

What is the Minnesota Competency Attainment Board?

The Minnesota Competency Attainment Board (MNCAB) was established by legislative action in 2022 and 2023, and is charged with creating and administering a statewide, independent competency attainment system as set forth in [Minnesota Statutes Ch. 611](#). This includes establishing a system that certifies competency attainment programs and uses forensic navigators to support individuals in the competency process.

What is a Forensic Navigator?

Forensic navigators work with defendants in criminal cases and justice partners to ensure that the defendant receives appropriate services so they can successfully comply with their conditions of release and attain competency. Forensic navigators work throughout the state and provide high quality, professional, coordinated services to individuals who live with mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and/or cognitive impairments that may affect their ability to understand the proceedings in their criminal case or consult with their counsel. See Minn. Stat. § 611.41, subd. 8 and § 611.55, subd. 3.

When did forensic navigators start providing services?

The Board's forensic navigator program "soft" launched in April 2024, with a goal to have at least 10 forensic navigators on board to start engaging with the courts and community partners. As of the end of May 2025, thirty (30) forensic navigators, six (6) forensic navigator supervisors, and one (1) forensic navigator manager are employed by MNCAB.

Why did MNCAB start with a soft launch?

There are a few reasons MNCAB took this approach. The realities and logistics of establishing a new state government agency are time intensive and complex. The operational infrastructure needed to hire, employ, and support forensic navigators is still in development more than a year into the work. Although the statute outlines duties and responsibilities for forensic navigators, the work has never been done in Minnesota before so there is inherent ambiguity in what the work entails.

The first forensic navigators started their work without established operational guidance, new employee training, onboarding, or other work direction that would normally be expected when starting a new position. The soft launch approach allowed MNCAB to learn more about the needs of defendants, the courts, and justice and behavioral health system partners during the first few months of official work while simultaneously acknowledging the complexity of establishing the operational infrastructure to hire and employ forensic navigators.

What does a soft launch mean for the court cases where a defendant's competency is in question?

Primarily it means that there will not be a forensic navigator available to be assigned to every case that may qualify for a forensic navigator. MNCAB's initial goal was to hire at least one forensic navigator for each judicial district and learned through the hiring process that the ability to accomplish that depended on the applicants for the position, where they reside in the state, and their skills and abilities to do the work.

What is a Competency Attainment Program?

Competency Attainment Programs are structured programs that provide therapeutic/clinical and educational services. The programs may be community-based and jail-based and are designed to identify and address barriers to a defendant's ability to understand the criminal proceedings, consult with counsel, and participate in their defense. See Minn. Stat. § 611.41, subd. 5.

Community-based programs may adopt an in-house model or a partnership model. An in-house model is one where the program wants to intentionally dedicate more resources to serving clients with competency needs. These providers may choose to have new or existing staff members become certified competency educators through the Board and provide both treatment and education in-house.

A partnership model is one where the program ensures participants receive adequate treatment and partner with the Board or another program to provide competency education services. Each program using this model can design the partnership agreement to meet the specific provider and participant needs.

How does a provider become certified as a Competency Attainment Program?

Policy 401 Competency Attainment Program Standards and Interim Certification Procedures was adopted by the Board in March 2024. It outlines the interim processes to apply to be a competency attainment program. The process and accompanying interim applications are available on the Board's website. See the Certification Procedures tab on the [Certification Advisory Committee / Competency Attainment Board \(mn.gov\)](#) page.

What is Competency Attainment Education?

Effective September 28, 2023, and as required in Minn. Stat. § 611.58, the Board approved a competency attainment curriculum. The curriculum is available for use by community and correctional facility providers. Competency Attainment Programs must ensure that defendants receive competency attainment education, as well as conduct regular assessments of the defendant's progress in attaining competency.