Common and Unique Public Service Competencies

HR Framework

Building capability for public service

June 2004
What are the common and unique Public Service competencies?

Competencies are defined as knowledge, skills, attributes and behavioural traits required for individual and organisational success.

These common and unique competencies define for all members of the Public Service the behaviours, skills, attitudes, attributes, performance factors and proficiencies that they should have and demonstrate. The competencies are limited in number and critical to the successful performance of the Public Service. They complement and support traditional competencies most departments are already using. They encapsulate the elements that make the Public Service a unique place to work.

These Public Service competencies are complementary to other generic competencies that departments expect of their employees – such as communication, relationship management, managing diversity, leadership and innovation etc.

The common and unique competencies have been identified as:

1. Collaborates to achieve whole-of government outcomes
2. Serves the public and community in a spirit of service
3. Acts ethically and with integrity to maintain trust in Government
4. Works within public service frameworks, legislation and structures, and
5. Works in ways that uphold the Treaty of Waitangi.

Each has been identified on the basis that it is both common across all Public Service agencies, and unique in its application in the Public Service.

Each is defined by means of a series of short behavioural statements, then expanded further to describe the performance or behaviours one might observe.

The behaviourally-anchored performance descriptions have been described at three levels of operation, broadly defined as:

- **Level i** General staff
- **Level ii** Team / leader / first line manager
- **Level iii** Middle / senior managers

Titles, roles and specialist functions (for instance policy, HR, IT) vary greatly across the sector. Each agency will need to interpret and use the levels in the context of its own structure.
Why have common and unique competencies?

One of the key ingredients in an over-arching Human Resource Framework in the Public Service was the adoption of standards that are both common and unique to the Public Service.

Having a shared understanding and use of those competencies which are both common and unique to the Public Service will:

- provide a nucleus for an integrated human resources approach across the Public Service that will assist in attracting and retaining diverse and capable talent
- make explicit the clusters of knowledge, skills and personal attributes that equate to high performance in the Public Service
- identify competencies that serve the strategic needs of the Public Service now, and its challenges for the future
- provide a common language for all New Zealand public service employees to understand
- make use of our competitive advantages of being able to provide individuals with learning and development opportunities across a range of contexts
- reduce duplication and inefficiency, through improved mechanisms for collaboration
- allow departmental resources to be used to better advantage, by allowing them to focus on their own unique context and specialties
- enhance public confidence and trust in the ethics, integrity, skills and knowledge of public servants
- improve our ability to develop leaders in the future, through improved collaboration and coordination throughout careers.

How will we use the competencies?

These competencies support competencies already defined by department. They can help clarify some expectations, but not replace them. They do not prescribe a format for competency frameworks.

There are a number of options for how you might use the competencies. This might include:

- overlay them against the department’s own current competencies to check that you have covered the common and unique Public Service competencies within the department
- use them when reviewing the department’s own framework, to ensure they are covered, or use them to standardise the wording of competencies
- use them as a basis for developing a new competency framework for the department
- use them to identify training and meet training needs through participating in coordinated Public Service training delivery
- use them to describe the competencies that will be developed when promoting a secondment opportunity
- introduce them as part of your induction programme, as outlined in the HR Framework induction modules
- use them to reinforce appropriate behaviours that lead to the achievement of shared outcomes, when working across agencies, and
- link the acquisition of these competencies to those described in the Leadership Capability Profile. The relationship has been mapped, and further details can be seen at [http://www.ssc.govt.nz](http://www.ssc.govt.nz)
1. Collaborates to achieve whole-of-government outcomes

*Description:* Identifies oneself as a public servant as well as an employee of a particular agency. Carries a whole-of-government perspective when interacting with other public servants and citizens, addressing problems and achieving results. Develops and maintains win/win relationships and partnerships.

**Short behavioural statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level i</th>
<th>Level ii</th>
<th>Level iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(general staff)</td>
<td>(team leader/ first line manager)</td>
<td>(middle manager)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Builds relationships with a wide circle of contacts to achieve results</td>
<td>a) Develops networks and relationships with individuals and agencies that have a role to play in meeting the client’s needs.</td>
<td>a) Proactively builds positive working relationships, with people at all levels within the public and private sectors, related industry and community organisations and interest groups, with the intent of achieving effective delivery of relevant services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Collaborates to achieve win/win outcomes</td>
<td>b) Facilitates individuals working together by identifying common goals, encouraging collaboration and joint ownership of ideas and approaches, and clarifying accountabilities.</td>
<td>b) Identifies and acts on opportunities to partner with colleagues, stakeholders and other organisations to champion initiatives that achieve positive outcomes for the client, the organisation and the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Thinks laterally about problems</td>
<td>c) Adopts a cross-boundary mentality in own work and encourages it in others.</td>
<td>c) Identifies opportunities to reduce duplication of services and to integrate service delivery to clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Looks for the big picture</td>
<td>d) Takes a whole-of-government perspective, understanding other agencies in the sector and their role</td>
<td>d) Proactively shares information and resources across areas to better leverage the capabilities of the department/government in planning and problem-solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Takes a whole-of-government perspective, understanding other agencies in the sector and their role</td>
<td>e) Focuses on the desired outcomes</td>
<td>e) Contributes to cross-government priorities, and aligns own responsibilities with required government priorities and outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Focuses on the desired outcomes</td>
<td>f) Notes the desired outcomes</td>
<td>f) Sets and accomplishes goals and priorities in order to deliver results consistent with government direction, departmental objectives and public expectations. Initiates and implements structure and processes, and recommends new policy/programmes to assist whole-of-government outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Behavioural statements that describe the performance or behaviour**

- a) Works with clients, stakeholders and colleagues cooperatively, earning respect and trust by following through on commitments.
- b) Gets work done using both formal channels and informal networks.
- c) Draws on front line knowledge, personal networks and creativity to solve service delivery problems.
- d) Seeks information and ideas from multiple sources. Freely and intentionally shares ideas with others.
- e) Can explain own area of responsibility, the purpose of the work unit, the direction of the department, and how various parts of the organisation contribute to meeting the organisation’s goals.
- f) Focuses on results and getting things done.
2. Serves the public and community in a spirit of service

**Description:** Shows commitment to understanding and meeting or exceeding client needs, based on an enduring belief in and commitment to the public interest, to the taxpayers of New Zealand and to an effective Public Service. Is responsive to feedback from clients, and strives to achieve ever better outcomes for clients. Manages client expectations. (Clients are those groups or individuals, internal or external who use the organisation’s products and/or services.)

**Short behavioural statements**

a) Feels a strong sense of service to the public  
b) Meets or exceeds client needs  
c) Is responsive to client feedback  
d) Strives to achieve ever better outcomes for clients  
e) Acts in the wider interests of the public by empowering clients

**Behavioural statements that describe the performance or behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Level i</strong> (general staff)</th>
<th><strong>Level ii</strong> (team leader/first line manager)</th>
<th><strong>Level iii</strong> (middle manager)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Has empathy with the needs and concerns of the public and takes personal pride in delivering a timely and accurate product/service.</td>
<td>a) Ensures that the public is provided with high quality services, clear information on services and entitlements, and is treated fairly and reasonably.</td>
<td>a) Assesses the department’s performance in meeting objectives (outcomes) and service delivery (outputs), and draws on this knowledge about performance to adapt and innovate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Identifies and responds proactively to the varying needs of a diverse group of clients, works within policies and procedures to tailor products/services accordingly, and delivers to the client’s needs.</td>
<td>b) Gives service beyond clients’ expectations by seeking information about the real underlying needs of the client, providing insights and recommending actions to address these needs.</td>
<td>b) Looks for long-term benefits and is innovative in addressing client needs from a holistic perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Follows through on client inquiries, requests and complaints with a timely and complete response.</td>
<td>c) Clarifies client expectations, monitors client needs, and acts promptly and undefensively on client feedback.</td>
<td>c) Takes personal responsibility for correcting client service problems, and seeks to address policy, process or system constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Represents the needs of the clients by promoting their interests to appropriate decision-makers.</td>
<td>d) Identifies client needs and takes the initiative to create products / deliver services that respond to those needs.</td>
<td>d) Identifies trends, anticipates and develops plans to meet future needs or existing and potential clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Provides helpful information to clients enabling them to make choices and set priorities that best meet their needs.</td>
<td>e) Acts in a way which helps clients to generate breakthrough ideas, fresh perspectives and new opportunities.</td>
<td>e) Empowers clients and communities to develop joint initiatives and to own outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Acts ethically and with integrity to maintain trust in the government

**Description:** Understands own part in assuring a competent, even-handed Public Service free of corruption and insulated from party political influence. Upholds public sector values. Consciously upholds a Public Service that is free from corruption, and the appearance of corruption. Acknowledges the high standard of public scrutiny applied to Public Service actions, and the need to maintain trust in the Public Service and government.

**Short behavioural statements**
- a) Behaves ethically
- b) Shows respect for the rule of law
- c) Is accountable for effectively managing public resources
- d) Is politically neutral

**Behavioural statements that describe the performance or behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level i</th>
<th>Level ii</th>
<th>Level iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(general staff)</td>
<td>(team leader/first line manager)</td>
<td>(middle manager)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Adheres to the Public Service Code of Conduct, and demonstrates values of political neutrality, honesty and integrity. Knows what to do when confronted with an ethical challenge or a potential conflict of interest.</td>
<td>a) Appreciates that actions and decisions must be able to be justified, therefore prepares advice/delivers services and makes decisions using sound reasoning and analysis.</td>
<td>a) Attaches the highest importance to lawful conduct, due process, fairness, honesty and professionalism, and demonstrates such values in daily conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Complies with all lawful and reasonable instructions and work as directed.</td>
<td>b) Is familiar with and consistently applies the acts and regulations that directly affects one’s own work and is aware of and respects the processes of law.</td>
<td>b) Is consistent and fair in requiring compliance with statutory obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Spends public money as authorised, uses and cares for public assets responsibly and performs work conscientiously.</td>
<td>c) Manages resources wisely, balancing the demands of competing priorities for limited time, property, resources and funds.</td>
<td>c) Is accountable for effective management of projects, people and budgets, and is creative in supplementing available resources, (e.g. by means of partnerships, fee-for-service, external or indirect resourcing approaches), to facilitate the achievement of organisational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Keeps public and private interests separate, and does nothing to bring the Public Service and/or the Government into disrepute.</td>
<td>d) Serves the government of the day, implementing their policies and programmes irrespective of personal preferences or individually motivated ambitions.</td>
<td>d) Is committed to the principles of New Zealand’s constitutional and legal system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Works within Public Service frameworks, legislation and structures

**Description:** Demonstrates an understanding of the principles and conventions of government and the constitutional and legal framework within which one works in the Public Service. Has knowledge of government structure and function, understands the complex Public Service environment and culture, and has an awareness of political and organisational realities. Recognises that present policies, processes and methods will in due course be affected by future environmental, economic and social developments and trends.

**Short behavioural statements**

a) Knows how the government sector works in principle and practice  
b) Is politically aware  
c) Is organisationally aware  
d) Finds ways to make the Public Service work better  
e) Thinks about and responds to the changing environment

**Behavioural statements that describe the performance or behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level i</th>
<th>Level ii</th>
<th>Level iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(general staff)</td>
<td>(team leader/first line manager)</td>
<td>(middle manager)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level i</th>
<th>Level ii</th>
<th>Level iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(general staff)</td>
<td>(team leader/first line manager)</td>
<td>(middle manager)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| a) Understands government conventions and processes – i.e. how things work.  
b) Is aware of the political environment in which the organisation operates and its interface with the Public Service.  
c) Understands the organisation’s mission, service mandate, and strategies and responsibilities.  
d) Is resourceful in finding ways to improve the status quo – for the client, for the department, for the Government.  
e) Initiates and responds to changes in the agreed service plan; implements new practices in response to changing operating environment.  
a) Understands and adheres to current government policies and practices – i.e. knows what we’re doing and why.  
b) Demonstrates sensitivity to the relationships between key players in the Public Service. Understands, accepts and communicates political realities and implications.  
c) Is able to see one’s own organisation from different perspectives and understands the big picture beyond one’s Department or Ministry. Weighs knowledge of policies, department needs and common sense in making decisions.  
d) Questions traditional thinking and challenges conventional means of service delivery, by searching for more effective, efficient ways to meet organisational goals.  
e) Able to shift strategic focus and activities quickly in response to changing organisational priorities.  
a) Understands and can explain the origin and reasoning behind key policies, practices and procedures – i.e. knows where we’ve come from, how things are now, and where the government wishes to take them.  
b) Is aware of the projected directions of government and uses this information to anticipate how those changes might impact on the organisation.  
c) Understands the reasons behind ongoing issues within the organisation, the forces affecting the organisation, and knowledge of ramifications and takes these into account when making decisions and taking action.  
d) Takes calculated risks in trying something new in order to improve the delivery of services and operations, and to improve overall performance across government and the Public Service.  
e) Considers and plans for how present policies, processes and methods might be affected by future developments and trends. |
5. Works in ways that uphold the Treaty of Waitangi

**Description:** Demonstrates an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, and its application to the workings of government. Ensures that Māori clients have their specific needs identified, services designed to meet these needs and delivered in ways that satisfy their interests. Respects Māori language, culture and knowledge, and is responsive to Māori traditions and institutions.

**Short behavioural statements**

a) Upholds the Treaty of Waitangi  

b) Demonstrates responsiveness to Māori  

c) Engages with Māori  

d) Values Māori knowledge and skills

**Behavioural statements that describe the performance or behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level i</th>
<th>Level ii</th>
<th>Level iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(general staff)</td>
<td>(team leader/first line manager)</td>
<td>(middle manager)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Understands the debates and practices surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi.</td>
<td>a) Knows how to address issues that impact on Māori, as parties to the Treaty, as citizens and as Public Service employees who identify as Māori.</td>
<td>a) Demonstrates an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, and an awareness of the Principles, and their application to the department and to the wider Public Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Understands Māori needs and is responsive to Māori in the delivery of services.</td>
<td>b) Provides services to Māori clients with sensitivity, understanding, and respect for the client’s culture.</td>
<td>b) Understands the social, ethnic and behavioural characteristics of Māori and can translate that knowledge into work practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Maintains effective relationships with Māori and understands Māori perspectives and priorities.</td>
<td>c) Works in ways that enhance consultative relationships with Māori, and acts on opportunities to actively engage with Māori.</td>
<td>c) Collaborates with Māori communities regarding service provision and delivery. Builds relations with Māori institutions characterised by mutual respect, recognition of each other’s authority and a willingness to work together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Interacts appropriately with Māori taking into consideration tikanga (custom) and kawa (protocol) according to informal and formal settings.</td>
<td>d) Is able to participate confidently and competently in situations that involve processes, systems and organisations based on ‘Mātauranga Māori’.</td>
<td>d) Finds ways to demonstrate that cultural responsiveness is valued, clearly defined, understood and applied within the Public Service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For information on the HR Framework, including secondments and induction modules, go to [www.ssc.govt.nz](http://www.ssc.govt.nz) or email hrframework@ssc.govt.nz

This resource was produced by a joint project team from Public Service departments, the Public Service Association and the State Services Commission.