

VEC Customer Feedback Policy

Information Management, Corporate Services

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Introduction

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is an independent and impartial statutory authority established under Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002* (Electoral Act).

We conduct Victorian State Parliamentary elections, local council elections, certain statutory elections and polls, and commercial and community elections. We also conduct boundary reviews, maintain the Victorian electoral enrolment register, conduct electoral research, provide education services, and work to engage all Victorians entitled to vote in the democratic process.

We welcome customer feedback as it gives us an opportunity to improve our services. We consider general feedback, complaints and compliments to be our main types of customer feedback.

Our [Customer Service Charter](#) explains what we do and the standard of service you can expect from us. Where you believe we do not meet this level of service, we appreciate the time you take to inform us. We are committed to treating complaints seriously and responding to them promptly. We also welcome suggestions for things we could be doing better and compliments that let us know what we are doing well.

This policy covers:

- definitions related to customer feedback
- your rights and responsibilities as a customer
- our rights and responsibilities in the customer feedback process
- how we accept customer feedback
- how we assess customer feedback
- how we manage our responses to different types of customer feedback
- how to seek a reassessment or referred assessment of our response.

Definitions

This policy contains the following terms.

Word/term	Definition
Customer	A person or organisation that accesses VEC products or services.
Feedback	Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a suggestion of something we can improveor• a compliment, outlining something we are doing well or should continue doing.
Complaint	When a customer: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• expresses dissatisfaction with a process, performance, policy or service related to an interaction with usor• alleges a breach of the Electoral Act, the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> or other statutory act, by-law or protocol by a candidate, party, organisation or individual.

Rights and responsibilities in the customer feedback process

Customers

You have the right to:

- make a complaint or give feedback
- be treated with courtesy and respect by our staff
- have your complaint or feedback managed in line with this policy
- seek a reassessment of our response if you are not satisfied with it or the process undertaken
- withdraw a complaint at any time.

You have a responsibility to:

- treat our staff with courtesy and respect
- provide only true and accurate information.

You can assist us in the management of your complaint or feedback by:

- providing sufficient information to enable us to investigate the matter
- providing further information if requested.

VEC

We have the right to:

- be treated with courtesy and respect
- investigate your complaint even if you withdraw it.

We must:

- support your right to complain or give feedback
- protect your privacy, and anonymity, if requested
- manage all types of customer feedback in line with our framework and policy
- provide you with a timely response
- provide you with an avenue for reassessment of our response
- cooperate with any request for information by another relevant organisation as a result of a referred assessment of our reassessment.

How we accept complaints and feedback

Our policy is that feedback and complaints must be given in writing, except under special circumstances (see below). You may submit feedback or complaints:

Online

www.vec.vic.gov.au

By email

complaints@vec.vic.gov.au

By post

Complaints
Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Special circumstances

Adjustments to our submission process may be made if you:

- have an impairment preventing you from being able to submit a complaint or feedback in writing
- have limited or no literacy in English.

If required, our staff can help you make a written or verbal complaint or give written or verbal feedback.

You can also contact us through:

- the [National Relay Service](#) asking for 03 8620 1100
- an interpreter.

What you need to submit with your complaint or feedback

We require the following information so we can understand your feedback or investigate your complaint:

Customer name

Your full name or the name of the group/organisation making the submission.

Contact details

Your contact details such as email address, postal address or telephone number. You must provide an email or postal address for us to be able to respond to you.

Details of your feedback or complaint

Details of your suggestion or compliment, or a description of the issue you are concerned about including dates, times, locations and the staff you interacted with if known.

Desired outcome

An indication of the outcome or resolution you are seeking.

Any supporting documents

Supporting documents could be photographs, notices, letters or anything you think is relevant to our investigation.

Anonymous submissions

You can submit feedback or a complaint anonymously, but this may limit our ability to seek further information from you if we need it to fully resolve the issue. We will not be able to respond to you if your submission omits your contact details.

When you need to submit your complaint or feedback

You can submit feedback at any time. If you are making a complaint, you should submit it as soon as possible after the event or your interaction, especially if responsive action is required. There may be time limits for submitting some types of complaints, including:

- those related to fraud or a legal matter
- a breach of privacy
- a [public interest disclosure](#) (previously known as 'whistle-blower' complaints).

What we do and don't respond to

We acknowledge all types of feedback received from customers. Some submissions may not be within our capacity to resolve. In these cases, we will do our best to find the information for you or refer you to the agency that can help.

We can only respond to complaints that fall within our responsibilities.

This includes complaints that:

- relate to a process, policy, performance or service administered by us, including the actions and behaviours of staff
or
- allege an offence relating to the Electoral Act.

For State Parliamentary elections we respond to all complaints under the Electoral Act, aside from those escalated by another agency as part of a legal proceeding to higher authorities (to the Premier of Victoria regarding Government transparency, integrity, accountability).

Some complaints may fall outside our responsibilities.

We may refer your complaint to another agency if the complaint:

- alleges a breach of local government electoral law or offences related to provisions in the Local Government Act. We refer these to the Local Government Inspectorate
- alleges a breach of local laws. We refer these to the Chief Executive Officer of the relevant council
- alleges a criminal offence. We refer these to Victoria Police.

We will advise you if we refer your complaint externally. In some cases, it may also be appropriate for us to notify the subject of a complaint that a complaint was received, particularly where further information is needed. We will treat your information respectfully and in confidence.

How we manage different types of customer feedback

Feedback

When you submit feedback, you will receive an acknowledgement within three business days. All feedback is registered in our Feedback Register and assessed to rectify any issues we need to immediately action. These may be treated within the complaints process if we find that a response is required (see 'Complaints' below).

Where feedback suggests something we can improve on, we will investigate the current process. Where an improvement can be easily implemented, we will refer the suggestion to the responsible team for action. Where the improvement is more complex, we may make a case to VEC executive management for a decision.

We may contact you for further information if required.

Complaints

The complaints process has four parts:

Step 1 – acknowledgement

We respond to let you know we have received your complaint and give you a case number.

Step 2 – assignment

Our Complaints Officer assigns your complaint to an expert at the VEC to investigate. Some complaints may fall outside our responsibilities. For more information, see 'What we do and don't respond to' above.

Step 3 – investigation

The VEC expert investigates your complaint. We may contact you if we require more information.

Step 4 – response

The Complaints Officer and VEC expert respond to your complaint. If you provide your complaint anonymously, we will not be able to respond to you.

How long it takes us to respond

We respond to most complaints within five working days; we will contact you if we expect it to take longer. Depending on the issue you have raised, our response time will vary. This could be affected by:

- whether your complaint relates to a specific electoral event
- whether your complaint needs to be referred to a different agency
- how many issues your complaint covers
- how complex the issues involved are.

Withdrawing your complaint or feedback

You can withdraw your complaint or feedback at any time, but we may continue to investigate it. To withdraw or follow up an existing case, you can email the Complaints Officer and quote your case number.

If you are unhappy with our response

You have the right to ask for a **reassessment** of our response to your complaint if you are unhappy with it.

There is no time limit for requesting a reassessment of the outcome of a general complaint.

Step 1: Case reassessment

To request an internal reassessment, reply to the VEC staff member who responded to your complaint. Make sure you tell us:

- your case reference number
- why you are dissatisfied with our response
- the details of issues you are concerned about
- what outcome you would like.

Please also supply any further supporting documents.

We will escalate your complaint to a person of authority at the VEC who was not involved in the original complaint process or response to conduct a reassessment. This reviewing officer will have access to:

- your request for a reassessment
- details of your original complaint
- details of our assessment, investigation and response
- staff involved in our original assessment, investigation and response, as well as any other supporting documents.

We aim to conduct a reassessment and respond within 10 working days. We will contact you if we expect to take longer.

Step 2: Referred assessment

If you are unhappy with our reassessment, you can contact:

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

Responsible for administrative reviews in respect to some VEC decisions, including disputes against the validity of a local government election.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Responsible for human rights and equal opportunity for Victorians.

The Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner

Responsible for how the public sector collects, uses and shares information.

Complaints about allegations of improper conduct

Where a complaint involves allegations of improper conduct, we will refer it to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

When we will stop responding to you

We will consider a case closed and will not send any further correspondence once we have responded to you and you have:

- told us you are satisfied with our response
- not contacted us for a period of 20 business days
or
- been provided with a response to a reassessment.

Unreasonable customer conduct

We may decide to terminate correspondence or contact with you, in consultation with the Deputy Electoral Commissioner, if your conduct becomes unreasonable.

The following examples are deemed to be conduct that, in isolation or taken together, can be considered unreasonable:

- *Unreasonable persistence* – you make excessive numbers of calls, or send excessive emails, letters, or paperwork in support of your complaint, or you refuse to accept our decision about your complaint based solely on the fact that it was not in your favour
- *Unreasonable demands* – you demand more reassessments than provided for in our policy, or you demand a different outcome without demonstrating that our original decision was wrong
- *Unreasonable lack of cooperation* – you fail or refuse to identify the issue of complaint (where you are capable of identifying it) or you provide disorganised information (where you are capable of organising it)
- *Unreasonable arguments* – you express irrational claims, beliefs or conspiracy theories; you make vexatious complaints; you illogically or unrealistically deny any responsibility for actions or inaction
- *Unreasonable behaviour* – you make threats of harm to yourself, our staff or third parties; you make baseless attacks on the intentions, motivations, ethics or conduct of our staff responding to your complaint; you use abusive language beyond what could be expected; you express unreasonable anger, violence or aggression; you lie or are intentionally misleading.

Recording complaints and feedback

We record all complaints and feedback in our complaints database or Feedback Register.

We analyse our data and provide reports to VEC executive management, the Electoral Commissioner and Parliament on how we can improve services. Senior management is responsible for acting on the recommendations in these reports.

For any submission you make, we record the following information:

- your details
- how we received your complaint or feedback
- a description of your complaint or feedback
- your desired outcome (if provided)
- our staff member responsible for handling your complaint or feedback
- any action we take, including contact with you, response times and the outcome
- when your complaint or feedback was finalised
- relevant demographic information that could help improve services
- any recommendations for improvement, and who is responsible for implementing them.

Information Privacy

We keep a record of all complaints and feedback we receive and reassessments we undertake. We handle all personal information collected from you, for the purpose of managing a complaint or conducting a reassessment, in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#) as well as the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

Personal information we collect from you during the customer feedback and/or reassessment process, will usually be disclosed to the VEC business area to which it relates, and to staff members involved in managing your case or reassessment. Where we are obliged to report details of your case or reassessment outcome to another agency, such as the Privacy and Data Protection Commissioner, your details may be disclosed as part of a report to that agency.

Personal information collected about you or a third party in relation to alleged breaches of the Electoral Act may also be disclosed to Victoria Police for the purpose of investigating any offence against Victorian law, or to the Director of Public Prosecutions for the purpose of prosecuting an offence.

Reporting

We report on complaints and feedback in the following documents:

- **Annual Report**
Summarises the complaints and feedback we received by category, gives an overview of any electoral events which impacted customer feedback received, and outlines the number of matters referred to other agencies. The Annual Report is produced after the close of the financial year and tabled by Parliament.
- **Report to Parliament**
In an election year, a specific report is produced to Parliament on the conduct of the election (for local government or State election only; by-elections are reported in the Annual Report). This outlines the complaints and feedback received in relation to the election specifically.

Details of individual complaints and feedback submissions or customers are never disclosed in the Annual Report or Report to Parliament.

Appendix A: Customer service guiding principles and good practice

We adhere to a human-centred approach in our interactions with you, embracing the following principles:

Accessibility

Where possible, we provide you with extra assistance. We train our staff to understand the importance of accessible processes. Our Complaints and feedback submission webform aligns with our [Disability Access and Inclusion Plan](#) and the [W3C guidelines](#).

Responsiveness

We are responsive to individual complaints and use all types of customer feedback to continuously improve our products and services.

Transparency

We stay transparent at all times during the customer feedback process. When we respond to you, we explain the assessment process and how we came to our decision.

Confidentiality

We handle your personal information in line with our [Privacy Policy](#). We do not confirm or deny the receipt of customer feedback or discuss complaints, allegations or reports with anyone other than the parties involved.

Fairness

We manage customer feedback with integrity and impartiality. We treat you and other parties with respect. You will have an opportunity to respond and seek a reassessment of our response to your complaint. We undertake reassessments via a prescribed escalation process. If appropriate, we may engage an external investigator to conduct an external assessment.

Efficiency

We acknowledge (including by automated email response) any customer feedback you submit to us within two business days. We send a response, resolution or update to complaints within five business days. If an investigation is likely to take longer than five business days, we will notify you.

Good practice guidelines

For more information on how we handle complaints and feedback in line with good practice guidelines for customer feedback handling in the public service, see:

- the [Australian/New Zealand ISO Standard: Guidelines for complaint management in organisations](#)
- the [Victorian Ombudsman's Good Practice Guide for Public Sector Agencies](#)
- the [Commonwealth Ombudsman's Lessons in good complaint handling paper](#).