



CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

AGENCY GUIDANCE

OFFICIAL INFORMATION PROGRAMME FOR THE STATE SECTOR

New Zealand is internationally recognised as having one of the most open and transparent governments in the world. We cannot rest on our laurels though and we are committed to continuing to improve in all aspects of what we do. This includes making government more open, more transparent and more focused on the needs of New Zealanders.

- Peter Hughes, State Services Commissioner

THE PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

The New Zealand government is in the midst of delivering a major programme of work to reorient the public service to put people and community needs at the centre of what we do. A key part of these changes focuses on opening up government-held information, technology, and open data to make government more open, accountable and responsive to citizens.

A major plank of our work in this area is to improve compliance with the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). The Act is a critical part of how government is open and transparent. It provides the foundation for access to government information so that citizens can participate in decision-making and hold decision makers to account. It is essential that the Act is working effectively and that government agencies are meeting their obligations under it.

In late 2016 the State Services Commission offered to lead in the provision of guidance and advice to assist agencies to comply with the OIA, and the Secretary for Justice subsequently delegated the Ministry of Justice’s function of providing advice and assistance on the OIA to the State Services Commissioner.

OFFICIAL INFORMATION PROGRAMME

The State Services Commissioner initiated a work programme in November 2016, with support from a cross-agency team and the Office of the Ombudsman, to help agencies meet the government’s commitment to improve management of, and access to, official information.

The aim of the work programme is to make government information more accessible through government agencies adopting a more consistent set of practices for responding to requests for official information under the OIA.

The programme focuses on lifting capability and performance across the State sector through three work streams – Compliance, Pro-active Release and Building Capability.

The Official Information Capability Development Toolkit is one of the projects being delivered through this work programme.

The toolkit has been developed to help agencies better understand their current level of capability and identify where they can improve in order to meet these expectations. It is expected that a self-review appropriate to the agency’s context will be undertaken at least every two years to assess improvement over time.



Compliance

Growing government agencies’ leadership in this area so they can confidently report on compliance with the letter and spirit of the OIA



Pro-active Release

Encouraging pro-active release of official information, including Cabinet papers and related material, building on existing good practice



Building Capability

Advising on and guiding improvement in government agencies’ capability to ensure more consistent performance

ABOUT THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

PURPOSE

The capability development toolkit has been created to help agencies assess and improve their official information capability in terms of their:

- compliance with the letter of the Official Information Act, particularly in relation to OIA requests, and
- compliance with the spirit of the Act, particularly in relation to the proactive release of information held by the agency.

It is based on five domains of capability which together build and strengthen commitment to the principles of openness and transparency.

It describes the key elements of capability as they relate to official information within an agency, and poses a number of lead questions and lines of enquiry across those elements. These provide a systematic way for agencies to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to identify and prioritise areas for improvement.

It is intended to help agencies understand their current level of capability, consider how they compare with good practice, and identify what they need to do next to continue to improve.

HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

The capability development toolkit is based on the Performance Improvement Framework (PIF) model. While the PIF deals with overall organisational capability in the context of the Four-year Excellence Horizon, this capability toolkit assists agencies to take an in-depth look at how they manage official information in order to lift capability, improve performance and support learning and continuous improvement.

The initial toolkit was developed with a small group of leaders responsible for management of official information in their agencies, drawing from their insights into the components of capability they considered the most important. The toolkit also reflects the key indicators of good practice that were outlined in the former Chief Ombudsman, Dame Beverley Wakem's report into central government agencies' OIA practices *Not a game of hide and seek* (December 2015).

The draft toolkit was then tested with agencies, ranging in size and with different levels of demand by requesters, to test how applicable it would be in different contexts.

Finally, the toolkit was piloted by four agencies to test its usefulness in assessing official information capability in different contexts and further revisions were made based on their experiences and feedback.

Through the testing and piloting phases, leaders were clear that they wanted a tool they could use to facilitate conversations with senior leaders and staff about the current state of the agency's official information capability, its strengths and weaknesses and improvement strategies. The toolkit has been designed to support this type of self-review and is not intended to be used as an external audit, for benchmarking, or as a compliance exercise.

Over time the tool will be regularly reviewed and adapted to meet the changing needs of the sector.

PRINCIPLES

FUTURE FOCUSED

The capability development tool is about encouraging future focused discussions to improve official information capability.

DIAGNOSTIC

It is intended to be used to identify and prioritise areas for building capability to improve performance. It can also be used:

- to test the consistency of official information practices across different group in a decentralised operating model
- as a regular input to an agency’s planning and improvement cycle
- as an input to a PIF self-review
- to prepare for an OIA own-motion investigation by the Office of the Ombudsmen.

SCALABLE

Different versions of the tool support high level, intermediate and in-depth reviews, taking into account differing agency contexts and needs.

FLEXIBLE

The different versions of the tool can also be used in combination, for example, specific lines of enquiry in the in-depth tool can be used where a particular issue has been identified through a high or intermediate level review.

EASY TO USE

The toolkit is easy to use and the resource and time necessary to undertake an assessment can be tailored to meet an agency’s particular context and needs.

WHAT THE TOOLKIT CONTAINS

The capability development toolkit contains:

- User guide (this document)
- One page high level review tool
- One page intermediate level review tool incorporating indicators of what good looks like
- In-depth review tool (available in both Word and Excel formats) which includes an optional reporting template in the Excel version for summarising the outcome of the review.

WHAT THE TOOL LOOKS LIKE

The capability development tool is aspirational and forward looking. It is based on five domains of capability, which have been identified as being critical to the effective management of official information.

The tool is designed to encourage discussions about an agency’s official information capability, and to help agencies identify a small number of priority actions to improve capability and performance.

- Customer focus
- Leadership and direction
- People and development
- Structure, policies and systems
- Performance

Together these five domains build and strengthen commitment to the principles of openness and transparency.



High level review

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

Three versions of the tool, with differing levels of detail, have been developed to support varying gradations of discussion and assessment for a variety of audiences, cascading from high level to in-depth.

Official Information Capability Development - In-Depth Worksheet
Customer focus – How well do we understand the information needs of New Zealanders and provide accessible and responsive services?

Element	Key question	Questions to consider in your review	What are we doing well?	What can we improve?	Maturity Rating	When do we need to act?
In-depth review	Understanding customer needs How well does the agency understand its customers and their short and longer term information needs?	How well does the agency understand its customers and their short and longer term information needs? How well does the agency understand its customers' information needs? How well does the agency understand its customers' information needs, including the format in which information is requested (electronic, paper, audio, video, etc.)? How well does the agency understand its customers' information needs, including the format in which information is requested (electronic, paper, audio, video, etc.)? How well does the agency understand its customers' information needs, including the format in which information is requested (electronic, paper, audio, video, etc.)?				
	Engaging with customers How well does the agency engage with customers to meet their information needs?	How well does the agency engage with customers to meet their information needs? How well does the agency engage with customers to meet their information needs? How well does the agency engage with customers to meet their information needs?				
	Proactive release How well does the agency proactively release information?	How well does the agency proactively release information? How well does the agency proactively release information? How well does the agency proactively release information?				

Official Information Capability Development – Intermediate Level Review

Domain	Lead question	Element	Key question	What good looks like
Customer focus	How well do we understand the information needs of New Zealanders and provide accessible and responsive services?	Understanding customer needs	How well does the agency understand its customers and their information needs? Engaging with customers to meet their information needs?	Official information is provided to the public and stakeholder groups based on understanding of their information needs. The agency has procedures in place for contacting requesters and their work-related practices. An active programme of proactive release of official information is in place, including publication of OIA requests.
	Proactive release	Proactive release	How well does the agency proactively release information? How well does the agency proactively release information?	The work programme has provided a clear statement of expectations regarding the agency's commitment to openness and meeting official information obligations.
Leadership and governance	How well do we respond to and address government's commitment to the principles of openness and transparency?	Senior leadership commitment	How well does the senior team demonstrate its commitment to openness and meeting official information obligations? Senior leadership	Demand and performance information is actively used to inform planning, measuring and enabling leading decisions.
	Working with Ministers	Working with Ministers	How well does the agency engage with Ministers in relation to OIA requests, responses and information release?	There is a clear understanding about responsive roles and decision-making responsibilities under the OIA, and how the 'no surprises' approach will be managed.
People and development	How well do we ensure we have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time?	Building in capability	How well do we build our official information capability within the agency and across the system? Culture	There is investment in people to build knowledge and skills, and maintain key roles.
	Training and development	Training and development	How well does the agency develop and sustain a culture that embraces openness and transparency? How well does the workforce understand the OIA and their role in the agency's approach to OIA?	All levels of staff and management act consistently with the letter and spirit of the OIA. OIA training and professional development is planned, organised and undertaken on a regular basis.
Structures, policies and systems	How well do our systems support effective and consistent official information practice?	Organisational design	How well does the agency's organisational structure support effective official information performance? Policies	Formal structure exists with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and the delegation for making decisions on OIA requests or at an organisational level.
	Tools	Tools	How well do the OIA and information management policies, processes and practices promote effective and consistent practice? How well do the agency's electronic systems and tools support its official information practice?	Effective OIA and IM policies, procedures and systems are in place and well understood and are relevant to current practice. Appropriate tools and technologies are in place to effectively protect and track OIA requests.
Performance	How well do we monitor and report on our official information performance?	Monitoring and reporting	How well does the agency monitor and evaluate its OIA performance? Continuous improvement	Performance standards are in place and are regularly reported on and reviewed by senior teams. Performance information, including complaints data, is used to continually improve OIA policies and procedures.

The different versions of the capability development tool have been designed to be used in a number of ways:

- High level review can be used as a conversation starter about official information capability either with the OIA team, with business units operating in a decentralised model or with senior leadership. It can also be used to triage potential weaknesses in the agency's operating model, followed by a more in-depth review in those particular areas.
- Intermediate level review might be appropriate for agencies with low to medium volumes and complexity of OIA requests or for specific work areas within larger agencies. Note that this level can also be used as a conversation starter and can be combined with a more in-depth review in particular domains as above.
- In-depth review is intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of capability. It can be used by all agencies regardless of size or complexity, and is particularly useful for agencies operating in a more complex environment and receiving large volumes of OIA requests.

The choice of which version of the tool to use will depend on the situation and the agency's context, including the volume and complexity of OIA requests received. In all cases, the self-review is undertaken as an improvement exercise.

MATURITY SCALE

The capability development toolkit is not prescriptive about what good looks like as this will vary depending on the agency's context.

Agencies' OIA functions sit within widely different organisational structures, operate in diverse contexts, face varying challenges and have different customer and ministerial expectations. Agencies with low volumes of OIA requests that are not particularly complex do not require the same operating model as large, decentralised agencies with significant volumes of requests, so the tool needs to be flexible enough to account for these differences.

The tool incorporates some aspects of a capability maturity model in that it provides indications of what good may look like for each element, as well as the ability to rate capability using a basic maturity scale. The maturity scale is provided for agencies' internal use.

The maturity scale:

- Provides a quantitative approach to an agency's self-review which can be used to monitor improvements over time
- Facilitates comparison and internal reporting of capability across the elements in each domain so that agencies can identify where they sit on the continuum and decide whether this is appropriate for their context
- Provides a focus for conversations regarding gaps between aspirational and current capability levels.

There are also potential risks associated with using a maturity scale, such as:

- Agencies may become bogged down in debates about the ratings rather than the priorities for improvement
- An individual or team's assessment that positions an agency on a simple scale such as this is not a calibrated measurement and is not suitable for comparing agencies
- Incorporating the ratings into performance management reporting can give rise to biased ratings.

THE FOUR-POINT SCALE

The four-point maturity scale can be used as part of the agency’s self-review to:

- Identify the agency’s aspirational level for each domain and/or element
- Assess where the agency currently sits on the maturity continuum.

The scale can be used at the domain and element levels to assess responses to the lead and key questions. It is not intended for use with the more detailed questions to consider provided in the in-depth tool.

Key	Maturity Scale
	Informal: An unstructured approach that is reactive and mostly dependent on individuals rather than agreed approaches
	Defined: Policies, practices and systems are in place; but they may not be applied consistently
	Practiced: Comprehensive and effective policies, practices and systems are in place; they are consistently applied and performance is monitored
	Embedded: Policies, practices and systems are comprehensive, effective, embraced by staff and integrated into operations. Systems are in place to monitor and improve performance, build capability, and anticipate future demands

USING THE MATURITY SCALE TO SET ASPIRATIONS

The four maturity statements can also be used to describe your aspirations for each domain or element. (Aspirational scores will be highly dependent on the specific domain or element, as well as your agency’s context, including the volume and complexity of OIA requests you receive.)

The gaps you observe between aspirational and current capability can assist in identifying and prioritising areas for improvement across the domains and elements.

ABOUT THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Commitment - from the chief executive and leadership team to openness and compliance with the letter and spirit of the Official Information Act
- Active sponsorship - from a 2nd tier manager
- Integration - with the agency’s planning and reporting cycles
- Engagement - that is open and honest.

GETTING STARTED

There are different ways you can carry out the self-review.

You may choose to carry out the self-review as an individual agency (or part of an agency depending on the operating model being used) with or without external support, or as a collaborative group of agencies working together to support one another with improvement initiatives. It can be undertaken by an individual, by an expert team or by a purpose built team with wide representation.

How the self-review is done and who is involved is up to you to decide, but we suggest you consider:

- Which version of the capability development tool best suits your agency’s context and needs. There are three tools to choose from – high level, intermediate, and in-depth – and you can use them for different purposes and in combination. For example, you might want to use the high-level tool to identify areas of potential weakness and then the in-depth tool to do a deeper dive into the weak spots.

- Who should be involved in conducting the assessment for your agency. In smaller agencies this may be the person with responsibility for the administration of official information working with their manager and leadership team to finalise the assessment. In larger agencies you may want to consider using a purpose built team, which might include peers from another agency.
- How you can draw information from a range of sources, perspectives and experiences about your agency's approaches to official information. You may choose to consult senior leaders, staff, people requesting information from your agency and other community representatives.
- The evidence your agency has to support the assessment process, such as strategic and operational plans, policies, job descriptions, delegations, performance development plans, OIA statistics and other outcome evaluation measures. You may have an instinctive view of your agency's capability but the most accurate assessment will come from in-depth conversations based on evidence.
- How to collect additional information to test your judgements. A variety of methods can be used including interviews, focus groups, workshops and surveys.
- How you propose to prioritise opportunities for improvement and build them into your agency's improvement plans.

WORKING THROUGH THE SELF-REVIEW

The development tool is intended to stimulate discussion and reflection on an agency's capability in managing its official information based on a process of interpretation, aspiration and evaluation.

ORIENTATION

Each domain in the assessment tool focuses on a lead question. Domains are divided into elements with a related key question. Finally, additional lines of enquiry questions are provided to guide thinking about each element.

Consider the most appropriate order for reviewing each of the five domains given your agency's particular context. You can start with any domain you choose but, because the capabilities are inter-connected, it's important to work through all of them to get the complete picture.

If this is the first time you have used the toolkit, you may want to start with domains like Structure, Policies and Systems and Performance before considering the more strategic areas.

STEP ONE: INTERPRETATION

Start by considering what each of the five domains and associated elements are looking for and identify what good would look like in your agency's context. Use the intermediate level tool, which includes suggested indicators of what good looks like, and the in-depth tool which has the additional lines of enquiry, to help with this step. The aim is to interpret the meaning of the domains and elements into your specific context.

We suggest you tailor the indicators of what good looks like so that they reflect your agency's circumstance and to provide a formal record to refer back to for the current and future self-reviews.

You may also find it useful to adapt some of the additional lines of enquiry questions within the in-depth tool to reflect what good looks like in your agency's context.

STEP TWO: ASPIRATION

The next step is to consider each of the domains and/or elements in turn to decide the maturity level you aspire to in say two years' time. There are four maturity levels – informal, defined, practiced and embedded (see page 9 for the definitions on each one).

Remember that these aspirational scores are highly dependent on the specific domain or element you are considering, as well as your agency's particular context. 'Embedded' may not be an appropriate maturity level for every context.

Record your agency's desired maturity level for the elements in each domain using the maturity scale (or for each domain if you are using the high-level tool). You may find the Summary Report template (Excel) useful for this purpose.

STEP THREE: EVALUATION

Gather information to support the evaluation process – this might include, policies and procedures, OIA performance statistics, and information collected from interviews, focus groups or surveys with a range of senior leaders, agency staff, people requesting information from your agency and other community representatives.

Using the evidence you have gathered, consider each domain or element in turn. Depending on the tool you are using (high-level, intermediate or in-depth), consider the lead question, key question or additional lines of enquiry questions. What do you do in each of these domains? Record what your agency is doing well and what it could do better. You may also want to note the evidence you considered in reaching your conclusion.

Note that the lines of enquiry questions are intended as prompts only – you do not need to specifically address or evaluate each one.

Review your approach through the ‘lens’ of the maturity scale. Which of the four statements in the scale best describes your agency’s current situation? Select the most accurate and record your findings. The Summary Report template may be useful for this.

When you have assessed all five domains, prioritise the areas you have identified for improvement. This will enable you to see at a glance your agency’s priority areas for future capability building.

You can do this simply by: using a High, Medium, Low priority rating; signalling which areas need to be tackled first, what you will do next and what later; or, you could signal which quarter the activity will be completed by.

REPORTING

An optional one page Summary Report template is included in the toolkit.

It summarises the key components of the capability development tool, provides aspirational and current maturity scales for comparison, a column for recording your proposed actions and a priority order for implementation.

The summary report can be used to discuss the results of the self-review with the leadership team and agree the 3-4 key things the agency should focus on to lift its capability. It also provides a record of your agency’s overall results and future actions for improving capability.

NEXT STEPS

Put in place an action plan to progress the agreed priority areas, including what you will do, who is responsible for taking things forward and the timeframes.

Provide regular updates on progress within your agency, encourage ongoing feedback on improvement strategies and acknowledge successes.

Consider repeating the assessment regularly in the future as part of your planning cycles – tracking your progress will help your agency grow and develop.

SUPPORT

The State Services Commission is available to support agencies wishing to undertake a capability development self-review or needing support with improvement initiatives.

We will be publishing on the State Services Commission and PSI websites practical guidance and case studies on common issues from time to time, and can also help agencies connect with others to share ideas on improvement initiatives.