

PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW:

CULTIVATING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS EMPLOYERS DEMAND

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CASEL

SEL *for* Workforce Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding the developmental and contextual nature of social and emotional competencies has always been a key concern of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), including the ways students and adults use core social and emotional competencies in preparation for and within their work-life. The current labor market requires employees to have social and emotional skills more than any other recent trend in workforce demands (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019), yet there is not clear alignment between the social and emotional skills developed in K–12 and workforce skills. This brief begins to define the relationship between social and emotional competencies and the skills today's employers seek in the workplace for state and district policymakers, educators (e.g., classroom and CTE teachers), and the business community. This work builds upon CASEL's learning with states in the CASEL Collaborating States Initiative that are beginning to explore the relationship between SEL and workforce development (e.g., Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin).

CASEL defines five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (see Figure 1). Each competency is comprised of a set of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that, when developed and applied in safe and culturally supportive environments, allows individuals to maximize success in that environment. These competencies (and underlying skills) are often thought of in relation to the school context (see Table 1), yet individuals use these competencies in varying contexts, including the world of work.

We analyzed surveys of the skills that employers seek — and often have trouble finding — to identify the most in-demand skills (see Figure 2). We found that employers are continually identifying communication and interpersonal skills, self-management skills, the ability to collaborate or work in teams, problem-solving skills, and integrity or the ability to make ethical decisions as the most sought-after skills in the workplace. Further, an analysis of job postings (BurningGlass, 2015) found that employers are seeking a variety of similar social and emotional skills in job candidates.

We then identified how these underlying skills and attitudes map onto CASEL's five core competencies. For example, we know that in the academic setting, students with good self-management skills use impulse control and goal setting. In the workplace, self-management includes strategic planning and reliability. For relationship skills, communication and relationship building are important in the academic setting. In the workplace, listening skills and conflict resolution are important (see Table 2).

This alignment demonstrates that the social and emotional competencies developed in K–12 educational settings are foundational for more advanced application of skills individuals will need to be successful in the workforce. These findings indicate that state and local leaders should partner with businesses to create an integrative education-to-work pipeline that deeply embeds SEL into classrooms as well as workforce development to develop future-ready students. We believe this strengthened approach will equip employers and younger workers alike to adapt rapidly to new and changing employment environments. The time is now for state and federal policymakers to modernize workforce development efforts by embedding the social and emotional skills future workers will need to succeed at work and in life, by intentionally combining evidence-based policies and practices from the workforce development field and the SEL fields.

Introduction

For the past 25 plus years, we have learned the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) in education—both in schools and expanded learning opportunities (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018). Countless studies have demonstrated the importance of SEL. When students and adults engage in a process to develop their social and emotional competencies, students demonstrate more positive beliefs about themselves; improve their behaviors, skills, and competencies; and increase their academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Social and emotional competencies are also important for public health. One study found that a student's social and emotional competencies in kindergarten predicted several positive life outcomes, such as increased likelihood to graduate from high school on time, full-time employment, and decreased likelihood of drug use or involvement in crime (Jones et al., 2015). Other research indicates that strong SEL in K-12 educatioinal settings is linked to greater civic and community engagement (DePaoli et al., 2018). In effect, SEL is a booster rocket to many outcomes that schools, communities, and states already measure.

We have learned the importance of these skills for academics, relationships, and public health outcomes broadly, but what is the relationship between social and emotional competencies and the skills employers seek? States (e.g., Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Collaborating States Initiative (CSI) have begun to explore the relationship between SEL and workforce development[1], and they are seeking greater understanding about how to support students within the school context, while at the same time preparing them for the future of work (Dusenbury, Yoder, Dermody, & Weissberg, 2020).

In this brief, we help state and district leaders begin to explore how skills needed in the workplace align with skills in the CASEL SEL framework. We first provide an overview of social and emotional competences (as defined by CASEL) and then describe the skills employers seek from employees. We then connect these frameworks, embedding employability skills within the social and emotional competencies framework. Understanding in-demand skills and competencies, and the means by which they are developed, is even more crucial as the nature of work continually evolves in response to trends that are reshaping the global economy—for example, the gig economy and current public health realities. We recognize that there are other skills and competencies that individuals need in the workforce. These skills are also important to identify, but they are not the focus of this brief.

This brief is part of a new project under CASEL's **Collaborating States Initiative (CSI)** titled *Bridging Hope and Opportunity: Education to Workforce Pathways through SEL and Skills for the Future.* This builds on the efforts of the CSI's work with more than 35 states, which has led to multiple states developing PreK-12 SEL standards that some states linked to workforce development. In a soon to be released brief, we begin to identify those policies and practices states are initiating to intentionally connect SEL within their workforce development programs.

1 "Workforce development" has been used to refer to a broad array of efforts to designed to support career exploration and preparation through education and other means (e.g., Solberg, 2017). We use the term "workforce development" to include any training programs or preparation efforts that provide future workers with the skills to explore and be successful in early careers and beyond, based on needs identified by employers to stay competitive in a global marketplace. These efforts include (among others) career and technical education instruction, dual enrollment, career pathway exploration, apprenticeships, work-based learning, internships, individualized learning plans, and career interest planning and guidance.

OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

CASEL defines SEL as the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (see Figure 1). Multiple frameworks describe social and emotional skills that students and adults develop and apply over time (Berg, Nolan, Yoder, Osher, & Mart, 2019). Similar to other frameworks, CASEL's framework identifies a variety of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive skills, organized around five core competencies. The five core competencies are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Each core competency is comprised of multiple skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Each can be taught and developed in multiple ways, often dependent on cultural identities and the context and environment. In other words, we may use our social and emotional competencies differently in math versus science class, or when we are in the school hallways or in afterschool programs. Similarly, they may look different when making decisions about our health, our careers, or in our relationships.



Figure 1
CASEL's Framework for Systemic SEL

Table 1 shows example social and emotional skills, attitudes, and knowledge and the five core competencies, particularly as we think about the academic domain and the relationships formed within school settings. These are not the only skills related to each, but ones CASEL has found to be highly related in PreK–12. The goal of this brief is to highlight examples of some skills employers are seeking related to each of these competencies.

CORE SEL COMPETENCIES		EXAMPLE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS
SELF-AWARENESS	The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."	Identifying emotions Accurate self-perception Recognizing strengths Self-confidence Self-efficacy
SELF-MANAGEMENT	The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.	Impulse control Stress management Self-discipline Self-motivation Goal-setting Organizational skills
SOCIAL AWARENESS	The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.	Perspective-taking Empathy Appreciating diversity Respect for others
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.	Communication Social engagement Relationship-building Teamwork
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.	Identifying problems Analyzing situations Solving problems Evaluating Reflecting Ethical responsibility

Table 1. Social and emotional competencies and related skills

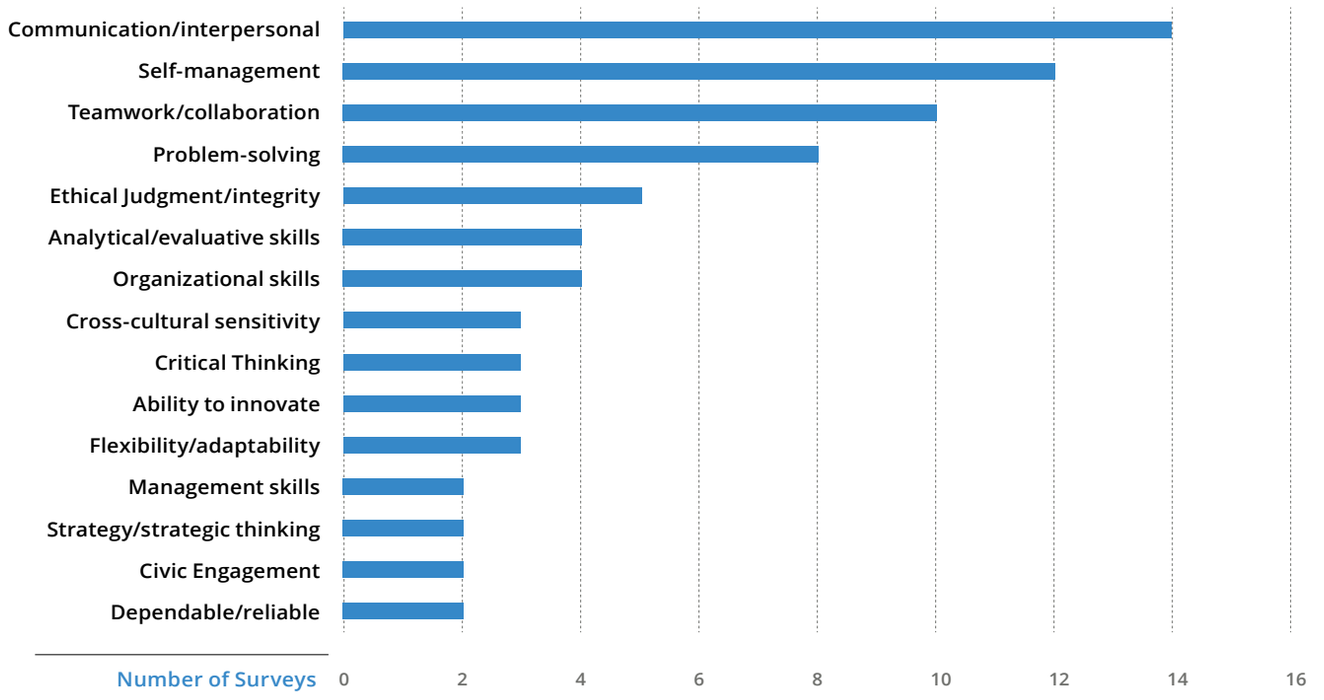
OVERVIEW OF IN-DEMAND SKILLS IN THE LABOR MARKET

Research has demonstrated the importance of social and emotional competencies and skills for success for learning in school and extended learning programs (e.g., Taylor et al., 2017). But how important are social and emotional competencies really for life after school, particularly in the labor market? In 2019, LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends, which combines a survey of over 5,000 talent professionals across the world, found that 91 percent of employers believe social and emotional skills (which the study referred to as "soft skills") are very important to the future of work, more than any other trend changing the nature of workplaces (e.g., artificial intelligence, remote learning), recruiting, and hiring around the world, and further 80 percent of employers said these skills are increasingly important to company success (LinkedIn Talent Solutions, 2019).

In Appendix I, we provide a sample of the surveys used to identify the social and emotional skills employers demand (see Table 2). We found that researchers used several different techniques to assess the most in-demand skills from employers. Most surveys included a list of skills and then either asked employers to choose those that are most important or to use a numerical or Likert scale to indicate importance. Other surveys included an open-ended question to employers about the skills they wish to see in job applicants.

A review of employer surveys over the past decade shows that businesses across industry and country alike are demanding these same skills. To support this, we analyzed the most common skills employers mentioned across 15 highly cited surveys dating back to 2009 [see Appendix I for a list of the surveys]. Across these surveys, we found that the employers continually mentioned multiple social and emotional skills, with the most referenced skills being communication and interpersonal skills, self-management skills, the ability to collaborate or work in teams, problem-solving skills, and integrity or the ability to make ethical decisions. The review made clear that the future of work values social and emotional skills as a top priority to have in employees beyond technical skills (see Figure 2). Further, this analysis illustrates the interconnectedness of those skills employers view as the future backbone of America's workforce and those that underpin SEL, demonstrating the need to have a developmental continuum of skills from birth through adulthood organized around a common framework of competencies, such as the CASEL framework.

Figure 2. Top Skills Employers are Seeking



THE SEL SKILLS GAP

In our review, we found that social and emotional skills are not only in demand in the workforce but are among the most difficult to find in employees (see Appendix I for list of surveys). For example, a survey of employers in West Virginia found that the largest gap in skills demanded, contrasted with those available, were multiple social and emotional skills, such as attitude, teamwork, initiative, communication, and self-management (West Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Similarly, Bloomberg's Recruiter Report showed leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills as among the most sought after but least common skills across industries (Bloomberg, 2019). The gap between the social and emotional skills needed and current capacity of employees in the workforce as noted by employers, demonstrates the importance of aligning the social and emotional skills young people develop in PreK-12 in schools and extended learning programs through explicit and embedded SEL programs and practices *to* employability skills needed in the workplace. Table 2 helps make those connections by defining the core employee social and emotional skills in employer surveys aligned to the CASEL core SEL competencies.

In addition, an analysis of job postings (BurningGlass, 2015) found that employers are seeking a variety of similar social and emotional skills, or what they call "baseline skills," when searching for job candidates. The analysis found that across sectors communication and organizational skills were among the top skills employers sought. Outside of those two skills, other social and emotional skills employers identified in job postings varied across sectors. For example, planning was higher for information technology and marketing but not as high for design, media and writing, or customer and client support.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES	EMPLOYEE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS (in demand skills from employers)	
SELF-AWARENESS	• Positive attitude • Flexibility • Ability to apply skills to real-life settings • Openness to developing/ learning new skills • Sense of self-worth	• Ability to Innovate • Confident • Creativity • Commitment • Shows flexibility
SELF-MANAGEMENT	• Initiative • Works well under pressure (e.g., manages emotions) • Punctuality • Ability to work independently • Detail-oriented • Strategic planning (e.g., setting and achieving goals)	• Strong work ethic • Time management • Entrepreneurial thinking • Reliability • Organizational skills • Adaptability • Budgeting • Self-discipline
SOCIAL AWARENESS	• Cross-cultural sensitivity • Ability to work with people of different backgrounds/cultures	• Supervision of others • Respects individual differences
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	• Written and oral communication skills • Listening skills • Conflict resolution • Teamwork and works well with others	• Effective communication • Ability to collaborate • Management skills • Responds to customer needs
RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING	• Integrity • Honesty • Analyze and solve complex problems • Ability to evaluate information from multiple sources	• Critical thinking • Reasoning • Civic participation and engagement • Ethical and sound decision-making • Observes carefully

Table 2. Social and Emotional Skills Demanded by Employers

CONNECTING SEL AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Over a decade ago, the Secretary of Labor convened the Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to identify necessary 21st-century skills, particularly for younger, emerging workers. The resulting report highlights academic skills for employment including reading and mathematics but also identifies individual responsibility, self-esteem, self-management, sociability, and integrity as necessary skills.

This is consistent with our analysis of employer surveys. It is clear that social and emotional skills are critical for the future of the workforce, along with the technical skills required of each profession. Although some frameworks integrate technical and social and emotional skills (e.g., U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTE) Employability Skills Framework), understanding the core social and emotional skills students and adults need, developmentally and in the multiple environments in which they live, is a high priority, requiring clear and concise language across the contexts and environments. This makes a framework like CASEL's an effective organizing guide for states and districts as they think about a systematic approach to align SEL and workforce development efforts.

The importance of creating a comprehensive and developmental framework is evidenced by the work of states and the ways in which they have begun to connect their SEL efforts and their workforce efforts.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Education Career Ready Skills (PA CRS) are social-emotional learning progressions that support the development of student competence. By design, the PA CRS reflect priorities to ensure youth are career ready and prepared to meet the demands of the 21st-century workforce.
- Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) are jointly focused on developing the social and emotional skills students need now and in the future. DPI's vision for student success, *Every Child a Graduate: College and Career Ready,* promotes students' academic preparedness and social and emotional competence through their knowledge, skills, and habits. DWD, in its Hot Jobs Projection project, notes which social and emotional skills employees will need for the 50 top jobs in the state.
- Delaware's Department of Education, in collaboration with multiple agencies and the business community, has created an extensive career pathways system to prepare students, beginning in high school, to learn the technical and social and emotional skills they will need for advanced and high-paying careers in needed fields within Delaware.

We will continue to explore these state policies and practices in a forthcoming brief as states systemically embed and connect their SEL and workforce development efforts.



CONCLUSION

Our review of employer surveys found that it is essential to create an integrative education-to-work pipeline that deeply embeds SEL into classrooms as well as workforce development to develop future-ready students. Part of the effort must be professional development to make educators aware of the strong labor market demand for SEL skills and the relationship between what they are teaching in the classroom and extended learning programs and student success in getting a decent-paying job. Our analysis revealed that employers want and are in need of employees with the social and emotional competencies outlined by CASEL. Specifically, we consistently found that employers are seeking employees who have self-management and relationship skills, with an emphasis on communication and the ability to collaborate or work in teams (Figure 2). Employers also desire workers who have respect for people from different backgrounds, think critically and strategically to make wise and ethical decisions, and manage themselves even if things do not go their way. We also found, similar to other researchers (e.g., BurningGlass, 2015), that the identified social and emotional skills are examples of core workforce skills listed in job postings. These combined findings highlight the integrated role SEL and workforce development efforts can play to ensure students are future-ready.

> "New entrants to the workforce will require very strong social, employability, and work-readiness skills that reflect the behavioral, attitudinal, and character traits highly valued in the workplace and in society. These noncognitive, nontechnical skills can be developed in the CTE classroom, but require both new technical content in these classrooms and changes in how CTE teachers deliver their curriculum." – Stringfield and Stone (2017)



The SEL field has learned a great deal about the best approaches and evidence-based practices to promote multiple social and emotional competencies. The time is now to modernize workforce readiness efforts by embedding the social and emotional skills future workers will need to succeed at work and in life — in the classroom, in afterschool and expanded learning programs, in community colleges and technical education programs, and in other efforts to promote youth success. Through better alignment and connections, we can begin to transform the education-to-workforce pipeline. This brief provides perspective to help state and district leaders begin to use language and practices that support students' success in both schools and the workforce. CASEL looks forward to sharing examples of ways states are beginning to advance this work and emerging, initial recommendations in forthcoming briefs based on our continued work with eight states in our *Bridging Hope and Opportunity: Education to Workforce Pathways through SEL and Skills for the Future.*

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APPENDIX I

Summary of Questions from Employer Surveys

Source	Question	Choices	
Cengage (2019)	What skills are you looking for in job candidates?	N/A	
Hart Research Associates (2018)	On a scale from 0-to-10, how important are the following skills for recent college graduates you are hiring?	• Critical thinking/analytical reasoning • Apply knowledge/skills to real world • Communicate effectively in writing • Self-motivated • Communicate effectively orally • Able to work independently • Able to work effectively in teams • Ethical judgment and decision-making • Able to analyze and solve complex problems	• Find, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources • Solve problems with people of different backgrounds and cultures • Able to innovate and be creative • Able to work with numbers or stats • Able to stay current on changing tech • Proficiency in a foreign language
iCIMS (2017)	Which skills do you value most in a job candidate?	N/A	
Robert Half Technology (2016)	(1) What are the top areas that technology professionals could improve? (2) What skills are needed for career advancement?	• Communication skills • Problem-solving skills • Work ethic	• Creative thinking • Professionalism • Business Acumen
Bloomberg Recuiter (2015)	Looking at this list of qualities, choose the 5 most important qualities when hiring MBA graduates and the 5 qualities that are hardest to find when recruiting MBAs.	• Strategic thinking • Creative problem-solving • Leadership skills • Communication skills • Analytical thinking • Ability to work collaboratively • Motivation/drive	• Quantitative skills • Entrepreneurship • Global mindset • Initiative/risk-taking • Decision-making • Adaptability • Industry-related work experience
Vivian et al. (2015)	(1) What skills are lacking among applicants to job vacancies? (2) What skills are lacking internally?	• Ability to manage and prioritize tasks • Team working • Customer-handling skills • Managing own feelings and handling those of others • Managing or motivating other staff	• Persuading or influencing others • Setting objectives for others • Instructing, teaching, or training people • Sales skills • Making speeches or presentations • None of the above

Source	Question	Choices	
Thatcher (2014)	How important is each attribute for entry-level employees? Very Important; Important; Somewhat important; Not important	• Occupational knowledge related to job • Application of occupational knowledge related to job • Use/operation of equipment, tools, and materials • Reading and writing skills • Math skills • Computer skills • Organizational skills • Problem solving skills • Completes work in accordance with quality standards	• Listening and speaking skills • Interpersonal skills (one-on-one) • Works effectively within a team or group • Customer focused • Seeks to continuously improve performance • Demonstrates good work ethic • Accepts advice, supervision, and constructive criticism • Professional appearance
Hart Research Associates (2013)	How important is it that your employees have the following quality or skill?	• Ethical judgment and integrity • Comfort with people of different backgrounds/cultures	• Interest in giving back to the community • Knowledge of global cultures/histories/values
World Bank South Asia Human Development Sector (2011)	Please indicate the importance of the following personal characteristics, basic skills, and job related skills that you look for in new employees: Extremely important; Very important; Important; Slightly important; Not important	• Reliability • Punctuality • Commitment • Honesty • Personal appearance • Other physical attributes (e.g. fitness) • Stable family background • Modesty • Behavior manner • Communication skills • Regional language skills	• Mathematics (calculation) skills • Problem solving skills • Analytical thinking • Computer skills • Writing skills • Ability to work independently • Customer relations skills • Management skills • Diploma/certificate on education/qualification relevant to the position • Previous work experience in the same /relevant field
Hart Research Associates (2010)	Below are some learning outcomes that colleges try to achieve. For each one, please rate how much emphasis should be placed on this outcome.	• The ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing • Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills • The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences • The ability to analyze and solve complex problems • The ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions • Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings • The ability to innovate and be creative • Concepts and new developments in science and technology	• The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources • The ability to understand the global context of situations and decisions • Global issues and developments and their implications for the future • The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics • The role of the United States in the world • Cultural diversity in America and other countries • Civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement • Proficiency in a foreign language • Democratic institutions and values
Oakland University (2009)	Which of the five following skill sets would you say are most important to the successful management of your agency?	• Decision-making/problem-solving • Leadership • Budget preparation, administration • Program implementation, service delivery • Strategic Planning • Teamwork • Supervision of subordinates • Conflict Resolution	• Program Development • Performance measurement, program evaluation • Citizen participation and involvement • Grants/external funding • Manage stakeholders • IT-related tasks • Media relations, program marketing • Agency/program advocacy, lobbying • Statistical/data analysis