

# Guidance notes

## on completing a competency application form



**A helpful approach** to completing a competency application form (and preparing yourself for a competency interview) is known as the STAR approach. The STAR model is a particularly good structure on which to build your responses and will provide an effective way to structure your thoughts.

- Situation** set the scene and describe the situation or problem you encountered.
- Task** outline the task that was required to resolve the issue or problem
- Action** describe what you actually did. How and when you did it, the rationale for the choices you took and the key things that you did to overcome the issue or problem.
- Result** what the outcome was and the difference it made.

### Situation and Task

Describe what you did and what was achieved. Write a short summary describing the facts surrounding the situation, how it affected the organisation, the project, the customers, etc. and any problems and difficulties that you encountered. Convey the significance of what was done and how it affected the outcome, together with some brief details of what was involved.

### Action (what you did)

This is really the most important part, as it concerns explaining what you actually did. Give a brief summary of the critical actions you personally took that relate to the competency in question. The best way to approach this is to ask yourself: What were the one or two key things I did that had the greatest impact upon the final result?

### Result

Try to be specific about the situation, the tangible results achieved and the part you played in achieving that result.

This is particularly important if you were acting as part of a team. Highlight the role you actually played in achieving the outcome rather than focusing too much on the team activities. Note the proportion of the achievement for which you claim credit.

Remember it is important to try to give specific and separate evidence of each competency. Please avoid using an achievement more than once and give examples that are recent, preferably within the last 2-3 years. For each competency give an actual example, from the last two to three years if possible. You can draw on relevant experience you have gained in the workplace or outside the formal workplace. We want to know about the knowledge, skills and behaviours you used and that you will be able to apply this in a different situation in the future.

The information you provide will be used in the shortlisting process and will form part of the interview. We will also take it into account when making final decisions.

**Behavioural competencies** describe "how" the Council wants employees to behave and the role profile includes all the Behavioural Competencies required for the role. As these form part of an employee's personal development and will be regularly reviewed through the Personal Development Review process, we may not require you to evidence these in your supporting statement.

However, if one or more of the Behavioural Competencies have been ticked in the Application Form box in the right hand column, you will be required to provide evidence for this.

It is important that the evidence you provide focuses on "how" you have performed successfully. For example if you are required to provide evidence of "Embracing Change and Continuous Improvement" you must do more than say:

"I have 5 years experience of managing change and driving continuous improvement throughout organisations".

You must give specific examples of how you have achieved this. For example, what are some of the tools and techniques you have used? An example answer is provided below:

“My background is in the transportation industry where I started my career as a Change Facilitator. This involved working on a range of key projects that focused on finance, operations, ICT, quality and corporate change. All of these projects led to employees having to work in different ways and I was able to attain a practical understanding of the need for clear and timely communications. I also became experienced in applying change management methods such as stakeholder analysis; communications planning and tools to gain consensus and understand priorities.

I was then appointed the Project Manager of a joint venture with Arden County Council. In this role, I led the Communications and Stakeholder Management workstream and developed the strategies to effectively manage change. This included strategies to consult with affected staff and strategies to facilitate workshops with Unions and Members in order to raise concerns upfront and limit conflict later on. I also ran the internal communications for the Programme Team. My team was responsible for providing the mechanisms for communications; this included running feedback surveys during implementation and cascading information via the intranet and Frequently Asked Questions.

My current role as the Project Lead for Bostley County Council’s Process Improvement Programme involves developing the engagement and communications strategies at a strategic level with Members and Chief Officers and at the tactical level with affected teams.”

For each competency give an actual example, from the last two to three years if possible. You can draw on relevant experience you have gained in the workplace or outside the formal workplace. We want to know about the knowledge, skills and behaviours you used and that you will be able to apply this in a different situation in the future.

**Functional competencies** describe the knowledge and skills required to do a job. The role profile includes the functional competencies required for the role. It is important that you evidence all of these in your supporting statement.

It is important that the evidence you provide focuses on the knowledge and skill you acquired to perform successfully. For example if functional competency says:

“Articulates an up to date grasp of reward philosophy, strategy, policy and employee reward systems. Is able to advise others and apply knowledge and skills to solve complex reward problems, formulate appropriate Council policy and design and implement reward systems and processes.”

You must do more than say:

“I have 8 years experience of managing Employee Reward in both the public and private sector.”

You must give more detail around the knowledge and skills you have developed. For example, what experience have you gained? An example answer is provided below:

“I am currently employed as the Arden County Council’s Employee Reward Lead. Prior to this I was the Principal Officer – Employee Reward at Bostley County Council.

At Arden, I have been responsible for developing a reward system which expresses what the organisation values. This has included job evaluation aspects as well as non pay elements relating to the total reward package. The system consists of integrated policies, processes and practices which reward employees in accordance with their contribution, skill and competence and the market rate for the relevant role.

I have provided practical guidance and support relating to employee reward at all levels including Chief Officers and Members and provided advice on financial aspects of a variety of reward systems.

I am an expert in equal pay matters and have successfully defended Arden County Council against a number of equal pay claims.”

## Qualifications, training and other requirements

This section includes any additional requirements of the job and you will need to make sure that these are also evidenced either in your supporting statement or elsewhere in the application form if that is more appropriate. For example if it is essential that you hold a law degree, you may already have included this in the section “Educational Qualifications Obtained”. Similarly, if you are required to hold full membership of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, you may already have included this in the section “Membership of Professional Bodies”.