

Political Neutrality

Te Noho Taiapa

Staying Politically Neutral:
Protecting Information



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 having a picnic with some family and friends.

The chat amongst the group turns to work and people start talking about the latest headlines in the paper about the public service.

One of your friends says, "hey you work in the public service, you must know the full story behind what's going on in the news at the moment".

You stand there for a moment thinking what to do.

What do you do next?

Consider for a moment what you think you might do

You decide to reply, and give your opinion. After all it's just your friends and family so it's okay to share information.

However, the information you share with your friends was not in the public domain. It was confidential and learned during the course of your work. Even though it's a group of family and friends, you should not share information that isn't in the public domain.

Now, how about you explore the alternative

You distract them by asking if they want another sausage. Or you politely decline to comment.

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

This is a good choice. Information that you have learned in the course of your work and is not in the public domain, should not be shared.

Information you have learned in the course of your work, and is not in the public domain, should not be shared.

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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