



# Program Management Core Competency Model



**Center for  
Economic Opportunity**



**School of  
Professional Studies**

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## AN INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) is to pilot, evaluate and replicate successful and innovative anti-poverty programs in New York City and, through the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), in other cities across the U.S. It does so in partnership with a substantial network of government, philanthropic and community partners.

Rather than identifying high-performing non-profits and trying to replicate them in their entirety, CEO instead typically invests in promising program models and relies on well-established and high-performing community-based organizations to implement them. A director of a CEO program, therefore, is responsible for implementing and managing CEO's innovative programs — which typically have a significant research agenda — while also ensuring that his/her work is advancing the organization's own priorities and mission. Balancing the numerous priorities of so many stakeholders requires significant expertise and talent.

CEO recognizes that program directors have many responsibilities and that their roles can be challenging at times. As a result, CEO asked the CUNY School of Professional Studies to help create the CEO Program Management Forum — a series of professional development courses and tools — to facilitate program directors' communication about what tools they need to be successful and to create opportunities for continued learning and professional growth.

*On the cover:* Directors of CEO Programs present at a CEO Learning Network event.

This Program Management Core Competency Model represents a key step in this effort. It outlines the shared values that CEO and SIF programs have in common and identifies the associated core competencies in which program directors, must be proficient. The purpose of the competency model is to create a common definition of high-priority capabilities of program directors, thereby establishing a framework for professional development activities.

**The values and core competencies were developed through a process that included:**

- » Interviews with program directors and leaders of selected CEO and SIF-funded programs, as well as technical assistance providers;

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- » Facilitated sessions with program providers at the SIF Learning Network Conference in May 2012; *and*

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- » Research and review of competency models used in related fields.

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In addition to providing a framework for professional development, this list of competencies can be used by program directors to reflect on their own areas of strength and areas of opportunity. It can be used to make more informed decisions on program operations as well as to serve as a guide for selecting and developing staff.

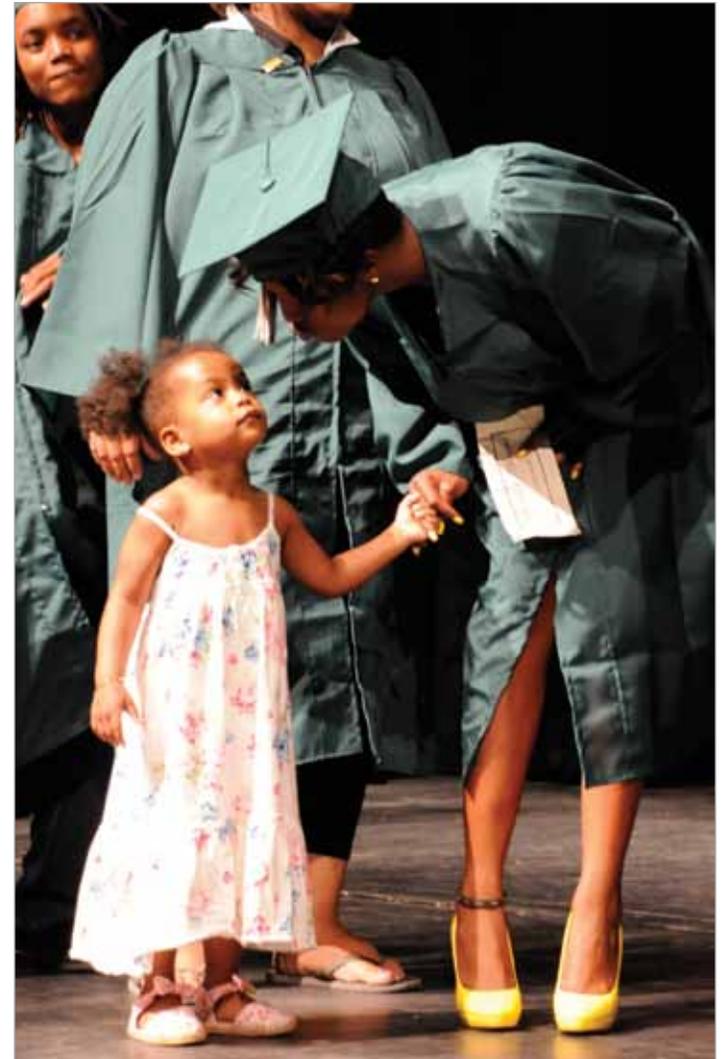


Kristin Morse, Executive Director of CEO

## OUR SHARED VALUES

The organizations that manage CEO initiatives are a diverse group. However, there are important things that these initiatives hold in common — the core beliefs about the work. CEO programs value:

- » Being a part of mission-driven organizations that promote opportunity, fairness and access;
- » Careful data collection, monitoring and evaluation to determine what works;
- » Innovation to improve outcomes;
- » Having a positive impact on the lives of the people served;
- » Collaboration, sharing ideas across programs and working with others;
- » Having the freedom and being agile enough to adapt and make mid-course corrections; *and*
- » The growth and development of staff, who are the key to program success.



Students receiving their High School Equivalency Diploma at a graduation from CUNY Prep. The program serves 16–18 year olds that had previously dropped out of high school.

## CORE COMPETENCIES FOR CEO PROGRAM DIRECTORS

This competency model focuses on the role of program directors. While their program areas vary, most CEO program directors manage a team of staff — either large or small — within agencies or nonprofit organizations. Regardless of a program’s particular area of focus, mastery of the skills associated with program management is imperative. This is because CEO and its partners can only evaluate an innovative model if the model is implemented as designed. Then evaluation will show if the model is, in fact, a better way of achieving outcomes or if it is no different in its impact from other models that were already in place.



A program director for CEO’s WorkAdvance program, which provides sector-focused job placement and training for low-wage workers and the unemployed.

### *What is a Competency?*

A competency is the capability to use a set of related knowledge, skills and characteristics to perform work or tasks effectively.

- » Competencies encompass the knowledge and skills that people need to perform their jobs.

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- » Competencies also include internal capabilities that people bring to their jobs. They may be expressed in a broad array of on-the-job behaviors.

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- » **Skills** are those activities at which one is proficient or capable of being proficient.

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- » **Knowledge** is the state of knowing about or understanding the subject and related subjects that lead one to doing a job well.

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- » **Characteristics** are those traits and behaviors that constitute a person’s character, such as enthusiasm, honesty or integrity. Characteristics illustrate how people do their jobs and how they express their attitudes towards their work and their colleagues.

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### *What is a Competency Model?*

A competency model is a collection of multiple competencies that together define successful performance in a defined work setting. This competency model — the Program Management Core Competency Model — provides a clear description of what a program director in a CEO or SIF program needs to know and be able to do — the knowledge, skills and characteristics — to perform the role well.

### *Core Competencies for CEO and SIF-Funded Program Directors*

Following is an outline of core competencies defined for CEO and SIF program directors. The level of proficiency needed for each is determined by the program's specific needs and the particular role of the program's directors. They will be used to design and roll out the CEO Program Management Forum, which will include specific training programs and tools to assist programs in developing their program management teams. Further defined in the following pages, the competencies fall into the categories in the diagram to the right.





# Program Director Competency Model

## 1

## Core Competencies

## STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Every program director is faced with the responsibility of stepping back to consider the long- and short-term objectives of the program and deciding how to best use resources to achieve successful outcomes. When confronted with the many demands of day-to-day operations, a well-developed strategy and plan will help keep the program on course.

*Program directors:*

- » **Communicate** clearly the mission, vision and goals of the program and its alignment to the funders' objectives

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- » **Develop and implement a strategy** and work plans to achieve program goals

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- » **Allocate the time and resources** needed to carry out activities; coordinate efforts with affected parties; monitor progress and keep parties informed

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- » **Anticipate obstacles** and develop contingency plans to address them; take necessary corrective action when projects go off-track

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- » Use experience and expertise to **innovate**, challenge assumptions and **invent** practices when necessary

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Managers of CEO's youth development programs discuss best practices in subsidized internships.

*On the previous page:* Employment Works participants receive training at a Workforce1 Career Center. Employment Works is a CEO program that provides probationers with job placement and training as well as support services to prepare them for long-term employment.

## 2

## Core Competencies

## LEADING PEOPLE AND BUILDING TEAMS

Many program directors have the responsibility to recruit, lead, develop and motivate teams of people. Achieving program goals requires the commitment of a dedicated group of people who are working together towards the same end.

*Program directors:*

- » **Identify** the key capabilities needed to perform staff roles and use available resources to ensure that the right people are in the right positions

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- » **Provide** direction and delegate responsibility to staff; provide ownership of tasks while holding them accountable

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- » **Deliver** constructive criticism and voice objections to others' ideas and opinions in a supportive manner; respond appropriately to positive and negative feedback; encourage others to express their ideas and opinions

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- » **Motivate**, develop and retain staff, providing them with opportunities for professional growth

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Participants and staff at CEO's 2011 HHC Nursing Career Ladders: Registered Nurses graduation.

## 3

## Core Competencies

## COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

To ensure program growth and effectiveness, partnerships are essential. Program directors take a lead role in establishing and maintaining effective collaborations with other organizations.

*Program directors:*

- » Proactively **network and build relationships** with community resources (e.g., community groups, employers, institutions) to support the goals of the program
- » **Involve** other stakeholders in problem-solving and decision-making to gain buy-in and alignment
- » **Communicate** with funders, researchers and technical assistance providers to ensure that they are provided with what they need and that the program benefits from their support
- » **Seek out** colleagues from the field to learn from their experiences and to identify ways to strengthen programs
- » **Represent** the program confidently in interactions with funders, community groups, participants and other key stakeholders



An agency partner from the New York City Housing Authority meeting with counterparts from the San Antonio Housing Authority. The two agencies are implementing CEO's Jobs-Plus employment program for their residents.

## 4

## Core Competencies

## ANALYSIS AND DECISION-MAKING

The role of the program director requires ongoing analysis of daily activities and decisions that need to be made thoughtfully and quickly. Doing this well supports the program and the team.

*Program directors:*

- » **Review and analyze** program data to ask questions, make decisions and develop strategies to improve program performance
- » **Review** the data requirements needed for evaluation purposes, implement processes to facilitate its collection and communicate the importance of evaluation to program stakeholders
- » **Identify** alternative solutions to problems and select those that most effectively support the program's goals and strategy
- » **Make difficult decisions** even in unclear or poorly defined situations and do so in a timely manner



A program coordinator for CEO's Young Adult Internship Program, an education-conditioned internship program for disconnected youth, presenting to peers from similar programs.

## 5

## Core Competencies

## PROGRAM KNOWLEDGE

Understanding the context, goals, population and variables that impact a program's success is essential to effective program management.

*Program directors:*

- » Know the **population** being served, community, competitors and resources available to the program and its participants
- » Apply **knowledge** gained from previous work experience in similar areas of service delivery to current position
- » Know **best practices** available to draw upon and how and when to implement them
- » Demonstrate **knowledge** of federal/state/city laws, regulations and agency guidelines for programs managed
- » Use knowledge of administrative policies, rules and procedures to **oversee processes** that ensure program compliance



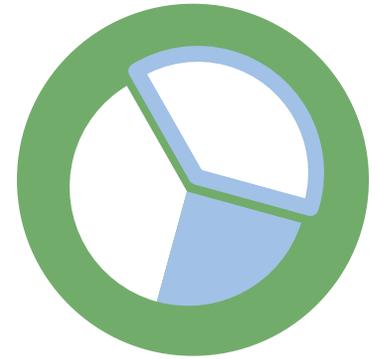
A participant in CEO's federally-funded WorkAdvance program in Tulsa, OK, which is targeting the transportation sector.

## 6

## Core Competencies

**CONTRACT MANAGEMENT AND BUDGETING**

Sound contract and budget management are important foundations for successful programs. They enable directors to control the management and outcomes of their programs. For directors at both the funding organization and provider levels, knowledge of contracts and budgets is essential.

*Program directors:*

- » **Manage** program objectives against contractual obligations to ensure programs are in compliance with agreements and expectations of the funders

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- » **Identify** program performance criteria that need to be measured to evaluate quality and opportunities for improvement

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- » **Translate** programmatic objectives, priorities and analysis of current resources into accurate and clear budget proposals

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- » **Review** budget and spending patterns to provide management and oversight

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- » **Identify opportunities** to use financial resources more effectively to achieve program goals

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## 7

## Core Competencies

## PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

Personal management includes those abilities and activities that drive program performance through the demonstration of key skills, behaviors and attitudes. Personal management encompasses a broad range of skills that include the following.

*Program directors:*

- » **Plan and manage** their time effectively, acting on competing priorities with an understanding of their importance to accomplishing program goals

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- » **Communicate** frequently, providing relevant details and context, and listen actively

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- » **Produce** clear and concise written communication (reports, emails, etc.) and presentations

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- » **Express** themselves with confidence and demonstrate a willingness to assert points of view that may meet opposition

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- » **Model professional behavior** to staff and program participants

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Clyde McQueen, President of Full Employment Council. FEC is implementing Project Rise, CEO's federally-funded, cohort-based education-conditioned internship program for disconnected youth ages 16-24, in Kansas City, MO.