

Kaitiakitanga | Stewardship

We proactively promote stewardship of the Public Service.

What is stewardship?

Stewardship is a proactive duty of care for something that belongs to or exists for the benefit of others, now and into the future. Being a good steward requires active planning and management of resources so that the public's medium and long-term interests can be protected.

The Public Service Act states that stewardship of the Public Service includes a duty of care for:

- its long-term capability and its people,
- its institutional knowledge and information,
- its systems and processes,
- its assets, and
- the legislation administered by agencies.¹

Why is stewardship important?

Stewardship is the foundation upon which:

- a. We protect against short-term thinking when developing policy and making decisions.** Stewardship requires us to look ahead and provide advice on future challenges and opportunities to strengthen New Zealand. In doing so, we connect long-term public service stewardship with the priorities of the government of the day.
- b. We enhance our capability to serve future governments and the public.** By providing strategic advice on medium and long-term issues, we position ourselves well for future service.
- c. We protect the long-term sustainability of New Zealand's system of government.** By designing our systems and processes with longevity in mind and by caring for our people, knowledge, information and assets, we are well placed to support the continuity of New Zealand's entire system of government.

There are a number of rules and frameworks that support open government such as access to information, consultation frameworks, co-designing services and how we provide advice. Our role is to work through these relevant frameworks where they apply in our work. Open government is an evolving space. As improvements are embedded into the system, we seek out further opportunities to enhance our practices.

¹ Public Service Act 2020, [Section 12\(1\)\(e\)](#).

What are our roles?

Our leaders have a responsibility to ensure their agencies uphold and promote the principle of stewardship. There are several different ways in which we can support them to perform that duty including:

Supporting Ministers to be good stewards of the public interest. We do this by encouraging them to maintain institutions, assets and liabilities, as well as the currency of the legislation administered by their agency, and by providing advice on long term implications of policies.²

Fulfilling independent stewardship obligations our agency may have. There are statutory obligations of stewardship that chief executives owe directly to Parliament and the public. This work must be done independently of Ministers. An example of this is long-term insights briefings, which provide information on medium to long term trends, risks and opportunities that may affect New Zealand.³

Stewardship of personal and official information. We are stewards of New Zealanders' personal information and official information. It is important that we ensure we have good information management practices that protect personal and official information now and into the future.

² Public Service Act 2020, [Section 52\(1\)\(d\)](#).

³ Public Service Act 2020, [Schedule 6, clause 8](#).



Practical guidance

While public service agencies have some statutory stewardship duties, all agencies can promote stewardship through some of these practical tips.

Long term capability and people

We need to anticipate, actively manage and plan for our future workforce so that we can meet future challenges. This can be supported by developing future-focussed capability and ensuring this is embedded throughout our teams and processes. We also ensure we have data and information that can support us to do that. In supporting stewardship responsibilities of the Commissioner and the Public Service Leadership Team, the Public Service should use common workforce standards. See: [Te Kawa Mataaho Guidance: Information standards and guidance](#).

Institutional knowledge and information

We must preserve our institutional knowledge and information, including by meeting the requirements of the Public Records Act 2005. This means we maintain information practices in accordance with our legal obligations and ensure information is recorded and can be found. However, it is more than that. It is also about our people and their experiences, memory and expertise. It is just as important to encourage continuous knowledge sharing and succession planning for critical roles in our agencies and teams.

Systems and processes

We must work to ensure that our systems and processes are robust so that the Public Service can deliver and maintain the services that we provide to the public. We can promote stewardship by regularly monitoring, reviewing, evaluating and updating systems and processes with sustainability and security in mind.

Assets

The Crown is responsible for significant public assets which are crucial to providing services to the public. Stewardship of both physical and digital assets goes beyond complying with the Public Finance Act 1989 and requires us to protect and maintain these assets for the long-term benefit of New Zealand. See: [Office of the Auditor General - Managing Public Assets 2013](#).

Stewardship of legislation

Legislation and more fundamentally, regulatory systems and service delivery arrangements, need ongoing care and attention to deliver effectively and fairly over time. In practice, this is about proactive monitoring, reviewing and updating of our legislation and administrative practices so that the systems we operate under are fit for purpose for our current and future contexts. For more information on regulatory system stewardship see: [Treasury - Government Expectations for Good Regulatory Practice](#) and [Treasury - Starting out with regulatory stewardship - An introductory resource](#).

Links to additional guidance

This guidance complements and should be read alongside:

- [Te Kawa Mataaho - Long-term insights briefings](#)

