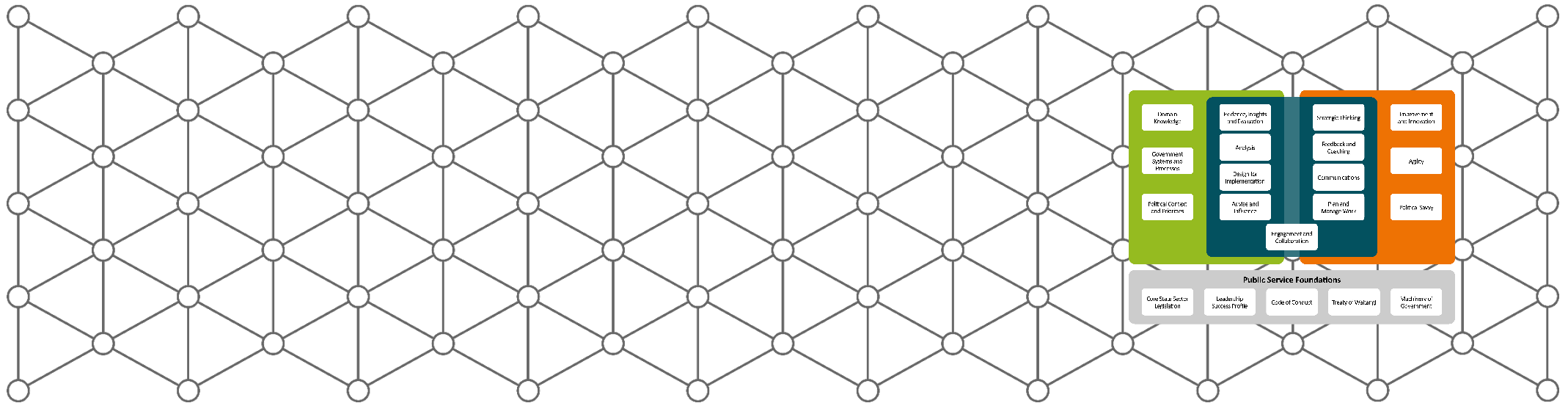




# The Policy Project

Responsive today,  
shaping tomorrow

## Policy Skills Framework



# Contents

The Policy Skills Framework and how it can be used .....	3
Detailed descriptors.....	5
Domain Knowledge .....	5
Government Systems and Processes.....	6
Political Context and Priorities.....	7
Evidence, Insights and Evaluation.....	8
Analysis .....	9
Design for Implementation.....	10
Advise and Influence.....	11
Engagement and Collaboration .....	12
Strategic Thinking.....	13
Feedback and coaching.....	14
Communication.....	15
Plan and Manage Work.....	16
Improvement and Innovation.....	17
Agility .....	18
Political Savvy.....	19

# Purpose of this document

The Policy Skills Framework describes the mix of knowledge, skills and behaviours a modern policy practitioner requires – to be able to deliver quality policy advice.

Each element of the Framework is described at varying levels of experience and competence (from developing, through practising to expert/leading). This acknowledges the variety in the mix of skills (in breadth and depth) that policy practitioners can have over the course of their careers.

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The Policy Project  
c/o The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160  
New Zealand

Email: [policy.project@dpmc.govt.nz](mailto:policy.project@dpmc.govt.nz)

Website: [www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project](http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project)

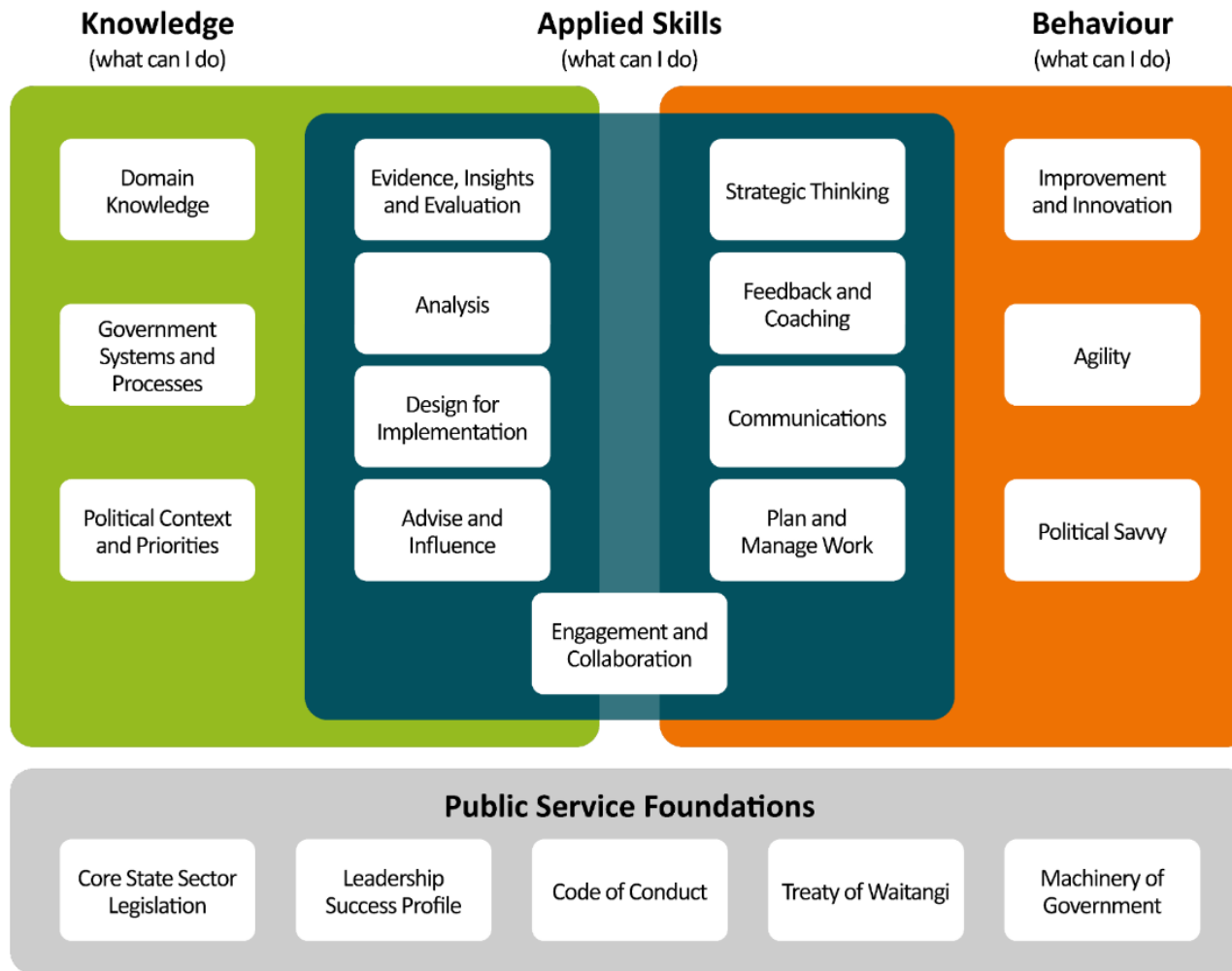
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# The Policy Skills Framework and how it can be used



The Policy Skills Framework provides the foundation for:

- mapping an individual's skill set and levels of expertise, and identifying priorities for development planning (see [Map your policy skills profile](#))
- diagnosing whether policy teams are 'fit for purpose' and identifying gaps and skills oversupply (see [Map your team's policy skills profile](#))
- constructing policy roles and teams, using it as a reference menu
- illustrating a range of policy career pathways
- demonstrating the skills drawn on at different stages of an end-to-end policy workstream
- recruitment processes (in job descriptions, adverts, interview questions and exercises, and referee checking).

Each of the knowledge, applied skills, and behaviours is described at three levels:



Developing

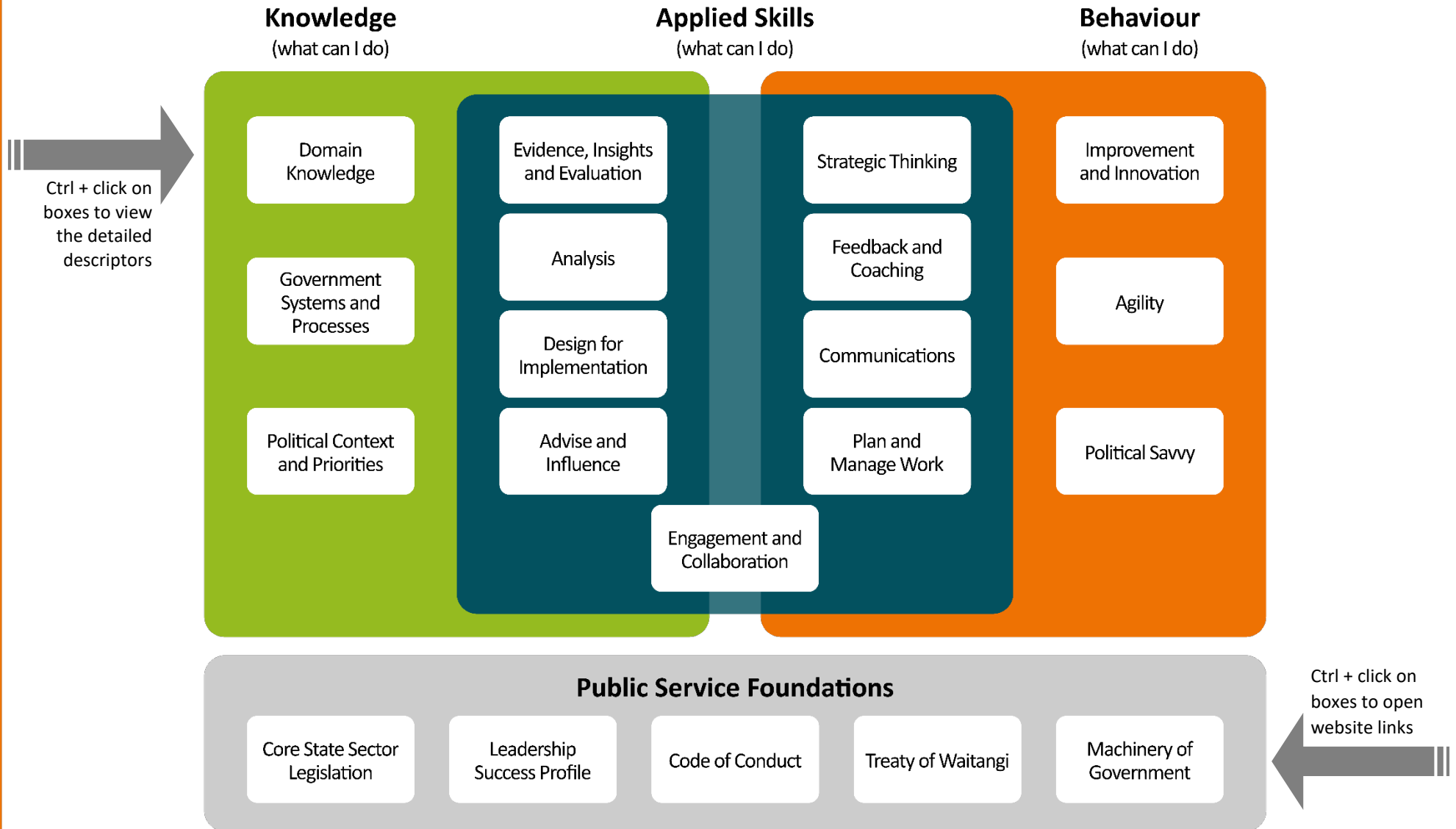


Practising



Expert / leading

# Policy Skills Framework



# Detailed descriptors

## Domain Knowledge

Specialist subject matter expertise

### Developing



- Acquiring subject matter knowledge relevant to the work of the agency and sector.
- Building technical know-how on the legal, regulatory and service delivery frameworks.

### Practising



- Has solid subject matter knowledge of policy issues and the current policy and regulatory settings.
- Is advancing practical understanding of the domain and sharing knowledge with others.

### Expert / Leading



- Is a subject leader for the agency in the domain.
- Is recognised as a thought leader in a field of knowledge and builds agency credibility by:
  - contributing to the knowledge base
  - sharing, synthesising and influencing thinking
  - forging links with the academic community.

## Government Systems and Processes

Cabinet and Parliamentary processes and other requirements relevant to policy making

### Developing



Learning the processes and requirements related to:

- Cabinet (Cabinet Manual, Cabinet paper development, officials' roles related to Cabinet committee meetings)
- Parliament (e.g. New Zealand legislation, process of Bills through all stages in the House, including Select Committee scrutiny)
- central agency requirements related to submissions of policy proposals (e.g. Impact Analysis Requirements, Better Business Cases).

### Practising



- Understands and follows processes to ensure policy proposals meet the requirements of Cabinet and Parliamentary processes (including liaising with and instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel Office relating to legislative change).
- Can apply required frameworks and processes to policy proposals (e.g. Impact Analysis Requirements, Better Business Cases).

### Expert / Leading



- Understands and leads others in the effective processes of policy proposals, including on large-scale, complex cross government programmes through:
  - relevant budgetary cycle and funding arrangements
  - Cabinet committee processes
  - legislative and Parliamentary processes.

## Political Context and Priorities

Understand government priorities and relevant political context

### Developing



- Becoming aware of the Government's agenda and priorities, and where your agency's work fits.
- Developing knowledge of the agency's political context (stakeholders, thought leaders and commentators, and current issues).
- Growing understanding of the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for policy-making in their work domain.

### Practising



- Understands government priorities, the current political context for and the historical context of their policy area.
- Can clearly articulate how their work area contributes to the agency's policy work programme and government priorities.
- Understands the obligations of the Crown under the Treaty of Waitangi in their work domain.

### Expert / Leading



- Is highly skilled at gaining clarity from ministers and senior leaders on desired outcome, scope and appetite for risk related to new, curbed or redirected spending – in order to shape new policy directions and programmes.
- Scans, anticipates and responds to changes in government priorities and pressures throughout the Parliamentary and election cycle, and to trends or significant shifts in context.
- Shares information and insights to ensure colleagues are well-informed about issues affecting the agency, government and wider policy ecosystem.
- Thoroughly understands the obligations of the Crown under the Treaty of Waitangi and expectation of Māori in their work domain.

## Evidence, Insights and Evaluation

Gather and generate evidence to support analysis

### Developing



- Becoming familiar with how to use evidence throughout the policy cycle.
- Growing an understanding of the different kinds of qualitative and quantitative evidence, evidence sources and evaluation types.
- Learning how to summarise and synthesise evidence to draw conclusions (e.g. on key issues, their magnitude, root causes and possible solutions).
- Learning how to incorporate end-user perspectives accurately and empathetically into analysis.

### Practising



- Can synthesise diverse information and evidence, distil what is important, and use it to tell a coherent story.
- Can competently assess the quality and limitations of evidence, data and research. Understands empirical methodology, principles of data integrity, and the basics of statistical analysis.
- Understands methodologies for drawing insights from the 'citizen-as-customer' and the frontline, and how those insights can inform policy.
- Can identify measurable and meaningful indicators of effectiveness, plan (and possibly execute) fit-for-purpose evaluations, and extract lessons learnt to help build an ongoing evidence base.

### Expert / Leading



- Applies expert knowledge to lead others in developing strong evidence-informed policy.
- Develops and guides others on the right lines of inquiry.
- Draws on the right capabilities to mine data and use 'big data' for insights that can enable better decisions and create value.
- Can commission and/or execute monitoring and evaluations, and build their findings into policy development, at early and subsequent stages in the policy cycle.



## Analysis

Apply analytical frameworks and methods to make sense of evidence

### Developing



- Learning about the range of analytical frameworks that can be used in policy analysis including:
  - academic disciplines (e.g. various schools of economics, political science, sociology) and the frameworks they offer for making sense of what is happening and why
  - sectoral and system frameworks (e.g. Treasury's living standards framework, natural resources sector framework)
  - decision-making frameworks (e.g. cost benefit analysis, multi-criteria analysis, risk analysis, regulatory impact analysis, business cases, decision trees).
- Can prepare draft analysis with guidance.

### Practising



- Has deeper and broader experience in applying different analytical frameworks, and understands their underlying assumptions and limitations and their appropriateness for different types and complexities of policy challenges.
- Can make sense of evidence and turn it into insightful advice that tells a coherent story (e.g. about the problem or opportunity, its magnitude and causes, who is affected and how, and a proposed pathway to achieve desired outcomes) – while being transparent about how issues are framed (inherent bias) and gaps in evidence.
- Can guide less experienced staff to undertake specific analysis and identify, direct or commission specialists where particular expertise is required.

### Expert / Leading



- Can thoughtfully apply new and emerging methods of analysis and problem solving (e.g. design thinking, behavioural analysis), articulate their advantages and disadvantages, and lead the adaption or development of common frameworks, principles, methodologies, tools and techniques.
- Coaches others in standard and emerging methods of analysis.
- Able to translate complex evidence into insightful analysis that supports advice by continuously:
  - testing underlying assumptions/bias
  - asking questions that encourage critical thinking
  - testing feasibility of policy options and likely benefits, costs and risks for different groups and stakeholders.
- Employs deep critical thinking skills and uses breakthrough methods to find solutions to challenging problems.

## Design for Implementation

Design policy proposals to include workable delivery and implementation options

### Developing



- Learning how to develop policy options with implementation in mind by becoming familiar with:
  - the range of policy instruments used to deliver policy intent (such as incentives, subsidies, regulation, service delivery and behavioural nudges)
  - the organisational expertise you need to involve to make policy work (e.g. legal, finance, procurement, operations, service delivery partners), and the importance of involving them and service users in 'end-to-end' and 'outside in' processes.

### Practising



- Can confidently include delivery options in policy design, consistently thinking 'end to end'. This means being able to:
  - use implementation-focused decision-making models (e.g. Impact Analysis Requirements, Better Business Cases)
  - assess the impact of factors like benefits, costs, and risks, and the assumptions they are based on
  - include frontline staff in early and later stages of policy design
  - engage with other experts to convey or seek advice on implementation requirements.

### Expert / Leading



- Leads decisions on the choice of policy instruments using rigorous criteria and proven design frameworks so that options are feasible. This means being able to:
  - constructively challenge traditional delivery mechanisms and actively examine alternative mechanisms (e.g. via new technologies, non-regulatory levers, new partnerships)
  - systematically identify and address internal and external issues, challenges and risks that could affect implementation
  - build relationships with potential delivery partners, inside and outside government, to test option viability, resolve problems and identify efficiencies
  - develop robust delivery roadmaps that are collaborative, assign accountabilities and enable adjustment if circumstances change.

## Advise and Influence

Deliver advice that is robust, free and frank, compelling

### Developing



- Learning how to use a range of techniques to inform ministers and other decision-makers.
- Learning about the constitutional conventions of free and frank advice.
- Contributing to advice that is clear, accurate, well-reasoned, evidence-based, impartial, politically neutral and targeted to the audience (the decision-maker).

### Practising



- Provides free and frank advice to decision-makers that:
  - tells a compelling story
  - has all the relevant information to support the decision
  - puts the decision in context
  - shows what needs to be done to make it happen (through clear, action-oriented and realistic recommendations).
- Can champion decisions and work with others to ensure they are implemented effectively.

### Expert / Leading



- Has credibility and a reputation as a 'trusted' advisor. This means that they are able to:
  - offer proactive free and frank advice to decision-makers, even when it has not been requested
  - frame advice in the context of sector and collective priorities (beyond institutional boundaries)
  - anticipate and time provision of advice to have the greatest influence
  - influence others, shape policy debates, and build 'coalitions of the willing' to ensure decisions are implemented effectively.

## Engagement and Collaboration

Engage stakeholders and the community, and build relationship capital to understand diverse expectations, co-create solutions and support implementation

### Developing



- Learning when, how and who to engage with during the policy development process.
- Is sensitive to other frames of reference, and learns how to gain diverse insights about problems and potential solutions.
- Builds collaborative relationships with counterparts within and across agencies to facilitate working together.

### Practising



- Builds and uses collaborative networks. Engages with openness and respect for diversity of views, and strives to build consensus.
- Can design communication and engagement processes to support joint objectives.
- Understands and uses citizen-centric approaches to identify and develop collectively agreed solutions.

### Expert / Leading



- Builds and draws on relationship capital.
- Determines what needs to be managed across agencies or the system and can skilfully design the process.
- Encourages and enables a customer-centric ethos – reflecting the diverse needs and views of current and future New Zealanders.

## Strategic Thinking

Incorporate longer-term thinking and broad system perspectives to shape policy trajectories

### Developing



- Developing an ability to think conceptually and imaginatively by participating in activities related to setting vision, strategic direction, and achieving outcomes.
- Becoming familiar with the main drivers of change impacting on the areas in which the agency operates.
- Becoming familiar with patterns, links, and synergies between policy issues, portfolios, agencies and sectors.
- Developing an ability to think ahead about next steps. Considers how current action contributes to longer-term policy intent.

### Practising



- Contributes to activities related to setting vision, strategic direction, and achieving longer-term outcomes.
- Understands the broad political, economic and strategic context and the assumptions embedded in them. Identifies links between and across policy issues, organisations and systems.
- Understands current trends, change drivers, emerging states, critical uncertainties and strategic issues related to their work and can incorporate that future focus into policy design.
- Can incorporate thinking about a range of future states into policy design.

### Expert / Leading



- Leads activities related to setting vision, strategic direction and achieving longer-term outcomes. Can translate strategic intent into medium-term plans and activities.
- Articulates the broad strategic context, its drivers and its dominant assumptions, and identifies where and how to intervene to maintain strategic direction.
- Has broad expertise in strategic foresight, including scanning and exploring future states, and can communicate the implications of this foresight for existing policy direction and investment in policy capability.

## Feedback and coaching

Give and receive constructive challenge and feedback to develop the capability of individuals and teams

### Developing



- Actively seeks and learns from constructive feedback.
- Is learning how to work with their own and others' weaknesses, strengths, preferences and personalities.

### Practising



- Invites and offers regular constructive feedback to colleagues.
- Shares knowledge and expertise, and reviews the work of others. Thinks of the work as 'team products' and is active in supporting quality control.
- Accepts responsibility, is self-reflective and can appreciate and work with others.

### Expert / Leading



- Models for others effective ways of giving and receiving constructive feedback and challenge. Can facilitate courageous and difficult conversations on quality and performance.
- Provides 'on-the-job' training of team members through supervision, guidance, coaching and mentoring.
- Cultivates a positive team culture of celebrating achievements and learning from mistakes.

## Communication

Deliver clear and compelling messages fit for purpose and audience

### Developing



- Writes clear, concise, error-free work.
- Learning how to produce a range of written outputs (e.g. aides memoire, briefing notes, A3s, Cabinet papers, presentations, speech notes).
- Is articulate and confident when contributing to discussions.

### Practising



- Writes high-quality advice in a polished, plain English style that is easy to read and has a clear purpose.
- Confidently presents information in the most accessible form, and consistent with the preferences of the audience.
- Can represent their agency's interests at high levels, within boundaries and a clear agenda.

### Expert / Leading



- Produces eloquent written communication that persuades and inspires.
- Mentors and develops the communication skills of others.
- Reduces confusion in commissioning.
- Presents information in a variety of settings and in a way that captures and inspires audiences.
- Is persuasive and compelling in both internal and external interactions.
- Can reliably represent the interests of their agency, even in uncertain territory.

## Plan and Manage Work

Ensure advice is delivered using the right mix of resources and 'right touch' project management methodology

### Developing



- Developing an ability to manage their own workload (e.g. by clarifying priorities, speaking up when at capacity or under-utilised and making thoughtful trade-offs between timeliness and quality).
- Learning about scope, scope management and accepting commissions.
- Learning how to break down their work into logical steps, tasks and estimated time to complete them.
- Becoming reliable and consistent in their output.

### Practising



- Understands the commissioning process, and is active in establishing the mandate and defined deliverables for their own work.
- Manages risks, issues, conflicts, timelines, resourcing and deliverables and knows when to escalate for clarity. Reports on progress as required.
- Can lead simple to moderate complexity policy projects.
- Identifies when commissioned work is project-sized and would benefit from fit-for-purpose project management disciplines.
- Understands a variety of project planning and management techniques and is able to apply these.

### Expert / Leading



- Can translate strategies, priorities and issues into policy projects with clear intent and direction of travel, scope, and level of resources.
- Takes a leadership role in the policy or programme team (including cross-agency), ensuring the right skills and experience are available when required.
- Can establish and manage clear and meaningful governance and decision-making arrangements (managing information flows effectively), reconciling them with line management accountabilities.
- Can apply 'right touch' project management principles to ensure desired outcomes are delivered on time and to the right level of quality, by:
  - adapting the principles agilely in response to uncertainty and change
  - using stakeholder management plans and risk registers appropriately
  - working with stakeholders and functional groups and across related work to ensure plans are realistic, workable and joined up.



## Improvement and Innovation

Seek ways to 'do things better' and 'do better things'

### Developing



- Driven to enhance their own professional development.
- Views mistakes as an opportunity for learning and improvement.
- Broadminded, inquisitive, and harnesses new and innovative ways of working and thinking.

### Practising



- Pursues a diverse range of experiences to build their knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- Participates in robust discussions on the quality of policy processes, insights, and lessons learned.
- Challenges themselves to look beyond their immediate areas of expertise for insights on best practice.
- Has the knowledge and experience to shift from a 'great idea' to a workable solution.

### Expert / Leading



- Seeks opportunities to add value. Uses evaluation and lessons learned to improve future performance and provide fresh perspectives.
- Can lead the 'idea-to-innovation' process. Promotes a culture of being receptive to diverse thinking, insights and new information.
- Fosters experimentation and positive risk-taking. Guides others in deploying innovation and continuous improvement methodologies.
- Creates learning opportunities for other staff.

## Agility

Responsive to change, and resilient to uncertainty and setbacks

### Developing



- Quick to grasp and use new concepts and information.
- Adapts to altered instructions and priorities.
- Recovers quickly from setbacks.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and change.

### Practising



- Understands the policy process is iterative, and adjusts thinking and approach as required.
- Can challenge earlier assumptions or conclusions in light of new information.
- Makes sensible trade-offs between time, risk, quality and completeness.
- Is resilient in the face of change and can switch focus to new priorities.

### Expert / Leading



- Is a proven and respected consultant and supports others in the face of complex and challenging change.
- Is 'strategically opportunistic' – can seize opportunities, integrate new content, collaborate and draw connections that will support policy objectives.
- Is able to manage and prioritise conflicting demands – leads the way in adjusting priorities, redeploying resources and recovering from setbacks.

## Political Savvy

Navigate issues, relationships and situations with sensitivity to the political context

### Developing



- Watches and learns from others considered adept at working with ministers and other internal and external stakeholders.

### Practising



- Builds the trust of ministers and other decision-makers by being responsive and aware of political priorities.
- Understands the various roles played in the policy process and how decisions are made.
- Becoming adept at interpreting and navigating sensitive situations, relationships and competing interests, including between different policy portfolios.
- Able to influence and build alignment between issues and people.

### Expert / Leading



- Sustains trust-based relationship with ministers, other decision-makers and key stakeholders. Can have respectful and sometimes 'uncomfortable' conversations without damaging those relationships.
- Highly adept at building alignment and alliances between competing interests and agendas.
- Helps shape the authorising environment by being able to influence the thinking and behaviour of others.
- Anticipates and times advice for when it can have the most influence and impact.