

# **Process evaluation of the Election Access Fund Act (2020): after the first use of the Fund**

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**Pragmatica**

## Report information

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## Evaluation team

Pragmatica Limited held the contract for this evaluation. Judy Oakden, Michelle Moss and Kellie Spee undertook the evaluation in consultation with three leaders with lived and whānau experience of disability as advisors, Pati Umanga, Louise Were, and one other person who chose to remain anonymous. We also received feedback from the Ministry and the Commission project management teams to inform the evaluation.

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## Executive summary

### Key Messages

- The Election Access Fund (the Fund) provides an important signal that disabled people are welcome as parliamentary candidates. One Fund recipient saw the Fund as a 'game changer' for the disabled community and the democratic system.
- The Election Access Fund Act 2020 (the Act) was administered according to its purpose. The Fund generally met the Act's expectations of removing barriers and facilitating participation. While only four recipients experienced the Fund in its first use and this uptake may seem low, it is similar to that of Funds set up in other jurisdictions. In those countries, uptake increased over time (e.g., Wales, England, Scotland).
- The Commission did well in implementing the Act and in designing and operating the Fund in challenging conditions. The evaluation rated implementation as good for administration, meeting expectations, and operational effectiveness. Interviewees suggested areas for further development, including better partnering and collaboration with Māori and Pacific people and further raising awareness of the Fund.
- Full use of the Fund is untested, and the Fund needs more time to become established. Grants of \$45,349 were paid out of the \$1m multi-election funding available – and the remaining funding is likely sufficient to cover future election cycles as planned.
- Interviewees thought the Commission could continue managing the Fund – they valued the organisation's political neutrality, experience and integrity in the electoral process. Some suggested the Commission consider collaborating with NGOs to enhance the effectiveness of the Fund further.
- Other ways the Fund could consider further supporting the disabled community to take part in the democratic system identified in the evaluation were:
  - amend the Act to include elections for local and regional bodies and civic boards – enabling participation on district, city and regional councils as well as community boards
  - extend the time the Fund is open past the planned 20 months
  - consider more flexible approaches for the payment of grants
  - extend the scope to remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election other than cost. For example, support potential candidates early to understand the participation requirements and plan ways to overcome possible barriers.

### Introduction

The Ministry of Justice Tāhū o te Ture (the Ministry) commissioned an external evaluation of the Election Access Fund Act 2020 (the Act) and Fund. The evaluation sought to review the operation and effectiveness of the Act, as required by section 10 of the Act. The Act's purpose is to "remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or by-election that are faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face" (Election Access Fund Act 2020, s3). In particular, the evaluation:

- considered the operation, purpose, and scope of the Fund and assessed whether any amendments to the Act are necessary or desirable
- provided a 'light touch' review of the Fund's implementation and operation, for accountability and probity purposes.

We used an evaluation-specific methodology, including Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs), performance criteria and rubrics to help focus the evaluation and make evaluative judgements. Three leaders with lived and whānau experience of disability were on our evaluation team as advisors. We applied a mixed methods approach combining interviews with document reviews, including a scan of overseas literature of similar funds. Seventeen people took part through semi-structured interviews between March and June 2024. Interviewees were selected because they took part in establishing and operating the Fund (12) or were Fund recipients (4), or a Fund enquirer (1). The report answers seven KEQs of which the first three were judged using performance criteria and rubrics, while the other four were more exploratory.

**Limitations:** We note that the evaluation timing, after the first use of the Fund, and a low uptake in this first round (N=4) limits understanding of the effectiveness of the Act.

## Context

**Size of the disability community:** There are an estimated 1.1 million disabled New Zealanders (24% of the population), based on data collected in the 2013 Disability Survey (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Māori have the highest disability rates across all age groups, apart from the 65 and over group as in this group Pacific have the highest rates. Despite such a sizeable disability community, there are few openly disabled people who are parliamentary representatives or candidates in general elections.

**How the Fund works:** The Fund aims to help with disability-related costs for equipment and technology, communication (such as a New Zealand Sign Language interpreter), travel, accommodation and personal assistance (including expenses for this person to accompany the candidate when doing candidate activities). The Fund works alongside the costs of candidate activities that everyone has. Candidates can make two types of applications – one for funding for candidate selection processes and another for support for the election campaign. The Fund does not cover the general costs that non-disabled people standing for election also have. Nor does it cover other party activities that are not about selection or being a candidate. Candidates can apply multiple times, up to a maximum of \$50,000 per election, and can stand in as many election campaigns as they like. Fund recipients have to account for their spending and the Commission can provide support for this. Payments do not count as personal income, or party campaign funding. For more information about how the Fund works, see Appendix B.

**Setting up the Fund:** The Electoral Commission Mō Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri (the Commission) was charged with setting up the Fund under the Act. The work on the Fund began around July 2021, when the Act came into force. The Commission established and opened the Fund for applications in October 2022. This was a completely new area of work for the Commission with no precedent for developing such a fund in New Zealand and occurred during a global pandemic. There was a short time between the Act coming into force (July 2021) and the time when many political parties started to select candidates for the 2023 General Election (September 2022).







Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People (Whaikaha) was established on 1 July 2022 as the Fund was being set up.

## Key findings

Overall, the evaluation found the Commission did well in implementing the Act, and in designing and operating the Fund. An overall rating of ‘good’ was provided in terms of administration, meeting expectations, and operational effectiveness. This rating indicates fairly consistent evidence of satisfactory performance, with room for further development and refinement. Weaknesses and challenges are acknowledged and/or are being addressed. A summary of findings for each KEQ is set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Evaluative judgements for the first three KEQs

KEQs for the establishment and implementation of the Election Access Fund	Performance rating	
Overall rating	Good	
KEQ 1: To what extent is the Act being administered according to its purpose	Good	
KEQ 2: How well is the Election Access Fund meeting the expectations set out in the Act?	Adequate	
KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?	Good	

Ratings were defined as: Poor: (Not at all or only occasionally with clear weaknesses evident); Adequate: (Sometimes, with many exceptions); Good: (Fairly consistent, with some exceptions); Very good: (Almost always). This performance rating is described in more detail on page 53.

### KEQ 1: To what extent was the Act administered according to its purpose?

The Act was administered according to its purpose, and therefore this aspect received a good performance rating. The Commission achieved the administrative requirements set out in the Act, including consulting relevant parties, establishing the Fund (including setting up systems and processes to manage the Fund) and promoting it. The Act has few legislative settings or definitions. This was considered a strength, as it allowed for responsive and flexible Fund design and implementation. Disabled people led and were actively involved in establishing and implementing the Fund.

The Commission consulted with a range of parties, including disabled people and groups, Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs), government departments and political parties. However, they acknowledged more work is needed to enable wider involvement in Fund design and implementation by a range of people and groups within the disability community, particularly Māori and Pacific groups.

The social model of disability is considered good practice in the disability community<sup>1</sup>. This model, in accordance with the Act, supports a design to remove or reduce disability-related cost barriers. The evaluation findings suggest however, that in future, wider use beyond cost barriers would be useful.

Uptake of the Fund was low in its first round (five applications across four applicants) but is expected to build. This initial uptake is similar to that of Funds established in other jurisdictions, where uptake increased over time (e.g., Wales, England, Scotland).

The Fund did not appear widely known. Efforts to ensure a wider and deeper reach into different groups of the disability community would help increase awareness of the Fund.

Finally, although not an expectation in the Act, interviewees felt more could be done to meet Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and accommodate the diversity of disabled people.

## **KEQ 2: How well does the Election Access Fund meet the expectations set out in the Act?**

The Fund generally met the Act's expectations and was rated adequate on this aspect. However, with only four recipients and one election we have limited ability to generalise the findings.

The first expectation of the Act is to **remove or reduce barriers** faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face. The Fund was effective in doing so. It covered costs associated with accessible transport and accommodation, equipment, technology and personal assistance (such as, for site assessments, synthesising and explaining written material, administration and diary keeping), thereby enabling Fund recipients to participate as candidates.

The evaluation found the Fund was flexible enough to support the four Fund recipients, with diverse experiences, to participate in the General Election and that funding amounts were sufficient to cover the costs associated with the applicants' identified barriers. The payment settings, that the Fund is not treated as an election expense or donation and is exempt income, were acceptable to interviewees. Fund recipients found accountability processes manageable, but only with support to undertake them.

In some instances, the Funds' ability to reduce or remove barriers was limited by difficulties finding the right support or resource and/or by time limitations (e.g., funding was received late in election cycle and it could not all be spent). Subsequently, some funds were returned. Both Fund recipients and other interviewees suggested that in future it would be useful for the Fund to open even earlier than the approximately 20 months before an election. Some interviewees suggested the Fund for the 2026 Election should open as soon as possible to support disabled people to prepare to apply and stand.

The second expectation of the Act is to **facilitate participation** of disabled people in, or seeking selection as candidates in, general elections or by-elections. Findings indicate that the Fund was able to do so. In particular, the ability of the Fund to reduce cost barriers played a part in people's decisions to stand. Some Fund recipients and enquirers would not have stood, or considered standing, without the Fund, while others said they will not consider standing again without the Fund.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term 'disability community' in this report to collectively refer to the different disability communities, rather than to suggest there is just one community.

The Fund also facilitated more and deeper engagement in the General Election for Fund recipients, by increasing the extent and level to which they were able to participate. For example, through accessible transport, technical equipment, and skilled support, they were able to attend more meetings and participate in more debates, as well as absorb, make sense of and retain information, more akin to non-disabled candidates. As a result, Fund recipients felt the Fund had contributed to providing a more even playing field for them.

The use of the social model of disability (e.g. not having to evidence their impairment) facilitated uptake of the Fund. It removed a significant barrier to accessing the Fund and taking part in the General Election.

While it is not currently the Fund's role, feedback from disability community interviewees suggest it could have a future role to support potential candidates' awareness of the requirements of taking part in parliamentary elections so they have a clearer understanding of how barriers to their participation could be reduced.

### **KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?**

The operation of the Fund was found to be both efficient and effective, and as a result its operation received a good performance rating. Disabled people contributed to the Fund's operation, there was effective governance and management of the Fund, and effective project management processes supported learning and accountability. Processes were developed to support disabled peoples' access, participation and engagement in the Fund, but need refining to ensure better access for different types of impairments.

Interviews revealed that the Fund resourced a range of disabled people and ethnicities, but not knowingly, as no ethnicity data was collected. Although not part of the Act, feedback indicates that knowing the applicants' ethnicity would help the Fund to be more equitable and meet Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Administrative processes provided timely funding for some Fund recipients, but some experienced delays. This is because policies and procedures were new and required extra discussion and refinement in some instances.

Two million dollars was set aside to establish and implement the Fund. Of this, a total of \$751,836 was used between July 2021 and January 2024, excluding grants. Based on data available, we conclude that resources were reasonably well spent to achieve the Act's objectives. The Commission was prudent and sought efficiencies in spending, for example drawing on internal resources. We note however that a higher spend on the consultation process and direct outreach may have enabled better reach in consultation and promotion.

The Fund has \$1m set aside that is only for grants and intended for several election cycles. In this round, a total of \$45,349 were provided for grants (across five applications, and four applicants), with unspent funds of \$19,465 returned (e.g., due to time limitations and reduced ability to find the right support). The Commission notes that the relatively high set-up cost to grant spend follows the pattern of similar funds in other jurisdictions, where fund efficiency increased over time (Electoral Commission, 2024a).

### **KEQ 4: What opportunities were created by the implementation of the Fund?**



The Fund provides an important signal to disabled people that they are welcome as parliamentary candidates. One Fund recipient saw the Fund as a ‘game changer’ for the disabled community and the democratic system. Fund recipients highlighted a need for more role models for disabled people in the political sphere and considered the Fund to have the potential to inspire and empower involvement in politics and provide opportunities for advocacy and awareness-raising about disabled people’s rights.

Findings indicate that the Fund helps disabled people progress their political ambitions. Fund recipients indicated it had helped them raise their profiles and get known, strengthened their networking with other party members and helped them gain important political experience and skills. Overall, feedback from disability community interviewees and Fund recipients suggests the Fund has the potential to contribute toward a more representative parliament over the long term, if investment is sustained.

### **KEQ 5: What challenges occurred for any stakeholder while implementing the Fund?**

**Challenges for Fund recipients** and enquirers centred on timing and awareness of the Fund (e.g., finding out about it late), and accessibility of the Fund material (e.g., volume and format of information). Also, some did not know all their needs before applying to the Fund (due to not knowing all the processes associated with candidacy). Sometimes, there were funding delays. Finding their own resources and getting cost estimates ahead of time were also challenges, as was limited support for the Fund from political parties. These challenges impacted more on some Fund recipients than others.

**Challenges for the Commission** included finding people with suitable experience for oversight and management when there was uncertainty about likely Fund uptake. There were also challenges associated with capacity issues, due to staff turnover and other priorities within the Commission, and reaching diverse disability groups, including Māori, Pacific and youth. The latter requires building knowledge of disability communities and disability rights as well as building broader disability community networks and relationships. Progress was made but findings indicate more work is needed, particularly in actively collaborating and partnering with Māori, Pacific and young disabled people, to ensure the Fund supports their ambitions. Additional challenges were compressed timelines and low political party involvement.

### **KEQ 6: Is the Commission the most appropriate body to manage the Fund?**

Disability community interviewees thought the Commission should continue managing the Fund. They valued the Commission’s political neutrality, experience, and integrity in the electoral process.

However, interviewees did see challenges for the Commission in managing the Fund in that their role limits the ability to encourage uptake of the Fund, and they have a limited remit to support applicants as candidates. A disability-led NGO may have a deeper understanding of the disability community and the necessary skills to reach out to, encourage and support candidates to apply.

Disability community interviewees suggest the Commission consider collaborating and partnering with disability-led NGOs. These NGOs could provide extra support to help build a pipeline of possible candidates and to improve knowledge of the Fund.

### **KEQ 7: What are the learnings from implementing and using the Fund for the Minister to determine the grant amount in future?**

The evaluation found that the \$1m of existing grant funding is likely sufficient to cover several election cycles. However, the amount allocated in the first round is not an appropriate benchmark for future funding needs. The first use of the Fund had few applicants. They had less time to apply for and use their funds than what would be expected in future elections (12 versus 20 months<sup>2</sup>) and some received funds late in the election cycle. Further, funds were only used for the selection process by one and was not used for by-elections.

Overseas Funds have seen a growth in number of applications over time, which will likely affect the funding needed in future. We note that the current funding cap appears sufficient to cover for individual needs, but that the issues discussed earlier would have impacted on the amount applied for. Therefore, another assessment of grant amount is needed once the Fund is more comprehensively used.

**Possible changes in future:** All interviewees were asked about possible changes to the fund in future. Disability community interviewees called for extending the length of time the Fund is open. They also called for the Fund to be extended to cover local body elections enabling participation on district, city and regional bodies and civic boards. Naturally, this would incur additional costs to candidates that have not yet been tested and possible ramifications around the management of the Fund (e.g., Department of Internal Affairs is responsible for local body election policy). There was a mixed response to funding political parties to support candidates, and most disability community interviewees thought the funding should go to the candidates themselves.

Disability community interviewees would also like to see the Government consider supporting the Fund's objectives with wider policy changes (e.g., support the pipeline of political involvement, make the political culture and environment to be more accessible).

## Conclusion

Based on the findings from all interviewees and the document review, there was sufficient evidence to suggest the following changes.

**For the Act:** Feedback from the disability community interviewees, submissions to the Bill and consultations to set up the Fund, all underscored the desire for an amendment to the Act. The disability community representatives involved at all these stages called for the Act to cover local body elections enabling participation on district, city and regional bodies and civic boards as well as general elections, to ensure broader representativeness in civic leadership.

### For the Fund:

- Extend the length of time the Fund is open to beyond 15 months after the return of the writ with much earlier promotion – to allow more time to raise awareness of the Fund, and for potential applicants to plan and apply for the Fund.
- Consider more flexible approaches for payment of grants. Some disability community interviewees suggested lump sum payments may be a better approach than funding individual items, as is currently the case. While this may present a risk that funds are used beyond that defined by policy, it would

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<sup>2</sup> The Fund opens 15 months after the return of the writ, which will be Feb 2025, 20 months before the election.

address some of the barriers disabled people faced in accessing the Fund such as having to obtain cost estimates ahead of time.

- Extend the scope to remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election other than those of cost. By doing so the Fund could play a key role in supporting a more representative Parliament.

# Introduction

## Terms of reference for the evaluation

The Election Access Fund Act 2020 (the Act) originated as a private member's Bill from Mojo Mathers. It passed with cross-party support in March 2020. The Act's purpose is to "remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or by-election that are faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face" (Election Access Fund Act 2020, 2020).

The Ministry of Justice Tāhū o te Ture (the Ministry) administers the Act, and the Electoral Commission Mō Te Kaitiaki take Kōwhiri (the Commission) was responsible for setting up the Election Access Fund (the Fund) and supporting its administration. The Act came into force on 1 July 2021, and the Fund opened for applications in October 2022. The Fund is available for disability-related costs such as sign language interpreters, accessible transport, special equipment, support assistants and personal assistants.

The first use of the Act triggered two planned reviews. First, the Commission reviewed the funding provided under the Act as part of its statutory report on the 2023 General Election, *Ko te pūrongo a Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri mō te Pōtitanga a-Motu 2023: Report of the Commission on the 2023 General Election* (Electoral Commission, 2024a). Second, the Minister of Justice is statutorily required (according to section 10 of the Act) to carry out or arrange for a review of the operation and effectiveness of the Act no later than six months following the Commission's review.

The Ministry commissioned Pragmatica Ltd, an external evaluation firm, to undertake the second review on behalf of the Minister of Justice. This took the form of an evaluation, which culminated in this report to be tabled in the House of Representatives as soon as practicable after its completion.

## The evaluation: purpose and methodology

This evaluation seeks to understand whether any of the settings in the Act or the Fund need to be changed to achieve the intent. The Ministry agreed that the evaluation's focus was to:

- consider the operation, purpose, and scope of the Fund and assess whether any amendments to the Act are necessary or desirable; and
- provide a 'light touch' review of the Fund's implementation and operation, for accountability and probity purposes.

We used an evaluation-specific methodology. This provides an approach for understanding **how good** something is, whether it is **good enough**, and **how it can be improved** (Davidson, 2005). It involves using Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs), performance criteria and rubrics, to help focus the evaluation and judge the quality and value of the evaluation subject. We collaborated with three leaders from the Disability Community who served as the evaluation's advisors, and staff from the Ministry of Justice, to ensure we optimised an appropriate evaluation design and areas of inquiry.

The KEQs were:

- KEQ 1: To what extent was the Act administered according to its purpose?
- KEQ 2: How well does the Election Access Fund meet the expectations set out in the Act?
- KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?
- KEQ 4: What opportunities were created by the implementation of the Fund?
- KEQ 5: What challenges occurred for any stakeholder while implementing the Fund?
- KEQ 6: Is the Commission the most appropriate body to manage the Fund?
- KEQ 7: What are the learnings from implementing and using the Fund for the Minister to determine the grant amount in future?

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, including:

- semi-structured interviews with Fund recipients, one Fund enquirer, Steering Group and Application Panel members and staff from the Commission (17 people in total) conducted between March and June 2024
- review of the Ministry's and the Commission's documentation and data
- a scan of overseas literature about similar funds.

After internal analysis of the data, we held a sense-making workshop with representatives from the Ministry, the Commission, and disability leadership representatives. For a more detailed methodology, including the performance criteria and rubrics, please refer to Appendix A on page 51.

This report is structured according to the KEQs and the performance criteria.

## **Disability community framing and involvement**

The Ministry required the evaluation framing and approach be acceptable to the disability community. We took this on in four ways. First, we included leaders in the disability community who have lived and whānau experience of disability as advisors on our evaluation team. Second, we carefully considered the language used. We settled on the following terms:

- “Disabled people” is used to describe a general group of people with impairments. It is accepted terminology in New Zealand (Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People, 2023, p. 5) and aligns with the terminology used in the Act. For this evaluation, “disabled people” is a general term that includes tāngata whaikaha Māori, whānau hauā, Deaf people, Pacific disabled people and their whānau and rangatahi. A glossary on page 62 better describes these terms.
- “Impairments” is used to describe the challenges disabled people face as in society (social model) as opposed to saying they are disabled as a consequence of their impairments or differences (medical model). More on our considerations around these terms are included in Appendix A.

Third, we used inclusive and flexible engagement methods to enable disabled people's participation in the evaluation. Fourth, we considered relevant policies, such as *New*



*Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026*, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*, the concept of “reasonable accommodation” (Disabled People’s Organisations Coalition, Human Rights Commission & Office of the Ombudsman, 2023) and the more recent *Enabling Good Lives Principles*<sup>3</sup> (2024) in undertaking our evaluation.

## **Limitations of this report**

The Act mandated that this evaluation take place within six months of the Commission’s review of the first use of the Fund. Key limitations to undertaking the evaluation so early in the Fund’s existence are the low number of applicants to the Fund (4), the timing of the applications (two only applied a few months ahead of the election and were not able to use all the funding allocated to them), and that the Fund was only used for selection by one Fund recipient. None of the people who applied for the Fund were running independently or ran for by-elections. Therefore, these aspects of implementing the Fund are untested. This limited our ability to make evaluative judgements on the Fund’s benefits to applicants or to estimate the amount needed for the Fund in the future.

Particular care was taken to ensure that Fund recipients’ confidentiality was retained, as well as that of other participants. Therefore, all quotes in this report are anonymous and we removed any identifying information. Where we could not do this, we have checked with the interviewee before including their quote in this report.

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<sup>3</sup> Enabling Good Lives is a partnership between the disability sector and government agencies aimed at long-term transformation of how disabled people and families are supported to live everyday lives. Its principles are: beginning early; person-centred; ordinary life outcomes; mainstream first; mana enhancing; easy to use; and relationship building.

## **Context**

### **Size of the disability community**

There are an estimated 1.1 million disabled New Zealanders (24% of the population), based on data collected in the 2013 Disability Survey (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Māori have the highest disability rates across all age groups, apart from the 65 and over group, where Pacific have the highest rates. Despite such a sizeable disability population, there are few openly disabled people who are parliamentary representatives or candidates in general elections.

### **How the fund works**

The purpose of the Fund is to assist disabled people in putting themselves forward for elections or by-elections to Parliament. It aims to help with disability-related costs for equipment and technology, communication (such as a New Zealand Sign Language interpreter), personal assistance, travel, accommodation and expenses for a personal assistant to accompany the candidate to do candidate activities.

The Fund works alongside the costs of candidate activities that everyone has. Candidates can make two types of applications – one for funding to be selected and another for the election campaign. The Fund does not cover the general costs that non-disabled people standing for election also have. Nor will it cover other party activities that are not about selection and being a candidate. Candidates can reapply for more money if needed up to a cap of \$50,000 each election. Candidates have to account for their spending and the Commission can provide support for this. Payments do not count as personal income, or party campaign funding. Candidates can stand in as many election campaigns as they like. For more information about how the Fund works, see Appendix B.

### **Setting up the Fund**

The Commission was responsible for setting up the Fund under the Act. The work on the Fund began around July 2021, when the Act came into force. The Commission established and opened the Fund for applications in October 2022. This was a completely new area of work for the Commission with no precedent for developing such a fund in New Zealand, or anywhere else, and occurred during a global pandemic. It was a short time between the Act coming into force (July 2021) and the time when many political parties started to select candidates for the 2023 General Election (September 2022). While the Fund was set up, Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People (Whaikaha) was also established on 1 July 2022.


# KEQ 1: To what extent is the Act being administered according to its purpose?

*The purpose of the Election Access Fund Act is to “establish a fund designed to remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or a by-election faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face.” (Election Access Fund Act 2020, s3.)*

## Overview

Based on the available evidence, this evaluation found that the **Act was administered according to its purpose,<sup>4</sup> with some development still needed** and rated this aspect good. The Commission established a Fund designed to remove or reduce barriers for disabled people participating as a candidate in a general election or by-election. However, there are some areas for further development, refinement and learning. Findings indicate promoting the Fund more widely and greater involvement from Māori and Pacific are required.

Table 2: Performance rating for KEQ 1

Performance rating <sup>5</sup>		
KEQ 1: To what extent is the Act being administered according to its purpose?	Good	

## The Fund was established and opened for the 2023 General Election

The Commission established and opened the Fund for applications in October 2022. Work on the Fund began around July 2021, when the Act came into force. The evaluators conclude the Commission did a good job of setting up the Fund considering:

- it was a completely new area of work for them
- there was no precedent for developing such a fund in New Zealand, nor anything directly comparable anywhere else
- there was a short time for this work – that is, the period between the Act coming into force (July 2021) and the time when many political parties started to select candidates for the 2023 General Election (September 2022)
- the Commission set the Fund up during a global pandemic, which impacted on workforce capacity and timelines.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Ministry is responsible for administering the Act, most of the activity to do with the Act achieving its purpose focuses on the establishment and design of the Fund, which was the role of the Commission. The Ministry's administrative responsibilities centre on: monitoring the Commission and holding the Commission accountable to the Government and the overarching provisions of their appropriations; administering and annually evaluating the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry and the Commission; and providing funds for the implementation of the Act and for ongoing Fund allocations.

<sup>5</sup> The performance rating is based on generic rubric, with the following performance levels: Poor: (Not at all or only occasionally with clear weaknesses evident); Adequate: (Sometimes, with many exceptions); Good: (Fairly consistent, with some exceptions); Very good: (Almost always). This performance rating described in more detail on page 53.

Aspects of fund establishment are described in more detail below.

## Administrative requirements of the Act were met

The Commission achieved the administrative requirements expected of them, as set out in the Act. This is documented in Table 3.

Table 3: Ways the administrative requirements of the Act were met

Administrative requirements of the Act	Comments based on interviewee feedback and review of key documents
Consult people and organisations that the Commission considers appropriate on the eligibility criteria for accessing the Fund <sup>6</sup>	The Commission consulted with people and organisations from the disability community and government agencies. The consultation focus included the eligibility criteria as well as other areas of the Fund's design.
Publish the eligibility criteria in the Gazette	The Commission published a notice in the Gazette on 6 October 2022.
Administer the Fund	The Commission administered the first round of the Fund. It has established systems and processes to manage the Fund going forward, including an Applications Panel with four members with lived experience of disability. The efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of the Fund is discussed under KEQ3.
Report on the funding as part of the Commission's general election reporting	The Commission reported on the funding as part of its General Election 2023 reporting.

## Disabled people led and were actively involved in establishing and implementing the Fund

A key pillar of the *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026* (Office for Disability Issues: Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga, 2016) is supporting disabled people's involvement in decision-making that impacts them.

Disabled people's active involvement is evident throughout the process of establishing and operating the Act and Fund.

- The Act originated as a private member's Bill and was then championed through Parliament by MPs with lived experience of disability
- Disabled people informed decisions on establishing and implementing the Fund through various consultation processes.
- Disability leaders with a range of backgrounds, areas of expertise and barriers, were represented at both governance (for example, on the Steering Group) and operational levels (Applications Panel and Senior Advisor role). They played a

<sup>6</sup> We note the Act says that the Commission must consult with people and organisations **the Commission considers appropriate**.

vital role in testing and refining the Fund's initial design. They also assisted in adjusting policies and processes during implementation.

### **The Act allowed for flexibility in establishment of the Fund**

A feature of the Act is that it has few legislative settings or definitions. This approach was deliberately adopted, recognising the evolving nature of the disability community and allowing for changes in future. For example, there are no definitions of barriers, access or technology support, as these may change.

Feedback indicates that the legislative settings for first use worked well. Interviewees involved in design and delivery found the lack of prescription was a strength because it allowed for responsive and flexible fund design and implementation, with input from the disability community. However, it did also put pressure on capacity, as the Commission had to start from a clean slate.

### **Consultation occurred, with an opportunity to go wider in future**

The Act required the Commission prior to issuing a Gazette notice of the eligibility criteria of the Fund to consult with "persons and organisations the Commission considers appropriate" (Election Access Fund Act 2020, s7.2). The Commission consulted with government departments, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), disabled individuals and groups, and political parties. The Commission also consulted beyond the eligibility criteria, on other aspects of the Fund's design, to ensure it would be acceptable to disabled people.

There were two rounds of consultation. Initial engagement was with 14 sector leaders, to develop high-level design and an implementation framework for the Fund, which occurred between July and November 2021. Sector leaders engaged with representatives from government agencies, Access Alliance members (including Māori), DPO members, a DPO coalition representative and two political party representatives. Additionally, a thematic review of all the submissions from the Election Access Bill informed the work.

Reporting by the Electoral Commission for this first round identified the importance of drawing on the *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026* and in particular of using a social model of disability for the Fund (Tregaskis Brown, 2021). Using a social model frames disability as "*something that happens when people with impairments face barriers in society; it is society that disables us, not our impairments*" (Office for Disability Issues: Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga, 2016, p.12).

The second round of consultation occurred in July - August 2022 and mainly drew on survey responses. There were also opportunities to present feedback in other ways than the survey, such as face-to-face or through online or phone engagement.

The consultation survey was sent to a database developed by the Commission of 500 people. There were 97 responses (giving a 20% response rate). These included individuals (89), groups (6), and organisations (2) and represented a diverse range of impairments. Comments indicate some Māori representation in the survey responses, but ethnicity data was not collected.



Topics covered in the survey included:

- the proposed applicant process approach
- the planned criteria for when a disabled person is “seeking selection”
- using the UNCRPD definition of a “disabled person”
- a legal declaration being enough evidence of eligibility
- third parties being able to provide information about an applicant’s needs
- the proposed funding timing
- how to pay funding to applicants
- the types of funding support to consider
- governance structures
- the Fund’s engagement (or not) with political parties
- accountability approaches.

The Commission acknowledged more work is needed to enable wider involvement by a range of people and groups within the disability community. Despite genuine attempts, a key challenge for them during the consultation phase was building partnerships and relationships with Māori and Pacific groups. Their internal evaluation report notes a need to prioritise engagement with these groups ahead of the next funding round (Electoral Commission, 2024b). Further, the Commission’s report and our evaluation findings indicate that:

- although there was good use of DPO and the newly formed Whaikaha<sup>7</sup> networks for consultation, not all disabled people are involved in these networks and there is a need to cast the net wider
- the Commission contacted all political parties as part of the consultation process, but not all of them subsequently engaged.

Interviewees for this evaluation believed there should be another attempt at engaging meaningfully with the political parties, as they can play a key role in promoting the Fund and supporting its purpose.

### **The Fund is designed to remove or reduce disability-related cost barriers**

As recommended in the Commission’s report from the first consultation round (Tregaskis Brown, 2021), the Fund design is based on the social model of disability. This includes using the definition of a “disabled person” from Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This is: *“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”* (United Nations, 2006, p. 4).

The Commission’s focus in implementing the Fund was to cover disability-related costs that non-disabled candidates would not have to bear – such as sign language interpreters, accessible transport, special equipment and support assistants and personal assistants. The Fund does not cover costs that all candidates face in relation

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<sup>7</sup> Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People was established on 1 July 2022.

to selection or candidacy, such as designing and publishing advertising, printing leaflets, postage costs, standard travel and accommodation. Neither does it cover political party costs that parties should cover (e.g., providing accessible campaign material for electors, providing accessible venues for conferences and events).

Disability community interviewees were grateful for the types of costs covered by the Fund but felt it could go wider in the types of costs it covered. They noted the economic and social disadvantages that disabled people face, such as at times lower incomes and more limited networks, mean their starting point is different to that of non-disabled people standing for elections. Therefore, some candidate costs, for instance of printing leaflets, may be a more significant barrier for disabled people as they are likely to be on a lower income.

While the focus on cost-related barriers was considered a good first step, feedback from disability community interviewees suggests an opportunity exists for the Fund to take a broader interpretation of barriers, including going beyond cost-related ones. When framing barriers through the social model of disability, these interviewees thought disabled people faced more barriers than non-disabled people related to political inexperience, a lack of knowledge of the electoral process and having to face stigma around disabled people as politicians. Practical support, such as mentoring, could help reduce some of these barriers. This feedback mirrors the findings in the Welsh pilot study (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023).

As well as aligning the Fund design more to the UNCRPD, one interviewee requested the Fund should align with Enabling Good Lives principles and Te Tiriti o Waitangi to facilitate full participation by disabled people in general elections.

## **Systems and processes are in place to manage the Fund**

The Commission developed systems and processes to manage the Fund in time for the 2023 General Election. They described these in their internal evaluation report (Electoral Commission, 2024b). We note that the Commission drew on ideas from the Steering Group and consultation feedback to develop the initial policies, systems and processes for managing the Fund and application process. The Commission has documented in the *Election Access Fund Standard Operating Procedures* (Electoral Commission, 2023a) the detailed steps to process each aspect of a fund application and use the supporting documentation. Overall, Fund recipients found the application process affirming and that it recognised disabled people as valued contributors to civic life. We found no evidence suggesting the application process caused any harm or trauma.

We further discuss the effectiveness of systems and processes in KEQ 3.

## **The Fund was publicised in several ways but needs further reach**

For advice in developing the Election Access Fund campaign, the Commission and its advertising agency partnered with a Māori-owned advertising and design agency and a media and branding organisation led by people with lived experience (Electoral Commission, 2022b).

The Commission advertised the Fund to potential candidates through political parties, DPOs, paid social media and an advertising campaign. The Commission also sent a printed handbook version of the applications guidelines to sector stakeholders and political parties. The application information was developed in English, te reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, EasyRead, large print, audio and braille formats. All information about the Fund is permanently available on the Commission's website.

There were two phases to the campaign. The first was to raise awareness of the Fund's consultation process. The second was to raise awareness of the Fund opening. The campaign featured people with lived experience of disability, with a diversity of impairments, age and ethnicity. The second phase centred on direct outreach, social media and a national advertising campaign targeting adults aged 25+ (including radio and print with a weighting to Māori and Pacific populations, and online videos).

The general sentiment was that the outreach worked well. The Commission notes in their internal evaluation report that the disability community actively supported the promotion of the Fund opening by sharing social media posts, including content in their newsletters, and encouraging people to apply (Electoral Commission, 2024b).

However, disability community interviewees observed that the advertising campaign was not particularly visible to them, and possibly needed either greater support, or to have started sooner before the election. We do not have evidence of how effective publicising the Fund was for the disability community overall, because of limited available media metrics, which lack specificity about the disability community. However, we note that:

- Disability community interviewees believed awareness of the Fund in their networks could have been higher and that it took time for the information to filter through their communities (e.g., one Fund enquirer found out about the Fund in September 2023, too late to make an application worthwhile).
- Some interviewees questioned the extent to which the Fund promotions reached different disability groups (Māori and Pacific in particular).
- Some interviewees believed that political parties could have done more to promote the Fund. While political party involvement was present in the early consultation phase of the Fund, interviewees remarked that there was practically no engagement during the promotional phase.

In the future, it will be essential to consider increasing collaboration with Māori and Pacific groups, and to continue and expand on engagement with regional and local disability community groups and political parties to further promote the Fund.

### **Uptake was low in first round, but is expected to build**

Four people made five applications to the Fund<sup>8</sup>, and they were all successful.<sup>9</sup> Although some interviewees felt this was a low uptake, it is in line with other countries' first use, such as Wales (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023). In New Zealand two enquiries came in soon after the Fund opened in 2022, which resulted in one application and the other waited to be selected before applying, suggesting a low early

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<sup>8</sup> One applicant made two applications.

<sup>9</sup> More detail about what they applied for is included in KEQ 2 on page 25.

demand. Two other applicants applied in May 2023: one found out about the Fund late, and the other took time to decide to apply. In addition, there were two enquiries to the Fund that did not proceed further. One enquirer spoken to said they found out about the Fund too late to apply.

Disability community interviewees suggested that the first use of the Fund is not an accurate predictor of the longer-term uptake, and overseas experiences support this view.

*Disability funding is quite interesting anyway because a lot of people, when there's a new opportunity for a fund, they will sit back, watch, and see how other people go with it. So, it's not like a surge in uptake situation because a lot of people will be like, 'Well, we've seen these funds before and they haven't really actually helped us in a meaningful way, so we're just going to see how people engage with this one.'*

The evaluators suggest that further funding rounds with longer lead times may more accurately indicate demand. None of the people who applied for the Fund were running independently or for by-elections. Therefore, these aspects of implementing the Fund are untested.

### **Interviewees indicated more could be done to meet Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and accommodate the diversity of disabled people**

Although Māori have higher rates of disability than New Zealand European (Statistics New Zealand, 2014) there is no section in the Act relating to Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations or responsiveness to the diversity of disabled people. However, feedback indicates the Commission was mindful of its Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, and that Commission staff made genuine attempts to engage and include a diverse range of disabled people in setting up the Fund.

- They tried to secure tāngata whaikaha Māori involvement on the Steering Group. While these attempts were unsuccessful, they did achieve Māori and Pacific representation on the Application Panel and in the Senior Advisory role. Both groups also included people with different physical, neurodiverse, and sensory impairments.
- They asked Māori and Pacific advisory groups at Whaikaha to review proposed processes from a Māori and Pacific perspective, and to ensure they were inclusive of te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- They drew on help from Māori and disabled communications advisors to develop the communications campaigns and produced communications in different languages and formats.
- They communicated through Māori and Pacific radio networks and print placements in press, upweighted in areas with high Māori and Pacific populations.
- They sought support and advice from the Commission's Kaumātua.

Although this evaluation is about the intent of the Act, which as indicated above has no policy setting about Te Tiriti o Waitangi and/or meeting Māori or Pacific needs,

interviewees noted that Māori and Pacific are disproportionately affected by disability. They suggested there is an opportunity to develop partnerships with more diverse disabled groups, particularly Māori and Pacific, in the ongoing development and delivery of the Fund. The enquiry and application process do not collect the ethnicities of enquirers and applicants. Feedback from disability community interviewees indicates that collecting this information would help inform an understanding about the extent to which the Fund reaches and/or could meet the needs of these priority groups.

Some community disability interviewees suggested the need to build a better understanding of intersectionality – which in this context is the intersect between a person’s cultural positionings such as ethnicity, disability and identity. This would help ensure the Fund is responsive to the intersectional and compounding barriers that some disability communities may face. In addition, they suggested that youth should be involved with the Fund, including in any future governance structure.



## KEQ 2: How well is the Election Access Fund meeting the expectations set out in the Act?

**Expectations of the Act**

- Remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or a by-election faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face.
- Facilitate the participation of disabled people standing as candidates in, or seeking selection as candidates in, general elections or by-elections.

### Overview


This section explores learnings from the first use of the Fund about how well it meets the expectations set out in the Act. However, with only four applicants seeking funding for the General Election, and no applications for by-elections, it is difficult to make conclusive judgements. Some interviewees felt it was too early to judge the usefulness of the Fund.

*The Fund is going to need several rounds in order for it to be properly judged in terms of its usefulness.*

That said, feedback indicates that the current interpretation of the Fund’s scope does meet some expectations set out in the Act. Overall, this evaluation rated this aspect adequate, indicating that the Fund needs more time to become fully established. However, at this stage, it:

- helps **make a positive difference** in reducing and removing some barriers for disabled people who accessed the Fund
- helps facilitate their participation in elections.

Table 4: Performance ratings for KEQ 2

Performance rating <sup>10</sup>		
KEQ 2: How well is the Election Access Fund meeting the expectations set out in the Act?	Adequate	

### The Fund’s ability to reduce or remove barriers

#### The Fund was effective in reducing and removing barriers

All four Fund recipients agreed that the Fund reduced or removed barriers to standing in the 2023 General Election that existed as a consequence of their disability.

<sup>10</sup> The performance rating is based on generic rubric, with the following performance levels: Poor: (Not at all or only occasionally with clear weaknesses evident); Adequate: (Sometimes, with many exceptions); Good: (Fairly consistent, with some exceptions); Very good: (Almost always). It is described in more detail on page 53.

■ *So, [the Fund]... removed the barriers and lifted the playing field if you like.*

Funds helped cover cost barriers associated with accessible transport and accommodation, equipment and technology, and personal assistance (such as, for site assessments, synthesising and explaining written material, administration and diary keeping), thereby enabling Fund recipients with physical, sensory and/or neuro diverse impairments to participate as candidates.

■ *[My assistant] ensured that all the places I went were accessible; [and identified] the best way to get to them. I had my own microphone system because when I had notes I'd hold them up quite close to my face which means if I had a lectern microphone I might block it with the notes. So, I had my own lapel microphone system which [my assistant] had to set up every time I did a debate or every place I had a meeting. All those things were really important, enabling me to take on the whole candidate role.*

The Fund did not reduce or remove all barriers because in some instances, while funding was available, Fund recipients could not find the appropriate support needed (e.g., specific professional support) or funding arrived too late in the election cycle to be able to take full advantage of the resource (e.g., not enough time to learn how to use technical aide).

■ *I was meant to use it for a reader/writer but we [applicant and Electoral Commission] actually weren't able to find a reader/writer, which was really disappointing.*

Interviewees suggested that a resource, that is regularly updated, of where to find different types of support and resources would be useful.

### **The Fund was sufficiently flexible to cater for individual needs**

The Fund is based on a high-trust model, and Fund recipients appreciated being able to self-report their needs. They welcomed the Fund covering a range of costs related to reducing or removing barriers to their participation. Interviewees more broadly also agreed that there was sufficient flexibility in the policy settings to cater for funding Fund recipients' individual needs, including the ability to make multiple applications as additional needs arose.

■ *It was a high trust model and it was flexible, and you know I think that's the... trust we need as a community to be able to thrive and move forward [and] to be able to say, 'Look I know myself best, to be able to have this equal equitable opportunity, this is what I need, this is what I'm applying for', and then the rest is... process.*

The Fund application material provided examples of disability-related costs covered through the Fund. However, Fund recipients said it was difficult to know what their needs might be related to being a candidate before experiencing it. One community disability interviewee suggested that preparatory workshops could be helpful for disabled people interested in applying to the Fund, to provide them with a better understanding of the selection and election processes and expectations of them as candidates. This would better support them to assess the kind of support they might need ahead of making an application. It was also suggested that the list of disability-related costs could be expanded further.

Currently applicants must supply a budget of their likely disability related expenses and evidence of estimates via quotes or past invoices. Recipients are then funded for the costs they have outlined. There were some differences in opinion amongst those involved in the operation of the Fund around the level of flexibility needed to accommodate applicant's needs, particularly because it can be difficult to pre specify what the costs might be.

Some interviewees suggested that providing a lump sum to participants to use, while still retaining a process to account for spend, would be a more supportive approach.<sup>11</sup> Community disability interviewees suggested this approach would align better with the social model of disability rather than providing funding for specific needs as is the current approach. Feedback from Fund recipients indicates that this would make it easier for them to apply and use the money. While this may present a risk that funds are used for out of policy defined costs and barriers, it would address some of the barriers disabled people faced in accessing the Fund such as having to obtain cost estimates ahead of time.

### **Individual funding amounts were sufficient**

All Fund recipients indicated that the funds they received covered the costs associated with their identified barriers. However, as indicated elsewhere, some said they received the money too late or couldn't find the right support, so returned a portion of the funds. An issue that arose was that in the initial Fund design costings for support assistants were based on basic Support Worker rates in the Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlements Act 2017 (2017). However, the support required was more akin to a skilled personal assistant than a support worker – and required higher pay rates. The Electoral Commission in consultation with the Steering Group amended the Fund policy to cater for higher rates for skilled personal assistants after the Fund was opened. Therefore, potential candidates may not have known higher rates were available.

### **More time is needed for preparing for and making applications**

The Fund opened in October 2022, one year ahead of the 2023 General Election. This time period was all that was then available for disabled people once the Fund was established. It was shorter than planned future timeframes; 15 months after the return of the writ, which will be 20 months ahead of the next General Election. There were also some delays in getting the applications material developed in multiple formats, meaning the opening was a month later than originally anticipated.

Most interviewees agreed that one year was too short a period for the Fund to facilitate participation of disabled people in the General Election and may have impacted on uptake. Political parties started their selection process in September 2022, a month before the opening of the Fund. As indicated elsewhere, only two Fund recipients applied when the Fund opened, and only one used it for candidacy selection.

While most interviewees felt that the Commission did a decent job of setting up the Fund within the short time available, one interviewee felt the timing was too tight and would have preferred the Commission had waited and opened the Fund in the next electoral cycle. This would have allowed more time for building relationships with key

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<sup>11</sup> The Whānau Ora approach was suggested as a potential model to explore – for instance providing a small sum for a candidate to make a plan and then further funding to implement that plan.

partners and disability communities, for promoting the Fund more widely and providing more time for potential applicants to get ready to apply.

Both Fund recipients and other interviewees suggested that in future it would be useful for the Fund to open even earlier than the approximately 20 months before an election. Some interviewees suggested the Fund for the 2026 Election should open as soon as possible to support disabled people to prepare for selection and become candidates. We heard that because disabled people face extra barriers, they may need extra lead time to decide to stand and to rally further support for selection. This suggests that promoting and opening the Fund earlier than the Electoral Commission's currently planned 15 months after the return of the writ could improve uptake of the Fund. Findings suggest there could be a tiered approach where practical and/or educational support is offered in the first instance, before funds become available.

### **Payment settings worked well**

The Act sets out the expectations that payment from the Fund is not treated as an election expense or donation (Section 8) and is exempt income (Section 9), which also provides for exemptions from income tax under other Acts. No Fund recipients or interviewees raised concerns about the way payments were treated, suggesting that this part of the process works well.

### **Fund recipients found accountability processes manageable with support**

Fund recipients were required to keep records of all matters relating to their funding and to provide an interim report during their funding period (spreadsheet of spend to date against budget) and a final report (record of expenditure and proof of spend) once it ended. Record keeping includes timesheets and proof of payment for support assistants and personal assistants and receipts and invoices for goods and services purchased.

Although Fund recipients indicated that it was easy to account for the money spent, they all relied on support through this process. The Electoral Commission offered help to all Fund recipients. Some applicants accepted it, while others used their personal assistants to help keep track of receipts and spend and complete reporting requirements. Feedback indicates the process could have been difficult for Fund recipients to manage on their own, suggesting it may need to be reviewed.

### **The Fund's ability to facilitate participation**

#### **The Fund has the potential to influence people's decisions about standing**

As indicated elsewhere, the Fund helped cover costs associated with transportation, skilled support and technical equipment. Feedback indicates that the ability of the Fund to reduce cost barriers plays a part in people's decisions to stand. One Fund recipient indicated that they would not have stood in the election had it not been for this support, as the additional cost borne by them as a disabled person would have been too high.

■ *The funding was integral because I faced such real barriers, like transport.*

An enquirer to the Fund indicated that they would not have considered taking part in the election, had it not been for the Fund.

■ *'[It] wouldn't even have crossed my mind'.*

This person did not end up applying or standing, as they found out about the Fund late and there were some delays in getting their queries fully addressed. Subsequently, they decided it was too late to apply.

Two other Fund recipients said they would only be likely to stand again if the Fund is there to support them.

■ *If I do stand again, I would only do it if I had the EAF [Election Access Fund] because now I know, especially, what the whole process entails.*

■ *If I do decide to campaign again and be a candidate for a party, I won't hesitate if the Fund is there. But if the Fund isn't there I probably won't do it.*

## **The Fund facilitated more and deeper participation**

Fund recipients said the Fund increased the *extent* and *level* to which they were able to participate in the election, helping them do things they could not otherwise have done – to a high or very high degree.

One applicant used the Fund to pay for a personal assistant who helped them absorb, make sense and retain information, as well as plan and organise their involvement in different debates. This enabled them to participate in more depth, and in more debates than would otherwise have been likely.

■ *So, [with my personal assistant] I went to fifty events in three months and ... of those fifty events, thirty-six were debates. And the stamina and the mental and intellectual endurance you need for these debates is not well placed for people [like me]. So, what would have happened [without the Fund] is ...and I wouldn't have been able to compete... I would have limited my campaign to digital content [and] some events where I didn't have to debate, or the few debates where I was a subject matter expert.*

Another applicant, with physical disabilities, used the Fund to pay for accessible travel and accommodation costs which would have been too high to bear personally. This enabled them to travel wider and farther than would have otherwise been possible.

■ *You know, I've never driven and, and I will never drive [due to my impairments] so [the Fund] enabled me to get around to visit, cause I had quite a lot of travel requirements, like I, I visited from [city] right down to [city], and quite a lot of cities in between. [The Fund] enabled me to feel like I could participate and also to be able to participate [in the election].*

## **The Fund contributed to a more level playing field**

As a result of being able to participate at a higher and more intense level, Fund recipients felt the Fund had contributed to providing a more even playing field for them.



*So it enabled me to participate at the same level of all my other fellow candidates.*

*I guess I feel like it put me more on a level playing field with other candidates who can do this stuff [without support].*

At times, Fund recipients revealed their disability to their party; at other times, they did not. This is a very personal decision each person has the right to make.

### **Use of the social model of disability facilitated take-up**

It was a relief and unusual, according to Fund recipients, that they did not need to 'evidence' their impairment in applying for the Fund. This removed a significant barrier to accessing the Fund and taking part in the election.

*You know for me, to receive any funding of any sort I have to get a medical certificate. And I have to prove on a regular basis that I'm still disabled, which is incredibly disempowering.*

Fund recipients welcomed and found affirming the Election Access Fund's focus on the skills they bring, rather than any impairment they face.

*There's that sensitivity about standing, for being seen as a credible applicant and candidate and being seen for your skills, not your disability.*

Interviewees were generally positive about the broadness of the eligibility criteria, including the use of the UNCRPD approach and definition of disability. With only four Fund recipients, it is difficult to say how effective the criteria are in eliciting a diverse range of Fund recipients. However, Fund recipients did represent a range of barriers to participation.


### KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?

We relied on the Electoral Commission’s internal and published reporting (Electoral Commission, 2024a, 2024b) for most of the detail in this section, as well as drawing on feedback from interviews. Key documents we reviewed are cited as references to this report.

#### Overview

Findings from the Electoral Commissions internal reporting and feedback from interviewees indicates that the Fund’s operation for the first round was efficient and effective, with some opportunities for refinement. Therefore, this aspect received a good performance rating.

Table 5: Performance ratings for KEQ 3

Performance rating <sup>12</sup>		
KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?	Good	

#### The operation of the Fund drew on expertise from disabled people

Leaders with lived experience of various impairments were on the Steering Group, the Applications Panel and in the Senior Advisory role. The latter two had direct involvement in the Fund’s operation, and all brought different skills and experience from the disability and other sectors, as well as their lived experience. Most Applications Panel and Steering Group members underwent a formal selection process.

#### There was effective governance and management of the Fund’s operation

The Fund’s governance consisted of a Steering Group that oversaw the establishment and implementation of the Fund, and an Applications Panel that reviewed applications to the Fund. The groups enabled effective governance and management of the Fund. There was representation of:

- seniority and previous leadership experience
- different impairments
- political and legal expertise
- different ethnicities
- some disability related organisations and departments

<sup>12</sup> The performance rating is based on generic rubric, with the following performance levels: Poor: (Not at all or only occasionally with clear weaknesses evident); Adequate: (Sometimes, with many exceptions); Good: (Fairly consistent, with some exceptions); Very good: (Almost always). It is described in more detail on page 53.

- different world views.

One person was selected through this process for the Steering Group. A benefit of having her on the Steering Group was the deep knowledge she brought from her political experience and in initially bringing the private member's bill. She is also the Chief Executive of the Disabled People's Association (DPA). Ideally, the Steering Group would have included tāngata whaikaha Māori<sup>13</sup> (disabled Māori) but no suitable candidate was located. Therefore, for the Applications Panel, after two attempts the Commission directly approached someone identified in the second round of consultation to ensure Māori representation.

Our findings suggest that both groups functioned well. The Fund benefited from the Commission assigning senior personnel to the Steering Group and the Applications Panel, with the authority to make high-level decisions. Meanwhile, the make-up and facilitation of the Applications Panel enabled robust discussions which led to important changes to policies and processes (e.g., allowing for both support workers and personal assistants). The Steering Group was responsive to the Applications Panel, which served in an advisory capacity making recommendations to the Commission on how to treat applications and adjust policy where necessary.

The Steering Group was disestablished after the first round of the Fund, and there will be a review of the future governance structure. Interviewees noted that continued and strengthened involvement by Māori and Pacific at this level is critical and suggested also including young people and rangatahi.

### **The Commission developed processes to support disabled peoples' access, participation and engagement in the Fund**

Interviewees feedback and documentation showed there were processes in place to support disabled people's access, participation and engagement in the Fund in its first round. In particular:

- all information about the Fund and how to apply are on the Commission's website
- staff were available for one-on-one engagement with enquirers and applicants, to help them navigate application and reporting processes
- a Senior Advisor with lived disability experience was available for one-on-one engagement and support
- there was an 0800 number for enquirers to contact the Commission
- information in different languages and formats, such as te Reo Māori, sign language, braille and large print was available.

Fund recipients said that once they knew of the Fund's availability it was easy to find out about the Fund (e.g., through Google). They also found it was easy to contact the Commission to get support, that there was enough support provided by the Commission to apply, and that, for the most part there was a quick response to their application.

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<sup>13</sup> While not used in the Act, we are using this term for disabled Māori.

However, there were differences in experiences relating to the overall application process; whether it was quick to fill in the application form; and whether it was easy to get the funding. Two Fund recipients faced challenges in accessing and digesting the information provided. They noted that without the support from the Commission, it would have been difficult for them to complete the application process.

Those involved in implementing the Fund acknowledged that, in hindsight, systems and processes may have been designed more with physical barriers in mind. Overall, interviewees agreed that what is in place is a good start, but that further improvements could increase access, participation and engagement for a wider range of barriers.

Interviewees considered the application and funding process safe and that it protected confidentiality. The Commission recognised this need in the design and implementation of the Fund. One way the Fund did this was by being particularly careful to keep enquirers' details confidential. Disability community interviewees said this was necessary as a stigmatising culture towards disabled people continues to exist within some political parties.

### **Administrative processes provided timely funding for some, but not all**

Although some Fund recipients were impressed with the speed at which they received their funds, others experienced slight delays. Feedback suggests this is because policies and procedures were new and needing extra discussion and refinement to approve an application. In these instances, the Applications Panel deliberated to find a solution. While Applications Panel members had different worldviews about what was fitting and reasonable to fund, and engaged in meaningful discussions, this decision-making process took time. Also, applications sent to the Panel for review had all identifying information about the applicant removed. At times, the Applications Panel members felt they did not know enough about the candidate's impairment, barriers and ongoing support needs, to make an informed decision about the application. In these instances, the Commission went back to the applicant for more information. After the Applications Panel gave their view of the application, the Commission made the final decision.

### **Effective project management processes supported learning and accountability**

The Commission considered project management a key strength in both the setup and operational phases of implementation. Their processes allowed feedback from a range of interviewees (both during consultation and during implementation) to influence the Fund design. Those involved in the operational aspects of the Fund (e.g., panel members, disability advisor, electoral staff) spoke positively about the Commission's openness to learning and their ability to act when changes were needed. Therefore, adjustments made during the first round of the Fund allowed extra learning and refined processes and policies.

## The Fund resourced a range of disabled people

From our interviews it is clear the Fund helped a range of disabled people overcome different barriers across different ethnicities<sup>14</sup>. However, because no ethnicity information was collected as part of the enquiry information or in the application information the Commission could not knowingly promote involvement by different ethnicities. Although not part of the Act, the evaluation suggests knowing the applicants' ethnicity would help the Fund to be more equitable and meet Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

## Resources were reasonably well spent to achieve the Act's objectives

Interviewee feedback and a review of external and internal documentation (Electoral Commission, 2024a, 2024b) revealed that resources assigned to set up and manage the Fund<sup>15</sup> were reasonably well spent to achieve the Act's objectives.

The Commission spent \$751,836 between July 2021 and January 2024 to establish and operate the Fund, out of an available \$2m<sup>16</sup>. A breakdown in Table 6 below shows \$313,747 was spent on employee-related costs, \$429,502 on specialist services (which includes advertising and placement costs) and \$8,587 on other items. The Commission will not incur some of these establishment costs again.

Table 6: Expenditure on the establishment & operation of the Election Access Fund

Cost category	Establishment Expenditure	Operational expenditure	Total expenditure
	July 2021–end October 2022 (\$)	November 2022– end January 2024 (\$)	July 2021–January 2024 (\$)
Employee-related	158,783	154,964	313,747
Specialist services <sup>17</sup>	148,323	281,179	429,502
Other	2,929	5,658	8,587
<b>Total</b>	<b>310,035</b>	<b>441,801</b>	<b>751,836</b>

Sourced from (Electoral Commission, 2024a p.135)

The Commission notes in their internal report (Electoral Commission, 2024b) that the relatively high cost of setting up the Fund reflects legislative requirements set out in the Act to consult with and engage disabled people. It also reflects the need for specialist services for advertising and publicity, and for turning materials into various accessible formats. These activities were key to ensuring the Fund was acceptable to the disability community. We note however that the advertising campaign was not as effective as planned. It is possible more could have been spent on the consultation process and direct outreach, particularly on Māori and Pacific disabled people who represent a

<sup>14</sup> The ethnicity of the Fund recipient was established during our interviews.

<sup>15</sup> We have a separate section about grant spend on page 34.

<sup>16</sup> Figure provided by the Ministry.

<sup>17</sup> Specialist services include fees for advertising placements.

higher greater proportion of disabled people compared to other ethnic communities, groups and political parties (Office for Disability Issues: Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga, 2016).

Regarding employee-related costs, we note that the Commission sought efficiencies in spending. They contracted some external staff, notably a full-time senior advisor with lived disability experience, and experience with administering funds, but also drew on internal capacity. For example, when a contracted part-time project coordinator left, this role was absorbed into the role of a Commission staff member, creating efficiencies. Even though there were resource constraints, seconded staff filled the gap to ensure opening of the Fund.

Some aspects of administering the Fund, such as refining policies and processes, were resource intensive. This was largely due to the Fund being new in New Zealand and operating a fund being a new activity for the Commission. This is to be expected and the Commission is not likely to incur these costs to the same extent in the next round of the Fund.

We could not find suitable comparisons for setting up a new fund of this type in New Zealand. Interviewees believed the Commission did a good job of setting up the Fund and responsibly used the resources. However, timing constraints did preclude building strong networks with a range of disabled groups including Māori and Pacific communities. This is work that still needs to be undertaken in the next round.

### The grant spend was modest

Four Fund recipients applied through five applications and received funding of \$45,349, of the \$1 million available.

Funding applications ranged from \$2,567 to \$13,647, with an average grant of \$11,337 for each recipient. The following table describes the categories of funding applied for. In this first use of the Fund, most of the requested funding was for support and personal assistants.

Table 7: Grant spent for the first use of the Election Access Fund

Grant spend category	\$ (including GST)
Support assistants and personal assistants	32,377
Travel	10,862
Equipment	2,110
<b>Total granted</b>	<b>45,349</b>
Amount returned	19,465
<b>Total spent</b>	<b>25,884</b>

Adapted from (Electoral Commission, 2024a, p 137).

Election funding is available until the close of election day and for two weeks after for administrative support to complete outstanding pre-election administrative tasks. Fund recipients returned \$19,465 unused funds to the Commission. Reasons given were that they did not spend the grant in time or could not procure the resources applied for. This



means the actual total spend was \$25,884 with an average spend of \$6,471, per Fund recipient.

A common theme in the interviews was that Fund recipients were modest in their funding requests. They were careful to apply for things they believed were reasonable. However, one Fund recipient went as far as not applying for funds sufficient to cover all their needs. They had concern over a possible public reaction if seen to get too much money.

It's difficult to compare the uptake of this Fund for national elections and by-elections directly with jurisdictions in England, Scotland and Wales. In those countries the funding was available for both local body and national elections. The Commission concluded (Electoral Commission, 2024a) that the New Zealand General Election scale was nearest the Senedd Cymru elections in Wales (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023). On that basis the Fund had a comparable performance in terms of the number of people applying for and being funded.

## KEQ 4: What opportunities have been created by the implementation of the Fund?

This section describes the opportunities created in implementing the Fund.

### Signals disabled people are welcome as parliamentary candidates

The Election Access Fund Act 2020 and the associated Fund herald an important improvement for the disability community. The Act signals government support for disabled people to participate as candidates in the general election.

*Knowing that the government was there backing people with learning disabilities and [other] disabilities felt really dignifying. Like I felt like I could be there [in Parliament], and I should be there because the government has recognised [disabled people], like it just felt like a really mana-enhancing thing.*

One disability community interviewee said

*I think it does have a lot of potential, not just in terms of the practical support, which is really important, but also in terms of sending a signal that actually we, as a country, want to have disabled people representing us and we think that's important.*

One Fund recipient saw the Fund as a “game-changer” for their community and the democratic system.

*I think it could be a complete and utter game-changer to the face of our democracy, the level of participation, the accessibility of [disabled] people.*

### Potential to inspire and empower disabled people's involvement in politics

Fund recipients highlighted a need for more role models to provide inspiration for disabled people to enter politics and believed the Fund provides an opportunity for this to occur by facilitating their participation.

*The fact is that if we don't have disabled people in [political] positions, we're never going to get more disabled people seeing that can happen and seeing that they can actually make the changes that they want to see.*

*I'd like to think that there could be a kind of snowball effect, that the more representation there is, the more people see [politics] as a path that's possible for them.*

Fund recipients also noted the potential for the Fund to help raise young disabled people's expectations that their participation in politics is welcome and possible.

*[A disabled politician] is something for our youth to look up to, to know that it can be done, to know that people with disabilities can be in these positions.*

One disability community interviewee said that they knew of people inspired by the Fund who are considering applying in another round.

*I've had feedback from people who didn't apply this time but are really keen to apply next time. The availability of this Fund has started people thinking, 'Oh well, maybe I [can stand in the General Election].'*

### **Provides opportunities for advocacy and awareness-raising**

All Fund recipients advocated for disabled people's rights, inclusivity and accessibility to varying degrees in their campaigns, with some making it their primary focus. They believed it was important to have disabled people involved in national politics, to raise awareness about disability-related issues and promote positive change.

*We face barriers literally at every part of our lives, and it is so important that we have somebody with living experience standing up and representing our community ... [To stand] was a really amazing opportunity for me to really bring attention to disabled people and the inequities we live with. So I campaigned purely on a disability platform.*

### **Helps disabled people progress their political ambitions**

Fund recipients told us that the Fund helped them progress their political ambitions to various extents. Some hoped to be voted in themselves. Others hoped that their party would win or be part of a winning coalition. None of the Fund recipients were elected. However, Fund recipients still considered that the Fund helped them take important steps towards potentially reaching these ambitions in the future. They indicated that the Fund helped:

- raise their profiles and getting known to a much higher extent (for example, being able to take part in more debates)
- strengthen their networking with other party members (for example, through the ability to travel more extensively and take part in more events)
- gain important political experience and skills.

Fund recipients also had other short-term ambitions, such as getting a good position on their party list, campaigning extensively and campaigning on disability issues – and this, they also believed the Fund helped with.

*I had many ambitions and then it all kind of happened to me. So I don't think any of that would have happened without the Fund and so I'm really, really grateful.*

### **Potential to contribute toward a more representative Parliament**

Disability community interviewees highlighted the importance of a representative Parliament.

*I think Disabled People engaging in civics and politics is very, very important. I'm of the strong view that if we do have a parliament, then it should reflect the communities it serves.*

Interviewees noted that if Parliament reflected the population, disabled people would be around one fifth of MPs. One Fund recipient noted the long-standing lack of disabled people's visible representation in their party.

*I don't think that [my party], well, the last time [they] had a candidate that was so obviously representative of the disability community in my recollection or in terms of what people have told me, was [date].*

Although the first round of the Fund did not contribute to increased participation and representation of disabled people in Parliament, interviewees believed that, given time and continued investment, the Fund will help contribute to this happening in the future.

*We need to be investing in this over our generation... because, it's been... decades that we haven't.*

## KEQ 5: What challenges occurred for any stakeholders while implementing the Fund?

In this section, we identify challenges that occurred for any person or organisation with an interest **during the implementation of the Fund**. The two key parties mentioned by interviewees were first, disabled people wanting to stand as candidates, and second, the Commission.

### For Fund recipients

It was useful to hear directly from Fund recipients and Fund enquirers about the challenges they faced when applying for the Fund. Some of the interviewees also had insights into the kinds of challenges faced in implementing the Fund that impacted applicants.

Table 8: Summary of challenges for Fund recipients

Key themes	Description of the challenge and possible solutions
Timing and awareness of the Fund	<p>The first implementation of the Fund was time-limited. However, feedback and engagement with the Fund show that applicants often found out about the Fund quite late in the electoral process. Disabled people said they need longer to consider standing, build networks and get known.</p> <p>One interviewee reflected on the complexity of potential candidate's requirements and therefore the need for early support:</p> <p><i>"It's not just being out on the campaign trail, but there are some legislative requirements on you through the nomination process, but also through declaring donations and expenses, etc., which are quite complex processes. And so, it's perhaps a bit more involved in being a candidate than may meet the eye from an outside perspective. I think there will be some value in helping to build that understanding early in the electoral cycle."</i></p>
Accessibility of the Fund material	<p>As noted elsewhere, the information about the Fund and the application form are not readily accessible for all disabilities. Interviewees proposed including video clips accessible to applicants with lived experience of neurodiversity. One Fund enquirer could not use their screen reader on the material.</p>

<b>Not knowing one's needs and information gaps</b>	Some Fund recipients said they did not really know what support they needed as they had not stood as candidates before. This indicates that applicants need extra help before applying. Some frequent questions for Fund recipients and enquirers were: the types of administrative support the Fund covers; how to employ support and personal assistants; about producing and working to a budget; and about standing as an independent candidate. Interviewees suggested developing further information on these topics.
<b>Delays in responses/receipt of funding</b>	Sometimes, Fund recipients and enquirers said they experienced delays in getting a response from the Commission and/or had to wait a few weeks for their application to be processed and their request deliberated. This delay impacted their ability to apply/start accessing resources.
<b>Fund recipients had to find their own resources</b>	It was difficult for some Fund recipients to find the right resources and supports for which they had received funding. Thus, with funds returned, the barriers were not removed.
<b>Obtaining cost estimates ahead of time</b>	Feedback indicates that it is difficult for some Fund recipients to gain cost estimates from suppliers without estimates of how much of their time they might need, and/or if they will be able to contract suppliers for the work. A more flexible funding approach may be useful (e.g., lump sum payment).
<b>Limited support from political parties</b>	Most Fund recipients did not receive support from their party in applying for the Fund. Political parties could play a key role in preparing potential candidates to apply.

## For the Commission

As reflected in our interviews, and mentioned elsewhere, the Commission faced several barriers and challenges while setting up the Fund. The Commission also noted some of these challenges in its internal evaluation report (Electoral Commission, 2024b).

Table 9: Summary of challenges for the Commission

Key themes	Description of the challenge
<b>Finding the right people</b>	Finding people with the right experience, skills (including lived disability experience) and cultural representation for the oversight and operation of the Fund was challenging. The Commission repeated recruitment rounds and shoulder-tapped some people to fill positions.

<b>Uncertainty about number and type of applicants</b>	Uncertainty about how many people would apply to the Fund and what type of needs applicants would present made policy development challenging. Therefore, the implementation team made some policy decisions on a case-by-case basis.
<b>Capacity issues</b>	While the Fund had some dedicated staff, other Commission staff working on the Fund also had other projects/responsibilities and were in high demand during implementation of the Fund. Progress halted at times, and allocated staff left the project due to other Commission priorities, which impacted timings. This suggests the need for more dedicated capacity for the next round.
<b>Compressed timelines</b>	The resourcing delays noted above, and challenges related to COVID-19, contributed to compressed timeframes for undertaking the work.
<b>Connecting with Māori and Pacific disability groups</b>	Despite trying multiple different approaches, the Commission appeared to lack resources to engage effectively with a range of disabled communities, including Māori and Pacific communities. In addition, feedback indicates consultation fatigue and a lack of capacity within some of these groups were also possible barriers to engagement as consultation for the establishment of Whaikaha also occurred around this time. Longer lead-in times are necessary for engaging with these groups. Engagement with these communities needs to begin promptly for the 2026 Election.
<b>Engaging with diverse disability groups</b>	The disability community is very diverse, with many different groups. Many individuals with disabilities do not align with the main disability organisations. Therefore, effective engagement in broad consultation and media placement requires deep knowledge of the disability community which the Commission is still building.
<b>Low political party involvement</b>	The Commission achieved some engagement with some but not all political parties. Capacity issues were perceived as a possible barrier for parties to engage.
<b>The Commission's neutrality restrains some activity</b>	A tension is that while the Commission needs to provide information about the Fund, they cannot be seen to encourage uptake of the Fund. The nuances of this appear to have impacted the way engagement and promotion was approached.



## **KEQ 6: Is the Commission the most appropriate body to manage the Fund?**

### **The Commission is most appropriate to manage the Fund**

In general, interviewee feedback confirms the Commission is the appropriate body to manage the Fund. The Commission's political neutrality stood out as the key advantage in operating the Fund. The Commission has now built institutional knowledge, and processes and systems are in place for operating the Fund efficiently. Therefore, most interviewees were reluctant to move the Fund to another agency, given that it is so newly formed.

### **Strengths of the Commission managing the Fund**

According to interviewees, the strengths of the Commission are that it:

- has expertise around electoral process and staff are trained to be politically neutral
- is focused on helping New Zealanders take part in parliamentary elections, with other agencies having a broader disability focus
- has a high degree of integrity and is more trusted than many other government agencies, with Ministers seen to have little involvement – further giving a sense of political neutrality
- has generated some goodwill consulting with disability community over the Fund
- now has institutional knowledge, systems and processes in place to manage the Fund
- ran the grants process relatively efficiently, with the caveat that there were only a few enquirers and applicants.

### **Challenges for the Commission in managing the Fund**

Challenges for the Commission in managing the Fund according to interviewees are that:

- while the Commission can provide information, it cannot be seen to influence potential applicants or political parties, possibly limiting the ability to encourage uptake of the Fund
- the Commission is still building awareness of, and ability to respond to current disability rights issues (but disability interviewees reflected that the Commission has considerable influence)
- the Commission has limited remit, capability and capacity to support potential applicants as candidates, whereas a disability-led NGO would be better resourced
- the Commission may need to employ more disabled people as staff or contractors with relational skills and a deep understanding of and ability to connect with disability communities, including Māori and Pacific communities

- grants management is not a core skill of the Commission, and they may need additional resourcing if demand for the Fund grows significantly
- the disability community has a low trust of government agencies generally and may trust NGOs more.

### **Suggested possibilities for collaboration**

Most interviewees thought the Commission was currently the best organisation to manage the Fund, and there was no clear alternative. Most disability community interviewees were somewhat reluctant to move the Fund to another agency at this stage, given that it is so newly formed.

Overseas, NGOs have managed similar Funds (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023; The Scottish Government, 2021). There, researchers found that disability-led organisations are seen as independent of the government and have the necessary skills to reach out to, encourage and support candidates to apply (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023).

In New Zealand, disability community interviewees suggested that in future the Commission might co-manage the Fund with one or several NGOs. The benefit of this approach is that NGO involvement would:

- better maximise reach into the disability community, given the NGOs' connections and understanding of disability communities
- increase the responsive support *for* disabled people *by* disabled people in applying for and using the Fund.

However, interviewees also told us that the synergy across the diverse disabled-led groups or the conditions required to collaborate are not always in place. As already identified, no single disability organisation has deep contacts with all the disability communities, so it may require several organisations working in collaboration and partnership to enable greater facilitation.

Finally, one disability community interviewee suggested that the Department of Internal Affairs or the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment or Te Puni Kōkiri may be suitable government agencies to manage the Fund because they work closely with communities and have strong fund management experience. However, these organisations were not suggested by any other interviewees.

## **KEQ 7: What can be learned from implementing and using the Fund for the Minister to determine the amount of the grant in future?**

This section contains key learnings from interviewee feedback for the Minister to determine the amount of the grant in future and for implementing and using the Fund.

### **The amount of the grant**

The Election Access Fund has \$1m of grant funding available that is only for grants and is intended for several election cycles. As indicated elsewhere, a total of \$25,910 was spent in the first round of the Fund, leaving plenty of funds for future elections. This indicates that the total grant is sufficient to cover more than one election. However, we highlight that the amount allocated in the first round is not an appropriate benchmark for future funding needs.

### **Funding was returned**

A total of \$45,375 was initially allocated to Fund recipients, but half of this amount was returned because Fund recipients did not have enough time to spend the full grant, and/or because they were not able to procure the resources they needed.

### **Timing implications**

Three Fund recipients received funding after candidate selection and candidates said funding for pre-selection campaigning would have been useful. Two Fund recipients received funding late in the election cycle and were therefore not able to spend the full grant in time. As the Fund will open earlier in future elections, allowing applicants to campaign for longer, it will likely incur higher costs.

### **Uncertainty over what to apply for**

As this was a new fund, applicants were uncertain about the appropriate amount to apply for. Some applicants said they erred on the side of caution in making their applications. In future rounds they may be more knowledgeable and make larger funding requests.

### **Only used for general elections at this stage**

The Fund is currently only for general elections and by-elections. To date the Commission has not received any applications for by-elections so that process is untested.

### **Comparison with other countries**

The Commissions review of overseas funds found that the number of applications built over time, which will affect the funding needed in future.

*The Welsh fund received only two applications for the Senydd Cymru national elections that were run in the first year of the fund but received 18 applications (of which 17 were approved) for local government elections in 2022. The scale of the New Zealand general election is most similar to the Senedd Cymru elections in*

*terms of candidate numbers, and the Senedd Cymru elections also took place in the first year of operation of the Welsh fund. On this basis, the New Zealand fund might be seen as having a comparable performance with the Welsh scheme.* (Electoral Commission, 2024a, p. 138)

### **The current funding cap appears appropriate**

During the design and establishment of the Fund the implementation team set a funding cap of \$50,000 per applicant, per election. Fund recipients in the first round asked for funding well below that level (on average \$10,695), but due to the issues noted above, this cap was not sufficiently tested. However, as it stands, the current cap allows for higher funding applications should funding be required for a longer period and/or additional candidacy activities (e.g., party selection).

Feedback suggests that applicant costs could vary depending on the size of their electorate, the number of physical meetings required, and party-specific processes. For example, Māori electorates are larger, and there is likely to be more face-to-face contact needed. Pacific communities may also require more face-to-face meetings. Subsequently, the funding cap may need further testing through an equity lens. Back-of-the-envelope estimates from one disability community interviewee are that up to \$75,000 might be needed to support travel costs for a candidate in a large Māori electorate.

However, Fund policy documentation and interview feedback indicates that, although there is a funding cap, there is flexibility to meet needs that may require a higher level of funding.

*There was flexibility about the threshold. It's why I think any candidates that go over the threshold, the idea was that [they] would come back for further discussion and a recommendation around whether this particular candidate [had] circumstances that required greater access to the Fund.*

### **Key learnings about future implementation**

#### **Extend the length of time the Fund is open**

In the coming 2026 election, the Fund is planned to open 20 months before the likely election. Some community disability interviewees thought the Fund should open even sooner to allow potential candidates a longer time to prepare and get known before the selection process. If the Fund opened earlier, candidates would have money on hand soon enough to line up their resources in time for preselection activities.

*Please get the Fund up and running and open for applications much earlier, like start thinking about it as soon as possible after the election... Providing more support earlier in the process is really important. Making it clearer that people can apply for the Fund to be considered as a candidate even before they've been selected, I think, is probably a really important thing. Because certainly the intent of the Fund is to support people to go through the selection process, not just to kick in afterwards for campaigning... They need to be able to access the Fund just to be able to be on a more level playing field to be considered and selected as a candidate by different parties.*

The extended time which the Fund is going to be open may lead to higher and more fund applications. This needs to be considered when determining the grant amount in the future.

### **Extend funding to cover local body elections**

A consistent theme through the earlier consultations and in our interviews is that disability community interviewees strongly urge that the Fund should include local body elections. Some disability community interviewees would also like to see the Fund extended further to create a pipeline of participation for disabled people into politics on district, city and regional bodies and civic boards. This would include funding for participation on civic boards (such as school boards) to facilitate greater civic participation.

*I really think that we need [the Election Access Fund] at local, regional and central levels. We talk about [how] we want more disabled people represented in all levels of government, we have to be real about it and make this a real thing that we make happen.*

The argument for extending the Fund to local body elections at district, city and regional levels centred on two key points:

- Important issues about access and participation often affect disabled people in everyday life locally. These are not as easily influenced nationally.

*The local government world impacts disabled people's lives far more than central government.... And I think the need for representation at local government, is far greater.*

- Involvement in local politics is less intimidating and more achievable than national politics. It provides a chance to experience civic leadership on a more manageable scale.

*I think the level of risk for a campaign is far lower. And also, the cost is far lower to mount a campaign at local government level.*

*I'd like to stand for a local government but I'm probably not going to be able to because if I do, it's going to cost a lot. It's going to be a big financial burden for me because there isn't any local government EAF fund.*

Again, extending funding to cover local body elections and/or civic boards would likely increase interest in the Fund. This would need to be considered when determining the size of the grant in the future.

### **Possible consequences if the Fund is extended**

The Department of Internal Affairs is responsible for local body election policy. Therefore, if the Act were amended to allow for local body elections, there would be ramifications for the Fund's management. The mechanics of how the Fund might work across two government agencies is outside the scope of this review.

If the scope of the Fund increased to cover local body elections, interviewees thought the Commission would need more operational resourcing to build greater capacity to work with the disability community.

*[Expanding it to local body elections would mean], we'd get much more enquiries and engagement and there'd be a lot more work to do for the Commission. There's a [large] number of local body territories across the country, so it would be a big jump up.*

Comparisons with other jurisdictions, such as in England, Scotland and Wales may be helpful in assessing likely uptake of a fund that covered both local body and national elections. However, the Commission noted that amounts granted overseas varied significantly and may not provide a useful guideline for New Zealand (Electoral Commission, 2024a).

### **Consider supporting the Fund with wider policy changes**

If the Government wishes to increase disabled people participating in politics, the Fund alone may be insufficient to meaningfully achieve this goal – and may need to be supported by wider policy changes. Disability community interviewees told us of the importance of government signalling that disabled people can contribute to civic participation at a deeper level and that this needs wider policy work.

Disability community interviewee feedback indicates the need for investment to increase the pipeline of political involvement. Suggestions include:

- educating disabled people about politics to generate more involvement in politics generally
- mentoring and supporting disabled people who show an interest in taking part in politics
- strengthening or growing community networks
- providing funding for local body elections such as district, city and regional bodies and other local politics (such as, school and health boards)
- acknowledging and supporting involvement of young people and rangatahi in the pipeline to ensure a growing pool of disabled people as politicians.

Some disability community interviewees felt activities (such as mentoring) could be administered through the Fund. Others thought they should be separately funded, retaining the available grants for potential candidates. Disability community interviewees suggested the Commission outsource education and mentoring roles to other organisations, such as Whaikaha, other disabled person-led organisations or other NGOs. Models of NGOs mentoring of disabled people into politics exist in Scotland and Wales.

*We don't have enough mentorship and training and pathways into politics or for our disability communities... there's nothing, there's literally nothing. In the UK they have some interesting mentorship programmes.*

Disability community interviewees also highlighted a need to change the political culture and environment in New Zealand, to be more accessible to and welcoming of disabled people. This includes:

- ensuring all parties have a disability policy

- encouraging parties to actively champion disabled people as candidates or giving candidates with disabilities priority on their lists
- promoting participation of disabled people as potential candidates within political parties and as independent candidates.

### **Mixed response to the idea of funding going to political parties**

There were mixed responses to funding political parties to support candidates. Most disability community interviewees felt funding should go to the candidates themselves.

However, as also signalled in the *He Arotake Pōtitanga Motuhake Independent Electoral Review* (2023), some disability community interviewees thought there is room for the Fund to encourage political parties to be more open and responsive to disabled people as candidates. One disability community interviewee commented:

*I think the political parties could play an important role in getting this thing up off the ground and getting our first disabled in. If they're not part of the picture, we've got a disconnect happening between the politicians and the funding and future candidates.*

Several disability community interviewees commented that there still existed a stigma to supporting candidates with impairments, and they would like to see further support for that to change.

*I'm not sure I can think of other practical support, but... I wonder whether it would be worth somehow supporting political parties to be more open and accessible to disabled candidates. I don't know if there is some sort of training. I've done accessibility training through MSD, and it was really great and I took some of that back to my Party and said, "Hey is our website navigable for people who can't use a mouse for instance?" Maybe that would help.*



## Conclusion

The Electoral Commission did a good job in establishing the Fund considering the openness of the Act, lack of experience in setting up Funds, limited examples to draw on, and compressed timelines. The Act and Fund was highly valued by interviewees we spoke to from the disability community. They highlighted that a more representative Parliament would benefit not only disabled people, but all people of New Zealand.

The Fund provides an important signal to the disabled community that disabled people are welcome in Parliament. The first round of the Fund facilitated participation in the 2023 General Election and helped remove or reduce barriers for those who received funding. This is a positive result, but with only four Fund recipients, at too low a scale to make a meaningful difference – yet. More needs to be done to raise awareness of the Fund and make it more responsive to the diversity and intersectionality of the disability community. It also needs to provide sufficient timeframes for disabled people to plan, prepare and participate in selection and candidacy processes.

The Act and Fund aims to support disabled people's involvement as candidates in general elections and by-elections. While it does so, the evaluation findings overall suggest there is an opportunity for the Act and Fund to play a larger role in increasing the disability community's involvement and ability to participate. The disability community interviewees maintain there is a need for the Government to undertake wider policy work to reduce stigma around disabled people's involvement in politics as candidates. Interviewees suggest a broader interpretation of the Act could be taken to reduce or remove other barriers than cost barriers, to support this wider work. For example, interviewees suggest that the Commission (and the Fund) could play a key role in increasing political knowledge, awareness, or support relevant networking, for potential candidates in the disability community. Extending the to include elections for local and regional bodies and civic boards – enabling participation on district, city and regional councils as well as well as community boards would help enable this broader goal.

The Fund needs time to bed in and another evaluation will be needed to evaluate its effectiveness once more disabled people have accessed the Fund. There is also a need to test other aspects of the Fund, such as its ability to facilitate participation in by-elections. In the meantime, the Fund will benefit from continued refinement and consideration around its processes, policies and scope – with active involvement from the disability community.

Feedback from the disability community interviewees, submissions to the Bill and consultations to set up the Fund, all underscored the need for an amendment to the Act. **The disability community calls for the Act to cover local body elections enabling participation on district, city and regional bodies and civic boards, along with general elections, to ensure broader inclusivity in civic leadership.**

## Appendix A: About the evaluation approach – further detail

### An explanation about language

**Disabled people:** Language is changing related to ways of identifying disabled people. The most current term for disabled people advanced by Whaikaha is ‘disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and their whānau’. However, Whaikaha also note the term ‘disabled people’ remains accepted terminology in New Zealand (Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People, 2023, p. 5). The term disabled people aligns with the language in the Act. Therefore, this evaluation uses this term to describe a general group of disabled people including tāngata whaikaha Māori, whānau hauā, Deaf people, Pacific disabled people and whānau.

**Impairments:** The evaluation uses the term ‘impairments’ to describe the challenges disabled people face. This evaluation frames impairment from a social model (the impact on the person) rather than a medical model (a medical description of the person’s impairment). We recognise *“individuals have impairments, but rather than the impairment disabling a person [medical model] the experience of disability... arises from systems, attitudes and structures [social model]”* (Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People, 2023, p. 5)

### Evaluation methodology

We used an evaluation-specific methodology to undertake this study. An evaluation-specific methodology is an approach that provides robust information about **how good** the evaluation subject is, whether it is **good enough**, and **how it can be improved** (Davidson, 2005).

This approach included using Key Evaluation Questions, performance criteria and a generic rubric, to help focus the evaluation and judge quality and value. These aspects are described below.

### Key Evaluation Questions

The Key Evaluation Questions for this evaluation were:

- KEQ 1: To what extent is the Act being administered according to its purpose?
- KEQ 2: How well is the Election Access Fund meeting the expectations set out in the Act?
- KEQ 3: How efficient and effective is the operation of the Election Access Fund?
- KEQ 4: What opportunities have been created by implementation of the Fund?
- KEQ 5: What challenges occurred for any party (stakeholder) while implementing the Fund?
- KEQ 6: Is the Commission the most appropriate body to manage the Fund?
- KEQ 7: What can be learned from implementing and using the Fund for the Minister to determine the amount of the grant in future?

Performance criteria

Criteria describe aspects of performance that are relevant to, and important to making an evaluative judgement about the administration, expectations and operation of the Act and Fund. We drew on a range of sources to develop the performance criteria, including:

- the purpose of the Act – which is to “**remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate** in a general election or a by-election **faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability** and which non-disabled individuals do not face”.
- leaders with lived and whānau experience of disability who were on our evaluation team as advisors recommended we include the Enabling Good Lives principles (Enabling Good Lives, 2024) and the Social Sector Commissioning (2022-2028) Action Plan (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.)
- discussions with the Ministry and the Commission
- background documentation provided by the Ministry, the Commission and our own online search
- literature on the UK, Scottish and Welsh Electoral Access Funds for disabled people.

Here we describe the criteria used for the first three Key Evaluation Questions.

Table 10: Summary of Key Evaluation Questions & associated performance criteria

Key Evaluation Question	Performance criteria
To what extent is the Act being administered according to its purpose?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness of the Act and Fund<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ a well-publicised Act and Fund that is/are known of by disabled people considering a political life.</li></ul></li><li>• Fund implementation:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ disabled people are leading and contributing to this Act and Fund, priorities and intent</li><li>○ the systems and processes are in place to manage the Fund</li><li>○ application processes are affirming and recognise and respect disabled people as important contributors to civic life</li><li>○ the application process does not cause disabled people harm or trauma</li><li>○ there is uptake of the Fund.</li></ul></li><li>• The Fund set-up and administrative processes support disabled people’s access, participation and engagement.</li></ul>
How well is the Election Access Fund meeting the	<p>What can we learn from the FIRST AND ONLY USE of the Fund, in terms of:</p> <p>The <b>interpretation of the scope of the Fund</b> is appropriate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>facilitate participation</b> for disabled people</li></ul>

expectations set out  
in the Act?

- the Fund application process is easy to use/navigate and offers sufficient support to enable a successful application
- the Fund opens early enough to support disabled people to get ready to stand in an election.
- **remove barriers** for disabled people:
  - provide funds for individual needs (as identified by the disabled person) and ensure they are individually and intersectionality tailored
  - provide enough funds to support disabled people to meet costs not borne by non-disabled people
  - ensure accountability processes are manageable.

How **efficient and effective** is the **operation** of the Election Access Fund?

- Draws on expertise from the disabled people to set up the Fund's operation.
- Strong governance of the Fund's operation, including disabled people, provides a clear vision of how the Fund benefits disabled people.
- The Fund was established:
  - with processes developed to support disabled peoples' access, participation and engagement
  - to resource a diverse range of disabled people applying
  - with clear policies and procedures around application and eligibility of grants
  - with efficient administrative processes to provide timely funding
  - with effective project management processes that support both learning and accountability.
- The **resources assigned** to set up and manage the Fund were **well spent** to achieve the Act's objective<sup>18</sup>.





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<sup>18</sup> "To remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or a by-election faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face" (Election Access Act, 2020, s3).

## Performance rubric

We developed a generic performance rubric for the evaluation that describes what different levels of performance look like. The table below outlines the rubric. It was used to make assessments against the criteria for the first three Key Evaluation Questions. This rubric was specifically developed for the first use of the Fund.

Table 11: Performance criteria for this evaluation

Levels of performance	Description
Poor (Not at all or occasionally with clear weaknesses evident)	 Clear evidence of unsatisfactory performance; serious weaknesses across the board or critical aspects completely missing.
Adequate: (Sometimes, with many exceptions)	 Patchy evidence and only adequate performance evident. Some critical aspects barely in place.
Good: (Fairly consistent, with some exceptions)	 Fairly consistent evidence of satisfactory performance; with room for further development or refinement. Weaknesses and challenges are identified, acknowledged and/or being addressed.
Very good: (Almost always)	 Consistent evidence of strong performance overall, with no areas still to develop or refine.

## Ethics process

We used a generic social research ethics form designed for independent researchers who do not have access to an institutional committee-based ethics process for this evaluation (Learning for Sustainability, 2013). This generic social research protocol check list, which we completed and reviewed as a team, was useful for thinking through our interviewing and data collection processes and ensuring the safety of participants in all stages of the evaluation. We provided the ethics protocol developed for this evaluation to the Ministry along with our evaluation plan prior to undertaking the evaluation.

A particular risk recognised was ensuring information was not provided in enough detail for Fund applicants to be identified. Therefore, we do not provide more details about the applicants or their applications.

## Summary of data collected

The evaluation drew together evidence from a range of both quantitative and qualitative sources including:

- interviews undertaken with 17 people, between 30 March and 3 May 2024
- Ministry and Commission documentation about establishing the Act, establishing the Fund and administering the Fund

- a small scan of overseas literature about similar funds
- a sensemaking workshop to review early findings, held online on 20 June 2024, with representatives from the disability community leadership, Ministry, and Commission.

## Qualitative interviews

Interviews were the primary data source for this evaluation. The following table summarises the interviews undertaken.

Table 12: Summary of qualitative interviews conducted

Qualitative interviews	Number of interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund recipients: All applicants that received funding were interviewed</li> </ul>	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund enquirers: Twenty people made enquiries to the Fund. However, only four had had sufficient contact with the Commission<sup>19</sup> and made inquiries sufficiently relevant to the Fund,<sup>20</sup> to be deemed in scope to be interviewed. We approached all four and two responded. We conducted an interview with one person rather than sending them a survey as was originally planned given there were so few possible people to speak with. We were unable to meet the requirements of the second Fund enquirer who requested our interviewer and data analyst have specific dietary preferences.</li> </ul>	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steering Group: All members of the Steering Group were interviewed. One was from the Commission.</li> </ul>	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applications Panel: All members of the Applications Panel were interviewed.</li> </ul>	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Parties: No interviews were undertaken with party officials. The Commission had already contacted them as part of their review and none agreed to take part.</li> </ul>	

## Interviewing process

To satisfy privacy requirements and our ethics protocols, the Commission first gained consent to pass over contact details to our research team for all potential interviewees. We produced an information sheet for interviewees including in accessible formats and provided choices of giving written or oral consent.

Interviews were conducted online, in the comfort of interviewees homes or offices. For those interviewees living with impairments, this allowed them to use their equipment or support to ensure the interview process was as smooth as possible.

<sup>19</sup> One enquirer started the application process but withdrew, one requested information about standing as an independent, but made no application, and two were invited to meet and discuss the Fund but made no further contact.

<sup>20</sup> Some had enquired about things that were out of scope of and/or not relevant to the Fund (e.g., funding for child's laptop).

Interviews were semi structured, based on a topic guide of pre-agreed key questions. Most interviews took about 60 minutes, with the longest interview taking nearly two hours. Māori respondents had the option of being interviewed by a Māori team member.

Interviews were transcribed and then coded and analysed using an online coding programme. We kept the evaluation data secure through password-protected devices. Interviewees were offered their transcripts for review. Quotes in this report were de-identified, and agreement from the interviewee sought before inclusion where we thought there was a possibility a quote could be traced back to them. In all instances interviewees agreed to us using their quotes.

## Documentation review

There were a range of different documents reviewed for the evaluation. They are all listed in the reference section. There were several key sources: the Ministry and Commission, overseas research, key contextual documentation suggested by the disability community leaders who were our evaluation advisors, and other key documentation relevant to the work.

**The Ministry and the Commission** provided documentation of the aspects considered during the Bill's development and amendments into legislation. The Commission also provided much documentation on their implementation and processes, including their own internal review (Electoral Commission, 2024b), and *Ko te pūrongo a Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri mō te Pōtitanga a-Motu 2023: Report of the Commission on the 2023 General Election* (Electoral Commission, 2024a).

**Overseas research:** Because there was no precedent for the Fund in New Zealand, the Ministry and the Commission searched out overseas literature. Key documents that potentially informed the establishment of the Fund included projects in the UK more generally (Childs, 2016; Evans Goldsmiths & Reher, 2021), as well as in Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2021) and Wales (Davies, Dawkins, & Lewis-Richards, 2023).

**Key contextual documents:** We were asked to ensure that the evaluation would have buy-in from the disability community. We brought onto the evaluation team three disability community leaders as advisors. Early in the evaluation they pointed us toward contextual pieces such as *Enabling Good Lives principles* (Enabling Good Lives, 2024), the *Social Sector Commissioning (2022-2028) Action Plan* (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.), and the *Guide for reasonable accommodation* (New Zealand's Independent Monitoring Mechanism, 2023). These documents reflect some of the current ambitions of the disability community.

**Other key documentation:** We also referred to the following documents:

- The original Bill, that predated the Act, drew on *the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016 – 2026* (Office for Disability Issues: Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga, 2016) which has three principles that guide their work: “Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring disabled people are involved in decision-making that impacts them” (Office for Disability Issues: Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga, 2016, p. 6).
- Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People was established during the implementation of the Fund on 1 July 2022. They adopted *Enabling Good Lives*



to “champion transformation in how disability supports are designed, funded, and delivered to disabled people and their whānau” (Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People, 2023, p. 5).

- *He Arotake Pōtitanga Motuhake Independent Electoral Review (2023) Final Report*: Their recommendations for a fairer, clearer, and more accessible electoral system made suggestions as to how the Election Access Fund could better support disabled people and Māori.

### **Data collection, analysis, synthesis and reporting**

Thematic analysis identified key themes, which were then mapped against the performance criteria and rubric. Once the data was compiled, we held a sensemaking session to check for further information prior to writing the report. The report was framed around the KEQs.

## **Appendix B: Information from the Electoral Commission website on the operation of the Election Access Fund**

The following is a summary of key information provided by the Electoral Commission to people applying for the Election Access Fund.

### **Introduction**

In 2020, the Election Access Fund Act was passed. This Act enabled the Electoral Commission to set up and run the Election Access Fund (EAF). The Fund assists disabled people who want to put themselves forward for election to Parliament. It can help with disability-related costs to do candidate activities. The Fund works alongside the costs of candidate activities that everyone has.

### **Help with your application**

You can apply to the Fund via an online submission process at [elections.nz/gettinginvolved/election-access-fund/election-access-fund-online-application](https://elections.nz/gettinginvolved/election-access-fund/election-access-fund-online-application), or you can complete this form.

If you need help to complete this form, we can meet with you. Meetings can be done by phone, or online by Zoom or Microsoft Teams. If you would prefer to complete the form yourself, we can give you guidance if you have questions.

If you would like us to help you complete this form, please call 0800 36 76 56 or email us on [electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz](mailto:electionaccessfund@elections.govt.nz) with the following information:

- Your preferred method of contact (Phone call, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or other).
- If you will have a support person or agent with you, and if so, their name.
- Any support or access accommodations you need during the meeting, such as
- NZSL interpreters, electronic documents or text-based communication.
- Cultural support needs.

### **Checklist**

The following is a checklist to help you complete your application. Please read it carefully before you begin your application and take time to gather the information you need. Completing the checklist is optional, but we recommend you go through it before you submit your application.

- I have read all the information about how to apply to the Election Access Fund, available via the Electoral Commission website: [elections.nz/getting-involved/election-access-fund](https://elections.nz/getting-involved/election-access-fund) I meet the eligibility criteria in Section 1 of this application form.
- I have included evidence of my intention to seek selection or stand as a candidate.
- I have answered all the required questions in this application form.
- I have completed my budget, either using the provided template or by writing my own.
- I have collected supporting evidence for the items outlined in my budget.
- I have completed the legal declaration in Section 8 of this application form.

### Eligibility criteria

To be eligible you must:

- be a disabled person, as described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- have a disability, access need or impairment that has lasted or will last for longer than six (6) months.
- be standing as a candidate in, or seeking selection as a candidate in a parliamentary general election or by-election
- be experiencing, or will experience, barriers to standing or seeking selection as a result of your disability or access need, which non-disabled people do not have
- meet the requirements to be a candidate under the Electoral Act 1993:
  - At least 18 years old on or before nomination day or by the day the current Parliament expires.
  - A New Zealand citizen
  - Registered as an elector, and
  - Not otherwise disqualified for registration.

### What the fund covers

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.

### **What the fund does not cover**

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

### **Guidelines for funding**

The Ministry of Health has guidance on how much to pay the people who provide you with disability-related support to do candidacy activities. In this section you will find basic guidance on minimum wage rates. You can find more detail in the Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlements Act 2017.

This section then provided details for different pay rates (ranging from \$22 to \$28 per hour), food, mileage and accommodation rates. These are all generally based on rates for support assistants.

## Appendix C: Election Access Fund Act 2020

The Parliament of New Zealand enacts as follows:

### 1 Title

This Act is the Election Access Fund Act 2020.

### 2 Commencement

This Act comes into force on 1 July 2021.

### 3 Purpose

The purpose of this Act is to establish a fund designed to remove or reduce barriers to standing as a candidate in a general election or a by-election faced by individuals as a consequence of their disability and which non-disabled individuals do not face

## Part 1 Preliminary provisions

### Interpretation

In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

**by-election** has the same meaning as in section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 1993  
**candidate**—

(a) means a constituency candidate or a list candidate within the meaning of those terms in section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 1993; and

(b) includes a person who has declared their intention of becoming a constituency candidate or a list candidate

**Commission** has the same meaning as in section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 1993

**fund** means the fund established under section 6

general election has the same meaning as in section 3(1) of the Electoral Act 1993

**Minister** means the Minister of the Crown who, under the authority of any warrant or with the authority of the Prime Minister, is for the time being responsible for the administration of this Act.

### 5 Act binds the Crown

This Act binds the Crown.

## Part 2

### Election Access Fund

#### 6. Election Access Fund established

(1). The Commission must establish a fund to facilitate the participation of disabled persons standing as candidates in, or seeking selection as candidates in, general elections or by-elections.

(2) In each year, out of an appropriation by Parliament for the purpose, the fund must be paid a general grant.

(3) The amount of the grant must be determined by the Minister, taking into account the purpose of this Act set out in section 3.

## **7 Eligibility for funding for election access**

- (1) The Commission must, by notice in the Gazette, set out the basis on which a person listed in subsection (3) may be eligible for a payment out of the fund.
- (2) The Commission must not issue a notice under subsection (1) without first consulting persons and organisations that the Commission considers appropriate, having regard to the purpose of the fund.
- (3) A person may be eligible for a payment out of the fund if the person is a disabled person who is standing as a candidate in, or seeking selection as a candidate in, a general election or a by-election.

## **8 Payment from fund not election expense or donation**

Any payment made from the fund to a candidate is not to be treated as—

- (a) an election expense for the purposes of subpart 1 or 2 of Part 6A of the Electoral Act 1993; or
- (b) a candidate donation or a party donation for the purposes of subpart 3 of Part 6A of that Act.

## **9 Payment from fund is exempt income**

Any payment from the fund to a candidate is exempt income of the candidate for the purposes of section CW 64 of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for exemptions from income tax under other Acts).

## **10 Review of Act**

- (1) The Minister must, no later than 6 months after the date on which the Electoral Commission provides its first report on this Act under section 8(1) of the Electoral Act 1993 after the commencement of this Act,—
- (a) review, or arrange for a review of, the operation and effectiveness of this Act; and
- (b) prepare a report on that review.
- 2020 No 4 Election Access Fund Act 2020 Part 2 s 10
- (2) The review must—
- (a) consider the operation, purpose, and scope of the fund; and
- (b) assess whether any amendments to this Act are necessary or desirable.
- (3) The Minister must present the report to the House of Representatives as soon as practicable after it has been completed.

## Appendix D: Glossary

Word/concept	Description
<b>Disabled people</b>	In New Zealand, “disabled people” is a general term that includes tāngata whaikaha Māori, whānau hauā, Deaf people, Pacific disabled people and whānau and rangatahi.
<b>Disability community</b>	While we refer to the ‘disability community’ to describe collectively those experiencing barriers to participation, we recognise the diversity of multiple communities experiencing different barriers.
<b>Disability community interviewees</b>	All the disabled people we spoke to, including Fund recipients, Steering Group members, Applications Panel members and Commission staff
<b>Enabling Good Lives</b>	Enabling Good Lives (EGL) is a partnership between the disability sector and government agencies aimed at long-term transformation of how disabled people and families are supported to live everyday lives in New Zealand. EGL is a new approach to supporting disabled people that offers greater choice and control over the supports they receive, so that they can plan for the lives they want.
<b>Enabling Good Lives principles</b>	The principles of Enabling Good Lives are: self-determination, beginning early, person-centred, ordinary life outcomes, mainstream first, mana enhancing, easy to use, relationship building.  For more information see <a href="https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/">https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/</a>
<b>Facilitates participation</b>	A process that reduces or removes the systemic barriers to disabled people taking part in activities as an electoral candidate.
<b>Fund enquirers</b>	Disabled people who only enquired about the Fund but did not make an application
<b>Fund recipients</b>	Disabled people who enquired, made an application, had it accepted, and were Funded.
<b>Impairments</b>	“Impairments” describe the challenges disabled people face.
<b>Implementation team</b>	All people we spoke to who were involved in setting up the fund from the steering group, applications panel and Commission staff both disabled and non-disabled people.
<b>Interviewees</b>	All the people we spoke to in our interviews.
<b>Māori</b>	Indigenous people of New Zealand
<b>Model: medical model of disability</b>	Barriers to daily life come from the impairments of disabled people, which need to be ‘fixed’. (People with disabilities)
<b>Model: social model of disability</b>	Barriers to daily life do not originate from the disabled person, but are those perpetuated by society (Disabled people)



<b>New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026</b>	<p>The Strategy guides the work of government agencies on disability issued from 2016 - 2026.</p> <p>The vision of the strategy is: “New Zealand is a non-disabling society – a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and all of New Zealand works together to make this happen”.</p>
<b>Youth and rangatahi</b>	Māori and other young people with lived experience of disability, in this context aged between 18 and 35.
<b>tāngata whaikaha Māori</b>	Māori disabled people
<b>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</b>	Māori-language version of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840)
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UNCPD defines disability as (1) an impairment; (2) having limitations in activity and (3) experiencing restrictions on participation.
<b>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)</b>	The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the General Assembly by resolution A/RES/61/106 on 13 December 2006 and entered into force on 3 May 2008. New Zealand ratified the CRPD on 25 September 2008. New Zealand has made no reservations to the CRPD.
<b>Whaikaha: Ministry of Disabled People</b>	Ministry established to work in partnership with the disability community, Māori and Government for a better, more independent future for disabled people and whānau in New Zealand.
<b>Whanau hauā</b>	Māori families who are living with disability. Also, a Māori model of disability with a collective rather than individual view of disability (Hickey & Wilson, 2017).

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