

Effective management of groups makes the best use of everyone’s expertise and time, and supports great decision-making. This guide will help you think about establishing and operating a group, and the kinds of secretariat services that might best meet your group’s needs.

WHO USES SECRETARIAT SERVICES?

Developing, maintaining or reviewing effective policies, initiatives, or programmes requires input from a wide range of stakeholders. Many organisations including government agencies, Crown entities, private sector and community organisations establish groups to provide input into or oversee work, set directions, make decisions, and/or create, review or judge. Secretariats support all kinds of groups including:

- Governance groups, boards, and committees
- Advisory groups, committees, and working parties
- Steering and reference groups
- Taskforces
- Commissions and Boards of Inquiry
- Consortia
- Collaborative groups
- Statutory bodies
- Tribunals.

WHAT MAKES A SECRETARIAT EFFECTIVE?

Regardless of the type of group and its functions, effective secretariats:

- connect members and stakeholders to work together on common goals
- support the group’s chair by offering sound and trusted advice on governance, policy, and administrative issues, and identifying nuances associated with issues under consideration
- support practical results that achieve goals and objectives
- ensure transparency while monitoring confidentiality
- act thoughtfully about group members’ time and needs, and
- deliver on time, every time.

WHAT DOES AN EFFECTIVE SECRETARIAT DO?

| Project management | Governance | Policy | Administration | Finance |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of a work programme that includes objectives, work streams, timeframes, budget, and responsibilities. • Identify and manage risks to the group and its work programme. • Report regularly to the group and funder on activities completed and upcoming activities. • Develop and maintain a calendar of events. • Build and maintain effective relationships within the group and with other stakeholders. • Manage contracts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alongside the group’s chair, support new members to understand the role and function of the group. • Develop terms of reference and operating procedures. • Prepare a governance manual. • Provide advice on governance issues faced by the group. • Advise members on any related groups and reporting lines. • Run appointment, resignation and dismissal, and/or election, processes. • Develop and maintain conflict of interest registers. • Manage group-related workflow of members. • Prepare annual reports. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare advice on policy issues including research, drafting tasks, think-pieces, policy papers, consultation, data analysis, decision-making papers, etc. • Circulate emerging information to group members (e.g. new studies published). • Coordinate members’ input on papers and seek input from external stakeholders as needed. • Implement resolutions, directives or actions as required. • Develop stakeholder engagement strategies. • Prepare communications for members and stakeholders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide meeting support (i.e. assisting the chair to develop agendas, collate and circulate papers, prepare and circulate minutes, etc.) . • Organise meetings including all logistics (i.e. travel, accommodation, catering, venue booking, etc.). • Manage correspondence. • Manage mailouts. • Keep records (i.e. minutes, deeds, constitutions, terms of reference, etc.) including establishing and maintaining document management systems. • Manage telephone/email enquiries. • Establish and maintain an online presence (i.e. websites, social media, etc.). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare accounts, file company reports, complete annual accounts and returns, and any other regulatory requirements (if needed). • Process grants, honoria, fees or allowances, dividends, and any other payments. • Manage accounts receivable/payable. • Prepare papers on financial issues. • Manage budget. |

ESTABLISHING A GROUP

Step 1: Prepare a business case to establish your group

- Consider your issue, determine your mandate and decide if, and what kind of, a group could help you to achieve a desired result.
- Prepare a business case: identify and document your issue and how your preferred type of group could help as well as documenting the group's purpose and functions, the results it needs to achieve, how it will operate, any specific powers (or limitations), the mix of skills and experience needed, and who it will report to, when and how.
- Determine how you will measure success, judge the group's work and its value, and the indicators that can be used.
- Consider the Treaty relationship between the Crown and Māori: how must your group operate to meet any Treaty obligations or expectations of stakeholders?
- Obtain the correct approvals to establish a group.

Tips

Avoid duplication: talk to internal stakeholders to find out if there are existing groups that could help you achieve your results.

Larger groups can provide more diverse perspectives and wider experiences. Smaller groups can be agile.

Establishing a group requires different approvals depending on who it reports to: make sure you follow the right pathway and check that you are working within your organisation's processes and requirements.

Remember: some types of government groups cannot be established in the three months prior to a general election.

Step 2: Prepare the tools needed to establish the group

- Develop a written terms of reference or other guiding document that includes relevant contextual information and information about the group's purpose, its functions and scope, required outputs and desired outcomes, term/timeframe, membership, decision-making powers and processes, members' roles and responsibilities, reporting requirements (to whom, when, what and how), relationships to other groups (if needed), support to be provided to the group, protocols for internal and external communications (including liaison with the media), identifying and managing conflict of interest, and confidentiality.
- Describe meeting mechanics (i.e. frequency of meetings, attendance requirements, meeting arrangements, decision-making processes, quorum etc.), and payments (e.g. remuneration/recognition, travel, etc.).
- Develop position descriptions for the chair, vice-chair, and members.
- Decide whether to seek nominations or advertise vacancies.

Tips

Create a name that clearly reflects what the group is mandated to do. Don't forget to check that the group's acronym is acceptable, easy to remember and use, and does not carry any unfortunate connotations.

Use Cabinet Office advice to determine fees. Crown employees cannot usually be paid fees for appointment to a government group.

Make sure your terms of reference clearly set out the appointment process (including for specific office-holders), resignation or dismissal processes, and an approach to succession planning.

Consider what information about winding up the group may be needed. Make sure expectations are clear from the start.

Step 3: Appoint members

- Consider the skills, qualifications, and expertise needed to meet the group's terms of reference. Aim for the right mix of:
 - expertise (i.e., appropriate knowledge of the topic, practical understanding of the issues, governance, management or business acumen, understanding of legal and regulatory frameworks, etc.)
 - personal attributes (i.e. the ability to contribute to quality decision-making, history of constructive collaboration, the ability to analyse relationships and processes, integrity, etc.)
 - ability to represent a community of interest (including users/consumers), visibility, and mana
 - ability to remain engaged and participate responsively and constructively over the term of the appointment.
- Complete the appointment process: advertise vacancies or seek nominations, shortlist, interview, complete due diligence checks like referees, qualifications, convictions, online profiles, and solvency/credit checks.
- Document any terms and conditions that apply to the appointment (i.e., the expectations of the group, members' roles and relevant duties, and expectations relating to conflict of interest, confidentiality and the duty not to disclose information, remuneration etc.) and have appointees sign a letter of appointment before attending their first meeting.
- Appoint a chair who is a strategic thinker, and who has mana, good judgement, experience working collaboratively and constructively, and the ability to stimulate debate, bring people together, seek effective input, and build and maintain relationships.
- Consider mechanisms to co-opt or involve others as required.
- Consider if publicity is required to announce the groups' establishment and appointments.
- Make sure that resignation and dismissal processes are clear, fair, and just.

Tips

A complementary balance of skills, experience and perspectives brings status, ability, and visibility to the group and increases the likelihood of success.

Different types of groups need candidates with different attributes (e.g. advisory groups need expert opinion, inquiries need legal expertise, etc.).

Consider the group's balance of gender, ethnicity, age, and location.

Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Women and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs have contacts for suitable appointees.

Different kinds of groups follow different appointment processes: follow the right pathway!

Six weeks is a suggested minimum time required by a peak body to provide a nomination.

Terms and conditions agreements cover things that are important to developing trusted relationships.

Make sure appointees have sufficient time to dedicate to your work and are available before you appoint them.

The person who appointed the member is also responsible for dismissal: make sure that they are involved throughout the process.

Step 4: Plan for succession

- Provide a term length that enables the group to achieve its terms of reference.
- Consider implementing a membership rotation policy that balances fresh thinking and new perspectives with established understanding: think about the likelihood that the group's terms of reference will change and within what timeframe, the minimum time a member needs to be involved, and whether appointment is staggered or flat.

Tips

Early development of a succession plan supports clear expectations about ongoing appointment to the group.

Commonly, members are appointed for a two or three year term. Many groups limit the number of terms served to two or three terms. Provide for appointment for additional terms in case no other suitable candidates come forward.

Step 5: Establish the support needed by the group

- Consider what secretariat support the group requires to operate effectively: consider project management, governance, administration, policy, and financial management services.

Tips

Secretariat services are often managed internally by organisations but contracting can be an effective way of supporting a group.

OPERATING A GROUP

Step 1: Complete induction for all new members

- Develop and implement an induction programme covering the group's role and functions, key internal and external relationships, reporting requirements, governance processes (including managing conflict of interest, gifts, etc.), member and group duties and responsibilities, behavioural expectations, expected workloads and timing, and the group's legislative, operating, and sector context.
- Provide new members with governance texts, key minutes, working papers, reports, and budgets.
- Develop a list of contact details and share within the group.

Tips

Use a range of approaches to build understanding. At a minimum, the group's chair should brief each new member on expectations and context before their first meeting. The group should discuss the terms of reference at its first meeting.

Consider holding additional meetings to build members' capacity if needed.

Step 2: Develop tools to effectively manage the group

- Develop tools to support the group including a conflict of interest register, a register of directorships and roles, agenda and minutes templates, a calendar, a budget, reporting templates, stakeholder and communications plans, and communications tools like email, approved cloud-based document management systems, logos, letterhead, and website material.
- Determine preferred communication approaches for each member and any personal requirements that support full engagement in the group.
- Consider whether a governance manual is necessary.
- Support the development of an annual work programme for the group: set goals, tasks, timeframes, budget, and determine responsibility for each work stream.
- Develop any monitoring frameworks required.

Tips

A good secretariat keeps a rolling calendar of meetings, timing for major decisions and work programme activities: this helps to keep everyone organised.

Encourage members to list potential and actual conflicts of interest relating to direct financial benefits, family members' financial interests, and potential and actual conflicts based on other roles and/or relationships.

A dedicated email address and telephone number for the group simplifies communications.

Make sure your organisation and group supports your preferred cloud-based data storage approach.

THE FIRST MEETING

The group's first meeting sets the tone and direction of the group. It is often the first opportunity that each member has to input into the group's work. Expect this meeting to contain robust and challenging discussions on direction, the proposed work programme, and outputs and outcomes to be delivered. An effective secretariat can help to manage this process by ensuring that governance protocols and processes are understood by all members and adequate time to discuss the induction material is provided for. It may take more than one meeting before substantive work can begin.

Step 3: Support the chair and group well

- Plan ahead:
 - Discuss the upcoming agenda with the group's chair: they are responsible for direction-setting and adequate notice means good papers and an easier role for the chair!
 - Help to identify potential tensions before each meeting: support the chair to ensure open and constructive discussion during the meeting.
 - Discuss each meeting's outcomes with the chair as soon as possible after the meeting and follow-up with individual members if they have work to complete before the next meeting.
 - Use a calendar to manage all members' expectations, time, and contributions.
- Support the development of an annual work programme or similar planning document and work with the group to maintain an overview of progress and upcoming tasks and timeframes.
- Aim for full participation at each meeting: distribute the agenda and clear, concise meeting papers at least 10 working days (where possible) before each meeting.
- Make effective use of technology and members' time: is a face-to-face meeting, teleconference, or video-link the best way to meet? If issues are detailed/technical, consider using smaller working parties within the group to explore issues and report back.
- Help the chair to summarise discussion and decisions made during each meeting.
- Provide minutes as soon as possible after the meeting (within at least 10 working days).
- Keep comprehensive and up-to-date records.
- Be responsive: complete all actions within two weeks of meeting closure (or at least have longer-term tasks underway).
- Provide policy and project management services as needed.
- Maintain close oversight of the group's budget, keep appropriate financial records, and ensure that any monetary issues are raised in a timely fashion with the chair.

Tips

Consider when and where meetings will be held as far in advance as possible so that it is easier to secure time in diaries.

Once dates are confirmed, book flights and venues to take advantage of cheaper rates.

Support consumer or user members to access wider networks: this greatly improves their voice and the group's decisions.

Consider the needs of your members when setting tasks: members are busy and an effective secretariat actively manages members' input.

Effective minutes record the substance of discussion and the actions/decisions made by the group. Make sure the minute headings match those of the agenda. Include dates by which any item is effective. Ensure that the chair approves the draft minutes before circulation to the wider group for review.

Don't forget to collect evidence on the group's work, and its challenges and success as you go.

Make sure that you follow any and all legislative responsibilities required of your group: think about the Privacy Act 1993, the Official Information Act 1982, the Public Records Act 2005, the Public Finance Act 1989, the Crown Entities Act 2004, and the State Sector Act 1988 (if applicable).

Also see Allen + Clarke guides on Project Management, the Official Information Act and the Privacy Act.

MANAGING CONFLICT WITHIN THE GROUP

Healthy and robust decision-making can place group members in conflict with each other. Timely and trusted support from a strong secretariat can help the chair to manage difficult issues to a successful resolution. Be mindful of the position of each party, facilitate collaboration by maintaining a no-surprises approach with group members on all issues, and support the creation of decision-making processes that are fair, just and clear to all, including processes for challenging and reviewing decisions made.

REVIEWING A GROUP

Step 1: Review or evaluate the group's performance to decide future direction

- Support the group to complete an annual self-review of its work.
- Be clear about what will happen to the group once it achieves its terms of reference or reaches the end of its term: communicate this with members as early as possible.
- Support review processes: consider if there will be one review or multiple reviews conducted over the lifespan of the group.
- Ensure there is sufficient time to complete a fair review before decisions need to be made.
- Use a range of evidence to answer the following:
 - Has anything changed in the broader context (e.g. government policy settings)?
 - Has the group achieved what it needs to achieve? If not, why not?
 - What has the group impact been?
 - Has the group's aims or purposes changed since establishment?
 - Do current governance and operational support arrangements optimally support achievement of the group's terms of reference?
 - What are the group's strengths, weaknesses, achievements, limitations, and past and upcoming challenges?

Tips

Think about who will evaluate or review the group's work: usually it is best that this be an independent person or agency.

Document effort and achievement as part of the development of an annual work programme.

Consult with the group's chair about what is needed to make sure that the group is strong into the future if it is to continue.

Maintain a continuous learning focus throughout the review.

Include all key governance documents in the review, including the terms of reference, key outputs, outcomes and performance indicators, any governance hierarchy/map, any other associated governance documents, work programmes, annual reports, and/or progress reports.

Also see Allen + Clarke's *A Quick Guide to Evaluation and Planning for Evaluation*

Step 2: Winding up a group

- Obtain the correct approvals to disestablish the group.
- Review all governance documents and any documents associated with the group's establishment to determine what steps need to be followed to wind-up.
- Make sure that all papers and records are filed and stored correctly in accordance with the Official Information Act 1982 and the Public Records Act 2005.
- Consider what kind of publicity is required to announce winding up (if any).

Tips

Any requirements of the terms of reference regarding winding up must be followed. If nothing exists, establish and follow a clear, fair, and just process.

Specialist expertise may be required for the disestablishment of some types of groups, including financial advice.

Don't forget to thank all members (past and present) for their services and time!

Useful Resources

Cabinet Office circular CO(02) 5: Appointments of Public Servants to Statutory Boards.

Cabinet Office circular CO(02) 16: Government Appointments: Increasing Diversity of Board Membership.

Cabinet Office circular CO(12) 6: Fees framework for members' appointments to bodies in which the Crown has an interest.

Cabinet Office. 2008. *Cabinet Manual*.

Cabinet Office. *Cabinet Guide*.

State Services Commission. 2014. *Board Appointment and Induction Guidelines*. Wellington: SSC.

State Services Commission. 2014. *Statutory Crown Entities: A Guide for Departments*. Wellington: SSC.

ALLEN + CLARKE: WHAT WE CAN DO TO HELP

Allen + Clarke provides secretariat services to a number of groups. We have a friendly, collaborative working style and extensive experience supporting public sector agencies to effectively connect the dots and bring together committees, working groups, and community forums to guide, inform, implement or evaluate public policy and initiatives. This includes:

- Advice on the best types of group for a specified purpose or function.
- Advice on governance matters including the development of terms of reference, rules, appointments/dismissals, succession planning, strategic planning and review.
- Great relationship building.
- Seeing the bigger picture: robust planning, project management, and monitoring of work programmes.
- Supporting effective communications between members and between the group and other parties, and practical advice on stakeholder engagement.
- An eye for detail: all day-to-day administrative tasks required to support a well-functioning group including establishing processes and tools, organising meetings, travel and catering arrangements, agenda development, minutes, managing correspondence, and reporting.
- Prudent financial management including preparation of business cases, budget management, and financial reporting.
- Research and policy support including the development of agenda papers, data analysis, the preparation of think pieces, practical advice on government processes, and the preparation of annual reports.
- Advice on governance issues including the preparation of governance manuals.
- Review and evaluation services.
- Contract management.

We also organise and facilitate consultation meetings. For more information, visit our website: www.allenandclarke.co.nz.

