

Stewardship

Concepts of stewardship should be at the core of our daily decision-making.

NSW government sector employees are custodians of our system of government – a system that will exist long after we move on. NSW government sector employees are responsible for implementing policies, managing public funds, and ensuring that our public services are delivered smoothly and efficiently. It is important to understand that our decisions and actions have consequences both now and in the future – adopting a stewardship mindset is one way that we can help preserve public trust in our institutions and ensure that we leave them in a better state than we found them in.

What is stewardship?

The word ‘stewardship’ is often used in the public sector, but it can mean slightly different things to different people. Dictionary definitions of ‘stewardship’ refer to conducting, supervising or managing something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care. Ultimately for the NSW government sector, the beneficiaries of our stewardship are the people of NSW, both now and in the future.

A stewardship mindset is evidence-based, well-reasoned, and consistent with the public good. It involves learning from past decisions, looking forward, looking back, and looking around to make informed choices.

None of us can do this alone. The integrity of the NSW government sector is connected to individual as well as collective effort.

Stewardship in practice

Concepts of stewardship should be at the core of our daily decision-making. Good stewardship can involve:

- **Maintaining trust:** Bringing to life the core NSW government sector values of integrity, trust, service and accountability
- **Taking care:** Ensuring responsible management and maintenance of knowledge, including through embedding effective governance and risk management processes in all of our work
- **Thinking long term:** Considering the future generations in our decisions, and considering the impacts of our decision in a way that looks beyond election cycles
- **Maintaining knowledge:** Preserving institutional knowledge for continuity through creating good records that capture the reasons for our decisions

- **Responsible management:** Managing resources, including financial, human and natural resources, effectively, efficiently and ethically
- **Frank and fearless advice:** Providing honest advice on the long-term impacts of decisions that the Government of the day is looking to make.

Stewardship is about accountability — taking ownership of our decisions both in the moment and over time. It is embedded in our day-to-day decision-making processes. We can further demonstrate this by:

- Conducting thorough analysis, including reviewing past actions
- Considering proposed actions from the perspective of those impacted
- Reflecting on and learning from unintended consequences
- Supporting systems and cultures that promote long-term thinking and evaluation
- Maintaining good recordkeeping practices to explain decisions and considerations.

Stewardship is a practice that we can learn and improve over time. It requires deliberate behaviours and a growth mindset. Embedding psychologically safe environments is crucial, both in personal behaviours and in the behaviours we choose to reward.