

STATE OF MAINE
COMPETENCY BASED MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

I. Objective

The State of Maine is transitioning its standards for assessing minimum qualifications for positions. Previously, the State has used a primarily years and degree-based system of measuring job qualifications and is transitioning to a competency-based model to allow for more efficient and agile hiring practices to be implemented. Typical qualification assessments have traditionally relied on using fixed years of experience and degree acquisitions as the metrics for determining candidates' aptitude to perform the primary duties of the job. In many instances this can result in candidates with the capability to perform the work in question being overlooked in the screening process or choosing not to apply for the job since they lack a traditional educational path or specified number of years of experience. This in turn limits the applicant pool for positions and results in underutilization of functionally proficient applicants, which can elongate the recruiting process and hinder operational efficiency within the office.

Competency based minimum qualifications seek to address these challenges by focusing on the innate and learned knowledge, skills, and abilities that candidates possess and how they have and can apply those to the primary functions of a job to meet operational needs of the State.

II. What is a Competency?

For the purpose of staffing a competency is defined as a measurable functional capacity to affect positive results relating to a specified area of operation. These functional capacities are observed as identifiable cognitive traits and patterns of behavior demonstrating:

- Knowledge that has been learned, acquired, or developed through education, training, and/or experience;
- Skills that are developed, refined, and applied; and/or
- Innate abilities to perform tasks and react to situations effectively.

III. Benefits of a Competency Based Framework

Competency based staffing aims to view requirements of jobs through the broader lens of what practical knowledge, skills, and abilities can be applied to fulfill their primary functions. This expands the criteria used to evaluate qualifications; allows for indirect but related experience and KSA's to be correlated with functions of the job; and acknowledges inherent differences in how individuals may acquire proficiency in an area of expertise; the rate at which they can develop advanced levels of skill; and the degree of aptitude they intrinsically have for performing specialized functions. It also makes the interview process more agile by opening up avenues for candidates to demonstrate their ability to meet or exceed the operating standards of the role and empowers hiring managers to make detailed and informed decisions using their professional discretion and advanced subject matter expertise regarding the field.

IV. How are Competency Based Qualifications Structured?

Competency Based Qualifications are based on broad subject matter concepts and operational functions. Rather than describing a set of specific educational or vocational experience requirements, such as a specific number of years or degree level, they:

- Indicate a generalized level of familiarity with an area of subject matter relating to the job;
- Specify areas of knowledge that contribute to successful completion of the work; and
- List demonstrated functional capacities that can be applied to the core function of the job.

The level of familiarity with specialized subject matter described should provide a wide degree of interpretation for candidates and managers and suggest who might be interested in the work without precluding prospective candidates solely on the basis of degree attainment or years of direct experience worked. This facet of minimum qualifications describes what level of understanding is required to perform a job's core functions. The level is relative to the core function and area of subject matter pertaining to the job and thus it is up to management to determine what meets this criterion and to be able to explain why. This component of minimum qualifications is broken into three tiers:

- Entry-Level – requiring little if any preexisting education, training, or experience;
- No Qualifier – requiring a moderate or average level of preexisting education, training, or experience; and
- Advanced – requiring a significant level of preexisting education, training, or experience.

Measurement of the level of familiarity with specialized subject matter is based on proven acquisition of practical knowledge. This is expressed as types of preparatory arrangements that can facilitate increased understanding in and aptitude with subject matter in an area of knowledge. More often than not there will be more than one area of knowledge that is applicable for the preparation of an individual for a specific job. Depending on the nature of the job itself these areas of knowledge may be specific and directly related to subject matter dealt with or from a parallel or unspecified closely related field. This knowledge can be gained through a methodology or combination of methodologies so it is important that this component reflects what is functionally required to complete the work of a job and kept broad to maximize the effectiveness with which the available talent pool can be utilized. Typical methodologies for acquiring functional knowledge include:

- Formal education;
- Formal or informal training;
- Work experience;
- Internships/apprenticeships; and/or
- Any other learning methodology resulting in the obtainment and development of a practical body of knowledge.

Demonstrated functional capacities clarify how the preceding knowledge and experience listed allows a candidate to successfully perform the work of the job. They are listed as observable action statements indicating current or past application of practical proficiency, personal intuition, or a body of knowledge in some form. Functional capacities can be specific to the job itself, as with areas of knowledge acquired, though it should be noted that they tend to be broader in nature and applicable across jobs, fields, and even organizational levels at times. While functional capacities are demonstrated through the knowledge and experience listed earlier in the qualifications, they are not directly tied to them and therefore are not constrained to being directly related to one narrow subject matter area. The focus for this component of competency-based qualifications is instead on individual task areas of the work being performed within the job. It is also important to note that functional capacities are not specific to very particular operating conditions or standards such as software platforms, models of equipment, or other organizationally contingent factors, as this risks unnecessarily excluding otherwise qualified candidates. They concentrate on the actions performed themselves rather than the method with which the actions are performed and typically include:

- Sub-functions
- Productive work behaviors
- Socioemotional capabilities

Example For Engineering Technician IV

“[1] Advanced education, training, and/or experience [2] in engineering, construction, or another related field [3] demonstrating competency in functional problem solving, conducting surveys and studies, drafting plans, and coordinating projects.”

1. Generalized level of familiarity – the extent of what you know about specific subject matter
2. Area of specific knowledge – the content of what you know about specific subject matter
3. Demonstrated functional capacities – how you have, can, and do apply specific subject matter

V. Special Requirements

Some jobs may also require licenses, certifications, professional registrations, or other verifications of attainment of recognized occupational standards. These are considered to confirm that an individual has demonstrated proficient knowledge of a comprehensive body of knowledge or a certain level of effectiveness with a specific skillset, range of tools, or work methods for the purpose of reasonably ensuring safe and effective completion of a range of processes, procedures, and tasks. Special requirements are listed in a separate section after the minimum qualifications but are still considered part of the criteria for selecting candidates in

the recruiting process and thus can create barriers for otherwise qualified candidates. Because of this, they should only be listed when there is a genuine occupational requirement making them necessary for an incumbent to perform the primary functions of the job.

At times, a particular licensure or certification may be considered an effective indicator for gauging competencies within a job by departmental management but is not an officially or legally mandated occupational requirement. In these cases, a department may list the special requirement on the job posting as an additional criterion that will be given preference in the selection process. It should be kept in mind that doing so establishes the license or certification as an organized component of the selection process and can complicate hiring if a candidate without the preference is selected over another that does have it. Therefore, it is crucial that any special requirements are thoroughly researched, discussed with Service Center and HR staff, and internally evaluated for alignment with operational needs before being added as either a permanent fixture to a classification's minimum qualifications or a situational preference for a specific position.

VI. Exceptions

Certain classifications have established occupational requirements exempting them from having minimum qualifications presented in the competency-based model. These tend to be in the areas of law enforcement, medical fields, scientific fields, and trades requiring very strict and specific criteria in order to obtain degrees, licenses, certifications, and professional designations. To maintain compliance with these requirements jobs within these classifications must have minimum qualifications that are clearly quantified using rigid measurements. Metrics used in quantifying qualifications for these classifications include:

- Degrees/years of education;
- Years/hours of work performed in a specific function;
- Specific types of coursework;
- Regular attainment of continuing education credits;
- Age restrictions;
- Completion of in-house training programs; and/or
- Experience in a specific State classification.

As with special requirements, it is important to verify that there is a binding legal or occupational requirement for an exception to be used in the minimum qualifications of a classification. The basis for an exception to the competency-based model should be documented in detail by the Department and service

center and should include specific citation of any legal precedent, law, rule, statute, or occupational standard justifying it.

VII. Establishing Minimum Qualifications

Development of minimum qualifications involves Departmental Management, Service HR Center staff, and BHR Compensation & Classification staff. Minimum qualifications for a new classification will require that the Department and Service Center have an FJA drafted to inform the Compensation & Classification team's creation of the classification specification. Any significant changes to an existing classification that could influence the minimum qualifications will also necessitate the drafting of a new FJA. When establishing competency based minimum qualifications, the following should be considered:

- What skills are required to perform the core functions?
- What tasks are performed?
- What must be known starting in the job vs what can be learned on the job?
- What level of the organization is the job?
- What phase of the career cycle is the job intended to be?
- Are there other agencies utilizing the classification for this job?
- What types of knowledge can be applied in the job?
- Are there qualities from outside of the workplace that can be applied to the job?
- How formal does the setting for training or education need to be?
- How can competency be demonstrated and assessed?

Departments may draft a classification specification with suggested minimum qualifications or wait to discuss this with Service Center staff and the Compensation & Classification team. Any criteria for special requirements or exceptions to the competency-based model should be reviewed and confirmed prior to engaging the Compensation & Classification team. In either case, additional discussion may take place back and forth several times to determine what knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes are minimally necessary to complete the core functions of a job. The Compensation & Classification team will address any concerns they may have with suggested qualifications and ensure that the final qualifications meet the needs of the classification; maintain the greatest utility of the classification possible; and support solutions to ongoing staffing needs.

VIII. Assessing Competency Based Minimum Qualifications

Utilizing competency based minimum qualifications in the interview and selection processes requires more direct involvement from first line managers and

operates on the assumption that they are the chief subject matter experts in their area. Managers are expected to review the qualifications of candidates to determine if they fall into the competencies listed in the classification specification and define how they align with and support the core functions of the job in question. Service Center staff tracks and assists with managing the administrative procedures of the interview process and ensuring that documentation for the selection is maintained. They ensure that only candidates meeting the defined components of the minimum qualifications and any special requirements are filtered through to be reviewed for selection. Ultimately however, it remains up to the hiring managers to utilize their subject matter expertise and professional discretion to identify what knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience constitutes the appropriate level of education, training, and/or experience for the job and will translate to the most effective work performance.

IX. Authority

5 M.R.S. § 7061; 18-389 C.M.R. Ch. 4.