

## Core Competencies for Community Development Professionals

By Courtney Mailey

In the spring and summer of 2009, a small focus group of community development leaders from Virginia came together at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond to discuss key elements of strategic workforce planning for the community development industry. To begin developing a deeper pool of managers and leaders, the group first considered their business plans along with the types of people and positions they needed within three to five years to accomplish their missions. They identified three key staff roles present in every type of community development organization today: leaders, project managers and support staff. While the group agreed that each role has competencies for being most effective in that role, it also agreed that every type of staff member throughout the organization should demonstrate five core competencies for community development organizations and for the industry as a whole to be successful.

Using the Lominger competency development model as a springboard, the group identified five core competencies by consensus: **Community Focus, Integrity and Trust, Perseverance, Problem-Solving and Strategic Agility.**<sup>1</sup> These fundamental core competencies, otherwise known as behaviors, attitudes and soft skills, must be displayed by community development organization staff, volunteers and board members at all levels.

Core competencies ultimately describe consistent behavioral choices. Establishing core competencies helps articulate expectations of individual performance, develop goals and support the organization in harnessing the outputs of its people to drive critical outcomes.

Because community development is a multi-faceted profession, the focus

group tailored existing Lominger categories to be more reflective of community development work. For example, the group took “Organizational Agility” and “Political Savvy” and combined them to create “Strategic Agility.” This new competency reflects the importance of knowing how various relationships and organizations are connected and being able to maneuver within that network, while being aware of potential pitfalls and fallout from unexpected events or crises.

Another competency, “Community Focus,” was created from many different behaviors and traits and reflects a unique competency specific to this industry. Among other things, a person highly skilled in community focus can maintain a broad perspective about how different stakeholders are affected by his or her own decisions as well as those of institutions and groups. Community focus also means interacting with people in every kind of circumstance, rich or poor, with ease while maintaining a focus on the ultimate purpose of community development work—creating better places for people to live.

Identifying core competencies acts as a building block for workforce development because it helps clarify the types of careers community development offers to candidates recruited into the industry. Core competencies also help senior managers articulate what behaviors represent the ideal for staff development and performance. As Keri Ellison, a talent and organizational development consultant in Human Resources at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, says, “Just because someone completes a performance goal doesn’t mean organizational objectives were met if the person does it in the wrong way.

We fall short when we don’t pay attention to competencies about how someone does something versus what gets done.”

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger, *FYI For Your Improvement*, Lominger, Inc.: Minneapolis, MN, 2002.