

**Medical Library Association**  
**Competencies**  
**for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success**  
**2017**

**Medical Library Association**  
**Task Force to Review MLA's Competencies**  
**for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success**  
**Final Report**  
**May 2017**

*We must educate for the problems of a generation hence, not for the problems of today...librarians must be imbued with the psychological ability to handle change and to live with ambiguity. Without this they will be performing tomorrow's tasks with yesterday's concepts.*

—Estelle Brodman, 1979

*Health sciences librarianship stands apart in ensuring that knowledge about advances in the science and technology of health care research and practice is readily accessible to health care professionals, educators, students, researchers, and the public.*

—Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success

Final Report, 2007

## **Executive Summary**

What does it mean to be a health information professional? As members of the Medical Library Association (MLA), we share the belief that quality information is essential for improved health. We agree to a set of core values: the use of scientific evidence in making health care decisions; public awareness of, access to, and use of high-quality health information; lifelong learning and professional development; advancement of health information research and evidence-based practice; community and collaboration within and outside the profession; and irreproachable ethical standards. These tenets guide our practice.

But what is the practice of a health information professional? What is our common skill set? In times of stunningly rapid growth in information and evolving technology to manage and communicate information, what are the expected skills of someone called a health information professional?

These were the questions addressed by the Task Force to Review MLA's Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success, which was charged by the MLA Board of Directors in January 2015 to review and revise the *Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success* (2007) "in light of the needs of MLA members and the changing educational environment, making recommendations for changes in content, structure, and title." This document, *Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success* (2017), is the product of the task force's work over the two and a half years of its existence.

### **The MLA Professional Competencies**

Professional competency statements define essential professional skills and abilities that can be observed, measured, and taught. Updating the 2007 competencies required us to collect a deep and wide range of information and to think about our essential skills in the context of current and anticipated practice. The 2017 competencies are a result of an extensive process of gathering input from a wide-range of experts and stakeholders. Our goal was to distill this input into a concise, clear, comprehensive, and forward-looking guide to lifelong learning and success for health information professionals and the development of preprofessional academic preparation and continuing education programs. With this document, we hope we have succeeded in reaching this goal.

The process began with an open forum at MLA '15, continued with a web-based survey of the entire MLA membership, and was followed by the creation of a compilation of competencies by the task force. A project award from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) Southeastern/Atlantic Region Regional Medical Library supported the revision of the compilation by handpicked MLA leaders and experts. The task force then created and revised multiple drafts with feedback from selected professionals early in their careers, experienced professionals, members of international medical library and health information professional associations, and the MLA Research Imperative Task Force. We estimate that

more than 100 people have spent more than 1,000 person-hours revising and updating the MLA competencies.

This document, while a descendant of the 2007 competencies, differs from it in many ways. Today, technology is so pervasive in the work of health information professionals that we wove technology-related skills throughout the current competency statements, rather than identify technology skills as a standalone competency. The emphasis on research skills reflects the growing importance of rigorous examination of evidence for our own practice, just as we have taught and promoted the importance of evidence in health care decision making. The previous “Curricular Design and Instruction” competency is replaced with a broader statement about our role as educators.

We chose “health information professional” as an inclusive label to refer to the professional group for whom these competencies are relevant. “Health information professional” is part of the name of the Academy of Health Information Professionals, and the 2015 MLA strategic plan has as an educational goal to “position MLA as the go-to education resource for health information professionals.” Health information professionals are medical librarians, health sciences librarians, health information specialists, informaticists, and many other professionals, whether they are members of MLA or not.

### **How to Use the Competencies**

The task force identified six competencies necessary for professional success that serve as the foundation for professional development, preprofessional academic preparation, and continuing education programs.

Each competency is accompanied by a brief explanation, three to ten Performance Indicators, and definitions of Basic and Expert Levels of proficiency for each indicator. Within the Performance Indicators are one or more typical, observable, and measurable skills and activities that demonstrate a competency. Each Performance Indicator is further defined by Basic and Expert Levels of proficiency. Performance at the Expert Level assumes Basic Level proficiency. The key verbs describing each level were

influenced by Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives, which require that skills be observable. For example, "describe" is an observable proxy for "understand" and "comprehend."

Read the document as a whole and think of the competency statements as core and the explanations, Performance Indicators, and levels as elaborations and illustrations of the core.

We recognize that not every health information professional, in a specific job, does everything covered by the competencies. We expect that all early career health information professionals could demonstrate skills at the Basic Level across all competencies with minimal additional training.

The competencies do not address personal attributes, as important as they may be to professional success. We encourage all health information professionals to read this document in conjunction with the [Code of Ethics for Health Sciences Librarianship](#), which articulates core principles of practice.

## **Medical Library Association Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success 2017**

Competency 1, Information Services: A health information professional locates, evaluates, synthesizes, and delivers authoritative information in response to biomedical and health inquiries.

Competency 2, Information Management: A health information professional curates and makes accessible bioscience, clinical, and health information data, information, and knowledge.

Competency 3, Instruction & Instructional Design: A health information professional educates others in the skills of bioscience, clinical, and health information literacy.

Competency 4, Leadership & Management: A health information professional manages personnel, time, budget, facilities, and technology and leads others to define and meet institutional goals.

Competency 5, Evidence-Based Practice & Research: A health information professional evaluates research studies, uses research to improve practice, conducts research, and communicates research results.

Competency 6, Health Information Professionalism: A health information professional promotes the development of the health information professions and collaborates with other professionals to improve health care and access to health care information.

## **Medical Library Association Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success 2017**

***Competency 1, Information Services: A health information professional locates, evaluates, synthesizes, and delivers authoritative information in response to biomedical and health inquiries.***

At the core of what we do is find information to answer biomedical and health-related questions at the point of need. We are experts in assessing information needs and delivering information in a format and means of delivery best suited to the individuals and groups making requests.

### Performance Indicators

#### **➔ Assesses information needs.**

*Basic:* Uses reference interview skills.

*Expert:* Uses the language of biomedical science.

#### **➔ Selects information.**

*Basic:* Locates published information and assesses its authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and relevance.

*Expert:* Uses unpublished resources and consults with subject experts.

#### **➔ Searches databases and other online resources.**

*Basic:* Describes steps in conducting a search; identifies relevant resources; formulates search strategies using appropriate search

construction techniques, subject descriptors, and natural language and Boolean connectors.

*Expert:* Formulates and executes complex search strategies in a variety of information resources; customizes search outputs.

➔ **Finds published and unpublished studies for complex reviews.**

*Basic:* Describes systematic review standards and guidelines; searches relevant subject-specific databases and other sources.

*Expert:* Filters results using predefined eligibility criteria; organizes and distributes results; documents search strategies and procedures for publication.

➔ **Customizes the organization and delivery of information.**

*Basic:* Prioritizes information for ease of use; selects appropriate delivery method and technology.

*Expert:* Synthesizes results; explains strengths and limitations of sources.

➔ **Stays current with developments in bioscience, clinical, and health information.**

*Basic:* Describes basic terms and trends.

*Expert:* Specializes in one or more areas of bioscience, clinical, or health information.

***Competency 2, Information Management: A health information professional curates and makes accessible bioscience, clinical, and health information data, information, and knowledge.***

Our strength is our ability to develop and organize collections tailored to specific audiences. In cataloging and classifying, including assigning metadata, we impose order to improve access. Traditionally, we have organized information resources into libraries, and personal records and artifacts into archives. Now, our expertise is being applied to organizing research data into collections that can be used electronically across institutions and countries. We know the value of and how to apply standards so that records of collections are universally comprehensible and enduring.

Performance Indicators

**➔ Selects, acquires, manages, evaluates, and disseminates bioscience, clinical, and health information.**

*Basic:* Describes collection management tools.

*Expert:* Uses current evaluation methodologies, including bibliometrics, to develop and implement collection management policies and strategies.

**➔ Organizes resources.**

*Basic:* Organizes resources according to national and international standards.

*Expert:* Develops classification and metadata schemes for unique collections.

**➔ Adheres to copyright and intellectual property law.**

*Basic:* Describes copyright and intellectual property law relevant to libraries.

*Expert:* Applies knowledge to open access publishing and virtual learning environments; contributes to copyright and intellectual property law discussions on behalf of institutions or associations.

➔ **Conserves, preserves, and archives print and digital materials to maintain historical and scholarly records.**

*Basic:* Adheres to standards in archiving, digital preservation, and records management.

*Expert:* Formulates institutional strategies for archiving, digital preservation, and records management; promotes the significance of institutional asset management.

➔ **Provides access to resources using appropriate technologies.**

*Basic:* Describes access, including open access, management systems, and services.

*Expert:* Negotiates terms and conditions of licensing contracts; monitors trends in open access publishing; promotes institutional repositories.

➔ **Promotes scholarly communication.**

*Basic:* Describes open access and publishing models, institutional repositories, authors' rights, and public access policies.

*Expert:* Analyzes scholarly communication trends; collaborates on initiatives to promote and advance scholarly communication.

➔ **Implements data management plans.**

*Basic:* Describes the data life cycle; identifies and describes data resources, tools, and repositories; explains data plan requirements of funding agencies.

*Expert:* Conducts data curation interviews; develops and implements data management plans and policies; consults on managing data across the data life cycle.

***Competency 3, Instruction & Instructional Design: A health information professional educates others in the skills of bioscience, clinical, and health information literacy.***

Librarians are educators. We help others, but we also enable people to be self-sufficient. What we teach continues to evolve, from how to use resources, to how to critically appraise research articles, to how to organize data collections. As the world becomes more and more an information space, there will be additional opportunities to teach information management skills. We also share our expertise with one another. Our teaching role requires that we be skilled in pedagogy and the use of technology-enhanced learning.

Performance Indicators

**➔ Develops curricula using contemporary instructional design principles.**

*Basic:* Describes principles of instructional design.

*Expert:* Develops face-to-face and online learning activities based on instructional design principles.

**➔ Uses learner-centered instructional approaches.**

*Basic:* Describes learner-centered instructional approaches.

*Expert:* Uses learner-centered face-to-face and online learning approaches.

➔ **Uses innovative instructional and communication methods and technologies.**

*Basic:* Describes trends in communication and instructional methods and technologies; uses social media and web-based technologies.

*Expert:* Evaluates, develops, and implements innovative instructional and communication strategies and technologies.

***Competency 4, Leadership & Management: A health information professional manages personnel, time, budget, facilities, and technology and leads others to define and meet institutional goals.***

Every health information professional has personal management responsibilities. Institutional management and leadership roles require skills beyond those learned through formal education. Management skills and a leader's abilities affect the culture and performance of coworkers and the effectiveness of an institution.

Performance Indicators

➔ **Strategically organizes people and resources to serve institutional needs.**

*Basic:* Identifies goals; initiates, plans, and delegates tasks to meet goals; analyzes and communicates outcomes to relevant stakeholders; fosters a positive team environment; serves as team member role model.

*Expert:* Establishes, justifies, and leads large-scale collaborative projects that demonstrate return on investment to stakeholders; provides and models value-based leadership through staff and resource administration.

➔ **Creates and implements strategic plans.**

*Basic:* Describes the strategic planning process.

*Expert:* Creates and implements strategic plans.

➔ **Inspires and leads others to perform at their highest level.**

*Basic:* Uses communication and collaboration skills.

*Expert:* Articulates a vision, motivates and leads others to contribute to realization of the vision, and guides institutional change.

➔ **Integrates multicultural awareness and appreciation of diversity and equality into professional practice.**

*Basic:* Describes own cultural background and recognizes biases; values cultural norms, experiences of others, and expressions of diverse viewpoints; recognizes power dynamics in relationships.

*Expert:* Develops and implements practices that foster diversity and equality; contributes to correcting inequities; participates in external collaborations.

➔ **Practices fiscal accountability and stewardship, and follows institutional resource policies.**

*Basic:* Describes established policies that safeguard assets consistent with institutional objectives and sound business principles.

*Expert:* Controls and supervises library resources consistent with institutional objectives and sound business principles; advocates for and secures institutional support to ensure maintenance and growth of the library.

➔ **Secures and manages external funding.**

*Basic:* Describes grant and other external funding processes; identifies funding opportunities.

*Expert:* Applies grant-writing principles and strategies; identifies partners and collaborates to develop proposals; executes fundraising strategies; disseminates information about successful strategies and outcomes.

➔ **Develops and implements enhancements to the library user experience.**

*Basic:* Describes the literature on library user experience and user experience assessment.

*Expert:* Uses results of formal and informal user experience assessments to propose and implement library user experience enhancements.

➔ **Identifies emerging technologies and advocates for their use.**

*Basic:* Explores and evaluates emerging technologies.

*Expert:* Leads initiatives to incorporate new technologies.

➔ **Allocates space and facilities.**

*Basic:* Describes common library functions and associated space; identifies standards for space and facilities allocation.

*Expert:* Proposes or leads design of library facilities.

➔ **Develops and implements effective advocacy, marketing, and communication strategies.**

*Basic:* Promotes institutional mission and goals; forms internal partnerships.

*Expert:* Designs marketing and public relations strategies and programs; forms external partnerships.

***Competency 5, Evidence-Based Practice & Research: A health information professional evaluates research studies, uses research to improve practice, conducts research, and communicates research results.***

For many years, we have promoted and taught the skills of evidence-based medicine. Now, we need to apply these skills to our own practice. Not all of us are researchers in the academic sense, but we all have access to a wealth of data from local and published sources. Newer research methodologies—such as community-based action research, outcomes research, and data mining—may be useful in analyzing our activities and impact. As we develop research skills, we can use, create, and share evidence to improve practice.

Performance Indicators

**➔ Finds and evaluates evidence to support decision making.**

*Basic:* Describes evidence-based practice; formulates questions; develops search strategies; locates relevant, credible, and transferable published evidence.

*Expert:* Uses evidence to make and justify decisions.

**➔ Evaluates activities, programs, collections, and services using evidence-based methodologies.**

*Basic:* Gathers data and user input on activities and services.

*Expert:* Identifies and develops evaluation methods and metrics for assessing and improving services.

**➔ Conducts research.**

*Basic:* Describes the research process, structure of research papers, and common research methods, including bibliometrics; explains standards of ethical research.

*Expert:* Selects and implements appropriate research design; collects, manages, and analyzes data; interprets results; explains threats to validity of conclusions.

➔ **Interprets data and presents statistical and data analyses.**

*Basic:* Describes basic statistical and data analysis concepts and terminology; interprets visual displays of data and bibliometric analyses.

*Expert:* Explains rationale for choice of statistical and data analyses; critiques and explains statistical and data analyses in published research; uses advanced data visualization tools.

➔ **Communicates research results.**

*Basic:* Describes how research is disseminated; describes issues related to research dissemination.

*Expert:* Communicates research results; writes, edits, and revises manuscripts for publication.

***Competency 6, Health Information Professionalism: A health information professional promotes the development of the health information professions and collaborates with other professionals to improve health care and access to health care information.***

As members of a profession, we are motivated to contribute to society in ways that highlight our special knowledge and expertise.

## Performance Indicators

### ➔ **Collaborates with other health sciences professionals and promotes the contributions of health information professionals.**

*Basic:* Describes the role of health information professionals in the biosciences, clinical practice, and health care.

*Expert:* Collaborates with fellow health information professionals to achieve common goals; advocates the value of health information professionals in improving health care and institutional return on investment.

### ➔ **Provides information and expert advice on current issues in health care information services.**

*Basic:* Identifies current trends and their impact on information services and practices.

*Expert:* Employs expertise to influence programs, services, and policies; collaborates at the national or international level.

### ➔ **Applies knowledge of the health care environment to respond to health care trends.**

*Basic:* Describes the health care environment and current trends in health care.

*Expert:* Assists institutions in meeting accreditation and legal requirements; responds to trends by redirecting resources.

### ➔ **Advocates for health information access.**

*Basic:* Promotes access to health information; participates in community outreach activities.

*Expert:* Employs expertise to influence health information programs, services, policies, and legislation.

**➔ Contributes to the profession and shares expertise through publications, teaching, research, and service.**

*Basic:* Participates in professional organizations by serving on committees, publishing, or presenting; obtains Academy of Health Information (AHIP) membership.

*Expert:* Serves in a leadership role in a professional organization or publication; serves as representative to a national or international organization.

**➔ Participates in and fosters a culture of lifelong learning.**

*Basic:* Identifies gaps in knowledge and skills; seeks professional development opportunities and mentors to address gaps.

*Expert:* Builds professional skills in advance of emerging trends; mentors others.

Task Force to Review MLA's Competencies  
for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success

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