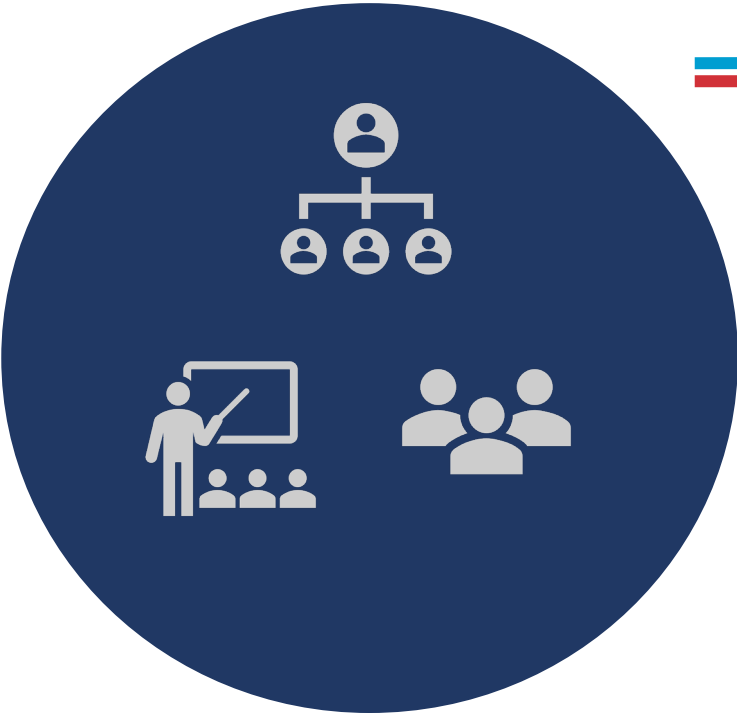


# Merit System Principles Maturity Model



# Purpose

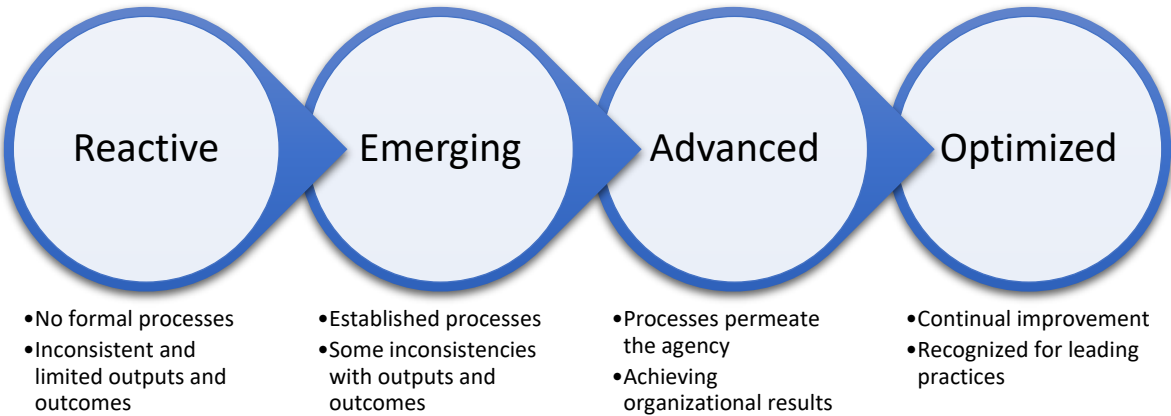
The framework for efficient and effective management of the Federal workforce in the public interest is centered around adherence to the [Merit System Principles \(MSPs\)](#) and avoidance of [Prohibited Personnel Practices \(PPPs\)](#). Adherence to MSPs contributes to successful organizational performance by creating a common understanding of acceptable and efficient activities impacting personnel actions, including, but not limited to, ensuring fair and open competition as well as employment practices free of political influence or other non-merit factors. As identified through Governmentwide studies,<sup>1</sup> agencies should strive for greater awareness of the MSPs and foster a culture that supports the MSPs. Those studies demonstrate the positive link between MSP adherence and organizational outcomes, including a reduction in administrative burdens. Additionally, violations of a law, rule, or regulation directly concerning or implementing an MSP may result in investigation, litigation, and even enforcement actions. Such actions require much attention, may impact employee morale, and can result in corrective action and payment of compensatory damages, all resulting in government inefficiencies.

In support of that effort, OPM, in collaboration with an interagency workgroup, developed this maturity model and training templates as the initial tool to help agencies to evaluate the extent to which the merit system principles are integrated into their policies, activities, and culture. This model is designed to help agencies determine where the gaps are and provide ideas for how agencies could advance their maturity. The model emphasizes the critical role of agency leaders who set the tone for agency culture and have highly consequential responsibilities regarding the fair and effective management of their workforces. As part of our oversight responsibility, OPM will incorporate the model as one of many frameworks that guide our evaluation activities, referencing the standards when offering recommendations in support of agencies’ effective and efficient management of human capital.

# Structure

While this maturity model defines maturity levels at the Executive Agency<sup>2</sup> level, it can also be applied at the department (or agency equivalent), component, and/or subcomponent levels to gauge effectiveness and consistency with relevant policies. The maturity levels build upon the preceding maturity level. The agency’s effective and efficient activities that are present at a lower maturity level, must continue to be present at the higher maturity levels. For example, in the Data-Driven Decision Making sub-standard of the Senior Leadership Engagement and Accountability standard, part of the Emerging level includes “MSP/PPP data is collected and shared across the agency...” This effective activity must continue to be present at the Advanced and Optimized levels, along with the other activities defined at those higher maturity levels, to meet the Advanced or Optimized levels of maturity.

## Maturity Model Levels Overview



<sup>1</sup> [Perceptions of Prohibited Personnel Practices: An Update](#) and [Merit System Principles: Guiding The Fair And Effective Management Of The Federal Workforce](#)

<sup>2</sup> “Executive agency” means an Executive department, a Government corporation, and an independent establishment. (5 U.S.C. 105)

# Senior Leadership Engagement and Accountability Standard

Senior leaders, defined as all agency executives, including political appointees, have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and drive communication about MSPs and PPPs throughout the agency. Through data-driven decision making, senior leaders hold themselves as well as their subordinate managers and supervisors accountable for achieving results. MSP/PPP data referenced throughout this standard may include, but is not limited to, findings from human capital or other internal or external evaluations, number of sustained allegations of MSP violations or PPPs, and any resulting corrective actions taken, training data, knowledge gap assessments, climate surveys, barrier analyses, and trend analysis in human capital activities such as hiring, pay, and performance.



## Reactive

- Communication - Little to no senior leader involvement with MSP/PPP communications.
- Data-Driven Decision Making - MSP/PPP data is not collected. Senior leadership involvement with agency decision making on MSP adherence is limited.
- Achieving Results - Although the agency promptly investigates allegations of violations, the investigation and corrective action procedures do not follow agency policy. Engagement and accountability for results, including the development and completion of corrective actions to address violations of law, typically do not extend beyond the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, Inspector General, and General Counsel. Little to no evidence that senior leaders hold themselves, subordinate managers and/or supervisors accountable for ensuring MSP adherence and PPP avoidance.

## Emerging

- Communication - Ad hoc MSP/PPP communications from senior leaders without a formalized set of communication roles and responsibilities.
- Data-Driven Decision Making - MSP/PPP data is collected and shared across the agency, but there is limited analysis. When this data is used to develop measures or set targets to drive improvement, senior leadership’s involvement in those decisions is limited.
- Achieving Results - The procedures taken by the agency to investigate alleged MSP violations and take corrective action follow agency policy. Senior leadership ensures assessment of MSPs/PPPs is included in policy and adequately resourced. Senior leaders hold themselves and some subordinate managers and supervisors accountable for MSP adherence and PPP avoidance through established performance standards and tracking MSP/PPP training participation.

## Advanced

- Communication - Identified and assigned key leadership roles and responsibilities for MSP/PPP communications. MSP/PPP communications flow from senior leaders to all levels of employees, as needed. For example, non-supervisory employees receive communications tailored to their level of impact, as do supervisors, HR staff, managers, executives, and political appointees.
- Data-Driven Decision Making - Senior leaders regularly meet to discuss MSP/PPP data. Senior leaders use insights from these efforts to inform organizational goals, priorities, and drive improvement.
- Achieving Results - Senior leadership’s involvement in the examination and improvement of adherence to MSPs is evident, synchronized, and consistent. Senior leaders hold themselves and all subordinate managers and supervisors accountable through established performance standards and tracking MSP/PPP training participation.

## Optimized

- Communication - Key leadership roles involved with MSP/PPP communications include at least one senior leader designated to champion MSPs. MSP/PPP communications from senior leaders explain the application of the principles to the organization and demonstrate the connection to workforce management decisions and agency goals.
- Data-Driven Decision Making - The agency is recognized for leading practices in the use of MSP/PPP data to frame, guide, and benchmark decision-making on the development of organizational goals and workforce management policies.
- Achieving Results - Senior leaders throughout the agency are actively involved in the examination and improvement of adherence to the intent of laws and policies that implement the MSPs by ensuring full integration and utilization of results to inform organizational goals and priorities. The agency is recognized for leading practices in continuously improving its processes.

### Related Resources from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board



- Keys to Managing the Federal Workforce Guide
- The Merit System Principles: Guiding the Fair and Effective Management of the Federal Workforce
- Agency Leader Responsibilities Related to Prohibited Personnel Practices

# Integration of Merit System Principles Standard

*Demonstrating and reinforcing the linkage between adherence to MSPs and successful agency outcomes, the agency incorporates the application of MSPs into its workforce management policies and evaluation activities.*



## >>> Reactive

- › Policy - Workforce management policies include aspects of adherence to MSPs and avoiding PPPs.
- › Implementation- Implementation of the concepts outlined in policy is missing or limited.
- › Evaluation - MSPs and PPPs are not incorporated into recurring workforce evaluations. Evaluations align to MSPs on an ad hoc basis in response to relevant complaints. If evaluation reports discuss MSPs and PPPs, there is little to no supporting data provided.

## >>> Emerging

- › Policy - Workforce management policies explain how adherence to MSPs supports meeting the agency mission and/or strategic goals.
- › Implementation - Relevant workforce management policies are only implemented at the agency level.
- › Evaluation - Scheduled and recurring workforce evaluations verify compliance with, and gauge employee knowledge of, MSPs and PPPs. Evaluation reports, supported by multiple data sources, discuss the levels of employee knowledge and extent to which MSPs are upheld.

## >>> Advanced

- › Policy - Agencies have established mechanisms for internal leadership communication about the state of reporting PPP violations as a supplement to the agency grievance and complaint processes.
- › Implementation - Relevant workforce management policies are implemented at the agency level and some component/subcomponents (or agency equivalent).
- › Evaluation – Evaluations use multiple assessment methods to gather perceptions and awareness of MSPs and PPPs among all levels of the workforce. Evaluation reports describe how MSPs are upheld, identify root causes of variations in results, and provide required/recommended actions for improvement.

## >>> Optimized

- › Policy - Agencies identify a feedback mechanism in which documented or perceived obstacles to MSP adherence and/or instances of PPP violation can be analyzed to improve the policies, as needed.
- › Implementation - Relevant workforce management policies are fully implemented agencywide. The agency has established an additional feedback mechanism in which documented or perceived obstacles to MSP adherence and/or instances of PPP violation can be reported.
- › Evaluation – Evaluations assess commitment to the MSPs among all levels of the workforces. Evaluation reports address the engagement and accountability of senior leaders through how well they use MSP/PPP data analyses to make decisions that drive continuous improvement.

### Related Resources from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board



- [Perceptions of Prohibited Personnel Practices: An Update](#)
- [MSP Question and Answer List](#)
- [PPP Question and Answer List](#)
- [Additional reports, research briefs, and newsletter articles](#)

# Training Standard

MSP training is effective when: (1) provided to employees at all levels – to include non-supervisory employees, HR staff, supervisors, managers executives, and political appointees – with tailored content that addresses their respective roles in protecting employee rights and preventing violations of law; (2) is timely; and (3) senior leaders use data to identify areas for improvements.



## Reactive

- Content - Formal training (i.e., training that is structured, goal-oriented, and developed by subject matter experts) does not exist.
- Timing - No formal training schedule exists. Some components within the agency may conduct ad hoc training. Refresher training does not exist.
- Data - Training data is not collected or, if collected, not reviewed.

## Emerging

- Content - Formal training is developed but is not tailored to different employee groups. All levels of the workforce receive the same training.
- Timing - New hires complete formal training within their first year of employment. Refresher training may or may not exist.
- Data - Training data analysis focuses only on the degree to which trainees find the training favorable, engaging, and relevant to their jobs, and the agency uses the information to update the training curriculum and/or schedule, as applicable. The data analysis is not provided to senior leadership to inform decision-making.

## Advanced

- Content - Formal training is tailored for only two employee groups, supervisory and non-supervisory. It is not tailored for managers, executives, and political appointees. Formal training content includes, as applicable for each employee group, the application of the MSPs, the potential risks for not adhering to these principles, and impact on management decisions.
- Timing - New hires complete formal training during orientation to the agency, as soon as practicable but no later than their first 90 days of employment with the agency. Non-supervisory employees, HR staff, supervisors, managers, executives, and political appointees complete mandatory refresher training in accordance with the agency's established schedule. Upon employees' advancement into higher levels of responsibility (e.g., become a supervisor, executive, etc.), employees receive the training tailored to the level of that new role as soon as practicable but no later than their first 90 days in the appointment. For instance, tailored training is provided to employees who engage in activities which are susceptible to MSP violations or PPPs (e.g., participating on a rating and ranking panel, an Executive Resources Board, or Performance Review Board).
- Data - Training data analysis includes examination of the degree to which trainees acquire the intended knowledge and skills to adhere to MSPs. Although data is provided to senior leadership, they do not use it to inform decision-making.

## Optimized

- Content - Formal training content is tailored for all levels of the workforce regarding their respective roles in protecting employee rights and preventing violations of law.
- Timing - New hires complete formal training during orientation to the agency, or as soon as practicable but no later than their first 30 days of employment with the agency. Non-supervisory employees, HR staff, supervisors, managers, executives, and political appointees complete mandatory refresher training in accordance with the agency's established schedule. Upon employees' advancement into higher levels of responsibility (e.g., become a supervisor, executive, etc.), employees receive the training tailored to the level of that new role as soon as practicable but no later than their first 30 days in the appointment.
- Data - Training data analysis includes examination of the degree to which trainees apply what they learned when they are back on the job. Senior leaders use the results of data analysis to inform decision-making, to include identifying obstacles to implementation and developing mitigating strategies.

### Related Resources from the U.S. Office of Special Counsel



- [Prohibited Personnel Practices Overview](#)
- [Outreach, Training and Certification Overview](#)
- [Additional Resources for Prohibited Personnel Practices](#)
- [Additional Resources for Outreach, Training, & Certification](#)