

Aging Network Workforce Competencies Project Summary

Goals and Objectives

The Aging Network Workforce Competencies (ANWC) Partnership shares the goal of an Aging Network workforce that is prepared with knowledge, skills, values, and abilities (competencies) in four key domains—gerontology, cultural competence, person-centered care, and participant-direction—to promote the dignity and independence of older adults to remain in their homes and communities. As a first step toward that goal, Partnership members—the Council on Social Work Education’s National Center for Gerontological Social Work Education (CSWE Gero-Ed Center), the National Resource Center on Participant-Directed Services (NRCPDS), and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)—implemented an 18-month study of competency-based workforce initiatives and needs within the Aging Network, funded by the Retirement Research Foundation July 1, 2012 – December 31, 2013.

The ANWC Project is framed within the context of multiple national initiatives that are developing, implementing, and measuring competencies for the long-term services and supports (LTSS) workforce. Extensive work is being conducted at the national level. Most notably, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) is driving a shift towards a competency-based approach to workforce development, education, and training within the Aging Network

The ANWC Project’s objectives are to:

1. Evaluate the extent to which individuals who hold social work-oriented positions (e.g., options counselors, case managers, intake specialists, and support brokers) utilize competencies in the following four domains: gerontology, cultural competence, person-centered care, and participant-direction.
2. Identify the educational background and professional training of individuals in social work-oriented positions.
3. Document the training needs of administrators and individuals in direct service positions related to a competency-based approach in the areas of gerontology, cultural competence, person-centered care, and participant-direction.

To attain these objectives, focus groups of selected AAA leaders and members of the n4a Executive Committee were conducted; an electronic survey was disseminated to AAA directors and staff in social work positions; teleconferences were held with AAA directors to obtain their interpretation of the data; and a report summarizing survey findings will be disseminated to the social work education community and the aging network.

Survey Findings

Data analysis found that AAA staff in social work-oriented positions indicate that they most need additional training in participant-direction competencies; the least in gerontological competencies. Gerontological

competencies were ranked as most relevant to AAA staff's daily job responsibilities, followed in priority order by person-centered, participant-direction, and, least relevant, cultural competencies.

In terms of educational background, 42% of staff respondents received a bachelor's degree, 35% Master's degrees, with only 8% at the Associate's level and 7% High School/GED completion. Twenty-eight percent of staff studied social work, with 19% in the fields of psychology/human services/counseling, followed by liberal arts (18%), business/public administration (9%) and, last, gerontology (8%). The majority of staff state that they received gerontological preparation within their field of study – typically through field placements.

Sixty-five percent of surveyed AAA directors strongly agree or agree that their agency uses a competency-based approach to workforce development. Twenty-six percent measure competencies to a very great or great extent, with 56% assessing competency attainment to some extent. In regards to training, 79% of agencies require or mandate it on a quarterly basis. Seventy-five percent of AAA Directors indicate that they have provided training in the four domain areas, yet over 80% recognize that additional staff training in each area is essential. Additionally, 82% of AAA directors indicate that less than 5% of their annual budget is allocated to staff training and development, due primarily to budget constraints and loss of billable revenue when staff attend trainings. Other barriers are lack of time and lack of affordable, quality trainers.

Disseminating and Leveraging the Findings

The ANWC Project's dissemination objectives are two-fold: 1) share survey findings with key constituents, such as AAAs, ACL, other federal officials, and social work practitioners and educators, and 2) build capacity and interest to leverage additional workforce development opportunities for the Aging Network.

Survey findings and their implications will be disseminated to the Aging Network by n4a and NRCPS and to the social work education community by the CSWE Gero-Ed Center. Dissemination outlets include n4a and CSWE annual conferences, websites, newsletters, email blasts, listservs, and press releases.

A case statement and concept paper, *Developing Effective and Efficient Training Models for Area Agencies on Aging Workforce Development*, have been created and efforts are underway to identify potential funders. The proposal will assess how best to deliver future competency-based training programs and in what format, such as through a web-based learning portal for self-study, interactive webinar format, or a hybrid webinar format (combining onsite in-person training pre, during, or post webinar). The goal is to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of these different competency-based training formats to ensure that future training is responsive to the educational needs of highly diverse AAAs.