



NZ Science Media Centre

Strategic Plan 2023-2025

Our purpose

Increasing public understanding of research, science & innovation by enabling researchers to work effectively with the media

Our values

- Independent
 - Relevant
 - Trusted
 - Inclusive
 - Influential
 - Motuhake
 - Whai take
 - Pou whirinaki
 - Manaaki tangata
 - Whakaaweawe
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Commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

We commit to demonstrate Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of partnership, participation and protection in the ethics and practice of our work.

We recognise and value the contributions of mātauranga Māori, Māori perspectives and expertise to the research, science and innovation sector.

We work in partnership with Māori-led organisations to support quality media coverage of research- and science-related issues that meets the needs of Māori communities.

We involve Māori journalists, scientists and researchers across our range of our activities, building strong, reciprocal and enduring relationships.

Our strategic aims and how we achieve them

1. Support quality journalism on science-related topics

We benefit from a strong, trusted relationship with journalists and editors, built up over nearly fifteen years' track record of independence and relevance.

All major newsrooms in New Zealand consistently seek out and make frequent use of Science Media Centre resources to inform their reporting on topics such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, natural disasters, emerging technologies and risks to food, biosecurity and public safety.

Feedback from recent evaluations clearly show that news organisations rely on the SMC and place high value on our existing activities and resources. Demand continues to grow, especially for media queries, expert reaction and training, despite overall declining staffing numbers within newsrooms.

As audiences fragment and news consumer habits evolve across digital channels, the SMC will support public interest journalism initiatives to strengthen a diverse range of trusted information sources.

Key actions

- Linking media and experts on deadline
- Proactively adapting to media needs
- Anticipating emerging issues
- Providing trusted resources (expert reaction, SMC Picks, media hotline for queries)

2. Strengthen researchers' media & public engagement

In 2022, our Science Media Savvy programme marked 10 years of long-term investment in New Zealand researchers' strategic media and communication skills. The dividends are visible across every area we work in, with former workshop attendees highly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic response, awarded prestigious research funds and fellowships, advising policymakers, and forging innovative transdisciplinary collaborations through connections made as a result of this training.

Participants in Science Media Savvy training gain Increased confidence and skill in communicating their work to media and public audiences. We inspire them to make the most of opportunities to raise public awareness., providing sharper explanations of important issues facing society and greater clarity over research impacts.

Word-of-mouth from past participants continues to drive strong demand for Media Savvy workshops. Over recent years, we have expanded online offerings and experimented with new formats. These experiences have served to reinforce the value of intensive, face-to-face delivery as a core component of our training.

We have especially noted the important role these workshops perform in establishing new, trusted relationships between researchers and the Science Media Centre team, and between researchers and journalists they encounter in the workshop setting. For research communities that are reluctant to engage with journalists, Media Savvy workshops offer a circuit breaker to break down stereotypes and change attitudes.

Given these significant outcomes, the SMC will continue to deliver training and workshops targeted to prepare researchers who face media interest in the issues their work highlights.

As capacity and resourcing permit, we will continue to develop and adapt tailored training options that meet the unique needs of specific research communities (e.g. Māori researchers, Pacific researchers).

Key actions

- Raising the profile of effective media skills as an essential part of scientists' public outreach
- Providing support, resources and training for researchers and research organisations
- Continuing to develop and adapt training and resources to fit unique needs of diverse research communities

3. Foster diverse voices' participation as experts in a wide range of media

Media rely on independent, trusted experts to provide context and analysis that helps to shape their coverage of important issues facing society. As time and staffing pressures continue to mount within news organisations, this reliance is likely to increase further.

At the same, significant shifts in the outlook and demographics of decisionmakers within newsrooms – i.e. who gets to decide what's relevant to target audiences – mean that media increasingly seek out expert perspectives that reflect the diversity of Aotearoa NZ's population. 'Nothing about us without us' is a fundamental principle to which media organisations are increasingly held accountable.

We see growing demand for highly qualified scientists and researchers who can offer evidence-based perspectives and can *also* speak from their own lived experience as members of particular communities (e.g. Māori, Pacific, Asian, speakers of languages other than English, women and gender diverse, early career or youth).

In recent years, the research, science and innovation sector has begun to identify and reform some of the systemic inequities in academia and education that serve as barriers to a more representative workforce. However, ethnic and gender disparities are highly entrenched in many research disciplines.

This means that building up networks of researchers from diverse communities who are willing and able to engage with the media requires consistent and intentional effort on our part.

The SMC will continuously improve and refresh our expert database, proactively targeting our efforts to connect and build trust with researchers representing a diversity of underserved cultures and communities.

Key actions

- Building relationships, prioritising targeted training and outreach
- Collecting data, critically assessing practices, and targeting gaps
- Partnering strategically to support sector initiatives that create more equitable opportunities for underserved communities

4. Broker new relationships and foster collaboration

The Science Media Centre proactively seeks out opportunities to link media organisations with researchers across disciplines, laying groundwork for win-win coordination, collaboration and cooperation that would otherwise not take place.

Previous and current examples of this type of work include:

- Inviting climate researchers into newsrooms to analyse media coverage and provide feedback, in support of a media-led initiative to lift the bar on climate reporting;
- Raising reporters' awareness of online mis- and disinformation trends via multi-agency background briefings;
- Offering Te Rito journalism cadets first-hand experience of science in the field and the lab, in partnership with Crown Research Institutes
- Enhancing science communication through Drawing Science, a multi-year project to seed new collaboration between researchers and illustrators;
- Partnering with the AusSMC and our international network to create a resource kit for researchers experiencing online abuse and harassment;
- Strengthening data journalism practice through Data Aotearoa, a professional development wānanga and mentoring programme for established and emerging data journalists.

We will continue to seek opportunities to foster new collaborative projects and initiatives, linking individuals and organisations from different parts of our network to create positive impact and mutual benefits.

Key actions

- Seeding new science-media projects
- Leveraging networks to make new connections, improve outcomes for all
- Building trust and reduce barriers to collaboration

5. Innovate to support changing practices and culture in newsrooms and research organisations

When the Science Media Centre was founded in 2008, we accepted the challenge of changing attitudes within newsrooms that tended to view science as a 'niche' interest, with little relevance for the wider news cycle.

Years on, journalists' expectations look very different. By focusing unswervingly on anticipating news media's needs and providing relevant, timely and useful resources for

journalists, we have demonstrated the enormous value that evidence-based and informed expert views can add to media coverage across every news round.

Equally important to this shift has been the SMC's role in championing researchers' media engagement, building trust and capability within research organisations, especially when complex and controversial issues reach the headlines.

We will bolster these efforts, strategically targeting senior leadership within key media and research organisations who are less frequent users of the SMC's resources. We will also invest in reaching early career journalists and researchers to build their capability over time.

Key actions

- Raising expectations, celebrating excellence
- Providing targeted feedback, support and advice
- Applying new approaches to analyse and make suggestions to improve quality, depth and breadth of media coverage of science-related topics
- Influencing senior leaders; supporting early career individuals

One-page strategic overview (overleaf)

New Zealand Science Media Centre - Strategic Plan 2023 - 2025

Increase public understanding of research, science & innovation by enabling researchers to work effectively with media

Demonstrate Te Tiriti principles in ethics and practice, recognise and value mātauranga, partner with Māori-led organisations

Support quality journalism on science-related topics	Strengthen researchers' media & public engagement	Foster diverse voices' participation as experts in wide range of media	Broker new relationships and foster collaboration	Innovate to support changing practices and culture in newsrooms and research organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link media and experts on deadline Proactively adapt to media needs Anticipate emerging issues Provide trusted resources for journalists and media organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise profile of effective media skills as essential part of scientists' public outreach Provide support and training Adapt resources to fit unique needs of diverse research communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relationships, prioritise targeted training and outreach Collect data, critically assess practices, and target gaps Partner strategically to support sector initiatives that create more equitable opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seed new science-media projects Leverage networks networks to make new connections, improve outcomes for all Build trust and reduce barriers to collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise expectations, celebrate excellence Provide targeted feedback and advice Analyse and make suggestions to improve quality, depth, breadth of media coverage Influence senior leaders; support early career individuals

Independent

Relevant

Trusted

Inclusive

Influential