# National Institutes of Health

# GS-2210 Information Technology Management

# Behavioral Interview Guide

**Behavioral-Based Interview Overview**

Behavioral-based interviews focus on discovering how a candidate performed in specific work-related situations. This interview technique seeks to uncover how a potential employee actually did behave in a given situation; not on how he or she might behave in the future. The premise behind this technique is that a good predictor of future performance is how someone performed in the past in a similar situation. Behavioral-based interviews are becoming more common throughout industry and government and many candidates are familiar with this technique and are well prepared for these interviews. Candidates can and should draw on previous work-related experiences as well as non-work-related experiences (e.g., school projects, community involvement) that are relevant to the interview questions.

**Behavioral Interviewing Suggested Protocol**

As much as possible, all questions should relate to experiences that have occurred in the last 2-3 years (best for recollection of behavioral details).

All behavioral interview questions should focus on what the interviewee did, said, felt or thought in the past. The interviewer should be looking for phrases such as “I did….”, “I said….” etc.

Do not ask questions about what the interviewee would do in a given situation or what they would have done differently. The focus is on what the interviewee actually did/said/thought/felt in the past. If the interviewee uses such phrases as “I would,” the interviewer should probe by saying, “What did you actually do at that time?”

The interviewee should focus on what he/she did, rather than what “we” did. While working as part of a team is very common and desirable, it is important to understand what the candidate’s individual role was. The interviewer should probe the interviewee if “We” is used in describing actions. For example, if the interviewee says “We implemented the new payroll system by…..”, it is the interviewer’s job to ask the interviewee what his/her role was and what he actually did (as an individual).

Prior to delving into the detail of each question, ask the interviewee to provide a brief (30 second) overview of the situation by highlighting the beginning, middle, and end. This helps the interviewer to keep the interview on track. For example, if you feel lost in the discussion, you can pause the conversation by asking the interviewee where you are in the story (beginning, middle, or end).

**Suggested Introduction to the Interview**

This is a behavioral interview, which may be different from interviews you have had in the past. A behavioral interview focuses on what you have done, said, felt and thought in past experiences. Please use the first person as much as possible because I am most interested in what you have done, said, thought and felt in the situations. So, if you use the term “we” rather than “I”, I may interrupt you to clarify what you did in the situation versus what others did.

I am going to ask you specific questions about your experiences and will ask that you try, as best as you can, to only discuss experiences that have occurred within the past 2 or 3 years so that you will be able to recall the details of the situations.

I will ask follow-up questions to get as many of the details around what you were doing in the situation. Imagine that I am making a movie of what you were doing in the given situation. I am interested in everything you did, said, thought and felt.

NOTE: The information provided above offers suggestions for conducting behavioral-based interviews. Interviewers should use this information as a tool and tailor the interview to meet the needs of the individual organization

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| Information Technology Management |
| Competency | Definition |
| **Data Management** | Plans, develops and manages data storage and retrieval systems by applying generally accepted data models, standards and processes. |
| **Emerging Technologies** | Maintains current knowledge of market trends and the evolution of technology in relevant specialty area(s). |
| **Enterprise Architecture** | Maintains a comprehensive IT framework to manage and align IT strategies, plans and systems to support the organization’s mission, goals and structure. |
| **Information Security** | Ensures the confidentiality, integrity, availability, reliability, and non-repudiation of the organization’s information contained in and transmitted from systems and networks by implementing security laws, regulations, policies, standards, and control techniques. |
| **Information Technology** **Policy and Planning** | Develops a framework for acquiring and managing information technology systems based on the organization’s business requirements. |
| **Information Technology Service Operations** | Supports stakeholders by assessing and translating information technology into responsive solutions. |
| **Network and Telecommunications Technology** | Designs, manages, and maintains network systems to transmit data. |
| **Software Engineering and Development** | Develops or selects, integrates, and transitions software technology. |
| **Systems Administration** | Plans and coordinates the installation, testing, operation, and maintenance of hardware and software systems. |
| **Systems Analysis and Design** | Analyzes the business needs and integrates technology into the organization by designing and utilizing models and methodologies to simulate deployment. |
| **Web-Based Technologies** | Supports the development, maintenance and application of web-based systems, services and technologies (e.g., Internet, intranet, extranet, and website). |
| **Health Informatics** | Combines computer science, information science, and healthcare information with the latest IT systems to optimize the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information in health and biomedicine. |

**Data Management**

Plans, develops and manages data storage and retrieval systems by applying generally accepted data models, standards and processes.

### Key Behaviors:

* Working knowledge of relational database management systems (RDBMS) models.
* Considers the challenges of development, the benefits and applications of data warehouses, and best practices to implement applications.
* Utilizes knowledge of data mining and its various uses to perform duties.
* Learns self on and understands the benefits associated with using multidimensional information (e.g., Online Analytical Processing (OLAP).
* Knows bibliographic data management systems and databases for scientific research, such as PubMed.
* Learns, stays up to date on and incorporates the basic components of a data, records, and knowledge management process.
* Considers the differences between data management and records management and how they may support one another.
* Maintains, analyzes and/or updates a computer database.

### Interview questions:

1. In which areas of data management do you consider yourself to be a specialist or expert? How do you envision being able to utilize your expertise within NIH? In what specific areas do you need to expand your knowledge to become more proficient?
2. Explain a situation in which you used data mining or other processes to solve a problem regarding managing a data storage or retrieval system?
3. If you were responsible for keeping a computer database current, what steps or processes would you go through to help assure success?
4. Share an example of when you analyzed and modeled data and/or built interactive support for a database system. Provide some details on what references or standards you considered in building this database system.

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| **Summarize the situation, behaviors demonstrated and outcomes. Then provide an overall proficiency rating for the competency as defined in the Administrative Officer competency model.** |
| Situation: |
| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Emerging Technologies

Maintains current knowledge of market trends and the evolution of technology in relevant specialty area(s).

### Key Behaviors:

* Applies emerging and evolving technologies to current and future business needs at the operational and tactical levels.
* Compares, contrasts and evaluates internal and external sources of information to assure awareness and understanding of new and emerging technology and its business implications.
* Considers trends in technology and compares and contrasts options for flexibility and risk.
* Manages competing priorities among future hardware and related software initiatives.
* Researches regularly to understand and anticipate emerging business needs to ensure technology can adequately support business needs and processes.
* Evaluates cost benefits of alternative IT-and non-IT-solutions to develop a business case, and ensure support and justification for the best alternative.
* Analyzes and evaluates data to determine or support decisions around, when to adopt new technologies (i.e., lead, follow).
* Evaluates and pilots technologies prior to major investment or deployment.
* Reviews, recommends, and/or determines emerging technologies based on their value.

### Interview questions:

1. The Information Technology field is dynamic and new technologies are constantly emerging. How do you stay current on best practices and emerging technologies in your field?
2. Provide an example of a project or analysis that you have worked on which compared the cost/benefits of various alternatives considered in improving the effectiveness of a current system. What did you consider in making your recommendations? Why?
3. Give an example of a recent assignment you worked on that involved learning about/developing new technology.
4. You have just been given a generous budget for designing and developing a state-of-the-art information technology system. Where would you go to find the latest news on new technologies that would fit your needs? What information would you seek before developing a recommendation?
5. Explain briefly how new/emerging technologies can improve how NIH manages its operations; mission and/or can help cure diseases.

### Candidate Response:

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**Enterprise Architecture**

Maintains a comprehensive IT framework to manage and align IT strategies, plans and systems to support the organization’s mission, goals and structure.

### Key Behaviors:

* Identifies and uses various criteria (e.g., time, budget, etc.) to determine IT success and ensure alignment with stakeholder needs.
* Follows the enterprise architecture transition plan for moving from baseline business and technology operating environment to the target environment.
* Considers key regulatory requirements and guidance as they relate to enterprise architecture.
* Considers and integrates security and privacy into the enterprise architecture.
* Demonstrates an understanding of basic architecture documentation (i.e., work product) methodologies at each level of a commonly used framework (e.g., Zachman, FEAF or DODAF).
* Identifies opportunities to improve systems supporting business processes.
* Provides guidance and support to customers and stakeholders on the use of the enterprise system.
* Applies emerging and evolving technologies to current and future business needs at the enterprise, operational and tactical levels.
* Analyzes, designs and implements enterprise-wide IT solutions (e.g., applications, platforms, security) that align with the organization’s structure, goals and systems.

### Interview questions:

1. Give an example of a time when you made a recommendation to improve an IT infrastructure. What did you consider in developing your recommendation? How did you manage/consider existing platforms and security systems?
2. Describe the process you would use which required taking requirements for IT architecture from a customer and converting them into a technical solution.
3. If you were asked to work with a team to recommend an enterprise architecture for a government organization, what regulatory and security requirements would you consider crucial to incorporate in the architecture design. Why?
4. Describe a situation in which you had to develop an enterprise-wide IT solution for a problem which involved diverse local area networks. What were your major challenges? What were the results?

### Candidate Response:

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**Information Security**

Ensures the confidentiality, integrity, availability, reliability, and non-repudiation of the organization’s information contained in and transmitted from systems and networks by implementing security laws, regulations, policies, standards, and control techniques.

### Key Behaviors:

* Uses knowledge of continuity assurance principles, methods, and practices to plan, implement and ensure continuous service.
* Assesses risks associated with vulnerable systems and information.
* Considers privacy, security and accessibility of government websites.
* Keeps up to date on standards and determines or recommends levels of security protection required to protect and close exposure/risk to systems and information, in accordance with organization and federal standards.
* Uses the concepts of confidentiality, integrity and availability as applied to information systems security.
* Implements cost effective methods to reduce risks to systems and information.
* Reviews the types of and uses or recommends the most effective security controls as directed by Federal policies and procedures.
* Ensures procedures for detecting, reporting and responding to security incidents are consistent with and follow standards and guidelines issued by applicable governing entities and regulations.
* Identifies and evaluates resources needed to achieve acceptable levels of security and to remedy deficiencies based on system criticality and information sensitivity.
* Reads and/or collaborates to clearly understand the implications of legislation, regulations and standards related to information assurance and security.

### Interview questions:

1. Provide an example of a situation that you have experienced or that you look out for as an IT professional, that could compromise the security of information contained on a Government website. Describe the risk and potential consequences.
2. Describe a time when you were responsible for (or on a team) developing or implementing information systems security plans and procedures. What did you find most challenging?
3. Tell us what you would do if you were asked to remedy security deficiencies detected in an IT system, but you did not have the budget needed to correct the problem.
4. If you were developing a security policy for a government organization, what would be your primary considerations in reducing risks to the organizations’ information and systems?
5. If you were designing a system, would your primary focus be (e.g., threats, vulnerabilities)? What is the rationale for your response?

### Candidate Response:

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**Information Technology Policy and Planning**

Develops a framework for acquiring and managing information technology systems based on the organization’s business requirements.

### Key Behaviors:

* Aligns IT investments with the organization’s mission (e.g., capital planning and investment control, Enterprise Performance Life Cycle).
* Uses established analysis, business cases and decision-making processes to evaluate capital investments in IT and IT-alternative investments.
* Considers the organization’s strategic and performance plans, to identify specific requirements and capital planning processes to drive the acquisition strategy (e.g., Enterprise performance life cycle).
* Evaluates current and emerging best practices in IT relative to the enterprise’s strategic plan.
* Acquires feedback from business owners, community and end users.
* Establishes and utilizes methodologies to compare and contrast cost, benefits and risks.
* Analyzes cost and economic data to assess quality and communicate meaning to others.
* Evaluates needs and a variety of potential IT-based solutions.
* Identifies and designs shared solutions between organizations to leverage technology investments.
* Assesses and manages all IT investments. (Follows logical steps to move from assessment of individual IT capital investments, to an integrated process for managing IT investments, as portfolios).
* Follows the organization’s IT acquisition approach to compare, contrast and evaluate acquisitions.
* Develops metrics, critical success factors and key indicators to monitor and assess results.
* Develops security plans to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the organization's information, information systems, and networks in accordance with policies, procedures and control techniques, and agency and federal regulations.

### Interview questions:

1. Stakeholders are often involved when developing or revising an IT related policy or process. Describe a time that you worked with stakeholders to revise or develop a new IT policy or process. Was there anything particularly challenging about the project or process? Please explain.
2. Describe a time when you managed (or were part of a team) the implementation of a change to an existing policy/process or the creation of a new policy/process. Describe how you communicated a policy/process change with stakeholders.
3. How do you plan activities and prioritize project tasks?
4. What steps do you take to maintain a good relationship with customers and stakeholders?

### Candidate Response:

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**Information Technology Service Operations**

Supports stakeholders by assessing and translating information technology into responsive solutions.

### Key Behaviors:

* Develops metrics, critical success factors and key indicators to monitor and assess results.
* Ensures continuous customer support and contact with customer.
* Diagnoses problems in computer hardware or software and makes recommendations for problem resolutions.
* Implements the most effective solutions to resolve organization and stakeholder/customer problems.
* Applies knowledge of IT systems, methods and practices to support customers (e.g., help desk functions).
* Uses knowledge of IT principles, methods and practices to plan, implement and coordinate services to diagnose and resolve problems, and ensure continuous service.

### Interview questions:

1. Tell us about a time when one of your ideas was carried out successfully. Or a project team you were on completed an assignment successfully. What was your contribution to the successful outcome?
2. Describe how you would identify the IT/information system requirements of a customer?
3. What criteria would you use in deciding whether to request higher level support if you were unable to diagnose a computer hardware or software problem for a customer?
4. Describe an occasion when you provided assistance to a customer, but they were not pleased; how did you rectify the situation?
5. Describe a difficult problem with an IT system that you resolved (or helped resolve). What steps did you take to solve the problem?
6. What would you do to help diagnose a problem with computer hardware or software?

### Candidate Response:

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**Network and Telecommunications Technology**

Designs, manages, and maintains network systems to transmit data.

### Key Behaviors:

* Maintains awareness of capabilities and limitations of data transmission modes and media.
* Uses knowledge of data transmission concepts, functions and mechanisms.
* Evaluates the benefits and limitations of commonly used local wired and wireless voice and data communication architectures, devices and protocols; as well as wide-area voice and data architectures, devices and protocols.
* Applies network systems knowledge to plan, design and develop systems, and properly deploy systems to support the organization.
* Uses network engineering knowledge in design, operations and security activities.

### Interview questions:

1. What operating system do you prefer and why?
2. What troubleshooting techniques would you use if a network you were responsible for was experiencing periods of slow response?
3. Provide an example of a risk you have taken in designing, developing, or deploying systems. Why did you decide to take this risk?
4. If there is something you discover in journals, meetings, or other professional activities that might be applicable to your work, how would you handle sharing this information with your supervisor and colleagues?

### Candidate Response:

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**Software Engineering and Development**

Develops or selects, integrates, and transitions software technology.

### Key Behaviors:

* Compares benefits and limitations of open source software with vendor-developed software.
* Evaluates software quality and applicability in testing software capabilities.
* Knows and considers available off-the-shelf software to make “build or buy” decisions.
* Monitors software configuration changes to anticipate and address the impact of data reliability and customer satisfaction issues.
* Tests, debugs, and maintains detailed instructions (programs) for computers to follow and ensure performance of their intended functions.
* Conceives, designs, and tests logical structures for solving problems by computer.
* Maintains an awareness of the different programming languages used based on the purpose of the program, individual focus and area supported (e.g., specialist, generalist), and the organization.
* Understands existing and emerging technologies and their applicability in the software implementation environment [e.g., vendor or open source, Service Oriented Architectures (SOA)].
* Adopts and applies systems engineering perspectives and processes to software development.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a difficult problem you faced when integrating or transitioning software to a changing environment. How did you handle it? In retrospect, would you handle it the same way now?
2. If you were asked to apply systems engineering processes to developing software, what processes would you apply? Why?
3. Describe an important achievement you have had related to selecting software or testing software capabilities. Why did you select this example as an important achievement?
4. Provide an example of a time when you, or your team, considered buying off-the-shelf software vs. developing software. What were some considerations? What was your recommendation? Why?

### Candidate Response:

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**Systems Administration**

Plans and coordinates the installation, testing, operation, and maintenance of hardware and software systems.

### Key Behaviors:

* Evaluates, selects, and installs compilers, assemblers and utilities.
* Integrates hardware and software components within the systems environment.
* Evaluates new systems engineering technologies and their effect on the operating environment.
* Ensures that information security/assurance policies, principles, practices are an integral element of the operating environment.
* Monitors the systems environment to ensure effective performance.
* Manages hardware and software obsolescence.
* Anticipates and forecasts hardware requirements when software needs change.
* Supports decisions to determine when hardware upgrades are required based on emerging software requirements.
* Plans and schedules the installation of new or modified hardware, operating systems and software.
* Addresses opportunities and challenges of implementing transformational technology (e.g., virtualization, cloud computing) into the Federal environment.
* Manages accounts, network rights and access to systems and equipment.
* Implements security procedures and tools to ensure rigorous security measures are in place.
* Ensures system availability, functionality, integrity and efficiency, and maintains system configuration.

### Interview questions:

1. Describe a time when you noticed some unusual activity in a user account. What steps did you take?
2. Describe a time you reviewed an existing process or worked on developing a new process. What obstacles, if any, did you face (i.e., system limitations, security considerations)?
3. Describe a situation in which you diagnosed and/or resolved issues related to an upgrade, new installation, or migration. What were the challenges? What were the results?
4. What would you consider in establishing and maintaining quality control of data management systems?

### Candidate Response:

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| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Systems Analysis and Design**

Analyzes the business needs and integrates technology into the organization by designing and utilizing models and methodologies to simulate deployment.

### Key Behaviors:

* Compares and contrasts characteristics and challenges in new systems adopted by the organization.
* Maintains awareness of stakeholder point of views related to available systems.
* Embraces a systems perspective for IT and related assessment process(es).
* Distinguishes between outcome (what the system needs to achieve) and output (what the system does).
* Identifies and uses modeling and simulation approaches/tools (e.g., dynamics modeling, cost benefit analysis, costing, forecasting, sourcing models - build or buy) to make decisions.
* Maintains knowledge of programs and standards associated with quality management.
* Identifies criteria and integrates (go/no go) consideration stages into development life cycle.
* Determines and conducts applicable data mining and modeling activities.
* Identifies and uses various criteria (i.e., time, budget, etc.) to determine IT success and ensure alignment with stakeholder needs.

### Interview questions:

1. Tell us about a recent experience you have had in applying data mining to develop a model to assist a customer with a business need. What was the result?
2. How would you go about determining new user requirements (for an existing or new system/software)?
3. Give an example of an effective solution you created to solve a problem.

### Candidate Response:

### Interview Summary:

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| Behaviors: |
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**Web-Based Technologies**

Supports the development, maintenance and application of web-based systems, services and technologies (e.g., Internet, intranet, extranet, and website).

### Key Behaviors:

* Considers stakeholder needs when recommending appropriate web technologies.
* Considers the organization’s strategic vision of web technology solutions.
* Evaluates current collaborative web technologies and the benefits/risks associated with them.
* Considers internal factors such as records management, human resources, etc. when making decisions involving technologies.
* Assesses delivery strategies, web technologies, oversight, and organizational implications for web-based development.
* Knows Internet standards relative to web technology development.
* Considers web technology in relation to privacy standards and Federal regulations.
* Assess the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating new web technologies and applications into the Federal Government’s IT infrastructure.
* Identifies and uses tools for information management and technology product design and development.

### Interview questions:

1. If you were asked to develop a web-based information system for a Federal Government organization, which standards and technologies would you consider?
2. What is the most important consideration in assuring that a web-based Internet or Intranet system is kept current? How have you, or would you, help assure that the system is kept current?
3. Do you have experience managing web-based technologies in a scientific environment/organization? Describe your experience, role?
4. If you were helping a stakeholder develop a new web-based information system what information would be important to share? Why would it be important for me to know this?
5. Describe a time when a website or intranet site that you were responsible for crashed or began to function incorrectly. What steps did you take to fix the problem? Was the problem fixed?

### Candidate Response:

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| Behaviors: |
| Outcome: |
| Overall Competency Proficiency Rating: 1 2 3 4 5 |

**Health Informatics**

Combines computer science, information science, and healthcare information with the latest IT systems to optimize the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information in health and biomedicine.

### Key Behaviors:

* Creates and advances databases, algorithms, computational and statistical techniques, and theory to solve formal and practical problems arising from the management and analysis of biological data.
* Gleans understanding of biological processes through the use of mathematical and computing approaches.
* Focuses on developing and applying computationally intensive techniques (e.g., pattern recognition, data mining, machine learning algorithms, and visualization) to increase understanding of biological processes.

### Interview questions:

1. Provide an example of a time that you used a scientific database, such as PubMed as a reference or for research. What was the situation? What was the result?
2. Describe your experience utilizing IT-related tools and techniques (e.g., creating databases, algorithms, statistical techniques, and theory) to solve problems arising from the management and analysis of biological data.
3. Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem involving computationally intensive techniques (e.g., extremely high dimension data, computer aided techniques to help discover dependencies in high dimensions without complicated mathematical tools).
4. How would you approach a new assignment where you were asked to develop and apply innovative IT techniques to streamline and simplify security measures to access confidential health and biomedicine data?

### Candidate Response:

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## NIH Competency Proficiency Scale

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Score | Proficiency Level | Description |
| **1** | **Fundamental Awareness** (basic knowledge) | You have a common knowledge or an understanding of basic techniques and concepts.* Focus on learning.
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| **2** | **Novice** (limited experience)  | You have the level of experience gained in a classroom and/or experimental scenarios or as a trainee on-the-job. You are expected to need help when performing this skill.* Focus on developing through on-the-job experience;
* You understand and can discuss terminology, concepts, principles and issues related to this competency;
* You utilize the full range of reference and resource materials in this competency.
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| **3** | **Intermediate** (practical application) | You are able to successfully complete tasks in this competency as requested. Help from an expert may be required from time to time, but you can usually perform the skill independently.* Focus is on applying and enhancing knowledge or skill;
* You have applied this competency to situations occasionally while needing minimal guidance to perform successfully;
* You understand and can discuss the application and implications of changes to processes, policies, and procedures in this area.
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| **4** | **Advanced** (applied theory) | You can perform the actions associated with this skill without assistance. You are certainly recognized within your immediate organization as "a person to ask" when difficult questions arise regarding this skill.* Focus is on broad organizational/professional issues;
* You have consistently provided practical/relevant ideas and perspectives on process or practice improvements which may easily be implemented;
* You are capable of coaching others in the application of this competency by translating complex nuances relating to this competency into easy to understand terms;
* You participate in senior level discussions regarding this competency;
* You assist in the development of reference and resource materials in this competency.
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| **5** | **Expert** (recognized authority) | You are known as an expert in this area. You can provide guidance, troubleshoot and answer questions related to this area of expertise and the field where the skill is used.* Focus is strategic;
* You have demonstrated consistent excellence in applying this competency across multiple projects and/or organizations;
* You are considered the “go to” person in this area within NIH and/or outside organizations;
* You create new applications for and/or lead the development of reference and resource materials for this competency;
* You are able to diagram or explain the relevant process elements and issues in relation to organizational issues and trends in sufficient detail during discussions and presentations, to foster a greater understanding among internal and external colleagues and constituents.
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