



Competencies for PAs in Healthcare Administration

AAPA

AAPA PA Administrator Task Force

Task Force Chairs

Sarah Vanderlinden, DMSc, PA-C, DFAAPA

Risa Zimmerman, MBA, MPAS, PA-C, DFAAPA

Task Force Members

Jennifer L. Barnett, MPAS, PA-C, CAQ-HM, DFAAPA

Gayle B. Bodner, DHSc, PA-C, DFAAPA

Scott Cackler, MBA, PA-C

Michelle Dean, MBA, MS, PA-C

Melissa Dunlop, MS, PA-C, MBA, FACHE, DFAAPA

Emily Epling, MA, PA-C

Steven Hunter, DMSc, MBA, PA-C, CPAAPA

Diana Mendoza, MPAS, PA-C

Rev. Josanne K. Pagel, M.Div., MPAS, PA-C, DFAAPA, C-EBS

Scott Sadler, PA-C

Jamie Silkey PA-C, MPAS, MBA, MHA, DFAAPA

Sondra DePalma, DHSc, PA-C, CLS, CHC, FNLA, AACC, DFAAPA (Staff Advisor)

Suggested Citation

Vanderlinden S, Zimmerman R, Barnett J, et al. Competencies for PAs in Healthcare Administration. American Academy of Physician Associates; 2023.

Introduction

As administrators, PAs (physician assistants/associates) are on the front lines of leading a changing healthcare landscape as well as contributing to a more collaborative, team-based system. PAs in administration use leadership and management competencies above and beyond their clinical skill set to positively impact patient care in a variety of leadership roles, including management, administration, and executive leadership.

There are six domains of competencies for PA healthcare administrators: (1) leadership, (2) communication and interprofessional relationships, (3) PA professional practice and advocacy, (4) healthcare environment, (5) business skills and principles, and (6) education and academic development. Each domain includes competencies and essential skills and behaviors for administrative PAs. The document also contains an appendix of educational topics and learning opportunities for PA administrators.

This set of competencies serves as guidance for individual PAs, health systems, educators, and others to promote the development of administrative skills and knowledge for PAs in healthcare administration. Although PAs frequently serve as executive leaders within healthcare organizations and in other industries, the competencies specific to those roles are outside the scope of this document.

Methods

The PA administrative competencies were developed by an AAPA House of Delegates-appointed task force by reviewing related competency frameworks from healthcare administration and other healthcare professions. Concurrently, a collection of PA administrative leadership job descriptions across all roles and levels of leadership were reviewed for knowledge, skills, and behaviors. The task force compared the common components of existing competency frameworks and prioritized an inventory of competencies based on the common themes from the job descriptions. This process informed the creation of the final domains and competencies. For additional validation, the competencies were reviewed and feedback was obtained from the PAs in Administration, Management, and Supervision (PAAMS) group, AAPA's Commission on Continuing Professional Development and Education, and AAPA's Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives, and other subject matter experts.

Leadership

Incorporates growth mindset and self-assessment into professional role and development plans.

- » Acts with self-awareness of knowledge, skills, and behavioral strengths and limitations.
- » Assesses one's personal biases, both explicit and implicit.
- » Initiates performance feedback with adaptability and humility to address gaps in knowledge, skills, and behaviors.
- » Applies development tools to assess one's personal and professional values and goals and integrates them into career plan.
- » Demonstrates professional accountability to patients, colleagues, the organization, and society.

Integrates strategies into personal and professional life to support personal resiliency and well-being.

- » Incorporates personal wellness strategies into daily work.
- » Recognizes stressors that may impact personal and professional well-being.
- » Incorporates appropriate resources to support well-being.

Facilitates professional growth in others.

- » Establishes relationships, including mentor relationships, coaching, and sponsorship.
- » Provides support, encouragement, and necessary skills for individual development through collaboration and feedback.
- » Applies individualized development strategies.

- » Communicates personal and team accomplishments and achievements.
- » Identifies individuals for development and succession planning.

Develops effective teams that support diversity and innovation.

- » Models innovation, creativity, and continuous improvement.
- » Creates diverse teams and processes to sustain team effectiveness and success.
- » Facilitates team development by recognizing strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
- » Recognizes successes to promote positive culture and engagement.
- » Supports and rewards behavior norms, including professional expectations.
- » Assesses inappropriate behaviors and implements policies and procedures to promote professional expectations and equity.

Integrates ethical and social consciousness into healthcare.

- » Models compassion, integrity, and respect for others.
- » Integrates ethical principles related to healthcare and business.
- » Supports compassion, integrity, and respect.
- » Prioritizes good judgment and responsibility when utilizing resources and finances.
- » Defends the rights of all community members, including patients, their families, and the entire healthcare team.
- » Supports diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- » Recognizes and manages conflicts of interest.

Communication and Interprofessional Relationships

Uses effective interpersonal communication skills and behaviors.

- » Communicates professionally and with cultural sensitivity.
- » Adapts communication and interactions to the audience and stakeholder.
- » Demonstrates proficient communication, including verbal, written, and electronic methods.
- » Demonstrates skill in proposal writing and communication.
- » Incorporates active listening to include empathy and curiosity.
- » Facilitates consensus-building in group discussions by encouraging ideas and opinions from others.
- » Communicates and receives viewpoints with respect, inclusivity, and a perspective that begins with assumptions of good intent and without judgment.
- » Develops collaborative relationships and works effectively with other health professionals.

Develops interprofessional relationships to promote effective healthcare teams.

- » Demonstrates leadership skills that enhance team-based delivery.
- » Contributes to shared governance structures to support interprofessional vision and values.
- » Incorporates diversity and inclusion principles in professional relationships.
- » Creates professional environments that recognize and value differences in healthcare team members, patients, and communities.

Integrates conflict resolution strategies.

- » Incorporates problem-solving and critical thinking skills in conflict management.

- » Integrates dispute resolution techniques such as consensus building and mediation.
- » Recognizes risk and liability actions and areas.
- » Facilitates dialogue and understanding during times of conflict.

PA Professional Practice and Advocacy

Participates in professional advocacy through professional societies and in practice modernization.

- » Participates in professional societies and networks with peers.
- » Supports effective advocacy for the PA profession by supporting modernization of laws, regulations, and policies that promote optimal team practice.

Demonstrates professional responsibilities.

- » Maintains appropriate professional licensure, certification, and credentialing.
- » Represents the PA profession in one's leadership journey.
- » Supports lifelong learning among colleagues and others.

Incorporates knowledge for practice and patient-centered care in administrative leadership and clinical patient care.

- » Demonstrates knowledge of medical practice and promotes evidence-based medicine.
- » Facilitates evidence-based, patient-centered care.
- » Integrates standards established by regulatory, accreditation, and quality agencies.

Healthcare Environment

Incorporates regulatory and professional processes in healthcare systems, organizations, and governance.

- » Assesses compliance with professional practice laws, regulations, and policies.
- » Communicates with stakeholders on reimbursement, legislative, and regulatory changes.
- » Incorporates accreditation standards into the healthcare system.
- » Establishes professional processes to maintain minimal professional standards, including credentialing, privileging, maintenance of certification, etc.
- » Develops, assesses, and incorporates care delivery models and the roles and responsibilities of healthcare workers.
- » Analyzes workflows and workforce to achieve standards of care.
- » Supports PA and other healthcare professionals in committees and meetings.

Supports a patient-centered culture promoting shared accountability, social responsibility, and healthcare safety.

- » Assesses and implements processes that promote and comply with patient safety requirements, federal and state laws, accreditation requirements, and industry standards.
- » Facilitates staff education on patient safety, risk management, and compliance.
- » Implements measures promoting ethical standards and the protection of patient rights, including safety in clinical research.
- » Supports an organizational culture that focuses on patient safety, while including a non-punitive safety reporting system and proactive identification of safety concerns.

- » Appraises qualifications and competencies of staff.

Participates in public health strategies, including PA profession integration.

- » Utilizes vital statistics and health data to guide decisions and strategic plans.
- » Implements plans for disasters, public health emergencies, and other threats.
- » Models the PA profession in the community and with non-healthcare constituents and integrates that community perspective in organizational decision-making.
- » Collaborates with community partners and participates in public service as a leader in the community.

Business Skills and Principles

Integrates change management strategies into leadership and business practice.

- » Applies principles of change management.
- » Identifies and engages with internal and external stakeholders and sponsors.
- » Supports a culture that values change and continuous improvement.
- » Supports problem-solving and innovation.

Creates collaborative strategic initiatives reflective of organizational goals and the healthcare environment.

- » Creates operational strategies and proposals to achieve the organizational mission, vision, and/or strategic plan.
- » Incorporates key performance metrics in strategic planning and initiatives.
- » Applies knowledge of governance structure to achieve outcomes.

Incorporates fiscal management, budgets, and forecasting into operations.

- » Interprets financial statements.
- » Manages budgets and capital expenditure plans.
- » Determines key financial indicators and their impact on operating margin.
- » Identifies opportunities for operational efficiencies and quality improvement to support fiscal responsibility.

Creates staffing models that align with fiscal responsibilities and budgets.

- » Develops and implements staffing models.
- » Compares and contrasts the budget impact of staffing models.
- » Evaluates billing and reimbursement processes and models for healthcare teams.
- » Assesses productivity of individuals and teams.

Uses information management systems, technology, and data to assess trends and outcomes.

- » Uses data and technology to assess performance, monitor trends, and inform decisions.
- » Demonstrates adoption, implementation, and optimization of information systems.

Facilitates human resource management practices and workforce planning.

- » Develops long-term and short-term workforce plans.
- » Creates standard roles and responsibilities with defined career advancement pathways.
- » Develops programming with tools and resources for staff recruitment and onboarding, development, and retention.
- » Understands compensation principles and philosophy of FTE allocation, incentives, and fringe benefits.

Education and Academic Development

Supports the education of the next generation of PAs and other healthcare professionals.

- » Supports the learning of pre-PA and other healthcare professions.
- » Establishes partnerships with educational programs for collaboration and community engagement to support a qualified healthcare workforce.

Promotes professional advancement through evidence-based practices and scholarship.

- » Demonstrates subject matter expertise to transfer knowledge and promote skill development in learners.
- » Recognizes and accommodates diverse learning styles.
- » Incorporates diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning environment.
- » Supports PAs and other healthcare professionals to engage in research, innovation, and scholarly contributions.
- » Summarizes research, innovations, and published literature.
- » Participates in research, innovation, and scholarly contributions.

Develops sustainable education programs to support PAs and patient care.

- » Performs educational development assessments relevant to the target audience.
- » Applies curriculum design and continuing education standards to program and curriculum development.
- » Designs learning objectives and educational resources to achieve program standards.

- » Constructs effective assessments to measure objectives and learning outcomes, either to ensure competency or to provide graduated responsibilities and increased autonomy.
- » Establishes effective feedback techniques.
- » Creates interprofessional educational opportunities.
- » Enhances the growth of learners, educators, and mentors.
- » Identifies barriers to educational design, implementation, and sustainability.
- » Identifies educational stakeholders and collaborators.

Appendix

Examples of education topics and learning opportunities by Domain.

LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability of self and others • Adaptability and flexibility • Address limits of knowledge by using appropriate resources in dealing with uncertainty • Bias assessments • Boundary setting • Building resiliency • Career planning • Change management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching • Culture development • Customer service • Emotional intelligence • Equity • Mentorship • Feedback • Motivation management • Personal goals • Professional identity development • Psychological safety • Recognizing limits of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal knowledge • Reflective leadership • Self-assessment • Self-care • Sponsorship • Stakeholder management • Succession planning • Team building • Value assessment • Wellness assessments
COMMUNICATION AND INTERPROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening • Assessment of communication content, audience, and timing • Audience-aware communication • Body language control • Boundary setting • Build collaborative relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with patients and families • Emotional intelligence • Program development • Policy creation • Presentations skills • Professional electronic communications • Professional presence • Public speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research inclusion • SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) • Social intelligence • Writing in appropriate administrative, education, and research formats
PA PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ADVOCACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational PA education and practice standards • Involvement with professional organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of state laws and regulations • Participation in advocacy sessions and state legislative advocacy efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reimbursement policies and principles • Understanding of regulatory agencies
KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation organizations (e.g., The Joint Commission) • Assessment of safety events • Community engagement • Competency assessment (e.g., focused professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practice evaluation (FPPE) and ongoing professional practice evaluation (OPPE)) • Emergency and disaster response • Ethics • Healthcare law • Healthcare organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> principles • Healthcare quality tools and principles (e.g., Kaizen, Gemba, Lean, Six Sigma, etc.) • Human research standards • Knowledge of practice laws, policies, and rules/bylaws

BUSINESS SKILLS AND PRINCIPLES

- Medical staff
- Needs assessments
- Organizational structures
- A3 process
- Advancement models and promotions
- Alternative payment models
- Assessment of the need for more FTEs (full-time equivalents)
- Budget creation, management, and reconciliation
- Budget variance reports
- Business plan development
- Business proposal creation
- Business tools (ADKAR, AIDET, Gantt chart, RACI, etc.)
- Change management principles and processes
- Creating job descriptions
- Data assessment
- Database management
- Decision management
- Developing a business plan for return on investment (ROI), scorecards, and value-based payment (VBP)
- Facilitating and leading meetings
- Federal, commercial, and other payer systems
- Fixed-payer contracts
- Formal degree programs
- PDSA (Plan, Do, Study Act)
- Scheduling
- Workforce projections
- Organizational dynamics
- Performance assessment
- Performance improvement
- Presentations skills
- Problem solving
- Professional and career development
- Progressive discipline
- Project maps, business service plans, and business cases
- Quality improvement theory and processes
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Revenue and reimbursement best practices
- Scheduling
- Stakeholder management
- Strategic planning tools
- Supply chain management
- Termination
- Time management
- Union and nonunionized environments
- Workforce planning

EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Accreditation and Review Commission on Education-PA and Physician Assistant Education Association resources
- Adult learning theories
- Bloom's taxonomy
- Citations
- Competencies
- Creating learning objectives
- Curriculum vitae and resumes
- Education program development (e.g., ADDIE, Kern 6 steps)
- Evaluation and assessment methods (e.g., Kirkpatrick evaluation model)
- Evidence-based medicine
- Feedback for learners
- Hiring and training
- Human research best practices
- Inclusive learning methods
- Knowledge of the healthcare team
- Literature searches
- Needs assessment for learners
- Miller's pyramid
- Onboarding
- Organizational culture
- Preceptor development tools
- Preceptor education program
- Professional portfolios
- Program and education outcome assessment
- Remediation
- Student placement operations (e.g., processes, recruitment, administrative tracking, EMR practices, legal documents, etc.)

References

1. International Hospital Federation. Leadership competencies for healthcare services managers. 2015. https://www.ache.org/-/media/ache/about-ache/leadership_competencies_healthcare_services_managers.pdf
2. National Commission on the Certification of Physician Assistants, Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, PA Education Association, American Academy of Physician Associates. Competencies for the PA profession. Updated 2021. <https://www.aapa.org/download/90503/>
3. Zaweski J, Melcher B, Sedrak M, Von M, Fletcher S; Physician assistant educator competencies. *J Physician Assist Educ.* 2019; 30(1) 47-53. doi: 10.1097/JPA.0000000000000240
4. American Organization of Nurse Executives. AONE nurse executive competencies. 2015. <https://www.aonl.org/sites/default/files/aone/nec.pdf>
5. Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, Association of American Medical Colleges, American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine. The clinician educator milestone project. August 2022. <https://www.acgme.org/globalassets/pdfs/milestones/standalone/2022/clinicianeducatormilestones.pdf>
6. Englander R, Cameron T, Ballard AJ, Dodge J, Bull J, Aschenbrener CA. Toward a common taxonomy of competency domains for the health professions and competencies for physicians. *Acad Med.* 2013; 88(8) 1088-1094. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0b013e31829a3b2b