# Membership: Evidencing your Competence Effectively

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Currently, around 60% of CIEEM's members are either Full or Fellow members (many holding Chartered status) and, as the Institute's membership grows, they are increasingly likely to be asked to act as a sponsor or mentor by a potential applicant. However, unless you have achieved that level of membership or chartership in the last five years, it is possible that you may not yet have fully engaged with CIEEM's Competency Framework.

While the membership team assists applicants with the most regular queries, the real experts in evidencing competence well (and increasing the chances of producing a successful application) are our volunteer membership application assessors. During the 2018 calendar year these volunteer assessors diligently worked their way through 420 applications for professional membership grades from prospective members – the vast majority of which were, happily, successful. So, if you are considering applying for or upgrading membership, or are kindly supporting a colleague to do so, who better to advise you than the very members that assess the applications?

We asked our volunteer assessors for their 'top tips' for completing an application and evidencing competence well, and here is what they told us.

## Before you begin

i.    Before even starting an application, read the guidance document and watch the short videos available on the CIEEM website. While you are there, make sure you have the latest version of the application form.

ii.   Have a copy of the guidance documents available while you are filling in the form, and don't rush to get the form filled in. Take your time, and make sure that competencies are addressed clearly with all the relevant information presented in a logical manner.

iii.  Think carefully about your choice of sponsor. Ideally you are looking for someone who can mentor you through the process although we appreciate that this is not always possible.

## Get the basics right

i.    Make sure that you are applying your experience to the correct competency.

ii.   Ensure that you are clear in what the competency requires at the level for which you are applying, paying close attention to key words, and that you provide good examples to demonstrate that you practise at that level of competence.

iii.  Make full use of the word count: although it seems like more work upfront, it is less work in the long run (as I have never seen a short answer tick all of the boxes).

iv.   Be careful in spelling and grammar in all answers but be especially careful in crafting a response when the competency refers to report writing and/or communication.

v.    Spellcheck is your friend. A poorly presented application, with poor spelling and grammar is not a good advert for you, especially when trying to join a professional institute.

vi.   Demonstrate your communication skills by making the evidence clear and easy reading for assessors from different backgrounds. Avoid presenting your competency evidence as a single paragraph or using undefined acronyms and technical terms, especially if these are confined mainly to your organisation.

vii.  Avoid over-egging the pudding in an attempt to impress. Be sure that you have the evidence to support your claims.

viii. Ensure that the evidence that you provide is explicitly linked to an element of the competency. Assessors like applications where the information is there without having to dig too much for it.

## We need to know more than what you do

i.    To write a good answer, make sure that you follow the 'STARE' (Situation-Task-Action-Result-Evaluation) self-assessment method. The assessors will assess your answers on this basis, so make it easy for them to score you well.

ii.   Do not forget the crucial E part of 'STARE'. The information is sometimes referred to by sponsors, but it can be disregarded if not part of your evidence. Do not leave it to your sponsors to expand upon what you should say yourself.

iii.  Try to provide at least two examples to demonstrate your competence in each competency. Use a range of examples, rather than using the same project or thesis for every response, in order to show a wide range of skills and experiences.

iv.   Provide sound evidence covering a good proportion what is stated in the competency framework guidance for that competency, demonstrating work at the level that would be expected for the grade being applied for.

v.    Within the word limit, provide a couple of specific examples of your

competence along with other less detailed evidence of how routinely you have demonstrated this level of competence. Perhaps think of this as: specific examples demonstrating 'depth' of competence; and routineness demonstrating 'weight' of competence. A detailed example of something done well may not be sufficient if it is not obvious that you have done it more than once.

vi. If you studied something relevant to your chosen competency and were assessed by an exam or piece of coursework give the mark you achieved as evidence of your competence.

vii. If you were given another contract or project as a result of your good work in the example chosen to illustrate your competency then say this yourself as it is evidence of your competence.

## Before you press 'send'

i. Once you have written your submissions, re-read them. If possible, get someone else to read over them, and make suggestions for improvements.

ii. Make sure your sponsor(s) are aware that their part of the process is important, and that their contribution requires more than just a word or two.

iii. Do not be disheartened if you are asked for additional evidence following submission of your application. Take it as an opportunity to demonstrate your commitment and professionalism.

## Some finer detail

i. If you are struggling with the 'Professional Conduct' competency (especially if less experienced), then good examples are dealing with difficult landowners or using personal data from clients or landowners in line with a company's data handling procedures. We also often see reference to acting in the best interests of the client, but this should be about impartiality and integrity. And do refer to the Code of Professional Conduct.

ii. Don't forget the basics. For example, if you have chosen 'Information Technology', then using office suite software (e.g MS Word) is an excellent way to evidence this.

iii. Do not provide evidence against the 'Scientific Method' competencies that is not about 'real science' but is in fact routine analysis of data. For example, the analysis of bat call sonograms in order to identify species is evidence of competence in 'Species Identification'. The fact that this process uses software does not make it any different to using key characteristics to identify a plant species. This should not therefore be used under 'Scientific Method'. Do use evidence against these competencies derived from the world of academia or other scientific research and development environments.

iv. For 'Surveying' competencies, an awareness of biosecurity protocols is typically required and yet this is often not mentioned in applications.

In addition, some applicants discuss survey techniques in detail but do not always fully demonstrate evaluating this information or an understanding of what the survey is to be used for and the importance of having clear objectives when planning the survey.

## And finally...

Whether you are the applicant or acting as a sponsor or mentor, if anything is unclear please do get in touch with the membership team. Good luck!

**Contact the CIEEM Membership Team at:**
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