ACE NZ // COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The Base

The competency framework for consultants in the built and natural environment

Contents

What is a consultant in the built and natural environment?

A consultant in the built and natural environment provides design advice, analysis and management services to projects – both public and private. They may be engineers, architects, surveyors, project managers, planners and other disciplines. A consultant's role may involve providing advice and input into a project at all stages of the project cycle, from the planning stages through to construction.

To be a successful consultant, an individual is required to have a broad range of both technical and non-technical skills. Working within a consulting firm, or running your own, also requires a broad range of business and leadership skills and qualities, as well as corporate understanding. The depth and breadth of a consultant's knowledge and skills in different areas will depend on numerous factors such as the nature of the work, the level they are working at and whether someone is working in a technical role or leadership role.

Competency is defined as "an individual's ability to make choices from a repertoire of behaviours for handling situations and tasks in specific contexts of professional practice".

For the most part, the education of professionals in our sector focuses on technical skills, with the expectation that non-technical consulting skills are acquired and developed 'on the job'. Different businesses have their own approaches to the growth and development of their people's consulting skills, from large firms with mature internal systems to smaller businesses that may be challenged for the time and resources to support such programmes, or simply don't know where to access relevant courses or tools to assist them. Either way, there is no authoritative framework that sets out the core skills, competencies and behaviours of a successful consultant that can help businesses identify how they should be developing their people, and where to best invest their resources to grow their people to be the best they can be and aligned to industry best practice.

We are living in a time of change, challenge and opportunity, with the need to adapt to climate change, disruptive technologies, changing stakeholder expectations, and the need to innovate and adopt new and smarter ways of working in a restrained labour market. To be able to better address these challenges, professional services consulting firms in the built and natural environment need to ensure now, more than ever, their people have the skills needed to be effective consultants, providing consistently high-quality services, in the professional services consultancy sector. In a resource constrained environment, our businesses also need to know where they can best invest to develop and retain their people. That is why we have developed this framework.

The framework

The framework sets out the competencies we have identified as being central to making a great consultant, and is designed to be applicable in a variety of contexts, from sole traders to large consultancies.

The framework can be used to help guide the areas of knowledge and skills required across different aspects of consultancy so individuals and organisations can succeed in providing excellence in consulting in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The framework was developed through consultation with a broad range of our members. We started with a series of targeted consultations to understand the key non-technical competencies needed to be a successful consultant now and into the future, and how organisations currently develop these in their people. To help develop the structure and content of the framework, we carried out a series of focus groups to understand what the key elements were of each competency, and for people at various levels of experience. We then tested the draft framework with a range of our members.

Making sense of the framework

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	TALENT MANAGEMENT	OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE	CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
Communication and client management	People	Risk and quality management	Engagement and respect for Maori
Teamwork, mentoring and leadership	Health & Safety, wellbeing	Contracts	Environment and social
Ethics and values	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Procurement, pricing and bidding	
Conflict and complaints management		Technology and innovation	
Self-management		Strategy and governance	
Growth mindset		Finance	
		Business risk and insurance	

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Ao Māori

Pillars

Four foundational pillars reflect different areas of competency in consulting.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Ao Māori are the grounding competencies sitting across all aspects of the system.

Categories

The categories are the building blocks of each pillar.

Levels

Not everyone's house is built the same way. Within each category are three levels of progression. The competencies an individual requires will depend on their career trajectory.

The levels

There are three levels of proficiency within each category, but it is not expected that someone will have skills or knowledge across all the competencies or be operating at the same level across each category or pillar. The competencies you have proficiency in, and to what level, will depend on a number of factors such as your background and experience, and career pathway.

The three levels we have identified are:

Level	Description
Engages	- Is part of a process or provides advice - Does not hold higher responsibility, including decision making and people management
Leads	- Leads or holds responsibility for a process - May include leading people within the process - May input into some strategic development and works with organisation leaders on governance activities but has no overall responsibility at this level
Governs	- Holds ultimate responsibility for a process and output - Leads or is responsible for governance and executive level decision making

Relationship management

The ability to work and communicate with and influence others, both internal and external

Communication and client management

Description: Communicates effectively with clients, manages and builds relationships

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Ability to communicate and engage effectively with clients using a variety of modes of communication, tailoring communications to the intended audience • Delivers an excellent client experience cycle. • Builds trust with all clients and stakeholders.	• Ability to tailor communication to a range of different audiences, for example clients, other members of development team, government, public • Strives to understand client needs at business and individual level to add value and demonstrate expertise in the client's area of need • Always strives to be reliable, responsive and easy to do business with • Seeks and acknowledges feedback from clients and responds accordingly • Influences to add value both to the client organisations and specific projects, in terms of wider social and environmental impacts	• Demonstrated ability leading and building alignment among multiple stakeholders • Develops and maintains a portfolio of existing and prospective client relationships, and identifies opportunities to engage to add client value • Actively maintains a market profile and personal brand through traditional and social media channels • Uses client feedback insights and specific data to inform decisions to continuously improve the client experience

Teamwork, mentoring and leadership

Description: Works collaboratively, contributes to or leads building capability with a team and organisation

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Ability to work collaboratively within a team (internal and external) environment to deliver quality outputs • Shares thoughts and knowledge to contribute to team objectives	• Ability to work collaboratively within a team (internal and external) environment to deliver quality outputs • Shares thoughts and knowledge to contribute to team objectives	• Ability to lead, inspire, and support people to thrive in the workplace • Leads capability planning and development, including succession planning where appropriate • Contributes to industry associations, networking groups etc, to maintain strong relationships and build a personal brand

Ethics and values

Description: Complies with, and promotes, professional ethics and organisational culture

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Understands and complies with code of ethics of relevant professional body • Demonstrates honesty and integrity, including complying with anti-bribery and corruption laws, and understands how they apply to both the individual and organisation • Can recognise a real or potential conflict of interest and escalate appropriately	• Operates within role and scope of practise, and makes appropriate judgement calls relating to levels of competence • Identifies unethical or careless behaviour (both internal and external) and escalates appropriately • Can recognise a real or potential conflict of interest and provide advice on how to manage it • Recognises the importance of organisational values	• Ensures organisation operates in accordance with the ACE New Zealand member obligations • Understands how to develop and embed organisational values • Leads responsibly and ensures people within organisation and externally are able to carry out their duties professionally and ethically • Ensures organisation has clear processes around recognising and disclosing potential and real conflicts of interest, and how to manage these

Conflict and complaint management, and dispute resolution

Description: Skills to manage and respond to complaints and disputes effectively and efficiently

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Identifies and makes reasonable attempts to resolve issues that arise on a project	• Manages and responds constructively to complaints and disputes, and escalates when appropriate • Identifies potential concerns and conflicts and takes steps to resolve these early • Understands legal responsibilities for dispute resolution under the Construction Contracts Act 2002, or other relevant laws, including options for adjudication, mediation and arbitration	• Ensures organisation has adequate complaints and disputes management systems in place, and that staff are aware and follow them

Self management

Description: Effectively manage and take responsibility for your own actions and behaviours

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Ability to organise own workload and manage time efficiently, including ensuring timesheets and reporting completed in a timely manner • Good self-awareness and motivation • Understands and complies with relevant legal requirements including the Privacy Act	• Provides oversight and guidance to assist others to effectively manage team workloads • Undertakes and leads conversations with team to ensure work is engaging, challenging and varied • Provides advice relating to individual compliance with relevant legal requirements such as the Privacy Act	• Implements systems and processes to monitor workload of organisation to ensure staff workload is achievable, and takes steps to review this if issues are identified • Ensures organisation has appropriate policies and processes in place to ensure compliance with relevant legal requirements such as the Privacy Act

Growth mindset

Description: Belief that intelligence and talents are all susceptible to growth

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Ability to see a setback as an opportunity to learn and grow • Ability to be flexible and open to change • Recognise and be open to different views and opinions	• Ability to lead others through challenges and setbacks, and uses these as learning opportunities • Listens to others and supports others to take risks	• Future focused and takes calculated risks to ensure organisation is future fit • Supports innovation and new ideas to improve organisational outcomes

Talent management

Supporting people and building capability within an organisation

People

Description: Complies with policies and contributes to team development to optimise organisation performance

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Understands and complies with organisation policies and procedures • Supports diversity and inclusion, and culture of respect in workplace and on projects	• Supports people to engage with organisation policies and processes and their role in compliance • Involved with the development of policies and processes reflective of the needs of the workplace and strategic goals, including onboarding and professional development programmes • Contributes to building capability within the organisation, and is involved with performance management and development • Builds an inclusive culture in the workplace and with clients	• Develops and leads capability planning and professional development, including developing and making accessible policies and procedures to ensure compliance with relevant legislation • Identifies trends influencing engagement with work and makes changes/provides advice to accommodate changes • Creates policies and processes reflective of organisational human resources plans and strategies

Health, safety and wellbeing

Description: Contributes to and manages the health, safety and wellbeing of self and others

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Demonstrates an understanding of an individual's responsibilities in accordance with Health and Safety at Work Act • Demonstrates an understanding of importance of health and safety reporting, and escalates and reports concerns where appropriate • Demonstrates an understanding of mental health and wellbeing at work and knows where to access resources to support themselves	• Actively works to create a culture of safety and a positive no blame reporting environment, including ensuring staff are aware of incident reporting requirements in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act • Works to identify areas of organisational risk and takes steps to address these, including appropriately responding to incident and near miss reports • Takes steps to design good work for team members and supports them to thrive in the workplace	• Designs and implements health and safety protocols to ensure compliance with the Act, including as an office holder of a PBCU • Actively works to build a health and safety and wellbeing culture within an organisation • Understands and responds to risks and wider organisational implications, including identifying and driving change where required • Understands the importance of leader wellbeing and knows where to find resources to support this

Diversity, equity and inclusion

Description: Works to create and promote a diverse and inclusive environment

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Demonstrated knowledge of diversity, equity and inclusion concepts • Ensure fairness and equity in all activities • Integrates cultural awareness and operates effectively in different cultural contexts	• Contributes to creating a diverse and inclusive environment within the organisation • Recognises the risk of unconscious bias and actively works to overcome this • Acknowledges and supports cultural difference to lead and motivate others	• Involved in the development of relevant diversity, equity and inclusion policies and strategy, and ensures best practice is incorporated into all aspects of the organisation, including leading organisational change • Contributes to development of organisational culture based on its vision and strategy • Develops cultural agility within organisation

Operational excellence

The ability to support the operational functioning of a consultancy, and support the delivery of high quality outputs

Risk and quality management

Description: Manages risk and promotes quality both internally and externally

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Recognises and understands principles of quality and risk management • Understands and follows basic risk and quality management processes, including identifying and complying with relevant legal and regulatory requirements • Recognises risks in relation to project delivery and understands the impacts they have on service provision • Understands how project risk relates to project scope, communication processes, quality of deliverables, and contracted parties' responsibilities • Recognises when to escalate project "issues" as appropriate	• Provides oversight and leads the development of staff understanding of risk and quality management principles • Recognises potential risk in project delivery and applies proven risk and quality tools to manage these effectively • Ensures appropriate risk and quality management procedures are implemented to manage quality and minimise and mitigate risks • Can identify and foresee risk and takes steps to eliminate or mitigate consequences • Ensures incidents and near misses are responded to appropriately and any learnings are disseminated within organisation and project team where appropriate • Monitors project scope variations with respect to contracted scope and project risk	• Leads the implementation and management of quality and risk management systems • Sets the framework for, and oversees the implementation of, risk identification and quality management processes • Advises participants of the project, both internal and external, of potential risks within the project in a timely manner and proactively manages these • Sets and oversees company and project risk, and quality management processes, including sharing of claims experience, internal near misses, quality management successes, etc • Internally approves project scope variations and corresponding risk procedures

Procurement, pricing and bidding

Description: Understands and manages different aspects of procurement process

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Understands consultant and project procurement processes • Understands basics of fee levels and structures, and fee communication in project proposals • Understands the consultant's role in supporting project procurement	• Actively participates in procurement and/or bidding process, including preparing and evaluating relevant tender documents • Demonstrated ability to discuss fee structure and project proposals with clients and assists with preparation of proposals and fee estimates	• Actively works with stakeholders, both internal and external, to promote good procurement practises • Ensures broader outcomes/ESG are appropriately considered within procurement/bidding processes • Understands value-based pricing and is able to confidently negotiate pricing based on intended value to be delivered to the client • Able to manage and deliver high quality proposals that clearly demonstrate an understanding of client needs and the associated options for solutions and value to be delivered • Implements clear processes and provides oversight of fee estimations and project proposals

Contracts

Description: Understanding and input into contract management and administration

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Basic understanding of different forms of contracts – both consultant engagement and project • Understands role and contracted scope within a consulting engagement contract, for example CCCS and SFA • Understands role and contracted scope within a construction contract such as NZS 3910 • Recognises issues within a contract and escalates where appropriate	• Understands key elements of consulting contracts, including terms, compensation and scope, and how risk is allocated between contracted parties • Advises on technical, delivery or contractual matters within construction/project contracts, including identification and management of variations • Can identify unacceptable terms and conditions within a contract and provide advice where appropriate	• Leads contract development, including clearly setting out scope of service, and clearly identifying deliverables, roles and responsibilities • Develops and leads contract negotiations • Manages conflict and disputes within a contract

Finance

Description: Knowledge and skills in organisational and project financial management

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Demonstrates a functional knowledge of budget management • Demonstrates an understanding of project budgeting during design and delivery	• Demonstrates ability to manage and set budgets, including accurate project scoping and time allocation within a budget • Basic understanding of business finance management software • Demonstrates fluency with a range of financial concepts • Confidently able to provide budget advice to clients	• Competent in business financial systems, including investment, planning, cashflow and working capital • Responsible for internal and external reporting and financial compliance

Strategy and governance

Description: Involvement and input into organisational strategy and governance activities

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Demonstrates awareness of the organisation's strategic goals and leadership structure	• Assists with the design and implementation of the strategic goals and strategy, and writes or leads development of effective business plans to achieve strategic goals • Identifies system issues and provides advice to address and improve systems and processes • Understands performance reporting requirements and inputs into process as required • Inputs into the development of relevant operating procedures and understands and complies with relevant legal requirements	• Understands and leads governance functions in accordance with best practice, including strategy development, ensuring adequate operating procedures are in place, legal compliance and quality service provision • Understands importance of a clear vision and purpose to guide strategy • Monitors organisational performance and implements change processes where appropriate • Keeps up to date with industry trends and takes a leadership role in ensuring the organisation can respond and adapt • Responsible for performance reporting • Leads future organisational planning, including succession planning

Business risk and insurance

Description: Knowledge of insurance requirements and business risk

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Understands basic insurance requirements, including types of policies, constraints and limitations • Understands the relationship of insurance to service delivery, risk management, quality management and client management	• Understands how insurance can affect contractual arrangements and liability • Demonstrated ability aligning commercial agreements and contract scope with insurance terms • Understands process and requirements for reporting to maintain cover and support claims • Involved in negotiating commissions relative to insurability • Provides guidance and assists others on insurance terms, constraints and exclusions • Understanding of common law liability, project risk with respect to consultant engagement	• Ensures adequate levels of insurance (in particular, professional indemnity and public liability insurance) are in place • Ensures other insurance policies required for organisation are in place, for example building and contents, cyber • Ensures adequate structures and systems are in place to enable organisation to effectively assesses, manage and mitigate business-wide risks and potential liability exposure • Is involved with negotiating policies (new and renewals) with insurers • Ensures insurance strategy aligns with business strategies

Technology and innovation

Description: Engagement and knowledge of digital technology

Engages	Leads	Governs
• Understands and engages with relevant technology such as BIM, digital twins and AI in accordance with best practice • Keeps up to date with new technology • Aware of relevant cyber security requirements and data protection laws • Understands the importance of using professional judgement before using technology	• Engages and promotes digital adoption within the organisation, recognising the role it plays in client experience • Engages with clients to assist in decision making and promotion of the right technological solutions to achieve the best project outcomes • Is involved in the implementation and coaching of relevant cyber security and data protection processes and systems • Understands the relationship between technology tools and good practice – ensuring technology use is understood in the context of consulting solutions	• Involved in strategic planning that builds digital capability and capacity and creates an environment where innovation in the norm • Ensures organisation has adequate systems in place to identify, manage and respond to technological issues, including managing data and cyber breaches, and manages staff compliance with these • Identifies opportunities to utilise technology to enhance productivity, quality outcomes and client experience

Culture and environment

Knowledge and skills to influence wider social and environmental outcomes

Engagement and respect for Māori

Description: Knowledge and respect of Te Ao Māori and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Engages	Leads	Governs
- Understands the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and incorporates these into their work - Understands and respects tikanga of the tangata whenua where you work - Basic understanding of Te Reo, including mihi	- Understands how Te Tititi o Waitangi applies when working with Crown clients and their businesses own frameworks - Recognise the specific responsibilities of working with mana whenua across different geographical areas - Demonstrate skills and knowledge to undertake authentic engagement with tangata whenua	- Develops policies and procedures for cultural competency within the organisation - Ensures organisational activities work in partnership with tangata whenua and in accordance with tikanga Māori

Environment and social

Description: Understands and influences environmental outcomes

Engages	Leads	Governs
- Demonstrates an understanding of the potential effects of the environment and climate change - Provides advice to ensure projects are designed to be sustainable over entire life cycle	- Ability to drive client conversations and influence decision making so environmental impacts are considered as part of project design and delivery - Consideration of wider social impacts to maximise liveability, social cohesiveness, and support people and communities to thrive	- Ensure wider economic, sustainability, social and political impacts have been considered within all business activities and planning - Ensures global impact considerations have been considered in all decision making and project design - Ensures ESG metrics are collected and accurately reported upon in accordance with performance reporting requirements

ACE nz

Association of Consulting and Engineering
Level 11, 79 Boulcott Street,
Wellington 6011
PO Box 10247, Wellington 6140

acenz.org.nz