



Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values

Good Practice Checklist for Agency Heads—Supporting Ministers, Upholding the APS Values

Roles and responsibilities of agency heads and the executive

- Have you clarified and regularly reviewed expectations of Ministers about the service expected from the agency, any general requirements for implementing government policies and programmes, and how these might be met consistent with the APS Values and any other legislative requirements?
- Have you involved Ministers and their staff in corporate planning processes, as one means of setting out expectations around standards of service?
- Have you included performance indicators in relation to standards of service in Portfolio Budget Statements and do you monitor them through annual reports?
- Have you provided a feedback form or section at the end of briefs going to Ministers' offices?
- Have you articulated policies and procedures or provided written protocols to guide agency staff in meeting service standards agreed with Ministers consistent with the APS Values and Code of Conduct and any other legal requirements?
- Do you discuss with the Minister, at least on an annual basis, the quality of service that has been provided, as part of your performance assessment where relevant and as one input to the assessment of the performance of your senior managers?
- Do you invite the Minister's Chief of Staff and advisers to meetings of the agency's executive or management committee at least once a year, to discuss mutual support for the Minister and any issues arising from the respective roles and responsibilities of the agency and the office, including APS employees' responsibility to uphold the APS Values?
- Do you demonstrate senior management's support for Values-based decision-making, by incorporating questions in agency staff attitude surveys asking employees about their level of confidence in the decision-making processes of managers during interactions with Ministers and their offices?

Senior managers

- Do you foster an environment that encourages discussions around the practical implementation of the APS Values concerning interactions with Ministers and their offices, and remind Senior Executive Service staff in particular of their responsibilities to promote the Values, and their responsibilities as leaders to encourage discussions of ethical behaviour and uphold the Values in working with Ministers and their offices?
- Do you regularly remind senior managers of their responsibility to provide staff with ongoing support in managing their relations with Ministers and their advisers?
- Do you encourage the Senior Executive Service to regularly advise and mentor staff on managing relations with Ministers' offices? Do you encourage managers to create opportunities for mentoring and one-to-one training that canvasses relations with Ministers and working closely with the Minister's office?
- Do you encourage the Senior Executive Service to put in place arrangements to ensure they are regularly advised on the extent and content of informal exchanges that are taking place between staff for whom they are responsible and the Minister's office?
- Do you encourage all staff to approach senior managers and/or a central area of expertise and support, rather than be left to make decisions on their own and feel isolated?
- Do you provide regular feedback to all staff on particular priorities and requirements of particular Ministers?
- Have you emphasised to senior managers the importance of adhering to agency policies, procedures and written protocols, and their responsibility to disseminate them amongst all relevant staff?
- Are you openly available to senior managers and their staff who have questions or are seeking advice, including with respect to your or the executive's approach in particular cases?
- Have you ensured that executive management makes itself personally accountable for ensuring that sound file management practices are followed?
- Do you encourage senior managers to take relevant line staff to meetings with Ministers and/or their advisers, provided this is agreed with the Minister's office?
- Do you encourage senior managers to debrief employees after meetings with the Minister's office, to give them feedback on material they have prepared for the meeting, possible future directions and priorities, and other relevant matters arising during the course of the meeting itself?
- Do you encourage employees to convey to senior managers any concerns that the information they have provided to the Minister's office or to the media has been presented inaccurately? Are senior managers encouraged to keep employees in touch with any steps that have been taken to address their concerns?

Non-Cabinet Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries

- Do you encourage staff to take up the line difficulties which may arise over time in a portfolio with more than one Minister or their offices so they can be handled by the senior leadership, who can ensure that the matter is raised with Ministers or Chiefs or Staff in the broader context?
- Do you encourage senior staff to raise any operational inconsistencies that arise from the existence of more than one Minister's office in the portfolio with the Chiefs of Staff of the Ministers concerned so that they can manage the interface?
- Have you nominated a deputy to ensure that a particular non-Cabinet Minister is kept in touch with relevant general departmental communications as well as those tailored to that Minister's particular functions?

Departmental Liaison Officers (DLOs)

- In selecting the DLO, have you considered, subject to the Minister's requirements, making the appointment at sufficiently senior levels to ensure that agency advice is put on the table and that complex agency procedures can be fully explained to the Minister or advisers, and to provide relevant feedback to agency heads?
- Have you fully briefed and prepared DLOs for their role in Ministers' offices, including making clear to them their role as a member of the Minister's team and their role as a departmental officer?
- Have you ensured a careful and cautious approach to performance assessment of DLOs, ensuring feedback is obtained from both the Chief of Staff and relevant agency managers (or providing a prior set of payment in lieu of performance pay while the officer is in the DLO position)?

- Have you considered a short rotation scheme for graduate trainees or other junior staff with strong potential, to assist an experienced DLO in a Minister's office?

Disbursement of grants and making appointments

- Have you ensured that both the Minister's office and relevant employees are fully briefed on the processes under which grants schemes and appointments processes operate, including any statutory constraints that may apply. Where appropriate, have you discussed and/or agreed proposed guidelines with the Minister?

Budget processes

- Have you covered off process arrangements for Budget preparation in incoming government briefs and in training provided by the agency for new advisers?
- Have you ensured that Ministerial staff understand key features of the Budget process, including the importance of establishing reasonable timeframes and any consultation processes the government wishes to establish.
- Have you taken steps to establish close and iterative consultation processes in relation to Budget issues between senior managers and advisers under your guidance and that of Ministers?
- Have you ensured that Budget costings agreed with the Minister and advisers reflect the form of appropriation that is most appropriately aligned to the budgeted activity?

Assistance with media issues and public presentations by public servants

- Have you developed guidelines for dealing with media inquiries that clearly outline how the agency will handle them, and the relationship between the agency and the Minister's office in these cases?
- Do you have policies which delineate clearance processes and if relevant, outline the role for the agency's public affairs area?
- Have you ensured that employees are aware that they are able to raise with their senior managers any concerns that the information they have provided has been presented inaccurately?
- Do you ensure relevant staff are aware of and follow the guidance from the Australian Government Information Management Office on the placement of Ministerial media releases and speeches?

Good practice documentation handling

- Have you designated an area such as a Ministerial liaison group to be the champion of the broader objectives of the principles, policies and agency protocols governing interactions with Ministers and their advisers? This includes, but is not limited to, the provision of training and expert advice. It also means being strategic about keeping the relationship animated and productive.
- Have you ensured that written policies have been prepared for APS employees in sensitive situations that arise infrequently or are known to create challenges for employees?

Good practice in training, development and briefings

- Have you established an agency requirement that induction processes at all levels provide explicit guidance on relations with Ministers' offices? This information may be integrated into induction seminars and orientation, or it may be communicated by experienced staff acting as mentors to new arrivals. It could include, but not be limited to, a documentation in resource material that the staff member receives.
- Do you record and analyse feedback obtained from the Minister's office about briefing provided by your agency centrally, so that you can develop an overall picture of how often Ministers' offices are providing feedback and look at trends in that information?
- Do you ensure that feedback is transmitted back to all the employees involved in preparation of particular briefs, so they get some idea of how the Minister's office views their efforts? Do you ensure that in cases where the feedback is negative, managers handle this sensitively, with discussions with staff about the reasons for the feedback, and what might be done to improve briefs (and their assessments) in future?