

Background Note: New Zealand's Open Government Strategy

In 2011 eight countries launched the Open Government Partnership. They were the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Indonesia, Philippines, Mexico, Norway and South Africa. There are now 69 member countries, including New Zealand, which formally joined in July 2014.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) recognises that government is more likely to be effective when citizens are aware and engaged in building a strong and open society.

The focus for activity under the partnership between government and its citizens is a two-yearly National Action Plan. New Zealand produced its first National Action Plan in October 2014 and is now due to produce its second plan.

The principles that guide OGP plans are:

- **Transparency:** publication of all government-held information, the right of citizens to information, and open access.
- **Accountability:** the government being publically responsible for its actions and accountable for the outcomes.
- **Participation:** government engaging citizens in its policies and programmes and effective service delivery.
- **Technology and Innovation:** advancing transparency,

OGP then applies these principles to what it terms its "grand challenges". These are:

- Improving public services
- Increasing public integrity
- Effectively managing public resources
- Creating safer communities
- Increasing corporate accountability

New Zealand starts from a strong position. We rate amongst the top countries in international measures and comparisons (for example, we rank first amongst 100 countries in the international Open Budget Survey). Our governing system does not tolerate corruption. We rate amongst the top countries for integrity and the rule of law, underpinned by an independent judiciary and professional police force. We have a politically neutral public service designed to provide free and frank advice and deliver on the objectives of the Government of the day; and the Official Information Act is the platform around which citizens have a right to information and government has an obligation to provide it.

At the heart of the OGP is constantly improving the way government and citizens relate. There is a widespread programme across government in New Zealand to put the customer at the front and centre of the state services, and the OGP could be useful in pushing it along. The programme is pushing agencies to better understand citizens and customers and focus the way they think and operate on meeting their needs. Not their every need, but the things that government can and should do to improve their wellbeing. It is also about agencies working better together when that's what it takes to meet those priority needs.

The programme includes actions to make government easier and simpler to work with and meets their needs. It involves engaging communities in designing and delivering services that better meet those communities' needs. A key part is government agencies sharing their data and making it available to everyone so that all the evidence to guide the best solutions is available. And it means government agencies joining up their knowledge, people and resources to work together on the big problems and the exciting opportunities that require a collective approach.

The OGP challenges New Zealand to commit to actions that will maintain its strengths but build beyond them in areas where greater progress or new initiatives are needed. It sets out a process of public engagement to develop a two-year National Plan of Action and track progress on implementing it.

As part of that process, we will be engaging with New Zealand communities and Government agencies. We have some thoughts about areas where we can usefully build the National Plan of Action. We are both keen to get feedback on those ideas and hear other ideas from you.

Action areas we think National Action Plan could include are:

- Creating a platform for citizens to engage in surfacing the priority issues New Zealand faces and exploring solutions to them.
- Building an effective government-iwi consultation system
- Progressing the open data society
- Engaging communities in designing and delivering government-funded services
- Advancing voter and civic education

In the end, **the National Action Plan has to be owned by the Government**. The process would involve us taking in to account views and ideas that emerge from the engagement process and drafting a plan for Ministers to consider and sign off on. That needs to be completed by October to meet OGP's requirements.