

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Professional development goals are an essential part of your annual competence requirements. Clear, intentional goals help ensure you remain current, confident, and effective in your practice—no matter your role or area of specialization.

Here are some key points to consider when developing strong and meaningful goals.



1 Start With Your Self-Assessment

Your goals should directly address the strengths, gaps, trends, or changes in practice you identified through your self-assessment. Ask yourself:

- ◆ What do I need to learn to maintain competence?
- ◆ What emerging issues or client needs require new skills or knowledge?

2 Keep Goals Relevant to Your Practice

Professional development must connect to:

- ◆ Your area of practice
- ◆ The tasks or decisions you're responsible for
- ◆ The populations you serve
- ◆ Ethical, legislative and regulatory requirements

3 Clarify Your Learning Intent

Use these categories to guide what level and type of learning to plan:

- ◆ **Create** – develop, design, produce
- ◆ **Evaluate** – critique, assess, appraise
- ◆ **Analyze** – compare, differentiate, examine
- ◆ **Apply** – demonstrate, practice, use
- ◆ **Understand** – explain, summarize, discuss
- ◆ **Remember** – identify, list, describe

4 Make Your Goals S.M.A.R.T.

A strong goal is: **Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Relevant – Timely**

Example: "By June, I will apply trauma-informed interviewing skills with youth clients."

5 Match Activities to Goals

Choose activities that support what you aim to learn or demonstrate. This might include courses, workshops, mentorship, reading, policy review, practice application, supervision, and more.

Example: "By June, I will apply trauma-informed interviewing skills with youth clients by completing a six-hour workshop and reviewing two practice guidelines."

6 Review and Adjust During the Year

Revisit your plan regularly and revise as needed if your role, client population, or responsibilities change.

7 Focus on Impact

Ask how the learning will improve your competence or enhance client outcomes. A clear connection to practice strengthens your professional development plan.

SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS BY ROLE

Direct social work practice with clients

1. Apply trauma-informed engagement strategies with adults experiencing homelessness by completing training and integrating three new techniques into practice by September.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of my current safety planning approach with families by reviewing best-practice guidelines and adjusting my practice by year-end.
3. Analyze cultural factors influencing client decision-making by completing Indigenous cultural safety modules and reflecting on implications for my case planning.

Social work research

1. Analyze ethical considerations in participant consent processes by reviewing ACSW standards and two current research ethics guidelines by June.
2. Apply qualitative coding methods by completing a research methods course and coding a sample dataset by October.
3. Evaluate evidence quality in recent studies related to caregiver burnout by conducting a structured literature review.

Policy and program development

1. Evaluate the alignment of my organization's intake policies with current legislative and practice standards, developing recommendations by year-end.
2. Create a draft framework for a client feedback process by reviewing three comparable agency models and consulting with stakeholders.
3. Analyze gaps in service accessibility for rural clients by reviewing data, conducting staff interviews, and summarizing findings for program planning.

Leadership and supervision

1. Apply structured supervision techniques by completing a supervision training program and implementing a monthly reflective model with my team.
2. Evaluate team communication practices by obtaining feedback, reviewing best-practice leadership resources, and implementing two improvements by December.
3. Analyze conflict management approaches and integrate a strengths-based strategy into supervisory practice by mid-year.

Instructor, educator or field supervisor roles

1. Create updated lesson materials for teaching ethics by reviewing ACSW Standards of Practice and incorporating two new case studies into my curriculum.
2. Apply adult learning strategies by taking a short course on instructional design and implementing at least one new method in my classroom/supervision sessions.
3. Evaluate student learning outcomes by developing a new assessment rubric and piloting it during the next academic term.