

Professional Standard: Certified Strategic Commander Capabilities

Authority

This standard was endorsed by the Emergency Management Professionalisation Scheme (EMPS) Panel on 15 March 2019.

Context

This document describes the capabilities that a successful candidate for credentialing as a Certified Strategic Commander will demonstrate. These are capabilities expected of personnel who work in command positions at the strategic ('above the incident') level and wish to have their practice Certified as part of EMPS.

The attributes of strategic command may be exercised in different strategic contexts and with different levels of actor: specifically, at State/National level direct interaction with politicians and senior emergency managers exercising legislative functions (including use of emergency powers and declaration of states of emergency) will occur at a more intense level than the regional level. Certified Strategic Commanders are expected to demonstrate expertise in operating at the State/National level.

Demonstrating the capabilities will require a portfolio of evidence collected over time.

This document is NOT:

- a prescription of what training courses should be delivered
- a replacement for agency endorsement that personnel are capable of operating at this level
- a selection and recruitment tool for trainees
- a template to be used to sign off capabilities in a once-off observation.

What are the functions of Strategic Command?

Strategic command is a distinct concept from incident command at the tactical level. Incident controllers at the largest, most complex incidents may need to exercise strategic judgement in what they do, but the role of the strategic commander is not 'incident command +' and operates in a broader context.

Strategic commanders will:

- Oversee potentially multiple incident operations to ensure community safety through the protection of life, property and the environment, while managing government expectations about directing frontline operations
- Build relationships with communities, other agencies, and government to create alignment between the needs and expectations of governments and communities, and the needs and goals of tactical and operational responders
- Focus on managing and co-ordinating horizontally between peers and other agencies, while monitoring and overseeing hierarchical command structures

- Operate across agency boundaries to manage a given set of circumstances, including managing and allocating resources from across multiple organisations and facilitating whole of government decision making
- Be confident with political and media scrutiny, and manage media effectively
- Have the experience and networks to create trust with stakeholders
- Process information from multiple sources

Strategic Command is exercised at multiple levels, ranging from command and control at individual, very high impact and consequence events, through regional control and co-ordination activities, through to state and national command, control and co-ordination. Certified Strategic Commanders will be capable of operating at the highest levels.

Positions held by Certified Strategic Commanders include State Controller, Commissioner, Chief Officer, National Commander, Assistants and Deputies to those roles, and Chiefs of Staff.

Curnin and Owen (2014)¹ identify the key task of strategic commanders as spanning boundaries between organisations and coordinating the activities of multiple agencies to achieve the required effect in response to a significant event. This boundary spanning encompasses a number of specific roles (ibid.):

Collaboration	Representative
	Communicator
	Networker
	Enabler (authority to commit resources)
Skill	Information conduit
	Information analyst
	Resource co-ordinator
Knowledge	Organisational expert
	Domain (sector) expert

‘Command’ in the role of strategic commander should not be viewed in terms of the narrow definition of directing the activities of agency staff. It covers the range of activities identified above.

Stakeholders

Strategic Commanders manage relationships with a broad range of stakeholders including:

- affected and potentially affected communities and individuals
- politicians and public servants in local, state and national governments
- commissioners and chief officers
- executive and senior managers from their own and other organisations
- national and state media and public information agencies
- multi-jurisdictional emergency management response and recovery agencies
- international stakeholders including taskforce leaders and liaison officers, centres representing international resources, and representatives of the authority having jurisdiction on overseas deployments.

Areas of capability

¹ Steven Curnin & Christine Owen (2014) Spanning Organizational Boundaries in Emergency Management, International Journal of Public Administration, 37:5, 259-270
Professional Standard: Certified Strategic Commander

From the above we can identify three key areas of capability for strategic commanders as follows:

1. Technical skills
2. Collaboration
3. Knowledge and experience

and add to them a fourth key area of

4. Personal attributes and interpersonal skills.

1. Technical skills include:

- Decides how and when to use personnel and resources from multiple organisations
- Collects and analyses information received from multiple sources and agencies
- Provides information to support community and whole of government decision-making
- Monitors performance of hierarchical command and control arrangements
- Identifies key pieces of information in complex environments.

2. Collaboration includes:

- Represents organisation in a professional manner
- Establishes networks in advance of incidents taking place
- Emphasises horizontal coordination between peers over vertical command within organisations
- Aligns the needs of political leaders and communities with the needs and goals of operational responders at the tactical and operational levels
- Forms links between temporary incident management structures, and organisations

3. Knowledge and experience includes:

- Detailed knowledge and experience of own agency's capabilities and capacity
- Advanced understanding of other agencies' roles, capability and capacity
- Advanced understanding and experience of the emergency management environment in which strategic command is exercised

4. Personal attributes and interpersonal skills include:

- Exhibits moral courage in providing advice and decision-making
- Manages own and others' stress in dynamic environments
- Identifies and addresses causes of conflict between stakeholders
- Shows confidence and credibility in pressured situations
- Models ethics, inclusiveness and good governance.

The following table (Appendix 1) aligns these capabilities with example behavioural indicators that would demonstrate their application in practice.

Review

This standard will commence 1 April 2019. The Panel will review this standard after five years or as required.

Related professional standards

This document should be read in conjunction with:

- Certified Strategic Commander (Requirements) (2019)
- Code of Ethics (2017)
- Professional Standard: Continuing Professional Development (2018)
- AFAC Doctrine: The Role of the Chief

Key capability	Strategic Command Activities	Indicators
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents organisation in a professional manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains a professional demeanour under pressure Uses appropriate means of verbal and written communication Projects a positive image of the organisation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes networks in advance of incidents taking place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds inter-agency ties in advance of a crisis Identifies opportunities to create networks with other emergency managers Draws on pre-existing networks in the operational environment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasises horizontal coordination between peers over vertical command within organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively engages with peers to obtain or communicate information Establishes and supports unified command structures that meet the needs of all involved organisations Manages relationships across and out as well as up and down
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns the needs of political leaders and communities with the needs and goals of operational responders at the tactical and operational levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates political sensitivity and understands how the needs of political and operational leaders may differ Identifies and addresses community concerns Promotes a shared understanding of what emergency services can achieve
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms links between temporary incident management structures, and organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the authority to make decisions and commit their agency to action Has immediate access to key agency personnel to enable agency commitment Makes clear commitments that are followed through in a timely manner
Technical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decides how and when to use personnel and resources from multiple organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resourcing identifies and addresses overall resource requirements Resourcing decisions take into account resourcing requirements and capabilities of individual agencies Multi-agency resource requests are made proactively to take into account lead times for resource acquisition

Key capability	Strategic Command Activities	Indicators
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collects and analyses information received from multiple sources and agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scans the environment inside and outside the command structure for ideas Disseminates information inside the organisation and across organisational boundaries Makes sound judgements about the credibility of information sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information to support community and whole of government decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses networks to manage political expectations Utilises a range of media to communicate effectively with communities Promotes a shared realistic understanding of what can be achieved by emergency services and what cannot.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies key pieces of information in complex environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes volumes of information being received from multiple sources both inside and outside the command structure Assesses what is really important for the management of the incident and for the organisation Is attuned to key information that is missing as well as key issues that have been identified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors overall system functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is attuned to changes in information flow that might indicate a problem Has a high-level overview of operational activity across the area of operations Shows readiness to make (or get others to make) changes in hierarchical command and control arrangements where these are not functioning adequately
Knowledge and experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expert knowledge and experience of own agency's role, capability and capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a subject matter expert for their agency across all business areas Has a detailed understanding of the organisation's capability, capacity and strategic objectives Can provide a rapid and accessible account of their agency's capability to third parties including government
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced understanding of other agencies' roles, capability and capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knows what capabilities other agencies can bring to the joint achievement of goals and utilises them effectively Identifies opportunities to obtain capability and capacity from within the jurisdiction, from interstate, and internationally Appreciates the constraints placed on other organisations by their authorising environments

Key capability	Strategic Command Activities	Indicators
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced understanding of the emergency management environment in which strategic command is exercised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriately influences the way in which emergency management arrangements are applied in the factual context, for example declaration of states of emergency Understands how agency, state and national emergency management environments interrelate and complement each other Recognises opportunities to work outside existing rules, in a carefully calculated way, to achieve ultimate objectives
Personal attributes and interpersonal skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibits moral courage in providing advice and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes necessary decisions regardless of unpopular consequences Does not put off making difficult decisions Accepts scrutiny and adverse comment as a naturally occurring process during a crisis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages own and others' stress in dynamic environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-regulates emotions under the pressure of challenging circumstances Develops effective strategies to manage psychological and physiological demands Recognises signs of stress in others and works constructively to assist them in managing it
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies and addresses causes of conflict between stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employs conflict resolution and negotiation strategies to balance competing stakeholder needs and priorities, to achieve an agreed decision Encourages frank but respectful discussion to identify and resolve areas of dispute De-escalates tensions and promotes working towards common goals
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows confidence and credibility in pressured situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects an air of being in control of the situation Does not exhibit panic or loss of emotional control Recovers quickly from setbacks and perseveres to get things done despite difficulties
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Models ethics, inclusiveness and good governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts in accordance with the EMPS <i>Code of Ethics</i> Understands and works within organisational and legal frameworks Treats others with respect