

General Election 2011: Factsheet for State Servants

The ordinary business of government continues during an election period. State servants have an ongoing responsibility to work in a politically neutral way. Agencies must work to maintain public confidence in the institutions of government and continue to demonstrate their commitment to Ministers' priorities and policies.

Leading up to the election

The three months leading up to the general election is called the election period. The election period will commence around the end of August 2011, three months before the general election on 26 November 2011. During this period there is likely to be restraints on government decision making and increased media interest in the activities of government and the behaviour of State servants.

Political rights of State servants

State servants have the same political rights and freedom as other New Zealanders, but must maintain the political neutrality required to work with current and future governments. They must not confuse their political rights with their employment responsibilities. In short, State servants must keep their jobs out of their politics and their politics out of their jobs.

Government advertising

Publicity and advertising campaigns that inform people about Government policy, their rights and obligations do not need to stop during the election period. However, agencies should carefully consider whether their campaigns or advertising could be perceived as 'party political' and be certain that the advertising is appropriate at that time. It is never acceptable for agencies to encourage electors to vote, or not vote, for specific parties, policies or candidates.

Communicating with the media

Media interest in the activities of government and its agencies increases during the election period. Agencies and Ministers' offices need to have protocols in place to ensure that media enquiries are handled promptly, and only by those who are authorised to do so. Enquiries of a political nature should be handled by the Minister, and operational issues should be handled by the agency.

Interacting with social media

State servants should only contribute to social media, as an agency representative, with express approval. State servants who contribute to social media in a private capacity must not do anything that may harm the reputation of their agencies or of the State services.

Contact with Members of Parliament and political parties

State servants should follow their agencies' established protocols for contact with MPs and political parties during the election period. Apart from responding to constituency concerns raised by local MPs, contact in a work setting should only take place with prior ministerial approval.

Use of agency resources

State servants must not use their agencies' resources in a way that could be seen as breaching the principle of political neutrality. Agency premises and resources must not be used for electioneering, or to display party political material. State servants should not provide their work place contact details to political organisations or receive political material through their agency's email or internet facilities.

Advice and support

SSC's detailed election year guidance can be found at www.ssc.govt.nz/election-guidance. For advice or support talk to your senior manager or chief executive. Alternatively, contact the SSC at election@ssc.govt.nz, or telephone (04) 495 6600 and ask for the Integrity and Conduct team.