

Developing Park and Recreation Managers through Competency Development

An evidence-based approach to furthering the professionalism of parks and recreation management

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COMPETENCIES: An Evidence-based Approach that Supports Essential Park Services

- Parks and recreation managers are **essential professionals** protecting parklands, greenspaces, and protected areas.
- The work they do is **essential** to the **environment**, to **community health and resilience**, and to **the public** (Cohen et al. 2007, Hurd, 2005).
- Parks and recreation management is a **complex and dynamic field** requiring **highly competent professionals** with **many job duties and subspecialties** (Hurd, Barcelona, Zimmerman & Ready, 2019).
- Successful **management of Human Resources (HR)** is **crucial** to overall performance of park organizations (Minten, 2010).
- This presentation describes an **evidence-based approach** to further the professionalism of parks and recreation management through **competency-based management**.
- Here, we describe **three success stories** of competency-based management being applied both nationwide and globally.



Competencies are “the language of performance” (Armstrong, 2019, p.159)

Competencies- are “essential skills, knowledge, abilities, and personal characteristics needed for effective job performance” (Hurd, 2005, p.46)

Competency-based management- is a managerial model that focuses on the characteristics of an employee to meet organizational goals (Shet, Patil, and Chandawarker, 2019).

Utilizing competency-based management in professional settings—Hurd (2005)—Four uses for competency-based management within organizations:

1. **Standards for training & development:** employees can self-evaluate and identify training opportunities, growing skills and benefitting the organization
2. **Mechanisms to determine hiring standards:** clear definitions of competencies desired
3. **Tools for employee evaluation:** specific identification of training needs and gaps
4. **Frameworks for career advancement:** competencies serve as a career guide at each level within the organization.



KEY POINTS

- Competency-based management focuses on personal characteristics and skills of employees, with the goal to elevate their professional characteristics and further professionalism of the entire organization or field.
- Competencies are clearly defined standards, agreed-upon by field experts. They have multiple applications: Hiring standards, identification of training needs and opportunities, employee and self evaluation, and advancement.
- To develop competencies, the Eppley Institute often employs a modified Delphi approach research approach, which seeks expert consensus through focus group and survey feedback. Competencies are grouped into common themes (“Parent”) with related sub-skills (“Child”).



National Parks Competency Framework Development

Project Summary

- Began in 2005
- Competencies originated with industry standards and then were tailored fit National Parks Service (NPS) Facility Management Professionals needs
- Six parent competencies developed, each with child competencies (24 child competencies total)
- Validated to meet federal standards for competency formulation
- Subsequent gap analysis identified gaps between employee performance and competency standards
- Results of gap analysis informed training, development programs, and applied workforce learning service-wide!

Applications and Next Steps

- NPS Facility Manager Leaders Program was developed from the competency gap analysis and is the first Department of Interior program to win federal W. Edwards Deming award for workforce development (2010)
- Updates to competencies have continued through evidence-based approaches



WORLD PARKS ACADEMY

World Parks Academy Competencies

Project Summary

- Began in 2013-2014
- International application of Parks competencies
- Serves as a certifying body for parks professionals worldwide- not all nations have a comparable institution
- The framework was updated in 2022. This revision reflected expert consensus around emerging trends in parks and public land management that professionals need competency in areas related to climate change; environmental sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem services; strategic planning; DEIJ considerations, relationships with Native and Indigenous people, and interpretation

Applications and Next Steps

- List of international competencies spurred two international parks and recreation certification programs
- Recently revised to incorporate and reflect current trends (2022)



American Trails Competency Framework

Project Summary

- Began in 2021-2022
- Developed with nationwide group of trail professionals (including USFS, BLM, and others) and led by partners at American Trails
- Project Outcomes sought (1) to align, integrate, and coordinate trail trainings nationwide, and (2) increase the overall skill level of trail workforce
- Based on expert feedback for further differentiation, competencies were evaluated across 3 skill levels: Entry, full performance, and expert
- Modified Delphi approach validated competencies from 200+ trail experts nationwide (6 parent competencies with 47 child sub-competencies)

Applications and Next Steps

- Demonstrated that competencies can also be categorized by career skill level (Entry, Full Performance, and Expert)
- Subsequent project underway to develop an online e-course training series that derives from a competency-based gap analysis



Reach out to the Eppley Institute to learn more about how a competency-based approach can further professional growth in your organization or field!