

2025 ICF Core Competencies

Released September 2025



rev. 09.08.25

Updating the ICF Core Competencies

Summary

The primary objective in undertaking the 2025 global coaching job analysis was to understand how coaching practice has evolved since the previous job analysis in 2019. The aim was to identify any new competencies that are now essential for coaches, to determine any competencies that are no longer relevant, and revise existing competencies where necessary. Updates to the ICF Core Coaching Competency model were made through rigorous, evidence-based methods to assess how the Knowledge, Abilities, and Other Characteristics (KAOs) of coaching have changed.

The 14-month job analysis used a variety of methods, including literature reviews, focus groups, analyses of tasks and knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics (KAOs), surveys, and a review of the existing competency model. These approaches were designed to (a) identify changes in the coaching profession since the last update in 2019 and (b) determine how those changes could guide updates to ICF's competency model. This competency model is based on the data collected from nearly 3,000 coaches across the world, including both ICF Members and non-members and representing a diverse range of coaching disciplines, training backgrounds, coaching styles and experience levels.

While no new main competencies are introduced, five new sub-competencies have been added, and revisions have been made to 11 existing sub-competencies. One competency definition was updated, and a glossary of terms has been added. The glossary can be found in the appendix.

2025 ICF Core Competency Model

A. Foundation

1. Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Definition: Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching

- 1.01. Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
- 1.02. Is sensitive to clients' identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
- 1.03. Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
- 1.04. Abides by the ICF Code of Ethics and upholds the ICF Core Values
- 1.05. Maintains confidentiality with client information per stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws
- 1.06. Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions
- 1.07. Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate

2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Definition: Engages in ongoing personal and professional learning and development as a coach. Works with coaching supervisors or mentor coaches as needed. Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered.

- 2.01. Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices
- 2.02. Engages in ongoing learning and development as a coach, including remaining aware of current coaching best practices and use of technology
- 2.03. Develops an ongoing reflective practice to enhance one's coaching
- 2.04. Remains aware of and open to the influence of biases, context and culture on self and others
- 2.05. Uses awareness of self and one's intuition to benefit clients
- 2.06. Develops and maintains the ability to manage one's emotions
- 2.07. Maintains emotional, physical, and mental well-being in preparation for, throughout, and following each session.
- 2.08. Seeks help from outside sources when necessary
- 2.09. Nurtures openness and curiosity in oneself, the client, and the coaching process.
- 2.10. Remains aware of the influence of one's thoughts and behaviors on the client and others

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements

Definition: Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals.
Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

- 3.01. Describes one's coaching philosophy and clearly defines what coaching is and is not for potential clients and stakeholders
- 3.02. Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders, including commitment to working toward coaching goals
- 3.03. Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others
- 3.04. Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals
- 3.05. Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility
- 3.06. Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session
- 3.07. Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session
- 3.08. Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session
- 3.09. Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session
- 3.10. Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise
- 3.11. Partners with the client to close the coaching relationship in a way that respects the client and the coaching experience
- 3.12. Revisits the coaching agreement when necessary to ensure the coaching approach is meeting the client's needs

4. Cultivates Trust and Safety

Definition: Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

- 4.01. Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
- 4.02. Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
- 4.03. Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process
- 4.04. Shows support, empathy and concern for the client
- 4.05. Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions
- 4.06. Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

5. Maintains Presence

Definition: Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident

- 5.01. Remains focused, observant, empathetic and responsive to the client
- 5.02. Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process
- 5.03. Remains aware of what is emerging for self and client in the present moment
- 5.04. Manages one's emotions to stay present with the client
- 5.05. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong client emotions during the coaching process
- 5.06. Is comfortable working in a space of not knowing
- 5.07. Creates or allows space for silence, pause or reflection

C. Communicating Effectively

6. Listens Actively

Definition: Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression

- 6.01. Considers the client's context, identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs to enhance understanding of what the client is communicating
- 6.02. Reflects or summarizes what the client is communicating to ensure clarity and understanding
- 6.03. Recognizes and inquires when there is more to what the client is communicating
- 6.04. Notices, acknowledges and explores the client's emotions, energy shifts, non-verbal cues or other behaviors
- 6.05. Integrates the client's words, tone of voice and body language to determine the full meaning of what the client is communicating
- 6.06. Notices trends in the client's behaviors and emotions across sessions to discern themes and patterns

7. Evokes Awareness

Definition: Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy

- 7.01. Considers client experience when deciding what might be most useful
- 7.02. Challenges the client as a way to evoke awareness or insight
- 7.03. Asks questions about the client, such as their way of thinking, values, needs, wants and beliefs
- 7.04. Asks questions that help the client explore beyond current thinking
- 7.05. Invites the client to share more about their experience in the moment
- 7.06. Notices what is working to enhance client progress
- 7.07. Adjusts the coaching approach in response to the client's needs
- 7.08. Helps the client identify factors that influence current and future patterns of behavior, thinking or emotion
- 7.09. Invites the client to generate ideas about how they can move forward and what they are willing or able to do
- 7.10. Supports the client in reframing perspectives
- 7.11. Shares observations, knowledge, and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new insights for the client

D. Cultivating Learning and Growth

8. Facilitates Client Growth

Definition: Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.

8.01. Works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight or learning into their worldview and behaviors

8.02. Partners with the client to design goals, actions and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning

8.03. Acknowledges and supports client autonomy in the design of goals, actions and methods of accountability

8.04. Supports the client in identifying potential results or learning from identified action steps

8.05. Invites the client to consider how to move forward, including resources, support and potential barriers

8.06. Partners with the client to summarize learning and insight within or between sessions

8.07. Partners with the client to integrate learning and sustain progress throughout the coaching engagement

8.08. Acknowledges the client's progress and successes

8.09. Partners with the client to close the session

Appendix: ICF Core Competencies Glossary of Terms

Accountability: The responsibility to follow through on commitments and actions agreed upon during the coaching process.

Agreement: A formal document established between an ICF professional and the client(s)/sponsor(s) that outlines the terms, expectations, and conditions of their coaching relationship. It typically includes details such as the goals of the coaching, the duration and frequency of sessions, confidentiality policies, payment terms, cancellation policies, and the responsibilities of both the coach and the client.

Analogy: A comparison between two things that highlights similarities between them, often to explain or clarify a concept, process, or situation.

Autonomy: The client's ability to make independent decisions and take actions based on their own values and beliefs.

Beliefs: Personal convictions, assumptions, and interpretations that shape how a client sees themselves, others, and the world.

Bias: A difference in the perception, interpretation, or judgment —shaped by internalized beliefs, values, preferences, and cultural assumptions — that can result in an inclination for or against an idea, object, group, or individual.

Body Language: Non-verbal communication through gestures, facial expressions, and posture, which can provide insights into a client's feelings and attitudes.

Challenges: Thought-provoking interventions offered by the coach to disrupt the client's habitual patterns, assumptions, or narratives.

Client: The individual, team, or group member being coached, the coach being coached, mentored, or supervised, or the coach in training.

Client Systems: The network of relationships and environments that influence the client's life and decisions.

Coach Supervisor (Coaching Supervisor): An experienced coach who engages in reflective dialogue and a collaborative process with a coach (or group of coaches) for personal, professional, and ethical development and learning.

Coaching Approach: The specific methods and techniques used by a coach to facilitate client growth and development.

Coaching Engagement: The structured interaction between an ICF professional and the client(s)/sponsor(s). This engagement encompasses the entire coaching process, including the initial assessment, goal setting, regular coaching sessions, progress tracking, and evaluation of outcomes.

Coaching Philosophy: The underlying theory, beliefs and principles, that guide a coach's practice and interactions with clients.

Coaching Relationship: A relationship that is established by the ICF Professional and the Client(s)/Sponsor(s) under an agreement or a contract that defines the responsibilities and expectations of each party.

Confidentiality: The protection of any information obtained in or around the coaching relationship unless there is a legal reason or requirement, a threat of harm, or written consent to release is given by the client.

Context: The unique combination of circumstances, experiences, culture, identity, environment, and worldview that shape how a person understands themselves, others, and the world.

Culture: The shared values, beliefs, language, communication, norms, and practices of a group that help define them as a collective and which influence behavior and decision-making.

Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.

Energy Shifts: Changes in a client's emotional or physical energy levels, which can impact their engagement and progress in coaching.

Environment: The physical and social surroundings that affect a client's experiences and decisions.

Experiences: The events and interactions that shape a client's perceptions, beliefs and behaviors.

Grounded: Being stable and centered, often referring to a coach's ability to remain calm and focused during sessions.

Helping/Support Professions: Fields such as counseling, therapy, and social work that provide assistance and support to individuals, sometimes overlapping with coaching practices.

Identity: The client's sense of self, including their values, beliefs, cultural background, roles, lived experiences, personality, and the ways they see and define themselves in the world.

Insights: New understandings or realizations that emerge during the coaching process, leading to personal growth.

Knowledge: Information or skills, gained through study, observation, practice, or direct experience.

Measure of Success: Criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of the coaching process.

Mentor Coach: An experienced coach who provides a collaborative learning process (mentor coaching) through which feedback is provided to another coach based on observed or recorded coaching sessions, to further develop their unique coaching style and skills in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which one thing is described as another, creating an implicit comparison. In coaching, metaphors are used to help clients understand their experiences, feelings, or situations by relating them to more familiar or vivid concepts.

Observations: The act of noticing and interpreting behaviors and patterns in a client's actions and interactions.

Partners (with)/Partnering: Coach and client working collaboratively toward a common, client-centered goal which supports, encourages, and honors the client's autonomy in the coaching process.

Perceptions: The way clients interpret and understand their experiences and surroundings.

Powerful Questioning: The use of thought-provoking questions to stimulate deeper thinking and reflection in clients.

Presence: The coach's ability to be fully attentive and engaged with the client during sessions.

Progress: The advancement or improvement in a client's goals and development through the coaching process.

Reflective Practice: The process of self-examination and learning from one's experiences to improve coaching skills and effectiveness.

Reframing Perspective: Supporting the client to see a situation, belief, or experience in a new way, so they can discover new meaning, insight, or possibilities.

Manage One's Emotions: The ability to recognize, understand, and navigate one's emotional responses in a healthy and intentional way.

Session: A period of time when a coach and client have a coaching conversation

Sponsor: The entity (including its representatives) or individual paying for and/or arranging or defining the coaching services to be provided. This includes those having parental responsibility for minors.

Stakeholder: An individual, usually within an organization, who has an interest in a client's progress through coaching

Strong Client Emotion: Intense emotional responses or experiences expressed by the client during a coaching session.

Style: The unique manner in which a coach interacts with clients and conducts sessions.

Success: The achievement of goals and positive outcomes through the coaching process.

Technology: Tools, platforms, and systems used by coaches to enhance the coaching process. This may include digital coaching platforms, apps for self-coaching, videoconferencing tools, and AI systems that facilitate goal tracking, communication, and progress monitoring

Value or Values: The principles and standards that guide a person's behavior and decision-making.

Well-Being: A person's emotional and psychological state of overall health and happiness, encompassing resilience, positive emotions, and effective coping with life's challenges.

Without Attachment: The practice of engaging in the coaching process without being overly invested in specific outcomes, allowing for flexibility and openness.

Worldview: The overall perspective from which a person sees and interprets the world, influencing their beliefs, values, and actions.

EMPOWERING THE WORLD THROUGH
COACHING.

