



PEACEBUILDING *toolkit*

State-Building Competencies

State-building is an increasingly important foreign policy mission, whether in the form of assistance to the developing world or in the form of stability and reconstruction (S&R) operations in post-conflict societies. This document introduces a set of leadership competencies for state-building professionals (SBPs). It is the culmination of several months of work involving the following:

- Secondary research including hundreds of pages of documents, curricula, frameworks, and manuals.
- Discussions with practitioners from the military, State Department, USAID, a number of other U.S. civilian agencies, NGOs, and IOs.
- Working sessions and discussions with the founding members of the *National Security Education and Training Consortium* (NSETC).
- Input from the Steering Committee of the *National Security Professional Development* initiative (Executive Order 13434).
- Input from leaders of international interventions collected during a conference at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP).
- Working groups involving over 40 practitioners who participate in four full-day sessions sponsored by DoD's Center for Complex Operations and USIP.
- Guidelines and literature from the Office of Personnel Management.

The challenge in any synthesis of this nature is to provide enough detail to be useful, but not so much as to be overwhelming. To that end, we opted to focus on the most critical leadership competencies. We also focused on skills that are more readily teachable, like interagency planning, instead of characteristics like resilience and flexibility. We divided the competencies into three categories: core leadership competencies, state-building leadership competencies, and specialized state-building competencies.

We hope this document will inform career development, education, and training programs, both within and outside of the U.S. government.

Core Leadership Competencies¹

Effective leaders must ...

- **Think strategically** – Effective leaders must be able to envision future states; think strategically; and engage in interagency strategic planning.²
- **Think critically and creatively** – Effective leaders must be able to analyze problems; seek out, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources; assess and challenge assumptions; and offer alternative and creative courses of action.
- **Collaborate** – Effective leaders must be able to work with other organizations to accomplish goals, as well as build lasting networks/relationships. They must also be able to promote an environment that encourages collaboration, integration, and knowledge sharing.
- **Plan and manage** – Effective leaders must be able to develop interagency plans. They must also be able to execute and monitor interagency operations (i.e., be adept at budget/financial management, project management, and evaluation). In addition, effective leaders must be able to navigate interagency political and decision-making processes.
- **Mediate and negotiate** – Effective leaders must be able to mediate disputes and/or negotiate with partners and stakeholders.
- **Communicate** – Effective leaders must be able to clearly articulate information (written and verbal); read non-verbal cues; manage the expectations of diverse groups; listen actively; and tailor communications approaches to different circumstances and audiences.
- **Lead teams / coalitions** – Effective leaders must be able to create a shared vision and unity of purpose within their team. They must be able to win the confidence and trust of their teammates; effectively utilize the knowledge, skills, and resources of each team member; and develop/mentor staff. Effective leaders must also promote collaborative problem-solving and be able to manage internal conflicts.
- **Be culturally adroit** – Effective leaders must be able to work effectively with individuals from different cultures. They must have a good understanding of current events and of relevant global, regional, and local histories. They must also be familiar with the structures, processes, and cultures of the other organizations with whom they work.

¹ These leadership skills are applicable to all national security missions, including state-building. USIP, working with a number of agencies, took the lead in documenting them. They have been adopted, with only minor modification, by the Steering Committee of the National Security Professional Development initiative.

² Where the document uses the term “interagency,” a broader grouping can be substituted, including non-governmental organizations, foreign governments, regional organizations, the private sector, and international organizations.

State-Building Leadership Competencies

Effective SBPs must...

- **Understand their host-country** – In addition to having a good understanding of relevant cultures and histories, SBPs must be able to identify and work with reliable local partners. In many cases, they must also be able to work effectively with fragile populations, including societies emerging from conflict. They also need to understand the local language(s).
- **Understand the desired end-states** – SBPs must understand the hoped for end-states, and be well versed in how fragile states transition to them (e.g., safe and secure environment, the rule of law, good governance, sustainable economy, social well-being).
- **Secure the necessary authority** – SBPs must ensure their team has the authority it needs to succeed, as well as adequate financial and staff resources.
- **Build and maintain legitimacy** – SBPs must be able to build diverse constituencies who support their efforts within and outside the host-country. To this end, they must be able to deploy effective strategic communications and public awareness campaigns.
- **Engage the international community** – SBPs must be able to engage neighboring countries and manage regional relations. In many cases, they must also engage the international community, including governments, NGOs, and international organizations.
- **Leverage intelligence** – SBPs must know how to collect and use intelligence. They must stay politically and situationally aware, regularly monitor progress, and be comfortable making necessary course corrections.
- **Understand conflict** – SBPs must understand conflicts and how they evolve. They must be able to analyze specific conflicts to determine their history, causes, relevant actors, interests, and potential trajectories. They must be able to recognize early warning signs and potential “trigger” events. Taking all of the above into account, they must be able to help develop and execute mitigation strategies.
- **Manage spoilers** – SBPs must be able to identify and manage individuals or organizations who, intentionally or unintentionally, may impede success.
- **Manage transitions** – SBPs must be able to manage transition from military to civilian control and/or from outsider to local control. They must recognize that increasing the capacity of the host nation is a key part of their mission.

Specialized State-Building Competencies

In addition to the above leadership skills, SBPs must have the specialized skills necessary to support host-countries as they strengthen their state. Of particular importance are the technical skills needed to promote the rule of law, democratic governance, sustainable economies, security, and social well-being (e.g., education systems, healthcare systems, etc.). With its *Framework for Fragile States and Societies Emerging from Conflict* as a launching point, USIP is currently collaborating with a number of organizations to better define these areas of specialization, and to develop related practitioner tools and training.

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