

Walking a fine line during the election period

Published 26/06/2023

Being a public servant can sometimes feel like being a tightrope walker. We're trying to move forward to make a difference for New Zealanders, while treading carefully to ensure we're acting with political neutrality and integrity.

We have to maintain this balancing act all the time, but it's especially the case in an election period when sensitivities are heightened – the higher the tightrope, the bigger the fall!

We need to take cautious steps across all areas of our mahi, but also outside work too, such as on social media. As public servants, we're free to use social media in our private lives, but even then, we need to exercise political neutrality. This means taking care when commenting on politics or talking about work.



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"Anything on social media is public information, and therefore fair game for media, politicians, or anyone else, so we need to be very

wary about what we post," explains Al Witcombe, Director – Governance.

An election period is a particularly precarious time for us as public servants. We're operating in a politically charged environment when it comes to MPs and electoral candidates who may be looking for an opportunity to advance their own political agendas.

So if you're posting something on social media about the awesome mahi we're doing in our communities, be mindful of who attended stakeholder events and who may be in a photo or video. If we're not careful, we may be caught out.

There's lots of grey areas when it comes to an election period, so to keep safe on social media, follow these three steps:

Stop: think about what you're going to post. Does it promote a political party, electoral candidate or local government representative in any way, or give them an advantage?

Know who you are working with because the committee leader or local government representative you have been working with might now be an electoral candidate.

If you're looking to post or link to someone else's video, look carefully at content and how it's titled. Is it offensive or is there unacceptable language?

Check: we don't all have to be political experts, we have people in the organisation who can provide advice on how to navigate political waters.

Contact the [Government Relations](#) team if you're unsure about posting something on social media.

Do: follow these top six tips:

1. Ask yourself: “what would this comment look like on the front of the NZ Herald?”
2. Make it clear that your comments are your own.
3. If posting about work events, keep things factual and don't include references to a particular MP or electoral candidate.
4. While we can't control what external stakeholders post on social media, we can take steps to limit potential issues by not posing in photos or in videos during Kāinga Ora events.
5. Remember, anything on social media is public information, even private comments can become public.
6. Be Bold – demonstrate our value of **Whanake** and talk to the Government Relations team if you have made a social media misjudgement, they can help you manage the situation.

More advice about [social media conduct as a public servant is](#) available on Atamai and the Public Service Commission also have guidance on [public servants' use of social media](#). You can also reach out to our Social Media Advisor, [Charlotte Carter](#).

You can find a range of guidance about who to conduct your work during an election period on the [Election Hub](#).

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