Victorian Electoral Commission

Electoral Integrity Framework

November 2026

Victorian Electoral Commission

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Electoral integrity and why it matters

Electoral integrity is a key foundation of a strong democracy.

A strong democracy needs the public to trust the processes and systems through which its leaders are elected. Without trust in election results, instability can ensue, social cohesion is weakened and the accountability of government to the electorate is limited.

Electoral integrity aims to achieve trusted and legitimate electoral outcomes. While there is no universally accepted definition for the complex concept of electoral integrity, suggestions have ranged from the *absence* of fraud, malpractice or misconduct in elections to the *presence* of positive attributes in electoral administration, such as impartiality, accuracy and transparency.[1]

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) contributes to electoral integrity as the administrator of Victoria's electoral system, delivering impartial, transparent and legitimate electoral outcomes.

The diversity of perspectives on electoral integrity highlights that electoral management bodies are not solely responsible for its delivery. A complex network of democratic participants contributes to trusted and legitimate electoral outcomes, including political parties, candidates and the media.

Ultimately, electoral integrity is a shared responsibility, with all electoral participants playing a role in achieving trusted and legitimate electoral outcomes.

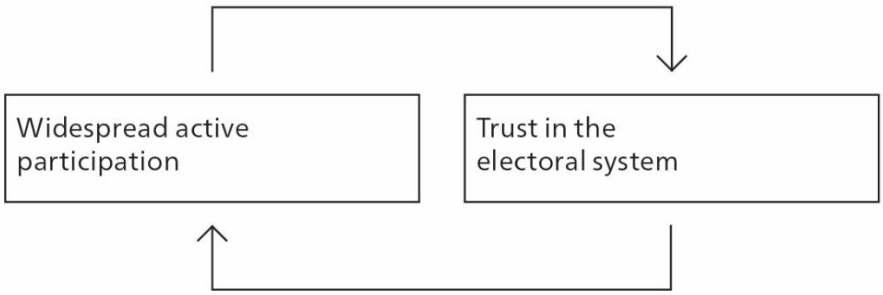
1 P Norris (2018) 'Electoral Integrity', in J Fisher, E Fieldhouse, M Franklin, et al. (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion*. Abingdon, Routledge, Kofi Annan Foundation; Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security (2012), 'Deepening Democracy: A Strategy for Improving the Integrity of Elections Worldwide', *The Report of the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security*, Kofi Annan Foundation.

2 About this framework

2.1 Vision

This framework outlines how we manage and monitor our contribution to electoral integrity as part of our vision of all Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

At the VEC, we believe the acceptance and legitimacy of electoral outcomes are enhanced when there is widespread and active participation across the electoral system. This participation is itself enhanced when there is trust and confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral system.



As such, the VEC Electoral Integrity Framework comprises two key elements: our role in electoral integrity is defined by both *what* we deliver (services to facilitate active participation) and *how* we deliver it (building trust).

Electoral participation is more than voting at elections. It includes:

- enrolling and maintaining enrolment
- nominating as a candidate
- forming a political party
- giving or receiving political donations
- being a scrutineer
- making a submission on electoral boundaries
- disputing an election result.

2.2 Goals

Active participation in democracy is achieved when people:

- can participate
- will participate
- do participate.

Participation in democracy requires opportunity, intention and support.

As the administrator and regulator of the *Electoral Act 2002* (Vic) (Electoral Act) and other Victorian electoral law, we play an essential role in enabling these 3 aspects of participation.

2.3 Core objectives

We have identified 6 core objectives that underpin active democratic participation and are the focus of our electoral integrity contribution. These are:

1. promoting enrolment
2. reducing barriers to participation
3. motivating participation and promoting respect for electoral law
4. fostering public trust in VEC services and electoral systems
5. developing knowledge of how, when and where to participate
6. delivering systems, tools and processes that enable free and fair participation.

There are numerous activities that we deliver to support each core objective. These are explained in 3 Delivering electoral integrity.

2.4 Integrity principles

We are equally guided by integrity principles in our conduct. These principles orient us towards better outcomes across all our functions and duties by establishing standards and practices for integrity in how we perform our work. Demonstrating these principles builds trust in the VEC and greater transparency of how the electoral system is delivered. The integrity principles and standards are described in 4 Demonstrating electoral integrity.

5 Monitoring electoral integrity explains the activities we undertake to measure our success in achieving electoral integrity outcomes, both through the delivery of core integrity objectives and the demonstration of integrity principles.

6 Electoral integrity beyond the VEC highlights how other democratic participants contribute to electoral integrity and can affect Victorians' active participation in democracy as a shared responsibility.

2.5 Figure 1: VEC Electoral Integrity Framework

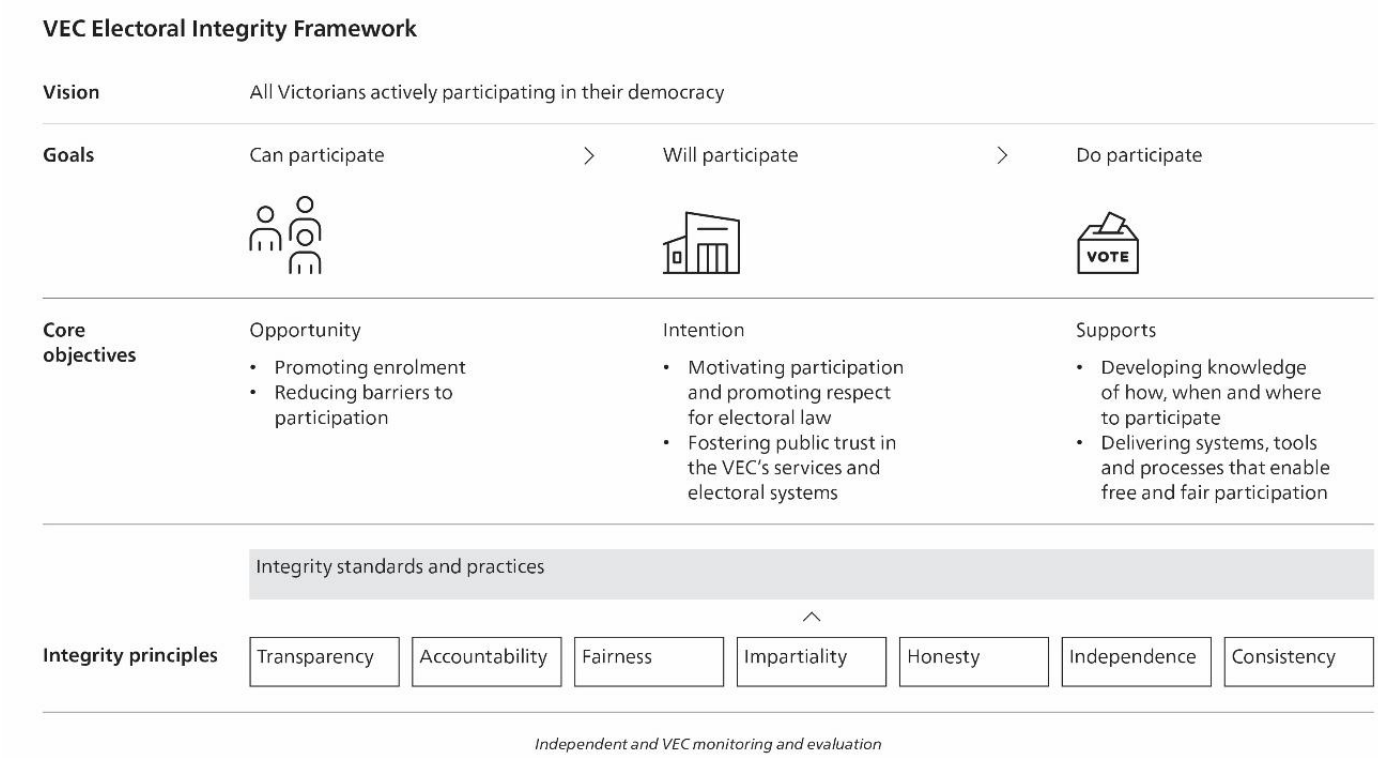


***Figure 1**: A diagram of the VEC Electoral Integrity Framework, which shows how we deliver electoral integrity through the 3 elements of active participation and their core objectives, and how we demonstrate electoral integrity through integrity standards, practices and principles. The framework is supported by monitoring and evaluation.*

3 Delivering electoral integrity

We deliver electoral integrity through a range of activities designed to facilitate and maximise free and fair participation. The Electoral Act enshrines the critical functions that these activities support.

3.1 Promoting enrolment

We strive to make enrolment as simple as possible for Victorians. These practices maximise inclusion on the electoral roll, which ultimately advances our aim of universal participation in representative democracy. As we believe that 'every vote counts', we equally believe that 'every enrolment counts'.

3.1.1 Facilitating enrolment

The *Constitution Act 1975* (Vic) outlines who is eligible to enrol to vote in Victorian elections. We aim to ensure that every eligible person is accurately recorded on the register of electors so they can easily participate in elections.

We partner with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to share enrolment information and streamline enrolment for Victorians. We also manage an online portal, making it convenient for people to check and update their details.

Those who are entitled to vote but are not on the electoral roll may still be able to participate in an election by casting a provisional vote, which includes an enrolment application.

3.1.2 Maintaining accurate enrolment information

We employ a range of initiatives to maintain the integrity of the electoral roll. These are designed to ensure information on the roll is as accurate as possible, including:

- updating names and addresses
- adding new voters
- removing people no longer eligible to vote in Victoria.

Having accurate enrolment data is fundamental to the delivery of many other electoral activities. Enrolment data informs:

- electoral boundary reviews
- planning the locations of voting centres based on population and voter demographics
- who is eligible to become a general postal voter
- many other matters.

In partnership with the AEC, we minimise divergence between the federal electoral roll and the Victorian register of electors and ensure errors are corrected.

3.2 Reducing barriers to participation

We are passionate about increasing electoral system accessibility for all Victorians. We use various approaches to reduce barriers to participation and equip voters with a range of accessible formats and tools to participate in democracy.

3.2.1 Advisory committees

We are guided by 5 advisory groups that represent priority communities, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people experiencing homelessness or in prison
- people with disabilities
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- young people aged 18 to 29.

These advisory groups support our accountability to underrepresented communities and ensure our decisions and processes are held to a satisfactory standard.

3.2.2 Education programs

We run education programs with priority communities to increase awareness about democracy and educate community members on key election themes, such as:

- why voting matters
- how to enrol
- what to do if you didn't vote.

The programs provide information in a range of languages and formats and include both in-person and online education delivered in a peer-to-peer model. This includes recruiting and training community members as paid 'democracy ambassadors' to deliver education sessions and develop relevant and accessible resources in consultation with stakeholders. For example, Easy Read guides, in-language videos, and train-the-trainer materials.

Education sessions are delivered in the community, including in prisons and aged care facilities.

VEC education programs are informed by extensive research into voter turnout, informality rates and demographic changes so that we can focus on communities with lower participation rates.

3.2.3 Multiple voting channels

We provide multiple voting channels to ensure everyone on the roll can vote in a way that suits their needs. This includes providing:

- early voting
- postal voting
- assisted voting at voting centres
- mobile voting, including low-sensory voting centres
- telephone-assisted voting.

Primarily for interstate and overseas voters, we also provide online postal vote applications, downloadable ballot papers, and return envelopes to minimise ballot paper delivery times.

We have designed these voting options to meet the needs of different communities while ensuring that voting remains secure, secret and reliable.

3.3 Motivating participation and promoting respect for electoral law

As the electoral management body for Victoria, the VEC is uniquely positioned to motivate participation in Victorian democracy. We are committed to supporting Victorians to understand the value of democratic participation and respect electoral law.

3.3.1 Public engagement

We engage with a variety of electoral participants to encourage engagement and foster interest in Victoria's democracy. We maintain active communication and engagement with stakeholders through:

- media engagement
- newsletter distribution
- social media
- our website.

Our communication activities are designed to raise awareness of Victoria's democracy and instil public trust in the electoral system to promote participation. Importantly, this provides all electoral participants with equal access to information, protecting fairness and impartiality.

3.3.2 Legislative reform

We believe that intention to participate is also facilitated by a fit-for-purpose electoral system. We conduct a continuous evaluation program to monitor public expectations and experiences of the electoral system and consider ways to improve our services. We continuously seek opportunities to make our services contemporary and accessible, and implement new ways of delivering services at each election.

As part of this evaluation program, we make evidence-informed recommendations to the Victorian Parliament for legislative reform. Recommendations for legislative reform are backed by:

- detailed analysis of electoral statistics
- comparative jurisdictional research
- feedback from key stakeholders such as voters, candidates and political parties.

The recommendations we advocate for consider

- our aim of promoting an electoral system that is aligned with public expectations
- where we may currently be limited in our ability to meet contemporary voter expectations.

3.3.3 Enforcing the Electoral Act

Perceptions of corruption or malpractice can lead to lower electoral participation as voters display apathy, distrust or cynicism.[2] Regulation of the Electoral Act increases public trust in the electoral system and can motivate people to participate in democracy.

The VEC is responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Electoral Act. We apply a constructive compliance approach to regulation, which includes providing education and guidance to help electoral participants meet their legal obligations.

Offences in the Electoral Act are designed to reinforce a free, open and fair electoral environment and protect the electoral process from:

- deception
- tampering
- interference
- improper influence.

By regulating conduct and enforcing compliance, we safeguard election outcomes and reinforce the importance of electoral integrity.

Our online complaints portal makes it easy for members of the public to report apparent non-compliance. We also use a range of measures to detect non-compliance, including thorough processes, analysis and audits. This proactive and responsive approach provides greater protection of Victoria's democracy.

As part of our regulatory functions, we administer Victoria's political funding and disclosure scheme through a public donation disclosure system, VEC Disclosures. This system provides transparency about political donations made to or by Victorian political entities. This information provides voters with insights into the nature and extent of support given to political entities and provides further resources to engage with and understand Victoria's democracy.

We publish our regulatory approach to provide clarity to electoral participants about how we perform our regulatory functions. The approach transparently outlines our constructive compliance responses and includes resources to understand and comply with regulatory obligations. Where a person or organisation fails to comply with their obligations, action is taken proportionate to our assessment of the level of harm, in line with a risk-based regulatory style.

3.4 Fostering trust in VEC services and electoral systems

Trust in VEC services and systems is critical to achieving high levels of democratic participation and resilient electoral outcomes. We foster trust through a range of practices that strengthen our transparency and impartiality as well as enable independent scrutiny of our operations.

[2] S. Dhalberg and M.Solevid (2016). 'Does corruption suppress voter turnout?', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*: Vol 26, No 4, pp: 489–510.

3.4.1 Reporting on our performance

As an independent public body, there may be a risk that the VEC is perceived as lacking sufficient accountability in how we perform our duties. For this reason, we prioritise transparency as an important way to build public trust in Victoria's electoral administration.

Prior to delivering major election events and state by-elections, we publish a service plan explaining how the event will be delivered. The aim of the publication is to build understanding of the electoral process and set expectations for the event. The service plan also provides a mechanism through which electoral participants can assess our performance and maintain an understanding of, and confidence in, delivery of open and fair elections.

Following a major election event, we publish an election report detailing the work and outcomes achieved. The report allows public scrutiny of how we administered the election and provides transparency on results. This allows electoral participants equal access to information about our performance.

Election reports are tabled in parliament, allowing oversight of our performance.

For state elections, we also publish independent evaluation reports, which provide perspectives of our service delivery from different electoral participant cohorts including voters, candidates and parties.

We also report to the Parliament of Victoria's Electoral Matters Committee (EMC) on a range of electoral matters. The EMC and VEC share an interest in improving the experience of Victorians through the electoral system. The EMC provides scrutiny of our performance and makes recommendations to improve how electoral functions are delivered, including opportunities to improve the governing legislation. The inquiries conducted by the EMC are an important mechanism to identify issues affecting the electoral system and for the EMC to make recommendations for appropriate remediation.

Lastly, our 4-year strategic plan provides transparency of our culture, values and priorities and outlines how and what we will focus on and achieve each year.

3.4.2 Staff disclosure of political activities

VEC employees, appointees and contractors are required to complete a satisfactory disclosure of their political activities prior to their engagement.

The VEC can legally refuse to employ a person on the basis of political activity. This includes where their political activity could compromise our actual or perceived independence and/or impartiality.

Disclosures of political activities enable us to ensure that all staff are – and are seen to be – politically neutral and impartial in the conduct of their duties. Impartiality is also an ongoing obligation of all Victorian public sector staff as outlined in the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic). VEC employees and contractors are bound by the Code of Conduct for Victorian public sector employees of special bodies.

While we don't publish individual disclosures for privacy reasons, the guidelines for assessing disclosures of political activities are available on our website.

3.4.3 Misinformation register

We maintain a misinformation register on our website to counter false or inaccurate information about elections and provide reliable information to the public.

The misinformation register supports the public to develop skills to critically assess information about elections. While we do not regulate truth in political advertising, the misinformation register can assist and remind voters to sort fact from fiction.

The operation of the misinformation register reduces the impact of false or inaccurate information and positions the VEC as a reliable, independent umpire of the Victorian electoral environment within its regulatory bounds.

3.4.4 Quality assurance practices

We use checklists and other quality assurance practices to ensure decisions meet legislative requirements as well as support the objective and consistent treatment of electoral participants.

Checklists are made available to electoral participants to provide transparency of our services and expectations. For example, the candidate nomination checklist assesses whether a nomination complies with legislative requirements and supports fairness and impartiality by ensuring all nominations are subject to the same standards.

Other quality assurance activities include:

- audits
- user testing
- risk assessments
- reporting.

These activities contribute to consistent, transparent, fair and accountable administration.

We are also audited by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) and report to an Audit and Risk Committee comprising independent members. Audits ensure we are:

- upholding the law
- achieving our objectives effectively and efficiently
- exercising governance and risk management practices in line with public sector standards.

3.4.5 Scrutineer observation

The role of scrutineers in observing voting and counting processes is an important transparency feature of elections that contributes to public confidence in the outcome of elections. Details of the role of scrutineers are outlined at 6.3 Scrutineers. We actively support the involvement of scrutineers in fostering trust in the accuracy and fairness of election results.

3.5 Guidance on how, when and where to participate

We present information in a wide range of formats so electoral participants can access the information they need to participate when and how they would like to.

3.5.1 Online resources

We publish handbooks, guides, videos and other resources to help electoral participants understand how we administer and regulate the electoral landscape and facilitate engagement with democracy. These resources cover a range of topics, including:

- how voting works
- enrolling to vote
- being a candidate in an election
- the role and responsibilities of a scrutineer
- disclosure of political donations.

Our handbooks and guides also help those who have obligations under electoral law by:

- explaining key legislative requirements
- describing processes
- providing forms and templates.

We also remind electoral participants when key obligations are due through direct, tailored communication.

Educational resources can be downloaded from our website and relevant printed handbooks are available at election offices during election events. Communications are in plain language and translated into high-priority languages to make them accessible for more Victorians. Where possible, we also produce Easy Read versions of key information.

3.5.2 Information sessions

In addition to the outreach sessions described in 3.3.2 Education programs, we also run information sessions for candidates and political parties to help them understand how to participate in elections. These sessions cover key topics such as:

- how to nominate
- how to appoint scrutineers
- electoral obligations.

3.5.3 Information alerts

During elections, we conduct extensive communication campaigns to raise awareness of the election and how to take part, including via the VoterAlert SMS and email reminder service. Other key channels include:

- newspapers
- television and radio
- digital media
- outdoor advertising.

We aim to raise awareness of, and engagement with, key dates – such as the close of roll and nominations, and the voting period.

3.5.4 Determinations

We publish determinations that outline how we administer specific aspects of electoral legislation. Determinations provide transparency about how the VEC will perform its functions, exercise its responsibilities and apply its powers under the Electoral Act.

Publishing determinations is in line with our regulatory approach, referred to above at 3.3.3 Enforcing the Electoral Act. Determinations help electoral participants understand their legal obligations and promote fairness by providing relevant compliance information to all electoral participants equally. This supports constructive compliance by providing electoral participants with resources to understand their obligations.

3.6 Participation systems, tools and processes

We have a strong focus on developing user-centric, innovative and effective systems and tools so that participation is accessible, straightforward and counts.

3.6.1 Systems

We provide several online tools to make it easy for the public to participate in the electoral landscape, including an interactive 'election venue locator' with accessibility information and electorate maps. When electoral boundaries are reviewed, we provide a platform for members of the public to view electoral boundaries and make a submission (including proposing amendments to boundaries) for consideration.

We also manage a public-facing online disclosure system, VEC Disclosures, which allows recipients of political donations in Victoria and their donors to disclose political donations. VEC Disclosures is designed to help recipients and donors meet their requirements under the Electoral Act and is also used by recipients to submit required annual returns. VEC Disclosures provides transparency in the funding of political entities in Victoria.

Our systems are subject to rigorous testing and monitoring to ensure they are secure and free from interference. The VEC is subject to the highest levels of security including the Australian Signals Directorate's Essential Eight security controls.

3.6.2 Processes

Election procedures are documented, quality-assured and designed to support easy and consistent participation. Simple design features make it easier for elections to operate smoothly and reliably, and for all eligible ballot papers to be included in counts.

For example, VEC-designed colour-coded ballot papers make it easy for election staff to quickly sort thousands of ballot papers across various districts, reducing the time it takes to conduct a count. We also standardise ballot paper formality principles, so decisions for admitting ballot papers to the count are consistent.

Instructional products provide clarity for election staff and greater consistency across an election event, which supports equal participation.

3.6.3 Feedback

Electoral participants can contribute to improving the electoral system through our feedback and complaints submission forms. We review feedback and complaints to identify areas for improvement. This data can lead to changes in our policies and procedures, and supports recommendations made to Parliament for legislative change. We analyse data extensively to identify trends and changes in public priorities, interests and concerns.

3.6.4 Live results release

During election events, we release results on our website in a timely and accurate manner. The online results system is an important accountability and transparency mechanism, providing the public with a reliable source of truth and quick access to election results.

Being able to access and engage with the results of elections is a critical part of electoral participation. Seeing live, accurate results reinforces the value and importance of democratic participation.

4 Demonstrating electoral integrity

Aside from delivering key activities designed to facilitate widespread and active participation, we contribute to electoral integrity through our conduct. The way we perform our duties and functions, and how we exercise statutory powers, affects perceptions of our integrity.

4.1 Electoral integrity principles

Our guiding electoral integrity principles are:

1. **Transparency** – being open to scrutiny and making it easy for others to observe our work.
2. **Accountability** – being responsible for the work we are expected to do and the outcomes we produce.
3. **Fairness** – treating others equitably, in an objective manner, without the influence of arbitrary considerations.
4. **Impartiality** – being politically neutral and non-discriminatory in our decisions and conduct.
5. **Honesty** – being truthful, including when we make mistakes.
6. **Independence** – our decisions and views are free from external interference.
7. **Consistency** – our services and conduct are reliable and cohesive.

Electoral integrity principles underpin our management of electoral integrity. When applied to the components of the VEC – systems, processes, decisions, legislative framework, culture and people – they establish integrity standards.

The electoral integrity matrix below at Figure 2 illustrates how we aim to apply integrity principles to the components of the VEC to create standards of electoral integrity.

4.2 Electoral integrity standards

We use integrity standards to guide our approach to electoral integrity and provide a vision for success.

The standards apply to all staff at the VEC, although some staff may contribute to a particular standard more than others due to the nature of their role and responsibilities.

With the release of this framework, staff will be trained in understanding and applying the integrity principles and standards to support the delivery of their duties and functions and to exercise their powers with integrity.

The standards are also a useful reference point to measure our electoral integrity maturity, by assessing how well we are meeting each standard.

4.3 Figure 2: Electoral integrity matrix – principles and standards

	Transparency	Accountability	Fairness	Impartiality	Honesty	Independence	Consistency
Systems	Our systems enable stakeholder communication and scrutiny of our work	Our systems enable us and other stakeholders to meet their legislative obligations	Our systems do not discriminate and allow equal access to information and services	Our systems reduce or remove potential bias and do not privilege any electoral participants above others	Our systems are reviewed and monitored to ensure they are fit for purpose	Our systems are free from interference and address our specific duties	Our systems are compatible and enable us to deliver our work cohesively and without vulnerability to error
Processes	Our processes are documented and open to scrutiny	Our processes are designed to uphold legislative responsibilities and protect the public interest	Our processes uphold the rights of people and employ the principles of natural justice and due process	Our processes are equally accessible, replicable and consistently adopted	Our processes are reviewed for continuous improvement	Our processes are independent from other bodies and protect the independence and accuracy of elections	Our processes are robust and are designed and employed in consideration of the complete electoral ecosystem
Decisions	Our decisions are recorded, appropriately published, and open to scrutiny	Our decisions reflect the public interest, and we consult and include relevant stakeholders	Our decisions consider the interests of affected stakeholders	Our decisions are consistent, objective, and do not favour certain stakeholders above others	Our decisions are made transparently and in accordance with our decision-making process	Our decisions are made independently and free from external interference or influence	Our decisions are evidence-based and justifiable
Legislative framework	Our legislative responsibilities and our performance against them are known to all stakeholders	We are accountable to all legislation equally and hold people accountable for compliance with legislation we regulate	Our stakeholders are equally given the opportunity and support to comply with electoral legislation	We do not favour stakeholders in regulating or administering legislation	We advocate for change to the legislation where we believe it can be improved and we collect data to inform legislative improvements	We monitor our own legislative compliance and ensure we are fulfilling our specific legislative duties	We apply legislation consistently and thoroughly
Culture	Our culture is articulated and demonstrated through our actions	Our culture reflects our values, which helps us support democracy	Our culture is to consider and respect everyone – all experiences matter equally	Our culture does not tolerate political bias and we have ongoing obligations to disclose conflicts of interest	Our culture is reported, reflected on, and measured. We encourage a culture of disclosure	Our culture is inclusive, designed by us, and represents the VEC's role in Victorian society	Our culture is ingrained organisation-wide and is strong enough to withstand challenging situations
People	Our people share information equally and openly	Our people act in accordance with their delegated or prescribed powers, duties and functions under all relevant law	Our people are treated fairly and show fairness towards others in their work	Our people do not act in a manner that would favour political participants or certain political outcomes	Our people disclose conflicts of interest, raise concerns, and do not conceal mistakes or errors	Our people act in accordance with the VEC as an independent body and protect elections from interference	Our people communicate and collaborate with each other and share common goals

5 Monitoring electoral integrity

We monitor our electoral integrity performance by evaluating:

- whether we are meeting core integrity objectives
- how well we are meeting the integrity standards.

5.1 Evaluating electoral events and services

We conduct internal evaluations and commission independent evaluations of our electoral services delivery – including at the end of major elections. These evaluations include measures to:

- monitor perceptions of electoral integrity
- gain insights into emerging trends in the electoral landscape
- assess changing stakeholder interests.

We have an ongoing research panel that provides a representative and random sample of the public based on age, gender and location.

Key statistics are indicators of the state of electoral integrity in Victoria and include:

- enrolment rates
- voter turnout
- public confidence in the VEC to deliver high-quality elections with integrity
- public perceptions of the VEC's transparency, independence and impartiality
- numbers of candidates in an election
- rates of access to electoral communications
- rates of use of diverse voting options
- numbers of complaints or investigations
- informality rates.

The evaluations focus on assessing key statistics and reflecting how well we have achieved our core integrity objectives during each relevant election. These metrics can be influenced by factors outside our control, such as how many people choose to nominate as a candidate in an election.

Importantly, evaluation activities track changes over time, helping to identify areas of improvement and emerging priorities. We combine feedback from stakeholders with election statistics to produce a comprehensive and evidence-informed understanding of our performance, and gain insight into other factors that may contribute to electoral outcomes.

The diagram in Figure 3 below has examples of data points that inform assessment of our performance against the core integrity objectives.

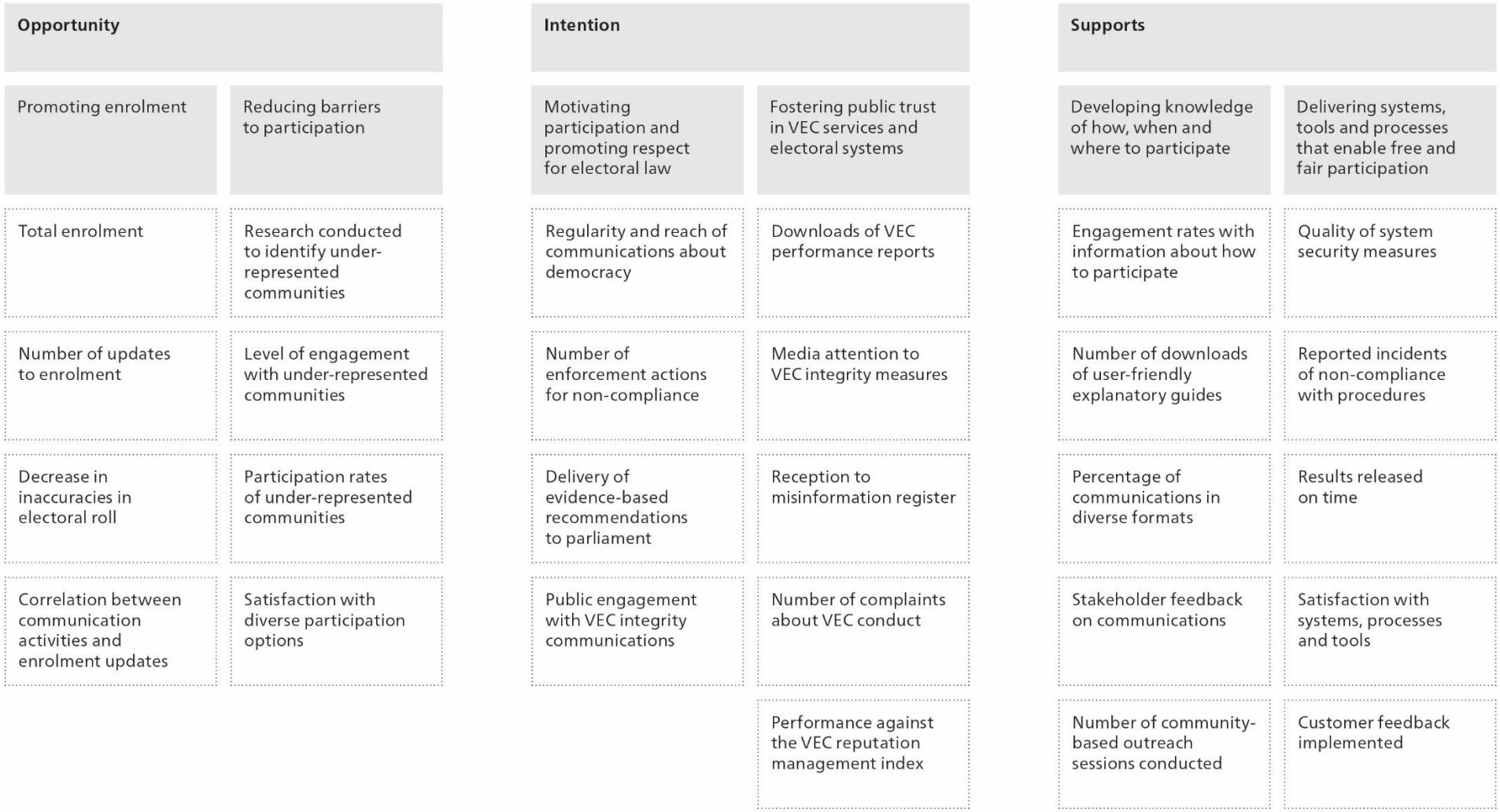


***Figure 3**: A diagram showing the data metrics that indicate whether the VEC is meeting each core integrity objective.*

The evaluation program informs our strategic priorities, so we can continue to strive to achieve our core integrity objectives in a dynamic electoral landscape.

5.2 Internal integrity pulse checks

During the planning and delivery of major electoral programs, we conduct integrity 'pulse checks' with staff to assess how well they understand and demonstrate the integrity standards. This activity identifies our integrity strengths and areas for improvement. It also provides an opportunity for staff to raise integrity queries, highlight risks and influence integrity management priorities. The pulse checks also reveal our performance against integrity standards over time.

We emphasise an integrity-focused culture and continuous improvement, and develop tools, training and resources to help staff implement strong integrity practices.

5.3 Legal challenges

Electoral law entitles candidates, voters and the VEC to dispute the validity of an election by petitioning the Court of Disputed Returns for state elections, or by applying to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for local council elections. Some VEC decisions can also be reviewed by VCAT, such as registering or deregistering a political party, and registering how-to-vote-cards for an election.

Oversight by courts and tribunals is an important safeguard of electoral integrity, providing an independent assessment of electoral outcomes.

The power to challenge the validity of an election – or, for local council elections, to seek a review of the declaration of the result of the election – supports Victorians to participate in their democracy.

Challenges to electoral outcomes can help us understand public expectations of electoral administration and assess perceptions of electoral integrity across groups of participants. They also allow judicial interpretation of electoral law, which ultimately helps us apply and manage electoral integrity.

We recognise our legislated ability to challenge the validity of an election is a key duty, to be performed when we have reason to suspect a miscarriage of the electoral process. This could occur through VEC actions, another's actions, or extenuating circumstances. Honesty, accountability and impartiality guide us where we make an application or petition.

5.4 Reputation index

We report annually on our reputation index. The administration of reputation index surveys and analysis of survey results support our ongoing efforts to monitor and track our reputation among voters. Surveys measure voters' perceptions of our:

- impartiality
- independence
- fairness
- trustworthiness

- community engagement and education
- electoral and election services.

Voter feedback on our reputation – and movement of the reputation index – informs our electoral integrity priorities and activities.

6 Electoral integrity beyond the VEC

Electoral integrity is a shared responsibility requiring input from all participants in democracy.

Political parties, candidates, political donors, scrutineers, election academics, journalists and members of the public all influence the vision of all Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

6.1 Candidates and political parties

Candidates and political parties can impact electoral integrity through their conduct and communication. This impact can be positive, for example, raising awareness of the election and encouraging voting, or negative.

Examples of behaviours that may negatively impact electoral integrity or perceptions of electoral integrity include:

- spreading mis- or disinformation
- using unethical tactics to canvass for votes
- misreporting political donations or misusing public money for electoral purposes
- electoral fraud
- bribery, intimidation or violence
- dissuading voters from participating in democracy
- obstructing or interfering with electoral operations
- misusing voter information.

The Electoral Act establishes offences to discourage political participants from engaging in such behaviour. The VEC, Local Government Inspectorate, Victoria Police and the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) may enforce compliance with electoral law including, where appropriate, pursuing prosecution.

Candidates and political parties are expected to demonstrate ethical behaviour throughout their democratic participation to support free and fair elections. They are also expected to educate themselves about electoral processes to support effective election administration.

The implied freedom of political communication is a fundamental element of the system of representative and responsible government, but must be balanced with, and not override, other participants' freedoms. We provide resources to help candidates and political parties understand their obligations and expect them to engage with this material.

More information on how we enforce compliance with the Electoral Act is provided above under 3.3.3 Enforcing the Electoral Act.

6.2 Media

The media plays an important role in bringing public attention to elections and other electoral matters.

The media is responsible for presenting fair, balanced and objective information about elections, including the conduct of candidates, political parties and the VEC. The media

can enhance electoral integrity by facilitating political debate and highlighting the policy positions of candidates to help people cast an informed vote. Media can also play a role in exposing behaviour that may negatively impact the integrity of an election. In this way, media can widely support the transparency and accountability of the electoral system.

At the same time, media can negatively impact electoral integrity through inaccurate or biased reporting.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) regulates communications and media services in Australia. ACMA encourages media services to:

- respond to the need for fair and accurate coverage of matters of public interest
- develop codes that respect community standards.

While there is no national code of conduct for the media, media services are encouraged to develop their own code of conduct. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance maintains the industry's most widely recognised Journalist Code of Ethics.

6.3 Scrutineers

Scrutineers are vital to the transparency and integrity of elections. They observe and actively scrutinise key election operations as they occur. Scrutineers are appointed by candidates to represent their interests in the conduct of election procedures, including counting ballot papers.

Scrutineers have a positive impact on electoral integrity by helping to ensure counting is consistent, fair and accurate.

However, scrutineers can also have negative impacts on electoral integrity, including if they do not fully understand the processes they are appointed to observe. We provide scrutineers with educational resources to help build their understanding of electoral processes.

6.4 Interference

The Electoral Act addresses the risk of external interference with electoral functions or processes by requiring the VEC (through express and implied duties) to ensure the integrity of voting. This includes securing ballot material, venues and systems.

The Electoral Act also anticipates that a person, body corporate or registered political party may attempt to interfere with electoral duties and functions, and makes such conduct a criminal offence. Examples of interference include:

- bribery
- using violence or intimidation to influence a person's vote at an election
- interfering with a person's political liberty
- tampering with ballot material
- forging electoral papers
- breaching the secrecy of the vote, except as permitted
- canvassing for votes (in person or using materials) in a way prohibited by the Electoral Act
- impersonating a voter or election official.

The Electoral Act also criminalises the provision of false information about casting a vote or carrying out of schemes to circumvent funding or disclosure obligations.

6.4.1 Foreign interference

Victorian elections are at risk of being targeted by foreign interference attempts, which is why the VEC partners with the National Counter Foreign Interference Coordination Centre (NCFICC). NCFICC works with democratic institutions to help them develop appropriate structures and safeguards to counter foreign interference, including through its support of the Electoral Integrity and Assurance Taskforce (EIAT).

6.5 Strategic partnerships

We maintain strategic partnerships with other organisations and public bodies to enable our service delivery to be efficient and effective, and to meet contemporary needs.

We have strong relationships with other electoral commissions in our region to share information and resources, and support strong standards of electoral administration.

We also contribute to and monitor research relating to electoral regulation through the Electoral Regulation Research Network, which fosters exchanges and discussions among academics, electoral commissions and other interested groups.

From a logistical standpoint, our strong partnerships with other organisations such as printing companies, distribution companies and postal services, enable millions of ballot papers and other election resources to be distributed across the state on time.

We have developed partnerships with other regulatory agencies such as Victoria Police and IBAC to detect, prevent and respond to interference with Victoria's electoral system. We partner with Commonwealth agencies and bodies through the EIAT on matters that may compromise the real or perceived integrity of Victorian elections. We also partner with online platforms to counter harmful electoral mis- and disinformation.

7 Conclusion

We are committed to delivering trusted and legitimate electoral outcomes to support a healthy, strong democracy in Victoria.

The Electoral Integrity Framework aims to reinforce trust in the VEC by supporting Victorians to understand the range of measures we have adopted across our electoral duties and functions to strengthen electoral integrity.

It explains our approach to defining, managing and monitoring electoral integrity across all aspects of our work, guided by our vision of all Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

This framework is centred on the belief that widespread active participation in democracy is both a driver and an indicator of trusted and legitimate electoral outcomes.

We take pride in the role we play in upholding electoral integrity, particularly in facilitating active participation in the electoral system and demonstrating integrity in our conduct.

To highlight shared responsibility for electoral integrity, the Electoral Integrity Framework also outlines how other democratic participants contribute to electoral integrity and ultimately impact active participation in democracy.

At the VEC, every vote counts. Electoral integrity is about ensuring this is true not just during a count, but at every stage of interaction that leads to a vote being cast and counted. Behind every vote, there is an ecosystem of democratic participants who all contribute to Victorians having the opportunity, intention and support to participate in the electoral system.

8 Glossary

Term	Definition
Disinformation	Inaccurate information intended to mislead or deceive.
Election event	One or more elections, or a referendum, occurring on a particular date. This includes for multiple wards in a local council election, and a state election or by-election.
Electoral boundary review	Periodic reviews of the boundaries of electoral districts, regions or councils to ensure population numbers are even between districts, regions or council wards.
General postal voter	A person who is automatically mailed a ballot pack for all elections in their area due to illness, age, living in a remote location or being a registered overseas elector.
Misinformation	False or inaccurate information spread without intent to mislead or deceive.
Electoral integrity standard	An expected behaviour, conduct or practice to promote strong integrity in the electoral system.
VEC	The Victorian Electoral Commission, an independent statutory body responsible for the conduct of state parliamentary and local council elections and other elections as required.


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