



NZSTA

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Governance support resources

Managing media relationships

Background

Principles of open government and transparency for school boards

School boards are public entities responsible for ensuring student achievement at their school. New Zealand is also a democracy with a legal framework that supports open government and transparency. As part of this, boards need to follow legal requirements about how they run their meetings, and what information they provide to others. Some examples are:

- Boards must publicly notify their meetings and agenda
- Board meetings aren't "public meetings", but are "open to the public"
- In certain circumstances, the board can decide to exclude the public or "go into committee"¹
- Boards must respond to information requests and should contact the NZSTA Governance advisory and support centre immediately a request is received

Guidelines for dealing with the media

A delegated media spokesperson

No conversation with a journalist is "off the record". This means that every board should delegate a spokesperson as media contact on behalf of the board. Who this person is will depend on the needs of individual boards. It is usual for the presiding member (chair) to act as spokesperson, although the task can also be delegated to the principal, or any other board member. The spokesperson must be able to confidently present the board's position.

A media spokesperson can simply be included in a board's delegations list, or the board can have a media policy. An example delegations list can be found in the [NZSTA Governance framework](#) Part A

Media policy

Many boards find that a media policy gives them greater control in situations involving media, and enables them to respond quickly to bad news, manage controversial issues, and communicate good news. A policy that encourages factual, accurate and timely communications also promotes confidence in the integrity of the board.

Board code of conduct

A media policy works well with the board's code of conduct (signed by every board member). Together, they ensure everyone fully understands their responsibilities to:

- "speak as one voice", even about decisions individual board members disagree with
- keep confidential any board decision made during public excluded business

An example Board code of conduct policy can also be found in the NZSTA Governance framework.

Plan for crisis situations

Expect the unexpected. Never ignore an emerging issue that may gain momentum and anticipate risks. Contact NZSTA and the Ministry of Education for advice. Consider engaging a reputable media consultant.

If the news is going to get out anyway, the board could take the initiative and notify the media. Consider 'proactive release' – release information before it is asked for – this could be published on the school's website.

If a situation develops, rely on the board's delegated spokesperson or appoint one, including an outside person such as a media specialist, and prepare a position. Don't 'hedge'. Emphasise the positive action the board is taking.

Be aware of the [Official Information Act 1982](#) and the [Privacy Act 2020](#) when providing any type of information to the media about the board and school. Take advice about this from NZSTA and the offices of the Privacy Commissioner and the Ombudsman.

Quick tips for the board's media spokesperson

- Provide accurate information
- Focus on key points, and be clear about the points you want to get across
- Try to prepare for difficult and challenging questions by checking facts and figures
- Keep your answers brief and avoid offering personal opinions or saying something you do not want to say
- Do not use jargon or say "No comment"
- Identify the journalist and ask what the interview or article will be used for
- Ask who else will be interviewed about this topic
- Request questions in advance – prepare your responses
- Provide co-operative, accurate and available sources
- Admit errors, rather than have a journalist uncover it
- Respect confidentiality. Board business dealt with in meetings while the public is excluded usually must remain confidential. If in doubt take advice
 - Ask to see the article before it is released – correct any errors of fact
- In interviews be aware of time-bites – get what you need to say out early

Resources

[NZSTA Governance support resources](#)

[NZSTA Knowledge Hub](#)

Ministry of Education webpage: [Media enquiries – information for schools](#)

1 Refer to [Local Government, Official Information and Meetings Act 1987](#)



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For further advice please contact the *Advisory and Support Centre* on

0800 782 435, option 1 or

govadvice@nzsta.org.nz