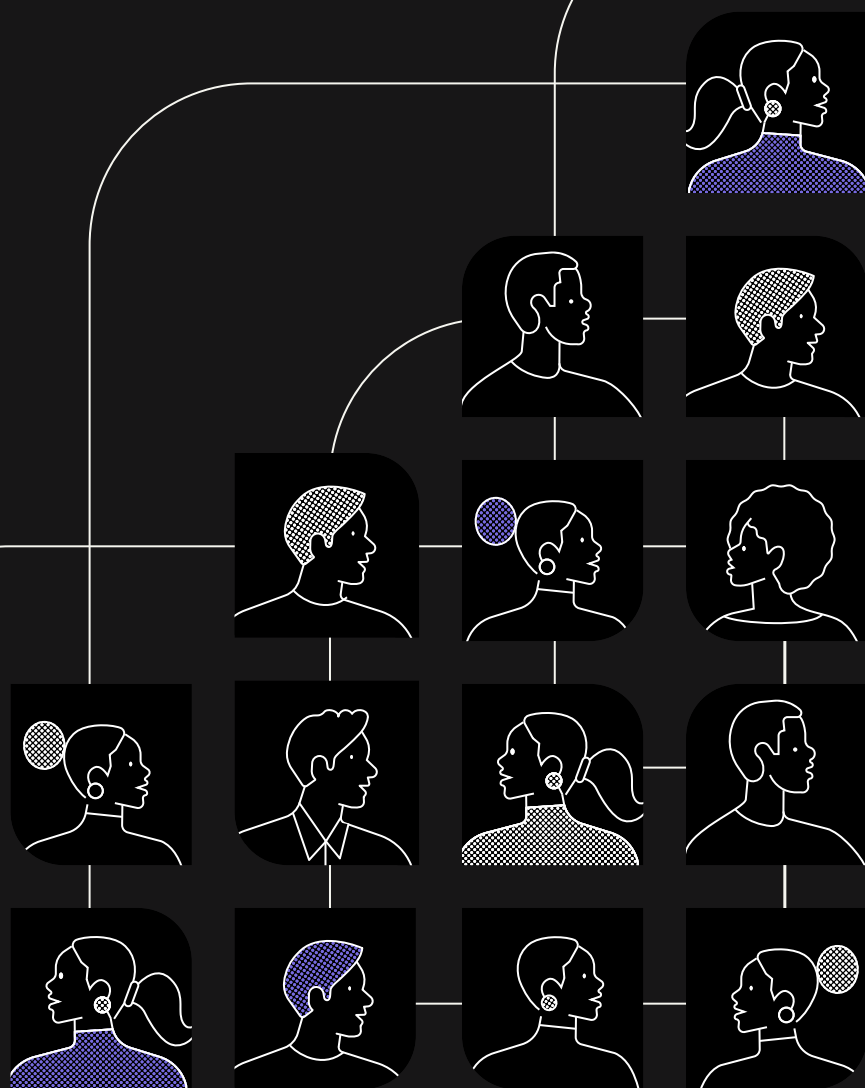


apolitical
COMMUNITY INSIGHTS



At a glance



Silos

Lack of opportunity to share and collaborate continues to frustrate public servants



Speed

Few public servants believe their government is keeping pace with citizens' needs



AI uncertainty

AI could help with public servants' daily repetitive tasks — but they lack training and guidance around using it



Futures thinking

Public servants say that foresight is the top skill they want to develop



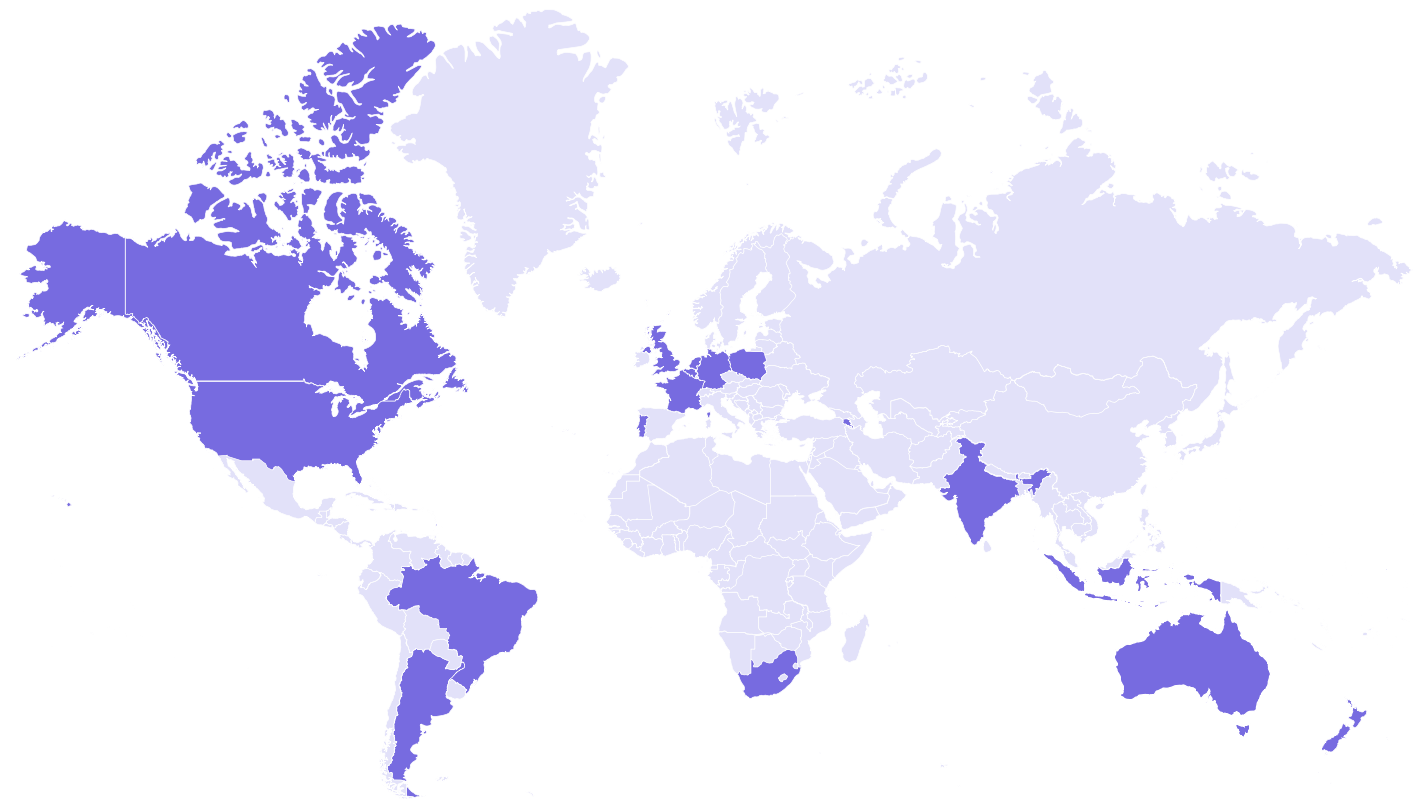
Taking action

Skills development is hard, especially when time poor — and joining Communities can help

130 interviews

Over the last year, Apolitical facilitated 130 interviews, ran nearly 100 unique polls and conducted 2 large-scale global surveys. We analysed the results and pulled out the 5 themes which are set to be top-of-mind for public servants for the next year.

- 100+ unique polls
- 2 global surveys
- 5 top-of-mind themes



This report distils the insights most relevant to government leaders as they make their way through 2025, map their priorities and consider the skills and knowledge their teams need to succeed. Why does this matter? Because it's rare to step outside your own silo and connect with the shared experiences of public servants across the globe. It's a chance to see what you and your peers are grappling with collectively — the missing skills, shared anxieties and deeply rooted challenges in government. It's also a testament to why governments thrive on connections and communities to drive change.

We asked hundreds of public servants what their biggest challenge is at work. Their answers had a lot in common.

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There are a lot of challenges in having a cohesive way of doing things and working with the people it even makes sense to work with. And even if you want to work more closely with others outside your immediate team, there are inherent barriers in the way local government is designed and organised. These silos make communication and cohesion incredibly difficult.



Public servant, Strategic Delivery Manager, London Borough of Hackney, UK in April 2024

Every interview begins with a simple yet revealing question: “What is your biggest challenge at work?”

At first glance, you might expect the responses to vary depending on seniority, location or role. However, when we analysed the responses, a surprising pattern emerged: the same core frustrations appeared time and again across continents and job titles.

These topics are far from trivial. They complicate daily workflows and slow the entire government machinery. They hinder public servants from delivering results, block innovations and make it difficult to challenge entrenched systems or introduce new methodologies.

The quotes in this report are anonymised to protect the privacy of the public servants we spoke with. What emerges instead is a global picture of the challenges faced across layers of bureaucracy, from the local to the national, spanning countries from Brazil and Canada to the Netherlands and South Africa.

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All the financial constraints we’re going through are the biggest challenge.



Public servant, provincial government, South Africa in June 2024

What is your biggest challenge at work?

BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

"Money is drying up all over the place."

TECHNOLOGY

"Getting the software to do what I want to do."

SILOS AND COMMUNICATION

"Avoiding duplication and working in silos."

"Not knowing what other teams are doing."

BUREAUCRACY

"Bureaucratic tasks you have to do that are not related to your actual work."



CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

"We're trying to do more with less."

"Creating opportunities for development for myself and my staff."

BENCHMARKING

"Ensuring the guidance that we provide represents best practice that's already been applied."

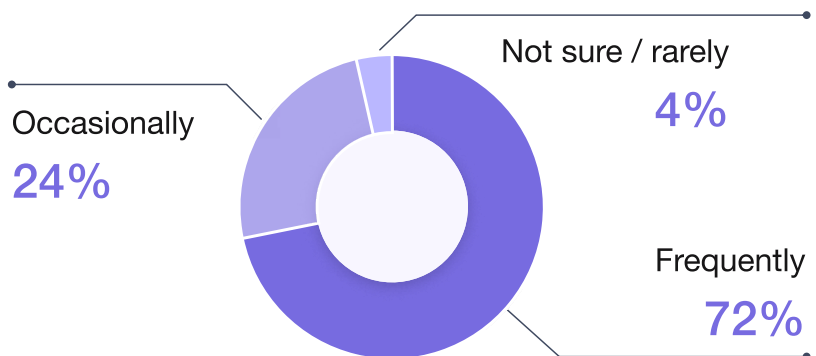
The lack of opportunity to share and collaborate continues to frustrate public servants

Silos are some of the most endemic barriers to government efficiency. They result in duplicated efforts and slow decision-making while limiting efficiency and agility.

0%

In a 2024 poll, not a single public servant reported never encountering silos. 72% said they face them frequently.

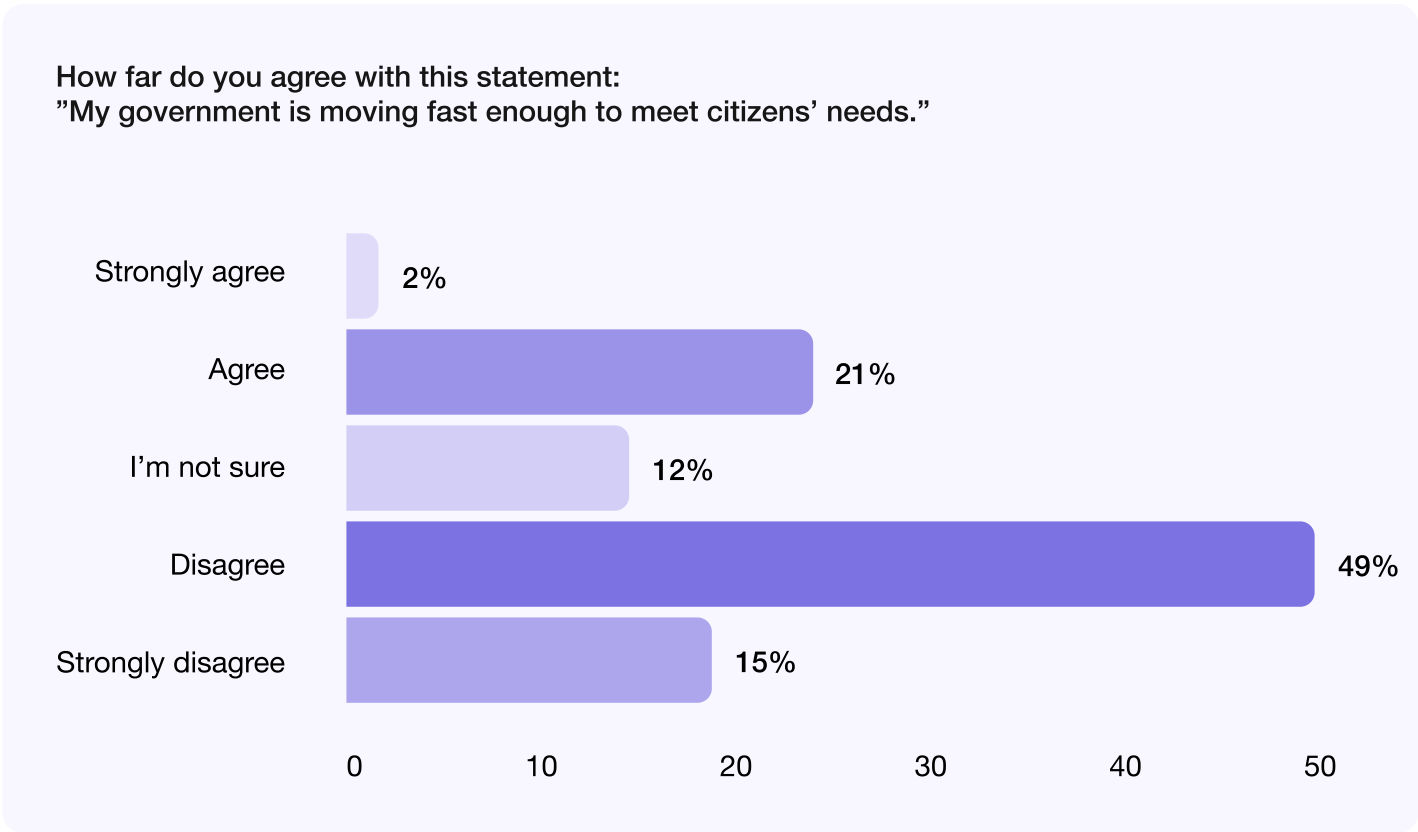
How often do you encounter silos in your work environment?



To truly unlock the potential of public servants, addressing these entrenched barriers is essential. Tackling silos, streamlining bureaucracy and dismantling unnecessary hierarchies will be key to enabling public servants to innovate, collaborate and deliver at their best in 2025 and beyond.


Few public servants believe their governments are keeping pace with citizens' needs

We asked a small group of public servants whether their government is moving fast enough. Three-quarters of all respondents don't think it is.



When we asked public servants why change happens so slowly, a clear pattern emerged: challenges in implementing new processes or ways of working often stem from the weight of historical and institutional factors. Governments are typically long-established institutions, shaped by deep-rooted traditions, norms and experiences of past missteps or scandals. These legacies can create a resistance to change that is more about institutional inertia than individual reluctance. The deeply embedded structures and the lasting impact of past events can make it difficult to shift the status quo, highlighting the complexity of driving change in such environments.

The pace of change in government is a huge learning curve. How people take up ideas and new things varies greatly. You have incredibly dynamic people who want to drive rapid change, but they're held back by systems that feel 200 years old and haven't evolved. There's a constant tension between those pushing for innovation and those resisting it.

 Local government official, UK in April 2024

To tackle complex challenges, governments need to move at speed and scale. There are a number of bright spots to be celebrated. Encouraging examples of governments accelerating the speed at which they deliver include:

Better and faster procurement: Streamlining processes to reduce delays and unlock innovation

Example: Peru's government implemented the "Single Supplier Search" in 2020, which stores information about government suppliers and impediments to working with them. It shortened the time it takes to identify the impediments to a possible supplier from 42 minutes to 3.¹

Proactive government: Shifting from reactive responses to proactive planning and action.

Example: In 2018, Estonia approved a plan to shift to a more proactive approach to providing government services. Citizens do not need to "ask for grants, assistance or advice" — instead, the state holds the information it needs to extend those offers itself.²

Automation of administrative tasks

Example: In 2018, India's Ministry of Railways started using AI to analyse the condition of its tracks by building an AI-assisted calendar. The calendar automatically plans maintenance, ensuring that tracks are monitored and repaired proactively.³

By addressing systemic inertia and embracing change, governments can position themselves to deliver faster, smarter and more responsive services.

1. Public Procurement Efficiency through 'Single Supplier Sheet' OECD 2020

2. Turning Innovation into Action, Apolitical 2025

3. Modernizing Railways: How AI is paving the way for intelligent mass mobility solutions of the future, IndiaAI.

AI could help with public servants' daily repetitive tasks — but they lack training and guidance around using it

One clear insight from Apolitical's [Generative AI in Government](#) survey stands out: 60% of public servants are already using generative AI, but only 15% have received any training. This significant gap underscores the urgent need to build AI skills across the public sector.

A public service manager in Canada shed light on how AI is transforming her team's approach:

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A key trend I see is how we evolve as a public service to effectively utilise artificial intelligence. There's no need to fear it; the issue is that we don't yet know how to use it properly.

For instance, I have junior staff who traditionally conduct jurisdictional scans on policy areas. With AI, we can now automate much of that work in a fraction of the time. But their role is still essential — they validate outputs and ensure the system receives the right inputs.

This raises a critical question: how do we reframe our roles to use AI as a tool to enhance, not replace, our work? I see this happening already — some use AI for meeting notes in platforms like Teams. But it's not perfect; sometimes action items aren't captured accurately.

Training on how to integrate AI into day-to-day work would be incredibly valuable for the public sector as we adapt to these changes.

 Manager, regional government, Canada in November 2024

This perspective reflects a growing recognition of AI’s potential to enhance efficiency — but also highlights a gap in understanding and access. Many public servants still face uncertainty about using AI tools.

I don’t even think we’re allowed to use, for example, ChatGPT. I have colleagues working on AI’s impact on the labour market, but we’re not actively using it ourselves.

 National government, Netherlands in September 2024

While public servants may not feel confident using AI tools, they are bogged down by administrative tasks where AI could speed up delivery or automate. Through engagement with the Apolitical community, we’ve learned that email, scheduling (and rescheduling) meetings and basic admin — like filling in time sheets — are taking a disproportional toll on public servant time. So too are tasks like editing and drafting documents for internal communications.

By automating repetitive tasks, public servants can focus their expertise on higher-value activities: validating AI outputs, making informed decisions and driving smarter outcomes.

What does this mean in the near future?

Generative AI presents a pivotal opportunity to reshape how government operates. With the right tools and training, public servants can:

1. Streamline repetitive tasks to save time
2. Focus on high-value activities that require human judgement and expertise
3. Build confidence in using AI to address complex challenges

This is already happening. A local council in the UK developed an AI assistant called “Hey Geraldine” to improve efficiency and decision-making.⁴ One of its key contributions was reducing workload by automating responses to common queries — a solution any department, team or council could adopt. Humphrey will soon become available for all UK civil servants to use, and will include tools that make it easier for governments to “analyse the thousands of responses any government consultation might receive in hours” accelerating the policymaking process substantially.⁵

4. [Peterborough City Council: Hey Geraldine, a personalised AI assistant](#), Local Government Association
5. [Shake up of tech and AI usage across NHS and other public services to deliver plan for change](#), GOV.UK

Public servants say that foresight is the top skill they want to develop



There are efficiencies in having a whole-of-government offering – a ‘common foresight evidence base’ – as opposed to each department reinventing the wheel.



National government, Australia in [“Why foresight is an important government capability”](#)

Foresight and speculative methods are some of the tools that urban decision-makers could use to explore and test. These tools can help municipalities to familiarize themselves with and work on how future trends might affect them, to start conversations about alternative interventions and how these might turn out over time for the city, and also such tools can help them to improve their future literacy skills and learn how to navigate a more proactive approach to urban governance.



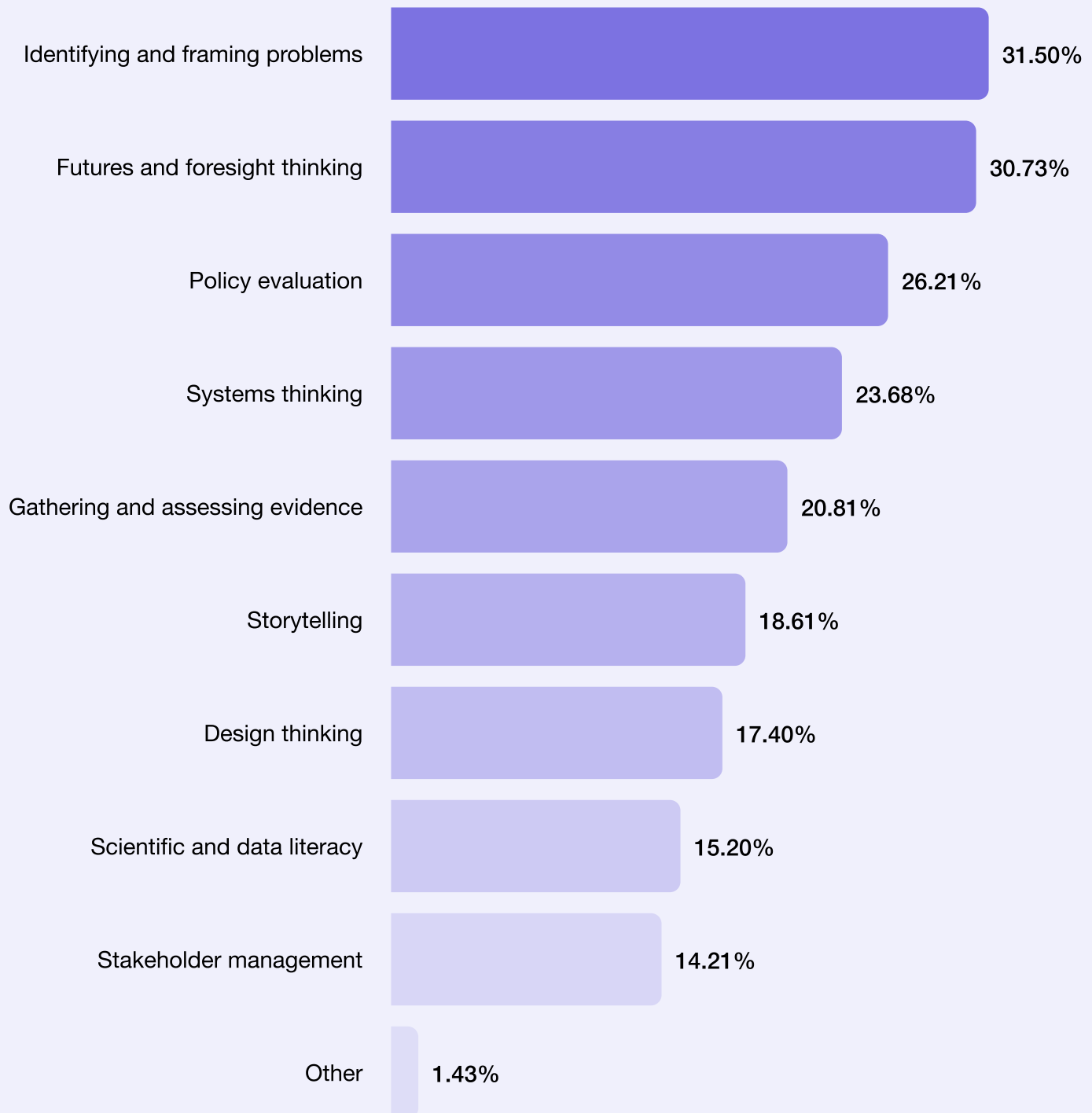
Researcher, Sweden in [“Urban Futures and Visioning Activities in Sweden”](#)

In an era of rapid change, futures thinking and foresight help public servants anticipate challenges, identify trends, and craft proactive, resilient policies. Preparing for the future is essential, especially when tackling complex challenges like climate change, technological evolution, quantum technology and demographic shifts.

In [Apolitical’s Learning and Skills Trends Survey](#), we asked civil servants to select the two policy skills they most want to develop. 31% of respondents named **Futures and Foresight Thinking**, second only to **Identifying and Framing Problems**.

The importance of foresight continues to grow. As governments face rapid change, from emerging technologies to quantum computing, combining foresight with AI skills could transform how civil servants solve problems and deliver solutions in a fast-evolving world. Integrating AI into futures thinking and foresight could involve using it to map out potential scenarios within a specific policy area.

What policy skills do you most want to develop?









Skills development can be hard, especially when time poor — and learning paths which include Communities can help







Apolitical added two questions to each interview in November 2024: 1) What skill do you most want to develop in 2025? 2) What skills do you see as crucial for the future?

The table on the following page lists those skills.

In these interviews, an additional challenge endemic to all skills development emerged: turning learning into action. Training for civil servants must provide practical, actionable advice that enables them to quickly apply what they’ve learned. It also needs to be designed to accelerate the learning process itself. Peers, for instance, are an invaluable source of knowledge, offering actionable insights drawn from their own experiences and successes, which can help others implement change more swiftly and effectively.

On Apolitical, you can accelerate your learning by joining a community of peers working on similar challenges

| SKILL | DESCRIPTION | COMMUNITY |
|---|--|--|
|  Collaboration | Fostering cooperation across teams, departments and stakeholders with the goal of breaking down silos. | Join the Collaborative Policy Delivery community. |
|  Storytelling | Understanding citizens' needs in 2025 and aligning policy work with those needs through a compelling narrative. | Join the Writing Effectively in Government community. |
|  Impact Orientation and Future Problem-Solving | Anticipating future challenges and proactively addressing them. Designing solutions today for problems that will emerge tomorrow. | Join the Long-term Governance and Futures Thinking community. |
|  Client-Centric Mindset | Prioritising citizens' perspectives over internal silos. Engaging directly with communities to understand and meet their needs. | Join the Excellence in Government Customer Experience community. |
|  Digital and Technological Adaptability | Embracing tools like AI to modernise processes. | Join the AI in Government community. |
|  Clear and Effective Communication | Translating government priorities into accessible messages. Writing concise briefs, memos and communications to support rapid decision-making. | Join the Government Comms community. |

| SKILL | DESCRIPTION | COMMUNITY |
|--|---|---|
|  Critical Analysis and Strategic Thinking | Synthesising complex evidence into insights. Conducting strategic planning and integrating risk analysis into governance and decision-making. | Join the Systems Thinking in Government community. |
|  Governance and Leadership Training | Building shared understanding of governance principles, risk management, and leadership roles. | Join the Managing People in Public Service community. |
|  Influencing Without Authority | Driving change by influencing others through persuasion and evidence. | Join the Life in Government community. |
|  Community Engagement | Actively listening to citizens to understand and respond to their needs. Reflecting on societal shifts and adapting to changes. | Join the Citizen Engagement and Technology community. |
|  Interoperability | Improving data-sharing systems to promote efficiency. | Join the Open Data in Government community. |
|  Agility | Balancing speed and accuracy to keep up with evolving demands. Adapting quickly as automation and AI reshape public services. | Join the Agile in Government community. |

About Apolitical

Apolitical is the world's largest community of public servants, with a mission to make governments smarter.

Apolitical is used by 250,000 public servants and policymakers in 160 countries to share best practice through communities of peers, and to upskill with short online courses on government priorities. Members range from mayors and ministers to policy pioneers and digital innovators. Apolitical's courses are co-developed with leading universities and research institutions, including Oxford, the London School of Economics and Georgetown.

Get in touch with our Chief Partnerships Officer, **Pooja Warier Hamilton**, to hear how we could support your organisation.

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