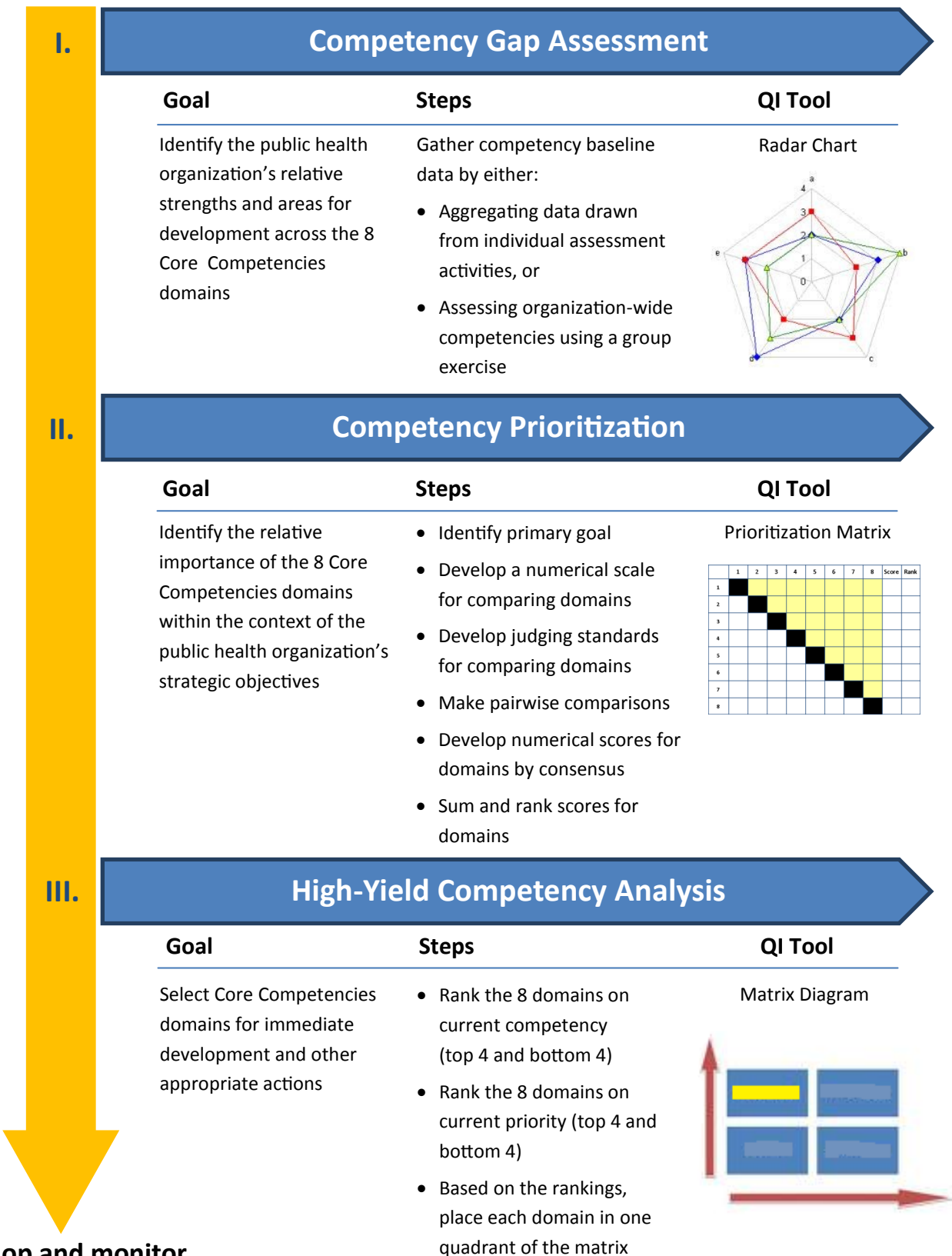# 3-Step Competency Prioritization Sequence

The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals (Core Competencies), a consensus set of competencies developed by the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (Council on Linkages), are widely used by public health organizations.[1] Three quality improvement (QI) tools can be used in sequence to help public health organizations and professionals effectively prioritize competency development efforts.

I. Competency Gap Assessment

Goal	Steps	QI Tool
Identify the public health organization's relative strengths and areas for development across the 8 Core Competencies domains	Gather competency baseline data by either: • Aggregating data drawn from individual assessment activities, or • Assessing organization-wide competencies using a group exercise	Radar Chart

II. Competency Prioritization

Goal	Steps	QI Tool
Identify the relative importance of the 8 Core Competencies domains within the context of the public health organization's strategic objectives	• Identify primary goal • Develop a numerical scale for comparing domains • Develop judging standards for comparing domains • Make pairwise comparisons • Develop numerical scores for domains by consensus • Sum and rank scores for domains	Prioritization Matrix

III. High-Yield Competency Analysis

Goal	Steps	QI Tool
Select Core Competencies domains for immediate development and other appropriate actions	• Rank the 8 domains on current competency (top 4 and bottom 4) • Rank the 8 domains on current priority (top 4 and bottom 4) • Based on the rankings, place each domain in one quadrant of the matrix	Matrix Diagram

Develop and monitor high-yield domains

[1] The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals and related tools are available at: http://www.phf.org/programs/corecompetencies

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Goal: Identify the public health organization's relative strengths and areas for development across the 8 Core Competencies domains. A sample follows the description of steps, and a blank radar chart template is provided on the following page.

	Option 1 Aggregate Individual Competency Data	Option 2 Estimate Organization-wide Competencies
Steps	• Gather individual-level data on current competencies in the workforce in all 8 Core Competencies domains. This may be done using a competency assessment tool (self-assessment).[2] Different versions of the tool are available for progressive career stages. • Calculate an average score for each domain for each individual; then calculate an average score across all individuals in each domain. • Plot average domain scores[3] on a radar chart (example shown below).	• Convene a group of 8-10 individuals who are collectively familiar with the skills and performance of a broad cross-section of the workforce. • Agree on a rating scale (e.g., 0 to 4) and reach consensus on the current competency of the workforce in each of the 8 Core Competencies domains. • Capture the rationale for the consensus rating on each domain. • Plot scores for each domain on a radar chart (example shown below).
Pros	Individual-level is ideal for capturing specifics and variations across the workforce. The data can be grouped by tenure, role, or other factors to assist in pinpointing areas of relative strength and opportunities for development.	Ideal for making a global assessment of overall workforce needs as a snapshot in time. Can be completed by a small group of individuals during a two-hour meeting.
Cons	Can be time-consuming to gather and analyze the data. No norms exist for the assessment tool.	Because group members have exposure to a limited sample of the workforce, the data may suffer from sampling bias.

> Label one axis for each domain

> Plot scores on each axis, with lower scores plotted closer to the center of the chart

*Higher values represent areas of relative strength.*

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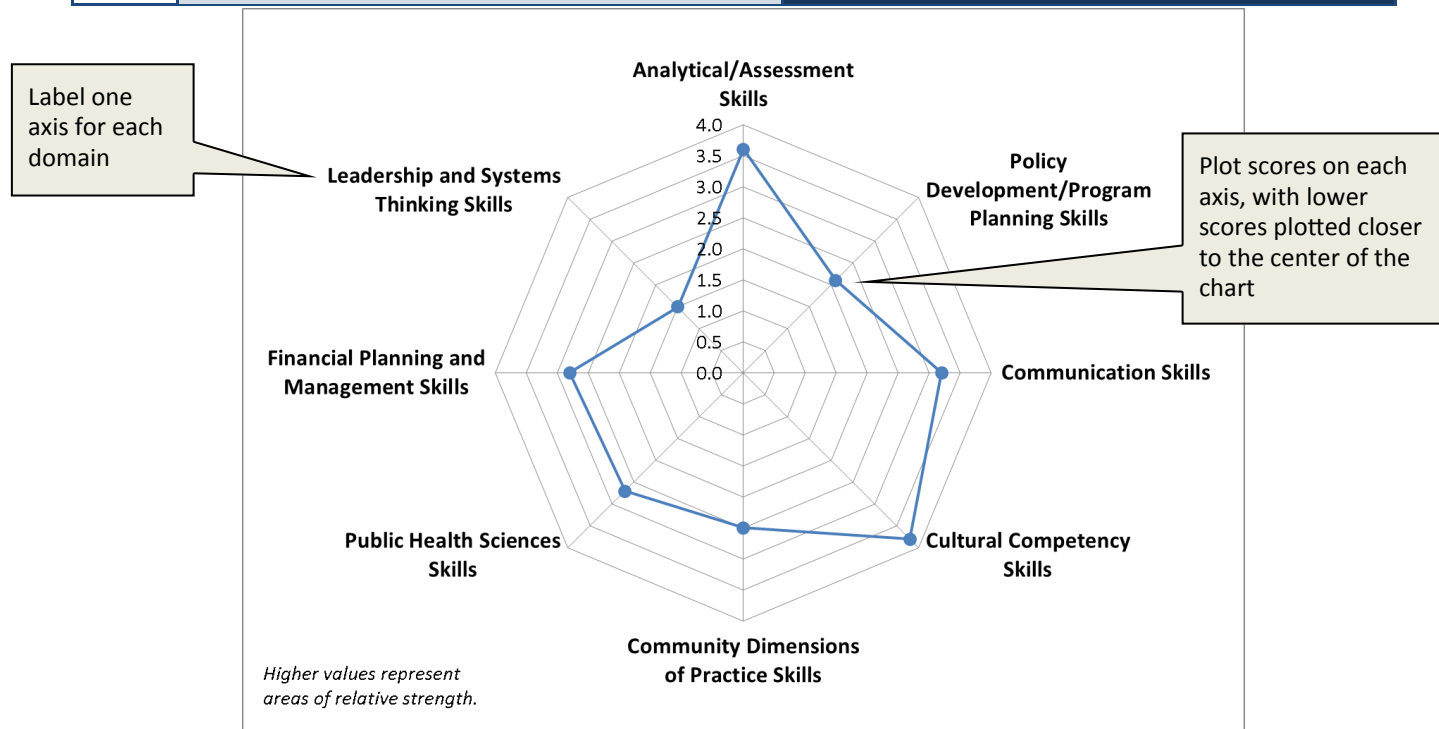
[2] The tools were designed as self-assessments to be completed by individual public health workers; they can also be used by managers to assess competencies of their team members.
Competency assessment tools provided by the Council on Linkages are available at: http://www.phf.org/competencyassessments
[3] Optional step: Calculate and plot the range and/or standard deviation for the workforce on each domain to examine the variation in competencies across the workforce.

Competency Gap Assessment (continued)

Use the blank radar chart to record the competency scores for your organization.

Which Core Competencies domains represent relative strengths and opportunities for potential improvement?

Higher values represent areas of relative strength.
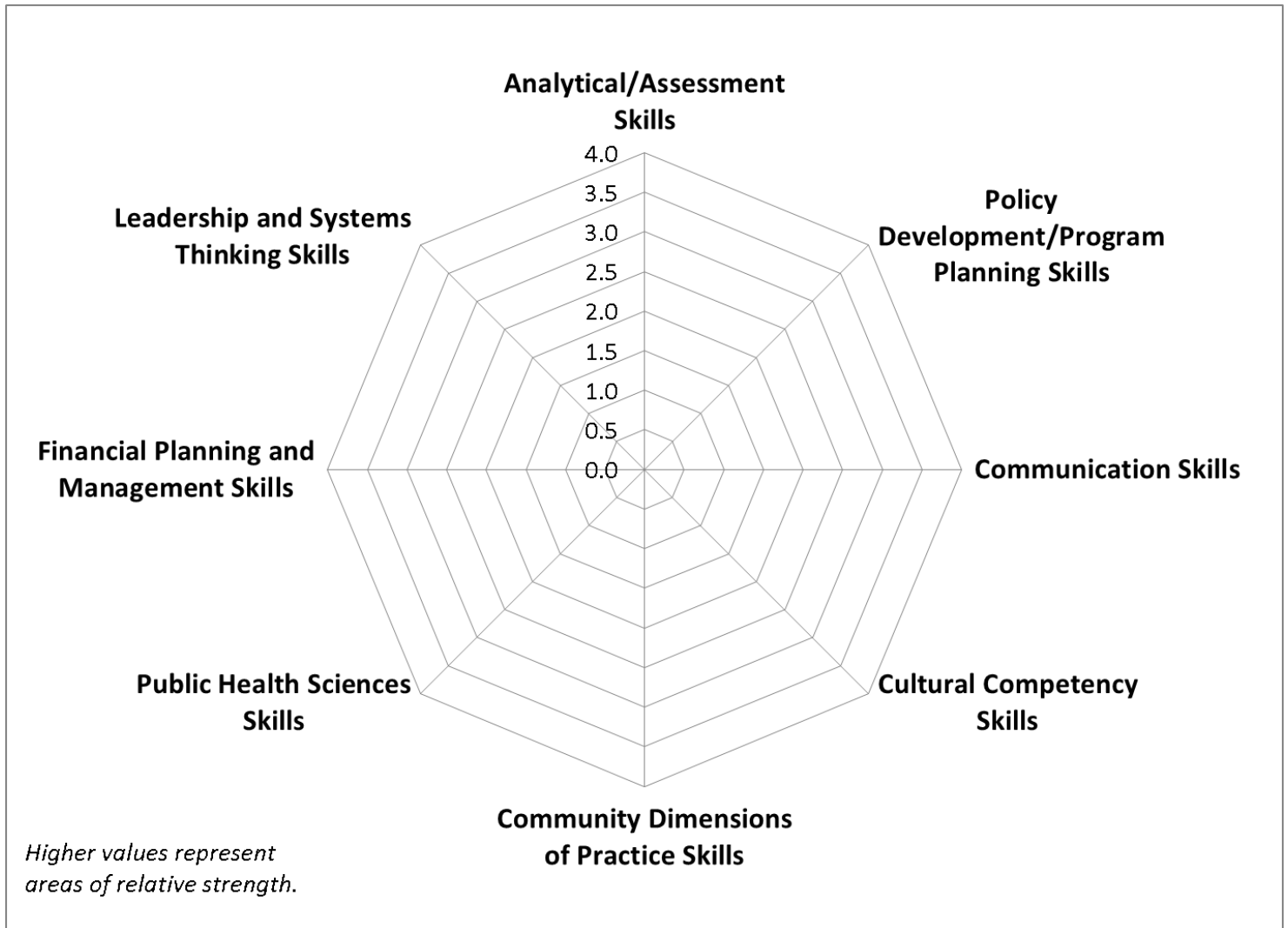
II. Competency Prioritization

Goal: Identify the relative importance of the 8 Core Competencies domains within the context of the public health organization's strategic objectives. A sample follows the description of steps, and a blank prioritization matrix template is provided on the following page.

Steps: Construct and complete a matrix in which all domains are compared to all other domains (one at a time) with the relative importance of domains evaluated according to programmatic goals.

- Identify decision criteria driver or goal (e.g., improved outcomes, improved efficiency, improved client satisfaction, improved financial results, improved flexibility).
- Develop a numerical scale to represent each judgment based on the decision criteria selected. The scale will be used to assign values to each comparison of one domain to another. For example: 0—no relationship, 1—equally important, 5—significantly more important, 10—exceedingly more important, 1/5—significantly less important, 1/10—exceedingly less important.
- Develop standards for judging to make sure each domain gets a thorough evaluation.
- Develop numerical scores by consensus by making pairwise comparisons between all domains (e.g., domain 1 vs. domain 2, domain 2 vs. domain 3). Let the experts decide; expertise will tend to vary from one domain to another during the exercise.
  * Does having _____ contribute more than _____ in achieving the goal?
  * Will _____ lead toward the goal more than _____?
- Sum and rank scores for each domain.

> Assign a score to each pairwise comparison; scores in white cells are the inverse of scores in the yellow cells for the same domain pair

> In yellow cells, values less than 1 indicate the row's domain is less important than the column's domain

> Total the cell values in each row to reach scores for each domain

> Rank order the scores; lower ranks are the higher priorities according to the group's consensus

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Score	Rank
1. Analytical/Assessment Skills		1/5	1	10	1/10	1	1/5	1/5	12.7	7
2. Policy Development/Program Planning Skills	5		1/5	1	10	10	5	5	36.2	1
3. Communication Skills	1	5		1	1	5	10	1	24.0	4
4. Cultural Competency Skills	1/10	1	1		5	1	1/5	5	13.3	5
5. Community Dimensions of Practice Skills	10	10	1	5		1	1/10	1	28.1	2
6. Public Health Sciences Skills	1	1	1/5	1/10	1		1	1/5	4.5	8
7. Financial Planning and Management Skills	5	5	1/10	1/5	10	1		5	26.3	3
8. Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills	5	1/5	1	1/5	1	5	1/5		12.8	6

Use the blank matrix below to complete the prioritization exercise.

Which Core Competencies domains are most important to realizing your organization's strategic objectives?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Score	Rank
1. Analytical/Assessment Skills	■									
2. Policy Development/Program Planning Skills		■								
3. Communication Skills			■							
4. Cultural Competency Skills				■						
5. Community Dimensions of Practice Skills					■					
6. Public Health Sciences Skills						■				
7. Financial Planning and Management Skills							■			
8. Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills								■		

This rating scale is only a sample. Scales with finer gradation can also be used (e.g., 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/6); however, scales with fewer gradations (such as the one to the right) emphasize differences between options and make ranking domains much easier.

Rating Scale:

0—no relationship	1—equally important
5—significantly more important	10—exceedingly more important
1/5—significantly less important	1/10—exceedingly less important

High-Yield Competency Analysis

Goal: Select Core Competencies domains for immediate development and other appropriate actions. A sample is provided below, and blank grid templates are provided on the following page.
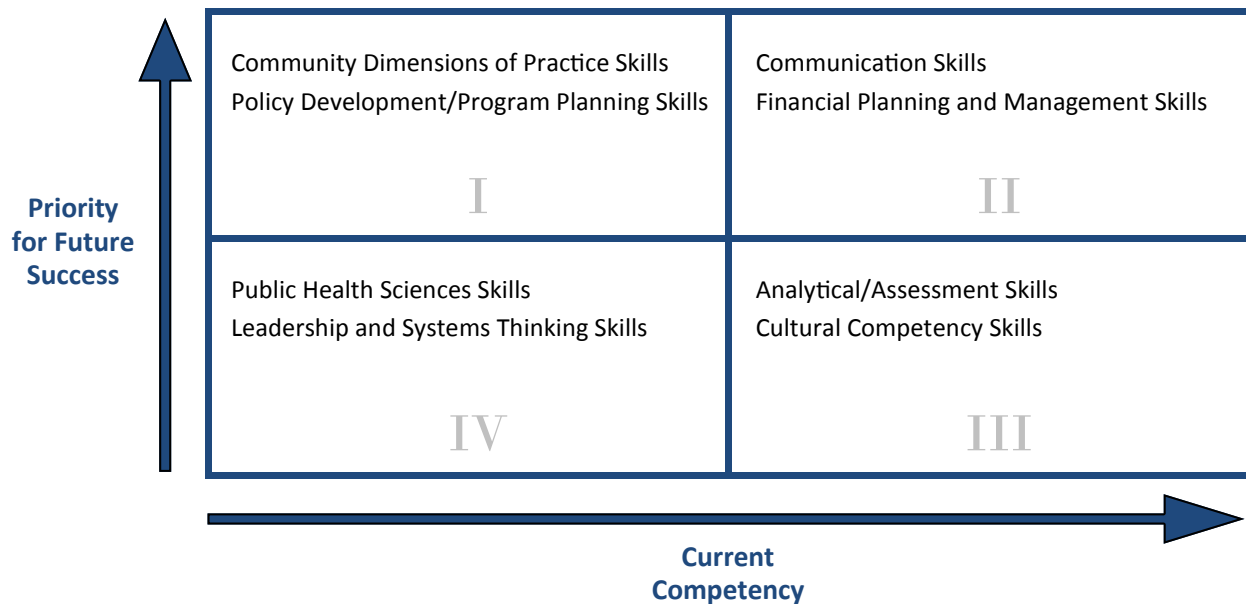
Steps: Using the data from Exercise I, rank the 8 domains on current competency.

Higher Competency Domains	Lower Competency Domains
1. Cultural Competency Skills	5. Public Health Sciences Skills
2. Analytical/Assessment Skills	6. Community Dimensions of Practice Skills
3. Communication Skills	7. Policy Development/Program Planning Skills
4. Financial Planning and Management Skills	8. Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills

Using the data from Exercise II, rank the 8 domains on current priority for future success.

Higher Priority Domains	Lower Priority Domains
1. Policy Development/Program Planning Skills	5. Cultural Competency Skills
2. Community Dimensions of Practice Skills	6. Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills
3. Financial Planning and Management Skills	7. Analytical/Assessment Skills
4. Communication Skills	8. Public Health Sciences Skills

Based on the rankings, place each domain in one quadrant of the Matrix Diagram below.

Priority for Future Success ↑

Community Dimensions of Practice Skills Policy Development/Program Planning Skills I	Communication Skills Financial Planning and Management Skills II
Public Health Sciences Skills Leadership and Systems Thinking Skills IV	Analytical/Assessment Skills Cultural Competency Skills III

Current Competency →

I DEVELOP: Higher priority areas where competency is relatively low

II LEVERAGE: Higher priority areas where competency is relatively high

III MAINTAIN: Lower priority areas where competency is relatively high

IV DE-EMPHASIZE: Lower priority areas where competency is relatively low

Use the blank tables below to identify high-yield Core Competencies domains.

Which Core Competencies domains shall we prioritize for workforce development in the short-term?
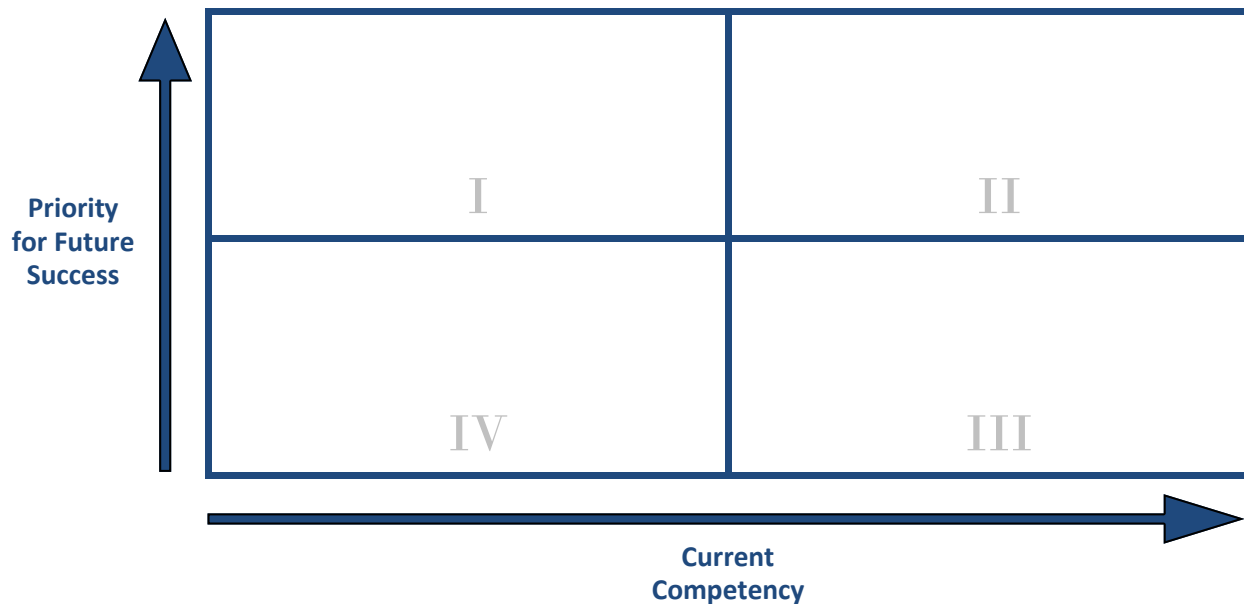
Steps: Using the data from Exercise I, rank the 8 domains on current competency.

Higher Competency Domains	Lower Competency Domains

Using the data from Exercise II, rank the 8 domains on current priority for future success.

Higher Priority Domains	Lower Priority Domains

Based on the rankings, place each domain in one quadrant of the Matrix Diagram below.

Priority for Future Success

I	II
IV	III

Current Competency

I DEVELOP: Higher priority areas where competency is relatively low

II LEVERAGE: Higher priority areas where competency is relatively high

III MAINTAIN: Lower priority areas where competency is relatively high

IV DE-EMPHASIZE: Lower priority areas where competency is relatively low