



FAQs for requesters: official information requests during a general election

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The ‘general election period’

What does the ‘general election period’ mean?

For the purposes of this FAQs, the ‘*general election period*’ refers to the period from the start of the ‘*pre-election*’ period on 7 August 2026, to the last date that the House of Representatives can meet following the establishment of a new government. The 2026 General Election will be held on Saturday 7 November 2026.

What is the timeline for the ‘general election period’ in 2026?

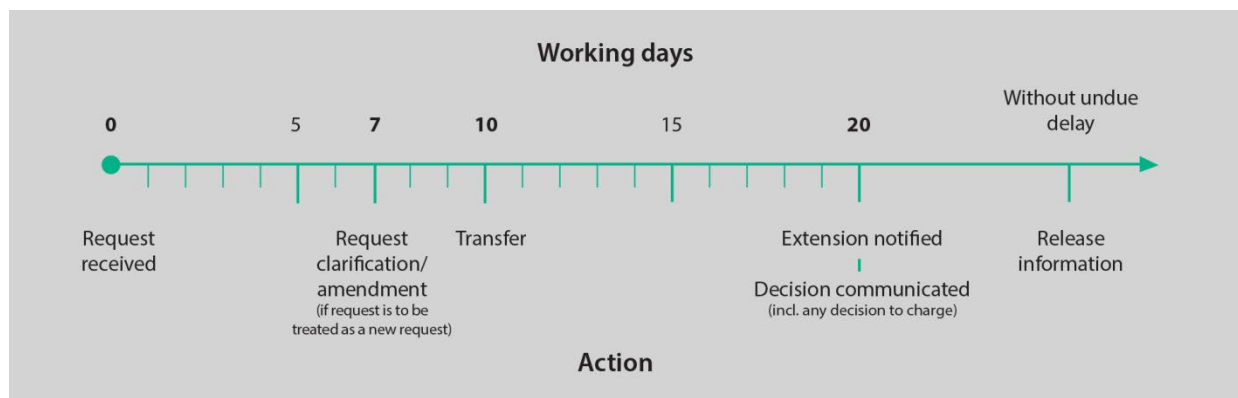
The indicative timeline for the 2026 General Election is in the table below.

Date	General election event
21 January 2026	Prime Minister announced that the 2026 General Election will be held on Saturday 7 November 2026
7 August 2026	Regulated period for election advertising expenses begins (pre-election period)
1 October 2026	The 54th Parliament (House of Representatives) is dissolved
4 October 2026	- Writ day – Governor-General issues formal direction to the Electoral Commission to hold the election - Last day to ordinarily enrol to vote (late enrolments must cast special votes) - Official campaigning begins; radio and television advertising begins
21 October 2026	Overseas voting begins
25 October 2026	Last day to enrol to vote in the election
26 October 2026	Advance voting begins
6 November 2026	The regulated election advertising period ends; all election advertising must be taken down by 11:59pm
7 November 2026	- Election Day: voting places open from 9.00am to 7.00pm - Preliminary election results released progressively after 7:00pm
27 November 2026	Official election results declared
3 December 2026	Last day for return of the writ
Within 6 weeks after return of the writ	First sitting of 55 th Parliament (new House of Representatives)

Following announcement of the results, a caretaker Government will remain place until the new Government is sworn in. Politicians will decide on the formation of the new Government and announce the Ministerial List.

Key timeframes

What are the timeframes under the Official Information Act (OIA) during the general election period?



All official information timeframes remain the same during the general election period.

An agency's legal timeframe requirements for responding to requests for official information are to:

- make a decision and communicate it to the requester '*as soon as reasonably practicable*' and no later than 20 working days after the day on which the request is received; and
- make available any official information it has decided to release without '*undue delay*'.

These legal timeframes will be viewed by the Ombudsman within the context of the general election. For example, requesters may be seeking information which is relevant to and may inform the public before the general election, and this should be taken into account in considering any request for urgency.

Advice for requesters

Can I still request official information during the general election period?

Yes. Official information requests can be made during an election period as usual. Requests can provide useful information to help inform the electorate and enable people to participate in the political process.

If you are making an information request during an election period, be realistic and understand that this is a busy time for Ministers and officials.

Can I ask for an urgent response to my official information request?

You can ask that your request be treated as urgent. If you do this, you must tell the agency your reasons for seeking the information urgently.¹

The agency will consider any request for urgency and assess whether it would be reasonable to give your request priority. A key issue to be aware of is whether you are seeking the information prior to the election to help inform the electorate.

Notwithstanding any request for urgency, the agency's legal obligations remain the same:

- to make and communicate the decision on the request as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 20 working days after the day on which the request was received; and
- to release any official information without undue delay.

However, a genuine and legitimate need for urgency may affect when it is '*reasonably practicable*' to make a decision on the request, and what would constitute '*undue delay*' in releasing the information.

If there is an administrative burden in making information available urgently, an agency may decide to fix a charge. Any charge to supply information can include '*any costs incurred pursuant to a request of the applicant to make information available urgently*'.²

How can I make an effective information request during the election period?

Keep in mind strategies for making your request in a way that helps the agency process it in a timely way. A large or complex request can get in the way of information being made available during the short window of the election period, to help inform the electorate.

Some strategies include:

- be as specific about the information you are seeking as you can be;
- let the agency know you are open to discussion if they need to talk to you to clarify or refine your request;
- don't rely on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to make your request:
 - if you are using AI do so responsibly; read over your request to make sure it is concise and reflects the specific information you are seeking, and remove any unnecessary detail or references to material you do not truly want;
 - be aware AI can get it wrong, it may provide you with advice about the requirements under the OIA that is not correct;

¹ See s 12(3) OIA and s 10(3) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (LGOIMA).

² See s 15(2) and s 13(3) of LGOIMA.

- refine the type of information you are seeking that is covered by your request:
 - indicate if you are just seeking key documents (such as final papers/reports, or reports/briefings to Ministers or Cabinet);
 - make it clear if you are not seeking certain information, such as individual's names or contact details or administrative information such as meeting arrangements;
 - be aware that requests for drafts can be cumbersome for agencies to process, given information systems can now routinely save hundreds of versions of documents as they are being drafted;
- ask for a list of the documents that are potentially in scope of your request to help narrow down what you are seeking;
- advise if you are happy to receive the information at issue in an alternative form (such as a summary) or subject to conditions.

For further advice on making requests, please refer to [Making official information requests: A guide for requesters](#).

The agency has told me it's too busy to respond to my request, what should I do?

If you are unhappy with the response to your request, including any delay, you can complain to the Ombudsman. There is no charge for making a complaint.

The Ombudsman can consider most matters concerning an agency's decision making on an official information request. We triage complaints when we receive them, and we will consider how to most effectively deal with complaints received during the election period. Delay and extension complaints will be dealt with immediately, with an emphasis on early resolution where possible.

Under the OIA,³ the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about:

- delays in making a decision or in releasing information;
- a decision to extend any of the maximum time limits;
- a decision to refuse (or partially refuse) a request for information;
- a decision to charge for supplying information;
- the way in which information has been made available; and
- conditions imposed on the release of information.

³ And under LGOIMA, where it relates to decisions made by local authorities.

We expect agencies to keep individual requesters up to date about their requests, particularly if there are any unavoidable delays.

Can an agency ask me for more information or to change or clarify my request?

Yes. If an agency decides that it needs to do so, it can ask that you provide it with more information or to clarify or amend your request. Be open to talking to the agency about your request, so that it can process it as effectively as possible.

You are under no obligation to discuss your request with the agency, but if you don't the agency may need to:

- extend the time limit to respond to your request;
- impose a charge to cover administrative or other expenses; or
- refuse your request altogether.

Be aware that clarifying or amending your request can result in it being treated by the agency as a new request that replaces the original. This means the maximum time limit for responding to your request will start again.⁴ This reinforces the importance of making a clear and specific request from the outset.

Can an agency consult others about my request?

Yes. An agency may decide to consult before it makes a decision on your request. Consultations may be with:

- you;
- external third parties who supplied or are the subject of the information (to see if they have any concerns about disclosure, for example in relation to privacy issues, understandings of confidentiality or commercial sensitivities);
- agency staff where that is necessary outside the usual internal arrangements for processing official information requests within the agency; and
- any other agency with an interest in the information, including Ministers.

If you have any concerns about disclosure of your identity to third parties during consultation, you should make this clear to the agency.

⁴ Unless the agency sought clarification more than 7 working days after receiving your original request, in which case the original time limit will stand. See s 15(1AA) and (1AB) OIA; s 13(7) and (8) LGOIMA.

Requests for official information involving Ministers

What information held by Ministers is subject to the OIA?

Ministers are subject to the OIA, but only information held in their official Ministerial capacity is ‘official information’.⁵ This generally includes:

- briefings, reports and Ministerial communications (including emails, text messages and various other formats);
- Cabinet or Cabinet Committee material; and
- portfolio information and other assignments.

‘Official information’ does not include information that is held by a Minister only:

- in their private capacity;
- in their capacity as an MP (e.g. electorate information); or
- in their capacity as a member of a political party (e.g. caucus information).

What happens during a caretaker period?

A caretaker period occurs from the day after the election until a new Government is formally sworn in. During this time, the incumbent Government stays in office but follows the ‘*convention on caretaker government*’ to restrict major decisions while coalition or support negotiations take place.

During this period, Ministers keep their roles and day-to-day administration generally continues. This includes receiving and responding to information requests. The Cabinet Manual says:⁶

The [OIA] continues to operate during a caretaker period. In general, responding to requests for information should be seen as part of the day-to-day business of government, and should be dealt with in the usual way. On rare occasions, requests may raise issues that are likely to be of long-term significance for the operation of government and that require ministerial involvement. In this situation, it may be necessary to consider extending the time limit in order to consult the incoming Minister. Any such extension must comply with section 15A of the [OIA].

⁵ See paragraph (a) of the definition of ‘official information’ in s 2 OIA.

⁶ See the [Cabinet Manual 2023](#), para 6.40.

At what point does non-government information become ‘official information’?

Information held by someone before they become a Minister, or held in one of their non-Ministerial capacities,⁷ may become ‘official information’ if it is subsequently used by that person for official Ministerial purposes.

When considering whether information, when held by a person who is also a Minister, is ‘official information,’ there are four key considerations:

1. the purpose of the information;
2. the nature and content of the information;
3. the context in which it came to be held; and
4. the use to which it has been put.

These factors should be considered to determine whether information is held or deemed to be held by a Minister in such a way that it becomes ‘official information’ for the purposes of the OIA.

For more information see the Ombudsman’s case note for cases 467651 and 467523: [Request for document related to coalition negotiations between Labour and New Zealand First](#).

What happens if the Ombudsman has an investigation currently open concerning a former Minister?

If the Ombudsman has a complaint on hand about an official information decision made by a former Minister, the new Minister will be provided with an opportunity to consider whether they agree with the former Minister’s decision to withhold the information or, instead, propose to release the information.⁸ If the new Minister agrees with the decision of the former Minister, the investigation will likely continue. If the new Minister makes a new or amended decision, the Ombudsman will decide whether to continue with the investigation.

Previous election-related cases

Previously, the Ombudsman has completed urgent election-related investigations into:

- [Student loans policy](#). This investigation concerned a request by the Office of the Leader of the Opposition in 2005 for costings for Labour’s interest-free student loan policy. The request was refused under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the OIA. The Ombudsman recommended that the information be released.

⁷ Such as in their private capacity, in their capacity as an MP or a member of a political party.

⁸ This may arise, for example, where circumstances have changed since the decision was made.

- [The government's proposed mixed ownership programme](#). This investigation concerned three complaints about decisions by the Minister of Finance and the Treasury in 2011 to refuse requests under sections 9(2)(f)(iv) and 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA. The Ombudsman found that the decisions were open to the Minister and Treasury.

Other relevant election-related investigations include:

- [Coalition negotiations between Labour and New Zealand First](#). This investigation concerned a request for a document related to coalition negotiations in 2017. The Ombudsman considered the information was not official information held by the Prime Minister in her official capacity, and so was not subject to the OIA.
- [Briefings to Incoming Ministers \(BIMs\)](#). This investigation concerned requests for BIMs after the 2017 election. The Ombudsman considered the requests could be refused as the information would soon be publicly available.
- [Draft Briefings to Incoming Ministers \(BIMs\)](#). This investigation concerned requests for draft versions of a BIM that had been published after the 2005 election. The Ombudsman considered the drafts could be withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the OIA, as disclosure would have a chilling effect on the process of drafting future BIMs.
- [Health reporting data](#). This investigation concerned the refusal of a request for health reporting data on the basis it would be made publicly available after it had been reported to the Minister in late 2017. The Ombudsman considered the requests could not be refused on this basis as it was not sufficiently certain the data would be made publicly available 'soon.' This was in the circumstances where an election was looming and it was reasonably foreseeable the need for Ministerial input would impact on the ability to release the information at the time anticipated.

Further information and help

Where can I go if my question isn't answered here?

These FAQs will be updated as new issues arise or any advice changes.

For complaints please use our [web form](#).

For any other queries please visit our [Get help \(for the public\)](#) page.