Competencies for Information Professionals

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INTRODUCTION

Data, information, and knowledge are critical to the functioning of modern organizations and today's society. Effective management and use of information help an organization or an individual to prosper and grow.

More and more work is knowledge work, and many professionals of all types have responsibility for elements of knowledge and information management. One category of professionals makes data, information, and knowledge its primary focus. These professionals come from various educational backgrounds, including library science, information science, and other disciplines. They work in many different types of organizations and settings and have a variety of job titles and professional labels. For purposes of simplicity and consistency, the term "information professional" will be used in this document to describe them.

Regardless of their job title and professional label, information professionals are connected by their focus on managing and applying the data, information, and knowledge required in their setting. They take a holistic view of the role of information and knowledge in organizations and communities, and they are concerned with information and knowledge through all stages of their life cycle.

Information professionals are also connected by the competencies they use to accomplish their work. Naturally, many of them specialize, and they do not all possess each competency to the same degree. Notwithstanding these differences, the goal of this document is to provide a common platform in which each information professional is able to find his or her unique competencies represented.

The SLA Professional Competencies Task Force envisions that this document will be used by various audiences in different ways. Among those audiences are the following:
- Members of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and other librarians and information professionals, as a resource for articulating their own skills and competencies to employers and as a checklist for professional development;
- Employers, as a source for understanding what librarians and information professionals bring to an organization and how they can contribute to organizational performance;
- Students and prospective students, as a guide to the profession they are entering and a framework for choosing courses, programs, and careers; and
- Library and information science educators, as a framework for developing their curricula.

Finally, it must be said that no document of this type can ever be comprehensive. We have compiled this document after careful consideration of a wide range of evidence, including a broad reading of previous competency work in our field, input from SLA members, and extensive discussion. We invite you to review it, comment on it, and, above all, use it in furtherance of your own career objectives, information practices, management initiatives, and the profession as a whole.

CORE COMPETENCIES

1: Information and Knowledge Services
Information professionals meet the information and knowledge needs of their organizations and communities by providing a diverse array of services based on an understanding of human information behavior and a holistic assessment of the community or organization they serve. For example, they support the effective use of a complex mix of data, information, and knowledge in any format, including published and unpublished material in physical and digital formats. They also enable knowledge sharing through interpersonal contact and relationships. Their work may address any aspect of human engagement with information and knowledge, including the identification of information needs, discovery and retrieval, analysis and synthesis, sharing, management, organization, and preservation.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Recognizing and articulating information and knowledge needs;
- Analyzing information and knowledge flows relevant to the context of community characteristics and organizational goals;
- Enabling the sharing of knowledge through interpersonal contacts and relationships as well as by using digital or electronic systems and processes;
- Prioritizing information services to meet the organization's most critical operational or strategic needs;
- Advocating for the effective use and management of information systems and processes;
- Teaching, training, and developing information literacy and associated skills for stakeholders;
- Using information management skills to learn about a domain, discipline or industry;
- Applying subject domain knowledge to the work environment to support the organizational mission; and
- Understanding the varied aspects of human information behavior.

2: Information and Knowledge Systems and Technology
Information professionals use information and communications technologies effectively to meet the information and knowledge needs of their communities and organizations. They design, develop, implement, and operate information systems that are cost-effective and

employ state-of-the-art technologies.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Engaging multiple stakeholders to recommend the information architecture needed by the entire organization;
- Selecting and implementing information and knowledge systems;
- Selecting and using information management tools, such as library management systems, content management systems, social media platforms, and information retrieval and analysis tools;
- Identifying systems and tools to meet requirements of specific communities;
- Designing interfaces for an intuitive user experience;
- Coding using appropriate scripting and other tools;
- Curating, publishing, and/or packaging information in usable formats; and
- Continuously evaluating information and knowledge systems and technologies.

3: Information and Knowledge Resources
 Information professionals maintain a deep knowledge of the content resources available to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Their knowledge extends to all types of sources and media. They systematically evaluate resources of potential value and prioritize the acquisition of resources based on their judgment of the value of each resource to the community. They also monitor the information marketplace and negotiate effectively with information vendors and content providers.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Establishing a budget for resources and advocating for allocation of funds;
- Aligning the strategy for managing information resources to support the strategic goals of the parent organization and community needs;
- Systematically evaluating new or unfamiliar resources by applying analytical frameworks and methods;
- Delivering authoritative information resources to meet the needs of a particular audience, cover a certain topic, field, or discipline, or serve a particular purpose;
- Managing and delivering relevant resources of all types, media, and formats, including published and unpublished, internal to the organization as well as external, digital, textual, numeric, and visual;
- Negotiating appropriate pricing and terms and conditions for the licensing or acquisition of information resources;
- Continually analyzing the effectiveness of the portfolio of resources under management, making adjustments as needed to ensure relevancy and provide users with optimum decision-support content;
- Identifying experts and sources of expertise and facilitating knowledge sharing within organizations;

- Auditing and mapping information and knowledge assets available within the organization in order to advise users about resources relevant to various business activities; and
- Teaching others to critically evaluate information and information sources.

4: Information and Data Retrieval and Analysis

Information professionals discover and obtain information effectively as needed by individuals and groups within their communities. They possess in-depth knowledge of search and retrieval engine functions that enables them to perform complex and difficult information retrieval tasks. They also apply information analysis tools and methods to extract meaning and actionable insights from the information retrieved.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Interviewing and consulting with community members to identify and clarify information and knowledge needs;
- Developing sophisticated search and retrieval strategies to discover and retrieve information from varied systems and repositories;
- Understanding search engines and information retrieval systems, including the unique functionalities provided by different systems, and applying this understanding to information search and retrieval projects;
- Assessing the veracity or quality of information and its underlying sources in search engines and information retrieval systems;
- Using appropriate data analysis, text analysis, visualization, and similar tools to analyze information in order to extract insights and meaning;
- Communicating the results of information retrieval and analysis projects in a way that is usable and actionable by the intended audience; and
- Teaching all competencies in a variety of formal and informal settings.

5: Organization of Data, Information, and Knowledge Assets

Information professionals organize and manage data, information, and knowledge assets so they are findable, usable, and accessible over their defined life span. They establish policies for the organization, preservation, and retention of these assets, taking into account the mission and operational needs of their institution. They establish requirements and procedures for metadata and evaluate and adapt industry standards for classification and categorization systems, storage and preservation, location, and connectivity to ensure that assets are properly managed.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Applying standard professional practices for descriptive and subject metadata to information assets;
- Developing custom metadata schemas;
- Developing custom taxonomies and ontologies as local circumstances warrant;

- Developing retention and destruction policies and procedures based on legal requirements and organizational operational needs;
- Training others in effective practices for information organization and management;
- Applying quality control practices to ensure the appropriate application of policies and practices for information organization and management; and
- Coordinating the development and implementation of archival systems and processes that are customized to support organizational needs.

6: Information Ethics

In their work, information professionals combine a strong moral and ethical foundation with an alertness for issues that commonly emerge in information- and knowledge-related work. They know and adhere to the professional standards of conduct formulated by the Special Libraries Association and other applicable professional organizations. They also know and adhere to the code of ethics of their employer. In the words of the SLA Professional Ethics Guidelines, they act with "integrity, competence, diligence, honesty, discretion and confidentiality through creating and sustaining an environment that facilitates mutual trust among employers, clients or other individuals served, and the profession." They model ethical information behavior for others in the workplace and lead the development of policies and processes to foster information ethics throughout their organizations.

Elements of this competency include the following:
- Recognizing ethical issues relative to information handling, including but not limited to privacy and confidentiality, information security, intellectual property and copyright, and intellectual freedom;
- Modeling ethical information behavior;
- Teaching, influencing, and coaching others;
- Contributing to organizational policies, procedures, and other initiatives; and
- Assessing and auditing the organizational implementation of information ethics.

ENABLING COMPETENCIES

In addition to these unique core competencies, information professionals also possess other essential competencies that are shared by professionals in other fields. These "enabling" competencies are vital for professional success and career development. It would be possible to produce a very long list of such competencies, but the following is a short list of those that merit the greatest attention:
- Critical thinking, including qualitative and quantitative reasoning;
- Initiative, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, innovation, and problem solving;
- Effective oral and written communication, including influencing skills;
- Relationship building, networking, and collaboration, including the ability to foster respect, inclusion, and communication among diverse individuals;

- Marketing;
- Leadership, management, and project management;
- Life-long learning;
- Instructional design and development, teaching, and mentoring; and
- Business ethics.

APPENDIX

Task Force Process
The Competencies for Information Professionals were developed by the SLA Competencies Task Force, which began its work in June 2015. Its approach was to collect input broadly. To that end, the task force held a knowledge café discussion at the SLA 2015 Annual Conference and conducted a survey of the SLA membership following the conference. Approximately 50 members took part in the knowledge café, and 270 participated in the survey. Survey results were analyzed quantitatively, and comments were tagged using the atlas.ti text analysis software. In addition, the task force reviewed a wide variety of existing documentation related to the competencies of information professionals and librarians, including prior SLA work (i.e., the 1997, 2003, and 2014 versions) as well as the competency statements of other associations and organizations of library and information professionals.

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