

## Humanitarian Coordination Competencies

The following **Humanitarian Coordination Competencies** capture a common understanding of IASC agencies of the competencies required of Humanitarian Coordinators and of Resident Coordinators performing humanitarian coordination functions. They mirror and build on seven of the eight Resident Coordinator competencies,<sup>1</sup> with indicators contextualized to humanitarian action, and include three additional competencies which have direct application in humanitarian contexts:

- Formulating Strategies, Applying Humanitarian Principles and Norms;
- Fostering Humanitarian Teamwork; and
- Negotiation and Advocacy.

These Competencies also incorporate:

- The Profile for Humanitarian Coordinators endorsed by the 65th IASC Working Group meeting in July 2006.<sup>2</sup>
- The Global Humanitarian Platform's *Principles of Partnership*;<sup>3</sup>
- The United Nations Secretariat's *United Nations Competencies for the Future*;<sup>4</sup>
- The United Nations Senior Management Network's *United Nations System Competency Map*;<sup>5</sup> and
- *Humanitarian Leadership Competencies* identified by People in Aid.<sup>6</sup>

These competencies are informed by the <b>Humanitarian Principles of Partnership:</b>
1. Equality
2. Transparency
3. Result-oriented approach
4. Responsibility
5. Complementarity

They are also guided by the <b>United Nations Core Values:</b>
1. Integrity
2. Professionalism
3. Respect for Diversity

Competencies represent the experience, skills and behaviors required to perform effectively in a given job, role or situation. They are what a person has; i.e. a characteristic, motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image, or body of knowledge which he or she uses.<sup>7</sup> Competencies are "personal effectiveness skills" which vary from the more basic specialized/functional skills to the generic, person-based, higher-level competencies. In situations of greater change and complexity, higher-level competencies are demanded, as normal planning and operating procedures become obsolete. This fits many emergency scenarios. Reports and evaluations tell us that success in emergencies often comes down to performances by individuals who have managed to make things happen despite substantial constraints.

The most effective individuals cope with a range of contextual factors that go beyond the performance of the task in hand. In the context of an emergency, the internal and external environment often demand an "extra something." This "extra" reflects an ability to work in mixed, often changing teams, with high pressure demands to perform and in difficult contexts.

<sup>1</sup> SHL Canada (2006) *Competency Framework – United Nations Resident Coordinator* (Prepared for United Nations Resident Coordinator Issues Group).

<sup>2</sup> IASC (2006) *Strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator's System - HC Training and the HC Profile* (IASC – Working Group 65th Meeting) WO/0607/7.

<sup>3</sup> The Global Humanitarian Platform (2007) *Principles of Partnership*  
<http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/pop.html>

<sup>4</sup> UN Secretariat, *The United Nations Competencies for the Future*  
<http://www.unep.org/vacancies/PDF/competencies.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Senior Management Network, *United Nations System Competency Map*  
<http://www.unssc.org/web/programmes/OP/smn/>

<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Leadership Competencies identified by People in Aid in *Behaviours Which Lead to Effective Performance in Humanitarian Response - A Review of the Use and Effectiveness of Competency Frameworks within the Humanitarian Sector* can be found at:  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7GTGOB/\\$file/pia\\_Jun2007.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7GTGOB/$file/pia_Jun2007.pdf?openelement)

<sup>7</sup> Emergency Capacity Building Project -Staff Capacity Initiative (2006) *Humanitarian Competencies Study*.  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/AMMF-6TVHZN/\\$file/ECB-Apr2006.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/AMMF-6TVHZN/$file/ECB-Apr2006.pdf?openelement)

## Humanitarian Coordination Competencies

Domain	Competencies
<b>1. Leadership</b>	1.1 Formulating Strategies, Applying Humanitarian Principles and Norms *
	1.2 Deciding and Initiating Action #
<b>2. Managing Relationships</b>	2.1 Relating and Networking #
	2.2 Fostering Humanitarian Teamwork *
<b>3. Influencing and Representation</b>	3.1 Negotiation and Advocacy *
	3.2 Presenting and Communicating Information #
<b>4. Managing Complexity</b>	4.1 Analysing Complexity #
	4.2 Planning and Organizing #
<b>5. Adapting and Coping</b>	5.1 Coping with Pressure and Setbacks #
	5.2 Adapting and Responding to Change #

# Competencies in common with Resident Coordinators Competencies, with indicators contextualized to humanitarian action.

\* Competencies which have direct application in humanitarian contexts.

# 1. Leadership

## 1.1 Formulating Strategies, Applying Humanitarian Principles and Norms

Demonstrates a broad-based understanding of the growing complexities of humanitarian issues and activities. Creates a strategic vision of shared goals based on humanitarian principles and norms, and ensures broad acceptance of it. Develops a roadmap which enhances humanitarian action.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Develops strategic plans for the achievement of the humanitarian goals, in collaboration with the humanitarian country team, building in appropriate contingencies.	1. Does not develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy with the humanitarian country team. Develops strategies without involving or consulting others.
2. Demonstrates an excellent understanding of humanitarian principles, standards and mandates.	2. Does not take into account humanitarian principles, standards and mandates.
3. Develops strategy with view to improved access, delivery of assistance and protection of affected populations.	3. Develops strategies that have no reference to the effect on affected populations.
4. Develops strategy taking agency mandates into account.	4. Develops strategies that negatively affect agency mandates.
5. Demonstrates an excellent understanding of the complex interrelationships of factors which impact on international humanitarian assistance.	5. Does not consider the broader context; isolates work to own technical field or agency background.
6. Anticipates new trends and identifies opportunities to promote the goals of the humanitarian community.	6. Considers only the present when developing strategy and plans.
7. Addresses underlying complex issues that have the potential to impact the implementation of the vision.	7. Does not take into account broader issues which could undermine the humanitarian country team strategy.
8. Takes an active role in developing and articulating a clear and coherent identity for the humanitarian community and builds commitment to this inside and outside of the UN.	8. Does not build an identity for the humanitarian community.

### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Ethics and Values; Behavioural Flexibility; Acts with Integrity and Transparency; Commitment to the entire humanitarian community and his/her TORs as Humanitarian Coordinator; Vision

## 1.2 Deciding and Initiating Action

Makes prompt, clear decisions which may involve tough choices or considered risks. Takes responsibility for actions, projects and people. Takes initiative, acts with confidence and works under own direction. Initiates and generates activity. Provides others with clear direction. Modifies decisions when necessary, in light of new information.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Identifies urgent decisions, and makes decisions quickly when necessary. Is able to balance decisiveness with consultation.	1. Avoids making urgent decisions or on the contrary reaches hasty and less cautious decisions. Unable to balance decision-making with consultation.
2. Makes necessary difficult decisions under pressure, even in the absence of complete information.	2. Unable to make difficult decisions under pressure, or with little information.
3. Accepts responsibility for own decisions and actions.	3. Does not take responsibility for actions, projects and people.
4. Acts on own initiative with confidence and without prompting.	4. Requires prompting or advice from others to act.
5. Accepts appropriate responsibility for staff within organizational parameters, including (but not limited to) security and workplace climate.	5. Places the blame on others.
6. Takes action quickly when appropriate.	6. Hesitates and fails to act in a timely manner.
7. Manages risk and takes calculated risks on the basis of available information and analysis.	7. Demonstrates an aversion to risk and does not make decisions.
8. Modifies decisions when necessary, in light of new information. Consults as widely as circumstances permit.	8. Does not modify decisions when faced with changing circumstances. Makes no attempt to consult.

### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Judgment/Decision Making, Ethics and Values; Cognitive Capacity; Behavioural Flexibility; Decisiveness; Leadership; Political and Organizational Awareness; Integrity; Analytical and Strategic Thinking; Learning and Knowledge Sharing; Technical Ability; Innovation and Risk Taking; Ownership

## 2. Managing Relationships

### 2.1 Relating and Networking

Establishes good relationships with stakeholders and staff; Builds wide and effective networks of contacts inside and outside the organization; Relates well to people at all levels; Actively listens; Manages conflict; Makes effective use of political processes to influence and persuade others.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Actively and successfully attempts to build rapport and trust with people from a wide range of non-UN institutions on a personal level during one-to-one contact. Actively listens to others and responds to their concerns.	1. Lack of confidence to seek out and initiate relationships with others. Unable to actively listen to others.
2. Uses an understanding of the broader organizational and/or country context to build rapport and understanding with staff, members of the humanitarian country team, other humanitarian stakeholders and national stakeholders.	2. Considers only a narrow, institutional, UN or local perspective when developing strategy and plans.
3. Relates effectively with staff at all levels of the organization without being constrained by conventional hierarchies.	3. Unable to establish or maintain work relationships with staff at different levels.
4. Systematically and effectively builds networks of contacts inside the humanitarian system and with appropriate stakeholders in the country of operation.	4. Does not establish networks within the host country, or once established, does not take the necessary steps to maintain relationships.
5. Systematically builds support for own initiatives or plans within the UN system and with key stakeholders.	5. Unable to build networks with stakeholders.
6. Facilitates the resolution of conflict between others.	6. Does not resolve problems and conflicts between others.
7. Uses tact and diplomacy to manage disagreements.	7. Unable to react in a tactful and diplomatic way in situations of disagreements.
8. Makes decisions taking into account the consequences of decisions on other stakeholders.	8. Makes decisions and carries out actions, ignoring the impact of decisions on other stakeholders.

#### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Building Partnerships, Across the Organization and beyond; Partnering; Organizational Awareness; Mediation and Negotiation; Team Leadership; Influence; Senior Government/NGO Relations; Commitment to the Organization and its Mandate; Working in Teams; Providing Quality Service; Generating Synergies

## 2.2 Fostering Humanitarian Teamwork

Builds and maintains humanitarian partnerships. Is committed to working in partnership with the humanitarian country team; promotes a climate of teamwork and harmony and facilitates a team approach; pursues the efficient use of common resources and common goals; shares information and supports others; ensures the full participation of team members in common endeavours; encourages clear, open and respectful dialogue.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Builds and maintains partnerships on the basis of transparent communication and trust.	1. Does not establish partnerships or is unable to maintain them and is unable to engender trust.
2. Promotes team effectiveness rather than any individual or agency interest.	2. Makes decisions and sets priorities based on individual or agency interest, rather than the common interest of the humanitarian country team.
3. Promotes a sense of team spirit by encouraging collaboration, cooperation and open communication among all the members of the humanitarian country team.	3. Works in isolation. Does not encourage cooperation among team members, does not consult with partners, and ignores external advice consistently.
4. Encourages buy-in and a sense of shared responsibility by delegating responsibilities to members of the humanitarian country team as appropriate.	4. Does not delegate tasks among the team.
5. Encourages frank dialogue and discussion throughout the humanitarian community while maintaining respectful interactions.	5. Exploits divisions in the team and is inflexible and rejects other perspectives. Does not encourage mutually respectful, frank dialogue and discussion.
6. Supports others, facilitates their work, and defends them in order to contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian action, recognizing others mandates.	6. Undermines others, ignores their mandates, and/or does not support their work.
7. Shares knowledge, information and expertise with team members.	7. Withholds information from the group, and does not share knowledge.
8. Respects and promotes diversity as an asset of the humanitarian community and acknowledges the equality as well as interdependence amongst stakeholders.	8. Disrespects diversity among the humanitarian community and ignores the added value of complementing contributions.

### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Effective Relationships; Collaboration; Joint Responsibility; Conflict Resolution; Ethical Obligations, Mutual Respect; Transparency; Result-orientation; Commitment; Complementarity

### 3. Influencing and Representation

#### 3.1 Advocacy and Negotiation

Can effectively influence or persuade others of a course of action. Is an effective advocate of humanitarian principles on behalf of the humanitarian community. Is able and prepared to adopt a number of ways to negotiate to gain support and influence diverse parties, with the aim of securing improvements for humanitarian access, provision of assistance, and to ensure protection of the affected population.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Scans the strategic external environment, identifies opportunities and threats, stakeholders, and those likely to oppose change, and seeks out allies and builds partnerships, with the intention of initiating action.	1. Ignores the external environment and others who may assist advocacy. Undertakes inquiry with no intention to undertake action.
2. Uses an appropriate advocacy mode of action to achieve immediate and sustainable change in the short, medium, and in the long term.	2. Inflexible in application of suitable modes of action and/or focuses on one time frame to engender change. Uses overtly aggressive or passive strategies.
3. Uses a range of active advocacy approaches.	3. Uses a limited number of active approaches to promote change.
4. Advocates for the inclusion of humanitarian principles in existing structures and processes.	4. Does not position advocacy around humanitarian principles or action.
5. Uses complex and multi-layered influencing strategies to negotiate access, enable humanitarian assistance, and ensure protection.	5. Inflexible in application of suitable negotiation strategies. Is unable to use a variety of modes in negotiation.
6. Negotiates skilfully in difficult situations and settles differences with minimum noise. Is aware of and understands his/her own negotiation styles and preferences. Is assertive and decisive, as well as diplomatic. Wins concessions without damaging relationships.	6. Unable to negotiate equitable solutions. Unable to recognize his/her negotiation style and find a balance to adapt to the situation. May hang on to a position too long, overtly diplomatic, or vague and lack decisiveness. May become overly accommodating and be reluctant to walk away.
7. Understands the motivations of counterparts, the tactics commonly used in negotiations and the appropriate means to counter them. Fashions creative solutions that satisfy all parties.	7. Does not consciously study motivations of counterparts during negotiations. Only uses standardized approaches.
8. Acts fairly and impartially and is able to build trust between negotiation partners.	8. Can not garner others' trust.

#### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Influencing relationships. Coping with ambiguity. Assessing risk. Gathering and reviewing the evidence base. Working in partnership for collaboration. Lobbying. Formulating policy theory and local and national practice. Providing leadership. Networking. Communicating effectively. Influencing. Interagency liaison. Cooperation. Coordination. Mediation. Representation. Managing Relationships. Generating synergies. Influence to action.

### 3.2 Presenting and Communicating Information

Speaks clearly and fluently; Expresses opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly; Makes presentations and undertakes public speaking with skill and confidence; Identifies information needs of a target audience or population, and works systematically to address the needs; Projects credibility.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Speaks clearly, audibly and fluently in both individual and group communications.	1. Unable to articulate ideas and actions in a clear and accessible fashion. Lacks coherence in structure of oral and written communications; overlooks key points.
2. Expresses opinions and arguments in a clear and straightforward manner, avoiding jargon.	2. Uses jargon often in interaction with others.
3. Effectively and quickly presents the key points of an argument, focussing on important rather than trivial elements.	3. Unable to summarize key ideas and focuses on small issues rather than key concerns.
4. Speaks with authority, conviction and integrity, projecting personal credibility and expertise.	4. Does not show confidence while presenting or speaking in public and is not perceived as credible.
5. Presents effectively during formal public speaking, adopting an engaging manner and appropriate aids in order to capture and hold audience attention.	5. Does not capture the audience's attention and lacks engaging presentation skills.
6. Identifies the information needs of a target audience and crafts communications to address the identified needs. Actively listens and reflects concerns of key stakeholders.	6. Does not take into account the information needs of the target audience. Does not actively listen and/or does not reflect the concerns of stakeholders in communication.
7. Chooses appropriate information to be conveyed.	7. Does not select appropriate information.
8. Communicates clearly and precisely in high-pressure situations.	8. Unable to communicate effectively under pressure.

#### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Communication in a Credible and Effective Way; Facilitation and Group Moderation; Presentation and Public Speaking; Cultural Sensitivity/Valuing Diversity; Conflict Management; Mobilizing Resources; Interpersonal Skills; Counseling/Consultancy

## 4. Managing Complexity

### 4.1 Analysing Complexity

Analyzes numerical data, verbal data and all other sources of information; Breaks information into component parts, patterns and relationships; Probes for further information or greater understanding of a problem; Makes rational judgments from the available information and analysis; Produces workable solutions to a range of problems; Demonstrates an understanding of how one issue may be a part of the larger humanitarian system.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Makes use of all available data when conducting analyses, including but not limited to numerical and verbal information.	1. Uses only a limited number of data when conducting analyses.
2. Accurately identifies patterns and relationships in available information, including causes and effects, and draws appropriate inferences.	2. Does not identify the underlying links and perceives the information at hand as unrelated.
3. Identifies information gaps and seeks further information when necessary, in order to obtain a greater understanding of a problem.	3. Does not probe for further information or greater understanding of a problem.
4. Arrives at systematic and rational judgments from the available information and analysis.	4. Does not draw rational conclusions from the available information.
5. Produces a range of workable solutions to problems that meet the demands of the whole situation.	5. Does not produce workable solutions to a range of problems.
6. Demonstrates an understanding of complex inter-relationships in the overall country situation and in the humanitarian system.	6. Does not recognize inter-relationships and perceives the information at hand as unrelated.
7. Is able to process data, information and correspondence in a timely fashion, under pressure and with constraints of emergencies.	7. Does not process and work through large amounts of often conflicting information that requires analysis in emergencies, in a timely fashion.
8. Identifies workable solutions to a range of problems, recognizing causes and effects influencing the humanitarian system.	8. Does not find solutions to multiple problems and cannot identify complex factors influencing the humanitarian system.

#### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Analysis; Analytical and Strategic Thinking; Exercising Judgement in Decision-making; Strategic Orientation and Perspective; Overseeing

## 4.2 Planning and Organizing

Sets clearly defined objectives; Plans activities and projects well in advance and takes account of possible changing circumstances; Manages time effectively; Identifies and organizes resources needed to accomplish tasks; Monitors performance against deadlines and milestones.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Identifies priorities and sets clearly defined and challenging objectives and action steps.	1. Focuses only on own work and avoids managerial responsibilities.
2. Responds effectively to crises and emergencies by quickly developing appropriate action plans.	2. Does not respond adequately and quickly in crisis and emergency situations.
3. Develops action plans that take account of potential changing circumstances and difficulties.	3. Avoids giving “bad news” or provides a false reporting of failure.
4. Allocates appropriate timescales for activities and sets achievable target dates for task or project completion.	4. Focuses on the trivial at the expense of more important issues.
5. Establishes milestones or other metrics for measuring progress against established plans, and monitors progress systematically.	5. Does not monitor progress towards goals; fails to respect deadlines and focuses on process rather than on outcomes.
6. Identifies and organizes the resources needed to accomplish identified tasks.	6. Does not adequately identify the resources needed in order to achieve results.
7. Manages own time effectively.	7. Demonstrates poor time management; frequently misses deadlines.
8. Manages and coordinates emergency situations based on a thorough understanding of humanitarian sectors and cross-cutting issues.	8. Not able to manage and coordinate an emergency situation due to insufficient knowledge of humanitarian inter-sector connections.

### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Results Driven, Effective Use of Resources; Action Management; Planning and Organising; Flexibility; Stakeholder Focus; Managing Performance; Appropriate and Transparent Decision Making; Delegating Responsibility; Adaptability; Managing Performance, Knowledge of humanitarian sectors

## 5. Adapting and Coping

### 5.1 Coping with Pressure and Setbacks

Works productively in a high pressure environment; Keeps emotions under control during difficult situations; Balances the demands of work and personal life; Maintains a positive outlook at work; Handles criticism well and learns from it.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Works productively while under pressure from superiors, humanitarian partners, country stakeholders, donors, or the demands of day to day work (tight deadlines, difficult staffing situations, etc.).	1. Demonstrates helplessness when confronted with ambiguous situations and stressful situations.
2. Continues to work productively in the midst of crises flowing from natural events, political ferment or military action.	2. Works unproductively and freezes or focuses on other less critical issues or continues to work at an average pace when a crisis requires speed.
3. Avoids emotional displays that may exacerbate difficult situations or interfere with effective working relationships.	3. Demonstrates a lack of emotional control during difficult situations and transfers own stress or pressure to others.
4. Maintains optimism at work, and recovers quickly from setbacks.	4. Demonstrates a morose and negative attitude, and responds slowly after setbacks. Focuses on problems, not solutions.
5. Accepts criticism as an opportunity for development and increased effectiveness, and moves forward effectively.	5. Reacts in a hostile and overly defensive way to constructive criticism.
6. Effectively manages conflicts between personal life and work-related goals or responsibilities.	6. Does not balance personal life and professional responsibilities.
7. Uses a range of mechanisms and strategies to reduce stress. Is mentally and physically fit and able to cope.	7. Has no avenues to reduce pressure and stress. Is unaware of own need to be and remain fit.
8. Flexibly adjusts leadership style to accommodate short time frames and pressure amongst a team.	8. Retains an inappropriate leadership style which ignores time constraints and pressure and makes no adjustments to account for pressure amongst a team.

#### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Managing Pressure; Works productively during Crises; Coping with Emotions; Optimism; Accepting Criticism; Managing Conflict

## 5.2 Adapting and Responding to Change

Adapts to changing circumstances; Accepts new ideas and change initiatives; Adapts interpersonal style to suit different people or situations; Shows respect and sensitivity towards cultural and religious differences; Deals with ambiguity, making positive use of the opportunities it presents.

Effective Behaviour	Ineffective Behaviour
1. Adapts approach to work in response to changing circumstances.	1. Reluctant to change when faced with new demands or challenges.
2. Encourages and welcomes new ideas and change initiatives with respect to the humanitarian response.	2. Shows little flexibility in attitude when faced with new ideas.
3. Identifies and adopts the most appropriate interpersonal style for different circumstances.	3. Does not adapt to changing priorities and demands.
4. Shows respect for organizational, cultural and religious differences, and demonstrates an ability to see issues from the point of view of others.	4. Seeks to relate only to persons of similar culture, religion, gender, agency or level.
5. Works comfortably in an environment where definite information or direction is not available.	5. Holds outdated views despite changes in the work environment.
6. Takes advantage of opportunities offered by ambiguity.	6. Becomes negative in outlook when faced with change.
7. Effectively utilizes tools and processes to manage change.	7. Does not undertake change management.
8. Utilizes change as an opportunity to advance humanitarian goals.	8. Unable to make use of opportunities emerging from change.

### Key phrases to describe this competency:

Change Management; Promoting Innovation and Creation; Leading Vision and Change; Managing Organizational Change and Learning; Facilitating and Leading Change, Embracing Diversity; Cultural Sensitivity