

APHIS Leadership Development Toolkit
Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: Who is the Toolkit for and how can it help me?

The Toolkit is for employees at all levels in APHIS. The Toolkit can help you enhance your effectiveness and leadership competencies in your current position, as well as develop the competencies to advance to a higher position. As a supervisor, the Toolkit can help you develop your employees' Learning Contracts/Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

Question 2: How do I use the Toolkit?

When you look at the APHIS Leadership Roadmap, the competencies listed at your career level and below are the ones at which you should be proficient to perform your current job effectively. The competencies listed at the level just above your level are the ones for which you should begin to develop proficiency. For competencies further up on the Roadmap, you should be aware of them and understand their importance, but you will likely use them in a limited fashion.

The Toolkit is broken down into separate "tabs" based on your career level. There is a tab for all employees, another tab for project managers and team leaders, a tab for supervisors, a tab for managers, and a tab for executives. Within each tab, you are provided with steps for identifying your goals, assessing proficiency, identifying learning experiences, creating an IDP, completing your identified learning experiences, and assessing your progress.

As you read through your particular tab, you will be redirected to other tabs in the Toolkit that provide more information about learning experiences, mentoring, developing proficiency in cross-cultural situations, and creating a personalized career guide. There is also a tab with specific information from your APHIS program.

Question 3: How do I use the Toolkit to discuss my development with my supervisor?

Developing leadership competencies is a joint effort between every employee and his or her supervisor. As an employee, you should discuss your goals with your supervisor and work with him or her to assess the leadership competencies you will need to reach those goals. If your supervisor does not approach you for a discussion, you need to initiate that discussion.

You can create your IDP using the Toolkit on your own before the discussion, or you can work in conjunction with your supervisor. Your supervisor could be instrumental in identifying resources, providing support, and assisting with

assessments. Once your IDP is drafted, a meeting should be set up with your supervisor so he or she can approve your plan.

Question 4: What is a competency?

A competency is an observable, measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, or characteristics an individual needs for effective or superior performance.

Question 5: Where did the competencies in the Toolkit come from?

The 28 competencies come from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM selected these competencies as part of a larger framework that outlines the skills needed for a successful Federal workforce. The 28 competencies are divided into six categories: 1) fundamental competencies; 2) leading change; 3) leading people; 4) producing results; 5) business acumen; and 6) building coalitions.

Question 6: What is the relationship between the *APHIS Leadership Development Toolkit* and the *APHIS Roadmap*?

The Roadmap provides a framework for career development at all levels. It identifies the competencies employees should possess or develop at various points in their career, as well as common learning experiences that may be used to attain competencies at that level. The Toolkit provides definitions of the competencies as well as specific behavioral examples for assessing whether you possess each competency at each step in the career ladder.

The Toolkit also builds upon the Roadmap by providing guidelines for creating a learning contract (or individual development plan) and by offering helpful points to consider when selecting and working with a mentor. Additionally, the Toolkit provides explanations of learning experiences you can utilize, and instructions on how to create your very own guide to planning your career.

Question 7: Are Individual Learning Plans (IDPs) synonymous with Learning Contracts?

Yes. IDPs and Learning Contracts are used interchangeably. Both have the same goal of focusing efforts towards individual goals and learning objectives, and revising these goals as your needs change. In these FAQs, we will use the term "IDP."

Question 8: Are all employees required to use AgLearn to develop their IDPs?

Employees are highly encouraged to use AgLearn for developing IDPs. An advantage to using AgLearn is that once you complete a learning activity, that activity is recorded in your AgLearn learning history. Using AgLearn means that you and your supervisor can more easily keep track of your cumulative learning than if you have separate paper Development Plan each year. However, if you do not have access to high-speed internet connections, you will probably find it easier to complete your IDP on paper.

Question 9: What is a behavior example?

A behavior example is a description of a behavior that demonstrates proficiency in one of the 28 OPM competencies. These behavioral examples allow you to fully understand what a certain competency means at a specific level on the Roadmap.

For example, at the All-Employee level, a behavioral example of the “Continual Learning” competency is: “actively seeks feedback on own performance.” Having a clearer understanding of the specific behaviors and activities that cover each competency will help you develop your IDP.

Question 10: What is a career guide?

A career guide includes an official description of a position, a list of needed competencies for that position, a list of possible positions en route to the desired position, and suggested learning experiences for developing the needed skills for the position.

Question 11: What do I do if there isn't a career guide for the position I would like to achieve?

There are instructions for creating a personalized career guide in Tab 11, “APHIS Program Information.” Tab 11 also includes a blank career guide form and a sample form.

Question 12: Should I be able to develop myself on work time or must I do that on my own time?

You should be able to complete your learning experiences on-the-job if they are related to your current job. If you prefer to choose learning activities outside of work, such as community service, you should complete those on your own time. Also, if you are seeking higher education or specialized training that is outside your current job description, you need to cover the monetary and time costs for that training on your own.

Question 13: I get interrupted if I try to develop myself at my desk. Are there any places where we can go to take AgLearn courses or to read?

Discuss this need for quiet with your supervisor. There may be learning spaces, libraries, or conference rooms in your building or in another public building nearby (such as a library). If you have high-speed internet access, you might also be able to request to work at home for one day a month to focus on your learning activities. You may also post a sign at your cubicle that says, "Training in progress. Please do not disturb," which will alert co-workers.

Question 14: How will APHIS use these competencies to select future leaders?

Recruitment, hiring, position descriptions, performance assessment, and promotion in APHIS should be based on the 28 OPM competencies, along with any necessary technical skills. Those seeking SES positions must be certified in the 28 competencies by an independent Qualifications Review Board before they can be considered for a position. APHIS has already begun using the leadership competencies in the application and evaluation process for all APHIS supervisory and management positions. The expectation is that supervisors and managers will be incorporating the competencies into hiring, performance management, and development of all employees.

Question 15: Will the Leadership Toolkit CD run on both a Mac and Windows operating system?

The CD will run on Windows operating systems only.

Question 16: Is there someone I can contact if I have more questions around the Toolkit?

Yes. Leslie Bolton, Training Specialist, APHIS Training and Development Branch, can provide you with more assistance, if needed. She can be reached at (301) 734-4990 or Leslie.A.Bolton@aphis.usda.gov.

For program-specific questions, please contact your program representative. A list of representatives can be found at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/esd/toolkit_poc.shtml.

Frequently Asked Questions for Supervisors

Question 1: Are employees required to have IDPs?

Supervisors are encouraged to ensure that all of their employees create IDPs.

Question 2: How often should an employee and supervisor meet to discuss the employee's development?

Employees and supervisors should meet twice a year (during mid-year and end-of-year performance appraisals), at a minimum, to discuss IDPs and accomplishments.

Question 3: How much money is the typical amount that I, as a supervisor, should set aside for development of my employees? Is there a suggested minimum per employee? Must it be divided equally?

The Employee Development Leadership Council (EDLC), a group of APHIS employees dedicated to ensuring the development of colleagues, set a standard of 4.5 percent; meaning 4.5 percent of your yearly budget should be set aside for development of your employees. In the interest of practicing fairness, it is suggested that you strive to divide your training budget equitably among all employees. This of course does not mean that the same amount must be allotted to each employee each year, but that the amounts are distributed fairly over a 2-3 year span of time.

Question 4: What do I, as a supervisor, do if there are requests for more money than I have available?

You can work with your supervisor to negotiate more funds to allocate towards employee development, or make a special request for funding for a specific training. You can work with employees and request that they find less costly alternatives to expensive training, that they alternate attendance in expensive trainings, and that they teach their colleagues the new knowledge once they return from a training opportunity. Finally, it is important to note that many valuable developmental opportunities are free or virtually free, and you should encourage your employees to explore those resources.

Question 5: My program/unit/staff has a limited training budget for formal training classes. Are there other ways I can develop these leadership competencies?

Absolutely! Tab 10, "Learning Experiences," in the Toolkit describes a variety of developmental opportunities that can be done at little to no cost. These developmental opportunities include detail assignments, shadow assignments,

task forces, community service, reading, mentoring, and networking, to name a few. In addition, AgLearn provides thousands of free courses on a wide array of subjects.