



## Transparency of senior leaders' conflicts of interest

Reference group meeting, 13 May 2026

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### Key points

- Transparency has trade-offs: it may build public trust but could discourage full disclosure or deter candidates from senior roles.
- A risk-based, principles-driven coverage model is preferred, but a phased approach beginning with tiers 1–2 is a pragmatic starting point.
- Coverage should extend beyond core agencies to include Crown entities and board members; however public service agencies represent a logical starting point, given the Commission's levers.
- Disclosure should be comprehensive internally, but publication should be more selective, focusing on relevant conflicts only.
- Non-financial interests (relationships, affiliations) are important but hard to standardise and raise privacy/safety concerns.
- Strong emphasis on balancing public trust with privacy and personal safety risks.
- Management plans are critical to demonstrate that conflicts are actively managed.
- A decentralised publishing model (agency-led) with common guidance is the most feasible near-term option.
- A phased implementation is also pragmatic, starting with the most senior roles.

### Overall discussion about the project

- Transparency and management of conflicts are two different things – would transparency have prevented some of the recent examples of poorly managed conflicts?
- Transparency can drive better practice but can also have a chilling effect.
- There are currently requirements for senior leaders to have management plans in place, but the public don't see this. Publication can help address perception concerns.

- Publication may make it less likely that someone with an unmanageable conflict is appointed to a role.

### Who should new transparency requirements cover?

- A risk-based approach is crucial. Look at inclusion based on things like decision-making influence and spending, rather than organisational tier.
- Senior staff with budget responsibility are relevant, there's no need to include frontline roles.
- One-size fits all approach doesn't work due to differences in organisational size and structure.
- Crown entities are where a lot of risk sits. Other roles outside of core public service may also be relevant e.g. advisory boards.
- Could cover tier 1 – 3 leaders, but tier 3 leaders have more expectation of privacy. Most tier 1 and 2 already have some level of public profile (e.g. biography on agency website) but not tier 3.
- A lot of variation between agencies at tier 3 level – for some agencies this is a team leader but for large agencies tier 3 can be a much bigger role.
- Could make inclusion of tier 3 depend on certain criteria e.g. agency size, financial delegation, decision making roles, influence on Ministers. Or provide flexibility for agencies to include tier 3 leaders or other roles they think are necessary.
- Phrased approach - start with tier 1 and 2 in agencies and then expand to lower tiers and Crown entities.

### What types of interests should be covered?

- Both financial and non-financial interests. Focus is often on financial interests, but relationships pose risks too.
- Only need to publish actual or perceived conflicts relevant to the role, not all interests declared.
- Could prescribe a core list of family members covered (e.g. spouse and children) but judgement is required beyond that. Need to cover friends as well as family, a close friend can also present a conflict of interest.
- Need to consider views of Māori and Pacific communities.
- Perceptions about what interests matter or could cause you to be influenced is subjective and highly variable, e.g. what counts as a significant relationship, what is a significant amount of money etc.

- NZX rule: shareholding of 5% triggers that you may not be independent of that company. This was recently increased to 10% but most entities still use 5% in conversation as a benchmark to trigger compliance checks.
- There are different expectations for private and public sector. For regulators any shareholding at all is probably an issue.
- Trusts and beneficiaries are issues to be worked through.
- Should affiliations or membership of political parties be covered? What about things like charitable donations or donations to political parties?

### What level of information should be published?

- Be comprehensive in disclosure of interests but have a higher threshold for what gets published.
- Publication could cover nature or type of interest at a high-level and the relevant organisation or type of organisation.
- Privacy and safety concerns are important, particularly for any information related to children.
- Example discussed of an interest register where interests of Directors were removed for safety and other reasons. Who determines what information is removed from a safety perspective, could this be misused to limit what is published?

### Where and how should information be published

- Best case would be PSC, but given fiscal context it may not be practical.
- Pragmatic approach would be each agency publishing their own based on shared guidance or a common data standard.
- Introduction of a director identification number would be helpful for monitoring interests across multiple agencies where individuals hold multiple roles.
- Keep the information as close to the conflict as possible. This would support publication on individual agency websites

## Appendix – Information sent to group in advance of discussion

### **OGP Commitment 4 - Senior leaders' conflicts of interest: information for reference group meeting 2 -3.30pm, 13 May 2026.**

#### Project background

The Public Service Commission (the Commission) has agreed to explore options to increase transparency of senior leaders' conflicts of interest. Declaring and managing conflicts of interest is important for ensuring objective decision-making, maintaining public trust and meeting legal and governance requirements.

This work has been included as a commitment under New Zealand's fifth [Open Government Partnership \(OGP\) National Action Plan \(2025-2027\)](#). In addition to being an OGP commitment, the Public Service Commissioner has also expressed his support for developing a more consistent and transparent, system-wide approach to senior leaders' conflicts of interest, in the context of recent investigations into poorly managed conflicts of interest.

Our commitment in the OGP National Action Plan is not prescriptive about solutions, but it is likely this project will focus on whether and how information about senior leaders' conflicts of interest could be made more visible to the public, while balancing privacy and employment obligations.

#### Purpose of group

We are seeking your input on this work as members of our advisory reference group. The group is intended to:

- Provide insights on trends and best practice from inside and outside the public sector.
- Act as a “critical friend” to test assumptions and provide input into material for discussion with affected senior leaders.
- Support stakeholder connections by suggesting where we may need to engage more widely and who with.

The Commission remains responsible for the day-to-day work required to carry out this commitment (for example, undertaking research and providing advice to Ministers).

The reference group has no tagged funding and involvement is not remunerated. We appreciate that this limits the extent to which non-government members can contribute their time.

We anticipate the time commitment to be small (a maximum of two to four hours of work per month, including pre-reading in addition to attendance at meetings), and for the majority of work to occur over May – July 2026.

## Current status quo

The current requirements for senior leaders in declaring and managing conflicts of interest are:

- **All public servants**, including senior leaders, are required to identify, disclose, and manage actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest as part of their employment obligations. This is also expected under the Commission's [conflict of interest model standards](#). This process is managed internally by organisations.
- **Chief executives of public service departments** are required to disclose their conflicts of interest to the Commission and develop a management plan for these.
- **Crown entity chief executives** generally disclose conflicts of interest to their boards.
- **Board members of crown entities** disclose interests to the board chair (or in some circumstances to the deputy chair or responsible Minister)
- Conflicts of interest are usually managed through internal processes such as disclosure, recusal, delegation of decisions, or other management plans.
- **There is no requirement to publish interest registers or management plans.** Some entities publish interest registers in annual reports or meeting minutes, but most do not. Interest registers can also be requested under the Official Information Act, on an organisation-by-organisation basis.
- The [Office of the Auditor General Guidance on conflicts of interest](#) recommends that even where there is no legal requirement to publicly disclose employee or office holder interests, public organisations should consider the benefits of doing so.
- While interest registers are not published for senior public servants, interest registers for both [Government Ministers](#) and [MPs](#) are publicly available.

## Feedback from OGP workshops

During the development of the fifth OGP National Action Plan, workshop participants raised conflict of interest management as a possible area for improvement. Issues participants raised included that:

- Knowledge and understanding around conflicts of interest is variable across agencies.
- There is currently no centralised data available on the conflicts of interest for senior public servants, meaning transparency is low.
- The management of conflicts of interest is an important part of our integrity culture and helps ensure staff are protected.

## Key Questions for the reference group

Below are some key questions for the group to guide discussion. For each question we have included a non-exhaustive list of prompts to indicate the types of issues we're interested in your views on.

### 1. Who should be covered by increased transparency?

- What roles should be covered by increased transparency requirements, and what criteria should be used to determine inclusion (for example, job tier, budget responsibility, or role-specific functions)? Should governance roles be included, where these exist for a particular entity?
- How can we ensure consistency across organisations with different organisational structures and risk settings? For example, a tier 3 leader could be a team manager in a small agency or a group manager with a significant budget in a bigger agency.
- What are the risks and benefits of including a wide range of roles in scope? Is there a risk a wide scope of coverage could overwhelm the public with information that is not materially relevant?
- How could any decisions be implemented and applied to different groups, including Crown entities? The Public Service Commissioner is the employer of public service agency CEs, but not CEs of Crown entities (who report to their Board) or other public servants (who are employed by their agency CE).

### 2. What types of interests should be covered?

- What types of interests should be within the scope of increased transparency requirements? E.g. should this cover all interests declared to an employer, including both financial and non-financial interests?

- How should the interests of family members and other associates be covered for the purposes of publishing interests? Is it better to take a prescriptive approach that clearly lists what family members are in scope (similar to that in the Crown Entities Act 2004) or to use a more flexible definition?
- How should we determine what interests are materially relevant? Not all interests are likely to result in a conflict of interest, and requiring the publication of any interest may overwhelm rather than inform the public.

### 3. What level of information about interests should be made public?

- What level of detail should be published about a conflict of interest, noting the tension between transparency and privacy/employment obligations? For example, should only high-level summary level information be published, similar to what is published for MPs and Ministers?
- Under what circumstances is it important that information on a conflict of interest is not made public (e.g. due to safety or privacy concerns)?

### 4. Where and how should information be published?

- Should conflicts be published centrally (e.g. by the PSC) or by individual agencies and organisations? What are the benefits of centralisation v agency managed publication?
- Could requirements to publish information on conflicts surface differences in approaches between agencies, and if so how should this be managed?
- If a centralised registry was developed, what governance and assurance arrangements are needed?

### 5. Other approaches to increasing transparency

- Aside from publication of interests, what other approaches are there to increase transparency of senior leaders' conflicts of interest?