

Election Access Fund

Te Tomokanga Pūtea Whakatapoko Pōtitanga

Application Guidelines

ENGLISH





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How to apply to the Election Access Fund

The following information is about the Election Access Fund /Te Tomokanga — Pūtea Whakatapoko Pōtitanga.

The Election Access Fund supports disabled people to stand as candidates in parliamentary general elections and by-elections.

The purpose of the Election Access Fund is to reduce cost barriers faced by disabled people by covering disability-related costs which non-disabled candidates do not face.

The following information explains who can apply, what costs can be covered, and how to apply for funding.

What is the Election Access Fund? Who runs the Fund and why was it created?

Who is the Electoral Commission?

The Electoral Commission (Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri) administers the Election Access Fund.

We run parliamentary elections in New Zealand. This includes:

- general elections, when people vote on who they want in parliament.
- by-elections, which happen when a Member of Parliament leaves, and people in their local area (or electorate) vote on who will replace them.

We register political parties, help candidates, parties and others to understand the electoral rules, and help the public to understand how to enrol and vote. We run every part of parliamentary elections, including running voting places and counting votes.

To keep confidence in the electoral system, we stay neutral, uphold and follow electoral law and work independently from government.

What is the Election Access Fund?

The Election Access Fund (the Fund) is for disabled people who want to stand for a parliamentary election or by-election. It does not cover local body elections.

The Fund covers extra disability-related costs that non-disabled people running for election do not have.

Why was the Fund created?

The Fund was created to improve access for disabled people when standing for parliament. The Election Access Fund Act 2020 tasks the Electoral Commission with setting up and running the Fund.

The Commission has designed how the Fund will work in consultation with disabled people, disabled people's organisations, political parties, and other interested people and organisations. We received feedback on who should be able to apply to the Fund, the types of things it could cover and how it could work. This feedback helped to inform the design and these guidelines.

What costs does the Fund pay for?

The Fund will pay for extra costs of being a candidate that people face as a result of their disability. It can be used to pay for the support and equipment you need to participate in the activities you need to do to stand for election. The Fund will not pay for the costs of activities that all candidates have to do to stand for Parliament. It will pay for disability-related costs you may have due to your disability that non-disabled candidates do not have.

Activities

Here are some examples of activities people do to get selected by a political party and to get voted into Parliament by the public. The Fund can pay for extra support or equipment you need related to your disability to help you do these activities.

Activities for party selection and list ranking could include:

- filling in forms
- being interviewed
- going to party events to meet party members
- going to party and branch meetings – in person and online
- going to party conferences
- attending training provided by the party.

Activities for candidates to promote themselves to voters could include:

- participating in “meet the candidate” public meetings
- participating in candidate fundraising events
- attending events including meeting cultural requirements
- giving speeches, debating, answering questions
- sending emails, writing social media posts
- knocking on doors and meeting residents
- making phone calls
- posting fliers in letter boxes

- meeting people on a street corner, at a shopping mall, an event like at a farmers' market, or anywhere the public gathers
- putting up election hoardings (signs).

Like all candidates you may need volunteers or paid staff to do some activities like leaflet drops and phone calling that are done by teams of people. If you are expected to do some of this work the Fund may be able to pay someone to assist who will do the parts you cannot do yourself due to your disability.

Examples of disability-related costs

The Fund can cover the extra disability-related costs you may have that people without a disability doing the same activities do not have. This may include one or many items in the following list, or it might be something else that is not listed. If you are unsure, please ask us or include it in your application.

Equipment and technology:

- adaptive equipment, such as Braille readers, aids for processing sound
- special computer software, such as speech to text, spell checking
- voice recorders
- modified seating, for example, where standing for long periods is challenging
- equipment for venues with limited accessibility such as portable ramps, mobile hoists.

Communication:

- New Zealand Sign Language interpreter
- translation of key material into an alternate format, for example when a community group sends a list of questions for candidates to answer. This does not include material from your political party (see the following “What costs are not funded”).

Personal assistance:

- A person or people to help with:
 - personal care related to your disability that is needed to undertake campaign activities
 - getting around (for example, a driver)
 - reading or writing or both
 - note taking

- understanding written material or explaining what is being said at meetings
- travel, accommodation and expenses for a personal assistant to accompany you.

Travel, accommodation and venues:

- accessible taxis to events or meetings
- extra costs of accessible accommodation
- provisions for service animals
- site assessments to check venue accessibility.

Other:

- extra costs to get back on track when things go wrong, such as fixing or replacing equipment that fails, paying for a replacement assistant or sign language interpreter if someone is sick.

A note on funding

Everyone's costs will be different depending on their disability-related needs, the type of activities they will be doing and where they are standing for election.

To ensure we can meet the requirements of the Fund we will fund actual and reasonable costs. These costs are reviewed by a panel who will help us determine if what you have asked for fits the criteria. We will assist you with the application process and give you guidance on what is reasonable for common items like accommodation, travel and food allowances for traveling assistants.

What costs are not funded?

The Fund will not cover general costs that non-disabled people standing for election have, such as:

- nomination deposits
- designing and publishing advertising
- having professional photos taken
- printing leaflets
- hiring venues
- postage costs
- survey costs
- paid skills training such as media training, planning, budgeting
- hiring an accountant, campaign manager or other professional services
- loss of regular income while campaigning
- personal living costs, including healthcare or therapy
- standard travel and accommodation (if there are extra costs directly relating to your disability these can be covered).

The Fund does not cover political party costs that parties should be expected to cover, such as:

- producing information that can be read by screen readers
- disability or inclusiveness training for staff and members
- providing accessible campaign material for electors
- providing accessible venues for conferences and events. Where it is not possible to get an accessible venue, for example, if none are available in a remote rural area, extra costs like portable ramps can be covered.

The Fund will not cover other party activities that are not about selection and your candidacy. This includes special campaigns, volunteering, petitions and general party fundraising and social events that do not have a candidacy focus.

The intention of the Fund is not to pay for disability-related costs that are already covered by another agency such as the Ministry of Social Development (Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora) or ACC (Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara).

Who can apply?

You can apply to the Election Access Fund if:

- you are a disabled person, as described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, being “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others ...”
- you are standing as a candidate in, or seeking selection as a candidate in, a parliamentary general election or by-election
- you face barriers to standing or seeking selection as a result of your disability, which non-disabled people do not face
- you meet the requirements to be a candidate under the Electoral Act 1993, including that
 - you are at least 18 years old
 - you are a New Zealand citizen
 - you are registered as an elector, and
 - you are not otherwise disqualified for registration.

To confirm that you can apply you will need to:

- sign a legal statement (in the application form) that says you meet the criteria above, and either:
 - send us a copy of an email or letter to your party secretary saying that you are seeking selection or
 - send us a copy of your public announcement that you are standing as a candidate.

When can I apply?

If you are seeking party selection to be a candidate for a registered political party:

- you can apply to the Fund when it opens in 2022
- you can apply for costs relating to what you need to do to seek party selection as a list and/or constituency ('electorate') candidate.

If you are seeking election as a candidate for a political party or standing as an independent candidate:

- you can apply for costs relating to being a candidate and seeking election to parliament
- you can do this at the same time as applying for selection costs or discuss this with us later once you have publicly announced that you are standing
- it does not matter if the party has not formally selected you as a candidate yet
- it does not matter if your party is registered with the Electoral Commission or not.

I want to apply – What are the steps?

Following are the main steps in the process.

Applying

1. You can apply online at elections.nz. Or, please email electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz or phone us on 0800 36 76 56 to say you want to apply.
2. We will send you an application form and ask if you would like to meet with us to help you put your application together.
3. If you want to fill in the form yourself, send it to us and we will check that it is complete.
4. If you want to, we will arrange for you to meet with a member of our team. This will take place online using Zoom or Microsoft Teams, or by phone. Please let us know:
 - if you would like to bring a support person, family or whānau member(s) to the meeting
 - if you have any disability access needs for the meeting (we can arrange and will pay for these)
 - if you have any cultural needs we can attend to
 - if you would like us to contact your political party to seek information about party activities.
5. At the meeting we will go through your application form with you and fill in as much as we can. If needed, you may be asked to provide more information and to meet with us again.

Getting a decision:

6. Your application will be considered by the Applications Panel. The panel has community members on it with lived experience of disability and election experience. Their job is to advise us whether they think your application meets the criteria and is fair and reasonable.
7. To protect your privacy your personal details will be removed before your application goes to the panel.

8. We will make the decision to approve or decline your application, based on the panel's advice.
9. We will inform you as soon as possible of the outcome.

Getting agreement:

10. If your application is accepted, we will prepare a written agreement between you and the Electoral Commission. This will state the amount to be paid and what it is to be used for. It will include reporting dates and if your funding is to be paid in full or by instalments.
11. This will need to be signed by you and the Electoral Commission.

Payment and reporting:

12. We pay you the agreed amount.
13. You organise the goods or services you need and pay for them.
14. As you do this you keep a record and collect proof of your spending (for example, receipts, tickets).
15. We will send you a simple report template for you to complete and return with your proof of spending, by the due dates in your agreement.
16. Once your selection or campaign activities are finished, or you are no longer a candidate, you will need to pay back any funding that has not been used.

Complaints and disputes

If you are unhappy with the process or outcome of the decision, you can make a complaint and it will be considered as soon as possible within two weeks. Contact us on electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz.

What information do I need to have to apply to the Fund?

Planning what you will need is an important part of the application process. We will be able to process your application more quickly if you provide us with as much information as possible.

To gather the information you need, we suggest that you:

- plan out the activities you will be doing to seek selection as a candidate or to campaign for election, as much as you can. If you want to stand for a political party, they will be able to provide information to help you estimate things like the number, type and location of meetings
- list and describe each of the supports you will need that relate to your disability and the activities they are needed for
- for the services you need, give your best estimate of the number of hours needed for each, and any travel needed for service providers for example assistants or interpreters
- give a per item or per hour and total cost estimate for each product or service you will be using. Check the application form for cost limits on common items
- write down the basis for your per item or per hour costs and gather any evidence, for example, from previous use of the service or quotes
- for equipment or technology please get two quotes from two different suppliers if possible and tell us the one you think is the best and why.

Privacy

The Electoral Commission will ensure your personal privacy through:

- proper collection, storage and disposal of your personal information
- making sure you have access to your own personal information and can correct it if needed.

The Commission will make sure it has systems in place to fulfil its duties under the Election Access Fund Act, the Privacy Act 2020 (“Privacy Act”) and other laws.

Retaining Personal Information

We will not keep your personal information for longer than we need to for the purposes for which the information was obtained.

If you ask us to, we will keep the information you give us for any applications at the next general election.

The information will only be used for this purpose.

Public reporting on the Fund

The Electoral Commission will need to report on the Fund. This will include things like the number of people who applied to the Fund, the types of assistance we funded, and overall spending. This will be done in a way that does not identify any individuals.

Enquiries and complaints

If you have any questions about how we collect information, or if you believe we have not done what we have agreed to do, you should contact us at electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz.

Common questions

Can my political party or a friend or whānau member help me apply?

Yes, we want it to be as easy as possible. You can have someone help you fill in your form, or you can meet with us and we will help you, or you can meet with us and bring someone along with you.

What if I need disability assistance to apply?

Please tell us what assistance you need and we may be able to help. For example, if you need a NZ Sign Language interpreter to assist you at your meeting with us, we can arrange and pay for that.

How long do I have to wait for my application to be approved?

Once your application is complete it gets discussed by the panel and then the Electoral Commission makes a decision. This should take no more than 2-3 weeks.

How soon can I get the equipment and support I need?

Once your funding agreement is signed, we suggest you start booking in the equipment and/or support you are funded for. It will be up to you to find the equipment and services yourself.

What if I have a disability but not a formal diagnosis?

You do not need to have a formal diagnosis. When you apply you will need to sign a legal declaration saying you meet the criteria for funding – including that you have a disability.

What if I have more expensive needs than other people?

People's costs will be different depending on their needs, the type of activities they are doing and things like how much travel they will be doing. We will take this into account. When you apply, you can list all the things you think you will need.

What if I am in a rural area where I have to travel further and it's harder to get services?

We expect there to be a higher need for transport support costs in large and rural areas. When you are filling in your form, we suggest you think of everything you might need disability support for, including travel. This might include transport for people who are assisting you, to get to venues and home again. It might also include getting equipment

from outside your area sent to you. The Fund can cover transport support costs like these.

Is there a funding limit?

There is a limit of \$50,000 total funding for a person, per election or by-election. For very high-cost applications we may ask for extra supporting information.

My condition varies and sometimes I need more assistance than at other times. Will the Fund be flexible?

Yes. When you are filling in your form try to think of everything you might need support for. Remember you can contact us to ask questions and we can meet with you. There will be flexibility in the amounts available to you. If your support needs turn out to be lower than what you applied for you will return any unspent funds. If you need more than what you applied for, you can apply for additional funds.

Will the Electoral Commission help me to get the services and equipment I need?

You will need to contact suppliers to get equipment or services yourself. The Fund only covers the costs of the equipment or services. We have a database of services and equipment providers we can share with you, but it will be up to you to choose. You may also choose providers that are not on our list.

Can a family member be my assistant or support person?

Yes, if this is who you prefer. The rate per hour will need to be reasonable, and we have guidance on this. Your assistant will need to keep good records of their service.

What if more things come up that I didn't know about when I applied?

Get in touch with us as soon as possible if you think you will need additional support. Depending on what it is, we may be able to adjust your agreement, or we may need to take it back to the panel to discuss.

If something comes up at short notice like an unplanned candidate meeting that isn't in my budget, can I pay for it and get reimbursed?

There will be some flexibility in your agreement so that things that come up can be paid for out of your grant money even if you didn't know about it when you applied. If your funding is getting low and you know some things are coming up, contact us so that extra funding can be considered.

What do I do if my equipment needs to be repaired or replaced?

You will need to gather information on what needs to be done and likely cost, then contact us as soon as you can so we can help with costs.

What if I go to an event and the host already has the assistance I need (like a NZSL interpreter)?

You will need to check before events what assistance is available. If you need to cancel a booking you have made, you might still have to pay. This will come from your funding so it is best you know ahead of time.

Will the Fund pay for help to prepare my report to show how I have spent the money?

We will not pay for someone to do this for you, but we can pay for help if you need it due to your disability, for example if you need a reader or writer. Please contact us if you think you need this.

What if I pull out or don't get selected or nominated? Do I have to repay the money?

You don't repay any money already spent, as long as the funding was used for what was agreed. You will need to pay back any money you have not spent.

What if I want to stand again in the next election? And the one after that? Is there a limit?

There is no limit on how often you can access the Fund. You will need to apply again for each election or by-election. Please note that the way the Fund runs may change over time. The information we need and the application process may be different if you apply again.

What happens if I get into Parliament? Will the Fund pay for my access needs?

No, the fund covers access needs before an election. If you become a member of Parliament, a relationship manager from Parliamentary Service will be in contact with you just after the General Election. You will be able to discuss your access needs at this time to ensure you have the support you need.

Do I or does my party have to declare what I have received from the Fund? Is a return required?

No. You don't have to file a public return. You do have to show us how you spent the money in your reports, but we won't publish it.

Can I use the equipment or services I get through the Fund for other purposes?

You should only use the equipment and services for selection or campaigning as per your agreement with us. It is really important that funding for an access need is not instead spent on something that gives an unfair political advantage. Your agreement will say if you can keep equipment after election day or if you must return it to us.

Can I apply if I am not living in New Zealand right now?

Yes. You will need to explain your situation and we may ask for more supporting information.

Changes to the rules

This is the first time this Fund has been set up or used in New Zealand. The rules about funding and what it can be used for are subject to change. Any changes will be shared with applicants and interested parties.

Contact

Email: electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz

Phone 0800 36 76 56



Election Access Fund

Te Tomokanga
Pūtea Whakatapoko
Pōtitanga



**ELECTORAL
COMMISSION**
TE KAITIAKI TAKE KŌWHIRI



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Te Tomokanga
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