

USING A COMPETENCY-BASED QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

A Modern Approach to Inclusive Hiring



PURPOSE

Make hiring decisions by focusing on candidates' knowledge, skills, and abilities—no matter how they were gained.

This toolkit helps HR and managers draft competency-based minimum qualifications (CBMQs) that broaden the talent pool and support equitable hiring.

The State of Maine is updating how it defines and evaluates minimum qualifications for job positions. In the past, hiring decisions were often based on a candidate's degree or a set number of years of experience. The new competency-based model shifts the focus to what a person knows, what they can do, and how those abilities relate to the job. This approach helps select the most capable candidates to meet the operational needs of the State.

Why is this change happening?

Qualified candidates can be overlooked in the screening process—or choose not to apply—because they followed a different path, such as learning on the job, serving in the military, or volunteering. Reliance on degrees or years of experience limits the applicant pool and slows down the recruitment process.

What is a competency?

For the State of Maine's hiring process, a competency is defined as a measurable, functional capacity to perform a task effectively. It includes:

- **Knowledge** gained through learning, training, and/or experience.
- **Skills** that are developed, refined, and applied over time.
- **Ability** to effectively perform tasks and react to situations.

Benefits of a Competency-Based Framework

Using competencies to evaluate talent during the hiring process focuses on what candidates can do, not just where they've been. Human resources staff and hiring managers can consider what practical knowledge, skills, and abilities candidates bring to the job. This approach:

- Broadens the definition of what qualifies someone for a role.
- Acknowledges differences in how people learn, how quickly they develop advanced skills, and their natural strengths.
- Focuses the interview process on actual job tasks.
- Empowers hiring managers to make informed hiring decisions based on their subject-matter expertise.

This is intended to be a quick, user-friendly overview of the full [Competency-Based Qualifications Policy](#), which can be reviewed on the Bureau of Human Resources' website in the [Policy & Practices Manual](#).

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Competency-based Qualifications Structure

Designed to focus on what is needed to do the job. Rather than listing specific education or time-based requirements, they describe:

- **Level of familiarity** - understanding of the job's subject area
- **Area of relevant knowledge** - the knowledge that helps someone succeed in the role
- **Functional capabilities** - skills or abilities used in similar work

Level of Readiness

Entry-Level

Minimal prior education, training, or experience

No Qualifier

Moderate prior education, training, or experience

Advanced

Extensive prior education, training, or experience

Ways to Build Competencies

- School or college
- Training (formal or informal)
- Work experience
- Internships or apprenticeships
- Volunteer work or life experience
- Military service

Example: 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. **Level of familiarity** - a general understanding of the job's subject area
2. **Area of relevant knowledge** - what you know that helps someone succeed
3. **Functional capabilities** - skills or abilities the person has used in similar work

Things to Remember

- **Special Requirements** - Some jobs may require a license, certification, or other credential. These should only be listed if they are required by law, regulation, or safety standards and are truly necessary to perform the job's main duties.
- **Exceptions** - Some jobs, like ones in law enforcement, healthcare, sciences, and skilled trades, require very strict and specific criteria to obtain and maintain certification, licensing, and/or professional designation. Compliance with legal or industry standards should be clearly stated.



Creating or updating minimum qualifications requires collaboration among managers, HR, and the Classification Team.

Using in Hiring

HR Service Center staff make sure only people who meet the minimum qualifications are passed along to hiring managers for review with their subject matter expertise. As a manager, you are expected to:

- Look beyond years or degree-based qualifications.
- Focus on how knowledge or skills show up in experience.
- Use your judgment to match skills to job needs.
- Interview and hire people who can succeed in the role.