



LESSON THREE WEB CONTENT: What is active participation

Active participation is all about being actively involved in the democratic process, whether it's by voting in referenda and elections, attending and speaking at public meetings, making submissions on public consultations and more.

Democracy and you

By voting in the local elections, you are playing a vital role in the democratic process and having your voice heard on issues that affect Auckland and your local community.

What is democracy

You have probably heard the term 'democracy' used a lot, so let's start by looking at the word itself. The word 'democracy' comes from the Greek word 'demos', meaning 'citizen', and 'kratos', meaning 'power'. So, when these two are joined together we learn that democracy means "citizen power", which you could also think of as 'people power'.

Democracy



Power to the people

Democracy is a form of government where the people of a nation have the power to decide who will represent them and which laws they will live by.

Democracy in Aotearoa

Here in New Zealand, we have a form of representative democracy. That means that we decide who we want to represent us and our interests when decisions are made, at the local and central government level.

In democracies, we select representatives (aka politicians) through the elections process.

Use your voice in elections and referenda

Elections give you the opportunity to vote for your preferred candidates who can act on your behalf when it comes to decision making.

Although it's not compulsory, voting plays a vital role in democracy and is a fundamental act of active participation.

Referenda

A referendum question asks people to vote on a particular idea or decision. The results may lead to the adoption of a new law. A binding referendum requires the result to be implemented (acted on) whereas an indicative referendum does not. All enrolled voters in New Zealand can take part in a referendum by post or in person.

Binding referenda

The Flag Referendum in 2015 asked New Zealanders to rank five proposed designs of a potential new flag. The 2016 Referendum asked people to choose between the current flag and the winning design from the first referendum. The vote was binding so the flag did not change.



Indicative referenda

The Firefighters Referendum 1995 asked how many firefighters New Zealand should have. The results were provided as a recommendation to central government and used to inform MP's in their decision-making process.

Citizens-initiated vs government-initiated referenda

Anyone can start a petition for a nationwide referendum known as a citizens-initiated referendum. For a referendum to be held,

several processes set out in the Citizens Initiated Referenda Act 1993 must be followed and supporting signatures from over 10% of eligible voters nationwide must be obtained.

A government-initiated referendum is one promoted by the Government. It can be binding or indicative and can pose more than one question or questions with more than two possible answers

Democracy in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland

Most democratic nations have different levels or tiers of government.

In New Zealand we have both local and central government.

Every three years, we have elections to choose who we want to represent us, whether it's across the country or within our local area.

Here in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, our local government is Auckland Council.

Ways to participate in democracy

For a healthy democracy, it's important you take part and have your views heard. There are many different ways you can participate in democracy, both at local and national level.



How you can get involved in local democracy with Auckland Council



Vote during local government elections

Local government elections are held every three years and we encourage you to learn about the candidates and get out and vote!

Your vote makes sure that the people who best represent your views and voice have a chance of being elected.

Become an elected member

As part of a democracy, any New Zealand citizen who is enrolled to vote can run for an elected member position.

You don't need any special qualifications to become a candidate. Elected members come from all backgrounds and walks of life.

A diversity of views and experience from elected members is another key part of a healthy democracy. Go to the [VoteAuckland website](#) to find out more about how, as an elected member, you can help shape the development of the Auckland region and build strong local communities.



Make a submission on public consultations

Before making major decisions, Auckland Council usually consults the community so their views can be considered by councillors and local boards.

We often consult on topics that affect the whole region, but consultations can also be led by local boards if it's a local matter.

We strongly encourage you give feedback during these consultations.

You can view all the topics which are open for consultation on the [Have Your Say website](#)

Have your say

Have Your Say website

Visit [AKL Have Your Say](#) to view all open consultations.

Consultations are also advertised on our website, social media pages, and sometimes in the wider media.

Select any consultation you are interested in to view the documents detailing the proposal.

Let us know how you feel about the proposal by sending us some feedback. You can either answer the multiple-choice questions in the feedback form online or write down your feedback and send it via email.

You should include things like:

- What do you agree with?
- What do you disagree with?
- What would you propose instead?
- Why would you propose this?

Join the People's Panel

The People's Panel is a great way of putting your hand up to take part in online surveys when we seek feedback from the public.

If you sign up for the People's Panel, you will receive one or two short surveys each month and you only need to complete the ones which interest you.

After you participate in a survey, you'll receive the results once consultation has closed. This is a great way of knowing more about how your community feels about topics that interest you. Of course, all your personal details will remain private throughout the process.

Help shape Auckland - [sign up to the People's Panel!](#)

Auckland Council – Civics Education



Talk to your elected local representatives

If there's an issue that's not currently open for consultation, you can always talk to your elected local representatives.

Local boards are elected to make local decisions for each local board area.

They have local offices that are open to the public.

Bring local issues and concerns directly to your local board by:

- contacting the local board office
- contacting elected local board members
- presenting to a local board meeting.

Auckland's unique governance structure means that we have both our governing body and local boards.

If you want to discuss Auckland-wide issues, contact a member of the Governing Body. Find their contacts on the Auckland Council website [here](#).

You should know

On the [Auckland Council website](#) you can find out :

- [who your local board is](#)
- [where the office is](#)
- [who the members are](#)
- [how to contact them.](#)

Start a petition

One way of engaging with your local elected representatives is through a petition.

A petition is a request for your elected representatives to investigate an issue that you are concerned about.

A petition can be made by one person, and it is usually on behalf of a group. Petitions made to council will be directed to the area of council that is responsible.

For example, if you and your neighbours felt that the trees on your street were always overgrown and needed more attention, you could submit a petition that was signed by you and your neighbours.

This petition would be asking council to investigate whether tree pruning in your local neighbourhood could happen more often.



Attend public meetings

At Auckland Council, all meetings and committees of the Governing Body and local boards are open to the public. All decisions made by the Governing Body and local boards affect Aucklanders, so we all have a right to know how they are made.

This ensures ‘transparent decision-making’ which is another very important part of democracy.

How to attend a public meeting

Attend these meetings in person or online if it is being held virtually.

See all [upcoming public meetings and agendas](#).

If a meeting is held online, then you can view the [live stream](#).

What to expect at a public meeting

Public meetings are held to discuss topics and issues and make decisions about them.

The topics that are being discussed at each meeting are put together in an ‘agenda’.

The agenda is published two days before each meeting, so you can find out what will be discussed.

Speak at public meetings

As a member of the public, you can speak at any public meeting. Up to 30 minutes at the beginning of each meeting are dedicated to hearing from the public.

For Governing Body and committee meetings, you need to contact the Governance Advisor that is running the meeting at least a full working day before the meeting. Contact details for the Governance Advisor will be in the meeting agenda. Remember to include the subject matter that you are requesting to speak about. You will have up to five minutes to speak.

For local board meetings, you do not need any formal approval to speak. You will have up to three minutes to speak.

After you have spoken in your allocated time, you can listen to the elected members' discussion at the meeting, but you will not be able to participate.

Deputation

You can also choose to make a presentation at your local board meeting through a deputation.

A deputation is a formal presentation, requiring seven days' notice and the chairperson's approval.

Each speaker is allocated 10 minutes for a presentation.

You can talk about issues facing you or your community group or give updates about your group's activities.

A deputation is delivered in a public setting and is recorded on the official minutes.

Find out more about [how to speak at Governing Body and local board meetings](#).

Request official information

The Local Government Official Information and Requests Act (LGOIMA) was passed in 1987 to ensure that information is available to the public from local government agencies, like Auckland Council, when requested.

Think of it as a tool for transparency that helps streamline requests for information from Auckland Council.

There is a lot of information that is readily available on the Auckland Council website, but sometimes we do not publish exactly what you are looking for.

Find out more about [requesting information from us](#).

Explore our archives

There is an [archive of previous meetings, agendas, and recordings](#).

You can see what was discussed at these meetings, and what decisions were made.

