

# Using Competencies to Shape Your Workforce

Learning about Competencies

Developing a Competency Model for Your Cooperative

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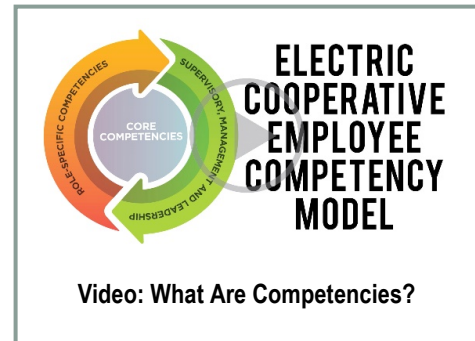


## Learning about Competencies

### What is a Competency?

A **competency** is a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) needed to successfully perform work roles. It helps to define what success looks like and clarifies expectations.

A **competency model** or framework organizes competencies into categories. It provides the architecture for managing and presenting the competency groupings and details. Competency models can be organized around industries or occupations; around departments or job groups, etc.; and can be structured to highlight organizational priorities and goals.



A competency model is *driven by* the needs of the cooperative, while also being *the driver of* change and continuous improvement. Both individuals and the organization as a whole can use competencies to assess their capabilities by ensuring each has the right mix of knowledge, skills and experience.

### The Competency Model as a Resource

A competency model helps drive individual and organizational performance and bring employees together around common goals, expectations, and measures of success. They can form the foundation for career ladders or lattices, link organizational and personal objectives, and ensure employees are clear about how they are expected to perform in their jobs.

Models can be a resource for:

- **Employees** who want to identify learning opportunities. Competency models can help individuals target the unique mix of skills and knowledge they need to achieve their professional goals and support their co-op's job roles.
- **Supervisors** who want to work with their employees to identify knowledge and skill gaps and build learning development plans.
- **Cooperatives** to improve organizational results by aligning a competency framework to the cooperative's strategic goals and priorities. Competencies then become a workforce management tool for building job descriptions, recruiting, performance management, succession planning, and learning and development.



## NRECA's Electric Cooperative Employee Competencies

The Electric Cooperative Employee Competency Model is intended to be a comprehensive, evolving, flexible resource that reflects the behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities co-op employees need to successfully provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to their members.

This model is meant to provide a foundation for cooperatives to customize for their needs and circumstances. The NRECA model organizes competencies into three categories:

1. **Role-Specific Competencies** address specific professional and technical roles.
2. **Core Competencies** support successful performance for ALL cooperative employees, regardless of the individual's role or expertise.
3. **Supervisory, Management and Leadership Competencies** promote the qualities needed to engage and lead individuals and high performing teams and affect organizational results.



## Developing a Competency Model for Your Cooperative

The following is just one approach for developing a competency model. It is meant to provide a high-level strategy for navigating some of the critical steps to the process.

### 1 Link to Business Needs

**Identify your cooperative's business needs, challenges and priorities.** This will help to form a coherent vision, to identify meaningful goals and objectives, and to gain the support of key stakeholders.

**Ask questions.**

- What is important to the cooperative?
- What problems/challenges will a competency model solve?
- What deliverables would leadership like to see?

**Define the Goal/Present the issue.** Describe the challenges and use examples to show how a competency model will have an impact on your organization.

Below are examples of the benefits of using competencies. Variations of these can become problem statements, justifications and goals.

- It aligns individual behaviors and skills with the strategic direction of the cooperative.
- It establishes a clear, accessible, standardized approach to performance.
- It identifies industry-specific performance expectations or indicators.
- It defines knowledge, skills, and abilities for specific job roles.
- It provides a workforce management resource that reflects the new and evolving skills.
- It provides a resource for professional development guidance and planning; for recruitment and selection, for performance management, for shaping career paths.
- It contributes to our ability to target scarce training and development resources.
- It lays out the foundation for an enterprise-wide leadership strategy.

**Anticipate questions.** Just as you had questions for your stakeholders, you can expect them to have questions of you, such as “How long will this take?” and “What resources will you need?”

**Put together a task force.** Consider pulling together a team that can both help you through the process and champion the initiative.

## Developing a Competency Model for Your Cooperative, *continued*

### 2 Assess Existing Competency Models

**Research and analyze any internal or external frameworks that currently exist.** Many competency frameworks have similar core or foundational competencies and manager competencies. Often, the main difference is in how they are labeled and categorized.

**Review industry-specific competency models.** These identify current and evolving technical competencies specific to certain business sectors.

Examples of competency models:

- [Electric Cooperative Employee Competencies](#)
- [Energy Industry Competency Model: G&T and Distribution.](#)
- [Center for Energy Workforce Development \(CEWD\)](#)
- [Competency Model Clearinghouse. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Competencies. U.S. Office of Personnel Management](#)
- [O•NET OnLine - Utilities](#)

### 3 Develop

**Pull together an initial framework based on one or more existing competency models.**

Ensure that the language and structure reflects:

- The needs and priorities of your cooperative.
- The cooperative's culture.
- Is comprehensive – includes all critical competencies.

**Gather feedback** from individuals and/or groups. Expect to go through several iterative reviews and revision steps as you identify gaps, edit, and refine wording.

- Reach out to subject matter or technical experts, employees, and others who could provide relevant input.
- Make sure everyone understands the purpose and process behind the competency model development initiative. It is helpful to send out a draft of the model and summary ahead of time.
- Explain what a competency is, review the draft model, and choose one or two specific competencies to delve in to at a more detailed level.
- Ask for feedback around details: does the language make sense, is there anything missing, are the categories structured correctly, is there anything that doesn't belong, etc.
- The focus of this feedback session will depend on where the model is in the development process, the expertise of the individuals or groups, etc.

## Developing a Competency Model for Your Cooperative, *continued*

### Group Feedback – Activity 1

**Purpose:** Obtain feedback, educate audience, gain commitment.

1. Write the names of the high level competency categories on separate sheets of flipcharts.
2. Ask each person to write down on post-it notes what they think people need to know or do that to be successful in that competency area. Set a time limit.
3. After a few minutes, ask for one or two volunteers to share what they've come up with. You'll confirm that they are on the right track and it'll help them understand what you're expecting.
4. Ask them to stick their post its under the relevant competency (flip chart sheet).
5. Review as a group:
  - Can the post-it items be organized in to subcategories.
  - Do these align with draft competency model.
  - Are there any gaps, is there anything new.

### Group Feedback – Activity 2

**Purpose:** Obtain feedback, educate audience, gain commitment.

1. Select a specific job role or job family, such as *Accounting* or *Member Services*.
2. Ask each person to write down on post-it notes what they think people need to know or do that to be successful in that job role. Set a time limit.
3. After a few minutes, ask for one or two volunteers to share what they've come up with. You'll confirm that they are on the right track and it'll help them understand what you're expecting.
4. Once time is up, have them compare their post-its in pairs or small groups. Ask them to try to group their post-its in a way that make sense.
5. Have each group report out.
6. Review as a group:
  - Where are there similarities and differences between the groups.
  - Where are there similarities and differences between the groups results and the draft competency model. subcategories.
  - Are there any gaps, is there anything new.

### Group Feedback/Prioritization – Activity 3

**Purpose:** Understand target audience perspective, educate audience, gain commitment.

1. Identify the competency area you want to focus on.
2. Identify the target audience to survey.
3. Create a paper-base or online checklist listing the competencies.
4. Don't forget to familiarize the audience with competencies, the purpose of your efforts, and how you will be using the results.
5. Depending on your goals, you can ask respondents to:
  - Rank the competencies by importance to the job role or to the cooperative.
  - Rank competencies by what they (or others ) need to most develop.
6. You can also use this as an opportunity to ask about any gaps or for other feedback.

## Developing a Competency Model for Your Cooperative, *continued*

### 4 Validate

**Validate in collaboration with employees and subject matter experts.** Ensure the model is comprehensive, usable and resonates with employees. Be sure to bring in fresh and diverse perspectives.

**Methods for validating** can look very much like what was done during the development of the model. Note that validation already began during the review process in the previous step.

### 5 Finalize

**Create a graphic of your competency model.** Develop an easy to scan visual that displays your competencies at a high level.

**Educate leadership and employees on the value of the competency model.** Discuss how the organization plans to use the model. Describe how employees can use competencies.

**Make it accessible.** Post on your website and link them to relevant tools and processes.

### 6 Maintain

Keep your competency model relevant by keeping it updated.

Consider reviewing the competency model on a regular schedule. Perhaps as part of an annual departmental or strategic meeting.

As part of the review, you should consider:

- shifting organizational goals or priorities
- the impact of new technology, work processes, or new regulatory requirements
- new demands for specific skills

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