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TAKING PART

## Express YOURSELF



Ways for having your say and being heard.



**ELECTIONS**  
ELECTORAL COMMISSION  
Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

There are many ways that you can take part in the decisions that affect you, your community, and your country. And not just at election time – there are things you can do year-round. It's important that you do. New Zealand is a democracy. This gives every New Zealander the right and the opportunities to have a say in how we live, what we value, and how we develop as a country. It can only stay this way if we all take a part in those decisions.

Over the next few pages are different activities you can use to have your say, explaining what the activity involves, why you might use it, and how you use it to take part.



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#### CONTACTING OFFICIALS

Remember, officials only advise on the shaping of policy and then have to carry it out fairly. They can't change policies – only politicians (your representatives) can. See: [newzealand.govt.nz/agencies](http://newzealand.govt.nz/agencies) for a listing of government departments and agencies. You'll also find a listing of government agencies in the blue pages at the front of the white pages telephone directory.



#### + TALK WITH THE PEOPLE WORKING FOR THE COUNCIL OR GOVERNMENT AGENCY

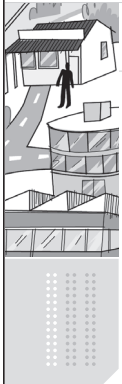
**WHAT:** Writing to, calling or making an appointment to see officials (workers) within councils, government departments or agencies.

**WHY:** While Members of Parliament (MPs) or councillors make the laws and decide policies, officials play a major role in helping them work through the options and the ways changes will be introduced and made workable.

**HOW:** As a first step, try writing to officials to express your views. You can also ask questions of government departments and agencies. Under the Official Information Act they are required to respond. Likewise, the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act requires local councils to respond.

It pays to be informed when you do this. Many departments, agencies and councils have websites that explain their policies, programmes and services. The sites often also provide a direct email link. If you'd rather speak to someone you can try calling the department, agency or council. Explain to the receptionist what you want to discuss and they'll help find the right person. If the receptionist asks to take down your concerns make sure you get a reference number so that you can follow up later. You can also ask to be sent a copy of the file note made of your concerns so you can be sure they've been recorded.





**+ CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE**

- WHAT:** Writing to, calling or making an appointment to see your local councillor or MP.
- WHY:** These people are your representatives, they know the system and they are the ones making the decisions. If they're not in a position to help you directly with your issues and concerns they can point you in the right direction.
- HOW:** MPs have offices spread throughout the country where you can make an appointment to see them on the days they're not in parliament. They are also contactable at their offices in parliament. When you write to an MP at parliament you don't need to put a stamp on the envelope – the postage is free. See [www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP) for the contact details of MPs' electorate and parliament offices. Quite often the MP's staff will be able to help you – they're used to dealing with sensitive information so don't be afraid to tell them what it's about.

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**COUNCILLOR CONTACTS**

Many councils provide the direct contact details for councillors on council websites. Otherwise, ring the council for this information – you'll find their number in the white pages telephone directory. They will be able to tell you which councillor looks after your issue or your area.

See: [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz) for a contact list of councils. Look for the map on the home page.

**OPPOSITION MPS**

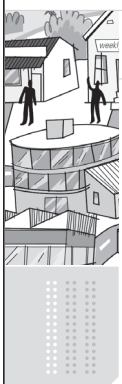
Sometimes it can be just as effective to contact MPs from the opposition parties (that is, the MPs not in government) who are the spokespeople for the same portfolios. They can ask questions in parliament or write to a Minister or government agency on your behalf.

See: [www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP) for a list of all MPs and their contact details.

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**+ CONTACT A CABINET MINISTER**

- WHAT:** Writing to, calling or making an appointment to see a cabinet minister about an issue you have with one of the departments or agencies under their control.
- WHY:** Cabinet ministers have high level responsibility for the government departments and agencies that fall within their portfolios. They can make direct requests of departments and agencies.
- HOW:** All MPs are busy, but especially cabinet ministers. It may take some time to get a meeting with one, and you should be prepared to accept other suggestions on how to take your concerns forward at first. You can always start by writing to a cabinet minister. This will bring your concern to their attention and you can be sure you will get a letter back. Letters to cabinet ministers are seen at high levels within the departments concerned, so it's a good way to make sure your issue is noticed. See: [www.beehive.govt.nz](http://www.beehive.govt.nz) for a listing of cabinet ministers.



**+ MAKE A SUBMISSION**

- WHAT:** Making a submission is simply about expressing your opinion on an issue being considered by MPs, councillors or other decision makers.
  - WHY:** A submission provides a clear and formal record of your views. Both parliament and councils have formal processes that will ensure views expressed in a submission are considered in the decision making process. Councils, in particular, must by law consult on certain things.
  - HOW:** In most cases, you need to write a submission. Sometimes you may also be able to speak about your submission at a select committee or council meeting. When writing a submission it always pays to be brief and to stick to the point. The main idea is to get your point across quickly, politely and through offering useful suggestions about what should happen. Most important, you need to make sure you get your submission in on time!
- Select committees and councils often advertise when they are seeking submissions from New Zealanders. Keep a watch for select committee notices in major newspapers and for council notices in local newspapers and websites.

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**SUBMISSION TIPS**

The parliament website [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz) (under 'Have Your Say') has tips on how to prepare a submission for a select committee. A number of council websites provide a template for you to use to email your submission. See if your council has a website by checking [www.localcouncils.govt.nz](http://www.localcouncils.govt.nz) Look for the map on the home page.

**STARTING A PARTY**

If you can't find a political party that shares your views closely enough you can always start your own. It takes a lot of work and organisation, particularly if you're setting up a party to take part in the general election.

See [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) (look under 'parties') for more information on the requirements of a registered political party.

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**+ JOIN/START A POLITICAL PARTY OR ADVOCACY GROUP**

- WHAT:** Simply, a political party is a group of people who share the same political views and values and want to get elected. An advocacy group (sometimes called a 'lobby group') puts a lot of effort into influencing politicians and voters, but doesn't stand for election itself.
- WHY:** A political party or advocacy group offers individual people an opportunity to join with others, increasing their ability to change things or to keep things as they are. Joining a party gives you the chance to shape that party's policies. Joining an advocacy group is easier than going it alone.
- HOW:** New Zealand has a lot of political parties and advocacy groups representing many different views and values. Some focus on one main issue. Others address a wide range of issues. It's a matter of finding the party or group that's right for you. There are many ways to support your political party or advocacy group – giving a donation, joining as a member, helping with fundraising, helping to shape party policies, or even standing for election. See [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz) (look under 'parties') for a list of registered parties.





**+ JOIN A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION**

- WHAT:** If you've got a burning issue or interest, it's likely others do too. New Zealand communities have many groups and organisations with members who share values and views, and who work to make a difference in their communities. They mightn't be as political as a party or lobby group, but they still have views and help build stronger communities. They could be sporting, cultural, health or social service in focus.
- WHY:** It is possible for one person to make a difference, to change things in their community. But it's a lot easier when you've got others to support you and share the work. The more people you have, the more people you can reach.
- HOW:** There are many ways you can get involved in community organisations, from simply attending meetings, volunteering your time to provide services or raise funds, to offering yourself for positions like secretary, treasurer or chairperson. Check with your local Citizens Advice Bureau on the local groups and organisations operating in your area. Look them up in your white pages telephone directory or see [www.cab.org.nz](http://www.cab.org.nz). Many organisations are listed on the CommunityNet Aotearoa web link directory at [www.community.net.nz](http://www.community.net.nz)

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**TYPES OF PETITIONS**

There are different types of petitions:

- + *Informal petitions* are ones you set up however you want on whatever issue you wish. There are no rules on how you set them up.
- + *Formal petitions* to parliament have to meet certain requirements to be accepted. You use these petitions to ask the House to act on a matter of public policy or law, or to put right a local or private concern. A committee of MPs will consider it.
- + *Citizens' Initiated Referenda* are petitions that ask for a nationwide referendum – votes – to be held on a particular issue. Strict rules apply to these petitions, like how they're worded, and 10 percent of all people on the electoral rolls must sign. They can take a long time to get up and running and the government can choose whether or not they take the results of any referendum into account.

See [www.parliament.nz](http://www.parliament.nz) under 'Have Your Say' for tips on how to draw up a petition to parliament.

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**+ START A PETITION**

- WHAT:** A petition is a formal request for change that you make to a decision maker like parliament or local councils. While just one person can make a petition, the more signatures you can collect for your petition, the more weight the petition may have with decision makers.
- WHY:** A petition can show the strength of public support for an idea. Petitions are a good tool for making more people aware of an issue – you've got to talk to them before getting their signature. They are also good for getting supporters actively involved in a cause. While petitions can help change decisions, they have no legal force, which means decision makers don't have to take them into account.
- HOW:** Draw up a form that clearly states the change you want to make. Provide plenty of room for signatures. Send out a team of supporters to get as many signatures as possible. Approach people on the street, at bus and train stations, in libraries, at events and so on. Also ask local businesses to display the petition forms in their premises. Once you've gathered your signatures, arrange to hand over your petition to an MP or councillor who is prepared to support it. You might want to get the local media along to cover the handover to help build even more awareness of your issue.



**+ ATTRACT NEWS MEDIA ATTENTION**

- WHAT:** Getting coverage of your issue in newspapers, radio and television, or in blogs.
- WHY:** The more people that know about an issue the more support you can build. Media attention can quickly put your issues in front of many people. It can also put pressure on decision makers.
- HOW:** Before you involve the media it's a good idea to do a bit of research. Identify which radio stations, newspapers or TV channels are most likely to be interested in your issue and give you the best coverage. Find out who the reporters are who are most likely to cover your issue. Contact them well ahead of time and find out what makes a good news story to them. Find out what are the best days and time to get in touch and how they like to be informed of what's happening. Remember, anyone working in news is busy – don't take up too much of their time and ensure you have your facts to hand.

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**PUBLICITY TOOLS**

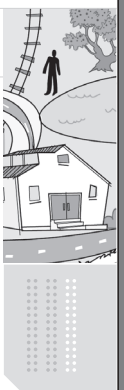
Here are some ideas for generating media interest in your issue:

- Write a news release** to set out your key points.
- Organise a public meeting.** Public meetings help to get more people aware of issues and show the level of local support. Invite the media to attend.
- Organise a publicity event.** A humorous or clever stunt can attract a lot of media attention. But be careful to stay within the law and respect other people's rights.
- Organise a protest march** through the streets of your city or town. Marches can both attract more media and wider public attention than if you hold a meeting in one place. Contact the local council to organise this safely and within the law.

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**+ STAND FOR ELECTION AS A REPRESENTATIVE**

- WHAT:** Put yourself forward to stand in elections for local council, for parliament, or for other community organisations such as community boards, district health boards, iwi organisations, or school boards of trustees.
- WHY:** Becoming a decision maker gives you the greatest opportunity to influence decisions. However, becoming a representative also means you take on the responsibility of representing the views of the people who voted for you.
- HOW:** See the Elections New Zealand website for advice on who can stand for parliament and the steps involved – [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)  
See Local Government New Zealand's booklet *Making a stand* on who can stand for council – see [www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/2007LocalElections/Booklet\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/2007LocalElections/Booklet_WEB.pdf)  
See the Ministry of Health website for information about standing in district health board elections – [www.moh.govt.nz](http://www.moh.govt.nz) (look for the link on the home page).  
See the New Zealand School Trustees Association – [www.nzsta.org.nz](http://www.nzsta.org.nz) for information about standing in the school board of trustee elections.  
For involvement with other community groups, check with your local Citizens Advice Bureau on the local groups and organisations operating in your area. Look them up in your white pages telephone directory or see [www.cab.org.nz](http://www.cab.org.nz). The CommunityNet Aotearoa web link directory at [www.community.net.nz](http://www.community.net.nz) lists many community organisations.





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## + GO WORK FOR A GOVERNMENT AGENCY OR COUNCIL!

**WHAT:** Get a job with your local council or a government agency.

**WHY:** These places need dedicated, ambitious people keen to contribute and make a difference.

**HOW:** Working with people in need or customers, developing policy options for politicians to consider, or helping keep a large organisation functioning and accountable to the public are all great ways to help improve the lives of New Zealanders. There are a huge range of jobs and careers possible in the public sector. Many council and government agency websites include a vacancies section that post the jobs available and the skills you need. But also keep your eye out for positions on recruitment websites or in the situation vacant sections in newspapers. There's more about working in the public sector and vacancies at [www.jobs.govt.nz](http://www.jobs.govt.nz)



### ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN HELP

Citizens Advice Bureaux see:  
[www.cab.org.nz](http://www.cab.org.nz)

Community Law Centres see:  
[www.communitylaw.org.nz](http://www.communitylaw.org.nz)

CommunityNet Aotearoa see:  
[www.community.net.nz](http://www.community.net.nz)

MP Electorate Offices see:  
[www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP](http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/MPP)

Local Government  
New Zealand see:  
[www.lgnz.co.nz](http://www.lgnz.co.nz)

Local Government Online  
see: [www.localgovt.co.nz](http://www.localgovt.co.nz)

Office for the Community  
and Voluntary Sector see:  
[www.ocvs.govt.nz](http://www.ocvs.govt.nz)

Electoral Enrolment Centre  
see: [www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)

Chief Electoral Office see:  
[www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)

Electoral Commission see:  
[www.elections.org.nz](http://www.elections.org.nz)



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and suggestions.

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