

SSPR DISCUSSION POINTS: COMPETENCIES AND THE SSPR

An effective performance management system should measure a person's contributions to the organization's success while enhancing the individual's skills and commitment to the organization. It is the goal of the City of Austin to support its supervisors and employees by providing a program that:

- Links individual performance to the City and department business goals
- Enhances communication and planning between supervisors and employees
- Establishes clear performance expectations
- Identifies opportunities for employee development, and
- Provides a comprehensive evaluation of employee performance

INFORMATION:

1. [What do we have today?](#)
2. [What's changing?](#)
3. [Why are we changing?](#)
4. [What is a competency?](#)
5. [Why are we talking about competencies?](#)
6. [What is the COA Employee Competency Model?](#)
7. [How are "competencies" different from the PRIDE values we've been learning about?](#)
8. [Are competencies going to be in my SSPR?](#)
9. [What is the benefit of adding competencies to talent management and the SSPR?](#)
10. [How did we get the competencies that we are using in the SSPR?](#)

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS:

1. [How are competencies useful to supervisors?](#)
2. [How to introduce competencies](#)
3. [How to talk about competencies](#)
4. [What is the new approach to the "Employee Development Plan"?](#)
5. [How to use competencies in the SSPR](#)
6. [How to encourage employees to learn and grow](#)
7. [Where to find more information](#)

INFORMATION

1. What do we have today?

When most managers hear the word “performance” they think of results; of “what” must be done. How much should we produce? How quickly do we need to respond? How much service should we deliver? With this focus, job responsibilities and goals are identified and standards established to measure employee success; this is the basis of the City of Austin’s current SSPR program.

2. What’s changing?

The current SSPR program and form will be updated to include employee competencies in the planning and feedback discussions for all employees. The competencies identified in the COA Employee Competency Model will be included in the discussion section of the SSPR form. Executive-level employees have been using competencies since 2010. Managers, Supervisors and Employees will begin using competencies in a new form for their FY13 planning meeting and discussion.

3. Why are we changing?

Results measures themselves do not tell the full story. Performance objectives do not communicate to employees what they need to do to maintain or improve their ability to perform successfully. What’s missing is a focus on “how” things get accomplished. How an employee accomplishes work is referred to as a “competency.”

4. What is a competency?

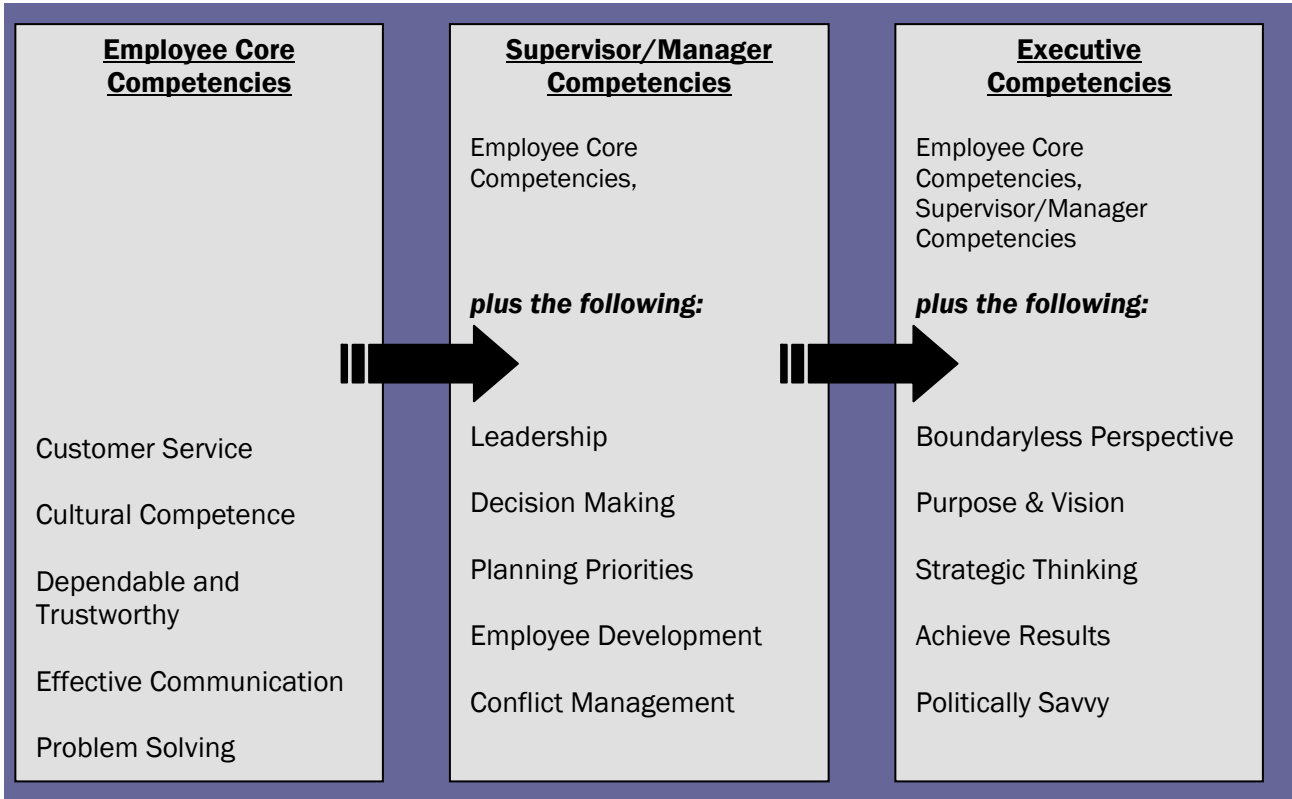
A competency is defined as a skill, ability or quality that a person demonstrates that enables them to deliver superior performance and exceptional results in a given job, role or situation. Put simply, a competency is a quality or ability that helps an employee to be more successful in their job.

5. Why are we talking about competencies?

When competencies enter the picture, the discussion of performance moves from “what” to “how.” How do we expect our employees to perform – should they be more team oriented; more customer-focused; better able to communicate effectively? In other words, performance is what you accomplish and competencies explain how you accomplish them. Together they provide a more complete picture of the employee’s success.

6. What is the COA Employee Competency Model?

The City of Austin competency model is a three-step model that includes fifteen competencies that define the characteristics and qualities that support our mission and enable employees to be successful. The model includes the five core competencies that are the qualities expected of every employee regardless of position in the organization. There are five additional Supervisor/Manager competencies and five Executive competencies that describe abilities important for those serving in leadership roles. Employees at all levels of the organization were involved in the development of the model.



7. How are “competencies” different from the PRIDE values we’ve been learning about?

The PRIDE Values reflect our core values of public service and how we as an organization relate to our customers and each other. They provide a shared understanding of how we will achieve our mission “to be the best managed city in the country.” In that way the values describe the environment in which we work each day.

The COA Employee Competencies speak to the expectations of us as individuals. They establish clear expectations of those qualities important to how we accomplish our work as employees of the City of Austin.

8. Are competencies going to be in my SSPR?

Yes. Competencies will be in everyone's SSPR. City executives began using competencies in their SSPRs in 2010 with the long term goal to integrate competencies into SSPRs for all employees. That goal will be realized beginning October 2012, when managers, supervisors and employees will begin including discussions on competencies in their SSPR plans as well.

9. What is the benefit of adding competencies to talent management and the SSPR?

Performance management programs that incorporate competencies have the benefit of being more qualitative, longer in view, future oriented and provide a consistent framework across departments and lines of business. This consistent framework provides a clear expectation that benefits employees throughout their career with the City of Austin.

Appraisal programs, like the COA SSPR program, that include competencies along with performance not only measure employee performance but help guide performance improvement. It provides useful insight into why an individual has succeeded or failed in meeting objectives and supports the effective targeting of training and development activities.

10. How did we get the competencies that we are using in the SSPR?

The City of Austin began an effort in 2009 to identify those competencies considered core to the underlying characteristic of all City of Austin employees as well as those specific to the levels of leadership in the organization. Employees from all levels were involved in the process. A three-step employee competency model was developed and has already been in use in Executive SSPRs since 2010. The next step is to incorporate these competencies into the performance and development discussion for all City of Austin employees.

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS

1. How are competencies useful to supervisors?

Supervisors and managers can make use of competencies in a number of ways to foster an environment of development and success.

- **Hiring:** Set your department and work group up for success by looking for evidence of these competencies in applicants.
- **Managing:** Give employees assignments that use their competency strengths or challenge them in competency areas for growth.
- **Reinforcing/recognizing:** Set an example of excellence by modeling the competencies in your own work. Recognize your employees for successes in each of the competency areas and for achieving their developmental goals. This will help reinforce the competencies and an environment of learning and development.

2. How to introduce competencies

It may be helpful to share the information in the above section (“Information”) with employees to explain why, what and how things are changing. Also share how including competencies in the performance conversation will help employees examine important areas that will aid in their overall job success.

A helpful way to integrate your employees into the competencies is to give a behavioral, tangible example of each of the competencies in action that you have seen in your work group. This will help bridge that gap and bring to light ways the competencies may already be in practice.

3. How to talk about competencies

We recently rolled out the City of Austin’s mission, vision and values of PRIDE. While these values describe what we stand for on an organizational level, the competencies are intended to reach each and every employee on an individual level. They explain how we go about our work, and the skills, abilities and characteristics that lead to success in our role.

Some specific talking points that can be used include:

- Talent management is an initiative to ensure that we have the best workforce available to provide services to citizens.
- Talent management helps us hire the best employees from the widest possible pool of talent.
- Talent management helps us focus training on the most important skills needed to do jobs well and develops employees to be the future leaders of the organization.
- Competencies are the common building block that ensures we hire, develop, and promote the best talent available.

- Competencies are the characteristics and qualities that allow employees to be successful on the job.
- Competencies provide a consistent framework for employee development across departments and lines of business.
- Competencies help organizations improve their performance and deliver results.

4. What is the new approach to the “Employee Development Plan”?

The new “Employee Development Plan” page of the SSPR has been reformatted to be encompassing of key developmental areas. The new form focuses on the three areas of competency development, performance and department goals and development, and personal growth and development. This change is beneficial to the individual employee as well as the work group and organization overall because:

- It supports a culture of continual development
- It ensures well rounded employee development plans
- It promises well developed applicants for city positions
- It focuses on the employee’s career plan and helps them take steps toward achieving their personal goals

The employee development plan is not intended to address solely areas of deficiency. Everyone should continue to develop, no matter what level of performance they currently exhibit. It is therefore the intent that all employees identify areas for development within the three categories of competencies, performance/departmental goals, and personal growth.

To make use of each of the three categories for development, the employee should identify the “What,” “Why,” and “When” of the development plan. They should select an activity (“What”) they think would be beneficial in achieving their developmental goal for each category. They should then identify the “Why,” or the reason they chose that activity and what outcome they hope to achieve by participating. Finally, they should work with their supervisor to establish an acceptable timeline of “When” the activity should start or be complete. By creating such detailed plans for each of the three development areas, employees will be able to better focus specific plans for development that will help both themselves and the organization achieve their goals.

5. How to use competencies in the SSPR

Competencies are included in SSPR plans for supervisor and manager-level staff and for employee staff for the FY 2012/2013 planning meetings. As an introduction to competencies these SSPR planning meetings may focus more on expectations and development.

1. To begin a conversation on competencies, briefly review what each of the competencies mean.

2. Then ask the employee to identify how frequently and effectively they feel they demonstrate each competency category.
3. Compare the employee's perspective with your expectations and to behavioral examples to discuss the employee's areas of strength and opportunities for development.
4. Together, look over the new competencies page and evaluate the employee's current "developmental/competent" status.
5. Agree on those areas of focus for development and make relevant notes to include in the employee's development plan.
6. Be sure to cover each of the competencies.

Once each of the competencies has been addressed, move on to the employee development plan in the SSPR Plan document. Having identified an employee's strength and development areas with respect to the performance areas and the competencies, they will be able to identify the areas they should focus on in their development plan. Make sure you are up to date on the available resources and tools for development to most effectively assist the employee with establishing their development plan. Notice that the development plan focuses not only on the competency areas, but also the areas of performance/departmental development as well as professional growth. Be sure to check in with employees on a regular basis to recognize and encourage progress toward their goals.

6. How to encourage employees to learn and grow

"The innate yearning to learn and grow is natural to human beings."

- Gallup

- Be a model for your employee to learn from
- Be open about your strengths and development needs related to the competencies
- Try to let employees identify their own areas for growth
- Ensure employee development plans are conducive to their learning style and any job or home constraints
- Focus on developing the competency areas will give them experience in these widely recognized valuable skills, making them attractive for new positions
- Be interested in their development and follow up with them about their progress on a regular basis
- Encourage employees to share their development goals with peers, family, and friends to increase accountability for sticking to their plan
- Make it easy for employees to access development opportunities
- Make sure goals and expected results are clearly identified
- Recognize employee development accomplishments
- Encourage employees to recognize peer excellence in competency areas
- Help interested employees find coaching/mentoring help
- Be the example of continual growth for your employees

- Create accountability for goals with you or with the employee's peer
- Encourage use of the Competency Daily Checklist as a daily reminder of the employee's goals

7. Where to find more information

You have been provided with a Competency Toolkit, which will also be available via the intranet. In this toolkit, you will find materials that will help you to become familiar with and use the competencies with your work group and/or department including:

- A copy of the new SSPR Plans for Employees and for Supervisors/Managers, including the new "COA Competencies" page and "Employee Development Plan" page
- "Competencies in Action Guide" – examples of how each competency might be demonstrated
- "Analysis of Employee Competencies" – an activity to help establish what each of the competencies looks like for your particular role and department
- "SSPR Discussion preparation" – a suggested way to prepare for conducting SSPR meetings with the competencies
- A number of job aids and postings to promote awareness of the competencies

You may also find more information in the Talent Management Toolkit, which can be found on the intranet. Under the "Development" section there are a number of articles, activities and alternate resources for competency knowledge and development.