



Washington State
DEPARTMENT OF
ENTERPRISE SERVICES

Washington State Enterprise

Leadership Competencies



2025

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About This Document

The Department of Enterprise Services (DES) seeks to serve Washington State public employees in their development as leaders. This document outlines eleven **core competencies** - knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors – that equip supervisors and managers to lead effectively.

Each competency includes several **indicators** of what that competency might look or sound like, but other examples exist. How a competency shows up in practice will differ between cultures and settings.

Organizations across the Washington State enterprise may wish to use this document to:

- Seek out new leaders and do succession planning,
- Share expectations with leaders,
- Reflect on leadership strengths and areas for growth,
- Think about how culture influences the way competencies show up,
- Discuss other indicators of competencies in practice, and
- Choose professional development opportunities.

These competencies were originally approved by a partnership of agency deputy directors, as one part of an enterprise-wide leadership strategy. The intent was to create a shared leadership language to encourage growth for leaders throughout their public employment. Indicators were updated in 2019 to call attention to the shared values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Competency 1: Models and champions our culture and values

Purpose	It's crucial for leaders to model their organization's culture and values because they set the tone for the workplace environment and influence how employees perceive and interact with the organization's mission. A leader's actions serve as a powerful motivator for employees. When they see leadership actively living the values, they are more likely to feel inspired and committed to contributing to the organization's goals.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Understands internal and external customers and their needs and promotes a culture focused on customer satisfaction. b. Cultivates trusting relationships with diverse people, working to better understand and partner with people who are differently situated. c. Is self-aware of positional privilege, implicit biases, and own experiences within the existing culture. d. Shares power and shifts it to those most impacted and marginalized. e. Addresses problems and co-creates solutions with staff and customers. f. Self-regulates and removes fear from the organizational culture. g. Follows through on commitments; holds self and others accountable to standards and promotes shared responsibility. h. Demonstrates courage, humility, and respect. i. Consistently models honesty, authenticity, and transparency. j. Advances equity, diversity and inclusion, and helps others to do so. k. Disrupts their own microaggressions and those of others.

Competency 2: Cultivates a shared, strategic vision

Purpose	Cultivating a shared strategic vision is essential for leaders because it provides clear direction and fosters alignment within an organization. A shared vision creates a sense of purpose, ensuring everyone understands and works toward the same objectives, which boosts collaboration, trust, and commitment. A strategic vision acts as a compass, helping leaders and teams make informed choices that align with long-term organizational goals, even when faced with challenges.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Describes a long-term vision that inspires their team and brings deep meaning and compelling purpose to the work of public service.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Helps employees connect to the vision, find meaning in their daily work, and identify their own contributions. c. Sees the big picture and paints a picture of group aspirations. d. Is forward-thinking; looks to future trends affecting the work and anticipates and communicates the implications. e. Thinks about individuals and the system. Views situations from individual, institutional, systemic, and structural perspectives. f. Understands, communicates, and advocates the business case for diversity, equity and inclusion.
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Competency 3: Drives results

Purpose	Leaders play a vital role in translating vision into action. Their ability to drive results ensures that strategic objectives are met efficiently and effectively. Leaders who focus on outcomes inspire and energize their teams. By setting clear goals and demonstrating progress, they keep morale high and encourage accountability. Results-driven leadership fosters a culture of continuous improvement.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Creates and nurtures a performance-based culture of continuous improvement and a safe environment in which to experiment. b. Shows passion for data-informed decision-making and scientific problem-solving. c. Eliminates barriers to increase equity and deliver on government's promises. d. Achieves goals that respond to customer needs and increase customer satisfaction. e. Maximizes resources across the organization.

Competency 4: Makes things happen as a public servant

Purpose	Understanding what it means to be a public servant is essential for government leaders because their role revolves around serving the public good. Leaders who embrace public service place the needs of the community above personal or political gain, ensuring their decisions benefit society. Leaders must also understand the complexity of government work, so they can work well with various stakeholders, from citizens to other government entities.
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Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Understands key forces in the organization's environment. b. Understands government operations, the legislative process, state budgeting, and the role of interest groups and the media. c. Analyzes stakeholders and other factors that need to be considered when tackling complex issues and carefully decides when and how to proceed. d. Understands the impact of impressions on communities and individuals served. e. Builds coalitions and manages stakeholder relationships. f. Creates and sustains enough support to implement a decision. g. Infuses a public service focus into business functions.
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Competency 5: Leads and navigates change

Purpose	Change is inevitable in any organization. Leaders who navigate change effectively can communicate its purpose, address concerns, and foster a sense of involvement, reducing pushback from the team. Effective change management minimizes disruptions and maximizes positive outcomes.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Navigates the organization through complex and changing environments, while attending to the human side of change. b. Experiments, seeks creative solutions, and takes risks. Encourages others to do so. c. Helps the organization stay appropriately anchored to mission and values in the face of external volatility, complexity, and ambiguity, while mastering the waves of complex change.

Competency 6: Communicates effectively

Purpose	Clear communication ensures everyone understands their roles, responsibilities, and the shared vision, keeping the team aligned and focused. A leader's words have the power to motivate, uplift, and inspire. Transparent and consistent communication fosters trust, as team members feel informed and valued.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shares timely and clear information. b. Models and creates a culture that values listening and candid conversation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Shares ideas and information from a place of authenticity. d. Listens and speaks with the audience in mind and an understanding of different points of view. e. Conveys persuasive messages that positively influence thoughts and actions.
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Competency 7: Builds relationships

Purpose	Building strong relationships is fundamental to effective leadership. By forming genuine connections, leaders show they care about their team members as individuals, which boosts morale, motivation, and overall job satisfaction. In times of stress or change, strong relationships make it easier for leaders to rally their teams, resolve conflicts, and maintain a positive work environment.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develops, maintains, and strengthens relationships inside and outside the organization. b. Engages with people and encourages others to engage. c. Actively listens to understand. d. Cultivates a culture of belonging and collaboration. e. Promotes respect, empathy, and trust in the work environment.

Competency 8: Embraces and embeds inclusion in decision-making

Purpose	Embracing and embedding inclusion is crucial for leaders because it fosters an environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered. Organizations with inclusive cultures are more likely to attract top talent and retain employees. Diverse perspectives enable leaders to make more informed and balanced decisions, avoiding groupthink and blind spots.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Embraces diverse points of view, talents, and capabilities – values differences between people. b. Respects individuals and provides every employee with the opportunity to develop their unique skills and talents so they can achieve their highest level of success. c. Is accountable for their impact, and the impact of their decisions and actions, on themselves, their co-workers, their stakeholders, and others they serve.

Competency 9: Fosters teamwork and collaboration

Purpose	Fostering teamwork cultivates trust, respect, and shared goals, which strengthens relationships within the group and creates a sense of belonging. Collaboration allows team members to pool their unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives, creating synergy that drives innovation and success. When teams work harmoniously, goals are achieved more efficiently and effectively.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leads and participates in teams. b. Creates a psychologically safe culture in which the synergistic power of teams is realized. c. Understands and builds networks. d. Helps their team members build trusting relationships and find meaningful connections. e. Creates opportunities to collaborate. f. Coaches and supports their team members to help them collaborate during challenging times.

Competency 10: Fosters learning

Purpose	By promoting learning, leaders help their employees develop new skills and broaden their knowledge – ensuring continual personal and professional growth. In a world that's constantly evolving, fostering learning helps teams stay agile and prepared to navigate new challenges, technologies, and opportunities. Leaders who keep learning themselves stay ahead of the curve and lead confidently through transitions.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Listens to learn; seeks to understand through dialogue rather than to be a “knower.” b. Commits to being self-aware and adaptive, so they can bring their authentic, best self to work. c. Creates a learning organization based on how learning really happens. d. Fosters a climate that empowers others and supports their creativity and innovation. e. Supports hypothesis-testing and creates a culture where mistakes are opportunities to learn. f. Encourages and invests in employee learning and development.

Competency 11: Develops people

Purpose	It's important that leaders help develop people because it strengthens individuals, teams, and organizations. By investing in people's growth, leaders unlock their team members' talents and abilities, enabling them to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully.
Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Brings people with the right skills and the right motivation into the organization and enables them to do their best work.b. Gives early and frequent feedback to cultivate growth and encourage strong performance management principles.c. Purposefully coaches others through instruction, counsel, and reflective questioning, to help them solve problems, think critically, and seize opportunities.d. Models and encourages learning from mistakes.e. Provides sincere, day-to-day appreciation and recognition.f. Develops the whole person by respecting and modeling life-work balance.g. Helps identify the right opportunities for staff (and the organization) through succession planning, with an eye to the future of the organization.