Guide: How to identify Key and mission-essential positions

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NIH Workforce Planning Toolkit

### Guide: How to Identify Key and Mission-Essential Positions

| Introduction: This document complements the workforce planning tool presentation slides ‘How to Identify Key Position and Mission-Essential Positions’ and is divided into three subparts. For application ease, reference the related slides and follow each part of this document in sequence. * Part A: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Criteria Guide provides guidance on how organizations can identify key and mission-essential positions.
* Part B: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Prioritization/Environmental Scan Guide offers the SKEPTIC model to help organizations prioritize key and mission-essential positions to focus and better align workforce planning activities with mission and strategy.
* Part C: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Identification Worksheet allows an organization to list key and mission-essential positions identified through application of Part A and B and focuses on where the position resides in the organization.
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**Part A: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Criteria Guide**

Success is built on the contributions of every employee at every level. Employees are an organization’s most important resource and valuable asset. Some positions are more closely aligned to the organization’s mission and strategy and are called “key or mission-essential positions.” These positions often are considered key or mission-essential because the position requires specialized knowledge, expertise, and capabilities that make a unique contribution or have a significant influence on the mission, scientific direction, or operation of the organization.

With every position it’s critical to ask, **If the position were to go unfilled, would the organization have a difficult time fulfilling its mission requirements?** If the answer is yes, then one of the criterion outlined in Table 1. Key and Mission-Essential Positions Criteria on the subsequent page should apply.

*Important Note: The identification of key and mission-essential positions is a separate activity from identifying Emergency Tier Designations and Continuity of Operations (COOP) activities. While the identification of Emergency Tier Designations and COOP activities allow the organization to respond in a short-term emergency setting, identifying key and mission-essential positions is strictly for workforce planning purposes, which have a longer-term planning focus for the organization.*

Table 1. Key and Mission-Essential Positions Criteria

| **Criteria** | Key and Mission-Essential Positions |
| --- | --- |
| Formal Leadership Positions (Criteria 1, 2, and 3) |
| Criterion 1Executive and Senior Leadership Positions | The **senior most leadership position**(s) (i.e., ‘Top Five’) for **your IC** and **the scientific divisions**, examples are as follows:* IC Director, Deputy Director, and Principal Deputies
* DDSM and ADSM or Executive Officer and Deputy Executive Officer
* Division Directors and Deputy Directors
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| Criterion 2Scientific Leadership Positions | Formal leadership positions **within the IC’s scientific divisions** (***not*** including division and deputy directors), examples are as follows:* Intramural Lab Chiefs
* Extramural Branch Chiefs
* Scientific Program Directors
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| Criterion 3Non-Scientific or Administrative Leadership Positions | Formal leadership positions that provide **non-scientific** or **administrative** **leadership** in supporting the science through direct technical, managerial, and operational expertise, examples are as follows:* Office Directors and Deputy Directors
* Office Branch Chiefs
* Acquisitions Director and Branch Chiefs, Grants Director and Branch Chiefs
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| Scientific or Non-Scientific Positions Requiring Unique Knowledge and/or Critical Expertise (Criteria 4 and 5) |
| Criterion 4 Mission-Essential Positions | **Scientific, non-scientific, or administrative** positions where **considerable professional, scientific, or technical expertise** is required to carry out the work. These positions **make a *unique*** **contribution** to the Institute’s mission. Incumbents of these positions may be considered **hard to replace**. Positions that if unfilled would directly impact the ability to achieve the mission, examples are as follows:* Senior Medical Officer position with responsibility for high-profile clinical research trial
* Information Technology Management position with cyber-infrastructure responsibility
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| Criterion 5‘Stand-Alone’ Positions  | Positions where **expertise and/or area of responsibility are concentrated** in ***one or a small number of incumbents.*** These positions typically have **limited or no bench strength**, which affects NIAID’s capacity to backfill, should the need arise, examples are as follows: * Operations Research Analyst position with mission and science planning responsibility
* Management Analyst position with responsibility for coordinating NIAID Telework program
* Architect position with niche skills in interior design
* Scientific position with knowledge of bioinformatics
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| Scientific or Non-Scientific Positions Requiring Immediate Transition Planning (Permanent or Temporary (Criteria 6, 7, and 8) |
| Criterion 6Incumbent on Extended Assignment | Any position where an incumbent is **or** will be **temporarily staffed to another position** such that his/her position of record will be vacant for an extended period, examples are as follows:* Incumbent on detail to another organizational unit or to another federal agency
* Incumbent on a rotational assignment to learn a specialized skill or to provide expertise
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| Criterion 7Incumbent on Extended Leave  | Any position where an incumbent is **expected to be** **out for an extended period** due to a planned or unplanned leave situation examples are as follows:* Incumbent on extended leave for long-term illness or on maternity leave
* Incumbent serving on jury or military duty
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| Criterion 8High Potential for Staff Exits | Positions where there is a **higher likelihood the current incumbent may leave** in the near term, examples are as follows:* Positions where staff turnover is known (anecdotally or statistically) to be high
* Positions where a large proportion of staff (>40%) is/will be retirement-eligible near term
* Position where incumbent has announced upcoming retirement
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**Note: Positions held by contractors should be limited to criteria 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8; if an organization has a contractor performing the duties of a key or mission-essential position in criteria 1, 2, or 3, please contact your administrative officer or HR liaison to discuss in-sourcing criteria and whether those duties should be performed by a Federal employee.**

**Part B: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Prioritization/Environmental Scan Guide**

|  **Organization Name:** | Key Position or Mission-Essential Position Name: |
| --- | --- |
| **Key Position or Mission-Essential Position Role Description** (i.e., What is the key position or mission-essential position segmented role? How is the key position or mission-essential position important to achieving the organization’s strategy or mission?): |

| SKEPTIC Model Notes |
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| Social/Demographic (Are there risks/opportunities due to expected shifts in demographics or the media view of the workforce?) |
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| Competition (Is your organization unable to match or compete with other agencies/private sectors on employee incentive, flexible work schedule, and engagement programs?) |
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| Economics (Do current economic trends imply revenue and funding issues, or job growth/unemployment rates?) |
|  |
| Political/Regulatory (Do changes in administration, elections, emergent health challenges, health policies or new health guidelines pose risks/opportunities?) |
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| Technology (Is training needed to address technological trends/innovations, new approaches and requirements?) |
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| Industry/Suppliers (Are there new or emerging competencies that impact the field?) |
|  |
| Customers (Are customer/stakeholder expectations changing in the field or requirements of stakeholders including congress evolving that pose risks/opportunities?) |
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### Part C: Key and Mission-Essential Positions Identification Worksheet:

| Organization’s Name: | Position Data Retrieved Date: |
| --- | --- |
| Worksheet Completed by: | Worksheet Completed Date: |

| Position | Series# | Role Segment (Strategic, Core, Supporting, Misaligned) | Mission Area 1 | Mission Area 2 | Mission Area 3 | Mission Area 4 | Key Position or Mission-Essential PositionY/N | Priority Key Position or Mission-Essential Position Y/N | Notes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Current Key or Mission-Essential Positions\* |
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| Other Positions |
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\*Parts A and B of this document provide guidance to help an organization determine if a position is key or mission-essential and if it’s a priority for your organization.

| Organization’s Approval | NIH OHR Approval |
| --- | --- |
| Approved by: | Signature: | Approved by: | Signature: |