

Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals

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Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals (ADOPTED May 3, 2010)

(This version contains Core Competencies with examples imbedded in individual competencies.)

Introduction

The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals (Core Competencies) are a set of skills desirable for the broad practice of public health. They reflect the characteristics that staff of public health organizations (collectively) may want to possess as they work to protect and promote health in the community. The Core Competencies are designed to serve **as a starting point** for academic and practice organizations to understand, assess, and meet education, training and workforce needs.

About the Three Tiers – 1, 2 and 3

Tiers 1, 2 and 3 reflect the Core Competencies that public health professionals at different stages of their career may wish to have. Specifically, Tier 1 Core Competencies apply to entry level public health professionals (i.e. individuals that have limited experience working in the public health field and are not in management positions); Tier 2 Core Competencies apply to individuals with management and/or supervisory responsibilities; and Tier 3 Core Competencies apply to senior managers and/or leaders of public health organizations.

On May 3, 2010, the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (a coalition of representatives from 17 national public health organizations) unanimously adopted Tier 1 and Tier 3 Core Competencies, as well as minor changes to the Tier 2 Core Competencies. Tier 2 Core Competencies were originally adopted in June 2009. However, it was noted that some minor changes to Tier 2 Core Competencies were desirable in order to ensure a logical progression of competencies from Tier 1 to Tier 2 to Tier 3. “Guidance definitions” for the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 Core Competencies are listed on page 19 of this document.

Why the Core Competencies are Important

Over 50% of state and local health departments and more than 90% of public health academic institutions are using the Core Competencies to identify and meet workforce development needs. To learn more about how public health organizations are using the Core Competencies, go to www.phf.org/link/corecompetencies.htm.

Please Note

In the tables below, a grey background is used to denote that the same competency appears in more than one Tier. It should be noted that while the same competency may appear in more than one Tier, the way one demonstrates competence may vary from Tier to Tier.

Analytical/Assessment Skills		
Tier 1 ⁱ	Tier 2 (Mid Tier) ⁱⁱ	Tier 3 ⁱⁱⁱ
1A1. Identifies the health status of populations and their related determinants of health and illness (e.g. factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, the quality, availability and use of health services)	1B1. Assesses the health status of populations and their related determinants of health and illness (e.g. factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, availability and use of health services)	1C1. Reviews the health status of populations and their related determinants of health and illness conducted by the organization (e.g. factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, availability and use of health services)
1A2. Describes the characteristics of a population-based health problem (e.g. equity, social determinants, environment)	1B2. Describes the characteristics of a population-based health problem (e.g. equity, social determinants, environment)	1C2. Describes the characteristics of a population-based health problem (e.g. equity, social determinants, environment)
1A3. Uses variables that measure public health conditions	1B3. Generates variables that measure public health conditions	1C3. Evaluates variables that measure public health conditions
1A4. Uses methods and instruments for collecting valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data	1B4. Uses methods and instruments for collecting valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data	1C4. Critiques methods and instruments for collecting valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data
1A5. Identifies sources of public health data and information	1B5. References sources of public health data and information	1C5. Expands access to public health data and information
1A6. Recognizes the integrity and comparability of data	1B6. Examines the integrity and comparability of data	1C6. Evaluates the integrity and comparability of data
1A7. Identifies gaps in data sources	1B7. Identifies gaps in data sources	1C7. Rectifies gaps in data sources

Analytical/Assessment Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
1A8. Adheres to ethical principles in the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of data and information	1B8. Employs ethical principles in the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of data and information	1C8. Ensures the application of ethical principles in the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of data and information
1A9. Describes the public health applications of quantitative and qualitative data	1B9. Interprets quantitative and qualitative data	1C9. Integrates the findings from quantitative and qualitative data into organizational operations
1A10. Collects quantitative and qualitative community data (e.g. risks and benefits to the community, health and resource needs)	1B10. Makes community-specific inferences from quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. risks and benefits to the community, health and resource needs)	1C10. Determines community specific trends from quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. risks and benefits to the community, health and resource needs)
1A11. Uses information technology to collect, store, and retrieve data	1B11. Uses information technology to collect, store, and retrieve data	1C11. Uses information technology to collect, store, and retrieve data
1A12. Describes how data are used to address scientific, political, ethical, and social public health issues	1B12. Uses data to address scientific, political, ethical, and social public health issues	1C12. Incorporates data into the resolution of scientific, political, ethical, and social public health concerns
		1C13. Identifies the resources to meet community health needs

Policy Development/Program Planning Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
2A1. Gathers information relevant to specific public health policy issues	2B1. Analyzes information relevant to specific public health policy issues	2C1. Evaluates information relevant to specific public health policy issues
2A2. Describes how policy options can influence public health programs	2B2. Analyzes policy options for public health programs	2C2. Decides policy options for public health organization
2A3. Explains the expected outcomes of policy options (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)	2B3. Determines the feasibility and expected outcomes of policy options (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)	2C3. Critiques the feasibility and expected outcomes of various policy options (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)
2A4. Gathers information that will inform policy decisions (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)	2B4. Describes the implications of policy options (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)	2C4. Critiques selected policy options using data and information (e.g. health, fiscal, administrative, legal, ethical, social, political)
		2C5. Determines policy for the public health organization with guidance from the organization's governing body
	2B5. Uses decision analysis for policy development and program planning	2C6. Critiques decision analyses that result in policy development and program planning
2A5. Describes the public health laws and regulations governing public health programs	2B6. Manages public health programs consistent with public health laws and regulations	2C7. Ensures public health programs are consistent with public health laws and regulations

Policy Development/Program Planning Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
2A6. Participates in program planning processes	2B7. Develops plans to implement policies and programs	2C8. Implements plans and programs consistent with policies
2A7. Incorporates policies and procedures into program plans and structures	2B8. Develops policies for organizational plans, structures, and programs	2C9. Ensures the consistency of policy integration into organizational plans, procedures, structures, and programs
2A8. Identifies mechanisms to monitor and evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality	2B9. Develops mechanisms to monitor and evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality	2C10. Critiques mechanisms to evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality
2A9. Demonstrates the use of public health informatics practices and procedures (e.g. use of information systems infrastructure to improve health outcomes)	2B10. Incorporates public health informatics practices (e.g. use of data and information technology standards across the agency where applicable, and use of standard software development life cycle principles when developing new IT applications)	2C11. Oversees public health informatics practices and procedures (e.g. use of data and information technology standards across the agency where applicable, and use of standard software development life cycle principles when developing new IT applications)
2A10. Applies strategies for continuous quality improvement	2B11. Develops strategies for continuous quality improvement	2C12. Implements organizational and system-wide strategies for continuous quality improvement
		2C13. Integrates emerging trends of the fiscal, social and political environment into public health strategic planning

Communication Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
3A1. Identifies the health literacy of populations served	3B1. Assesses the health literacy of populations served	3C1. Ensures that the health literacy of populations served is considered throughout all communication strategies
3A2. Communicates in writing and orally, in person, and through electronic means, with linguistic and cultural proficiency	3B2. Communicates in writing and orally, in person, and through electronic means, with linguistic and cultural proficiency	3C2. Communicates in writing and orally, in person, and through electronic means, with linguistic and cultural proficiency
3A3. Solicits community-based input from individuals and organizations	3B3. Solicits input from individuals and organizations	3C3. Ensures that the public health organization seeks input from other organizations and individuals
3A4. Conveys public health information using a variety of approaches (e.g. social networks, media, blogs)	3B4. Uses a variety of approaches to disseminate public health information (e.g. social networks, media, blogs)	3C4. Ensures a variety of approaches are considered and used to disseminate public health information (e.g. social networks, media, blogs)
3A5. Participates in the development of demographic, statistical, programmatic and scientific presentations	3B5. Presents demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for use by professional and lay audiences	3C5. Interprets demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for use by professional and lay audiences

Communication Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
3A6. Applies communication and group dynamic strategies (e.g. principled negotiation, conflict resolution, active listening, risk communication) in interactions with individuals and groups	3B6. Applies communication and group dynamic strategies (e.g. principled negotiation, conflict resolution, active listening, risk communication) in interactions with individuals and groups	3C6. Applies communication and group dynamic strategies (e.g. principled negotiation, conflict resolution, active listening, risk communication) in interactions with individuals and groups
		3C7. Communicates the role of public health within the overall health system (e.g., federal, state, county, local government)

Cultural Competency Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
4A1. Incorporates strategies for interacting with persons from diverse backgrounds (e.g. cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, gender, age, ethnic, sexual orientation, professional, religious affiliation, mental and physical capabilities)	4B1. Incorporates strategies for interacting with persons from diverse backgrounds (e.g. cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, gender, age, ethnic, sexual orientation, professional, religious affiliation, mental and physical capabilities)	4C1. Ensures that there are strategies for interacting with persons from diverse backgrounds (e.g. cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, gender, age, ethnic, sexual orientation, professional, religious affiliation, mental and physical capabilities)
4A2. Recognizes the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in the accessibility, availability, acceptability and delivery of public health services	4B2. Considers the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in the accessibility, availability, acceptability and delivery of public health services	4C2. Ensures the consideration of the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in the accessibility, availability, acceptability and delivery of public health services
4A3. Responds to diverse needs that are the result of cultural differences	4B3. Responds to diverse needs that are the result of cultural differences	4C3. Responds to diverse needs that are the result of cultural differences
4A4. Describes the dynamic forces that contribute to cultural diversity	4B4. Explains the dynamic forces that contribute to cultural diversity	4C4. Assesses the dynamic forces that contribute to cultural diversity
4A5. Describes the need for a diverse public health workforce	4B5. Describes the need for a diverse public health workforce	4C5. Assesses the need for a diverse public health workforce
4A6. Participates in the assessment of the cultural competence of the public health organization	4B6. Assesses public health programs for their cultural competence	4C6. Assesses the public health organization for its cultural competence

Cultural Competency Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
		4C7. Ensures the public health organization's cultural competence

Community Dimensions of Practice Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
5A1. Recognizes community linkages and relationships among multiple factors (or determinants) affecting health (e.g. The Socio-Ecological Model)	5B1. Assesses community linkages and relationships among multiple factors (or determinants) affecting health	5C1. Evaluates the community linkages and relationships among multiple factors (or determinants) affecting health
5A2. Demonstrates the capacity to work in community-based participatory research efforts	5B2. Collaborates in community-based participatory research efforts	5C2. Encourages community-based participatory research efforts within the public health organization
5A3. Identifies stakeholders	5B3. Establishes linkages with key stakeholders	5C3. Establishes linkages with key stakeholders
5A4. Collaborates with community partners to promote the health of the population	5B4. Facilitates collaboration and partnerships to ensure participation of key stakeholders	5C4. Ensures the collaboration and partnerships of key stakeholders through the development of formal and informal agreements (e.g. MOUs, contracts, letters of endorsement)
5A5. Maintains partnerships with key stakeholders	5B5. Maintains partnerships with key stakeholders	5C5. Maintains partnerships with key stakeholders
5A6. Uses group processes to advance community involvement	5B6. Uses group processes to advance community involvement	5C6. Uses group processes to advance community involvement

Community Dimensions of Practice Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
5A7. Describes the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the delivery of community health services	5B7. Distinguishes the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the delivery of community health services	5C7. Integrates the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the delivery of community health services
5A8. Identifies community assets and resources	5B8. Negotiates for the use of community assets and resources	5C8. Negotiates for the use of community assets and resources through MOUs and other formal and informal agreements
5A9. Gathers input from the community to inform the development of public health policy and programs	5B9. Uses community input when developing public health policies and programs	5C9. Ensures community input when developing public health policies and programs
5A10. Informs the public about policies, programs, and resources	5B10. Promotes public health policies, programs, and resources	5C10. Defends public health policies, programs, and resources
		5C11. Evaluates the effectiveness of community engagement strategies on public health policies, programs, and resources

Public Health Sciences Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
6A1. Describes the scientific foundation of the field of public health	6B1. Discusses the scientific foundation of the field of public health	6C1. Critiques the scientific foundation of the field of public health
6A2. Identifies prominent events in the history of the public health profession	6B2. Distinguishes prominent events in the history of the public health profession	6C2. Explains lessons to be learned from prominent events in the history in comparison to the current events of the public health profession
6A3. Relates public health science skills to the Core Public Health Functions and Ten Essential Services of Public Health	6B3. Relates public health science skills to the Core Public Health Functions and Ten Essential Services of Public Health	6C3. Incorporates the Core Public Health Functions and Ten Essential Services of Public Health into the practice of the public health sciences
6A4. Identifies the basic public health sciences (including, but not limited to biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, health services administration, and social and behavioral health sciences)	6B4. Applies the basic public health sciences (including, but not limited to biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, health services administration, and social and behavioral health sciences) to public health policies and programs	6C4. Applies the basic public health sciences (including, but not limited to biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, health services administration, and social and behavioral health sciences) to public health policies and programs
6A5. Describes the scientific evidence related to a public health issue, concern, or, intervention	6B5. Conducts a comprehensive review of the scientific evidence related to a public health issue, concern, or, intervention	6C5. Integrates a review of the scientific evidence related to a public health issue, concern, or, intervention into the practice of public health
6A6. Retrieves scientific evidence from a variety of text and electronic sources	6B6. Retrieves scientific evidence from a variety of text and electronic sources	6C6. Synthesizes scientific evidence from a variety of text and electronic sources

Public Health Sciences Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
6A7. Discusses the limitations of research findings (e.g. limitations of data sources, importance of observations and interrelationships)	6B7. Determines the limitations of research findings (e.g. limitations of data sources, importance of observations and interrelationships)	6C7. Critiques the limitations of research findings (e.g. limitations of data sources, importance of observations and interrelationships)
6A8. Describes the laws, regulations, policies and procedures for the ethical conduct of research (e.g. patient confidentiality, human subject processes)	6B8. Determines the laws, regulations, policies and procedures for the ethical conduct of research (e.g. patient confidentiality, human subject processes)	6C8. Advises on the laws, regulations, policies and procedures for the ethical conduct of research (e.g. patient confidentiality, human subject processes)
6A9. Partners with other public health professionals in building the scientific base of public health	6B9. Contributes to building the scientific base of public health	6C9. Contributes to building the scientific base of public health
		6C10. Establishes partnerships with academic and other organizations to expand the public health science base and disseminate research findings

Financial Planning and Management Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
7A1. Describes the local, state, and federal public health and health care systems	7B1. Interprets the interrelationships of local, state, and federal public health and health care systems for public health program management	7C1. Leverages the interrelationships of local, state, and federal public health and health care systems for public health program management
7A2. Describes the organizational structures, functions, and authorities of local, state, and federal public health agencies	7B2. Interprets the organizational structures, functions, and authorities of local, state, and federal public health agencies for public health program management	7C2. Leverages the organizational structures, functions, and authorities of local, state, and federal public health agencies for public health program management
7A3. Adheres to the organization's policies and procedures	7B3. Develops partnerships with agencies within the federal, state, and local levels of government that have authority over public health situations or with specific issues, such as emergency events	7C3. Manages partnerships with agencies within the federal, state, and local levels of government that have authority over public health situations or with specific issues, such as emergency events
	7B4. Implements the judicial and operational procedures of the governing body and/or administrative unit that oversees the operations of the public health organization	7C4. Manages the implementation of the judicial and operational procedures of the governing body and/or administrative unit that oversees the operations of the public health organization

Financial Planning and Management Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
7A4. Participates in the development of a programmatic budget	7B5. Develops a programmatic budget	7C5. Defends a programmatic and organizational budget
7A5. Operates programs within current and forecasted budget constraints	7B6. Manages programs within current and forecasted budget constraints	7C6. Ensures that programs are managed within current and forecasted budget constraints
7A6. Identifies strategies for determining budget priorities based on federal, state, and local financial contributions	7B7. Develops strategies for determining budget priorities based on federal, state, and local financial contributions	7C7. Critiques strategies for determining budget priorities
		7C8. Determines budgetary priorities for the organization
7A7. Reports program performance	7B8. Evaluates program performance	7C9. Evaluates program performance
7A8. Translates evaluation report information into program performance improvement action steps	7B9. Uses evaluation results to improve performance	7C10. Uses evaluation results to improve performance
7A9. Contributes to the preparation of proposals for funding from external sources	7B10. Prepares proposals for funding from external sources	7C11. Approves proposals for funding from external sources
7A10. Applies basic human relations skills to internal collaborations, motivation of colleagues, and resolution of conflicts	7B11. Applies basic human relations skills to the management of organizations, motivation of personnel, and resolution of conflicts	7C12. Applies basic human relations skills to the management of organizations, motivation of personnel, and resolution of conflicts

Financial Planning and Management Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
7A11. Demonstrates public health informatics skills to improve program and business operations (e.g. performance management and improvement)	7B12. Applies public health informatics skills to improve program and business operations (e.g. business process analysis, enterprise-wide information planning)	7C13. Integrates public health informatics skills into program and business operations (e.g. business process analysis, enterprise-wide information planning)
7A12. Participates in the development of contracts and other agreements for the provision of services	7B13. Negotiates contracts and other agreements for the provision of services	7C14. Approves contracts and other agreements for the provision of services
7A13. Describes how cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility analyses affect programmatic prioritization and decision making	7B14. Uses cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility analyses in programmatic prioritization and decision making	7C15. Includes the use of cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility analyses in programmatic prioritization and decision making
		7C16. Incorporates data and information to improve organizational processes and performance
		7C17. Establishes a performance management system

Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
8A1. Incorporates ethical standards of practice as the basis of all interactions with organizations, communities, and individuals	8B1. Incorporates ethical standards of practice as the basis of all interactions with organizations, communities, and individuals	8C1. Incorporates ethical standards of practice as the basis of all interactions with organizations, communities, and individuals
8A2. Describes how public health operates within a larger system	8B2. Incorporates systems thinking into public health practice	8C2. Integrates systems thinking into public health practice
8A3. Participates with stakeholders in identifying key public health values and a shared public health vision as guiding principles for community action	8B3. Participates with stakeholders in identifying key values and a shared vision as guiding principles for community action	8C3. Partners with stakeholders to determine key values and a shared vision as guiding principles for community action
8A4. Identifies internal and external problems that may affect the delivery of Essential Public Health Services	8B4. Analyzes internal and external problems that may affect the delivery of Essential Public Health Services	8C4. Resolves internal and external problems that may affect the delivery of Essential Public Health Services (e.g. through the identification of root causes and other QI processes)
8A5. Uses individual, team and organizational learning opportunities for personal and professional development	8B5. Promotes individual, team and organizational learning opportunities	8C5. Advocates for individual, team and organizational learning opportunities within the organization
8A6. Participates in mentoring and peer review or coaching opportunities	8B6. Establishes mentoring, peer advising, coaching or other personal development opportunities for the public health workforce	8C6. Promotes mentoring, peer advising, coaching or other personal development opportunities for the public health workforce, including him or herself

Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills		
Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
8A7. Participates in the measuring, reporting and continuous improvement of organizational performance	8B7. Contributes to the measuring, reporting and continuous improvement of organizational performance	8C7. Ensures the measuring, reporting and continuous improvement of organizational performance
8A8. Describes the impact of changes in the public health system, and larger social, political, economic environment on organizational practices	8B8. Modifies organizational practices in consideration of changes in the public health system, and the larger social, political, and economic environment	8C8. Ensures organizational practices are in concert with changes in the public health system, and the larger social, political, and economic environment
		8C9. Ensures the management of organizational change

ⁱ Tier 1 Core Competencies apply to public health professionals who carry out the day-to-day tasks of public health organizations and are not in management positions. Responsibilities of these public health professionals may include basic data collection and analysis, fieldwork, program planning, outreach activities, programmatic support, and other organizational tasks. In general, an individual at the Tier 1 level may be educated at the baccalaureate level, or educated at a higher level with limited experience as a public health professional.

ⁱⁱ Tier 2 (Mid Tier) Core Competencies apply to individuals with program management and/or supervisory responsibilities. Other responsibilities may include: program development, program implementation, program evaluation, establishing and maintaining community relations, managing timelines and work plans, presenting arguments and recommendations on policy issues etc. In general, Tier 2 competencies apply to individuals who have earned an MPH or related degree and have at least 5 years of work experience in public health or a related field (combined pre and post master's degree) or individuals who do not have an MPH or related degree, but have at least 10 years of experience working in the public health field.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tier 3 Core Competencies apply to individuals at a senior/management level and leaders of public health organizations. In general, an individual who is responsible for the major programs or functions of an organization, setting a strategy and vision for the organization, and/or building the organization's culture can be considered to be a Tier 3 public health professional. Tier 3 public health professionals (e.g. health officers, executive directors, CEOs etc.) typically have staff that report to them, and are educated at a similar or higher level than their Tier 2 counterparts.

For more information about the Core Competencies, please contact Pamela Saungweme at psaungweme@phf.org or 202.218.4424. We thank Janet Place of the North Carolina Public Health Academy at the University of North Carolina for preparing this matrix and her work chairing the Tier 1 Committee.