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# Preface

Employees of the Australian Public Service (APS) occupy a position of trust. They are entrusted by the Government and the community to undertake important work on their behalf. With this trust comes a high level of responsibility which should be matched by the highest standards of ethical behaviour from each APS employee.

Together the APS Values, the APS Employment Principles and the APS Code of Conduct set out the standard of behaviour expected of agency heads and APS employees. They provide the public with confidence in the way public servants behave, including in their exercise of authority when meeting government objectives.

The *Public Service Act 1999* (PS Act) requires APS employees and agency heads at all times to behave in a way that upholds the APS Values. Agency heads and Senior Executive Service employees must also promote the Values. All employees must inform themselves of their obligations under the PS Act.

The conduct of public servants, both inside and outside the workplace, can have implications for the confidence the community has in the administration of an agency or the APS as a whole.

This guide is structured around the three professional relationships that are a central part of work in the public service: relationships with the Government and the Parliament; with the public; and with public service colleagues.

The guide also contains information about how to deal with ethical problems that commonly arise in particular circumstances. It does not have the answer to every ethical problem that an employee may be faced with at work. It does however provide principles which will point to an answer in many cases.

## Summary

1.1.1 A good relationship between Australian Public Service (APS) agencies, ministers and their offices is central to effective government.

1.1.2 The APS Values, set out in the *Public Service Act 1999* (PS Act), help APS employees to build effective working relationships between the political and administrative arms of government.

1.1.3 Each of the Values is of equal importance. Particular situations may arise where there is tension between the different Values that are to be applied. For example, it is right to be responsive to ministers and their advisers by providing quick advice, **but it is also right to follow due process and established protocols. In such cases, the ‘right’ course of action may not be set out by statute, instruction or policy and good judgement will need to be exercised**.

1.1.4 **This section provides guidance on how the APS Values apply when interacting with ministers and their advisers and when interacting with the Parliament**. The section also provides guidance on public servants appearing in government advertising and awareness campaigns.

## APS Values

1.2.1 The APS Values are set out in the PS Act. The *Australian Public Service Commissioner’s Directions 2013* (the Directions) determine the scope and application of the Values**. Agency heads and employees are required to comply with the Directions. The Directions that are most relevant for those employees whose duties involve working directly with the Government and the Parliament are outlined below in relation to each of the Values.**

### Committed to Service

1.2.2 The Committed to Service Value provides for an APS that is professional, objective, innovative and efficient, that works collaboratively **to achieve the best results for the Australian community and the Government.**

## Providing information

2.3.1 In doing their work, employees are expected to exercise reasonable care in providing information. Information may be sought and provided face to face, over the telephone, electronically or in writing**. In all cases it is important to have regard to the following:**

1. **employees have a duty to exercise reasonable care and diligence to ensure that information provided is accurate**
2. employees should consider the use an enquirer may make of information sought and the degree to which they may rely on that information

### Care and diligence in connection with employment

3.3.5 **Employees are required to act with care and diligence in connection with APS employment**.

3.3.6 Care and diligence have their ordinary dictionary meanings of ‘serious attention and solicitude to work’ and ‘earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken’.[[1]](#endnote-1) The standard of care and diligence required of an employee may depend on their role and level of responsibility. **For example, the level of care and diligence required of senior managers responsible for the delivery of a program of work may be higher than that of other employees delivering single elements of that program**. It is expected that employees are fair minded and take reasonable steps to keep themselves informed, capable and aware of the law when exercising their role and responsibilities.

3.3.7 In some cases, the skills and experience of the employee may be relevant to whether they have acted with care and diligence. For example:

a. an employee who has received training in a specialist skill may be expected to exercise those skills—a person who was known not to have those skills could not reasonably be expected to exercise them

b. an employee with many years of relevant experience might reasonably be expected to discharge their duties more effectively than an employee who had no previous directly relevant experience.Section 4: Managing information

4.1.3 **Australian Public Service (APS) employees must be able to demonstrate that their actions and decisions have been made with appropriate consideration, with care and diligence, and using Commonwealth resources properly.**

1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)