

Effective Safety and Security Risk Management through Competency Certification



The International NGO Safety and Security Association (INSSA)

INSSA is a non-profit global membership association of individuals committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of safety and security for humanitarian relief and development assistance workers operating in complex and dangerous environments. INSSA enjoys collaborative partnerships with organizations that include Save the Children, Concern Worldwide, DisasterReady, and Catholic Relief Services, GISF along with many others.

Challenge

INSSA envisions a world in which humanitarian aid and development assistance is safely accessed and delivered to people in need. Safety is an important challenge to delivering this aid. Individuals must be trained and competent in managing the safety and security of themselves and others. INSSA sought to build a standardized approach to assess the level of competence among workers and build their skills, regardless of NGO size, location or mission. They embarked on building a certification program based on competencies.

“INSSA wished to build the capacity of its membership that consisted of security managers in international NGOs, humanitarian and human rights organizations. We had the subject matter expertise but didn’t have a methodology for identifying the competencies needed”.

*Michael O’Neill,
INSSA Board Chair (former)*

The solution

At the core of certification is the INSSA Security Risk Management Competency Profile. Competencies describe the behaviors, knowledge and skills necessary to function at a particular professional level. The Competency Profile defines four levels of behaviors increasing in responsibility and scope at the Country, Regional, Global and Executive levels. Certification exams are developed to assess the competencies at each of the four levels. The exams are easily available on-line and provide quick results.

Development process

HRSB worked in collaboration with INSSA to build all elements of the certification process.

Stage 1 - Certification Process

The process started with defining the concept of different professional levels and how they are aligned with education, knowledge and experience. A process flow for the steps in the certification process from the user and administrative point of view was determined along with the policy for eligibility for certification, testing, communication, etc. A revenue model addressed expenses and infrastructure required along with certification fees to achieve cost recovery.

Stage 2 – Competency and Exam Development

A competency model defined the key competencies required for security risk management including those related to risk assessment, security risk management, leadership and management and critical

incident response. Drawing on global subject matter experts, two multiple choice exams were developed: one at the country level and one at the regional level. The exam questions drew on realistic situations to challenge the test taker. Approaches to assessing the higher levels (Global and Executive) through peer assessment were also defined.

Stage 3 – Implementation and Monitoring

The final stage involved implementing the certification process in a phased approach starting with the country and then the regional exam. Applicants completed all elements of the application and exam process on-line. Results were generated immediately along with communication to the applicant. HRSB administered and maintained the process.

The result

INSSA is currently running two exams proven to be effective and efficient. The number of applicants continues to climb as organizations see the value of the certification process. The Country exam has been translated into multiple languages, thereby increasing access. The exams require limited maintenance and are quickly deployed.

Results of the assessments identify skill areas where members are looking to improve professionally—information that helps INSSA make more informed decisions about where to invest in additional course offerings and learning resources.

We have had a very beneficial and highly professional relationship with HRSG. I among many, know the level of effort that went into the development of the competency profile and exams. All of that made for a very positive and significant impact on what we have been able to achieve. The reviews of the certification process have been very positive, and we are excited to keep promoting the process."

*Michael O'Neill,
INSSA Board Chair (former)*

Testimonials

"This was a test of my professional experience. I didn't know if my knowledge of country level security management was globally applicable. Receiving the email that I passed was a very exciting moment for me, because it was a tangible proof that I am a security professional."

Gerardo Cálix - Regional Security Advisor Latin and Central America, Catholic Relief Services

"I found the exam to be helpful and comprehensive, requiring a range of best practices and principles applicable to safety and security management. The reference material provided assists in knowledge-building, and includes good tools for country-level (and all) managers."

Steve Robinson - Director of Operational Security, International Justice Mission

Learn more about the process, <https://inssa.org/certification>