

Job Functions and Training Needs of State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals

PROJECT DEFINITIONS

STATE AGENCY CHILD NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS:

Individuals employed by the child nutrition state agency such as nutrition program specialists, administrative personnel, and financial specialists who work with the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Food Distribution Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program. For the purpose of this research, the roles of clerical and support staff were not addressed.

FUNCTIONAL AREAS: The broad groupings or divisions of job responsibilities that are performed by the child nutrition professionals within the state agency.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES: The areas of expertise and accountability within each functional area that are necessary to ensure the purpose(s) of the job is/are met.

FUNCTIONAL AREAS

Financial Management

Personnel Management

Program and Regulatory Compliance

Program Management

Technology and Data Management

Training, Technical Assistance, and Outreach



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OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research were to identify job functions, job responsibilities, and training needs and preferences of child nutrition (CN) professionals working in state agencies.

METHOD

Phase I

- An expert panel of ten state agency CN professionals participated in a modified Delphi process to identify the functional areas encompassing the job responsibilities of state agency CN professionals.
- Following content analysis of job descriptions provided by state agencies and a review of the literature, researchers drafted job responsibility statements.
- Through a facilitated work session, the expert panel reviewed the wording of each draft responsibility statement, decided if any were missing, and arrived at agreement as to the job responsibilities related to each functional area.
- Training preferences and needs of state agency CN professionals were discussed and agreement reached.
- The functional areas, job responsibility statements, and training information identified at the work session were subsequently confirmed by the expert panel.

Phase II

- A review panel of 53 state agency CN professionals representing the seven USDA geographic regions of the United States responded to an electronic survey.
- Review panel members were asked to:
 - Verify the importance of each job responsibility statement to its related functional area.
 - Confirm the training needs and preferences of state agency CN professionals.

RESULTS

- Six functional areas were identified that encompass the job responsibilities of state agency CN professionals: financial management; personnel management; program and regulatory compliance, program management; technology and data management; and training, technical assistance, and outreach.
- Definitions for the six functional areas were developed and confirmed.
- Thirty-nine job responsibilities related to the six functional areas were confirmed by the Phase II review panel.
- The top three professional development/continuing education options most utilized by state agency CN professionals were USDA/FNS training and resources (90.4%), professional organizations and conferences (80.8%), and webinars (78.8%).
- The three most effective training methods for receiving continuing education were on-the-job training (65.4%), audio/video conferences (48.1%), and mentoring (46.2%).

APPLICATION

- The functional areas and job competencies provide a picture of the role of CN professionals at the state agency level.
- State agency administrators can use the functional areas and job responsibilities to aid in preparing job descriptions and identifying evaluation criteria for state agency CN professionals.
- The results of the research can provide the basis for mentoring and other succession planning activities to prepare CN professionals for state-level responsibilities.
- These findings can be used to develop training materials that focus on the responsibilities of state agency CN professionals.

Expert Panel

Review Panel