and Organizational Learning and Development** *(most common use of competencies at NIH)*

- Validation of competency models/lists that define success in a given role/job function
- Self and supervisory competency assessments
- Individual Development Plans (IDPs) resulting from competency assessment results
- Organizational learning strategies

❑ **Workforce Planning**

- Defining the work performed at the Institute/Center
- Improving operations and effectiveness (clarifying roles/expectations and work norms, driving culture)

❑ **Workforce Skills Inventory and Gap Analyses**

- Outlining the ranges of competency proficiency levels within each job function and determining where gaps reside

❑ **Succession and Transition Planning**

- Competencies-based skills inventory can tell leaders and managers about the capabilities and readiness of the pipeline of potential candidates to fill key positions in the future
- Can be used to develop a bench strength (depth chart) report and action plan for development and Succession & Transition Planning purposes

❑ **Recruiting/Interviewing**

- Assess if candidates demonstrate levels of proficiency in the competencies needed for defining success in a role or job function for which is being hired for
- Identify minimum requirements for new hires
- Articulate and standardize expectations

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization for Employee Learning and Development

Implementing Competencies in your Organization:
High-Level Process

Step 1: Select a pre-developed NIH model or build your own model

Step 2: Validate the model with SMEs *(See "NIH Competency Validation Toolkit")*

Step 3: Introduce model to the employee population

Step 4: Employees conduct self-assessment

Step 5: Supervisors assess direct reports

Step 6: Post assessment conversations between supervisor and direct report

Step 7: Employee creates Individual Learning Plan (IDP)

Step 8: Employee pursues approved learning activities as outlined in IPD

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Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 1: Select a Pre-Developed NIH Model or Build Your Own

NIH has a wide array of suggested pre-existing competency models which are available by visiting the NIH Competency Site by clicking [here](#).

If building a new model, use the [NIH Competency Dictionary](#) as a guide to analyze source documents such as PD's, job analyses, job announcements, job assessment questions, PMAPs:

- Identify the Non-Technical competencies that are essential for the position (as a rule of thumb you should have no more than 9 non-technical competencies)

- Identify the Technical competencies that are essential for the position

- Include your Institute/Center's Core competencies if applicable

- If the position entails supervisory duties you can also consider the leadership and management competencies

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 1: Things to Consider if Building a New Model

- Does the model include the particular **competencies** needed for staff to **successfully perform the work** in the job role?

- 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 in order to perform at high levels?

- Consider **high performers** (in and outside of the organization). What **differentiates** them? What makes them successful?

- What would you **look for in a new hire**; what are those characteristics critical for success in the position?

- Keep the model manageable. While it can be easy to include many competencies, only include the ones that are essential to describing what success looks like in the job role.

- **Focus on the behaviors** rather than the tasks and avoid a lot of specificity about tasks that can change frequently over time

Office of Acquisitions Competency List

The following is an outline of the Office of Acquisitions. The subsequent pages include more detailed competency definitions and key behaviors.

Technical Competencies
1. Acquisition Financial Management
2. Acquisition Management and Administration
3. Acquisition Planning
4. Contract Negotiation and Source Selection
5. Project Management
6. Solicitation

Non-Technical Competencies
1. Accountability
2. Adaptability
3. Attention to Detail
4. Collaboration
5. Continuous Learning and Self Development
6. Data Gathering and Analysis
7. Federal Departmental Policy and Procedures and Knowledge
8. Leveraging Technology
9. Professional Integrity

Institute Core Competencies
1. Communication
2. Customer Service
3. Decision Making
4. External and Organizational Awareness
5. Interpersonal Relations
6. Problem Solving

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 2: Validate the Model with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

Whether you are using a pre-existing NIH model or developing a new one, it is important to validate the model with SMEs to ensure the model depicts the necessary competencies needed to be successful in the job role now and into the future.

A small group of top performing SMEs should be asked to review the model and consider the following questions:

- Does the model include the particular competencies needed for staff to successfully perform the work?

- How will the work of staff in this job change in the future? What will this mean for the types of competencies staff will need to be successful?

- Consider top performers (in and outside of the organization). What differentiates them? What makes them successful?

- What would you look for in a new hire; what are the characteristics critical for success in the position?

- Are the definitions clear for staff to rate how proficient they are in each competency? And guide development?

- Is anything missing from the model?

Now that the model has been validated by SMEs, introduce the model through a kick-off meeting to all employees in the organization. Discuss how the model will be used (typically to enforce the culture and drive learning and development activities) and outline the next steps in the process.

Introduce the SME validation group so all employees can see that that the model was validated by their peers and so they can also have a chance to ask questions about the model and/or how it was validated/developed.

Explain that employees will be asked to assess their perceived levels of proficiency against competencies in the model and that their supervisor will also be assessing them against each of the competencies in the model.

*Emphasize that the purpose of this process is to guide individual and organizational learning and development activities and is **not tied to their PMAP assessment***.

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 4: Employees Conduct Self-Assessment

Using the NIH Proficiency Scale, the competency definitions, and key behaviors, employees should assess their perceived level of proficiency against each competency in the model.

This self-assessment can be completed electronically in the LMS by following the NIH LMS competency user guides, by using a simple excel tracker, or simply by writing proficiency levels on a sheet of paper next to each competency in the model.

It is important to remind employees that the NIH Proficiency Scale is **NOT tied to the PMAP rating scale** and that employees should be open and honest when assessing themselves.

Remind employees that the results of the self-assessment, when combined with other relevant information (e.g., organizational priorities, team needs, supervisory feedback), will support an employee and the organization in identifying their strengths and development needs.

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Proficiency - The ability to apply or demonstrate a competency on the job.

The NIH defines proficiencies using a rating scale with 5 levels: *(see appendix for detailed description of each level)*

1 - Fundamental Awareness (basic knowledge)

2 - Novice (limited experience)

3 - Intermediate (practical application)

4 - Advanced (applied theory)

5 - Expert (recognized authority)

Employees and supervisors will use the NIH proficiency scale to assess their perceived level of proficiency on each of the competencies in the competency model.

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 5: Supervisors Assess Their Direct Reports

Using the [NIH Proficiency Scale](#), the competency definitions, and key behaviors, supervisors should assess each direct reports' level of proficiency against each competency in the model.

The supervisory-assessment can be completed electronically in the LMS by following the [NIH LMS competency user guides](#), by using a simple excel tracker, or simply by writing the proficiency levels on a sheet of paper next to each competency in the direct report's model.

There may be times when a supervisor may not have had the chance to observe an employee demonstrating a competency but that's okay; this can be a topic of conversation during the post assessment conversation with the direct report.

It is important to remind supervisors that this is **not a PMAP activity** and that they are assessing their direct reports' levels of proficiency against a competency.

Remind supervisors that they will have an opportunity to meet with each direct report to discuss their ratings during the post assessment meetings.

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 6: Post Assessment Conversations Between Supervisor and Direct Report

After the self and supervisor assessments are complete, supervisors should schedule one on one meetings to discuss the results of the assessments.

During these meetings supervisors and employees should come together to review the proficiency ratings for each competency and discuss where strengths could be leveraged and where there may be opportunities for development.

The employee's and supervisor's proficiency assessment ratings for each competency may not be the same; if this is the case there should be a candid discussion around the difference of opinions to better understand the reasoning behind each rating.

These conversations will help both the supervisor and employee to better recognize where strengths can be capitalized upon and will provide a platform to discuss where there are opportunities for development, all of which will help the employee create a meaningful IDP.

This is a meeting with the supervisor and employee to discuss competency assessment results and proficiency scores.

During the meeting:

- Discuss the employee's assessment scores vs supervisor's scores
  - Where are there differences in scores?
  - How big are the differences (gaps)?
  - Is there a common understanding of the competency?
- Have a candid discussion to help each other better understand the basis for the assessment scores
- Discuss where strengths can be leveraged
- Discuss where there may be opportunities for development
- Gain a better idea of where you need to focus your learning and development efforts and which competencies you should focus on developing
- Establish an action plan or IDP

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Individual development plans are designed to help an individual map out their training and development plan for a period of time, generally between one and five years.

Employees should use the information gathered from their post assessment conversation with their supervisor to prioritize the competencies they want to focus their learning activities in the short to long term.

Using the NIH IDP Template employees should build their IDP.

Remind employees that not all learning activities have to be training.

Other examples of learning activities can include:

- Shadowing a leader or competency expert for a day
- Reading a book
- Participating in a stretch assignment
- Joining a cross-functional working group
- Job shadowing or rotations
- Interviewing an expert
- Mentoring and coaching

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 7: What is an IDP?

An **Individual Development Plan (IDP)** outlines career goals within the context of organizational objectives. It is a developmental "action" plan to move employees from where they are to where they would like to be or need to be. It provides systematic steps to improve performance and build on strengths related to one's current job, and to meet one's career goals. The goals of an IDP are developed by the employee with input from the supervisor. The IDP links the individual's career interests and needs to organizational priorities. IDPs are used to help employees:

- Learn new skills to improve current job performance
- Maximize current performance in support of organizational requirements
- Increase interest, challenges, and satisfaction in current position
- Obtain competencies that can help lead to career changes

An IDP is:

- A developmental partnership between the employee and manager. IDP preparation involves feedback, clarification, and discussion about developmental needs, goals, and plans. Manager-employee communication is key to the success of the IDP process. The mutual interests and concerns of the individual and the organization must be considered in the IDP process. The IDP is a vehicle to address the needs of the employee and the needs of the organization. The best IDPs begin with a plan to maximize current job performance. The activities can assist the individual in meeting both personal and organizational goals for success.
- A broadly defined developmental plan which may include on-the-job assignments, self-development activities, and formal classroom training.
- An active and ongoing process in the organization. Ideally, IDPs should be reviewed, updated, and revised every six (6) months, or as needed.

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 7: An IDP is *NOT*

- A performance appraisal. The IDP is not a means to formally assess the employee's performance. In this regard, it does not replace the performance appraisal system to determine promotion, pay, awards, etc.

- A contract for training. Employees should include all training interests on an IDP. However, training is not guaranteed because it is on an IDP. Training decisions are made in accordance with NIH's policy, priorities, and budgetary constraints.

- A way to clarify or revise a position description. If a position description does not accurately describe the duties performed, this is a matter for the manager and the Office of Human Resources to solve.

- A guarantee of a promotion to a higher grade. An IDP can help prepare an employee to become qualified for a higher graded position, but does not guarantee advancement.

- A panacea for manager-employee relations problems. The IDP is only one part of the comprehensive efforts of an organization to enhance job satisfaction and cooperative work relationships.

Implementing Competencies in Your Organization:
Step 8: Employee Pursues Approved Learning Activities as Outlined in IPD

Once employees complete building their IDP, they should forward it to their supervisor for final approval.

Once approved by their supervisor, employees should pursue the learning activities as outlined in the IDP.

The IDP is a living document and should be kept up to date on a continuous basis.

As the employee completes the learning activities, they should be documented in the IDP.

Other Uses for the Competency Model

Other Uses for Your Competency Model Can Include:

- Strategic workforce and organizational planning
- Identify hiring needs proactively based on competency gaps
- Talent pool assessment
- Clarifying expectations of the positon
- Basis for behavioral interviews
- Succession Planning

Competency Resources

Competency Resources

- **NIH competency main page**: https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/default.htm

- **NIH competency dictionary:** https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/core/default.htm

- **NIH competency FAQs:** https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/faqs.htm

- **NIH suggested competency models:** https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/occupation-specific/default.htm

- **NIH competency proficiency scale:** https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/proficiencyscale.htm

- **NIH competencies additional resources:** https://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/competencies/resources.htm

- **OPM competencies:** https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/assessment-strategy/

- **NIAID competency page:** http://inside.niaid.nih.gov/topic/humanresources/competencies/Pages/default.aspx

Appendix

NIH Proficiency Scale

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.

Individual Development Plan (IDP) Example