Policy Skills Framework

Development, insights and application
The Policy Project aims to improve the performance of the policy function and quality of policy advice across government. The Policy Project is hosted in DPMC and jointly funded by government agencies with significant policy functions.

Key to the success of the programme is the involvement and ownership of the New Zealand policy community in the design and implementation of the tools produced under the auspices of the Policy Project. In practice, this involves an ongoing conversation with the policy community to:

- Identify, celebrate and share existing good practice
- Build collective ownership of the policy system, the desired future state and a programme of improvement activities
- Encourage and facilitate collective approaches to improving performance or policy capability where it makes sense
- Co-develop new products, tools and resources to improve the performance of the policy function and quality of policy advice across government

The Policy Skills Framework is one the key tools co-developed with and for the policy community. It supports a Policy Quality Framework (focused on policy advice) and a Policy Capability Framework (focused on the policy function or ‘policy shop’).
What is the Policy Skills Framework?

The delivery of high quality responsive policy advice requires an ongoing supply of policy professionals with a common set of transferable core knowledge, policy skills and behaviours.

The Policy Skills Framework (PSF) is a common description of the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of the modern policy professional. Rather than focusing on competencies, the framework outlines the mix of skills policy practitioners need. It allows for varying levels of experience in each component (from developing to expert/leading) acknowledging that individuals have different strengths (skills breadth and depth).

Why a PSF?

In various forums facilitated by the Policy Project, policy leaders have expressed difficulties finding and retaining top talent.

Currently agencies largely operate as silos and compete for policy staff. There is no common view of what a great policy analyst/senior/principal analyst/advisor looks like and there is a multitude of different role descriptions and competencies. Some agencies complain they are constantly outbid. Other agencies may be appointing staff to levels above what they are ready for. ‘Title creep’ is an issue. There have been few coordinated efforts to address capability gaps or develop system-wide training offerings.

Policy Project engagements with the policy community and a comprehensive scan of agencies’ talent management material have established that there is a high-degree of commonality in the core skills desired by policy agencies and growing support for a system-wide approach to people capability. By providing a common, agreed view of the desired policy skill set the PSF provides a foundation for a system-wide approach to a variety of policy people capability challenges.

“How we develop policy needs to adapt to the changing context by incorporating new skill sets that enable us to confidently draw on user/citizen insights and be effective at networking, relationship management, commissioning, brokerage and facilitation. These complement the traditional policy skills of problem identification, rigorous analysis of options, trade-offs and risks, the application of methodologies that assess costs, benefits and regulatory impact, and building in feedback loops (including from the frontline) through evaluation.”

The Policy Project: narrative and direction of travel
What a PSF provides

On the **demand side**, the skills framework will help policy managers articulate the skills mix they require when recruiting, and help them to map the overall skills profile of their teams and any gaps and overlaps.

It also provides the foundation for the senior policy community to agree on levels – developing, practicing, expert/leading – for each component in the skills framework and expectations for key levels of the policy workforce – analyst, senior analyst, principal analyst and beyond. It could enable a more collective approach to training (both formal and on-the-job).

The PSF has potential to support and signal diverse policy career pathways. It provides a platform for a future articulation of ‘policy archetypes’—deep analytical expert, engagement specialist, policy innovator/entrepreneur—reflecting the growing consensus that the policy community requires diversity, not a one-size-fits-all conception of the policy analyst/advisor role.

On the **supply side**, a common skills framework will allow individuals to show their skills and experience profile – their policy kete. Individuals have different strengths and may be operating at different levels depending on the skill domain. For example, an individual could be expert at engagement and collaboration but less skilled at project management. The PSF allows an individual to show their breadth and depth and where they can contribute most to a policy team/process.
How has the PSF been developed?

The first prototype PSF was co-designed at a workshop that brought together two Policy Project cross-agency working groups; the policy quality working group (focussed on designing a Policy Quality Framework) and the people capability insights group (focussed on identifying issues related to policy skills, knowledge and training).

The aim of the workshop was to crash though the 'chicken and egg' challenge – what comes first, the toolbox (the what) or the skills and training (the who and the how)? This conversation tracker (933KB PDF) captures the outcomes of the workshop and the first prototype policy skills framework (opposite).

The Policy Project team were tasked to work with volunteers from policy agencies to continue refining the model to:

- Reduce the number of components and attempt to further theme/categorise the skills, and identify any gaps
- Describe each component and level of expertise eg. developing, practicing, expert/leading
Testing and iterating

Earlier prototypes were tested and refined against the Policy Value Adding Model, first set out in The Policy Project – responsive today, shaping tomorrow, recognising that the level and range of skills required is dependent on the degree of change sought as a policy outcome. Transformational shifts require skills at the ‘high art’ end of the spectrum, reflected in the expert/leading skills descriptions.

Insights from Tier 2 Policy Leaders Network sessions and Forums for policy analysts and managers further informed the development of the PSF components, as did conversations with recruitment agencies working in the policy space.

The next SPF prototype drew on a systematic scan of policy competency frameworks and policy job descriptions currently in use across NZ government agencies, as well as some international exemplars (UK, Canada, Australia). It also separated out some underpinning public service generic skills, not specific to policy roles, which can be simply referenced in the policy skills framework.

This prototype and related descriptions was tested with an inter-agency group in March 2016. The final prototype and descriptors were developed on the basis of that feedback.
**Key insights along the way**

**Commonalities exist**
Extant policy competency models all contain a core element of policy activities. The PSF gives depth and clarity to the definition of generic applied skills applicable to all policy practitioners.

**Looking to the future**
The PSF emphasises the skills needed for truly exceptional policy work in an environment that is fast, collaborative and innovative. It reflects ‘getting the basics right’ as well as signalling areas where practice is fledgling e.g. methods to generate customer/user insights, design-thinking.

**Job titles are not aligned across agencies**
Strong commonalities exist in job titles at Policy Graduate > Policy Analyst > Senior Analyst. However, significant variety exists in the seniority and expectations for roles titled Principal or Chief Policy Analyst/Director. The expert/leading description in the PSF sets a high bar for the abilities required at that level.

**Attitude matters**
Woven into the descriptors is the narrative that a person’s conduct and mindset is important. Integrity, impartiality and a desire to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of New Zealanders underpin policy work.

**Conversation is key**
A skills framework is primarily a tool that supports discussions – at recruitment, about performance and development, about capability - as distinct from a precise measurement or points system.

**Managers manage**
Invariably agencies apply separate competencies for policy managers that predominantly focus on the profession of management, which as a result are not included in this framework. The public service wide ‘Leadership Success Profile’ is referenced as an underpinning public service foundation for non-specific leadership roles.

**A range of tools to suit the application**
A range of tools suited to different users of the framework can be developed as required. Some foundation tools have been developed, e.g for an individual articulating their policy profile, a manager reviewing the skills make-up of their team (see annex).

**A foundation for future products and standards**
The PSF is a building block for future products such as an assessment of policy training provided, qualifications, cross-agency recruitment panels, secondments etc. These can be developed later if and when there is an appetite for them. Similarly, the PSF provides a foundation for departments to collectively decide on standardised definitions and requirements for the various levels of policy staff. This would enable consistency in job titles across the Public Service policy workforce and mitigate alleged ‘title creep’.
Critical success factor for the PSF

The overall PSF was tested for the following success factors:

**Functionality**
- Is scalable and can be used to assess capability at the agency, business unit or policy team level
- Retains core integrity but can be adapted by agencies
- Can diagnose and signal areas for improvement
- Helps agencies to meet related central agency reporting requirements (Treasury policy measurement exercise, 4-year plan workforce capability response)

**Usability**
- Easy to use
- Accessible (Policy Project website or future portal)
- Balances efficiency and effectiveness (relatively painless in terms of effort and resources required)

**Maintenance**
- Can be refreshed to reflect ‘the new normal’ by incorporating lessons learnt and changing expectations.

Applications – how the PSF can be used

The PSF provides the foundation for a range of applications:

- To map an individual’s skill set and levels of expertise, and use as a touchstone for development planning
- For diagnosing whether policy teams are ‘fit-for-purpose’ and identifying gaps and skills oversupply
- As a reference menu to construct policy roles and teams
- To illustrate a range of policy career pathways
- To demonstrate the skills drawn on at different stages of an end-to-end policy work stream
- In recruitment processes
Policy Skills Framework

Knowledge (what I know)
- Domain Knowledge
- Government Systems & Processes
- Political Context & Priorities

Applied Skills (what I can do)
- Evidence, Insights & Evaluation
- Analysis
- Design for Implementation
- Plan & Manage Work
- Advise & Influence

Behaviour (how I am/act)
- Strategic Thinking
- Feedback & Coaching
- Communication
- Engagement & Collaboration
- Improvement & Innovation
- Agility
- Political Savvy

Public Service Foundations
- Core State Sector Legislation
- Leadership Success Profile
- Code of Conduct
- Treaty of Waitangi
- Machinery of Government
### Policy Skills Framework - Descriptors

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Applied Skills</th>
<th>Behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(what I know)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(what I can do)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(how I am/act)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domain Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evidence, Insights &amp; Evaluation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Improvement &amp; Innovation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject matter expertise</td>
<td>Gather and generate evidence to support analysis</td>
<td>Seek ways to ‘do things better’ and ‘do better things’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Government Systems &amp; Processes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Agility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet and Parliamentary processes and other requirements relevant to policy making</td>
<td>Apply analytical frameworks and methods to evidence</td>
<td>Responsive to change and resilient to uncertainty and setbacks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political Context &amp; Priorities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Design for Implementation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Political Savvy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government priorities and relevant political context</td>
<td>Design policy proposals to include workable delivery &amp; implementation options</td>
<td>Navigate issues, relationships and situations with sensitivity to the political context</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plan &amp; Manage Work</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(what I know)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Applied Skills</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(how I am/act)</strong></td>
<td>Incorporate longer-term and broad system perspectives to shape policy trajectories</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement &amp; Collaboration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feedback &amp; Coaching</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage stakeholders and build relationship capital to understand diverse expectations, co-create solutions and support implementation</td>
<td>Constructive challenge and feedback to develop the capability of individuals and teams</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliver clear and compelling messages fit for purpose and audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plan &amp; Manage Work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Engagement &amp; Collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure advice is delivered using the right mix of resources &amp; right touch project management method</td>
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Putting it into practice ...

Start using the PSF for example:

- When assessing team skills make-up and gaps
- For development conversations with policy staff
- When constructing policy teams (including cross agency teams)
- When planning training/skills upgrades – both on-the-job and formal
- When refreshing skills or competency frameworks
- Ask recruitment agencies to use when recruiting new staff

Share the lessons – help build capability across the system

The Policy Project team is available to support agencies to use the PSF.

We encourage agencies and users to document their journey and share their lessons learnt, including insights related to the PSF functionality and usability.

This will help us to iterate and improve the PCF for future users.
The following tools have been developed for:

**Developing self**
- describing an individual’s policy profile and related questions for assessment and discussion -

- [Map your policy skills profile](DOC 5.4 KB)

**Developing the team**
- describing the skills mix of a policy team and related questions for developing a team and/or developing a cross-agency or project-based team -

- [Map your team’s policy skills profile](DOC 1.9 MB)