COMPETENCIES, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS FOR STATE AGENCY CHILD NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS

Mary Frances Nettles, PhD, RD

National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division
NFSMI Mission

- To provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition (CN) Programs
  - School Nutrition Programs
    - National School Lunch Program
    - School Breakfast Program
  - Summer Food Service Program
  - Child and Adult Care Food Program
NFSMI Mission

- Design an applied research agenda involving Child Nutrition stakeholders
- Conduct applied research projects that address operational issues impacting Child Nutrition Programs
- Determine best practices for issues impacting the operation of Child Nutrition Programs
- Provide research-based resources for program assessment
ARD Research Threads

- Operational Accountability
- Wellness
- Equipment/Design
- Human Resources
- Customer Service
- Green/Environmental Conservation
- Best Practices
Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills for Child Nutrition Professionals

- District-level School Nutrition Professionals
- School Nutrition Managers
- School Nutrition Assistants/Technicians
Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills for State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals

- Provide an overview of the research project
- Propose ideas on how to use the resource
- Network on application for individual states
Project Steps

- Electronic survey of state agency directors
- Review of job descriptions
- Expert work group #1 to identify functional areas and job responsibilities
- Expert work group #2 to identify competencies, knowledge and skills
- National review panels to confirm
Individuals employed by the CN state agency, such as program specialists, administrative personnel, and financial specialists who work with the CN programs.

Did not address the roles of clerical and support staff.
Survey of State Agency Directors

- Sent to all CN state agency directors

- 15 question survey addressing:
  - Education and employment background
  - Training provided to staff

- Administered through Survey Monkey
Examples of Questions

- List the entry-level education and experience requirements for the professional positions in each division/branch/unit
- For newly hired CN professionals, what training is provided during their first year of employment?
- How is first year training provided?
- Who conducts first year training?
Examples of Questions

- What professional development/continuing education opportunities are provided following the first year of employment?
- How are professional development/continuing education opportunities provided?
- Who conducts professional development/continuing education training?
- Education, experience, certifications of current staff
A total of 40 (65%) surveys were received

Most mandate specific education/experience requirements for entry-level CN professional staff positions
- Bachelor’s degree
- Bachelor’s degree plus 1-5 years experience in related field
- Master’s degree
- Registered Dietitian credential

CN professionals in managerial positions possess a graduate degree, specialized professional credential, increased years of experience, or a combination of these requirements
Selected Results

- First year training topics:
  - CN program needs
    - Federal and state regulations
    - Conducting effective training sessions
    - Conducting reviews/audits
  - Departmental issues
    - Diversity & sexual harassment
    - Problem solving & decision making
  - Subject matter specific
    - Menu planning
    - Food safety
    - Nutrition
Selected Results

- First year training methods for new CN professional staff:
  - On-the-job training (100%)
  - Independent learning (97%)
  - Individual counseling (97%)
  - Individual review of policy/procedure manuals, training resources, etc. (88%)
  - Mentoring (85%)

- First year training is conducted by staff from unit in which the trainee is housed (95%)
Selected Results

- Methods of professional development/continuing education for CN professional staff:
  - USDA/FNS training (93%)
  - Professional organization conferences (88%)
  - Seminars/workshops (68%)
  - Webinars (65%)

- Provider of professional development/continuing education:
  - USDA/FNS (90%)
  - State agency staff (88%)
  - Professional organizations (73%)
  - NFSMI (70%)
Selected Results

- State agency CN professional staff:
  - Undergraduate degree in nutrition (93%)
  - Graduate degree in nutrition (80%)
  - Registered Dietitian credential (80%)
  - Experience as a teacher (63%)
  - Undergraduate degree in business (63%)
  - Experience in foodservice management (63%)
  - Experience as school nutrition director (60%)
Job Description Review

- 19 state directors submitted job descriptions
- Analysis revealed 12 commonalities among the activities performed by CN professional staff
- The 12 commonalities were utilized in an electronic analysis to identify significant themes within the job
- 30 significant job function themes were identified from the job descriptions
Job Description Review
Top Job Function Themes

- Training
- Public relations/communication
- Management
- Regulations
- Review/evaluation
- Supervision
- Grants
- Technology

- Technical assistance
- Financial/recordkeeping
- Monitoring
- Coordination
- Nutrition
- Food distribution
- Reports/correspondence
- Policies/procedures
Project Steps

- Electronic survey of state agency directors
- Review of job descriptions
- Expert work group #1 to identify functional areas and job responsibilities
- Expert work group #2 to identify competencies, knowledge and skills
- National review panels to confirm
Expert Work Group #1

- 10 state agency professionals
- A modified Delphi Technique used to identify the functional areas
- The modified Delphi Technique consisted of 6 successive questionnaires sent by e-mail
- Specific instructions provided for each round of questionnaires with a summary of the questionnaire results from the previous round
Round 1 – Delphi Questionnaire for Child Nutrition Professionals in State Agencies

Functional Areas

- **Directions:** Keeping in mind the definition of functional areas, use your knowledge and experience to provide the following information.

- If you could sort the job responsibilities of child nutrition professionals working in state agencies into broad groupings or functional areas what would these groups be?

- Based on your experience, identify and list below, your opinion of what the broad groupings/functional areas would be for the job responsibilities of state agency child nutrition professionals.

- In your own words, provide a brief description or definition of each functional area you have listed.

- There are no restrictions on the number of functional areas. Feel free to list as many or as few functional areas as you feel are correct/appropriate.
Round 2

- Summary of round 1
- Round 2 Questionnaire
  - The round 1 functional area title/headings provided by the expert panel members
  - Rate agreement with the groupings or topic areas as a primary function for the job of state agency child nutrition professionals, using the scale: 4, strongly agree to 1, strongly disagree.
  - Indicate whether the topic is appropriate to be a major functional area
  - Indicate reason for difference in opinion
  - Could this area be combined with another area? If yes, list the area(s)
  - Suggestions for naming this functional area
Guidelines used to determine agreement:

- A 75% threshold to confirm agreement of the appropriateness of a topic to be a functional area
- A simple majority (one over 50%) to name the functional area

Summary of round 2

Round 3 Questionnaire #1
- Functional areas are **above the 75% agreement threshold**

Round 3 Questionnaire #2
- Functional areas are **below the 75% agreement threshold**
Rounds 4, 5, & 6

- Round 4: four functional areas identified and named:
  - Personnel Management
  - Program Management
  - Technology and Data Management
  - Training and Technical Assistance

- Round 5 added:
  - Program and Regulatory Compliance

- Round 6 added:
  - Financial Management
Expert Work Group #1
Work Group Session

- Objectives
  - Agree upon final functional areas
  - Develop a definition for each functional area
  - Identify job responsibility statements related to each functional area

- Title of one functional area was revised

- Small group discussion

- Consensus building steps
National Review Panel #1 E-Survey

- Sent to 82 state agency CN professionals
- 39 job responsibility statements categorized into the appropriate functional area
  - Verify the importance of each statement to the job functions of state agency CN professionals
- Training and continuing education resources utilized and training preferences
- Demographics
Selected Results

- A total of 53 (65%) surveys were returned
- All 39 job responsibilities were confirmed
- Professional development/continuing education options utilized were:
  - USDA/FNS training and resources (90%)
  - Professional organizations and conferences (81%)
  - Webinars (79%)
  - NFSMI training and resources (73%)
Selected Results

- Most effective training methods for receiving continuing education were:
  - On-the-job training (65%)
  - Audio/video conferences (48%)
  - Mentoring (46%)
  - On-line learning modules (44%)

- Desired improvements in training and continuing education
  - Consistent interpretation of regulations (87%)
  - On-line training modules by topic (71%)
  - Central link to share training opportunities (65%)
Project Steps

- Electronic survey of state agency directors
- Review of job descriptions
- Expert work group #1 to identify functional areas and job responsibilities
- Expert work group #2 to identify competencies, knowledge and skills
- National review panels to confirm
Definitions:

- **Functional areas:** the broad groupings or divisions of job responsibilities performed by the CN professionals within the state agency.

- **Competencies:** the areas of expertise and accountability within each functional area necessary to ensure that the purpose(s) of the job are met.

- **Knowledge:** the information a person has in specific content areas that is necessary for successful performance.

- **Skills:** the abilities to perform certain physical and/or mental tasks that are necessary for successful performance.
Expert Work Group #2

- 10 state agency professionals
- Draft knowledge and skill statements
- Job responsibilities – beginning point for competencies
- Small group discussion
- Consensus building steps
Expert Work Group #2
Expert Work Group #2
Expert Work Group #2

- Identify the time frame in which the knowledge or skill is needed
  - **When hired**: the knowledge/skills needed to perform effectively in entry-level state agency child nutrition program positions
  - **Advanced**: the knowledge/skills, gained through experience in child nutrition programs and professional training, needed to perform proficiently in multi-faceted state agency child nutrition positions

National Food Service Management Institute – Applied Research Division
Building the Future Through Child Nutrition
Project Steps

- Electronic survey of state agency directors
- Review of job descriptions
- Expert work group #1 to identify functional areas and job responsibilities
- Expert work group #2 to identify competencies, knowledge and skills
- National review panels to confirm
National Review Panel #2 E-Survey

- Sent to 84 state agency CN professionals
- 25 competency statements, 69 knowledge statements, and 111 skill statements within the six functional areas
  - Verify whether the knowledge/skill statements are important to the job responsibilities of a state agency CN professional
  - Confirm whether the competency statements are consistent with the supporting knowledge and skill statements
  - Categorize the knowledge/skill statements into two distinct groups: when hired and advanced
Selected Results

- 24 competencies, 66 knowledge statements, and 104 skill statements were confirmed
- 34 statements as needed when state agency CN professionals are hired
- 136 statements as being advanced and gained through professional experience and training
Competencies, Knowledge and Skills for State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals in the 21st Century

National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi

Competencies, Knowledge and Skills for State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals in the 21st Century

Financial Management
Personnel Management
Program and Regulatory Compliance
Program Management
Technology and Data Management
Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach

Applied Research Division
The University of Southern Mississippi

National Food Service Management Institute – Applied Research Division
Building the Future Through Child Nutrition
Functional Area 1: Financial Management

- Oversees a financial management system that manages and supports program goals which ensure regulatory compliance.

- Promptly and accurately processes program claims and federal funding reports per regulations and financial management requirements/guidance.

- Develops and oversees state child nutrition administrative and budget plans to ensure compliance with program regulations and prompt program funding.

- Develops and disseminates financial procedures and policy guidance in the areas of budgeting, annual financial reports, and submission of claims for reimbursement to program participants.
Functional Area 2: Personnel Management

- Establishes a comprehensive training system based on current educational principles to include orientation, new employee training, continuing education, and on-going professional growth.

- Collaborates with human resources to establish a comprehensive personnel management infrastructure to fulfill the mission of the organization and to comply with federal, state, and local regulations and policies.
Functional Area 2: Personnel Management

- Provides leadership, direction and support to child nutrition personnel for department/bureau operations.
- Collaborates with human resources to interpret and communicate human resource regulations, policies, and procedures to program staff.
Functional Area 3: Program and Regulatory Compliance

- Interprets regulations and develops and disseminates written guidance to ensure compliance with federal, state, local policies, and rules and regulations for all participating entities.
- Evaluates policies and recommends changes and policy revisions.
- Designs program and compliance review instruments and procedures to ensure uniform monitoring and review efforts throughout the state.
- Oversees the development, preparation, and implementation of program agreements and ensures compliance with related requirements and regulations.
Functional Area 4: Program Management

- Plans, develops, implements, and evaluates child nutrition programs to meet changing priorities that support the mission of the program.
- Establishes and administers electronic or manual recordkeeping and reporting instruments to maintain efficient and effective programs.
Functional Area 4: Program Management

- Supports federal, state, local, and private disaster relief activities.
- Establishes a system for the coordination and oversight of child nutrition-related grant activities, if applicable.
- Interprets, analyzes, reviews, and provides written/oral testimony related to child nutrition programs, program rules, regulations, policies, and statutes.
Functional Area 5: Technology and Data Management

- Uses available resources to ensure that information technology systems and infrastructure meet the operational needs of child nutrition programs and ensures United States Department of Agriculture compliance.

- Researches, analyzes, and proposes the acquisition of technological equipment and computer software having the potential to make the work of the team more efficient and accurate.
Functional Area 6: Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach

- Serves as a resource for educational materials, presentations, current research, and regulatory information.
- Develops a comprehensive technical assistance plan to reflect current program policies and procedures, identification of client needs, areas of non-compliance, and program goals using all types of delivery methods.
Functional Area 6: Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach

- Develops and initiates outreach activities to expand the scope and effectiveness of child nutrition programs.
- Conducts needs assessment and acts as a resource for nutrition education and wellness/healthy environment.
What Did We Learn?

- Job requirements differ from state to state but most entry-level positions require at least a bachelor’s degree.
- The number of professional staff in state agencies varies from state to state.
- First year training is conducted by unit staff in the state agency:
  - On-the-job training
  - Independent learning
What Did We Learn?

- Managerial positions require
  - Graduate degree
  - Specialized professional credential
  - Increased years of experience

- Professional development/continuing education
  - USDA/FNS training
  - Professional organization conferences
  - Webinars
What Did We Learn?

- Most effective training methods
  - On-the-job training
  - Audio/video conferences

- Training/continuing education desired improvements
  - On-line training modules
  - Central link to share training opportunities
What Did We Learn?

- Clear picture of the very complex role of state agency CN professionals
- 34 knowledge/skills statements are needed when state agency CN professionals are hired
- 136 knowledge/skills statements are advanced and gained through professional experience and training
State Agency CN Professionals Can Use This Resource To:

- Select the competencies, knowledge and skills that meet the needs of the state agency
- Develop job descriptions for CN professional staff
- Identify interview questions for potential staff
- Design training programs for new staff
- Design professional development programs for all CN professional staff
State Agency CN Professionals Can Use This Resource To:

- Serve as a framework to identify the criteria for evaluating an effective state agency CN professional
- Identify staff members who demonstrate the potential to advance within the state agency
- Provide the framework for mentoring and other succession planning activities to prepare CN professionals for higher-level state agency responsibilities
Discussion Topics

- Develop a job description for a staff position
- Using the *when hired* knowledge and skill statements, develop interview questions for selecting entry level staff
- Select one functional area and design a training program for new staff
- Select one functional area and design a program to prepare CN professionals for higher-level state agency responsibilities