



Finding Fit:

Your Place, Role, and
Purpose in Public Service

Why you should take this course

Effective public servants bring a strong sense of self to their work. They know their place in the organization -- where they fit in the hierarchy and how they figure into complex decision-making processes. They know their role in the organization's successes and shortcomings, the boundaries of their influence, and their opportunities to contribute meaningfully. More than this, our best public servants know their purpose in Canadian democracy, have a strong sense of political acumen, and can distinguish between what they accomplish at work and their broader sense of self-fulfilment. Even the most effective of us struggle on these points from time to time. This workshop guides participants through challenges related to the ever-changing org chart, the convoluted and opaque nature of policymaking, the politicization of public policy, and the demoralizing aspects of churn and changes in government direction.

Overview: the need for fit

Today's public servants work in an environment of political, economic, and fiscal uncertainty. Polarization is deepening, and public servants find themselves at the centre of political conflict. The size, cost, and reach of the public sector are topics of heated debate, pitting big-state progressives against small-government conservatives. "Bureaucracy bashing" has been common in western countries. Recent surges in populist rhetoric in Canada, the U.S., and Europe, have painted the public service as an elite institution contributing to an unresponsive, unproductive, even undemocratic system. Beyond these high-level debates between insiders and outsiders, the precise function of public servants in Canadian democracy is less refined. In particular, little is known about how bureaucrats, themselves, view their role in 21st Century Canadian democracy.

Unfortunately, while they are great at skills-based training, few public service organizations are in a position to provide answers or in-house resources to support their staff in these areas of uncertainty. Long-established norms treat politics as equivalent to partisanship, with neither being discussed in the government boardroom or staff orientations. Questions and tensions fester, which hinder the ability of public servants to deliver on the government's agenda.

And yet, now is the time we need strong public servants with well-developed political acumen. As a new generation of elected officials develop a diverse range of policy prescriptions for Canada's future, public servants will be called upon to advise and implement. The depth and pace of political reform may challenge them to lead and manage change. Fiscal and environmental constraints may place pressure on the public service to continue to find efficiencies and promote innovation. More than this, the role and perception of public servants will feature prominently in the years ahead, as Canadians and their elected leaders decide on the proper place of government in the economy and society.

In short, much is expected of public servants when it comes to providing a high level of continuity, stability, and professionalism amid periods of political and economic change. In this context, public servants at all levels will require new knowledge and skills to perform well at their jobs, find efficiencies, and to provide leadership to navigate the uncertainty. But they will also need a strong sense of where they fit into the broader governmental system. This sense of place, role, and purpose is crucial if they are to remain productive, ethical, committed, and fulfilled members of the public service.

Topics Covered

This workshop is based on the top-selling *Public Servant's Guide to Government in Canada*, and builds on the following themes:

- Politics, Power, and Policymaking in Canada
- The Public Sector Bargain
- The Politics of Public Policy
- The Politics of Public Administration
- Navigating Life in Government
- Building Roles and Competencies in Government
- Achieving Your Career Goals



Who should attend

This course is designed for analysts, officers, and managers of all levels who are/will be directly involved in the development and implementation of public policy, but whose training has lacked a firm grounding in the politics of public administration. It is also designed for public servants at all levels who are not directly engaged in the policymaking process but seek career development by exploring decision-making and career-pathing in government.

Benefits of the course

As a participant in this workshop, you will:

- Gain a better understanding of the real world of public sector decision-making, including its political dimensions
- Establish a firm sense of self in relation to others in the policy process, including the distinct roles of elected and non-elected officials
- Distinguish and find alignment between personal and professional fulfilment
- Develop a more systematic approach to career-pathing in the public sector

Duration and format

This is an intensive, one-day workshop involving a series of expert commentaries and active learning activities designed to give participants hands-on experience and practical tips for finding their fit in government.

Your facilitator



Dr. Jared Wesley is a pracademic -- a practicing political scientist and former public servant -- whose career path to the University of Alberta Department of Political Science has included senior management positions in the Alberta Public Service (APS). While in Alberta's Executive Council, he gained valuable experience in the development of public policy and intergovernmental strategy. Over the course of his career, he has worked with dozens of federal and provincial departments, agencies, and boards, and commissions in both policy and professional development capacities. He also served as Director of Learning and Development in the Alberta Public Service Commission, establishing policies and curriculum to train public servants at all levels of the APS. At present, he is Founding Director of the Master of Arts Program in Policy Studies at the University of Alberta -- Canada's newest and most innovative public policy school. He studies and teaches the politics of bureaucracy and the bureaucracy of politics, and is co-author of two leading books: *The Public Servant's Guide to Government in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2018) and *Inside Canadian Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016 and 2019). He is a two-time recipient of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) National Award of Merit.

