Core values are the ultimate starting point for service. Airmen subsequently require a means to build their capabilities that will support the needs of the Air Force. These means are known as competencies. To develop the capabilities of Airmen, the Air Force uses a systematic competency-based approach to develop a force capable of providing decisive effects, integrate the total force, and increase the agility of the Service. Competency-based assessment, learning, and development facilitates the ability to identify our Airman’s needs, and to employ training and development strategies in their daily lives. This allows for continuous training and development outside of formal training or professional military education allowing for a more robust developmental program. Additionally, competency-based force development allows the Air Force to modify education, training, and experiences based on the competencies an Airman already possesses.

Competencies are the combination of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics that manifest in an observable, measurable pattern of behaviors required for mission success. It is through the identification of those behaviors that can enable all Airmen to have a clear understanding of what is expected from them as well as a means to help them translate successful behaviors to an operational environment where they will be mission ready and ready to fight. When applying competencies into everyday situations, the Air Force can go beyond covering only knowledge and skills components, but bring in those other elements (abilities and other characteristics) to provide all Airmen with a complete sight picture of what success looks like. This will enable the Air Force to shore up developmental gaps and increase mission effectiveness for all Airmen in all career fields, duties, and functions. An extensive catalog of Airmen’s competencies will allow for a shift in Human Capital Management strategy, by allowing developmental and assignment teams to match members to jobs they are most capable of performing successfully, and more importantly providing a method of selecting the best candidate for hard to fill or key billets.

Foundational competencies are competencies that are valued by the Air Force and universally applicable to all Airmen (officer, enlisted, and civilian). These competencies provide the core of Airmen development, and enable Airmen with tools, pathways, and capabilities to improve their performance in any job, specialty, or situation. Foundational competencies prepare Airmen to operate successfully across the widest array of Air Force tasks and requirements. The Air Force’s foundational competencies are key to
ensuring the capability of Airmen to operate successfully in a constantly changing operational environment.

Occupational competencies are a set of competencies required of all Airmen within a specific workforce category. These competencies provide a framework that describes the technical/functional skills, knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics needed to perform that function's mission successfully. They allow for intentional development providing a method to train and educate an Airmen at their pace in the areas where they need to focus for the job they will perform.

**Competency Attainment**

Competency assessments should lead to more effective management of performance, which encompasses the force development process. Competencies are learned and refined through education, training, and experience. As Airmen are being developed through a deliberate continuum of professional development, their competencies should be measured against the requirements of the job they are holding or the job they are preparing to take on, and not necessarily on rank or time in service.

Behavioral observation provides the best assessment of an Airman’s proficiency in any competency. This type of assessment should be conducted routinely in an Airman’s daily job by supervisors and trainers. Competency-based assessments tools and exercises must be converted from existing competency models, collect evidence based on authentic/real world assessments, and ensure the member has achieved the expected behavioral outcomes. Examples of competency-based assessments can be work samples, case studies, presentations, fact-finding exercises, vignettes, or group exercises.

The Air Force competency model has four proficiency levels: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, and Expert. Each proficiency level will have behaviors listed for all competencies. These behaviors will clearly be spelled out and will have been established using a specific set of criteria across all levels of proficiency. The criteria (or parameters) for each proficiency level will have been determined by a group of experts and validated by a target population. The criteria will be the same across each proficiency level within a competency and will enable members, through observable and measureable behaviors, to see how someone can progress through each level of proficiency.

Competencies are used to develop and assess Airmen for the needs of the Air Force. They assist in communicating desired behaviors at the appropriate performance level, control costs, and increase productivity. Assessing competencies is a critical component of the force development construct employed by the Air Force. For additional information, see Air Force Handbook 36-2647.