

Political Neutrality

Te Noho Taiapa

Staying Politically Neutral:
Taking up a role with a
political party



New Zealand Government
Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa



What is Political Neutrality?

Political neutrality means staying impartial and not showing support in your official role for any political party or candidate.

This is crucial to maintain the trust and confidence of the current and future governments and the public that public servants will perform their role fairly and will not pursue their own interests.

Let's explore some political neutrality scenarios and see what possible options we might have in each case.

At the end of this guide, there are a few questions to revise what you will learn through the scenarios.

Scenario

You are passionate about the environment, and this has led you to work in your agency and take on the role that you hold.

You've recently been talking to a friend and they suggested you become a member of a political party and take up a role as their environment representative, so that you can get really involved in influencing environmental issues.

What do you do next?

You initially think to take this approach

You decide to take the role on. This will be in your own time, so it doesn't impact on working hours.

Now that you have contacted the party to say that you are interested in taking the role, you wonder if there is anything else that you need to do. It's an out of work activity so there's nothing else that you think you need to do.

However, as you haven't declared it, you could find yourself in a conflict of interest situation as your work and agency are related to environmental issues.

But then, imagine you choose another way to go about it

You decide to have a chat with your manager.

Keep your politics out of your job and your job out of your politics.

Your manager works with you to do a management plan to mitigate the risk and update your conflict of interest information.

After that, you are more confident in going ahead and taking up the role.

Being politically neutral at work does not generally stop public servants from being politically active outside of work. Any conflict of interest should be identified and appropriately managed.

Additional information

The scenarios that you viewed here are just some of the examples you could come across in real life and they could each vary in detail depending on your role, organisation, experience, and other factors. Always use your judgement and experience to evaluate the situation and decide on the right course of action.

Remember, a good rule of thumb is – Keep your politics out of your job and your job out of your politics.

If you are ever in doubt, reach out to your manager in the first instance, or to the integrity and ethics champion at your agency.

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