



# Discussion Paper

## Australian Public Service Commission

### Proposing a new set of Australian Public Service Values

The Australian Public Service (APS) aspires to be among the best in the world—a Service that is recognised and valued because its people:

- take the extra steps necessary to ensure that the needs of our community are identified and met
- are forward looking and innovative
- work together and with the community to meet community needs
- deliver great value for money, effective programs, excellent service and maximum efficiency.

Fundamental to the achievement of those goals is the set of attitudes and behaviours that we bring to our work. These define who we are and guide us in our dealings with everyone and in everything we do. This is what we are attempting to capture in our statements of the APS Values, which are intended to describe in a few words what it means to be an APS employee. Although the particular focuses of APS activity may change over time as community needs change, these values endure, unifying the public service across time and across agencies.

In July this year, the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) asked APS agencies, employees and other stakeholders for their views on a revised set of values for the APS. This was to give effect to a recommendation of the Advisory Group established to review Australian Government administration which, in its report *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration (the Blueprint)*, recommended a reformulation of the APS Values to create ‘a smaller set of core values that are meaningful, memorable and effective in driving change.’

The Commission would like to thank all of those who made submissions and provided comments to this important process.

Having regard to that feedback, the Commission has developed a draft set of proposed values, and once again is seeking your comments. In interpreting these values it might help to think about them as statements that begin ‘I am...’

The proposed values are:

## **The APS Values**

### **Committed to service**

We take pride in being professional, impartial and efficient, and in achieving the best results for the Government and the Australian community.

### **Ethical**

We are trustworthy and act with integrity.

### **Respectful**

All people have worth. We respect everyone we deal with: their rights, their heritage, their hopes, and their views.

### **Accountable**

We are openly accountable to the Australian community through the framework of Ministerial responsibility.

### **Apolitical**

We perform our functions impartially and provide the Government with advice that is frank, honest, timely and based on the best available evidence.

## ***Proposed APS employment principles***

It is also proposed that the values will be complemented by a set of binding employment principles that will guide employment and workplace relationships in the Australian Public Service. Those principles are:

*The APS is a career-based public service which:*

- a) makes employment decisions that are equitable, with a fair system of review*
- b) makes decisions relating to promotion and engagement that are based on merit*
- c) requires effective performance from each employee*
- d) provides fair, flexible, safe and rewarding workplaces where communication, consultation, cooperation and input from employees on matters that affect their workplace are valued*
- e) provides workplaces that are free from discrimination, patronage and favouritism*
- f) recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community and fosters diversity in the workplace.*

These principles will need to be seen in the broader context of the Blueprint (refer below) which, for example, has recommended that the APS develop best practice standards for recruitment that uphold the merit principle.

As noted, the principles also build closely on material contained within the current APS Values and are, therefore, familiar to APS agencies and employees. Nonetheless, the Commission would be particularly grateful for any comments that you may have about whether they are appropriate, or any suggestions that you may have about how they could be improved, or comments regarding relevant Commissioner's Directions that could be made to explain their scope and application.

## ***Key questions***

The key questions that you may care to consider are:

Do the proposed values represent what you think should be the values of the APS?

Does this set of values meet the challenge to be 'a smaller set of core values that are meaningful, memorable and effective in driving change?'

As public servants, will these values help you make decisions about your work and conduct in the APS?

Although each value is as important as another, do you have any comments about the order in which they might be listed?

Do the employment principles give us the right framework for managing the employment relationship?

## ***Development of the proposed values***

### ***Starting point***

The first round of consultation confirmed that there is very strong support for making the APS Values simpler, easier to understand, memorable and more relevant to the way in which public servants fulfill their responsibilities and serve the Australian people.

Stakeholders external to the APS and agencies and employees within the APS most commonly suggested values represented by single words: for example, ethics; professionalism; transparency; consultation; responsiveness; and service. There was also support for respect, honesty, fairness, innovation, efficiency and leadership.

Some respondents also noted a need to include the protection and promotion of human rights. Another theme strongly supported was that of delivering service to the community, including engagement with the community, collaboration and responsiveness to community needs.

Leadership was a value supported by some respondents, to apply to the way leaders will engage with other employees in the APS, through demonstrating best practice and leading by example, and also to apply to APS leadership in the community to promote innovative policy solutions.

Respondents were generally supportive of impartiality as a core value, although it was not always identified specifically and was often discussed in terms of being incorporated into values such as professionalism, excellence and integrity. Several respondents noted in particular that the concept of impartiality should be applied in the broadest sense, and include decisions and interactions with the community. In this sense, impartiality includes elements of detachment, freedom from bias, and fairness.

Many respondents noted the importance of maintaining merit as a binding principle in the APS, to apply not only to the way in which the APS makes employment decisions, but as a description of the broader commitment to making the best decisions on each occasion, to act in the public interest.

However, there was not strong support for the retention of merit or merit-based employment as a separate value in its own right. It was suggested by some that it could be encompassed in a value associated with fairness (and/or equality, professionalism and excellence). Others contended that it did not belong in the values, but could be included elsewhere in the Public Service Act, such as in a set of employment principles.

Most respondents who commented on agency-specific values supported the continuation of the flexibility for agencies to develop their own values. This was seen as a useful tool that allows individual agencies to highlight issues of particular relevance to their work and required business principles and outcomes.

The first discussion paper also asked for strategies to embed the new values. The Commission will be consulting further on these issues in the near future.

## ***Developing the values***

A few general comments:

- It is important that a value statement is clearly understood in a consistent way. A short supporting statement has been developed to provide additional context and expand on the intended meaning of the value. Whenever published it is envisaged that the value will be accompanied by this descriptor.
- Many values were suggested in the first round of consultation, and many of these reflected similar intentions and meanings. The proposed new values set is aimed at best capturing the intentions of the various proposals and meeting the objectives for the new values outlined in the first discussion paper.
- Values can have overlapping concepts. Behaviours can sometimes be described in the context of a number of values.
- The proposed values are designed to be well balanced although, as is currently the case, there may be tensions between them. The relative importance of each of the values will depend upon the circumstance to which they are being applied and there will be occasions when public servants will need to consider carefully how they balance the demands of interacting values.

## ***Committed to service***

*We take pride in being professional, impartial and efficient, and in achieving the best results for the Government and the Australian community.*

There was strong support for a value that recognised the importance of managing our relationships with external stakeholders properly, particularly to reflect the importance of fair and responsive service, including effective engagement with the community. A commitment to service also applies to agencies providing a regulatory function or services within the APS, in which it can be understood in the broader context of policy advice and public administration. This is captured in identifying that a commitment to service applies to the way in which public servants perform all their functions.

‘Commitment to Service’ encompasses the effective, transparent, efficient and impartial implementation of government policies and programs to serve the entire Australian community. It incorporates collaboration with the community, innovation and teamwork, and sets the requirement that public servants will deliver high quality and effective results, and manage change effectively. It includes the notion of being citizen-focussed.

This value explicitly articulates the pride that public servants can take from the fact that they have been trusted with the responsibility of delivering services to the community on behalf of the Government. In performing all their functions, public servants can take pride in the positive impact that they have in achieving the best results.

‘Professional’ is used to incorporate ideas of excellence, diligence and that public servants should be trained and competent to perform their work. It includes exercising sound judgement.

‘Impartial’ is included here to emphasise that day-to-day decisions and interactions with the community and with colleagues should be fair and free from bias.

'Efficient' means ensuring the best possible outcomes are achieved at the lowest possible cost. It means managing the collective performance of the Service to enable the capacity, flexibility and level of responsiveness necessary to deliver the Government's priorities within defined budgets. It includes having at all times a culture of achievement, innovation and continuous improvement, where proper planning and the establishment of priorities deliver the intended results at least cost.

'Commitment to Service' also includes being responsive to Ministers in the sense of:

- being knowledgeable about the Government's stated policies
- being sensitive to the intent and direction of policy, taking a thoughtful and creative approach to the development of policy options
- taking a whole-of-government view
- being well informed about the issues involved
- having the capacity to plan for and discuss short and long term priorities, being forward looking
- providing practical and realistic options and assessing their costs, benefits and consequences
- carrying out decisions and implementing programs promptly, conscientiously, efficiently and effectively.

### ***Ethical***

*We are trustworthy and act with integrity.*

Many respondents noted values of professionalism, integrity, honesty, fairness, impartiality, and trust. An 'Ethical' value aims to encompass all of these ideas. Ethical behaviour goes beyond doing what is technically and legally correct; it is about doing what is right and proper.

Ethics and integrity are inherent in sound leadership that supports courage and innovation. These qualities are demonstrated in the promotion of best practice and the development of responsive policy initiatives.

Ethical behaviour supports the public's confidence in government and the democratic process.

'Trustworthy' reflects that public servants will behave in a way that is honest, fair and equitable, and will engender trust.

'Integrity' is included to describe behaviour that is sound, complete and reliable. It reinforces the notion that public servants can be trusted to do what they say they will do.

Being ethical also includes public servants upholding all of the behaviours set out in the APS Code of Conduct, as well as reporting and addressing unacceptable behaviour.

## ***Respectful***

*All people have worth. We respect everyone we deal with: their rights, their heritage, their hopes, and their views.*

Many respondents indicated strong support for a value of Respect.

The value of Respectful is intended to underpin all relationships, both external and internal. It reflects that public servants regard all people as having value and worth. All people will be treated with respect – stakeholders, clients, customers and colleagues – regardless of the circumstances. It includes respect for individuals and for their diversity, and being open to ideas, especially in relation to policy-making and working collaboratively with the community.

Respect is an important part of trust where actions are reinforced by integrity.

Respect for others can be identified as a component of many other values, such as professionalism and ethics. However, there was strong support for a value of Respect as a statement in its own right.

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of human rights issues in policy development and decision making. Where respect is the underlying principle for treatment of all people, it also encompasses respect for, and promotion of, human rights. A value of Respectful embraces the principle that people are individuals, and that their rights should be recognised.

In your view, would this value best be represented by the word 'Respectful' or 'Respect'?

## ***Accountable***

*We are openly accountable to the Australian community through the framework of Ministerial responsibility.*

Many respondents supported accountability and transparency as core APS Values.

The APS is more able to assist government to deliver results for the community, and achieve the engagement and co-operation of the community, when that community has confidence in the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service. This depends upon the ability of public servants to give a full and honest account of their actions. 'Openly accountable' is included to reflect transparency, and the requirement that public servants can effectively explain the actions they take, and be held accountable for them.

This value is also intended to describe the unique position of the APS in the Westminster system of Government, where:

- Governments are accountable to the Australian people at elections.
- Ministers are responsible for the overall administration of their portfolios and are accountable to Parliament for the exercise of Ministerial authority.
- Public servants are accountable to Ministers for the exercise of authority and through them to Parliament.

In addition, the value reflects the fact that public servants are accountable for their performance through agency management systems.

## ***Apolitical***

*We perform our functions impartially and provide the Government with advice that is frank, honest, timely and based on the best available evidence.*

Most respondents supported the notion that the APS should identify its political impartiality in a distinct value. This reflects the distinctive identity of the APS, the specific role that it has and the work that the Service performs. This concept has been described as being at the core of the professionalism of the APS.

'Apolitical' has been selected as the best description of advice and actions that are unaffected by political bias. Public servants engage with, and are responsive to, the elected Government. They provide the same high standard of policy advice, implementation and professional support, irrespective of which political party is in power.

'Impartial' is used here to apply to the way public servants perform their functions, including the way they conduct themselves in the community and provide advice to Government. Actions and advice are objective, non-partisan and unbiased. It also includes supporting the Government to explain policy in a non-partisan way, when required.

'Frank' is used to describe advice that is comprehensive and unaffected by fear of consequences. It does not withhold or gloss over important, known facts or bad news.

'Honest' and 'timely' further describe the nature of advice to Government. It is advice that is based on the best available evidence. It is politically neutral but not politically naïve, and takes a long term view.

## **Proposed values framework**

The proposed values framework is:

- a set of five new APS Values—each supported by a short description that clarifies their intent
- a set of statutory Employment Principles that will incorporate the current values that guide the APS as an employer
- binding Commissioner Directions that determine the scope and application of the employment principles and values
- a Code of Conduct, supporting the employment principles and new values
- amended Public Service Commissioner's guidelines *APS Values and Code of Conduct in Practice - A Guide to Official Conduct for APS Employees and Agency Heads*, providing practical examples of how the new APS Values, Employment Principles, and Code of Conduct apply in day to day work situations for public servants.

## **Your comments**

You are asked to provide your comments on this proposed set of values and employment principles to the Commission by 12 November.

An online discussion forum has been established for APS employees. The forum will be open from 27 October to 12 November and can be found at [www.ourvalues.govspace.gov.au](http://www.ourvalues.govspace.gov.au).

Stakeholders and APS employees can also send comments and submissions directly to [ourvalues@apsc.gov.au](mailto:ourvalues@apsc.gov.au).

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