



Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission



SES Performance Leadership Framework





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Overview

Priority one of the APS reform agenda calls for strengthened behaviour and outcomes-based performance management, starting with the Senior Executive Service. The SES Performance Framework progresses this initiative by providing an overarching set of requirements that will be applied across the APS to embed a culture of transparency and accountability for SES performance.

Effective SES leaders enable collective performance through exemplifying leadership behaviours. The Framework uses the language of performance leadership rather than performance management, emphasising leader responsibility for performance culture.

The Framework consists of:

- consistent elements for performance management that each APS agency will need to adopt
- a maturity model to guide agency implementation
- reporting and evaluation.

A key feature of the Framework is that the assessment of behaviour (how outcomes are delivered) is considered core to an individual's performance. Learnings from the SES talent assessments indicate that APS senior leaders' strengths relate to delivery. They set high standards, commit to action and hold themselves to account. The assessments showed that capabilities related to how outcomes are delivered, such as enabling and self-awareness are relatively less well developed. Increasing the emphasis on how outcomes are delivered in the Framework will support the development of more well-rounded senior leaders and improve workplace culture.

The Framework has been developed with reference to existing legislation, policy and guidance regarding expected behaviour in the APS. The adoption of the Framework across the APS is not intended to limit an agency's flexibility to continue to innovate in their approach to achieving high performance. It is intended to provide a standard set of requirements that must form part of an agency's performance practices, and integrate with an agency's existing performance management approach.

The Framework will develop over time to facilitate continuous improvement and incorporation of emerging best practice and innovation in performance development.

A review of the Framework will be undertaken following the first agency survey (as detailed at section 4.1) after release.





Elements of the Performance Leadership Framework

The Framework consists of the following elements:

- expectations for behaviours and outcomes
- performance assessments
- reward and recognition
- development and
- unsatisfactory performance.

2.1 Expectations for behaviour and outcomes

All SES employees will have expectations of behaviour and outcomes as a core requirement in duty statements, performance agreements and performance assessments. The Australian Government has committed to ensuring the APS provides respectful and safe work environments free from discrimination, gender-based harassment, sexual harassment, and bullying.

Leaders' behaviour sets the tone and creates the psychological safety necessary for the APS to be high performing and to provide the frank and fearless advice that is a cornerstone of the service. Leaders who enable a safe place to collaborate, express concern and ask questions create conditions for innovative thinking and a diversity of views. This means how we deliver is as important as what we deliver.

Setting expectations for behaviour makes it clear that solely achieving outcomes is not sufficient for effective performance. Expectations of behaviour will be determined between the SES employee and their supervisor and must encompass the APS Values and the Secretaries Charter of Leadership behaviours (DRIVE), as a core function of their role. SES employees must commit through their performance agreements to promote respectful standards of behaviour, reflect on their own biases and behaviours, and demonstrate how they are contributing to promoting respectful cultures, workplaces, programs and policies that empower people. Agencies may also choose to include additional expectations of behaviour, depending on their operational context.

Agencies should recognise where additional leadership roles and contributions are undertaken by SES employees, either within the Agency, or as a contribution to the broader APS. This could be through a range of channels such as committee membership, performing a network champion or advisory role, and/or in coaching/mentoring roles outside of day to day leadership positions, for example, providing culturally specific advice for agencies.





APS Values

Impartial The APS is apolitical and provides the Government with advice that is frank, honest, timely and based on the best available evidence.

Committed to service The APS is professional, objective, innovative and efficient, and works collaboratively to achieve the best results for the Australian community and the Government.

Accountable The APS is open and accountable to the Australian community under the law and within the framework of Ministerial responsibility.

Respectful The APS respects all people, including their rights and their heritage.

Ethical The APS demonstrates leadership, is trustworthy, and acts with integrity, in all that it does.

Secretaries' Charter of Leadership Behaviours

The Charter of Leadership Behaviours sets out the behaviours that we, as Secretaries, expect of ourselves and our SES, and want to see in leaders at all levels of the APS.

The Charter focuses on behaviours that support modern systems leadership within the construct of the APS Values and Code of Conduct.

These behaviours build on the Integrated Leadership System and the APS Leadership Capability Framework.

DRIVE

be **Dynamic**

- Have an inquiring mind and be willing to innovate and change
- Understand the system you operate in
- Practise new ways of deploying yourself in your system to achieve the best outcome
- Embrace risks and actively manage them
- Enjoy your work and have a positive attitude
- Don't walk past problems —be part of the solution

be **Respectful**

- Treat people with decency and respect
- Embrace diversity and actively seek out views and perspectives that challenge your own
- Build an inclusive culture that enables people to make their best contribution

have **Integrity**

- Be open, honest and accountable
- Take responsibility for what happens around you
- Have courage to call out unacceptable behaviour

Value others

- Be an active listener
- Value others' contributions, perspectives and wisdom
- Collaborate not compete to succeed as a team
- Understand people and their views and motivations in order to lead, influence and communicate well
- Build relationships

Empower people

- Trust, empower and grow others
- Interpret and provide context—don't do people's jobs for them
- Build capability and networks
- Expect people to deliver and find positive ways to hold them to account
- Accept people won't always get it right—and support them to bounce back

We encourage all APS leaders to consider how you can live up to these behaviours, where relevant to your role





2.1.1 Cultural competency and safety

The Australian Government has committed to ensuring the APS is a model employer that sets the standard for diversity and inclusion. This includes a commitment to boost First Nations employment and to embed and practice meaningful cultural safety as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

To support and drive this change SES employees must commit through their performance agreements to extend their own cultural learning, reflect on their own cultural perspectives, and demonstrate how they are contributing to culturally safe workplaces, programs and policies. A high level of cultural competence drives successful, diverse workforces, using cultural difference as a strength for more effective decision making, innovation and adaptability.

2.2 Performance assessment

An SES employee's performance assessment includes:

- formal performance conversations
- informal performance conversations
- feedback from others
- an annual performance rating and
- consistency in assessing performance.

2.2.1 Formal and informal conversations

Formal conversations must occur at least three times a year including a conversation at the commencement of the cycle, and then a mid-cycle and an end-of-cycle assessment.

Supervisors should consider and ask about the wellbeing of SES employees and take action to address any concerns.

In addition to formal conversations, informal performance conversations should take place throughout the cycle. Providing regular, constructive and developmentally-focused feedback, particularly at the time of an event or milestone (e.g. immediately following the delivery of a major presentation), can increase engagement and employee capability leading to high performance. Informal performance conversations should include what is working well and include recognition of achievements and accomplishments. Any performance concerns should be discussed at the earliest opportunity and include guidance on how performance could be improved.

While primarily aimed at recognising achievements, motivating ongoing positive outcomes and providing an early opportunity to address performance or behaviour concerns, regular informal discussions also ensure transparency and mitigates unexpected negative feedback during the formal performance assessment discussions.





2.2.2 Feedback from others

Prior to the end of cycle performance conversation, the supervisor must seek informal feedback from others which should include people relevant to the SES employee's role, e.g. direct reports, clients, peers, policy stakeholders and program partners. Specifically, the supervisor must be confident they have identified and collected feedback from a genuinely diverse group. The supervisor (in consultation with the SES employee) will determine who to collect feedback from but must seek a diversity of views that reflect how the SES employee impacts the broader staff experience, and collective performance. Informal feedback should be designed to understand how the SES employee's behaviours are aligned with the APS Values and the Secretaries Charter of Leadership Behaviours.

Example questions

Considering the **APS Values** and the **Secretaries Charter of Leadership Behaviours**, feedback from others could be sought with questions such as:

- what do they do well?
- what could they do differently?
- how are they demonstrating curiosity and leading innovation and change (Dynamic)?
- how are they building a more inclusive culture for all employees within their agency (Respectful)?
- how are they demonstrating cultural competence and contributing to culturally safe workplaces, programs and policies? (Respectful; Integrity; Empower)?
- how are they demonstrating courage and accountability (Integrity)?
- how are they encouraging a pro-integrity culture within their team and building psychological safety (Integrity; Empower)?
- how are they using their influence to build more positive relationships within and beyond their agency (Value)?
- how are they empowering, developing and building capability in others (Empower)?
- and more broadly how are they contributing to the stewardship of the agency and the broader APS?

Agencies are also encouraged to consider other inputs that could be used to provide insight into performance such as census results, pulse checks, professional development, exit interviews, team performance and evidence of corporate contributions, where these inputs validly provide insight into an individual's performance.





2.2.3 Annual performance rating

All SES employees will receive an annual performance rating of either:

- **On Track:** Individual is consistently meeting and/or exceeding expectations against expectations of behaviour and outcomes
- **Developing:** Individual is
 - new to the role, level or APS and has not yet had the opportunity to consistently meet expectations of behaviour or outcomes; or
 - improvement is required in relation to expectations of behaviour and outcomes
- The individual will be supported to achieve a rating of 'On Track' by the next annual review at the latest (for example, through a formal or informal development plan).
- **Not on Track:** Individual is not meeting expectations and a formal underperformance process will be commenced if it has not commenced already.

A rating of "Developing" cannot be given across two consecutive performance cycles for the same role. Where an individual was previously rated as "Developing" and has not yet achieved a level of performance that warrants an "On Track" assessment, they should be rated as "Not on Track".

SES employees will receive individual performance ratings for both behaviour and outcomes as well as an overall rating. The assessment of behaviour comprises 50% of the overall rating therefore if behaviour is not on track, the overall performance is not on track and a strong result for outcomes cannot be used to lift the overall performance rating.

The annual rating will be based on the SES employee's performance across the entire performance cycle. However, if an SES employee's performance is unsatisfactory at any time throughout the performance cycle, the employee's supervisor must take steps to restore performance including commencing formal unsatisfactory performance procedures where appropriate.

2.2.4 Consistency in assessing performance

Agencies must develop internal processes that ensure consistent application of the Framework across their SES cohort, primarily by developing supervisor capability. This should include:

- clarity for all SES employees that performance will be assessed on the basis of both performance and behaviour (and that a strong result for outcomes will not be used to offset or minimise behavioural concerns)
- increasing supervisor capability to objectively assess performance, provide recognition, and give effective, timely and actionable feedback
- calibration of indicative annual performance assessments.

The process developed by an agency must ensure relative consistency commensurate with their size and capacity. In addition to supporting fairness, the exercise of calibrating





proposed performance ratings enables an additional source of feedback on the SES employee's performance and behaviour and supports transparency and objectivity of decision making. Over time this process is expected to drive accountability of supervisors in understanding expectations and making fair, objective and balanced assessments of their staff, with effective consideration of both what is achieved and how.

While individual performance assessments should be treated with appropriate regard to personal privacy (with assessments only shared where there is a need-to-know), each agency's approach to calibration must be transparent and documented. Calibration should be designed to ensure relative consistency in ratings across individuals undertaking performance assessments, however agencies should not rank or place quotas on the number of staff who achieve a rating. Accordingly, use of a bell curve or similar performance distribution tool is discouraged.

2.3 Reward and recognition

Rewarding and recognising employees effectively is vital for attracting and retaining talent. Incentivising behaviours that are valued by the agency assists in creating a culture where how outcomes are delivered is considered as important as achieving outcomes. Agencies are encouraged to consider how to incorporate non-monetary rewards into performance management.

In practice, high performers are often rewarded with more work or more difficult roles, which can lead to burnout. Agencies should consider rewarding employees who demonstrate exemplary behaviours and achieve outcomes. Recognising that individual employees will have different preferences and perceptions of what might be considered a reward, consideration may be given to formal recognition, opportunities for reflection, mentoring arrangements, development opportunities, etc., noting that this needs to be coupled with the provision of time and capacity to avail themselves of such opportunities.

Agencies should also consider encouraging specific positive feedback both in informal conversations and publicly such as in meetings and internal communication channels. Acknowledgement should reference not just what was achieved, but also emphasize the DRIVE behaviours that were exhibited in undertaking this work.

2.4 Development

Maintaining a capable SES workforce is critical to ensuring the APS is able to effectively deliver on key accountabilities. To ensure the capability of the APS SES workforce, development opportunities must build individual, agency and enterprise capability. Preparation, planning, review time, and strategic recovery are critical enablers for sustaining high performance over the long term.

Each SES employee and their supervisor must have a conversation at the commencement of the performance cycle to identify the SES employee's development needs.





Development needs will be influenced by:

- where available, inputs from the SES employee's last performance assessment (both what was achieved and how)
- nine-box Grid potential matrix and
- 360-degree feedback.

Development needs should be regularly reviewed and adjusted throughout the performance cycle.

The nine-box grid assesses an individual's potential and identifies possible areas of development. Agencies are able to use an agency specific nine-box grid or the Commission's nine-box grid tool for the APS, the [APS Talent Segmentation Model](#). It is expected that the nine-box grid tool will be used at least annually. This may be aligned to performance conversations to inform development plans, or at any time including where the SES employee would like to reassess their development needs. Nine-box grid tools are not intended to be used for performance assessments.

A 360-degree feedback provides an opportunity for an SES employee to receive holistic feedback from their supervisor, direct reports, peers and stakeholders on their performance. This multi-source feedback process provides a comprehensive view of an employee's strengths and weaknesses. It should be used to inform development opportunities and each SES must participate in a 360-degree feedback exercise at least every three years.

At times, a 360-degree feedback may identify performance concerns that were not already known by the supervisor. Where this occurs, the supervisor must incorporate the feedback into the performance assessment and undertake a discussion with the individual.

360-degree feedback can be undertaken in various ways. Agencies can determine how they would like to undertake 360-degree feedback processes. For example, agencies may take a flexible approach that has been developed internally, or use an external provider specialising in facilitating 360-degree feedback processes.

2.5 Unsatisfactory performance

In accordance with section 49(2) of the *Australian Public Service Commissioner's Directions 2022*, agencies must have clear policies and processes for dealing with unsatisfactory performance. If an employee's performance is considered unsatisfactory at any time throughout the performance cycle, the Agency Head must ensure that the agency's unsatisfactory performance policy and procedures are applied in a timely manner.

Where an SES employee's performance is considered 'Not on Track' the employee's supervisor must take steps to manage it appropriately, sensitively and promptly in accordance with the agency's unsatisfactory performance policy and procedures, with the aim of restoring performance.





3

Implementation

A maturity model has been developed to support introduction of the Framework in agencies. The SES performance maturity model is a self-assessment tool designed to help agencies implement the Framework.

Agencies will commence at different levels of maturity, and some agency performance frameworks may already be consistent with the requirements of the Framework. However, some agencies may need time to implement particular elements. The implementation maturity model provides a mechanism to review the current status of an agency's performance framework to enable informed decisions on where additional focus may be required to uplift their performance management capability to align with the Framework.

All APS-agencies will:

- complete a self-assessment of their current maturity state against the maturity model prior to the 2024 Agency Survey
- report on their maturity state in the 2024 Agency Survey to the Secretaries Board.

It is expected that agencies will commence implementation at the earliest opportunity and completely implement the SES framework by 2025.

To support implementation, the Commission will facilitate sharing Agency success stories.

3.1 How to use the maturity model

This resource is designed to support agencies to understand their current performance process, policy, guidance and tools, and make informed decisions on where to focus future effort. Agency SES performance procedures should contain the elements of the Framework outlined above.

Prior to 2024, agencies are required to undertake an initial self-assessment to establish their current level of maturity, and then review the model at regular intervals to measure progress.

Importantly, this resource does not replace an agency's responsibility to bring performance leadership into people's day to day practice and everyday lived experience in the APS. Informal cultures are more powerful than the written policies and procedures.





3.2 Maturity model

| Performance assessments | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Standard | Level 1: Initial | Level 2: Defined | Level 3: Optimised |
| Outcomes and behavioural expectations | Agency is yet to incorporate behavioural expectations into the agency's performance framework. | Behavioural expectations and outcomes are both considered in the agency performance framework, but the agency is still working towards embedding behaviour as a core consideration. | Specific outcomes and APS-wide behavioural expectations are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> considered equally in the agency's performance framework and a core consideration in employee duty statements performance agreements and performance assessments. |
| Formal and informal conversations | Performance conversations may occur on an ad-hoc or reactive basis. | Performance conversations are formally documented but not yet taking place at least three times a year. Informal conversations are irregular or yet to be implemented. | Performance conversations are formally documented at no fewer than three check-in points in a 12 month period (the conversations include establishing performance agreement and mid-cycle and end cycle review). Informal conversations are undertaken regularly. |
| Feedback from others | Agency is yet to implement | Implemented but not consistently occurring every annual cycle for every SES employee | Feedback from others is sought as input into the end-of-cycle performance assessment for all SES employees |
| Annual Performance Rating | Agency yet to implement common rating scale | Agency has adopted the common rating scale | Agency has adopted the common rating scale, ensuring that behaviour is equally weighted with outcomes |
| Consistency in assessing performance | Agency is yet to engage in any form of supervisor capability development or validation process. | Agency undertakes some supervisor capability development or validation process but this is not practiced consistently across the agency. | Agency has a clear and well-communicated supervisor capability development program and validation process that is commensurate with the size and resources of the agency to ensure consistency across the agency. |

Definitions

Standard describes the essential building blocks that form the basis for agency performance management procedures.

Level 1: Initial represents emerging maturity, where an agency may be establishing capability or yet to embed the standard in their performance processes.

Level 2: Defined represents a maturity state where agencies are working toward consistency and incorporating improvement strategies as part of their performance processes.

Level 3: Optimised represents a maturity state that incorporates all the required elements of the Framework. Agencies at an optimised maturity level should continue to focus on continuous improvement of their performance processes.





Maturity model continued

| Development | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Standard | Level 1: Initial | Level 2: Defined | Level 3: Optimised |
| Development | Development opportunities are discussed at the commencement of the performance cycle. | Development opportunities are linked to individual capability. | Development opportunities are clearly linked to areas of capability development that build individual, agency and APS capability. |
| 9-box grid | Agency has not yet commenced implementation of a 9-box grid tool. | Agency has commenced implementation. | Agency has implemented a 9-box grid tool to identify development opportunities for SES employees. |
| 360-degree feedback | Agency is yet to incorporate 360-degree feedback. | Agency has introduced 360-degree feedback in some form but assessments are not yet occurring for each SES employee at least 3 yearly. | Agency conducts 360-degree feedback at least 3 yearly and includes results as a core consideration to inform development opportunities. |
| Unsatisfactory performance | Agency has an unsatisfactory performance process but it is not yet aligned with the performance framework. | Agency has an unsatisfactory performance process and it is aligned to the performance framework but the agency is yet to ensure the policies and processes are applied in a timely manner. | Agency policies set clear guidance on managing unsatisfactory performance and that those policies and processes are applied in a timely manner if an SES employee's performance is considered to be 'Not on Track' (including during the performance cycle, i.e. in the absence of a formal 'Not on Track' rating). |

Definitions

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Level 3: Optimised represents a maturity state that incorporates all the required elements of the Framework. Agencies at an optimised maturity level should continue to focus on continuous improvement of their performance processes.





4

Transparency and accountability

Creating and maintaining a strong transparency culture is crucial to ensuring confidence in the ability of the SES to provide APS-wide strategic leadership of the highest quality, contributing to an effective and cohesive APS. The APS Employment Principles, as enshrined in the *Public Service Act 1999*, require effective performance from each employee. The Directions further describe how employees at every level uphold the employment principles and support a high-performance culture.

The Framework provides for cascading accountabilities at Agency Head, agency and individual level.

From 2024 APS Agency Surveys will collect the aggregate data on SES Performance Ratings. The Commission will provide guidance to smaller agencies (with fewer than 5 SES). This data will be provided to the Secretaries Board.

4.1 Agency Head and agency accountability

Agency Heads are expected to take accountability for progress within their agency. Importantly, Agency Heads are expected to ensure ongoing engagement with contemporary approaches that support a performance leadership culture and build psychological safety. Agency Heads set the tone for positive workplace culture and behaviour within the APS. Leaders must consider how their actions will appear to staff without access to all details.

A phased approach to reporting has been developed, to support accountability for introducing the Framework. In the first phase, agency data will be reported to the Secretaries Board to provide high-level oversight of performance maturity across the APS. As performance maturity increases over time, it is intended that Agencies will move to a self-regulating approach.

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
|--|--|--|
| <p>The Agency Head reports to the APS Commissioner through the agency survey for annual reporting to Secretaries Board.</p> <p>Reporting includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a self-assessment of maturity • aggregate SES performance ratings. | <p>The Agency Head reports to the APS Commissioner through the agency survey.</p> <p>Reporting includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a self-assessment of maturity • aggregate SES performance ratings. | <p>The agency regularly self-assess maturity using the Framework Maturity Model.</p> |





4.2 Individual accountability for performance

To assist in creating a culture of transparency, performance assessments will be incorporated into recruitment. Incorporation into recruitment processes will be introduced using a phased approach recognising that the Framework will take time to reach a level of maturity where performance assessment processes are broadly consistent across agencies. A phased approach will also assist in ensuring the effectiveness of the new system as it is embedded in agencies. The introduction of phase 2 and phase 3 will be subject to the review of the Framework that will occur following the Agency Survey in 2024.

4.2.1 Phase 1 – Referee checks – demonstrating behaviours

From the commencement of the Framework all SES recruitment processes will require referee checks to include consideration of how an applicant demonstrates the behaviours of the Secretaries Charter of Leadership behaviour and APS values in addition to achieving outcomes.

Additional information on referee checks for SES recruitment processes is available on the Commission's SES Recruitment webpage.

4.2.2 Phase 2 – Referee checks – performance summaries

Pending review of the Framework, all SES recruitment processes will require the chair of the selection panel to seek a summary of performance assessments from a candidate's referee from 1 July 2025.

A summary of performance assessments from the previous two years performance agreements will be used to support transparency of individual SES performance as people change roles and agencies.

To ensure that the recruitment process is applied fairly in relation to each eligible candidate and to allow for a comparative assessment of candidates, a summary of performance assessments will be requested of candidates who are progressing to referee check, not just those candidates who are already APS employees.

The chair will be supported in the process by the Commissioner's Representative who will certify that the process included a request for performance summaries from referees.

4.2.3 Phase 3 – Movements between agencies

Pending review of the Framework, phase 3 will be implemented when the use of the Framework by agencies becomes more mature, and performance assessments harness a range of inputs to present a fair and comprehensive picture of performance.





Where an SES employee moves from one APS agency to another, the employee's current Agency Head will provide a summary of their performance assessments to the Agency Head of the new agency. An SES employee can decline to have a summary of their performance assessments provided to the new agency.

Agency Heads will review the summary performance assessments with a lens of understanding the development needs of the SES employee. Agency Heads will have the discretion to determine whether they provide a copy of the assessments to the SES employee's supervisor.

It is anticipated that there may be initial variances in the format of performance summaries provided by Agency Heads. Variance will reduce over time as agency adoption of common performance standards increases.

