

Investigation of the Job Functions and Training Needs of State Agency Child Nutrition Professionals



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OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the job functions of child nutrition (CN) professionals in state agencies
- Describe the educational level and employment background of the CN professionals
- Identify training provided to state agency staff

METHOD

Phase I

- An electronic survey was sent to 62 state agency directors of CN Programs
- Multiple choice and open-ended questions explored the training, professional development activities, educational and experience requirements for entry level and supervisory positions, and demographic information of CN professionals working in state agencies
- State agency directors were asked to submit organizational charts and job descriptions delineating the functions of CN professionals

Phase II

- Organizational charts and job descriptions were reviewed to identify job functions performed by CN professionals working in state agencies
- Preliminary themes that emerged through the review process served as identifying words/phrases for electronic searches of each job description to further ascertain job functions

RESULTS

- A total of 40 (65%) surveys were received
- State agency directors reported that they have CN professional staff with the following:
 - undergraduate degree in nutrition (92.5%)
 - graduate degree in nutrition (80.0%)
 - Registered Dietitian credential (80.0%)
 - experience as a teacher (62.5%)
 - undergraduate degree in business (62.5%)
 - experience in foodservice management (62.5%)
 - experience as school nutrition director (60.0%)
- First year training for new CN professional staff is provided by:
 - on-the-job training (100.0%)
 - independent learning (97.4%)
 - individual counseling (97.4%)
 - individual review of policy/procedure manuals, training resources, etc. (87.7%)
 - mentoring (84.6%)
- Professional development/continuing education for CN professional staff is provided by:
 - USDA/FNS (92.5%)
 - professional organization conferences (87.5%)
 - seminars/workshops (67.5%)
 - webinars (65.0%)
- Analysis of job descriptions 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 descriptions of CN professionals employed in state agencies.
- Thirty significant job function themes were identified from the job descriptions.

APPLICATION

- State agency staff members perform a pivotal role in ensuring that CN Programs comply with government regulations and positively influence the services provided to children in school districts and child care facilities.
- Results can be used to determine job functions, competencies, and skills needed to perform effectively as a CN professional in a state agency.
- Identification of common functions, competencies, and skills needed by CN professionals working in state agencies contributes to building a strong training infrastructure consistent from state to state.

Top Job Function Themes Identified from State Agency Job Descriptions

Training	Technology
Public Relations-Communication	Technical Assistance
Management	Financial-Recordkeeping
Regulations	Monitoring
Review-Evaluation	Coordination
Supervision	Nutrition
Grants	Food Distribution-Commodities