



Tohutohu Hāngai | Free and Frank Advice

We give free and frank advice to Ministers.

What is free and frank advice?

Free and frank advice is about agencies providing advice to Ministers without fear or favour, using our best professional judgement. By doing this, we strengthen the integrity and performance of New Zealand's system of government.

Free and frank advice focuses on the decision-maker's objectives, while also being honest, politically neutral, constructive and free from undue influence. This is particularly important for us to remember when challenging the decision-maker's understanding and initial preference.

Why is free and frank advice important?

Free and frank advice is the foundation upon which:

- a. **We support Ministers to make better decisions.** In giving free and frank advice, we make sure that Ministers are individually and collectively informed about the pros, cons, uncertainties and potential consequences associated with the decisions that they are being asked to make. We respect the decisions and the mandate of Ministers as elected representatives.
- b. **We give the public confidence that Ministers' decisions are well informed.** The public relies on us to give our best advice and to provide Ministers with a range of options. Good policy decisions, informed by free and frank advice, optimise services and results for the people in New Zealand now and into the future.

What are our roles?

Our leaders are responsible for ensuring that free and frank advice is given to Ministers by their agencies. We need to support our leaders to make sure that they have access to all the information, evidence and analysis to do that. How we provide that support will depend on the nature of the job that we do.

If our job involves providing advice directly or indirectly to Ministers, we need to be mindful of the wider context. This includes being aware of, and responsive to, the priorities as determined by the government of the day.

Our advice needs to include all relevant information. This requires us to understand both what has been requested and what is required to enable Ministers to achieve their desired results for people in New Zealand. It is important to keep both in mind.

We freely give advice to Ministers on how the government’s objectives can be best achieved. Our advice, where possible, is based on research, evidence, evaluation and analysis and supported by long-term policy capability. We canvas a range of options, aim to incorporate a range of perspectives and inform Ministers about the pros, cons, uncertainties and consequences of each.

Practical guidance

A relationship of trust and confidence

Effective free and frank advice depends on a relationship of trust and confidence. We support this relationship with our Ministers by providing quality advice and demonstrating that we are committed to helping them achieve their objectives.

Communicating advice

A Minister’s communication style preference is important and providing advice in their preferred style will support effective free and frank advice. Understanding and operating within this context is key.

It is also important to consider whether the advice has been understood. If it has not, it may be necessary to repeat the advice or reconsider the way in which it was delivered.

Documenting advice

We must be diligent in maintaining full and accurate records of advice provided. Where we have given advice verbally, we record key points and decisions. Where applicable, we comply with Protective Security Requirements when documenting our advice.

Links to additional guidance

This guidance complements and should be read alongside:

- [Guidance: Free and frank advice and policy stewardship](#)
- [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – Free and frank advice](#)