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## Why This? Why Now?

### Competencies

*Why are we interested in defining competency?*

Management tools are used to guide the behavior that is necessary to operationalize the organization's mission. Defining and understanding the behaviors that enable and define performance are first but critical steps if we are to develop, promote, and reward those who contribute to achieving the organization's mission. Thus, it is important that we share a general definition of **competencies** as *the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated by organization or system members that are critical to the effective and efficient function of the organization or system.*

The term **organizational competence** is used to describe the *collective demonstration of competency areas that are core or central to the public health agency's mission—that is, the promotion of health and the prevention of disease.*

It also is critical that the competencies inform and enable the public health system—organizations and individuals—as it transitions to a population-based prevention focus. The competencies must be identified, validated, assessed, and developed in the context of the Essential Public Health Services and the relationship of these services to positive health outcomes.

In summary, then, competencies are

- Actions that can be seen in practice
- Describable in behavioral terms
- Observable in the performance of system components
- Part of a continuous system/organization/individual performance improvement process