

Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills for State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project was to identify the functional areas, competencies, knowledge, and skills needed by child nutrition (CN) professionals working in state agencies.

PROJECT 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 in a competency area.

Skills: The abilities to perform certain physical and/or mental tasks that are necessary for successful performance in a competency area.

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.

METHOD

Phase I

- An expert panel of ten state agency professionals participated in a modified Delphi process to identify the functional areas encompassing job responsibilities of state agency CN professionals.

Phase II

- Researchers drafted a list of proposed knowledge and skill statements using information from the USDA, School Nutrition Association, and National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) Web sites; current job descriptions provided by state agencies; and additional statements from previous NFSMI research studies.
- Through a facilitated work group session ten state agency professionals reviewed the wording of each draft knowledge/skill statement, decided if there were any missing knowledge/skill statements, and agreed upon the competencies and knowledge/skill statements needed for each functional area.

Phase III

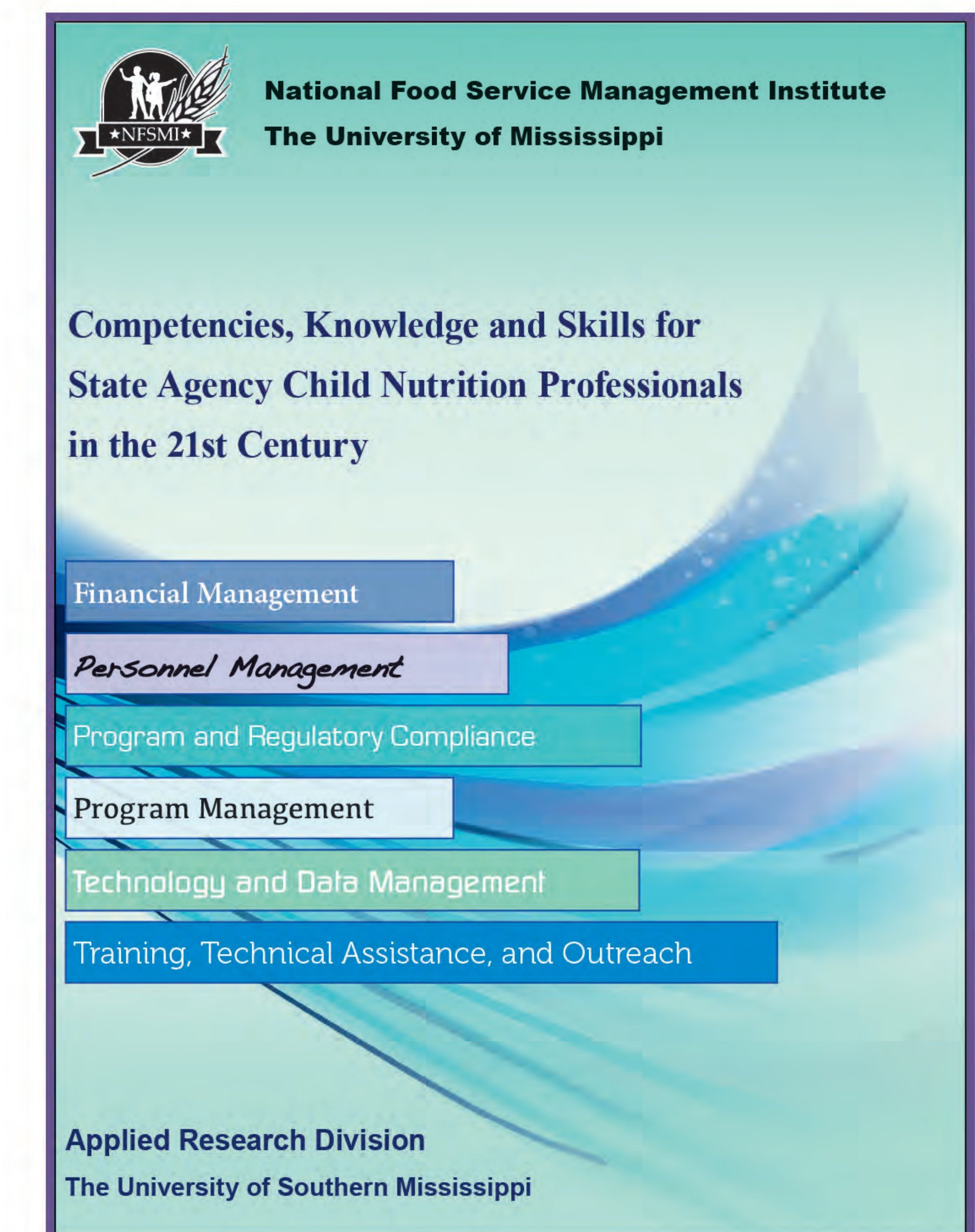
- Review panel consisted of 84 CN professionals representing the seven USDA regions.
- Review panel members responded to an electronic survey that asked them to:
 - verify the importance of the knowledge and skill statements to job responsibilities of state agency CN professionals;
 - categorize the knowledge and skill statements into two distinct groups: *When Hired* and *Advanced*; and
 - confirm whether the competency statements were consistent with the supporting knowledge and skill statements.

RESULTS

- Six functional areas encompassing job responsibilities of state agency CN professionals were identified: Financial Management; Personnel Management; Program Management; Program and Regulatory Compliance; Technology and Data Management; and Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach.
- Twenty-four competencies, 66 knowledge statements, and 104 skill statements were confirmed by the Phase III review panel.
- The review panel identified 34 statements as needed when state agency CN professionals are hired and 136 statements as being advanced and gained through professional experience and training. Of the 34 statements identified as needed when hired, the most statements came from the Personnel Management functional area, followed by Program Management then Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach.

APPLICATION OF RESULTS

- The functional areas, competencies, knowledge, and skills provide a clear picture of the complex role of state agency CN professionals.
- State agency directors can use this information to prepare job descriptions and evaluation criteria for state agency CN staff.
- The competencies, knowledge, and skills can provide the foundation to design training programs for new staff and on-going professional development for all CN professional staff.
- The review panel considered the majority (80%) of the knowledge and skill statements *Advanced* which confirms that state agency CN professionals are expected to operate at a high level of practice.
- The competencies, knowledge, and skills framework can provide the basis for mentoring and succession planning activities to prepare CN professionals for higher-level state agency responsibilities.



The resource is available at <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibrary/files/PDF/20140108022027.pdf>



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