

Competency Support Guide



Ontario Professional Foresters Association

Version 1
July, 2010

A Letter to Members of the OPFA,

The OPFA membership is currently considering amendments to the OPFA's by-laws; to modernize them and to ensure their consistency across all matters that impact on our practice as professional foresters. Included in that modernization are considerations as to how the OPFA can assure the public that their interests are protected with respect to our competency to act as stewards of private and Crown forests in Ontario (Article 14 of the proposed by-law amendments, reproduced in this document as Appendix 6).

In the Fall of 2008, I and several of your colleague members were named to the OPFA's Competency Support Committee. Our mandate is to develop a competency support system to help members make such assurances to the public interest, in a manner that members find useful in their own professional development efforts.

And we think we've taken the first steps. We present here a guide describing a methodology for members' use in planning and monitoring their individual competency maintenance, where reporting on the last year's continuing education efforts is a by-product rather than the objective. The new objective is to enable you to identify your personal practice focus, and through focused learning, speed your professional development.

This booklet will help you reflect on where your career has taken you, what competencies you've developed along the way, and where you hope to go. It will guide you in linking your immediate-, and near-term competency needs to learning opportunities. And to document and archive your continuing education as part of a flexible and evergreen Competency Support Plan.

But we're not finished yet. Our work to-date covers only the first four of seven components of the OPFA's competency support program (Article 14.5, Appendix 6). Based on your feedback, the Committee will recommend refinements to the development of Competency Support Plans, and improve the usefulness of this guide. We will then embark on forming recommendations on whether and how to implement the remaining components, which, depending on the adoption of the new by-law (Article 14) may include: peer review; audit, and professional assessment.

Competency Support, like continuous learning, is a work in progress. Please direct your feedback to the Competency Support Committee, care of the OPFA (opfa@opfa.ca).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Elliott', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bob Elliott, R.P.F., Chair

On behalf of the OPFA Competency Support Committee:

Jeff Barton, R.P.F.

Herb Bax, R.P.F.

Judy Biggar

Tom Croswell, R.P.F.

Steve D'eon, R.P.F.

Dean Johnson, R.P.F.

Ivan Listar, R.P.F.

Trevor Longpre, R.P.F.

Nancy Luckai, R.P.F.

Richard McNaughton, R.P.F.

Lauren Quist, R.P.F.

Staff : Judy Biggar; Tony Jennings, R.P.F.

CONTENTS

A Letter to Members of the OPFA	2
Introduction	5
Component 1: Personal Practice Focus	6
Component 2: Learning Plan	8
Component 3: Continuing Education	9
Component 4: Reporting and Archiving	10
APPENDIX 1 – Template for Personal Practice Focus	11
APPENDIX 2 – Template for Learning Plan	12
APPENDIX 3 – Template for Continuing Education Records	13
APPENDIX 4 – Competency Reporting Questionnaire	14
APPENDIX 5 – Example Competency Support Plans	15
APPENDIX 6 – Proposed By-Law Amendment (Article 14)	18

INTRODUCTION

This guide is a reference for members. It presents a recommended process to assess and document competency to practice as a registered professional forester in Ontario. It has been designed to facilitate self-assessment, and to serve as a tool to focus career development, using a format that meets the OPFA's standard for quality assurance.

Q: Do I have to document my competency?

A: Yes. Members are not bound to use this specific methodology, but are required to document their competency and learning by such a means that meets or exceeds the standards required by the OPFA in a quality assurance audit.

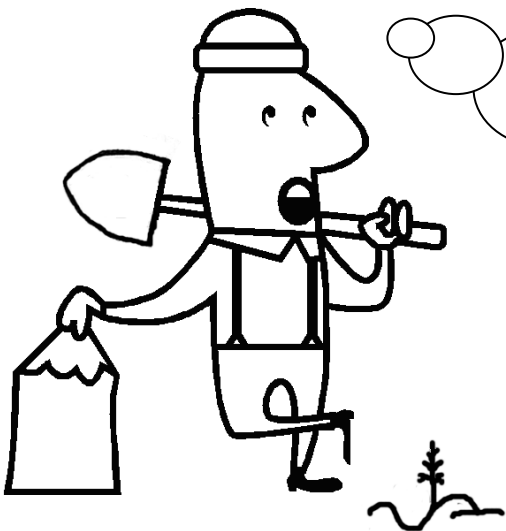
There are four components to the competency assessment and professional development protocol:

1. A personal practice focus;
2. A learning plan;
3. Continuing education; and,
4. Archiving and reporting.

All are to be periodically revised. For example, the personal practice focus should be revisited every three years or whenever a change in your career occurs. Your learning plan and continuing education documents should be updated annually.

Q: Why is all of this necessary?

A: Except under supervision, members may only practice in areas where they are competent. In order to serve and protect the public interest, the OPFA is required under the Professional Foresters Act (2000) to promote and increase the knowledge, skill and proficiency of members, and to enforce the standards for the professional practice of forestry in Ontario. The OPFA's revised by-laws now call for each member to regularly assess their own competency to practice; which may be subject to peer review.



COMPONENT 1: PERSONAL PRACTICE FOCUS

The personal practice focus (PPF) catalogues areas of existing competency, and is a tool to help identify what new or improved knowledge, skills and experience would maintain or enhance competency, or facilitate career development.

There are three elements to a personal practice focus, presented here as questions:

1. What are my current competencies?

You might opt to update a resume, draft a job description, or address the following supporting questions:

- What DO I know or am able to do?
- What MUST I know or be able to do?
- What do I consider to be my specialty(ies)?

2. What competencies should I build or strengthen?

You might opt to identify new knowledge or skills you anticipate needing for your current job, for professional interest, or for career progression. You might also consider refreshing knowledge and skills in order to do something better, to learn the latest state of practice, or to become a recognized expert. The following supporting questions can help frame this assessment:

- What do I WANT to know or be able to do?
- How is my job changing?
- What are my short-, medium-, and long term career goals?

3. How do I plan to build or strengthen key competencies?

You might opt to identify strategic actions you feel are necessary to continue competent practice in your job, and/or to facilitate achieving your career goals (e.g. improve my knowledge of silvicultural practices). This element need not identify specific courses or activities – this will be addressed as part of a learning plan.

Q: How detailed should my PPF be?

A: The personal practice focus need only be a page in length, or as long and as detailed as each member finds useful for their own needs and comfort. A template is included for your convenience in Appendix 1, and diverse examples are provided in Appendix 6.

Q: What areas of competency does the OPFA recognize?

A: The OPFA does not wish to limit the scope of competencies you might consider for your PPF. Nor does the OPFA consider competencies listed here or elsewhere to be exhaustive. For reference purposes, the Ontario Professional Foresters Act (2000) defines the scope of professional practice in forestry to be the “provision of services in relation to the development, management, conservation and sustainability of forests and urban forests... and includes [but is not limited to]:

- the designing, specifying or approving of silvicultural prescriptions and treatments, including timber harvesting;
- the appraisal, evaluation and certification of forests and urban forests;
- the auditing of forest management practices;
- the assessment of impacts from planned activities on forests and urban forests;
- the classification, inventory and mapping of forests and urban forests; and
- the planning and locating of forest transportation systems, including forest roads.”

Further, the Canadian Federation of Professional Foresters Associations lists the following seven core competency standards for the profession of forestry in Canada:

1. Tree and Stand Dynamics
2. Forest to Landscape, Structure and Function
3. Forest Management
4. Economics and Administration of Forestry
5. Leadership Skills: Communications and Critical Reasoning
6. Information and Analysis
7. Professionalism and Ethics

Details on each of the core competency standards can be referenced on-line, at:

<http://www.cfab.ca/English/Standards.htm>

Q: What if my interests/skills are non-specific to forestry?

A: The OPFA recognizes the necessity and advantages for members to hold diverse and multidisciplinary skills sets. Within reason, supporting competencies that will allow members to be more effective in their practice of forestry might also be considered in the PPF. For example, the careers of members often integrate aspects of communications, business administration, and human resources management. Providing they are not far removed from having influence over the sustainable development of Ontario’s forests, it is not unreasonable to include such competency development and maintenance in your PPF. And providing it represents a professional growth experience, members might also consider taking up activities to share their knowledge, or to expand the knowledge-base that professional foresters, and the public might drawn upon to advance sustainable forest management.

Q: What areas of competency should my PPF focus on?

A: You may choose to focus on those areas that have relevance to your current or intended practice, but be sure to include those elements that you think might be at risk to challenge by your employer, a client, in a peer review, or in an OPFA audit.

COMPONENT 2: LEARNING PLAN

The learning plan is a tool to help members maximize the effectiveness of continuing education, by identifying in advance (where possible and where appropriate), what courses and activities can help build or strengthen the competencies needed in current practice and/or for career progression.

Q: Where does the PPF leave off, and the learning plan pick up?

A: The PPF should identify general areas of existing and desired competency. The learning plan should identify select competencies that you expect to address within the next three years, and for each of them, identify specific courses or activities to pursue in the coming year(s). A template is included for your convenience in Appendix 2, and diverse examples are provided in Appendix 5.

Q: What if I already have a learning plan?

A: Many employers require their staff to have a learning plan in place. If you feel the learning plan you developed for your employer sufficiently addresses the competency needs you've identified in your PPF, then by all means, use it.

Q: What if I can't find the training I need?

A: Should you have difficulty finding the training you've identified in your learning plan as an immediate competency need, consider alternative means of learning, make a notation in your plan, and communicate this difficulty to the OPFA Competency Committee (care of opfa@opfa.ca). By identifying training and competency gaps that are shared by a number of members, the OPFA can perhaps facilitate a solution. The OPFA recommends also consulting others who hold such competencies, to ask what activities they undertook, or whether they could transfer their knowledge to you (e.g. on-the-job training).

Q: Are my work duties considered "learning"?

A: The OPFA would like to hear from you on this subject. Should our general work activities be considered or excluded as a learning activity? If we are paid to do it, should it count as continuing education? Should we only count some activities, but not others (e.g. on-the-job training from an instructor/supervisor/mentor versus the first application of learned skills versus the continued application of recently-acquired skills)? Should networking with colleagues count as a learning activity? And what if we are forestry researchers or educators – do our findings or preparation of teaching materials count as learning for a learning plan?

Competence is required. Striving for excellence is encouraged.

COMPONENT 3: CONTINUING EDUCATION

The core purpose for having drafted a PPF and learning plan was to help you identify your own continuing education needs, so that you might efficiently and effectively develop and maintain the competencies you've identified as being important. Randomly pursuing training opportunities as they present themselves, simply to meet and report the minimum hours the OPFA requires, serves little purpose for the OPFA, or for you.

Q: What is the minimum standard for continuing education?

A: Continuing education is documented by hour of focused activity. The OPFA requires members to undertake no fewer than 60 hours of continuing education, averaged over any given three year period. Members may count up to 6 hours of learning per day. A template to record continuing education activities as they are completed is included for your convenience in Appendix 3.

Q: What activities can be considered as continuing education?

A: Use your discretion to determine what represents a learning opportunity; however, only core learning time should be counted. For example, travel time, breaks, and other downtime should not be counted towards CE hours during events or on-the-job training. Members are encouraged to search-out opportunities and seminars offered by their employers, or other accessible organizations. Personal learning, through on-line coursework or reading forestry publications can be considered as continuing education. So too might relevant meetings or tailgate session with colleagues. Above all, consider continuing education to be dynamic and changeable, so that you can capitalize on interesting new opportunities as they present, regardless of having foreseen them in your learning plan.

! Did you know?

Up to 3 hours of the time spent each year developing and/or updating your PPF and learning plan can be claimed as continuing education hours.

Refreshing your ideas about professionalism and ethics counts too.

COMPONENT 4: ARCHIVING AND REPORTING

Members are now required to document and archive their personal practice focus, learning plan, and what continuing education activities they've undertaken. By December 1st, members are also now required to report on the status of their PPF, learning plan, and total education hours accrued in the year ended November 30th. The mandatory template for annual status reporting is provided in Appendix 4.

Q: Can my competency plan archives ever be used against me?

A: The OPFA requires only that you report on the status of your competency plan (PPF, Learning Plan, and Continuing Education hours). You are not required to submit any of these actual documents outside of a quality assurance audit. You may of course offer these documents in defence of complaints against your conduct, but the OPFA will not of its own accord, compel you to produce them in a professional assessment. **It is important to note that your competency documents are professional development tools, and are not legally-binding documents.**

Q: What if I am asked to perform a task where I have no competency?

A: Remember, your competency plan is not static. If you identify new competency needs, add them to your PPF, identify a means to gain the competency in your learning plan, and list the activities you took in your continuing education records. **You are bound by a code of ethics, and should not practice forestry where you are not competent to do so, unless under the supervision of another member**

! Did you know?

Most regulated professions in Ontario use peer review to support competency. While the OPFA does not yet require peer review of your competency self-assessment, the practice is strongly encouraged.

Invite a fellow member to review your PPF and learning plan, and to play a challenge role while doing so. You may find your colleague encouraging you to consider new ideas for your professional development.

Feedback on your experiences (like/dislike) would be appreciated.

APPENDIX 1
PERSONAL PRACTICE FOCUS
(One possible format)

Name:

Date:

Current competencies:

Competencies to develop:

Must:

Want:

Career objectives:

APPENDIX 2 LEARNING PLAN

(One possible format)

Name:

Date:

Current practice:

Career interests:

I will learn to, learn about...	I will learn by...	I intend to complete my learning by...	I know when I have succeeded when...

APPENDIX 4 COMPETENCY RECORDING QUESTIONNAIRE (Required form)

Note: Individual members are required to report their Learning Hours to the OPFA and keep copies of their documents in their personal files. The following questions provide a summary of the member's activities:

1. I have a written Personal Practice Focus in place (prepared, updated or confirmed within the past 3 years and since my last significant job change). Yes/No
2. I have a written Learning Plan Yes/No
3. and it has been in place for the last year Yes/No
4. The goals in my Learning Plan
 - a. have been met
 - b. are progressing as planned
 - c. have not been fully met due to...

5. During the past year My Continuing Education hours were:

	Hours	Comments (if any)
Current Practice Needs		
Desired competencies		
General Awareness		
Professionalism & Ethics		
Total		

6. As a result, I have revised:
 - a. My PPF yes/no
 - b. My Learning Plan yes/no
7. I have reported status & total continuing education hours in support of your learning plan – date: _____
8. I have copies of these documents on file for possible audit along with my current and previous PPF and LP.

_____ Name (Print)

SEAL

_____ Signature

_____ Date

APPENDIX 5 EXAMPLE COMPETENCY SUPPORT PLANS

MEMBER SAMPLE #1:

PERSONAL PRACTICE FOCUS

What do I want to know or be able to do?

- Use non-destructive acoustic sampling methods to study wood fibre characteristics
- Want to know all about red pine plantation management and white and red pine seedfall. Want to be able to publish synthesis reports on a) Pw/Pr seedfall and b) Pw/Pr management.
- Build a better understanding of high value tolerant hardwood management and utilization.

How will I acquire what I need or want to know or be able to do?

- Networking to contact and acquire knowledge from others.
- Field work required to directly confirm issues in some cases.
- Research to ensure methods are properly undertaken and utilized as per common standards.

LEARNING PLAN

What	How	When
Learn how to do use non-destructive acoustic sampling methods	Borrow a Hitman HM200 unit and test on logs. Communicate and capture expertise from others such as FPInnovations and CWFC staff.	2010-2011
Plantation red pine	Gather more up to date timber sale data and analyze for pricing trends. Incorporate into Penner's model. Gather photos, concepts, and outline for synthesis report.	2010 to 2012
White and red pine seedfall	Organize existing data set and see about analysis with a partner. Once organized and validation analysis conducted see about a Technology Development Paper	2011 to 2013
Build a better understanding of high value tolerant hardwood management and utilization	Stay on top of current HW study with FERIC and search out other opportunities such as with T. Jones, E. Swift, M. Huot and U.S. colleagues.	ongoing

MEMBER SAMPLE #2:

PERSONAL PRACTICE FOCUS

What must I know or be able to do?

- FMP analysis - do or contribute to SFMM inputs and modelling, Patchworks etc, FRI analysis, GIS mapping; also impact of policies
- Habitat modelling – OWHAM, caribou, marten
- Ensure all policies are applied
- Lead public consultation
- Design SEM fieldwork and do analysis

What do I want to know or be able to do?

- Use the new infrared imagery and LiDAR
- Improve knowledge of the xxx Forest & SFL operations there; also keep in touch with operations on the xxx Forest
- Support (not lead) silviculture and monitoring on both Forests
- Support community forestry initiatives; incl. carbon accounting & good forestry practice
- Keep current with forest management policy & emerging science e.g. caribou, utilization

How will I acquire what I need or want to know or be able to do?

- Get learning from interpreters on new imagery, and from A.H. on LIDAR
- Go out to 1 treeplant, 1 summer harvest and 1 winter harvest per Forest per year, plus recreational trips; connect with foresters
- Do 2 days SEM per Forest per year; read & push SEM policy changes; help with SEM analysis & conclusions
- Participate in OFRI & CIF webinars & electronic lectures on science & policy related to my practice focus. Also Forest Research Partnership sessions in person.
- Participate on local Sustainable Development Committee; advise on good forestry practice; provide the committee with carbon accounting methods and OFRI results
- (required by job) participate, read, investigate, listen, question

Then structure the last set of bullets, with more specifics, into a Learning Plan.....

MEMBER SAMPLE #3:

PERSONAL PRACTICE FOCUS

What must I know or be able to do:

- a. Retain my qualifications to the above standards by carrying out a sufficient number of audits each year.
- b. Stay current with provincial and federal forestry and environmental laws/ regulations.

What do I want to know or be able to do?

- a. Stay abreast with current forestry issues, changes, practices and new knowledge.

How will I acquire what I need or want to be able to do?

- a. Attend annual meetings of the OPFA.
- b. Maintain my membership in both the CIF and the OPFA.
- c. Maintain my qualifications as a Certified Environmental Auditor [etc] through continuing education credits and proof of carrying out the minimum required number of audits with the Canadian Environmental Certification Approvals Board and the Auditing Association of Canada.
- d. Continue to enroll in on-line courses that are provided to keep my forestry auditing knowledge up to date with current practices and new standards.

LEARNING PLAN

Learning opportunities		Est Duration	Actual Hours			
			2010	2011	2012	Total Credits (hrs)
OPFA	Attend annual mtg	8	6			
CIF	Online courses	2		4		
Workplace	Forest management planning Online, 10 weeks, 2 hrs/wk	20	8	12		
	Lead auditor training (one week)	40		20	20	
	Health and Safety in the Work- place	1hr		1		
	SFIS update				3	
Trade journals	Forestry Chronicle					

APPENDIX 6

ARTICLE 14 of OPFA by-laws

Article 14.1 – Purpose: Competency Support Program

The purpose of the Competency Support Program is to ensure that Members of the Association remain informed and current with respect to the knowledge and skills necessary to practice professional forestry in Ontario in a safe competent and ethical manner and for Members to constantly enhance their quality of practice.

Article 14.2 – Member Participation

Every Full, Associate and Non-Resident Member of the Association is required to fulfill the requirements set out in this Article.

Article 14.3 – Member Cooperation

Every affected Member shall cooperate with the Association with respect to the Competency Support Program which includes continuing education and quality assurance components.

Article 14.4 – Member Competency Maintenance

Every affected Member shall ensure that awareness of technical standards and acceptable practices that relate to the area of professional forestry in which the Member practices or intends to practice and every Member shall maintain competency in each area of professional forestry in which the Member practices.

Article 14.5 – Program Components

The following are prescribed as the key components of the Competency Support Program:

- a) Personal Practice Focus,
- b) Learning Action Plan,
- c) Continuing Education,
- d) Recording and Reporting,
- e) Audit,
- f) Peer Review, and
- g) Practice Assessment

Elements and Members' obligation commence at such time and with such administrative processes as Council approves.

Article 14.6 – Personal Practice Focus

Every Member shall create at least once every three years and in conjunction with any major job change, a record of

their Personal Practice Focus in accordance with the forms and requirements approved by Council.

Article 14.7 – Learning Action Plan

Every Member shall, at least once every three years, develop a written Learning Action Plan reflecting their Personal Practice Focus, in accordance with the forms and requirements approved by Council, which considers:

1. environmental, technological and other changes in their area of current and/or planned practice,
2. areas in which the Member wishes to excel,
3. general awareness of issues and trends in professional forestry beyond the area of current and planned practice, and
4. continuing professionalism and ethics and

sets out the manner in which the Member plans to acquire necessary knowledge and skills.

Article 14.8 – Continuing Education Activities

Every Member shall undertake the continuing education activities necessary for him or her to maintain competency and make reasonable effort to meet other objectives in their Learning Action Plan.

Article 14.9 –Minimum Hours

Every Member shall accumulate a minimum of sixty (60) hours of relevant continuing education activities during every rolling three-year period, plus such further learning as is suggested by their Learning Action Plan and shall retain a record of the nature of these learning activities and shall annually report the activities in the manner established by Council.

Article 14.10 –Initial Rolling Three-Year Period

The Member's first rolling three year period and first year for required reporting, shall commence on December 1st following the date when the Member became registered in the Full Membership or Associate Membership category.

Article 14.11 – Record Retention

Every Member shall retain their records relating to Personal Practice Focus, Learning Action Plan and Continuing Education Activities for at least seven (7) years.

Article 14.12 – Records to Association Upon Request for Audit

Every Member shall provide or provide access to their Personal Practice Focus, Learning Action Plan and Continuing Education Activities records to the Association upon request, for audit purposes.
Members shall cooperate with Audits of their records.

Article 14.13 – Peer Review and Practice Assessment

Every Member who is selected to participate in a peer review or assessment of their practice shall participate in the manner established by the Council and shall cooperate with any peer or any assessor appointed or approved by the Association. Such cooperation shall include providing access to or copies of documents related to the Personal Practice

Focus, Learning Action Plan, Annual Records and to the practice of the Member, answering oral or written questions, participating in evaluations or assessments, providing access to the Member's premises and records, distributing survey forms to colleagues and clients, providing access or introductions to colleagues or clients and/or allowing the peer or assessor to accompany the Member when and where appropriate on their work.

Where the results of a peer review or assessment indicate that a Member has gaps relevant to their practice, in their knowledge, skill or judgment, the Member shall remediate those gaps in the manner and timelines agreed to with the Association. Should an agreement not be reached, the Association, bearing in mind matters raised by the Member, may specify actions the Member shall take to remediate the gap. The Association may, if warranted, require the Member to undertake not to perform practice activity relevant to the gap(s).

Article 14.14 – Respect for Privacy

In administering the Competency Support Program, the Association shall respect, to the extent reasonably possible, the Member's right of privacy and shall treat materials as confidential to the Member and/or employer.

Information discovered in the administration of the program shall not be used in a disciplinary process. However, in egregious instances, the Registrar may be advised of reasonable and probable grounds to initiate a separate investigation.

Article 14.15 – Suspension for Non-Compliance

Subject to Article 15, the Registrar may suspend the certificate of registration of a Member who does not fulfill any one or more of their obligations relating to the Competency Support Program, without reason acceptable to the Registrar.

Article 14.16 – Application for Reinstatement

A Member whose certificate of registration has been suspended under this Article within the previous two years may apply, in writing, to the Registrar to request that the suspension be lifted.

Article 14.17 – Test for Reinstatement

The Registrar shall lift the suspension and any limit imposed on a certificate of registration under this Article if the Registrar is satisfied that the Person has fulfilled all of their obligations related to the Competency Support Program and has paid any outstanding fees and met any other outstanding obligations to the Association and there is no other valid reason for denying reinstatement.

So long as it does not result in allowing a Member to practice in an area beyond their current competence and despite Article 14.15, the Registrar may lift the suspension and any limit imposed on a Member's certificate of registration under this Article if the Registrar is satisfied that the Member has embarked on a satisfactory process to meet the obligation

Article 14.18 – Where No Action Taken

If, at the end of two years from the date of suspension, the reasons for suspension have not been resolved, the certificate shall be cancelled.