



SORP

SOCIETY OF OUTDOOR
RECREATION PROFESSIONALS

**Outdoor Recreation Core Competencies Outreach,
Identification, and Evaluation**

**FINAL REPORT
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EPPLEY CENTER FOR PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS

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Executive Summary

Project Background & Purpose

Outdoor recreation professionals play an integral role in creating, maintaining, and promoting outdoor experiences for all. In 2025, the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (SORP) partnered with the Eppley Center for Parks and Public Lands to refine and validate a set of core competencies for these professionals through a structured, consensus-driven process. This work builds on initial efforts that began in 2023 as a collaboration between SORP, the U.S. Forest Service, and an Advisory Group composed of representatives from both the public and private sectors. These core competencies are

foundational and universally applicable across the outdoor recreation field. They are relevant not only to federal, state, and local government park agencies, but also to nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, and other related settings.

Summary of Findings

For the purpose of this project, the Eppley Center employed a modified Delphi method to gather input from subject matter experts across two survey rounds. A total of 656 professionals were invited to participate, with 130 responding in Round 1 and 74 in Round 2. Respondents represented a wide range of affiliations, geographic regions, and professional backgrounds. Notably, the participant pool was highly experienced, with 77% reporting over 15 years in the field. The majority also held advanced

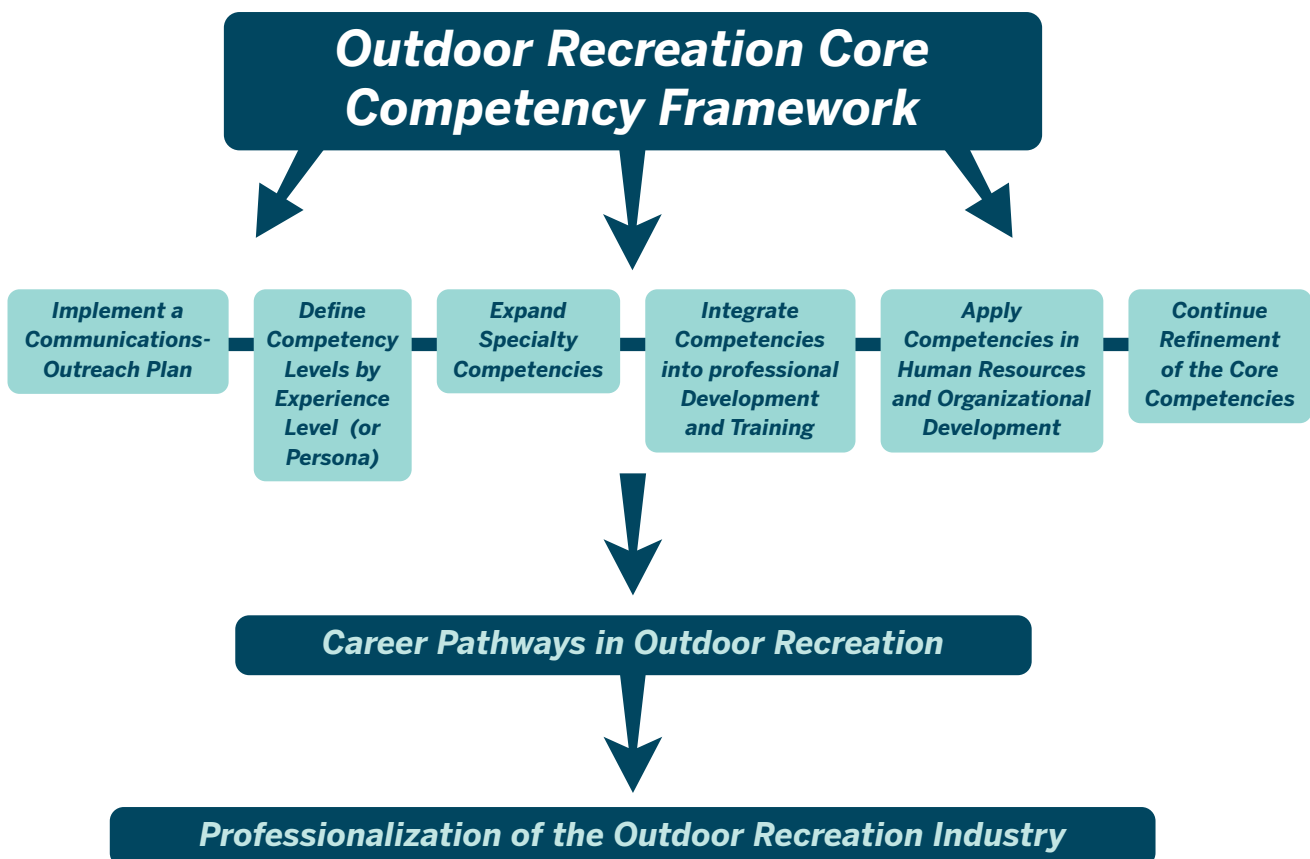
degrees, further underscoring the depth of expertise represented among participants. Due to the overrepresentation of USFS respondents, the Eppley Center provided a weighted analysis of the results as additional information.

Earlier work on the core competencies identified six domains: Land Management, Recreation Access, Project Management, Recreation Management, Recreation Planning & Visitor Use Management, and Program & Operations Management. In this project, respondents were asked to validate the competencies within each domain. A 90% agreement threshold was used to determine consensus, and most competencies met or exceeded this benchmark following revisions. Throughout the process, several competencies were refined, renamed, or merged by the project team and the Advisory Group based on feedback from participants.

Next Steps

The next phase of this initiative will be guided by SORP, the Advisory Group, the USFS Core Team, and other stakeholders. To advance the development and application of core competencies for outdoor recreation professionals, SORP should consider several strategic actions. These include defining tiered competency levels by career stage (for example, Entry, Full Performance, and Expert), expanding specialty competencies in collaboration with other organizations and in different sectors, aligning training and professional development with competencies, and integrating competencies into human resource practices. Finally, the ongoing refinement of the core competencies will ensure continued relevance and responsiveness to emerging trends in the field of outdoor recreation.

FIGURE: Next Steps Flowchart for Outdoor Recreation Core Competencies



Introduction

Background and Purpose

Outdoor recreation professionals play an integral role in creating, maintaining, and promoting outdoor experiences for everyone. An outdoor recreation professional is defined as:

Any person who participates in activities as part of their paid or volunteer labor that facilitates access to nature-based outdoor recreation. This includes any professional that plans for, manages, organizes, researches, analyzes, administers, and/or maintains outdoor recreation spaces, programs, and projects in public, private, and non-profit agencies and organizations.

In 2023, the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (SORP), together with their Core Competency Advisory Group (Advisory Group), initiated a project to develop a set of core competencies for outdoor recreation professionals. Stakeholders for the project included the SORP Board of Directors and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The Advisory Group consisted of members representing land management government agencies (federal and state), parks and recreation professionals (state and local), higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and other key partners. The overarching objective was to identify a set of core competencies for outdoor recreation professionals.

In 2025, SORP and the Eppley Center for Parks and Public Lands (Eppley) undertook a collaborative process to identify and refine the core competencies for outdoor recreation professionals.

Why A Core Competency Framework?

The Eppley Center has assisted with the development of competency frameworks for several organizations including American Trails (Anderson et al., 2022) and the World Park Academy (Wolter et al., 2022). For the outdoor recreation profession, a core competency framework identifies necessary skills, knowledge,

and understanding of topics directly applicable to managerial-level work in outdoor recreation fields.

These core competencies are foundational and universal in outdoor recreation. The competencies are applicable across sectors, not only in federal, state, and local government park agencies, but also nonprofit, higher education, and other settings.

Methodology

Design

To begin the evaluative process, SORP and Eppley staff (the evaluation team) reviewed a draft list of the competency domains and sub-competencies developed by SORP and the Advisory Group. The list was a result of several work sessions and extended discussions with other stakeholders. At the conclusion of this stage, six core competency domains and their corresponding sub-competencies were identified.

Core Competency Domains for Outdoor Recreation Professionals

1. Land Management
2. Recreation Access
3. Project Management
4. Recreation Management
5. Recreation Planning + Visitor Use Management
6. Program + Operations Management

The project team used a competency process developed by Eppley (Anderson et al., 2022; Wolter et al., 2022) and supported by research (Keeney et al., 2011; von der Gracht, 2012). A modified Delphi method using the survey tool Qualtrics® was used to present the list of competencies to subject matter experts (SMEs). An initial survey (Round 1) was sent to the SMEs who were asked to rate their level of agreement with the competencies as presented. The project team reviewed the results and level of agreement. The team and Advisory Group then revised competencies that



did not meet the targeted level of consensus (90%). In Round 2, SMEs who completed Round 1 were presented the revised competencies and again asked to rate their level of agreement.

Criteria for Subject Matter Experts

With the assistance of the Advisory Group, the project team determined the criteria for subject matter expert qualification. The criteria were also used to recruit participants.

Subject matter expert must identify as ...

(1) an outdoor recreation professional in a field such as park management, recreation planning, landscape architecture, natural resource management, applied outdoor recreation research, or conservation education.

and meet most of the following criteria:

- *Has several years of experience in land management, particularly with respect*

to outdoor recreation management (planning, access, visitor use management, monitoring & assessment of conditions, operations).

- *Demonstrates an ability to inclusively lead outdoor recreation projects and programs in collaboration with partners through business and operations acumen, effective communication and facilitation skills, and demonstrated ability in implementation and evaluation.*
- *Can effectively apply a wide range of knowledge of relevant laws, policies, standards, and grants/agreements as they apply to outdoor recreation projects and programs.*
- *Has demonstrated growth in professional trajectory, i.e., through career progression in outdoor recreation ranks, work experience in recreation planning or management, agency leadership, or a broad portfolio of responsibilities.*

Recruitment

The SORP Board of Directors and the Advisory Group assisted in subject matter expert recruitment. They were provided with the SME criteria and asked to refer qualified professionals using a Qualtrics® survey. They were reminded that SORP was seeking experts from a variety of outdoor recreation sectors, including federal, state, and local governments, nonprofits, non-government organizations, higher education, and others. The resulting list of professionals totaled **625 individuals**.

As part of Round 1 survey, the initial list of professionals was given the opportunity to refer other professionals from their network to participate. This resulted in an additional **31 individuals**. An additional **six individuals** participated in the survey but were not on the curated list and may have been directed to the survey by a colleague who received the invitation.

The final distribution list increased to **656 individuals**.

Data Collection

The data collection for the project was conducted in two rounds using the survey tool Qualtrics®. The Round 1 survey was distributed to the list of 656 individuals. The survey was available from May 20 to June 6, 2025. During this period, SORP sent out two reminders to the group to encourage participation. After closing Round 1, the project team determined that 130 valid responses were received for a response rate of 19.8%.

In preparation for Round 2, the project team reviewed the results from Round 1, including open-text comments received from respondents. The interim results were shared with the Advisory Group and other stakeholders for their insights and suggestions for revisions for Round 2.

For Round 2, the participation pool was limited to the 130 respondents who provided valid responses in Round 1. The Round 2 survey was available from July 17 to July 29, 2025. The Round 2 survey contained

only the revised competencies that did not meet the consensus level of 90% agreement. The Round 2 invitation email highlighted the changes to the competencies. As with the previous round, SORP sent two reminders to encourage participation. Round 2 had 74 valid responses for a response rate of 57%.

Analysis

For the purposes of the analysis, the project team excluded any respondents who did not complete at least one competency rating. The respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Based on previous work (Anderson et al., 2022; Wolter et al., 2022) and research (Keeney et al., 2011), the project team elected to set the consensus threshold at 90% which was calculated by combining the responses for “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree.”

The open-ended responses were reviewed by the project team and Advisory group and were used to provide direction on combining, revising, or eliminating the competencies that fell below the threshold of 90%.

Weighted Analysis

Due to the overrepresentation of respondents identifying as “Federal – US Forest Service” (67%) in Round 1, an additional analysis was conducted to better interpret the results. A weighting strategy was applied using the workplace/affiliation group identifier (e.g., Federal – US Forest Service) to make representation across groups equal. This approach reduced the influence of larger respondent groups and ensured that each affiliation contributed equally to the weighted results. Respondents from smaller groups were assigned higher individual weights, while those from larger groups received proportionally smaller weights. By applying this weighting scheme, the analysis provided a more balanced and equitable representation across all affiliation groups, supporting a fairer interpretation of the survey data.

Results

Participants

During the course of the project, 130 individuals participated in Round 1 and, of those, 74 individuals completed Round 2. During Round 1, respondents were required to confirm their level of expertise and asked to voluntarily provide demographic information.

Expertise

Ninety-four percent (94%) of the respondents identified as an outdoor recreation professional. The project team examined the remaining eight to ensure they met the criteria to participate in the study as subject matter experts. Overall, these individuals scored above 75% on all the criteria set for subject matter experts. The respondents brought a wealth of experience in the recreation professions with 52% reporting 16-25 years and 25% indicating 6-15 years of experience.

Table: How many years have you been in the recreation profession?

| Years in Recreation Profession | Count | % |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|
| I'm a student or an intern | 0 | 0% |
| 5 years or less | 3 | 3% |
| 6-15 years | 30 | 25% |
| 16-25 years | 62 | 52% |
| More than 25 years | 23 | 19% |
| I'm retired | 1 | 1% |
| I'm a volunteer | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 119 | 100% |

Workplace or Affiliation

While most respondents identified as working for the U.S. Forest Service (67%), professionals from other sectors were represented including higher education (8%), state workers (6%), nonprofit/non-governmental organizations (5%), National Park Service (3%), local/county (2%), and others on small scale. The only sectors identified as possible participants but not represented were Tribal Groups/American Indian Nations and Land Trusts.

Table: Workplace or institutional affiliation

| Workplace or Institutional Affiliation | Count | % |
|---|-------|------|
| Consultant / Consulting Firm | 3 | 2% |
| Federal - US Forest Service | 87 | 67% |
| Federal - Bureau of Land Management | 2 | 2% |
| Federal - National Park Service | 4 | 3% |
| Federal - Other | 1 | 1% |
| State | 8 | 6% |
| Local - City/Municipality | 2 | 2% |
| Local - County | 3 | 2% |
| Tribal Groups and American Indian Nations | 0 | 0% |
| Higher education or applied research | 10 | 8% |
| Nonprofit / NGO | 6 | 5% |
| Private Organization / Company | 1 | 1% |
| Land Trust | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 3 | 2% |
| Total | 130 | 100% |

Geographical Representation

Respondents were asked to identify where they lived based on geographic region (grouping of states in proximity to each other). The Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions were highly represented (28% each), followed by the Southwest region (19%).

Table: Geographical Representation

| Where Respondents Live | Count | % |
|--|-------|------|
| Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT) | 6 | 5% |
| Mid-Atlantic (DC, DE, MD) | 5 | 4% |
| Southeast (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV) | 3 | 3% |
| Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI) | 15 | 13% |
| Southwest (AZ, NM, OK, TX) | 23 | 19% |
| Rocky Mountain (CO, ID, MT, NV, UT, WY) | 34 | 28% |
| Pacific Coast (CA, OR, WA, AK, HI) | 34 | 28% |
| Other / International | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 120 | 100% |

Age

Respondents were asked to identify their age within predefined ranges. Of those who responded, the 46-50 age group was the most represented at 24%. This was closely followed by the 41-45 age group at 22%, and the 51-55 age group at 21%, indicating a strong representation of individuals in their forties and early fifties.

Table: Age

| Age Ranges | Count | % |
|----------------|-------|------|
| 25 and younger | 0 | 0% |
| 26-30 | 2 | 2% |
| 31-35 | 9 | 8% |
| 36-40 | 15 | 13% |
| 41-45 | 26 | 22% |
| 46-50 | 28 | 24% |
| 51-55 | 25 | 21% |
| 56-60 | 5 | 4% |
| 61 and older | 8 | 7% |
| Total | 118 | 100% |

Gender

Respondents were asked to identify their gender. There was almost equal representation of men (48%) and women (47%) of those who responded.

Table: Gender

| Gender | Count | % |
|---------------------------|-------|------|
| Man | 55 | 48% |
| Woman | 54 | 47% |
| Non-binary / third gender | 1 | 1% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |
| Prefer not to answer | 4 | 4% |
| Total | 114 | 100% |

Race or Ethnicity

Respondents were asked to identify their race and/or ethnicity. The majority of those who responded identified as white or Caucasian (87%).

Table: Race or Ethnicity

| Race or Ethnicity | Count | % |
|--|-------|------|
| White or Caucasian | 104 | 87% |
| Black or African American | 4 | 3% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 4 | 3% |
| Asian or Asian American | 2 | 2% |
| American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native | 1 | 1% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 0 | 0% |
| Another race or ethnicity | 0 | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 7 | 6% |
| Total Responses | 119 | 100% |

Level of Education

Respondents were asked to indicate their highest level of education. Among those who responded, close to half (46%) reported holding a Master's degree, followed by those with a Bachelor's degree (39%).

Table: Level of education

| Level of Education | Count | % |
|--|-------|------|
| Some middle school or high school coursework | 0 | 0% |
| High school diploma or equivalent | 1 | 1% |
| Some college coursework | 1 | 1% |
| Trade or technical training | 0 | 0% |
| Associate's degree | 0 | 0% |
| Bachelor's degree | 46 | 39% |
| Master's degree | 55 | 46% |
| PhD or other advanced degree | 16 | 13% |
| Prefer not to say | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 119 | 100% |



Round 2 Participants

Because respondents were required to identify themselves (name and email address) in both rounds of survey, the project team was able to derive the demographic information on the **74** Round 2 participants by linking the datasets.

Round 2 Demographic Information

- **Expertise:** Ninety-three percent (93%) of these individuals identified as an outdoor recreation professional.
- **Experience:** Forty-four percent (44%) reporting 16-25 years and 27% at 6-15 years.
- **Workplace:** Fifty-five percent (55%) of the Round 2 participants identified as working for U.S. Forest Service, followed by Higher Education (12%) and State (11%).
- **Geographic Region:** The Pacific Coast (31%) and Rocky Mountain (28%) regions were selected by the majority of Round 2 participants.
- **Age:** The 46-50 and 51-55 age groups were most represented at 23% each, followed closely by the 41-45 age group at 20%.
- **Gender:** In Round 2, women (54%) were more represented than men (43%).
- **Race or Ethnicity:** The majority identified as white or Caucasian (86%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (4%).
- **Education:** Close to half (51%) reported holding a Master's degree, followed by those with a Bachelor's degree (27%) and PhD (19%).

Core Competencies

Land Management

In the competency domain “Land Management,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on five (5) of the six (6) competencies. The competency “**Traditional Ecological Knowledge**” (TEK) received 83% consensus. Comments suggested several

reasons for the lower agreement such as TEK should be incorporated into all the competencies, the competency is too specific, and several suggestions on word choice. The project team and Advisory group revised the competency for Round 2 including renaming it to “**Tribal and Indigenous Relations**” and making changes to address some of the concerns brought up by commenters. In Round 2, the consensus level was 92%.

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Historical Context of Public Lands Management: Understand the historical formation and ethics of public land management, modern land management objectives, and evolution of access to recreation on public lands. | 70% | 96% | 97% |
| Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Cultivate and leverage the value that multiple disciplines, across areas of expertise and interest, bring to recreation planning and management. | 81% | 96% | 95% |
| Land Management Jurisdiction + Policy: Demonstrate knowledge of the missions, policies, laws, and processes of land management agencies and jurisdictions. | 77% | 97% | 97% |
| Public Lands Law: Understand and apply laws and principles of public land management to recreation infrastructure, programs, information, and operations ensuring, at minimum, compliance with applicable laws. | 70% | 95% | 87% |
| Shared Stewardship: Conduct business in a manner that reflects collaboration and consideration beyond your specific agency/organization. | 61% | 95% | 95% |
| Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Recognize the value that Traditional Ecological Knowledge brings to recreation planning and management. Consider and apply TEK in a manner prescribed by Tribes and Indigenous communities. | 39% | 83% | 73% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|---|------------------|---|
| Tribal and Indigenous Relations: Understand and honor the unique legal and cultural relationships between Tribes and state and federal governments, including treaty rights, Tribal sovereignty, and the federal trust responsibility. | 72% | 92% |



Recreation Access

In the competency domain “Recreation Access,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on five (5) of the seven (7) competencies. For the two competencies that did not reach the consensus level, the project team and Advisory Group reviewed the comments. The competency “**Individual and Community Wellbeing**” (88%) was removed from this competency domain, as it was represented elsewhere in the competency “**Community Context**” in the “**Recreation Planning & Visitor Use**

Management” domain. The competency “**Language Access**” (80%) was revised and renamed “**Communication Access.**”

The revised competency was presented in Round 2 and received a consensus level of 82%. The commenters who selected low agreement scores (“strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree”) indicated issues with the word choices (e.g. English is too specific, remove “barriers”) and preferred stronger verbs (use “address” instead of “understand”).

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Accessibility Laws and Principles: Understand and apply accessibility laws and principles to recreation infrastructure, programs, information, and operations ensuring, at minimum, compliance with applicable legal standards. | 69% | 97% | 91% |
| Cultural Access: Foster welcoming recreation environments that respect and reflect the cultural and social identities of users. | 54% | 91% | 97% |
| Economic Access: Identify and implement strategies to support users' ability to recreate outdoors regardless of economic status. | 56% | 94% | 92% |
| Individual and Community Wellbeing: Identify and communicate the role of recreation access in promoting multiple dimensions of individual and community wellbeing (social, mental, physical, economic and more). | 48% | 88% | 87% |
| Information Access: Provide information and education that supports users' ability to recreate outdoors and provide accurate, relevant, and easily understandable information across multiple mediums to broad audiences. | 67% | 95% | 95% |
| Language Access: Understand and support the implementation of strategies to support users who communicate in languages other than English. | 38% | 80% | 87% |
| Physical Access: Understand and apply universal design principles and management of physical spaces to ensure that individuals of all abilities can safely engage in outdoor recreation. | 58% | 93% | 90% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|---|------------------|---|
| Communication Access: Understand barriers and support the implementation of strategies and resources to support users who communicate in languages other than English. | 57% | 82% |

Project Management

In the competency domain “Project Management,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on six (6) of the seven (7) competencies. The competency “**Contract Administration + Management**” received 89%. The project team and Advisory Group revised the competency based

upon respondent comments. In Round 2, it received a consensus level of 85%. Some commenters who selected low agreement scores (“strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree”) indicated that the competency was not a “core competency” for outdoor recreation professionals and that it was part of “project management” as a whole.

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|---|------------------|---|----------|
| Compliance + Implementation: Maintain project momentum while adhering to applicable guidance, policies, and laws. | 73% | 97% | 100% |
| Contract Administration + Management: Plan, prepare, execute, and maintain /oversee recreation contracts that meets stated objectives, timelines, and deliverables. | 50% | 89% | 93% |
| Facilitation: Structure and guide project in a way that promotes shared learning, collaboration, and meaningful outcomes. | 54% | 91% | 93% |
| Inspections + Monitoring: Ensure project compliance with goals and applicable guidance, policies, and laws. | 58% | 93% | 97% |
| Outreach + Public Input: Foster collaboration among interested parties in meaningful opportunities to be informed, share input, provide feedback, collaborate, partner, and share leadership on recreation projects. | 65% | 96% | 98% |
| Project Budgeting + Milestones: Develop and implement project management plans and budgets that communicate milestones and are clear, effective, and are flexible to emerging needs and opportunities. | 65% | 93% | 98% |
| Technical Writing: Convey complex written information simply and clearly to key audiences. | 55% | 93% | 96% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|---|------------------|---|
| Contract Administration + Management: Provide management of recreation-related contracts as well as oversight of contractor activities, deliverables, deadlines, and payments. | 53% | 85% |

Recreation Management

In the competency domain of “Recreation Management,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on seven (7) of the nine (9) competencies. The competency “**Human Dimensions Tools + Data**” consensus level was 87%; and the competency “**Visual/Graphic Communication**” was 79%. Both competencies were revised after the project team and Advisory Group reviewed

comments from respondents. In Round 2, the consensus level for the revised “**Human Dimensions Tools + Data**” reached 93%, while the “**Visual/Graphic Communication**” rose to 86%. A few of the commenters who selected low agreement score (“somewhat disagree”) on the competency “**Visual/Graphic Communication**” indicated that the definition should be broadened and that this type of task would likely be outsourced.

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Conflict Resolution + Consensus Building: Facilitate collaborative solutions among multiple parties to understand competing interests and achieve shared objectives. | 68% | 97% | 98% |
| Customer Service: Provide support to customers, partners, and others involved in recreation and recreation management and planning. | 76% | 97% | 99% |
| Data Interpretation + Management Application: Analyze data from primary and secondary sources and apply findings to inform management decisions. | 50% | 95% | 99% |
| Human Dimensions Tools + Data: Use social science methods and findings to address the behaviors, desires, values, and beliefs of diverse user groups in planning and decision-making. | 50% | 87% | 84% |
| Information Gathering + Analysis: Identify and apply reliable and relevant information as well as user and stakeholder input to inform decision-making. | 64% | 94% | 99% |
| Leadership: Inspire and guide individuals and teams to collaboratively achieve goals and address challenges. | 81% | 98% | 100% |
| Public Speaking/Presenting: Effectively communicate ideas, insights, and recommendations to build support for recreation management and create space for productive dialogue. | 59% | 94% | 99% |
| Visual/Graphic Communication: Create clear and compelling visuals to convey data findings and information related to recreation management. | 37% | 79% | 85% |
| Welcoming + Belonging: Foster an environment where people feel safe, can be authentic, and have shared trust and respect. | 68% | 93% | 91% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|--|------------------|---|
| Human Dimensions Tools + Data: Demonstrate the ability to identify, interpret, and utilize the best available data from research entities, management agencies, and other relevant sources to inform planning and decision-making surrounding diverse user behaviors, desires, values, and beliefs. | 61% | 93% |
| Visual/Graphic Communication: Demonstrate knowledge of how clear and compelling visuals can convey data findings and information related to recreation management; and familiarity with tools and resources for creation. | 52% | 86% |



Recreation Planning & Visitor Use Management

In the competency domain of “Recreation Planning & Visitor Use Management,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on seven (7) of the nine (9) competencies in Round 1. The competency “**Indicators + Monitoring**” consensus score was 88%; and the competency “**Site Design**” was 87%.

For Round 2, the competency “**Indicators + Monitoring**” was kept as is and not presented for consideration. The competency “**Community Context**” was presented as a merging with the competency “**Individual and Community Wellbeing**” from the competency domain of “Recreation Access” without any changes to text. Finally, the competency “**Site Design**” was revised to reflect the comments and suggestions of respondents. The consensus score was 89% for the competency “**Community Context**” and 82% for “**Site Design**.” Comments from respondents questioned the alignment of the competencies with the competency domain and suggested more concise word choices.

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Community Context: Understand the unique characteristics of a community to develop and enhance relevant recreation opportunities. | 61% | 95% | 98% |
| Desired Conditions/Visioning: Articulate a clear and inspiring future vision, through outlining desired conditions, that aligns interested parties toward achieving meaningful outcomes for visitor experiences and natural and cultural resources. | 63% | 93% | 98% |
| Indicators + Monitoring: Establish and review measurable benchmarks to assess desired conditions for visitor experience and resource conditions. | 51% | 88% | 97% |
| Management Strategies: Identify approaches for managing recreation to achieve or maintain desired conditions through use of the 3Es: Education, Engineering, Enforcement. | 77% | 97% | 98% |
| Planning Frameworks: Understand structured recreation planning approaches and use them to guide decision-making at various scales. | 59% | 92% | 98% |
| Scenery/Visual Resources: Understand the aesthetic and experiential qualities of landscapes and integrate these qualities into planning efforts to create environments that foster connection, enjoyment, and a sense of place. | 43% | 90% | 97% |
| Site Design: Create functional, aesthetically pleasing, and sustainable layouts that enhance user experiences while maintaining natural, cultural, and environmental attributes and character. | 50% | 87% | 93% |

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Site-Specific Policy: Understand a project area's specific guidelines and regulations to inform planning components and incorporate guidelines and regulations into plans to ensure compliance. | 63% | 92% | 96% |
| Visitor Preferences: Identify and plan for recreation opportunities and benefits for visitors' varying attitudes, beliefs, and values and ability to be flexible with these differences. | 55% | 90% | 96% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|---|------------------|---|
| Community Context: Understand the unique characteristics of a community to develop and enhance relevant recreation access and opportunities. | 62% | 89% |
| Site Design: Demonstrate knowledge of guidelines and resources for creating functional, aesthetically pleasing, and sustainable layouts that enhance user experiences while maintaining natural, cultural, and environmental attributes and character. | 54% | 82% |

Program & Operations Management

In the domain of “Program & Operations Management,” the consensus threshold of 90% was reached on five (5) of the ten (10) competencies in Round 1. The “**Business Acumen**” competency received 88% consensus; “**Grants + Agreements**” received 89%; “**Hiring, Recruitment + Retention**” received 87%; “**Performance Management**” received 81%; and “**Special Uses + Permits**” received 85%. The project team and Advisory Group reviewed and made changes to reflect the comments and suggestions from respondents.

For Round 2, the competency “**Business Acumen**” was revised to incorporate language from “**Grants + Agreements**.” The competencies “**Hiring, Recruitment + Retention**” and “**Performance Management**” were merged into a new competency called “**Human Resources**.” The competency “**Special Uses + Permits**” was dropped from competency domain. The consensus score was 91% for the competency “**Business Acumen**” and 86% for “**Human Resources**.” The respondents who score as “neutral” and “somewhat disagree” found these competencies to be “too niche” and “MBA skills.”

Round 1 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|--|------------------|---|----------|
| Assessments + Monitoring: Use recreation assessment and monitoring programs and projects to maintain and improve recreation assets. | 56% | 92% | 97% |
| Business Acumen: Understand business principles and leverage funding sources to support program development and delivery and meet current and future program goals. | 53% | 87% | 90% |
| Grants + Agreements: Seek, execute, and track grants and partner agreements. | 61% | 89% | 90% |
| Hiring, Recruitment + Retention: Attract and retain employees with the necessary skills, training and education and ensure they are representative of the constituents your organization serves. | 64% | 87% | 88% |
| Management Intent: Determine and communicate direction for recreation infrastructure management based on law and policy, site design standards, and desired conditions. | 63% | 92% | 97% |
| Operations and Maintenance: Develop and implement comprehensive operational plan that addresses health and safety requirements, annual and cyclical maintenance, and minimum staffing needs. | 75% | 93% | 93% |
| Partnerships + Relationships: Develop and foster on-going positive interactions to enhance connections among the recreation community and the quality and scope of program impacts both inside and outside unit boundaries. | 76% | 96% | 99% |
| Performance Management: Use employee performance evaluation and management to enhance program impact and professional growth. | 42% | 81% | 89% |

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % Agreement (Somewhat Agree + Strongly Agree) | Weighted |
|---|------------------|---|----------|
| Safety + Risk Management: Apply workplace safety procedures and at recreation sites and for activities for employees, users, partners, volunteers, and others who interact with the recreation site or area. | 72% | 91% | 90% |
| Special Uses + Permits: Apply knowledge of uses that require permits and other approval on public lands to develop, issue, and monitor permits and other necessary approvals. | 53% | 85% | 84% |

Round 2 Results

| Competency | % Strongly Agree | % |
|---|------------------|-----|
| Business Acumen: Understand administrative practices and leverage grants and other funding sources to support program development and delivery and meet current and future program goals. | 63% | 91% |
| Human Resources: Attract and retain employees with the necessary skills, training, education; ensure they are representative of the constituents your organization serves; and use employee performance evaluation and management to enhance program impact and professional growth. | 64% | 86% |

Missing Competencies and Sub-Competencies

In Round 1, respondents were provided with the opportunity to identify any competencies and sub-competencies that were not included in the list presented to them. These suggestions were considered by SORP and the Advisory Group. Some examples of missing competencies included: wildlife management, inclusion of ecology in land management, resource management, conservation education & interpretation, and program marketing.

Final Thoughts on Competencies and Process

In both Rounds, respondents were encouraged to voice any additional concerns and suggestions related to the competencies and the process. The comments were also considered by the project team and the Advisory Group.

Next Steps

Based on previous work on developing competencies for trail professionals (Anderson et al., 2022) and park professionals (Wolter et al., 2022), the following next steps are recommended as a way to incorporate and further the development of the core competencies for outdoor recreation professionals.

Implement a Communications-Outreach Plan

The Eppley team recommends a multi-modal approach to communications and outreach regarding the competencies. Strategies include featuring the competency framework in resources like e-newsletters, providing the final competencies in published form online, and rolling out the competencies through events like online webinars and relevant industry conference presentations. A multi-modal approach facilitates multiple potential points of exposure to the competencies for the desired audience (outdoor recreation professionals) as well as opportunities for the audience to engage with the competencies and ask questions, which fosters buy-in.

Define Competency Levels by Experience Level (or Persona)

In the development of the previous competency framework, the importance of “persona levels” (such as Entry, Full Performance, and Expert) was explored. SORP might consider developing tiered definitions for each competency to clarify expectations at different career stages. This would address some of the feedback from survey participants who thought the competencies set unrealistic expectations for outdoor recreation professionals.

Expand Specialty Competencies

In the development of the Trail Professionals competency framework (Anderson et al., 2022), “specialty competencies” such as data/GIS/mapping, stonework, and accessible trails were identified. Building on the findings of this project, SORP could consider defining specialty competencies for outdoor recreation professionals. This effort could include collaboration with sector-specific organizations such as federal agencies, universities, and private entities to develop specialty trainings. These trainings could support advanced certifications or micro-credentials, helping professionals expand their capacity in emerging areas of outdoor recreation.

Integrate Competencies into Professional Development and Training

Both the WPA and American Trails competency frameworks emphasize the importance of aligning training and certification with validated competencies. SORP can advance a similar effort independently or in partnership with training organizations by mapping existing programs to the core competencies, developing competency-based learning pathways for outdoor recreation professionals, and exploring opportunities to incorporate these competencies into national or regional training networks.

Apply Competencies in Human Resources and Organizational Development

Competency frameworks offer a valuable tool for strengthening human resource (HR) practices across agencies and sectors. SORP should encourage the integration of core competencies into key HR functions, including job descriptions, hiring, onboarding, performance management, and succession planning. Aligning positions with relevant competencies can help assess candidate, guide orientation, evaluate performance, and identify professional development opportunities. This approach supports a more strategic and consistent application of professional standards across the outdoor recreation field.

Continue Refinement of the Core Competencies

As competency frameworks will evolve to meet the needs of the profession, SORP should continue to seek the input from their Core Competency Core Team and Advisory Group. The diversity and representation of the group can support the incorporation of new trends into the field as well as provide feedback from practitioners in the field to refine competencies and ensure relevance.

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