

# PUBLIC SERVICE VALUES

School of Public Affairs and Administration  
University of Kansas

Frequently, when we think of values, qualities like honesty, reliability, love and sincerity come to mind. These are values--deep-seated beliefs that lead to judgments about right and wrong--but they have to do with individuals and how we lead our lives individually.

*Public service values* influence public policy development, implementation, evaluation, and governance design, as opposed to the lives of the individuals who make policy and program decisions. The primary public service values in our culture in response to public wants and needs are *accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, social equity, diversity, and justice*.

**Accountability/Representation:** Government and public service providers answer to the will of the people. In government, there is a deep seated belief that the wishes of citizens should be represented by elected officials in governing bodies. In other types of public service providers, such as nonprofit organizations and public service enterprises, managers and decision-makers are held accountable to their trustees and governing bodies according to their public service mission. If a public policy or public program is going to have an impact on a group of citizens, that group should have the opportunity to be heard. Regardless of the accountability mechanisms, either through representative or trustee, public expressions of preferences are to be acknowledged. And, public involvement in the governing process is essential for legitimacy of governing processes.

**Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Citizens expect public service providers to be run prudently and for programs and policies to achieve intended outcomes, not only in the short run but also in the long run. This is accomplished through cost-consciousness and rational, analytical decision making and through an emphasis on expertise and professionalism, planning and merit. As such, this value goes beyond financial sensitivities and emphasizes the need for policymakers and program managers in public service organizations to be responsive to diverse outcome expectations of the public and also be good stewards of public resources.

**Social Equity and Diversity:** Frequently, citizens are differentiated by physical conditions, ethnical, economic, work, age, gender, and social background, as well as by political, social, and cultural preferences. Public service providers are expected to respect these differences and treat all citizens equally in policymaking and program implementation and strive to provide equal opportunities for all.

**Justice/Individual Rights:** Citizens are granted property rights and civil rights through

ordinances, statutes and laws, and the constitution. They also have the right to due process that protects them from arbitrary decisions by majorities or by those who govern, and are to be treated equally before the legal system despite their individual background. Both elected and non- elected decision-makers are expected to respect these rights in the processes of policymaking, implementation, evaluation, and adjudication.

While we cherish each value, it is a common observation that one cannot optimize all four values simultaneously. Thus, policymaking and managerial decisions focus not only on outcomes and policy goals, but also upon ways of accommodating these four values in order to connect what is politically and socially acceptable with what is administratively feasible and sustainable. One's political philosophy can be expressed as preferences for one value over another.

## **EVERYDAY EXAMPLES OF VALUES IN PUBLIC POLICY**

### Representation

- Homeowners say, “We have a petition signed by 20 residents on our block requesting a stop sign at 4<sup>th</sup> and Elm.”
- A group of citizens who supported you in your last election remind you, “You pledged to hold the line on taxes and now you are talking about raising taxes. That’s not what we elected you for.”
- A group of citizens says, “The city ought to be paying more attention to the welfare of its children. We’ve heard teenagers say they have no place to go at night. For their well-being and that of the city as a whole, we should build a teen center.”

### Efficiency/Effectiveness/Professionalism

- Staff says to the council, “At your request, we now have available a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan, and for your consideration we would like to develop a five year capital improvements budget to implement it.”
- A budget shortfall leads the chief administrative officer to consider layoffs. One of the alternatives presented to council is to make any layoffs based on job performance of the employees.
- The public works director is having a difficult time with the city’s director of neighborhood development on a road project. The public works director argues that according to the engineering consultant’s design, the best route will take the road parallel to 11<sup>th</sup> street. The director of neighborhood development argues that the preferred route will split an existing neighborhood.

### Social Equity

- A representative of the neighborhood association argues that the city wants to build an addition to its motor pool on the east side of town because that’s where the poor people live. The representative says, “You wouldn’t think of putting it on the west side of town.”
- The diversity officer reminds the city manager that a layoff policy based on “last hired, first fired” will have a disproportionate effect on minorities who were hired as part of the affirmative action program.
- The city council, elected at-large, wants a report from the city manager on the distribution of funds for infrastructure repair. There is some concern in town that more money is going to new development compared to the older parts of town.

### Individual Rights

- A new road is being built and an environmental group argues that to preserve green space the city ought to require a significantly greater setback than it presently does. The land owners along the route indicate their displeasure saying, “If the people want my land for green space, they should buy it.”
- The fire fighters union objects to layoffs based on performance because it gives too much discretion to supervisors who it contends will play favorites. Union spokespersons argue that employment decisions should be based on seniority.
- An angry group of parents confronts the city commission and says, “The city should put a crossing guard at 9<sup>th</sup> and Kentucky. Our children have a right to cross the street safely on their way to school.”