

National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration Local Government Management Education Committee

Proposed competencies for MPA/MPP programs with specializations in local government management

Presentation to NASPAA membership: October 18, 2012
Final revision: March 3, 2013

Background

The following proposed competencies are intended to guide MPA/MPP programs with specializations in local government management or similar titles. Program directors may use this framework as a guide in completing Standard 5.3, Mission-specific Elective Competencies.

These competencies are not part of the NASPAA Standards adopted by the membership in October 2009. These competencies, developed in consultation with ICMA's Advisory Board on Graduate Education, were selected because they are qualities generally associated with public administrators in local government. These competencies are in addition to the universally required competencies identified in Standard 5.1. Also, we avoided encroaching into other substantive areas, such as budgeting and finance, where additional specialization competencies are under development.

Three levels of learning outcomes

Graduates of MPA/MPP programs who aspire to a career in local government administration should demonstrate three distinct but cumulative levels of learning. While graduates of an MPA/MPP program may not be uniformly proficient at all three levels, it is expected that over time the program will demonstrate progress in overall student proficiency in meeting its performance expectations for each level. The three levels of learning are

- Level 1 - Conceptual knowledge/facts: *understand* the basic tenets of local government administration.
- Level 2 – Working knowledge/skills: *apply* conceptual knowledge to managing local governments.
- Level 3 - Analytical knowledge/behaviors: *integrate* conceptual and working knowledge such that others look to the person for guidance on decisions, actions, and choices.

Methods for conveying learning outcomes

Programs are encouraged to be creative in how they teach or otherwise convey the three levels of learning, and how they assess student learning outcomes for the totality of the student's learning experience. The following assumes that the instructional methods have largely a local government content.

- Level 1 – classroom instruction, certification programs, self-paced tutorials, workshops, conferences.
- Level 2 – internships, observation, volunteer activities, service projects, mock exercises, public hearings, problem-solving projects in courses.
- Level 3 – capstone courses, self-assessments by students, mentor evaluation, reflection and assessment activities in other courses.

MPA/MPP programs with a local government specialization should provide evidence of their graduates' mastery of each of these levels of learning for each of the following competencies.

Recommended competencies

1. Citizen engagement

- Level 1 – Graduates will understand the methods of and reasons for informing, engaging, and involving citizens, forms of communication, and the barriers to effective participation in local governance.
- Level 2 – Graduates will demonstrate skills in engaging citizens, communicating with diverse populations, and including diverse populations in local government.
- Level 3 – Graduates will assess their knowledge and experiences in citizen engagement in local government and reflect on what worked and what was not effective.

2. Governing board – career administrator relationships

- Level 1 – Graduates will understand and support the political context of local government, responsibilities of administrators to elected officials, policy-administration tensions, and media relations.
- Level 2 – Graduates will demonstrate skills in oral and written communication, conflict resolution, developing agendas, and running meetings.
- Level 3 – Graduates will assess their knowledge and experience in the relationship between elected and career local government administrators and reflect on what worked and what was not effective.

3. Ethics and integrity

- Level 1 – Graduates will understand the bases of administrative ethics, tenets of the ICMA and ASPA Codes of Ethics, political neutrality, ethical dilemmas, transparency, cultural sensitivity, and the public service ethic.
- Level 2 – Graduates will demonstrate skills in cultural sensitivity, fairness, objectivity, and the public service ethic.
- Level 3 – Graduates will assess their knowledge and experience with ethics and integrity in local government and reflect on what has worked to strengthen the ethical climate of their organization and the areas of ethical vulnerability.

4. Intergovernmental and interorganizational relationships

- Level 1 – Graduates will understand regional citizenship and governance, the role of nonprofits, businesses, and other governments in providing local services, privatization of local government services, business decision making, and consultants.
- Level 2 – Graduates will demonstrate skills in mediation and negotiation, oral and written communication, and networking with leaders in local government, nonprofits, and business.
- Level 3 – Graduates will assess their knowledge and experience in developing and maintaining networks among their peers in local government, nonprofits, and business and reflect on how the interests of both the region and the community in which they work can be balanced and mutually advanced.

5. Designing and managing the local government organization

- Level 1 – Graduates will understand the fundamentals of (1) the internal operations of local government including budget preparation and administration, tax policy, economic development, human resources management, internal controls, strategic planning and visioning, technology applications and (2) the primary functional areas of local government including public safety, parks and recreation, utilities, planning,

sustainability, animal control, human services, municipal and county courts, and public works, and the management of contracted-out services.

Level 2 – Graduates will demonstrate skills in organizing the internal operations of a local government, team work and collaboration, and managing the primary functional areas.

Level 3 – Graduates will assess their knowledge and experience in designing and managing the local government organization and reflect on the choices they would make in the design of a local government's operations.

Framework for reporting competencies

The following framework is adapted from the reporting requirements for Standard 5.1, the universally required competencies. For each of the recommended competencies, the program should use the following framework for identifying the student learning outcomes, the means for achieving those outcomes, the methods for evaluating the success among students in mastering those outcomes, and how the program has changed the specialization in local government management as a result of its evaluation process of the competency.

Level 1: What is to be learned? For each competency, the program identifies the learning outcomes that students are expected to (1) understand (conceptual knowledge), (2) utilize (working knowledge), and (3) critique (analytical knowledge).

Level 2: How will it be learned? For each competency, the program identifies the means for achieving the learning outcomes identified in level 1. How does the program convey the expected learning outcomes to students such that they understand, utilize, and can analyze that knowledge?

Level 3: How will the program verify that the learning has occurred? For each competency, how does the program know that students understand, can utilize, and can critique the knowledge they have acquired?

Level 4: What changes has the program made as a result of its verification of learning outcomes? What changes have been made or are anticipated in the local government specialization as a result of the program's recurring evaluation of student mastery of the five competencies.

A parallel process may be used in which students specializing in local government management provide reflective assessments throughout their graduate program on (1) what their learning goals are relative to the five competencies, (2) how their competency in the five areas has changed as a result of their graduate experience, and (3) how they will continue to develop their competencies in their career.