



PSA comments on Open Government Partnership National Action Plan draft mid-term self-assessment

About the PSA

The New Zealand Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi (the PSA) is the largest trade union in New Zealand with over 63,000 members. We are a democratic organisation representing members in the public service, the wider state sector (the district health boards, crown research institutes and other crown entities), state owned enterprises, local government, tertiary education institutions and non-governmental organisations working in the health, social services and community sectors.

The PSA has been advocating for strong, innovative and effective public and community services since our establishment in 1913. People join the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

The PSA is an affiliate of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi. We support the CTU's comments on the draft mid-term self-assessment.

Commitment 1 – Open Budget

We welcome the Treasury's work towards this commitment and endorse the recommendations of the Towards an Open Budget report on open budget development. This work is vital to improve fiscal transparency and accountability, and deepen public understanding and debate about government spending and policy priorities.

We agree with CTU that the shift necessary can only be achieved by a move away from the current “behind-closed-doors” process and towards a process that is open to citizens. We recommend that this commitment include moving towards Treasury having responsibility for publishing a Citizen's Budget, which uses language and formatting to make it easier for the public to understand, and which also makes visible the movement of funding between and within Votes from year to year.

Commitment 2 – Improving Official Information

We welcome the guidance from the State Services Commission on proactive release of official documents but more is needed. We recommend reforming official information laws by extending them to Parliamentary bodies and adopting the Law Commission’s recommendation to create an official information authority responsible for training, culture, advice, best practice guidance, and identifying necessary reforms. This includes the provision of guidance to staff in ministerial offices on the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) and a code of conduct on official information for Ministerial staff and the provision of guidance to those staff.

Ultimately, the PSA would like to see a shift to a culture of default disclosure of official information, to help ensure New Zealand’s democracy remains strong.

Resourcing is also a significant issue for the Office of the Ombudsman itself, and this must be addressed for the Office to fulfil its important monitoring role.

Commitment 7 – Improving policy practices

The PSA has some awareness of this DPMC initiative. It has contributed some useful tools to those managing policy professionals.

The Project’s ambitions include creating “accessible, easy-to-digest guidance material on:

- being an ‘intelligent customer/user’ of data and evidence
- methods for gathering and generating insights from others, including those directly affected by policy and public services
- using collaborative approaches, so that policy is informed by a broad range of input and expertise and meets user needs
- testing and improving policy and services with citizens-as-users.”

Yet, we note that the project has involved no consultation with civil society or the community sector in New Zealand and has instead relied on literature on best practice from overseas. This would seem an important gap, particularly in terms of building policy professionals’ ability to encourage genuine civil society and community participation in policy development. The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (disestablished in 2013) produced some [valuable material](#) on this, developed in collaboration with the community sector.

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