Election Manifesto

Open, sovereign, built to last

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catalyst

Aotearoa New Zealand has been accumulating a Big Tech dependency deficit for decades. Our country deserves better.

It is a fiscal, economic, innovation, and sovereignty problem. The longer it runs, the more expensive it becomes to fix. This is not an inevitability. It is a choice that any incoming government can make.

Every default to offshore Big Tech sends public money out of New Zealand, weakens competition, stifles local innovation, and hands control of critical data to vendors accountable to shareholders.

Governments around the world are breaking this pattern by choosing open source, sovereign solutions and backing domestic talent.

New Zealand has everything it needs to back our own future: world-class talent at a lower cost, budget to purchase technology and stimulate New Zealand's economy, open foundations that reduce duplication and amplify innovation, and sovereign cloud solutions that keep data onshore.

The projected multi-billion public sector technology spend over the next five years is one of the most powerful policy levers any incoming government holds. Every deliberate choice away from offshore dependency closes the deficit, builds lasting national capability, and unlocks this country's freedom to innovate.

The Public Service Commission has delivered the verdict: government IT is over budget, under-delivered, and locked into systems it doesn't control.[1]

We have a chance to build something the country can be proud of:

Open, sovereign, built to last.

This manifesto is a roadmap to do exactly that.

1. Source: https://itbrief.co.nz/story/sir-brian-roche-says-digital-delivery-system-needs-reset

Catalyst challenges the incoming government to show true leadership across three priority pillars:

1. **Open source and open standards first**
   Open, interoperable solutions as the default, not the exception.

2. **Sovereign data policy**
   New Zealand's data, held and governed in New Zealand.

3. **Value-first procurement settings**
   Public spending that grows the New Zealand economy, not Big Tech's bottom line.

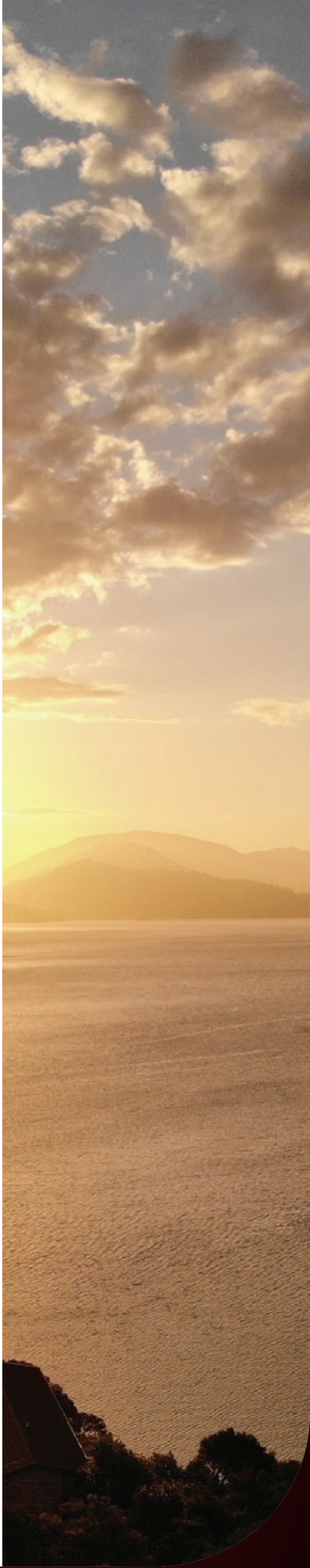
We are not the first.

But we have every reason, and every capability, to lead from here.

Estonia built its entire digital government infrastructure on open foundations in 2001. When it faced one of the largest coordinated cyberattacks in history in 2007, that infrastructure held. The UK mandates open source as the default for government procurement. The EU has a formal Open Source Strategy and a Tech Sovereignty Package. France's national cybersecurity agency concluded in early 2026 that open code is more trustworthy. Africa's leaders have signalled a move to sovereign data, local AI, and value that stays onshore. The US Department of Defense states publicly that open source being less secure is a misconception.

These are not outliers. They are nations that chose resilience over risk-aversion, innovation over inertia, and long-term national strength over short-term convenience.

New Zealand has the same opportunity. A government that chooses this direction does not just modernise public services it builds a platform for national innovation, grows a domestic technology economy, and leaves infrastructure this country controls and builds on for generations. That is not a technical outcome. It is the digital gain New Zealand expects and deserves.



Priorities at a glance

Digital self-determination isn't a technical question, it's a sovereign one. New Zealand's public sector has a real opportunity to build a more sovereign and resilient digital public sector, underpinned by open standards and open source software, hosted and managed in New Zealand.

The projected $13 billion public sector technology spend over the next five years is a powerful policy lever any incoming government holds.

Every dollar is a decision about who controls and accesses New Zealand's public services, who builds and protects them, and who benefits.

To guide this transition, we outline 10 clear actions across three pillars.

PILLAR	STATUS QUO	OPPORTUNITY
1. Open source and open standards first	Defaulting to proprietary closed systems locks the country into Big Tech dependency, and creates duplicated cost and effort.	Open, interoperable solutions as the default for all government technology procurement.
2. Sovereign data policy	Government and citizen data sits across a mix of offshore and onshore systems with no unified policy on what sits where, or which jurisdiction should govern it.	Critical government, and sensitive citizen data, hosted and managed, in New Zealand reducing exposure to geopolitical shifts.
3. Value-first procurement settings	Over-reliance on Big Tech for large public sector projects stifles competition and blocks local innovation.	Procurement settings that back local expertise, grow the New Zealand economy, and strengthen digital sovereignty.

1 Open source and open standards first

1. Open standards mandated across all public sector technology through a strengthened e-Government Interoperability Framework.
2. An Open Source Working Group with clear targets to embed open technology into government procurement as the default.
3. An interoperability engagement programme with the European Union so we continue to learn from existing, world-leading models.

2 Sovereign data policy

1. Critical government, and sensitive citizen, data is hosted and managed, under sovereign control in New Zealand.
2. A comprehensive public sector data ownership policy, centrally led and enforced by the Public Service Commission.
3. The Government Digital Strategy aligned to a robust sovereign data ownership framework.

3 Value-first procurement settings

1. Stronger procurement settings (including raising the direct award threshold and expanding the Economic Benefit Test) to improve value to taxpayer and the economy.
2. Disaggregation of large projects into smaller, modular components that domestic suppliers can compete for, building local capability instead of exporting it.
3. Investment in existing New Zealand-built open source platforms across government, demonstrating the fiscal and operational value of building once and sharing widely.
4. Procurement targets for domestic technology spend, with published results showing how much of government's technology budget is reinvested into the local economy.

1

Open source and open standards first

A resilient public sector doesn't depend on any single vendor, contract, or offshore decision.

How many public services are one vendor decision away from disruption?

New Zealand's current reliance on offshore, closed, and siloed systems is not stability. It is accumulated fragility. A single vendor can raise the price. A single contract can lock the exit. A single offshore decision can change the rules, and no Minister can overrule it.

That fragility compounds. Every dollar, every fix, every lesson poured into a closed system stays locked inside it. The systems keep moving, in the vendor's direction, not New Zealand's. When the gap grows too wide, the answer is always the same: digital transformation. This is the cycle of vendor dependency.

There is a better model. Open source means the software is not single-vendor dependent. New Zealand keeps the systems, keeps the choice, and keeps moving in our own direction. When one agency builds with open source foundations, other agencies can benefit: sharing breakthroughs and integrations, improving security, and more, rather than hoarding them in silos.

Open standards make this possible at scale. They are the prerequisite for genuine interoperability, fair market competition, and long-term public value. It is the same principle that lets a New Zealand debit card work at any ATM in the world.

New Zealand has done this before. In 2002, Cabinet made open standards the default for public service systems through the e-Government Interoperability Framework (NZ e-GIF). Then, it faded into a recommendation, and the silos grew back.

The UK and Estonia strengthened their equivalent mandates and became digital leaders to learn from.

Mandating open source and standards is not radical. It is unfinished business.

The pivot point for political leadership:

Fiscal responsibility means building national assets that serve New Zealand's interests. So, why is government paying for systems it can't adapt, can't share, and can't steer?

Catalyst is calling on the incoming government to break the cycle of vendor dependency by mandating an open source and open standards first framework, to ensure state technology is standardised, shareable, resilient, adaptable and interoperable long-term.

Actions for the incoming government

→ Open standards mandated across all public sector technology through a strengthened e-Government Interoperability Framework.

→ An Open Source Working Group with clear targets to embed open technology into government procurement as the default.

→ An interoperability engagement programme with the European Union so we continue to learn from existing, world-leading models.

2

Sovereign data policy

Digital sovereignty and national resilience go hand in hand.

Who governs, and has access to, New Zealand's most sensitive data right now?

Too often, the answer is offshore vendors, operating under foreign law, beyond any Minister's reach.

Digital sovereignty is not merely about where a server sits. It is about genuine, lasting control over the systems and data that underpin how this country functions. Resilience is what that control makes possible: the ability to adapt, withstand pressure, and keep critical services running on New Zealand's terms.

As sovereign power, the Crown has the authority and responsibility to choose. Government-held data should default to infrastructure hosted and managed in Aotearoa.

Every default to offshore Big Tech sends public money overseas, binds data and infrastructure to foreign jurisdictions, and narrows the policy choices available to future governments.

As government turns to AI to boost productivity, there is an immediate risk of the offshore dependency deepening. Not by design, but by default. Public awareness of AI is growing faster than the policy frameworks meant to govern it. This gap creates unintended consequences.

The question is not whether New Zealand adopts new technologies. It will. The question is whether it comes on New Zealand's terms, pre-configured for someone else's priorities, trained on someone else's data, and governed by someone else's law.

To honour the Crown's responsibility under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, government should proactively choose digital systems that don't create barriers to tino rangatiratanga.

Māori-led data governance frameworks already exist and are mature. A credible public sector data ownership policy should align with them, not just for Māori data, but as a principled model for all government-held data.

The pivot point for political leadership:

The government sets the parameters for risk. Why are we trading our long-term national security for short-term operational gain?

Catalyst is calling on the incoming government to mandate a sovereign data policy that protects sensitive citizen, government and national interest data, onshore.

Actions for the incoming government

→ Critical government, and sensitive citizen, data is hosted and managed, under sovereign control in New Zealand.

→ A comprehensive public sector data ownership policy, centrally led and enforced by the Public Service Commission.

→ The Government Digital Strategy aligned to a robust sovereign data ownership framework.

3

Value-first procurement settings

Public procurement is a strategic lever for national capability, not a passive transaction.

Every government contract is a choice about whose economy grows. Who are we choosing?

The Big Tech dependency is stifling market competition and systematically blocking local innovation. Government technology procurement must be treated as a powerful strategic lever for national self-determination and economic development, not a passive administrative process.

Every new contract is a choice, and choices add up.

New Zealand's $13 billion public sector technology spend over the next five years is one of the most powerful economic levers any incoming government holds.

New Zealand's domestic technology sector is world-class and ready to compete. What it needs is procurement settings that give it a genuine chance to do so.

Every dollar spent with a New Zealand-owned company stays in the local economy, taxed here, spent here, and growing skills here. It creates compounding economic benefits.

The pivot point for political leadership:

Every time we default to an offshore Big Tech out of inertia, we actively starve our world-class domestic tech sector and diminish local talent. Why are we outsourcing New Zealand's economic future to feed foreign corporate balance sheets?

Catalyst is calling on the incoming government to explicitly treat the $13 billion public technology spend as a strategic lever for national capability, resetting procurement rules to aggressively back Kiwi innovation and protect our sovereign capability.

Actions for the incoming government

→ Stronger procurement settings (including raising the direct award threshold and expanding the Economic Benefit Test) to improve value to taxpayer and the economy.

→ Disaggregation of large projects into smaller, modular components that domestic suppliers can compete for, building local capability instead of exporting it.

→ Investment in existing New Zealand-built open source platforms across government, demonstrating the fiscal and operational value of building once and sharing widely.

→ Procurement targets for domestic technology spend, with published results showing how much of government's technology budget is reinvested into the local economy.

What next?

When a nation has options, why would it not exercise them?

Aotearoa New Zealand stands at a critical digital turning point. What we build matters, but how we build it matters even more.

The rule of law and national self-determination are not lost overnight; they are eroded by stealth and by stages. More of our data hosted will be offshore, our systems governed by foreign terms of service, and our policy choices constrained by extraterritorial overreach. The job of a sovereign nation is not to ask “how high?” when offshore Big Tech says “jump”.

Over-reliance on off-shore proprietary platforms does more than just send public money overseas and heightens data security vulnerabilities. It diminishes our ultimate authority over our own public systems. Digital self-determination is not merely a technical question; it is fundamentally a sovereign one.

By treating the projected multi-billion dollar public sector technology spend over the next five years as a powerful policy lever, the Government has a real opportunity. It can build a resilient, people-centred public sector that plays by our rules and reflects our communities.

Adopting this manifesto will help to break our existing Big Tech dependency, safeguard our systems and data, and dismantle barriers so that technology serves as a tool for national self-determination rather than a mechanism for foreign control.

Every year we delay is another year of contracts that deepen the dependency deficit and weaken resilience. The decisions made in this term will determine whether New Zealand's digital infrastructure is an asset or a liability for the next generation.

Transitioning to open source software, open standards and sovereign solutions ensures that our infrastructure remains transparent, adaptable, unencumbered, and deeply aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

This doesn't require a single dramatic moment. It requires a clear direction and the discipline to consistently move toward it. We have a chance to build something the country can be proud of:

Open, sovereign, built to last.

New Zealand has everything it needs to back the future.

It’s time to build it together.

About Catalyst

Catalyst is a technology partner backing some of New Zealand's most critical infrastructure, innovative solutions, and award-winning software built on standardised, proven, and endlessly configurable open source foundations.

Founded in Wellington, New Zealand in 1997, Catalyst has grown to be a global success with offices in Aotearoa, Europe, Australia and Canada, and is proudly recognised as leaders in open source software.

We are dedicated to te Tiriti and sustainable business practices for our place, people and clients.

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