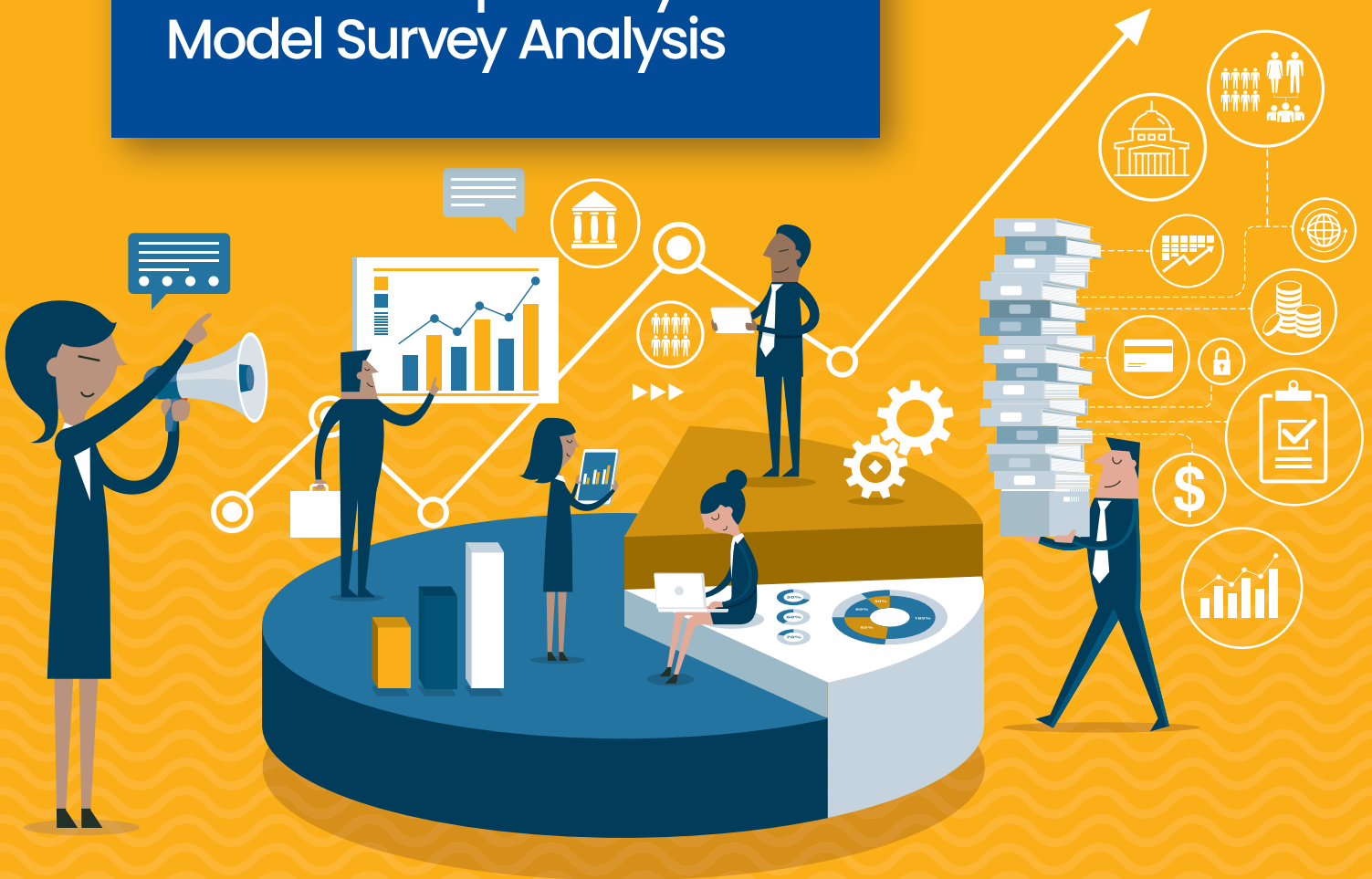


April 2022

AGA Research

Grants Competency
Model Survey Analysis



Acknowledgments

AGA is proud to recognize members of our Corporate Partner Advisory Group's (CPAG) Accounting & Auditing Committee for supporting this effort

Contributors

Theresa Falance, Senior Grants Subject Matter Expert, ManTech, and Grant Survey Co-Lead

Jim McKay, Senior Principal, Grants Management, ManTech, and Grant Survey Co-Lead

Andreia Bodale, Director, Guidehouse

Vanessa Raba, Associate Director, Guidehouse

Eric Rasmussen, Partner, KPMG

AGA

Ann Ebberts MS, PMP, Chief Executive Officer

Susan Fritzlen, Chief Operating Officer

Mary Margaret Yodzis, Editor

CPAG Accounting & Auditing Committee Leadership

Chair

Bert Neuhring, Partner, Crowe

Vice Chair

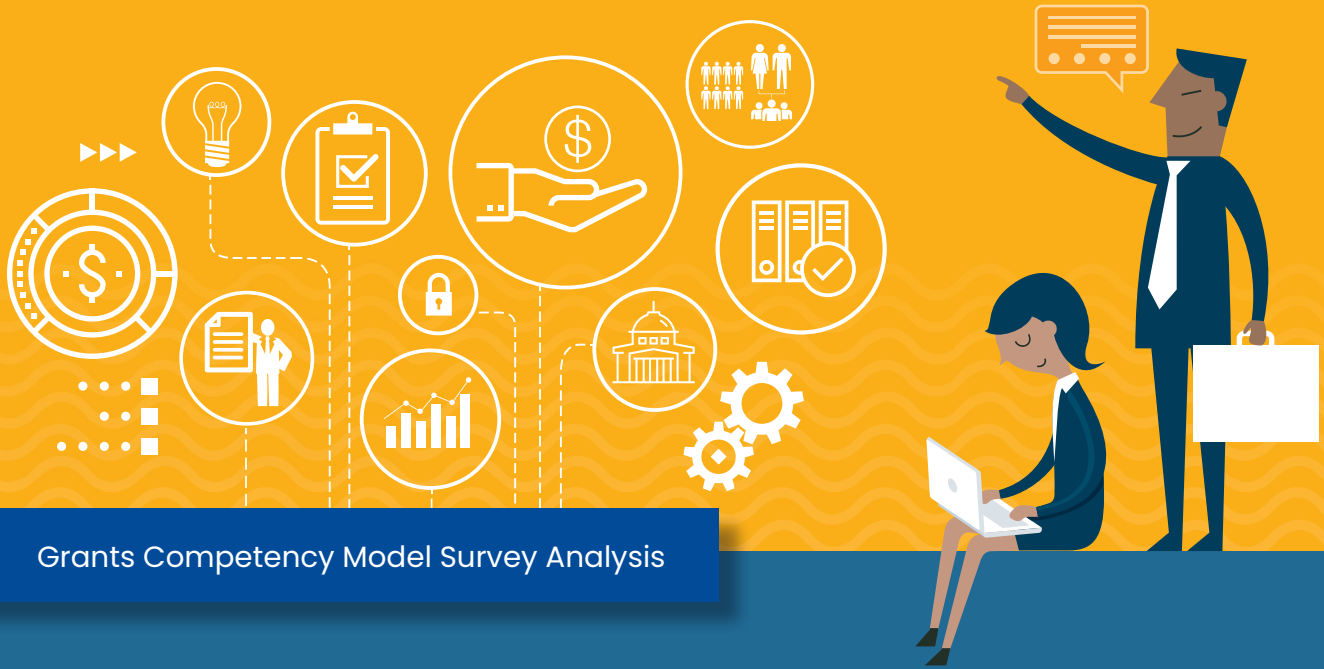
Lena Chapeton, Senior Manager, CohnReznick



AGA's Corporate Partner Advisory Group is a network of public accounting firms, major system integrators, IT companies, management consulting firms, financial services organizations, and education and training companies. These organizations all have long-term commitments to supporting the

financial management community and choose to partner with and help AGA in its mission of advancing government accountability.

AGA is the association that provides a network for connecting and empowering financial and related professionals to **advance** good government, **grow** their expertise and **accelerate** their careers!



Grants Competency Model Survey Analysis

Table of Contents

Problem Statement	4
Objective	4
Introduction	5
Comments on the Survey Premise	6
Participants' Comments and Author's Notes	7
Survey Responses	10
Observations	12



Problem Statement

The absence of a competency model for advancing the grants management profession leads to many of today's problems with financial integrity and program results. By requiring standardized skills and higher education in the discipline, an accepted model will inform higher level experiential training as well as skills assessment that is valid across agencies. This lack of a defined, standardized skill set has long hampered performance measurement in grants management. Recent events proved the governmentwide workforce ill-prepared to manage the trillions of dollars of pandemic relief funds distributed governmentwide and left state and local government personnel unsure of how to account for it.

AGA's 2018 *Uniform Guidance Implementation Survey* confirmed the need for cradle to grave training for grants managers. Recent presentations at AGA conferences as well as comments included in its *Grants Management Competencies Survey* suggest the creation of the needed curriculum depends on identifying the necessary skills. Currently, grants management competency cannot be

demonstrated through certifications valued in the financial management profession, such as Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM), Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and Project Management Professional (PMP). This situation leaves federal and recipient leadership to choose either managers who know how to manage but lack grants experience or grant experts without management experience to lead programs.¹

Existing grants management training and certifications, while valuable, are fact-based and foundational. They do not provide the cognitive challenges needed to assess and improve performance and to manage, create, train and evaluate professional grants management development systems. If higher level training were available and attainable, employment opportunities at the federal, state and local levels of government, as well as in non-profit organizations, would naturally attract a diverse pool of employees to the profession and produce professionals ready to address fraud, waste and abuse in grants programs.

Objective

AGA conducted this survey to gather evidence toward the identification of skill sets for a multi-level grants management competency model. Such a model could be published by an organization with sufficient authority to define the profession or to specify its inclusion in a classified group of professionals, such as the Federal Government's Grants Management 1109 Series. Likewise, it would define a higher-level grants certification equal in

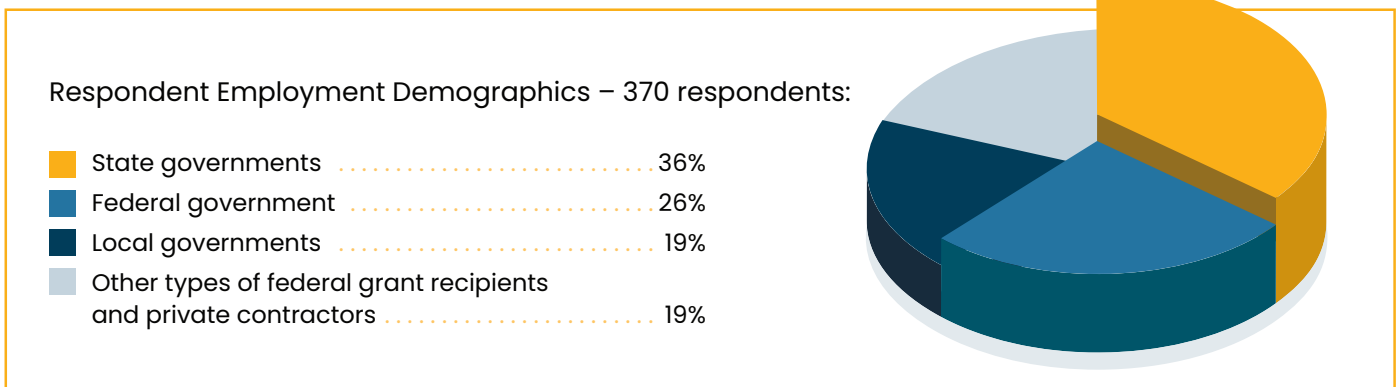
respectability to those available in the acquisition field. AGA hopes to contribute information towards a model that will empower grants professionals to recognize risks and their root causes, interpret federal guidance to design stronger controls and mitigations, and to adopt skills from neighboring competencies, such as performance and project management, to better manage and measure projects and the workforce.

Introduction

Using elements of several existing draft competency models in federal financial management, AGA set out to define the most important skill sets to be included in a grants management model that would demonstrate greater competency in each skill through a career progression. Tabulated results would show a representation of major skill areas. In addition, contributing elements in the results could be grouped into discrete skills families, including figures rounded-up to the next whole integer and, in some cases, combined ratings (e.g., “very important” and “important”); the end product would be a brief overview of prevailing opinions from grants management professionals in local, state and federal organizations and the private sector.

The evidence in this report should be regarded as a very preliminary contribution from the stakeholder community for consideration in a systematic development of the Grants Management Competency Model, as defined by proven job analysis methodologies and as performed by appropriate workforce management experts. The demographic breakdown of participants’ employment are depicted in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Demographics of AGA’s Grants Management Competency Survey





Comments on the Survey Premise

The concept of presenting this survey met with approval. Comments included:

“I’m excited about having working models with skillsets identified. Thank you!”

“I applaud your efforts to create a uniform model across the government for a grants management career path”

“Certification in Grants Management is required. It provides credibility to the users.”

“Very important certification.”

“I would like to see a similar model used in my state for grants management positions.”

“The federal government should take responsibility to develop, maintain and mandate a Grants Management Competency Model.”

“Effective, quality training for grants management professionals is pivotal for any grants management.”





Participants' Comments and Author's Notes

Competency Model Contents Comments	Authors' Notes
<p>Grants management skills are extremely important to avoid fraud, waste and abuse.</p>	<p>The federal government loses billions of dollars annually. In 2019, the Government Accountability Office estimated \$175 billion in improper payments alone.²</p>
<p>Training for individuals at each level will be key.</p>	<p>The Office of Management and Budget published a report in 2018 emphasizing the need for coordinated training.</p>
<p>Thanks for sending this out. I wish there was a program and project management expert who was part of the survey development team, however. There is considerable duplication in the categories typically covered under professional project and program management areas. If one took the 10 knowledge areas of project management, such as communications, stakeholder management and risk management, and one took the major areas of program management, to include governance and benefits, for example, the survey would have been much more condensed, and I imagine the results would have been more obvious. In any case, thanks for putting this together.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>A few managers were put in the position because they were great at a specific function (e.g., physician or lawyer), not because they could manage an entire clinic or program. As a manager, they were in way over their heads.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Project management is an extremely important component of the grants management process.</p>	<p>The survey was written by a PMP. Instead of inserting the authors' opinions, we used federal draft competency models. These comments provide additional evidence that the project management skill set is one of the most important components of management in general. Statements will be reflected in our analysis, mainly at the upper levels as recommended by the Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act.</p>
<p>Difficult to check box or rank when most are important and depend on level taught.</p>	<p>Standard Job Duty Analysis rules should guide the development of statements, to be sequenced by objectives that build up on prerequisite knowledge.</p>
<p>This is an important effort. Glad AGA is taking it on.</p>	<p>AGA is planning a forum on advancing the profession. One of the key components is competency model development.</p>

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

Competency Model Contents Comments	Authors' Notes
<p>Auditing and financial skills are very important. To issue and monitor grants funds are very important skills. You have to ensure grants are used for their intentions.</p>	<p>According to the Office of Justice Programs General Counsel Rafael Madan, "The federal government has a constitutionally based fiduciary responsibility to monitor federal fund expenditures. This is protecting the Federal Fisc."</p>
<p>There is normally a broader spectrum of positions – ones focused on the pre-award (proposal development, negotiation side), one focused on managing the projects at the local level with the investigator, and those focused on central financial administration activities.</p>	<p>Your statement confirms various skill sets are needed in the model and, further, those skill sets are also dependent on the career level of the grants specialists and may be developed according to the focus of a position in the grants lifecycle.</p>
<p>Most grants management in our bureau resides in accounting offices.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Most of my career has been in public accounting, but I felt the transition to grant accounting was not difficult because of my general understanding of transactions and tracking expenses. The main aspects that I had to learn dealt with learning the regulations in regard to equipment, contracts and indirect rates.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Accounting experience is key.</p>	<p>Accounting is very important. Also, the federal government has renewed focus on performance over simple compliance. Meeting objectives can be measured quantitatively or proven qualitatively, so the well-rounded practitioner needs to attend to both.</p>
<p>The certification should require a test and continuing education.</p>	<p>Yes, as specified in the ANSI 1100 Specification for Certification. The first step is building and accepting a competency model.</p>
<p>I'm not sure all of this covers grants management. Successful grants management is identifying the basic demands of the grant and accounting for them accordingly.</p>	<p>This survey did not include the program-specific skill sets. Rather, it focused on the business management side of grants management.</p>
<p>I audit grants. Lack of understanding of Single Audit requirements is a huge issue with grants managers.</p>	<p>Yes, audit-related knowledge is included in the skill sets. It was broadly included under financial management, which ranked highly at all career levels. Between 90–95% of respondents thought this skill set was very important or important at all levels. Auditing also scored second highest when respondents chose a neighboring field as a source for grants managers. Based on this feedback, future surveys or development could include audit as a separate skill set.</p>
<p>The latter involves serious talent in influence, communications, ally-building, etc.</p>	<p>The behavioral skills section should address these needs</p>

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

Competency Model Contents Comments	Authors' Notes
<p>The CGFM is a good certification for grants management/managers and could be a component specialty, like the "A" designation for Acquisition Managers, vs. having to develop a new certification.</p> <p>You did not include one major certification: Certified Government Financial Manager, issued by AGA.</p>	<p>AGA has considered that option.</p> <p>CGFM should be included.</p>
<p>Effective, quality training for grants management professionals is pivotal for any grants management.</p> <p>This is a very important skill that often gets put under financial management with very little training provided. We mostly learn on the fly.</p>	<p>Yes, the competency model is the first step toward objectives and content.</p>
<p>Good idea for AGA to create another certification, and agree that Grants Management needs a cert, and AGA needs to diversify.</p>	<p>AGA is considering options.</p>
<p>Leadership is extremely important. Being able to collaborate openly with other professionals allows for [more] transparency.</p>	<p>Survey respondents confirmed this sentiment, with 83% suggesting an additional level of performance be added for leadership.</p>
<p>Certification in Grants Management is required. It provides credibility to the users, similar to other professions. I suggest the certification be called "Certified Grants Manager" OR "Certificate in Grants Management."</p>	<p>If certification is achieved according to a proliferation of existing training resources and an independent test, it is correctly called certification. If the certifying organization owns the body of work that is tested or offers an organizational recognition, it is called a certificate.</p>



Survey Responses

Question 1 Given that certifications are extremely limited for grants managers, if no certification were available to determine competencies contributing to grants success, which of the following credentials would be the most useful for distinguishing a candidate for a grants position? (Top 3 answers)

Certified Federal Contract Manager	35%
Certified Public Accountant	26%
Project Management Professional	19%

Question 2 Given that Grants Management has been aligned under Financial Management, if you had to recruit a candidate from a neighboring field to train as a grants manager, which of the following fields do you believe has the most applicable skills to prepare a new grants manager? (Top 4 answers)

Accounting	27%
Auditing	24%
Acquisition/Contracting	22%
Project Management	22%

Question 3 Competencies can be either technical or behavioral. Technical competencies reflect the knowledge required to perform a specific role. Behavioral competencies describe the knowledge, skills and abilities to facilitate application of technical knowledge to job-related behavior. For example, oral communications abilities are behavioral skills that facilitate the technical skill of Negotiation Techniques. Accountability skills facilitate the technical skill of Project Management oversight of budgets and schedules.

The participants thought technical and behavioral competencies were equality important and should be associated with one another.

Question 4 The following categories have appeared in multiple federal competency models. Please rank the following overarching categories sequentially from 1.

- Financial Management & Award Management (tie)
- Acquisition & Grant Development (tie)
- Program Management
- Maintaining Management of Federal Guidance
- Project Management

Question 5 Initial plans favor a three-level model: **Level 1 (Intern), Level 2 (Journeyman), and Level 3 (Senior)**. Do you think additional levels should be added for management and leadership?

Less than half of participants (45%) said additional levels should be added for management and leadership.

Questions 6–8 Please use the table below to rank the importance of each overarching skill category to each phase of a Grants Management career. Please refer to the chart to see the draft reference model. (Top 3 answers)

Key Skill Categories for Level 1 (Intern):

- Financial Management & Maintain Knowledge of Federal Guidance (tie)
- Monitoring

Key Skill Categories for Level 2 (Journeyman):

- Maintain Knowledge of Federal Guidance & Financial Management (tie)
- Award Management & Monitoring (tie)
- Maintain Knowledge of Federal Guidance
- Financial Management
- Risk Assessment

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

Key Skill Categories for Level 3 (Senior):

- Project Management (98%)
- Maintain Knowledge of Federal Guidance
- Financial Management

Participants noted that as one progresses through the levels, “Risk Assessment” becomes more important.

Question 9 For Senior Grants Leaders, when considering skills specifically for Managers of Programs and their participants, the following skills have increased importance.

Performance Management	98%
Program Management	97%
Project Management	95%

Question 10 Should a competency model for grants management require participants to quote the Uniform Grant Guidance:

More than half of respondents (56%) thought all grants managers should have a working knowledge of the entire Uniform Guidance.

Question 11 In which of these sectors do you currently work? (Respondent Demographics – 370 respondents)

State Governments	36%
Federal Government	26%
Local Governments	19%
Other types of federal grant recipients and private contractors	19%

Question 12 Where did you spend most of your career?

State Government	37%
Federal Government	31%
Local Government	17%



Observations

Participants generally approved of the premise for the development of a grants management competency model, but only one assigned the responsibility to the federal government. Another expressed support for AGA to move toward this goal. Although a third of the participants work in state and local organizations, the responses include a large representation of federal employees as well.

No mandated competency model for grants management currently exists. The survey questions were based on broad topics proposed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' intra-agency ReInvent Grants Management Team and the Office of Management and Budget's Financial Management Competency model. Answers to survey Questions 4, 6, 7 and 8 show respondents consider Financial Management the most important topical area for grants specialists, followed closely by Maintaining Management of Federal Guidance. Of related occupations, Accounting (part of Financial Management) and Acquisitions were thought to be closely related. According to responses to Question 4, the areas of greatest importance to the grants management discipline include Financial Management, Award Management, Acquisition, Grant Development, Program Management, Maintaining Management of Federal Guidance, and Project Management.

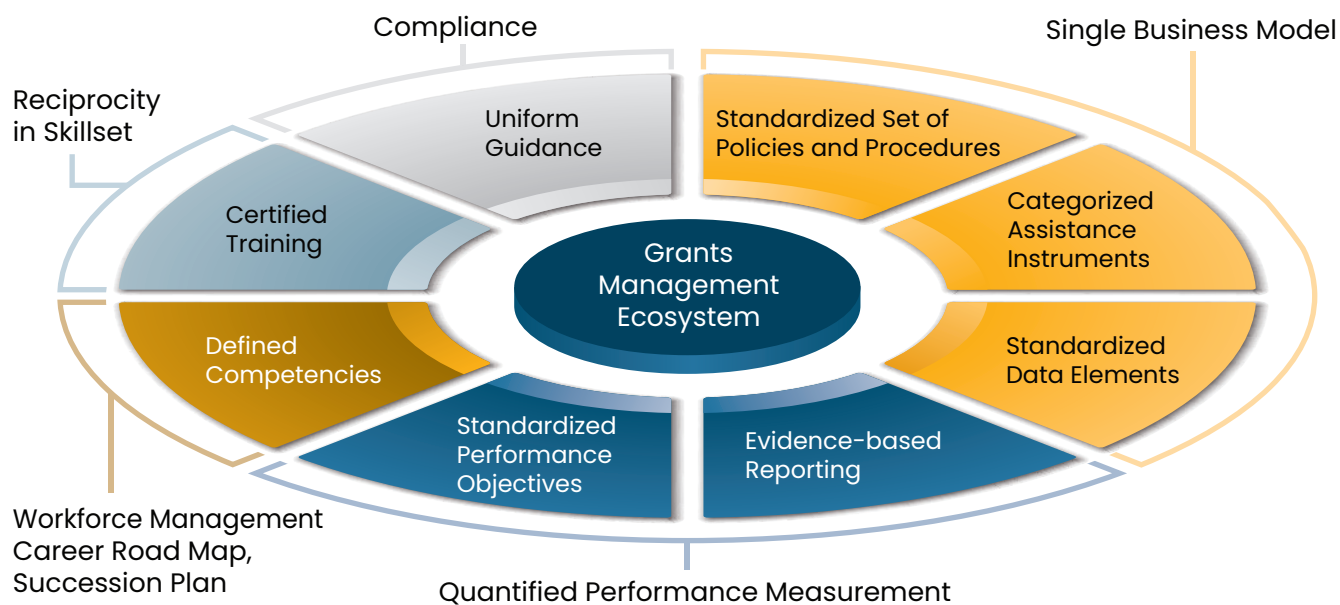
Most recipients approve of a multi-level competency model and suggest four levels. Standard models range between three and five levels. In a five-level model, the fourth is assigned to management and the fifth to leadership. The four-level model preferred here may indicate survey participants grouped management (program and project management) with leadership (strategy, motivation, governance and controls). As the levels ascend to Senior Grants Manager, program and project management and performance management become more important, probably reflecting views aligned more to management and leadership than proficiency in reaching senior technical status in grants management.

Federal Competency Models, especially those proffered by the Office of Personnel Management, tend to emphasize behavioral competencies that are more difficult to prove than technical competencies. However, our survey audience said technical and behavioral competencies are equally important and should be associated with one another.

In a recent AGA presentation, a senior government official³ described the grants management ecosystem, shown in **Figure 2**, as comprised of people, process, systems, policies and procedures, laws and regulations (including the Uniform Guidance), and personnel development. Key elements included compliance with regulations, standardized set of policies and procedures, categorized assistance instruments, standardized data elements, evidence-based reporting, standardized performance objectives, defined competencies, and certified training.



Figure 2. Grants Management Ecosystem



To-date, the federal government and supporting consulting industry have chipped away at symptoms of problems in all of these areas. Until the workforce development infrastructure is resolved, grants managers cannot know what is expected of them. It will slow their career progress and hinder the government’s ability to resolve nagging issues in all grants management components, not the least of which is unrelenting fraud, waste and abuse.

Author’s Note: This survey posed very basic questions about the components of grants management. For example, it concentrated on the highest-level skill category (i.e., financial management), rather than its components, which include the ability to perform cash vs. accrual accounting and financial analysis, read a financial statement, formulate a budget and more. According to this audience, high-level categories should include, at a minimum, financial management, award management, program management, project management, working knowledge of federal guidance and the 2 CFR § 200, and skills in acquisition and grant development and lifecycle.



The table presented in **Figure 3** shows an example of the next developmental step in breaking down categories into component elements, adding the demonstration of skills for at least three levels, and incorporating the quantification of performance measures. As long as there is no mandated competency model for grants managers, there is no legitimate way to demand the demonstration of technical and behavioral performance. Lack of reciprocity in skill demonstrations across the federal government and

its recipient organizations could be resolved by applying this rigor. The promise inherent in competency modeling is its use to drive down organizational strategy to the level of employee behavior.⁴ Being able to demonstrate necessary skills in the context of appropriate behaviors would set a standard for the entire profession and allow the value of practitioners' work to increase exponentially as they meet infrastructure and societal needs.

Figure 3. Grants Management Competency Model

Grants Management Specialist/1109	Basic (Level 1) Proficiency	Intermediate (Level 2) Proficiency	Advanced (Level 3) Proficiency
<p>Attribute, Skill or Behavior Characteristic Example: Uses Project Management Tools</p> <p>Measurement or Success Criteria: PMBOK: Project Scheduling Principles OMB Project Management Standards: Project Management</p>	<p>Example 2: Contributes to program schedule research, analysis and documentation</p> <p>Standard or Measurement: Demonstrates accurate use of mathematical operators and working knowledge of Microsoft Office software skills, such as the ability to develop spreadsheets, format documents and conduct internet searches, with up to two iterations of guidance</p>	<p>Example 2: Creates Work Breakdown and Milestone Schedules</p> <p>Standard or Measurement: Demonstrates proficiency in Microsoft Project or software to visualize data in GANTT, SWOT, PERT, PARETO and similar charts</p>	<p>Example 2: Leads and takes responsibility for forecasting, establishing and managing project and program budgets and schedules</p> <p>Standard or Measurement: Manages projects within budgets and schedules 90% of the time or reports risks and develops mitigations to remain on the project critical path as defined by the PMBOK</p>



Endnotes

- ¹ 2021 AGA Professional Development Training (PDT), Panel Discussion on Grants Management Competencies Survey (M-103), July 19, 2021.
- ² <https://www.gao.gov/improper-payments>
- ³ See Endnote 1.
- ⁴ Campion M.C., D.J. Schepker, M.A. Campion & J.I. Sanchez, J.I. "Competency modeling: A theoretical and empirical examination of the strategy dissemination process," *Human Resource Management* (Vol. 59, No. 3) May–June 2020, p. 291–306.



www.agacgfm.org