

Engagement for school network change

Principles and guidance for engaging with schools and communities



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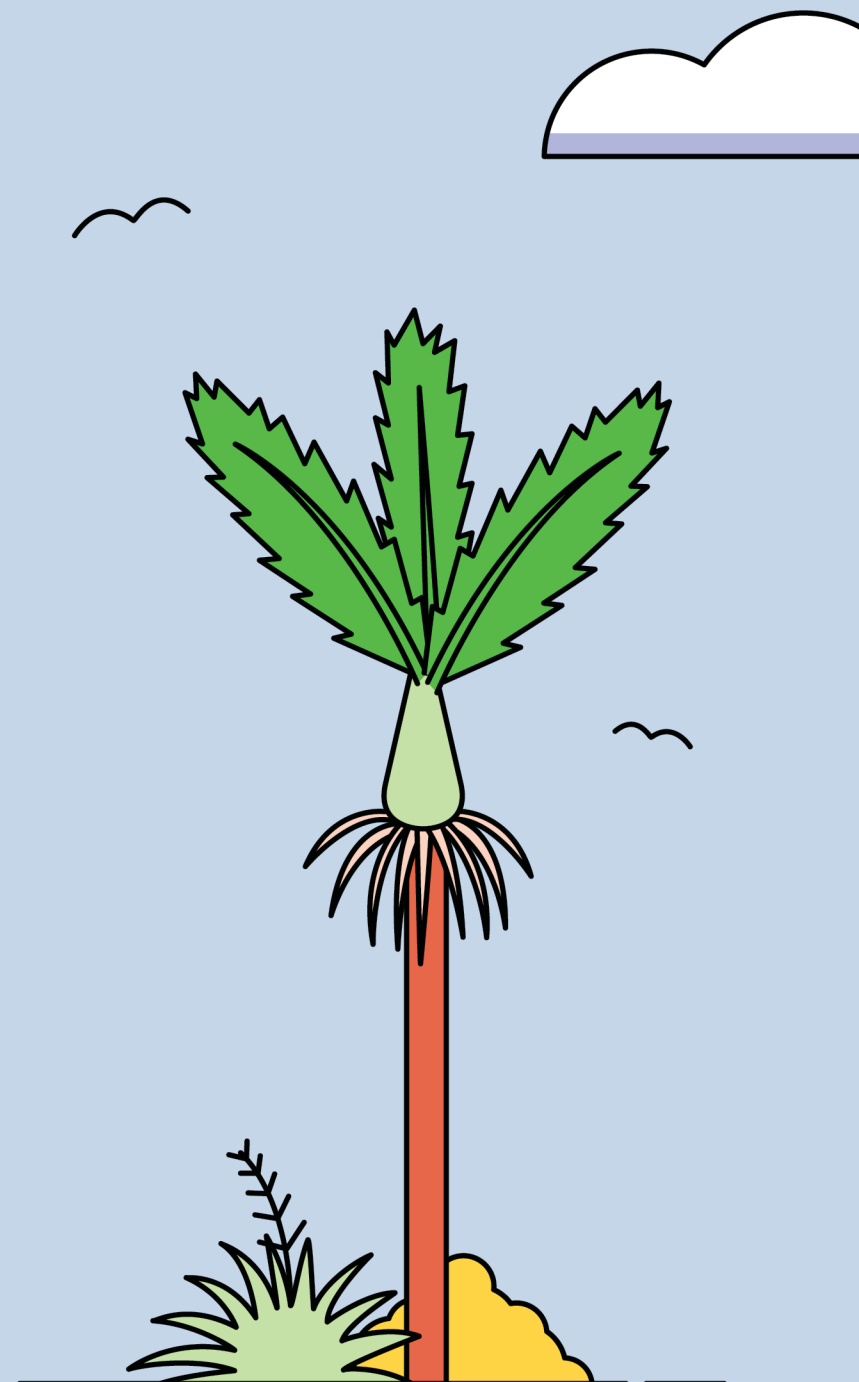
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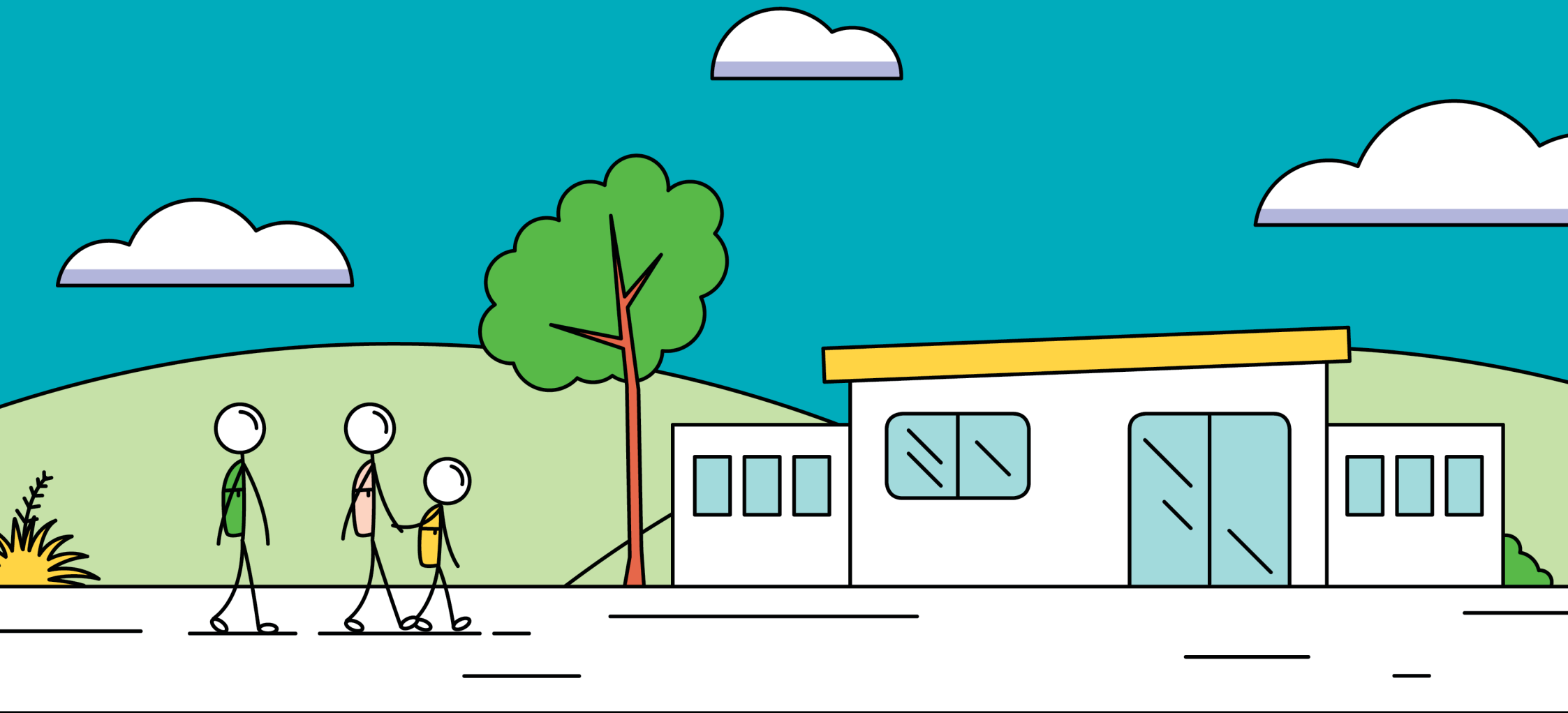
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Section 1

Overview of School Network Change

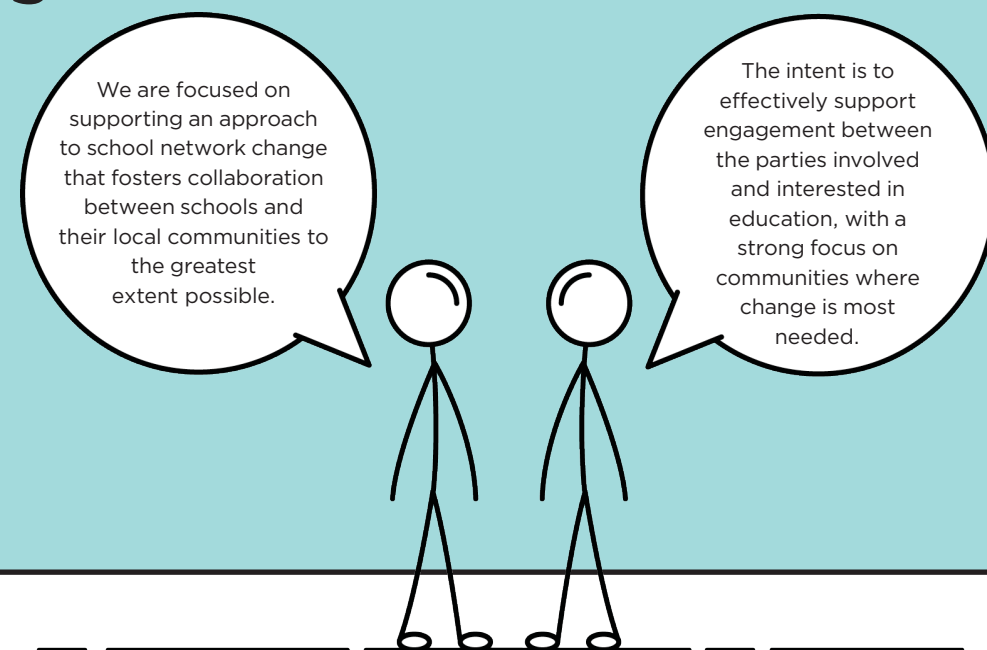
Introduction – School Network Change

Managing network change

This document provides information about the best practice and principles¹ the Ministry follows in the engagement process and in all our work with schools. When school network change is considered, there is usually an initial **engagement** period where the Ministry, school boards and a range of community stakeholders discuss the current state of education in their community and what is needed in the future. Ideally they co-create a vision for future education provision*.

In most instances, this is followed by formal **consultation** about particular options, as required by the Education and Training Act 2020. The Minister of Education then considers the options that have been developed during engagement and consultation, and makes their **decision**. Following this, the Ministry works with schools and communities to **implement** the change.

*Some changes, such as implementing or amending enrolment schemes, have their own particular process requirements under the Act when it comes to their management and consultation.



What is in this document

This document includes three sections.

Section 1 – provides an overview of the Ministry’s approach to school network change, why school network changes might be needed, the factors influencing change and the common types of change.

Section 2 – provides information on the engagement process, including why it is important, how it informs the whole change process and who should be involved. It also provides an overview of how the Ministry supports school boards (and groups and clusters of school boards and/or Kāhui Ako) and their communities to participate effectively in the engagement process to co-design potential change. The guidance applies to all types of school network change, including information on how to respond to change after a significant natural event or in a situation where a school merger or closure might be under consideration. These types of change are more complex and require special consideration.

Section 3 – the Engagement Toolkit includes information, tools and templates to support the engagement process. It is supported by an online Knowledge Repository which will be updated with lessons learnt and useful resources to support Ministry staff, school boards and communities to actively participate in school network review and change processes.

The vision

The Ministry’s vision is that all learners have access to learning environments that promote their wellbeing, progress, and learning pathways. This vision needs to be supported by a network of schools that provides high quality education. Ministry teams work alongside schools and their communities to co-create an efficient, accessible and equitable schooling network that meets all learners’ needs.

- An **efficient** schooling network uses resources to achieve equitable and excellent outcomes for students while also ensuring value for money from government investments.
- An **accessible** schooling network enables all school aged children (6–16 years) to attend a reasonably convenient school.
- An **equitable** schooling network offers opportunities for every learner to learn. It caters to differing ages, abilities, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, living circumstances and educational preferences where possible.

¹ This document has been developed in response to the “Investigation into the Ministry of Education’s engagement processes for school closures and mergers” by the Chief Ombudsman (June 2017) and more recently the Canterbury Primary Principals’ Association Submission “Network change after significant natural disasters” (August 2018). It takes into account learnings from other network reviews and the Ministry’s response to other significant natural events including the Kaikoura earthquakes (November 2016) and the Edgumbe floods (April 2017).

Overview – School Network Change

The Ministry's role

The Ministry's approach is to support a school² (or group of schools) and their communities to identify the school network that they need and that will best suit the nature of their specific communities' learning and wellbeing needs. The goal is to ensure that any change leads to outcomes that best meets learners' needs.

While the Ministry may initiate change, schools and their communities will have opportunities to have a significant say on the proposed school changes in their part of the network and, where possible, will be encouraged to co-design and take greater ownership of network change. School network change involves collaboration between schools and their local communities.

School boards and their communities may propose some quite different and new models that might result in school networks that can balance community needs and wishes (within reason) with effective use of resources (property, operational funding, staffing, school transport, etc.).

The Ministry is focused on providing greater levels of responsibility, leadership and ownership to school boards and their communities. The Ministry's role is to provide advice when it is sought about possible options or a preferred option. The Ministry will not predetermine how one or more schools might innovatively and collaboratively work together to come up with less traditional but equally effective ways of dealing with their local learning and wellbeing needs.

The Ministry is available to initiate, facilitate, and guide a network change process and to ensure school boards have the information they need to fully consider all aspects of the proposals for change with their communities.

In some cases, the purposes and process for change is tightly defined by the Education and Training Act, such as for enrolment schemes. The principles of fair and transparent consultation still apply, but the timeframes and process may be more precisely determined and managed by the Ministry.

What is change and what does it look like?

Key factors influencing change

All changes to the schooling network are underpinned by the desire to improve the quality of educational outcomes. Proposed changes to schooling are often triggered by one or more of the factors below:

Student population – Increases or decreases in the number of school-aged children and young people as they migrate in and out of a particular area, grow older resulting in changes to a community's demographics, or as a result of economic or social pressures such as the impacts of changes in local employment.

Diversity – The need for more schooling options, eg, Māori medium in a particular area to better reflect changes in learning needs, circumstances and situations.

Growth & development – Building, housing and property market activity, such as a large number of new homes being built in a particular area creating the need for a new school or more capacity in the network. Other changes such as public transport changes which result in increased or decreased access to schooling options in a particular area.

School property or infrastructure – Responding to compromised performance and condition issues such as significant property damage or deterioration.

Natural disaster – Like a storm, flood, landslide, tsunami, earthquake or volcanic eruption that requires the Ministry, and other agencies, to work with an affected community or region to ensure they continue to have the schooling infrastructure to support the learning and wellbeing they need.

Key types of school network change

Any change to a school is likely to have an impact on its local community and may also impact on enrolments, resourcing, and staffing at other schools in the network. Key types of proposed change where engagement will be needed include:

Schools may be considered for closure – this would include an engagement and consultation process about the proposed closure of a school.

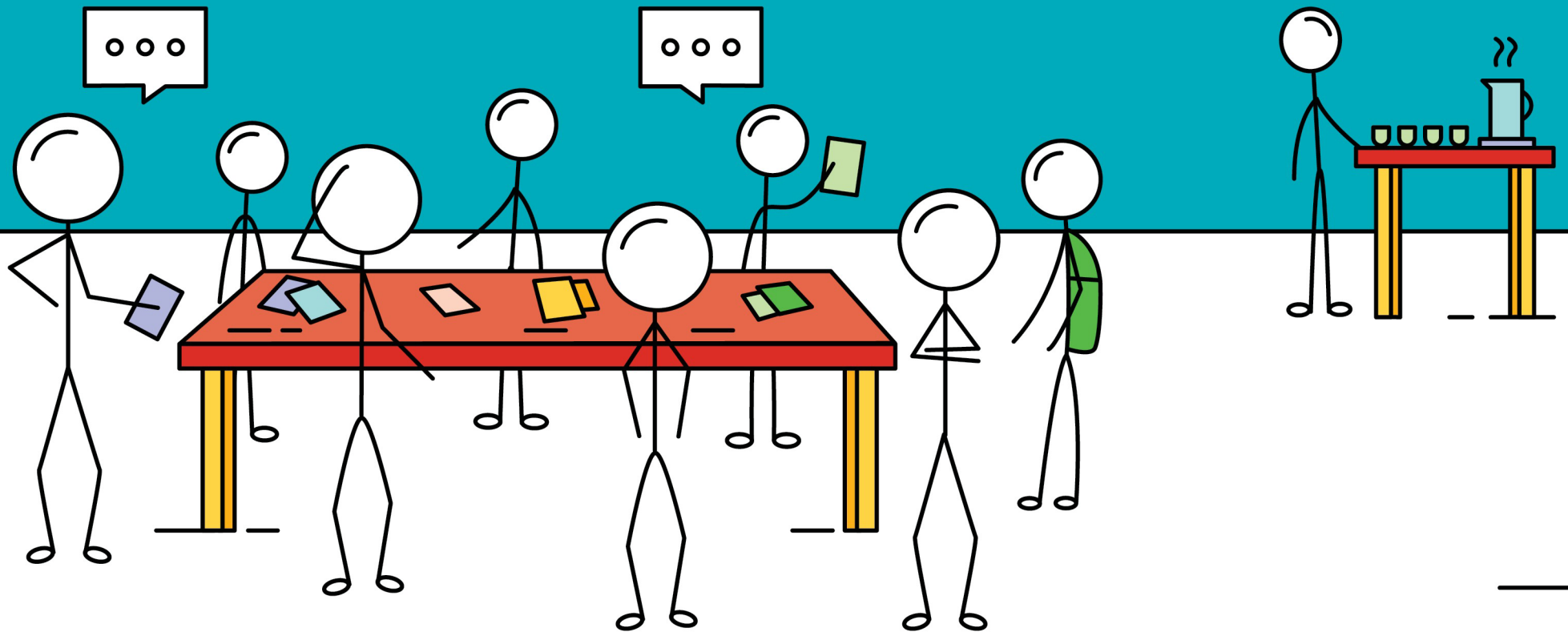
Schools may be considered for merger – It may be proposed to merge two or more schools to become one continuing school. The continuing school has all the rights, assets, liabilities and debts of each merging school from the date of the merger. The boards of the merging schools govern their own school until the date the merger takes effect, and are dissolved at the close of the day before the date of the merger.

New schools may be established – It may be proposed to establish a new school. In this case, the Minister will appoint an Establishment Board to prepare for the opening of the school and to govern the new school during its early months.

Network change occurs as the result of a significant natural disaster – Damage and population changes caused by significant natural disasters may also lead to a review of school network provision in a particular area, as occurred following the Canterbury earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, the Kaikoura earthquakes in November 2016 and the Edgumbe floods in April 2017.

Enrolment schemes and amendments – The purpose of enrolment schemes defined by the Education and Training Act 2020 is to avoid overcrowding, ensure that enrolment procedures are fair and transparent and to make the best use of the schooling network. This ensures schools are utilised as well as possible and that good educational outcomes are delivered. Introducing enrolment schemes can be complex and challenging for boards and communities. The Ministry is responsible for initiating and managing the process to develop and amend enrolment schemes to meet the purpose outlined in the Act.

² References to the Ministry working with 'schools' throughout this document should be read as the Ministry working with school boards and principals.



Section 2

Guidance for engagement

Engagement

Why engagement is important

Engagement is important because outcomes for school network changes are not predetermined and the voices of communities matter. Engaging in discussions early on in a process, before consultation occurs, is an important way for communities to have their say about what matters to them in the school network they are part of. When the engagement is effective, formal consultation is also more likely to be effective in getting the right outcomes for communities.

Early stages of engagement

The Ministry's stewardship role means analysing and providing advice to government on the best decisions to make for the overall design of the schooling system and its effectiveness. The Ministry works within finite budgets to deliver high quality teaching and learning environments that maximise positive educational outcomes for all children and young people.

The rationale for undertaking a review or reorganisation of school network needs to be clear, consistent, transparent and informed by accurate evidence from a range of sources. Ministry staff will support school boards, clusters of schools and, where relevant, Kāhui Ako in an effective engagement process that provides enough time for community consideration. The engagement process has no finite time period and, where possible, should take as much time as needed to capture all the relevant voices and take into account the circumstances and cultures of the local community.

School network change can be initiated when school principals, board members or members of a school community initiate a change discussion or when the Ministry identifies a network issue through ongoing monitoring and starts informal conversations with a principal or board members to better understand what is needed. The Ministry's first step will be to work with schools to understand whether a schooling change may be required.

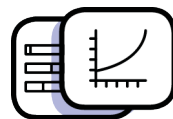
In the early stages of engagement Ministry teams need to regularly support school boards to engage with their communities to ensure that school provisioning is meeting the needs of all children and young people. If network issues are identified, discussions may lead to the need for change. The Ministry needs to share and confirm all relevant information with school boards and, where relevant, clusters and Kāhui Ako for sharing with their communities so that change can be identified early and planned for well.

Even with strong engagement processes, decisions may still need to be made that individual schools, communities or parts of communities may not agree with. The basis for consultation options and decisions should be clearly explained. The Minister or Ministry make decisions based on equity, access, the costs and benefits, and feedback from the community, as well as any legislative requirements. These decisions are always made with the best interests of children and young people in mind.

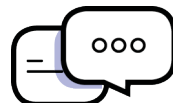
The Ministry is committed to supporting schools, groups of boards and Kāhui Ako to determine the best change. School boards need to hear from communities about their ideas, options, barriers and possible solutions to proposed network changes. Ministry processes need to ensure that everyone involved understands the different stages of a school network change process and how schools and the wider community can be involved.

Information and processes

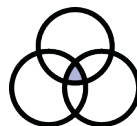
Generally, during engagement about possible network change the Ministry will support boards with the following information and processes:



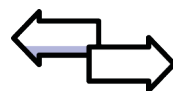
Fact file: The Ministry will provide all available information to a school in a 'Fact File' which includes a range of complex information presented in an accessible format.



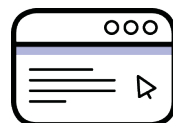
Facilitator: The Ministry may fund an independent facilitator to support a community to develop ideas and options for future network change.



Reference Group: A Reference Group may be established to represent schools and other interested parties in the local schooling network, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard.



Regular communication and information sharing: School boards, unions and key sector bodies are kept informed and information shared between the Ministry and the sector.

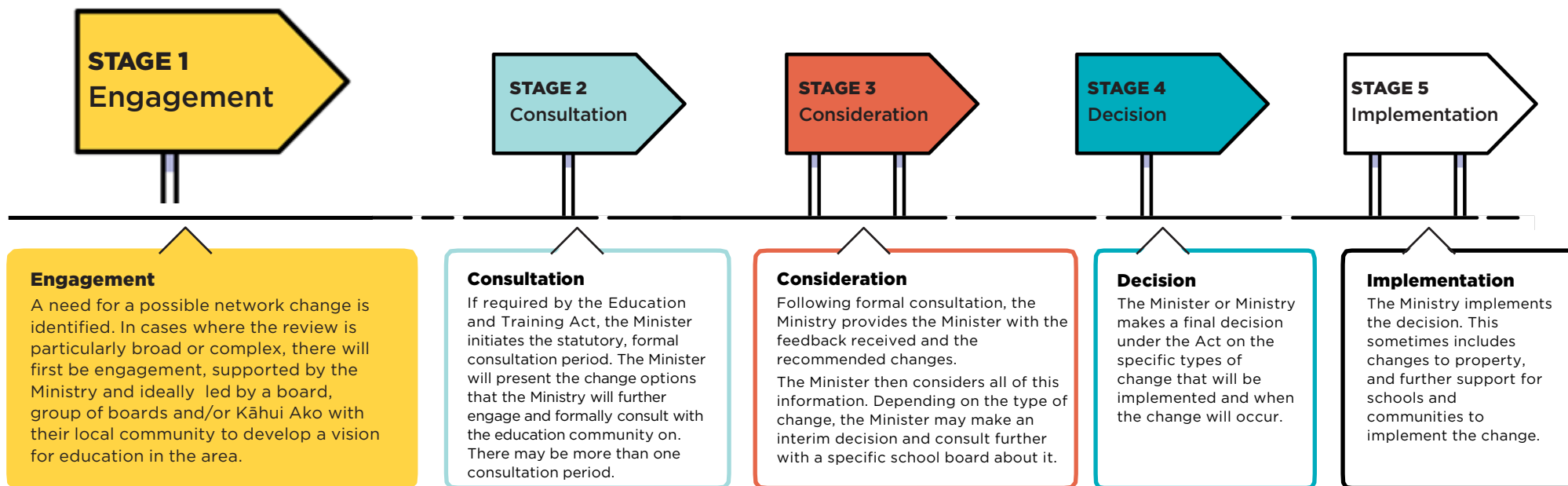


Online information: Key information and documentation will be made available on Ministry website (www.education.govt.nz)

Engagement

The five stages of school network change

Generally, there are five stages in a school network change process starting with engagement, followed by formal consultation, consideration by the Minister, decision making and implementation. This document focuses on the first part of the process: engagement - what best practice engagement looks like, and why it is important to get right.



Engagement and formal consultation

Engagement is the practice of actively bringing community or public voices into conversations to inform decisions that might interest or affect them. It offers the chance for school communities to co-design the changes that will work best for them. Early and effective engagement enables better informed decision-making, via the next and more formal step of consultation. Engagement will vary from community to community but for example, could include forums for representatives of specialist educational or interest groups, public hui, meetings with iwi, and workshops (co-design and co-create).

Engagement and consultation allow those who might be affected by a proposed network change to access information that enables them to effectively and confidently contribute to outcomes from an informed position. Engagement and consultation processes should consider all relevant options, barriers and solutions.

Everyone involved in engagement process shares the responsibility for exchanging information and acknowledging each other's positions. Regular engagement also supports an open approach to managing risk by providing a strong foundation for understanding decisions and building trust in the decision-making process.

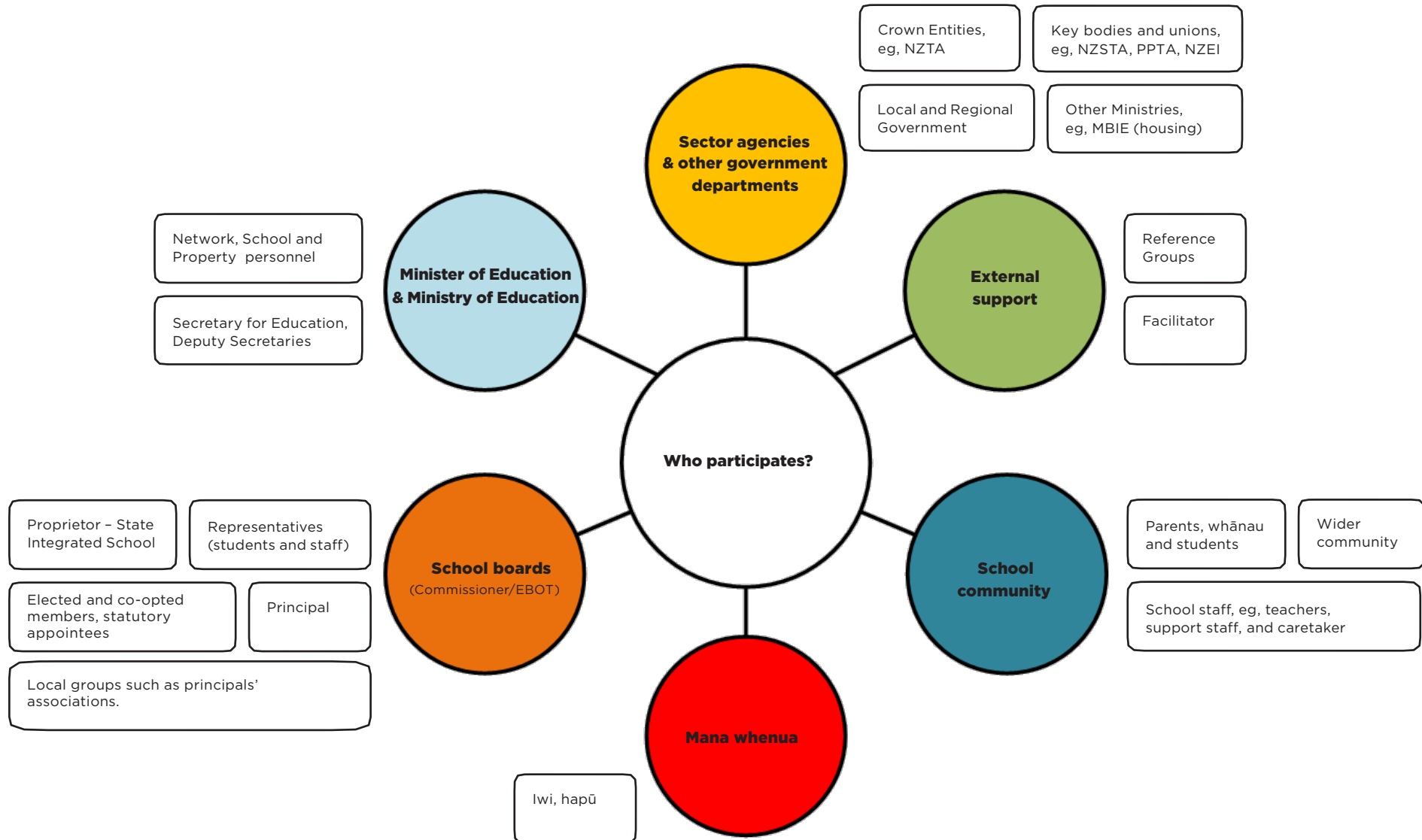
Consultation follows engagement, once a picture of what network change might work best has been formed. It is a formal process required by the Education and Training Act 2020 that extends a genuine invitation to schools who might be impacted by a proposed change to have their views heard and considered as part of the decision making process before a final outcome is determined. The Ministry also consults with key sector bodies and iwi as best practice.

Most proposed network changes require the Minister or Ministry to consult with the affected school boards (and a proprietor for state integrated schools). In statutory consultations, the government retains the final decision-making role. The Ministry may use boards and their channels to effectively gather the views of a community when consulting.

Early and effective engagement and formal consultation applied together inform the decision making process and help everyone to understand final decisions, and have trust and confidence in the change process for school network changes.

Who needs to be involved in the engagement process

The Ministry will work with school boards to engage with all parties involved and interested in education in a community. This includes children, young people and students, clusters of schools, Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, educators, iwi/Māori and Pacific partners, regional communities, central and local government partners in regions, education providers and partners, and our industry and training affiliates. Generally those involved in the engagement process around a network change are those who are either directly or indirectly affected by any proposed change. The diagram below illustrates the likely stakeholders involved in a network change proposal or review. The number of people involved in the engagement process is likely to vary depending on the scale of the change proposed.



Engaging a range of audiences

The diagram below illustrates the key audiences that will likely need to be engaged in the consideration of a significantly complex school network change.

Clusters of schools/communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako

Engaging with established school groups including principals, boards, training providers and community groups, which are developing learning pathways for children and young people.

Educators

Engaging with educators and education providers who play a significant role in the provision of education for children and young people. Educators need to be engaged and participate in the vision for their region to encourage commitment to deliver the future learning experience.

Central & local government

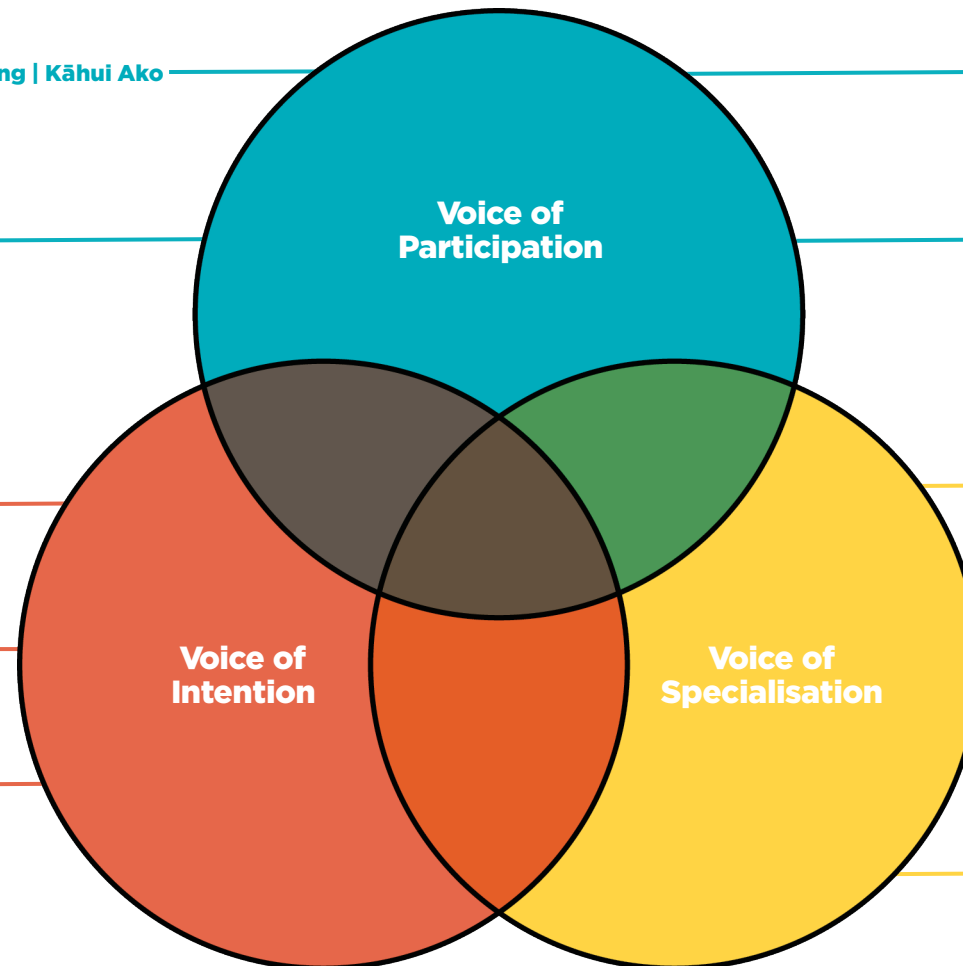
Engaging with the intent of local government plans and strategic interventions across the social and economic landscape in specific regions.

Mana whenua/iwi/Māori

Engaging in partnership with iwi and key Māori bodies (including NUMA) to understand vision and intent for education for whānau, and children and young people.

Local communities

Engaging with New Zealand's diverse communities to understand super diversity challenges and their unique perspective.



Children and young people

Engaging with children and young people in the system so they have ongoing (rather than ad hoc) input. Children are encouraged to participate and their contribution to decision-making is valued.

Whānau

Engaging with the voice of whānau/family in the education system.

Educational groups and organisations

Engaging with ERO, NZQA, the Teaching Council, principals' associations and other educational networks as appropriate.

Engaging with established groups and wider providers of educational services.

Engaging with key bodies and unions, such as NZSTA, PPTA, NZEI, APIS and other representative groups.

Industry

Engaging with key industry and philanthropic groups to identify future worker and job requirements.

Research

Engaging with current and leading educational and child-focused research to improve pedagogy and educational outcomes.

Support for engagement

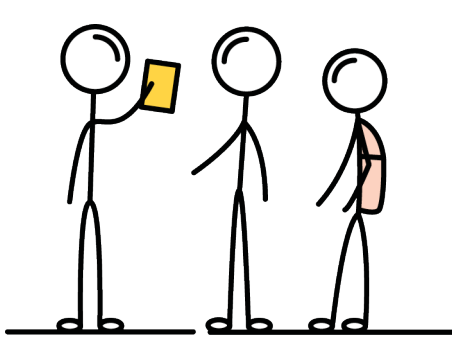
The Ministry is continually working to improve its planning approach, and systems and processes. Our focus is on supporting school boards (groups of school boards and/or Kāhui Ako) so that they and their local communities are actively informed and involved in designing and planning for potential changes to the school network in their communities.

Change can be challenging for communities to discuss and consider. For example, after a natural disaster, people in a community may be experiencing a range of impacts, such as injury, loss of friends or family members, relationship stress, property damage, temporary or permanent loss of income, and depression or post-traumatic stress, among other things.

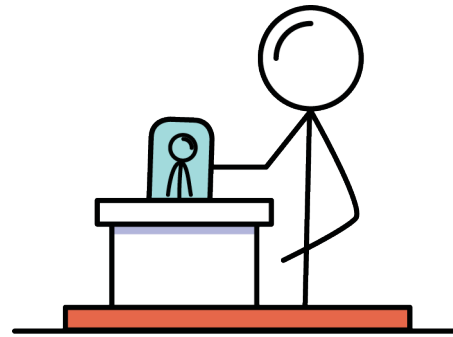
Meanwhile, in a small provincial town, where a school merger or closure is proposed, people may feel that their community identity is being threatened when a proposal is made to close a local school or merge it with another school. People who have had a close involvement with a school may also grieve and feel upset about the loss of their school. It is important that the Ministry conducts engagement in an open, transparent, respectful and culturally responsive way to reduce negative change impacts, and the associated stress.

We have created an Engagement Toolbox to assist Ministry staff, school boards, clusters of schools/Kāhui Ako to work effectively with their communities to manage engagement consistently and well.

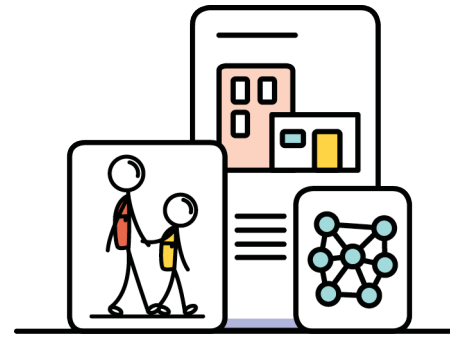
Key areas for engagement



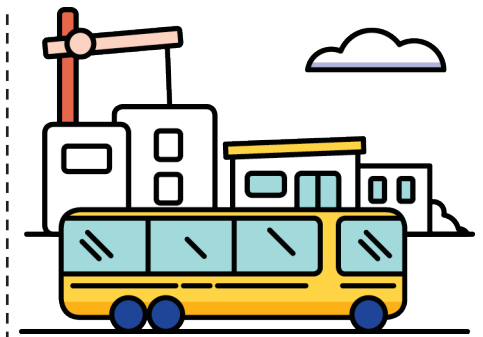
Ministry staff involved in change processes communicate early, listen to input and feedback, and take the time to co-create with local communities, where possible.



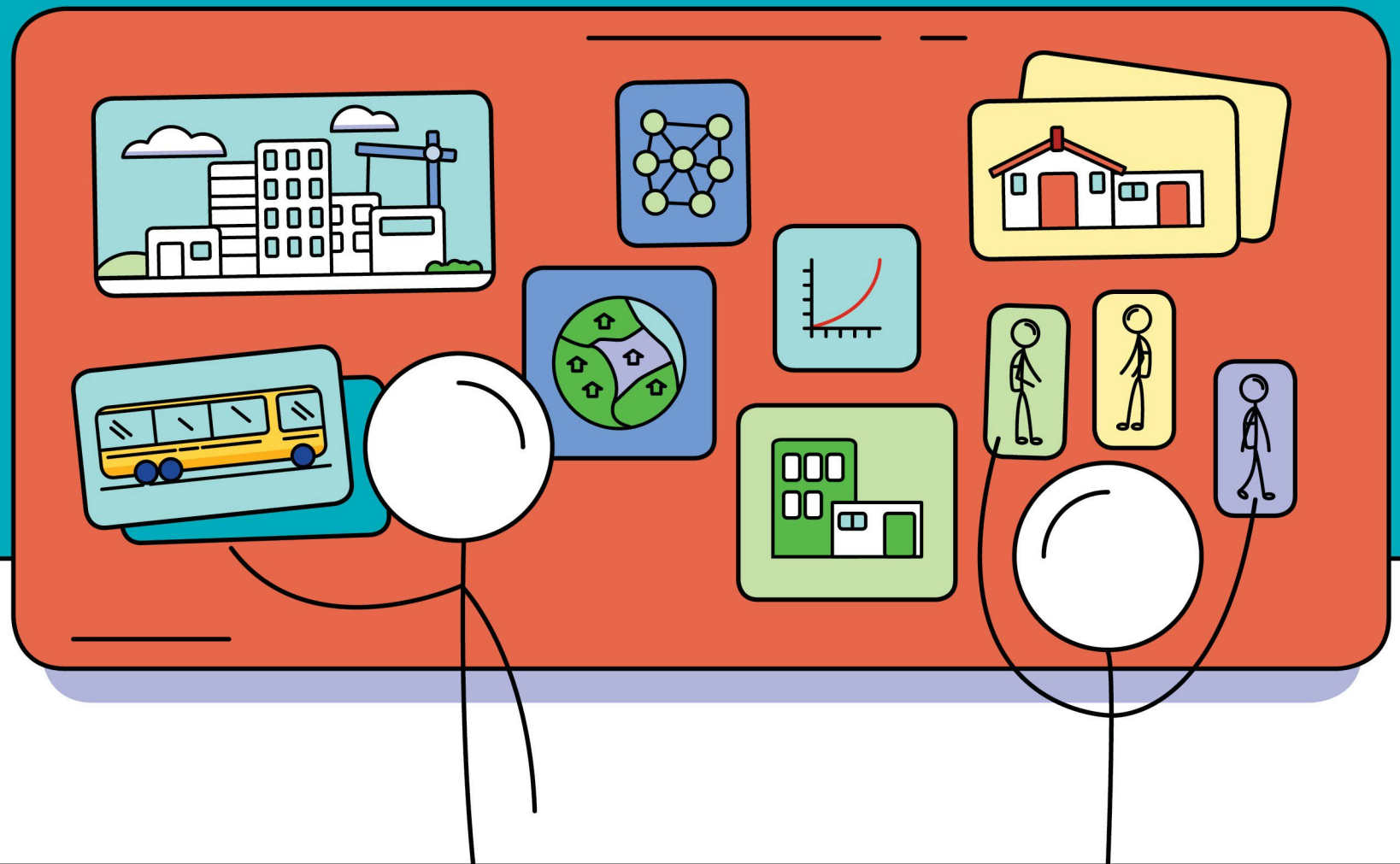
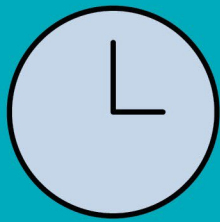
The communication and the policy framework for change is clear, consistent and transparent.



Information shared by school boards and their communities is accurate, transparent, learner focused and collaborative.



Schools, communities and Ministry national and regional offices are supported with the resources they need to manage change well.

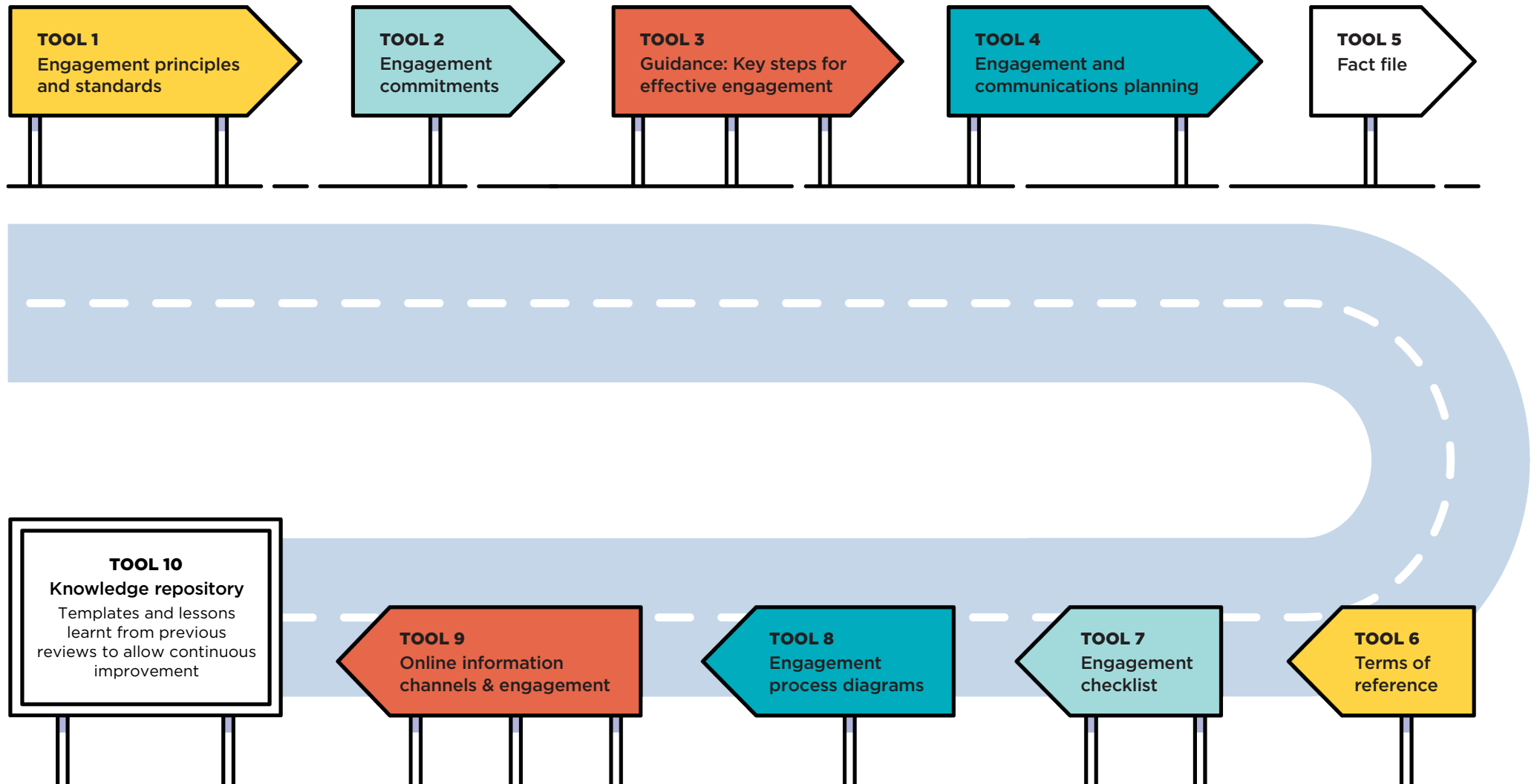


Section 3

Engagement Toolkit

Engagement tools

A set of engagement tools has been developed for use by Ministry staff, schools, clusters of schools and Kāhui Ako to assist the engagement process around school network change. Detailed documentation including relevant templates are available in the toolkit's online Knowledge Repository.

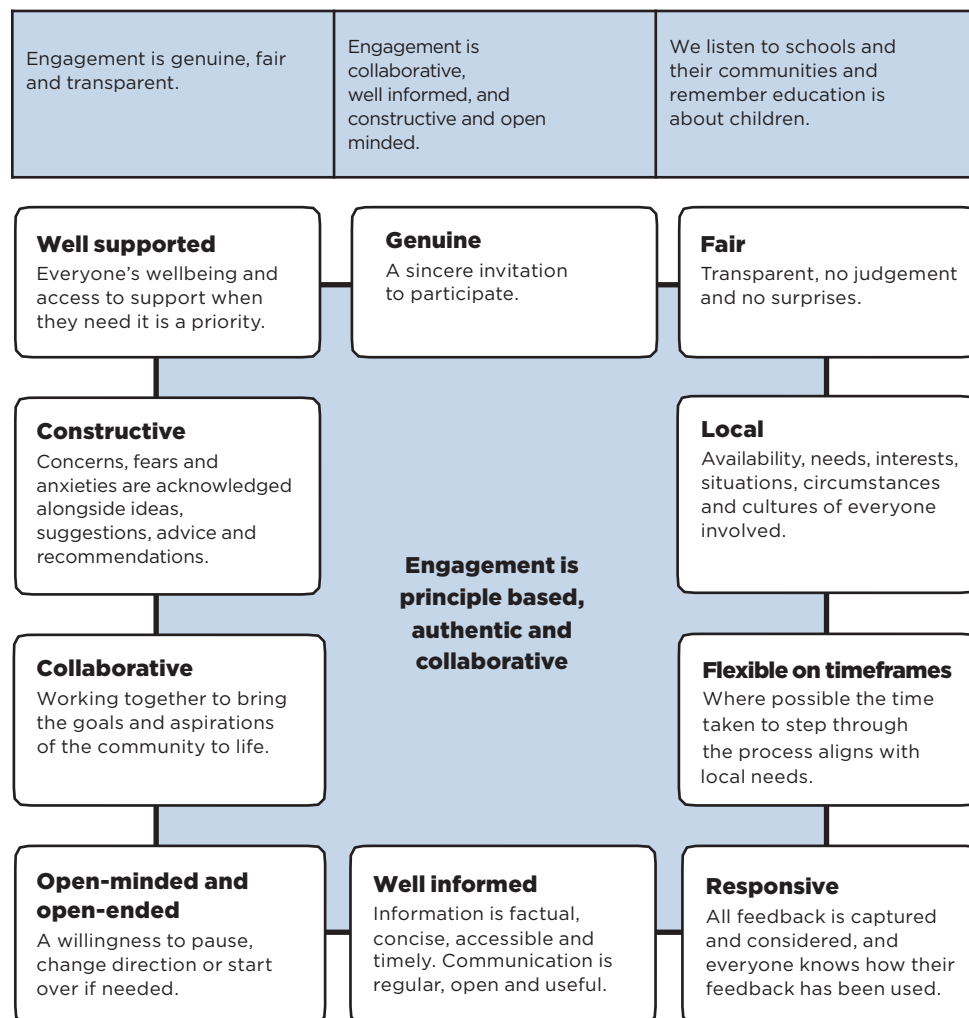


Tool 1 – Engagement principles and standards

A set of engagement tools has been developed for use by Ministry staff, schools, clusters of schools and Kāhui Ako to assist the engagement process around school network change. Detailed documentation including relevant templates are available in the toolkit's online Knowledge Repository.

Engagement principles

The principles of good engagement that we apply and work with are that:



Engagement standards

The Ministry has developed draft standards for effective engagement to help develop, inform and measure engagement on network change.

The draft principles are:

The Involvement Standard – We will identify and involve the people and organisations with an interest in the focus of the engagement.

The Support Standard – We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

The Planning Standard – We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

The Methods Standard – We will agree the use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

The Working Together Standard – We will agree and use clear procedures to enable the participants to work with one another efficiently and effectively.

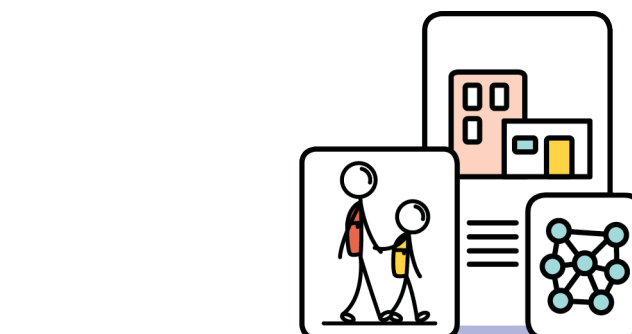
The Sharing Information Standard – We will ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants.

The Working With Others Standard – We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

The Improvement Standard – We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

The Feedback Standard – We will feedback the results of the engagement to the sector and all affected.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Standard – We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement meets its purposes and standards for effective engagement.



Tool 2 – Engagement commitments

When engaging with communities we are committed to focusing on:



Putting children and young people first

- Capture the voice of children and young people.
- Create engagement that provides children and young people the opportunity to participate, learn and grow.
- Ensure children and young people views are incorporated in our design.
- Empower children and young people to effectively collaborate and share responsibility to the best of their abilities.
- Provide suitable tools for engagement.



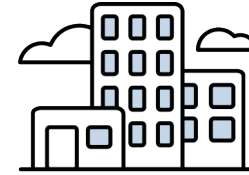
Empowering people

- Build the mechanism for two way dialogue, not a one-off collection of information.
- Establish mātauranga.
- Share the entire transformation journey and be honest about what we can and can't do.
- Design the right structure and environment to allow for our communities to contribute meaningfully – whakamanawa. Empower them to design, suggest and implement.
- Honour rangatiratanga and ensure our communities maintain the right to be involved in decisions which affect them.
- Be honest about the decision rights of the communities we are designing with.



Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi

- Work together to protect respective rights and uphold responsibilities to strengthen common and unique aspirations to enable fair and active participation.
- Understand that whānau, hapū and iwi have a legally recognised interest in the effectiveness of the education system for Māori children and young people.
- Ensure the education system supports and sustains Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori.
- Build our capability in working in Te Ao Māori.
- Build enabling and respectful relationships recognising Māori indigeneity.
- Empower rangatiratanga and Ao Māori mātauranga, whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga.

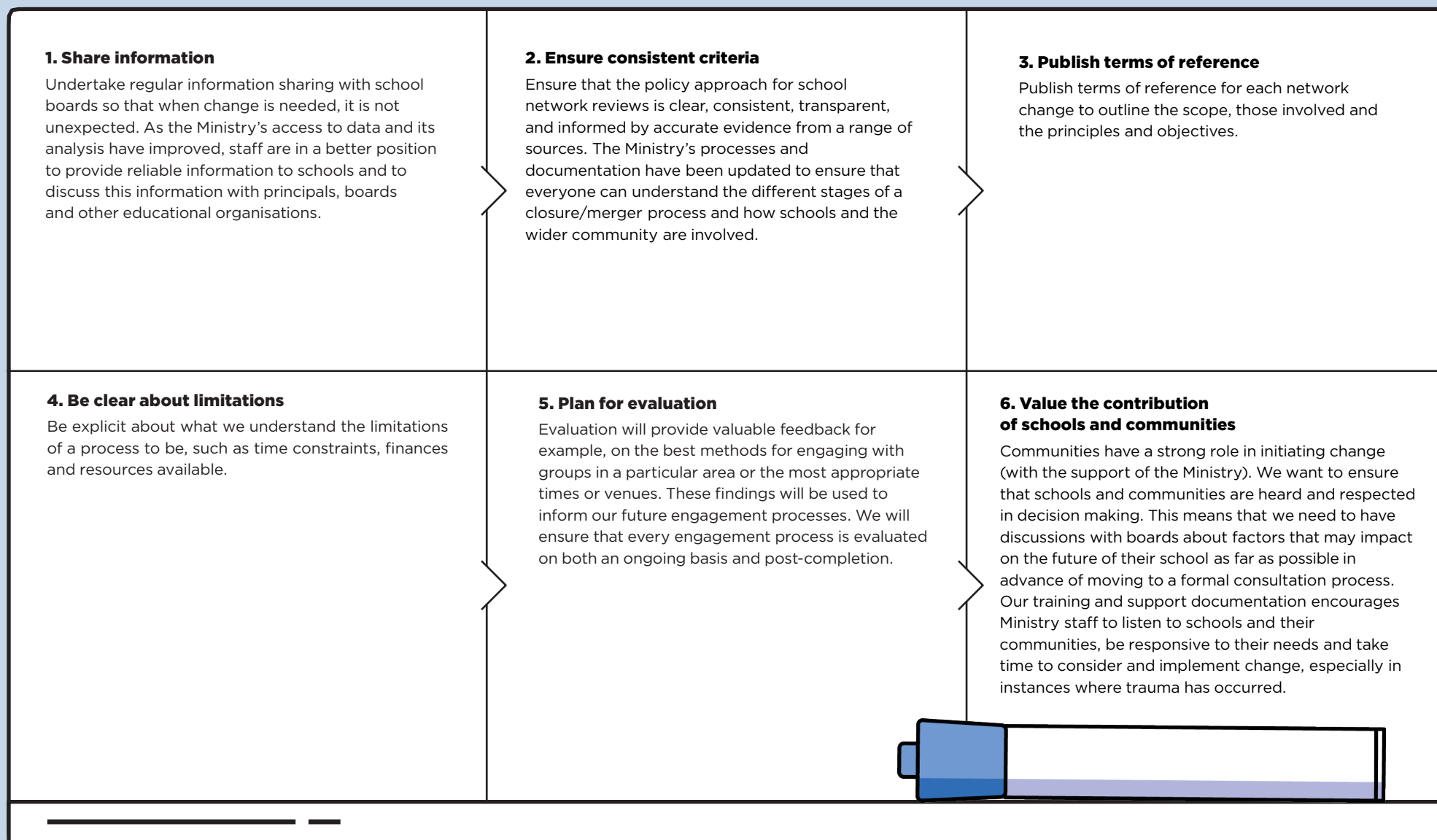


Being invested in the communities we are engaging with

- Mana whenua/iwi/Māori voice is present in community engagement.
- Invest in whakawhanaungatanga and manaakitanga.
- Be physically accessible and take design to the community.
- Cultural groups that make up the community are present in community engagement.

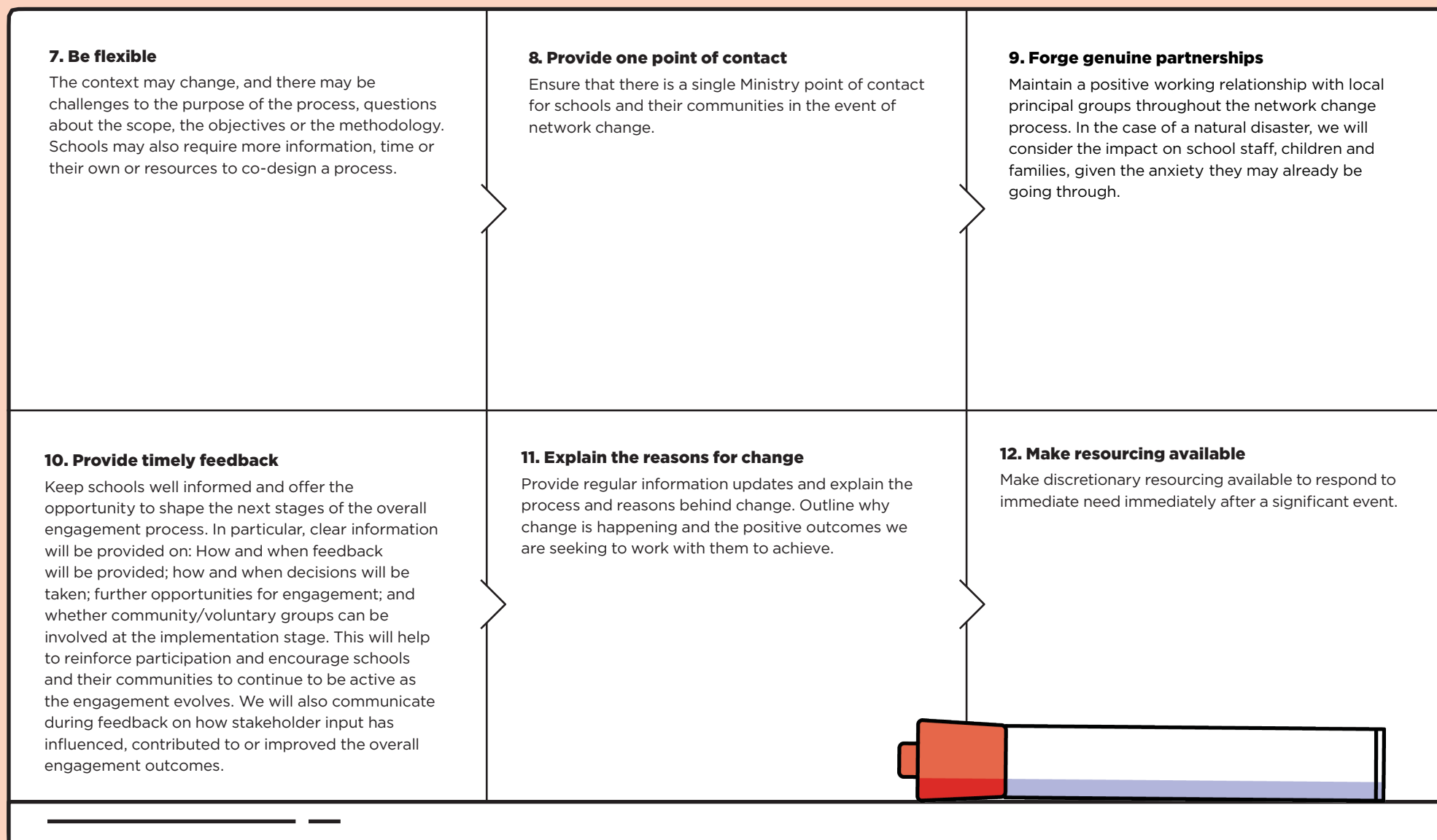
Tool 3 – Guidance: Key steps 1–6 for effective engagement

Ensuring that engagement is principle based, authentic and collaborative.



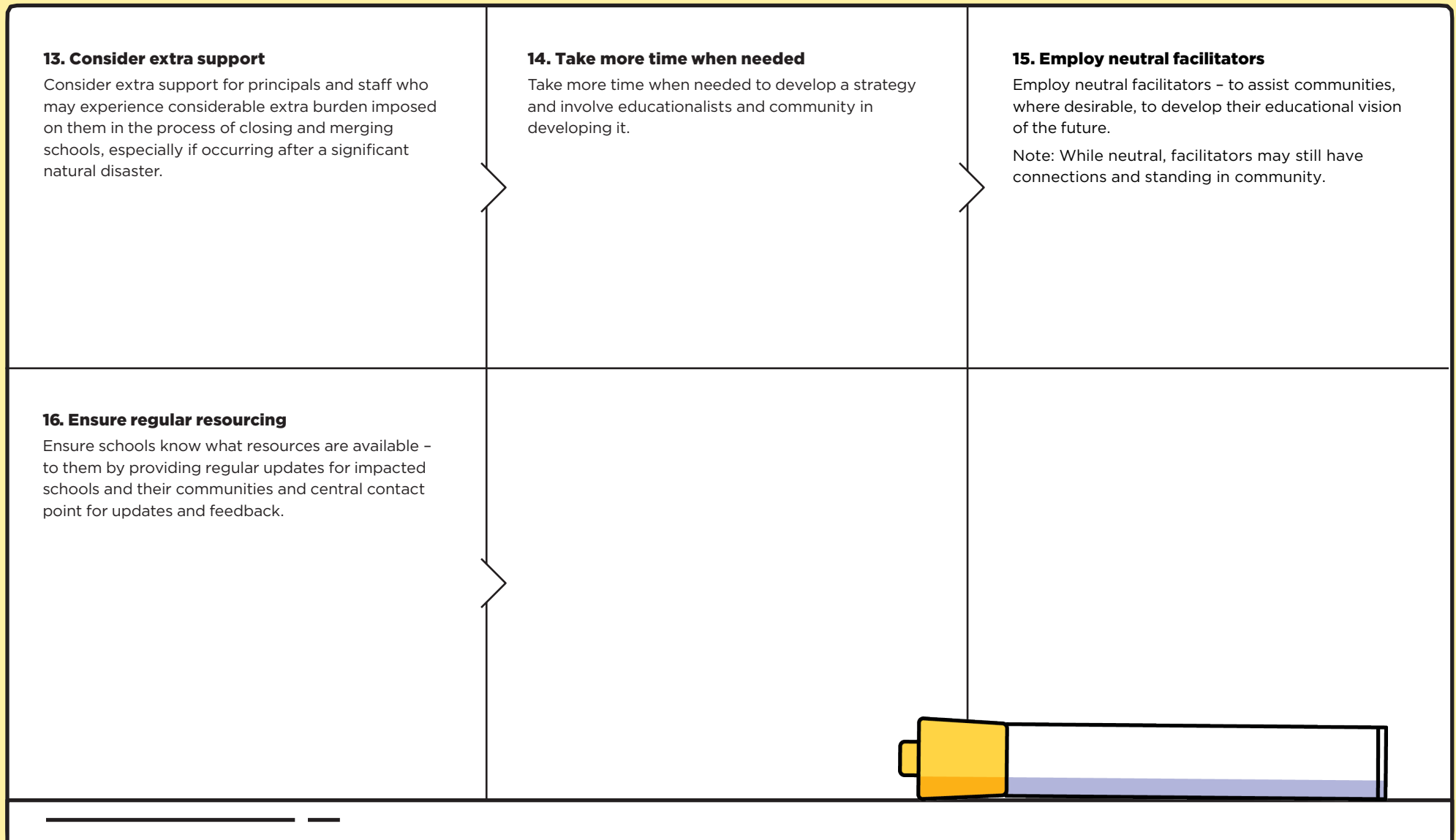
Tool 3 – Guidance: Key steps 7–12 for effective engagement

Ensuring that communication and the criteria for change is clear, consistent and transparent.



Tool 3 – Guidance: Key steps 13–16 for effective engagement

Ensuring that schools, communities and Ministry regional offices are supported with the resources they need.



Tool 4 – Stakeholder engagement and communications planning

Developing Stakeholder Engagement and Communications plan

Developing a Stakeholder Engagement and Communications plan for each network change (appropriate to the size and level of change) will help to ensure that an effective communication strategy is built into the delivery process consistently for every proposal relating to school network change. This will set up the framework and tactical plan for engagement and communication and will look at:

- Who is involved in the engagement process,
- What is being communicated and why,
- When the information is communicated,
- How the information is distributed,
- Who will provide the information being communicated, and
- How feedback is used.

The plans will need to:

- Incorporate all the elements of change, for example, changes are agreed and implemented, so that long term benefits of change are achieved,
- Identify every part of the Ministry that needs to be involved in network change.
- Outline realistic timeframes for conducting engagement around network change and implementing reorganisations, including preparatory work.

Engagement will vary depending on the different types of network change or review, levels of engagement may also vary depending on how complex the proposal is and/or who has proposed the change/review. Thinking through the following questions and issues will help in the planning and design of engagement:

- How to identify the stakeholders and their needs and concerns? How to understand what the schools, sector bodies and wider community already understand and what they need to know. What resources are needed and what is the approach, tools and methods that will be used?
- What level of participation or engagement is required and needed? Is this a small scale voluntary closure or something bigger and more significant requiring more resources and planning? This should be agreed with all relevant parties.
- When planning an engagement process, it needs to acknowledge diversity, identify any potential barriers and design the process to minimise barriers where possible.

Engaging with an open, community-focused approach

The Ministry will create appropriate opportunities for the sector and communities to engage where possible school network change is under consideration.

Exploring options for school network changes requires an open, community-focused, network-wide approach.

Community engagement and formal consultations are critical parts of any change process because they ensure a strong foundation for informed decision making, understanding decisions, and having trust and confidence in the decision making process.

School boards have a responsibility to ensure anyone in their community who might be impacted by a school network change understands what the implications might mean for them and are kept well informed whenever any aspect of a school network might change. Stakeholders must have access to up-to-date relevant and factual information when they need it, and be aware of the opportunities they have to share and have their views considered on a proposed change.

Developing options for a change process takes collaboration, can involve a variety of engagement activities, and might take time.

The types of engagement methods identified in the plan will include:

- A forum to bring together those who represent specialist educational or interest groups;
- Public meetings
- Catchment hui
- Meetings with Mana whenua/iwi
- Workshops (co-design and co-create);
- Presentations
- Existing local community and principal associations' communication channels will be used.
- Web based engagement
- Neutral facilitators to assist communities develop their educational vision for the future

The online Knowledge Repository that accompanies this tool kit includes an Engagement and Communications Plan template.

Tool 5 – Fact file

Sharing information and making it easy to understand

At the start of the engagement process, the Ministry will provide all available information to a school in a 'Fact File' which includes a range of complex information presented in graphic and picture form.

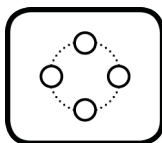
Ministry staff will engage with school to ensure that the information in the Fact File is correct before sharing it more widely as part of the engagement process.

The Fact File makes the presentation of technical information on possible school network change easier for boards and communities to understand. Local or national network teams will generate a Fact File appropriate to the level of network change.

The Fact File will include complex data in graphic and picture form such as:

- Information related to development and changes in an area or region;
- Statistics NZ population projections;
- Ministry school performance and viability data and information.

This information is part of network planning. It will be collated and made readily available.



Tool 6 – Terms of reference

Developing Terms of Reference for a possible school network change

The Ministry recognises the high levels of stress and high workload experienced by principals, teachers and boards undergoing network change processes and will work to ensure that appropriate supports are available during a school network change process.

The Ministry's national and regional teams will have appropriate levels of staffing in recognition of the high workload involved in reviews of educational provision and reorganisations.

The Ministry will encourage communities to have a active role in co-designing and co-creating the network change process, thereby developing a clear, compelling reason for change and a vision for the future.

The community, in partnership with the Ministry, clearly articulates what constitutes a successful (educational and economic) 'outcome' of reviews and reorganisations within an area.

The Ministry will ensure everyone understands the different stages of the closure/merger process and how schools and the wider community can be involved.

The Ministry will ensure a focus remains on maintaining educational delivery and outcomes throughout the review period.

The Ministry will work with boards and communities to develop a **Terms of Reference** for each network change outlining its scope, those involved, the key principles and objectives, timeframes, the decision making process and the outcomes sought.

Tool 7 – Engagement checklist – Outcomes 1-3

We have developed an Engagement Checklist, which includes six outcome areas supported by a number of actions, so that Ministry staff and the boards they are working with can select the actions relevant to their specific school change process, share the commitment to the actions with communities they are working with and monitor delivery against the actions together over time.

School Network Refresh – Actions we will take		
<p>Schools and communities are heard and respected in decision making.</p> <p>Appropriate time is allowed for communities to recover from trauma and then explore what change is needed for the future.</p> <p>We will listen to schools and their communities and remember education is about children.</p> <p>We will forge genuine partnerships with principals' associations during a change process and work closely with local principal groups.</p> <p>School catchment hui/co-create/co-design workshops are held early to capture different voices, insights and ideas.</p> <p>We will work to ensure that engagement is genuine, collaborative, well informed, transparent, constructive and open minded. Engagement principles are developed, agreed and followed.</p> <p>Community Reference Groups are activated.</p> <p>Schools may have input into appointment of Change Manager/Project Manager when they are needed.</p> <p>We work with other Government agencies and local councils to align and meet wider community and education outcomes.</p>	<p>Criteria for change is clear, consistent and transparent.</p> <p>A clear policy framework is developed to ensure consistency, equity and fairness when distributing resources.</p> <p>Clear policy framework is developed specifically for closures and mergers of groups of schools – one which ensures that affected school communities are informed, involved and invested in the outcome. Processes to ensure everyone can more easily understand the different stages of a closure/merger process and how schools and the wider community are involved.</p> <p>We will use local Ministry staff where possible and work to ensure continuity of Ministry staff so school staff know who they are dealing with.</p> <p>National guidance and a tool kit are published to support schools and national and regional network teams to work collaboratively.</p> <p>Ministry staffing is appropriately resourced to support engagement and consultation phases.</p> <p>Terms of reference are developed and shared for school mergers and closures so people can understand the criteria for why decisions are being made.</p> <p>We work with schools to consider options other than mergers, including the option of closing existing schools and opening a new school, if this works better for the local community. The final decisions will be made based on several considerations including community feedback, equity, costs and benefits, and the best interests of children and young people.</p>	<p>Engagement is principle based, authentic and collaborative.</p> <p>Information shared with schools and their communities is accurate, transparent, learner focused and collaborative.</p> <p>The Ministry communicates early, listens to feedback, and takes the time to co-create with local communities, where possible.</p> <p>Improving our pro-active engagement – undertaking regular information sharing with schools so that when change is needed, it is not unexpected.</p> <p>Being clear about limitations – and explicit about what we understand the limitations of a process to be, such as time constraints, finances and resources available.</p> <p>Planning for evaluation – and using the learning to inform our future engagement processes.</p> <p>Valuing the contribution of schools and communities – ensuring that schools and communities are heard and respected in decision making.</p> <p>Being flexible – and planning to be flexible. The context may change, and there may be challenges to the purpose of the process, questions about the scope, the objectives or the methodology. Schools may also require more information, time or their own or resources to co-design a process.</p>



Tool 7 – Engagement checklist – Outcomes 4–6

School Network Refresh – Actions we will take

Communication and the criteria for change is clear, consistent and transparent.

All information shared with schools and their communities is accurate and transparent. Appropriate and accurate information arising from policies and procedures is available.

The Ministry works with local associations who understand the sector and know their communities, and also uses local associations' communications channels

The Ministry learns from the Mana Ake project, a highly responsive and collaborative piece of work to support primary aged students in Canterbury with their mental health. The project supports clusters of schools to co-create processes to meet their community's needs.

There is one point of contact for schools and their communities when network change is being considered.

We use existing local community and association's communication channels.

We will forge genuine partnerships – Maintaining liaison and trust in local principal groups throughout the network change process by working closely with local principal groups. In the case of a natural disaster, we will consider the impact on school staff, children and families, given the anxiety they may already be going through.

There is timely feedback and information to help reinforce participation and encourage schools and their communities to continue to be active as the engagement evolves

We will explain the reasons for change, outlining why change is happening and the positive outcomes we are seeking to work with schools to achieve.

We will ensure consistency, equity and fairness when distributing resources and build trust through a process that sees everyone connected, respected and learning.

School board and community information packs are developed and shared.

Quality school property information is shared regularly and pro-actively with schools through regular and rolling engagement.

Wider school data (e.g. school transport options, staffing needs, etc.) is collected, considered and shared.

Data and information is easy to understand.

All feedback is captured and considered, and everyone knows how their feedback has been used.

Schools, communities and Ministry regional offices are supported with the resources they need.

We listen to schools to consider the realistic timing of change, manage resources, reduce workload stress and achieve better results.

Online information makes the engagement process and EAP/other assistance information available to all.

Peak Bodies & unions kept well-informed and able to provide advice and support to affected school communities.

We consider support options for principals and staff – who may experience extra burden in the process of closing and merging schools, especially if occurring after a significant natural disaster.

We consider what else can be done to lessen the career and financial effects on principals and staff who will be likely to lose their jobs if several schools close quickly.

Taking more time when needed – to develop a strategy and involve educationalists and community in developing it.

Publishing terms of reference – for each network change to outline the scope, those involved and the principles and objectives.

We also consider support via the operations grant for schools suffering a rapid fall in available funds due to government decisions.

Employing neutral facilitators – to assist communities, where desirable, to develop their educational vision of the future.

Ensuring schools know what resources are available – to them by providing regular updates for impacted schools and their communities and central contact point for updates and feedback.

We support the wellbeing and achievement of young people, schools and communities.

Our policy framework ensures a prioritisation of education goals as well as economic goals.

Engagement supports achievement, wellbeing and equitable access and pathways for all learners across New Zealand.

Māori medium needs understood and provisioned.

Learning Support needs understood and provisioned.

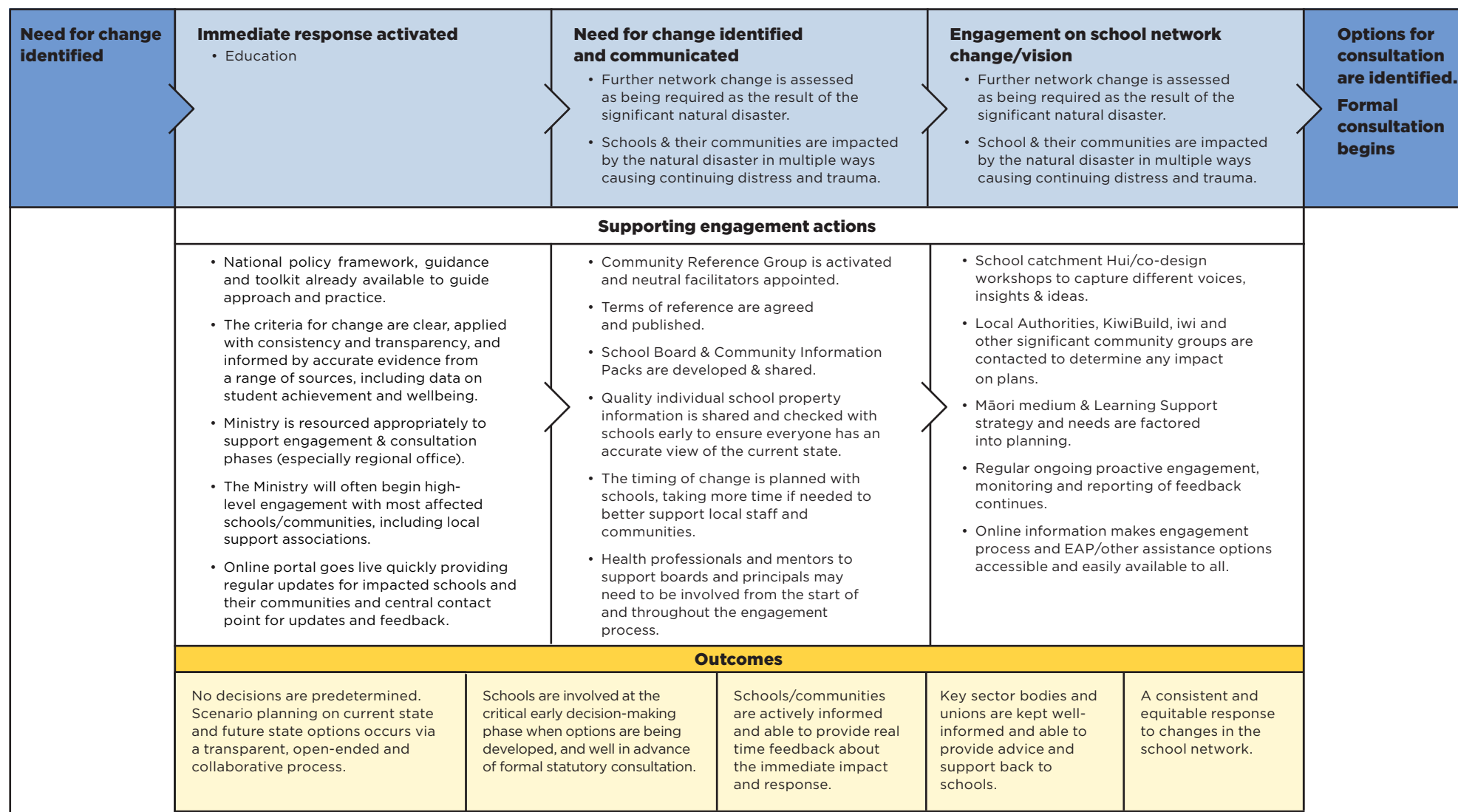
Reviews of school provision retain a prominent focus on education goals as well as economic goals.



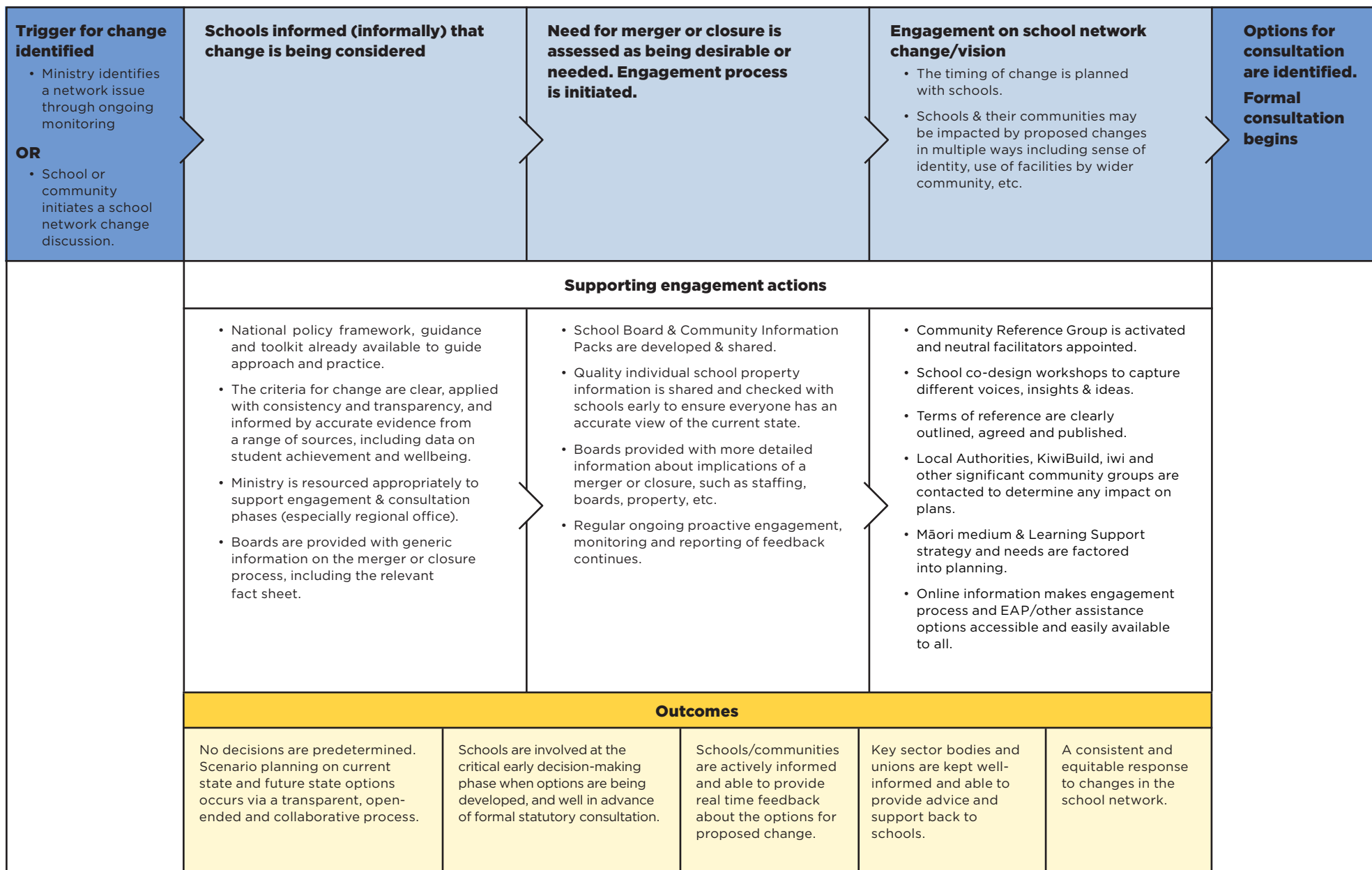
Tool 8 – Engagement process following a significant natural disaster

Following a natural disaster, people in a community may be experiencing a range of impacts, such as injury, loss of friends or family members, relationship stress, property damage, temporary or permanent loss of income, and depression or post-traumatic stress, among other impacts. These impacts can be ongoing and psychosocial health supports are likely to be required. The diagram below outlines an example engagement process for responding to a significant natural disaster. This can be used as a resource by Ministry staff, and schools and their communities, as needed.


(This process can be activated in response to a range of different events including for earthquakes, flooding, or a volcanic or tsunami event, for example.)



Tool 8 – Engagement process for school mergers and closures



Tool 9 – Online channels & engagement file



The Ministry will provide timely and accurate information to school boards and principals' associations for sharing with their wider communities involved in the network change process and prepare information in a variety of ways to meet their needs.

The Ministry's communications will be clear and we will provide accurate and reliable information right from the start about the proposed network change process.

All relevant documents will be put on the Ministry's website. This allows boards, members of the community and the media to access information about particular schools and the proposals for them. This will be done at every critical stage in the process.


The Ministry will capture and consider all feedback and ensure that everyone knows how their feedback has been used.

Information that is timely and accessible is key to a good engagement process.

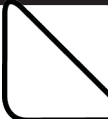
Websites are an opportunity for people to access information and engage (when planned as part of the network change plan) at a time that is convenient for them to participate. However, this is in addition to face-to-face engagement wherever possible.

Online information makes the engagement process and other assistance information available to a wider audience and can be used to ensure, for example, that key sector bodies and unions are kept well-informed and able to provide advice and support to their members.

The Ministry recognises that engagement needs to be appropriate and accessible for the community, eg, other ways of communicating will be explored if the community does not have widespread internet access.



Tool 10 – Knowledge repository



Learning together as we go

We will ensure that:

Reviews of all network change are conducted, learning disseminated, and changes made from that learning and/or good practice consolidated into ongoing practice.

Learning from highly collaborative projects, such as the Mana Ake project in Canterbury and other co-creation collaborative processes, are understood and used when responding to future network events.

As part of the learning process we will look for indicators/measures of alignment with engagement principles and guidance, as well as the outcomes sought.

We will look at indirect and direct methods to reveal different types of characteristics and evidence associated with the network change to establish a measured and substantive view of its success.

An online Knowledge Repository will be created to capture knowledge and information for future network change and to ensure we continue to grow and develop our abilities to manage network change and be transparent, learner focused and collaborative.

Key templates in the **Knowledge Repository** include:

- Fact File template
- Stakeholder and Engagement Plan template
- Project Plan template
- Engagement Checklist
- Risk Register Template

Messages and catchment plans for each catchment in the National Education Growth Plan (NEGP) and National Education Network Plan (NENP) will also be made available.