Evaluation

Election review

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) conducts a range of feedback, review and integrity check activities after each election to evaluate performance and inform planning for future elections.

Service plan

The 2018 Service Plan contained high level objectives that contributed to the overarching outcome of providing high quality and innovative opportunities for Victorians to participate in the democratic process. The service plan is outlined in Section 1 and the objectives and the corresponding achievements can be found in Appendix 21.

Electoral Matters Committee recommendations

The VEC implemented programs and actions in response to recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee after the 2014 State election. These are detailed in Appendix 22.

Voter feedback and evaluation

The VEC engages a market research company to survey voters, political parties and candidates about the VEC’s election services. For the 2018 election, the VEC engaged Colmar Brunton to conduct the independent evaluation. Voters recorded a very high level of satisfaction (84%) with their overall voting experience (see Figure 20).

VEC communications

There was a very high rate of recall (85%) of information from the VEC during the election – a significant increase over the 79% recall rate at the 2014 election. Voters most commonly recalled traditional media channels such as TV and mail (35% and 32%, respectively). New media channels such as apps, social media and streaming sites were less commonly recalled (all less than 10%). Seven in ten voters perceived the VEC’s communications to be effective, and voters generally had all the information that they needed in the election. Half of the voters who needed more information would have liked to receive more information on candidates and parties.
**Ordinary voters**

Ordinary voters’ satisfaction with their overall voting experience was slightly lower than that of voters in general, at 81%. However, ordinary voters were significantly more likely to be aware of VEC communications (88%), and were aware of the VEC’s VoterAlert Service (49%). In examining information from the VEC, ordinary voters paid most attention to where to vote – in the Election Guide, in newspapers, and on the VEC website. Ordinary voters were more disposed than other voters to want more information about candidates and parties.

More than three quarters (78%) of ordinary voters were satisfied with their experience at the voting centre on election day – a figure very similar to that recorded in 2014. Voters were overwhelmingly satisfied (86% or more) with the helpfulness and efficiency of VEC staff and privacy when voting. There was a slight decline in satisfaction with the ease of completing ballot papers and the layout and organisation of the voting centre, but satisfaction was still very strong at 80% or more.

The most common cause of dissatisfaction was waiting times. Only 28% of ordinary voters stated that they did not have to queue before they voted. The greatest proportion (42%) of voters queued for 10 minutes or less, 17% queued for 11-20 minutes, and 12% responded that they queued for more than 20 minutes. Queuing times were similar to those recorded in 2014.

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**Voter type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter type</th>
<th>Overall satisfaction</th>
<th>Aware of VEC communications</th>
<th>Read the Election Guide</th>
<th>Satisfaction with voting centre experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary voters</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD voters</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early voters</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email voters</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal voters</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provisional voters</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
<td>Not reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Assisted Voters</td>
<td>89%*</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*While TAV voters’ overall satisfaction was 89%, their satisfaction with the TAV service itself was 93%.*
Early voters

Early voters had high levels of overall satisfaction with voting services (88%). Convenience was the main factor in the motivation to vote early (63%) – a substantial increase on the 39% of early voters citing convenience in 2014. Legislative change allowing early voting for all electors, allied to a general trend to convenience voting, has clearly had a major effect. Other reasons for voting early included being in another part of the State or interstate (10%), being at work on election day (7%), health reasons (3%) and being overseas (3%).

Early voters’ overall satisfaction and response to VEC communications were not significantly different from those of voters in general. Early voters were significantly more satisfied than ordinary voters with their experience at the voting centre (87% satisfaction compared to 78% for ordinary voters). This may relate to waiting times, as 51% of early voters did not have to queue, and only 11% had to queue for more than 10 minutes.

Postal voters

Postal voters’ overall satisfaction with voting services was high, at 83%. As for early voters, convenience was the main reason why Victorians voted by post in 2018 (42% compared to 26% in 2014). A further 27% were away from home, either on holiday or for work. Only 9% of respondents voted by post for health reasons – a sharp decline from 33% in 2014. One in nine were general postal voters, 6% were at work on election day, and only 4% voted by post because they had received an application in the post from a political party.

A strong majority (63%) applied for a postal vote on the VEC website – a facility that became available at this State election. Far fewer (16%) used an application that was sent to them by a political party and very few obtained their postal vote application from the post office (5%, compared to 31% in 2014).

Nearly all postal voters were pleased about their voting experience, with 87% satisfied with the information they received about how to complete their postal vote and 87% satisfied with the ease of the application process. Timing issues were the source of complaint for the small proportion who were dissatisfied.

Postal voters’ responses to general questions about VEC communications were similar to those of voters in general, except that:

- awareness of VEC communications was lower than the general figure at 76%
- postal voters were more likely than average to see VEC communications in newspapers
- postal voters were more likely than average to read the Election Guide (52%), but were somewhat less likely to find it easy to understand (86%)
- postal voters were understandably far less likely to use the Voting Centre Locator on the VEC website (23%).

Provisional voters

A person who cannot be found on the electoral roll can apply to enrol and cast a provisional vote at a voting centre, by completing a form and providing a specified form of identification. Provisional voters tended to be less engaged with the electoral process than other voters. Very few provisional voters (13%) were aware that they were not on the roll when they went to a voting centre. Most (59%) only learned that they could be added to the roll at the voting centre itself. Consequently, provisional voters’ views of the election were less favourable than those of voters in general, with 71% of provisional voters being satisfied with their overall voting experience compared to 84% of all voters. Provisional voters were less likely than average to recall VEC communications (56% compared to the average of 85%). They were generally satisfied with their experience at the voting centre, but less so than voters in general. About half of the provisional voters recalled that it took less than 20 minutes for their application to be processed, while 42% recalled that it took longer than 20 minutes.
Email voters

Voters who are interstate or overseas can apply online to receive ballot material by email. When they receive their ballot material, they need to print their ballot papers, complete them and post them back to the VEC. Most email voters (73%) found out about the process from the VEC website, and 12% found out from family and friends. Half of the email voters applied because they were determined to vote even though they were outside Victoria, while a third applied because they were unable to get to an interstate or overseas voting centre. Most email voters were satisfied with the process of registering and receiving their ballot papers (for example, 83% satisfaction with the receipt of the password email), but they were less satisfied with the printing (66%) and returning (47%) of the ballot papers.

Email voters’ responses to general questions about VEC services reflected their particular circumstances. Overall satisfaction was lower than average at 68%. Fewer than average (57%) email voters recalled seeing communications from the VEC. The VEC website was their main source of information, and 81% of them had searched the website — although they found it more difficult than average to locate information. They were unlikely to use the Election Centre Locator (29%). Email voters were less likely than average to read the Election Guide (25%), and strongly favoured it being emailed to them in future (77%).

Email voters had a variety of suggestions to improve the process. The most popular was to be able to vote entirely online, bypassing the need for printing, folding and posting. One in six wanted ballot papers that are easier to print and assemble. Notwithstanding criticisms, two thirds of voters who received their papers by email would do so again.

Telephone Assisted Voters

Telephone Assisted Voting (TAV) was available at the 2018 State election for voters who are unable to vote without assistance because they are blind, have low vision or have a motor impairment. It replaced Electronically Assisted Voting that had applied at the three previous State elections in various forms. Three quarters of TAV voters thought that it was important to be able to vote in private. Half of them had previously cast an ordinary vote and 36% had voted by post, with smaller proportions using Electronically Assisted Voting (7%) or Braille ballot papers (3%). They learned about TAV from a variety of sources, including Vision Australia staff or materials, word of mouth and the VEC Election Hotline and website.

Voter response to TAV was almost uniformly positive: 93% were satisfied with the TAV service, 95% with its convenience, 94% with the length of the call, and 91% with how their vote was kept confidential. Seven in ten considered their voting experience to be better than in past elections, and nearly all (96%) would vote using TAV again and would recommend it to others.

In response to the general questions, TAV voters were less likely than average to see or hear VEC communications, less likely to read the Election Guide, and less likely to use the VEC website, but more likely to call the Election Hotline.

CALD voters

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) voters were the most satisfied of all voter groups across almost all measures. Satisfaction with the overall voting experience was above average at 90%. Voters from CALD backgrounds were significantly more likely to find VEC communications to be effective (79%) and more likely than average (57%) to use the VEC website. They were significantly more likely to have read the VEC’s Election Guide (48%) — and 97% of those who did read the Guide found it useful — and more likely than average (78%) to prefer the Guide to be emailed to them in future.

In relation to CALD voters’ particular needs, two thirds did not see any communications from the VEC in a language other than English, with just 7% seeing communications in non-English newspapers. Only 11% recalled seeing material in their first language at the voting centre; 81% of these found the information to be helpful. One in ten CALD voters required language assistance to vote, and these voters...
were most commonly assisted by family or a friend (47%), with 9% being helped by a staff member in their first language. More than 60% of CALD voters were aware that the VEC offers a telephone interpreter service to assist CALD voters, but very few called this service.

Voters with a disability

Eight per cent of voters identified as having a disability. Of these, 74% did not require assistance to vote, while 23% did require assistance. For those voters who did need assistance, 60% were satisfied with the assistance they received, while 15% were dissatisfied, providing feedback about voting centres that were not well enough equipped to cater for their condition. As discussed in Section 8, the VEC continues to be disappointed with the lack of fully accessible venues available.

Tracking survey of young voters

Colmar Brunton conducted a tracking survey of younger voters (aged 18-29 years) in four waves over the four weeks before the State election, to measure awareness of the election and of VEC communications, and to gauge attitudes to voting.

Awareness of VEC communications increased rapidly over the period, from 38% in Wave 1 to 85% in Wave 4. The most commonly recalled channel was free to air TV (48-52%), though there was also strong recall (22-30%) of advertising on social media and general online advertising.

Awareness of the election increased significantly over the period, from 74% in Wave 1 to 89% in Wave 3. However, there was little change in attitudes to voting. While 68% of younger voters considered that it was important for young people in general to vote, only 55% perceived that it was important for them as individuals to vote, with no significant change over the period. Between 75% and 78% of respondents stated that they were enrolled to vote and intended to vote, and again there was no change over the period.

The results suggest that VEC communications were effective in informing younger voters about the election, but it is less likely that the communications affected their intention to vote or their attitudes to the importance of voting.

Political parties

Political party representatives were very satisfied with the VEC’s management of the election, speaking highly of the VEC’s organisational and process management skills, particularly considering that new systems and processes were required as a result of legislative change. The VEC’s administrative staff were described as approachable, transparent and supportive, and as always providing well-informed responses to queries. The VEC communication of key information to voters was considered to have been effective, especially in relation to early voting, and the Election Guide was clear and well distributed.

The process of lodging nominations via a USB key was praised as smooth and efficient, especially by the larger parties. On the other hand, the process of registering how-to-vote cards was regarded as time consuming and complex. Party representatives praised the VEC’s Candidate Services Team for their assistance in the registration process, and found it easy to locate the how-to-vote cards on the VEC website.

Overall, the provision and operation of election day voting centres received very positive feedback. Sentiment was particularly positive regarding election staff, who were considered to be well-informed, supportive and courteous.

On the whole, the VEC was considered to have coped with the marked increase in early voting efficiently, and the number and location of early voting centres was generally seen to be appropriate. However, some representatives noted that the increased number of early voters led to queues at some voting centres, which was attributed to the VEC’s underestimation of the numbers and consequent allocation of insufficient resources. The location of some early voting centres was also questioned, with criticisms of them being located both in industrial estates and in shopping centres.
Most party representatives praised the VEC for offering Telephone Assisted Voting, and recommended that it should be opened up to as many under-served groups as needed.

In general, party representatives were satisfied with the communication, timeliness and accuracy of election results.

The most commonly suggested areas of improvement for future elections included:

- clearer guidance for the smaller parties, who do not have the same knowledge base as the larger parties
- shortening of the early voting period
- faster counting of early votes
- possible reduction of the number of election day voting centres, given the high numbers of early voters
- more attention to voting centre logistics (shade, toilets etc.)
- improved training of voting centre staff to ensure that they operated consistently
- greater attention in VEC communications on how to vote correctly to reduce informal voting.

Candidates

A very strong majority (86%) of candidates in the 2018 State election were satisfied with the VEC’s management of the election – a figure that is consistent with the 82% recorded in 2014. Most candidates were also positive about the performance of the Election Managers for their electorate: 88% were satisfied with the conduct of the computerised draw for ballot positions; 85% were satisfied with provision of accurate information about election arrangements; 85% believed that their Election Manager acted impartially at all times; and 83% were satisfied with the arrangements at voting centres on election day. All independent candidates were satisfied with their Election Manager’s handling of their nomination. However, it must be noted that on several matters Election Managers’ scores have declined since 2014.

Almost 80% of candidates were satisfied with the operation of voting centres on election day – a figure that has not changed significantly since 2014. However, there was less satisfaction with the accessibility of voting centres (67%) and still less with their location (54%). Candidates observed that some voting centres were located in busy areas that could be dangerous, had poor access for elderly voters and those with a disability, and had no shade or toilet facilities for volunteers. Similarly, while most candidates (70%) were satisfied with the efficiency and effectiveness of early voting centres, there was some criticism of their location and of the harassment of voters by volunteers.

Almost half (44%) of the candidates believed there is a need to improve services to voters with a disability, with their comments relating mainly to access to voting centres. One third of the candidates believed improvements are needed for voters from a non-English speaking background. However, these candidates’ comments suggested they were not fully aware of the services that the VEC provides.

The majority of candidates (77%) were satisfied with the process of counting the votes – a figure that has not changed significantly since 2014. Candidates were very satisfied about cooperation with scrutineers (95%), the accuracy of the count (89%) and the provision of results (78%), although they were less satisfied with obtaining information about the counting timetable (62%). Some candidates complained about feeling uninformed about how counting was progressing. Satisfaction about the speed of the count (68%) has improved significantly since 2014, when it was 51%.

VEC advertising was recalled by 85% of candidates. Unlike voters in general, the most commonly recalled source of information was advertisements and newspaper articles (50%). Almost two thirds of the candidates considered the VEC communications to be effective, and only 8% believed they were ineffective. About half of the candidates saw the VEC’s Election
Guide, and 89% of those who saw the Guide thought it was effective (although some thought there should be more information about how preferential and proportional voting works). Over three quarters of the candidates (77%) were satisfied with the usefulness of the VEC website, and they were overwhelmingly satisfied with particular aspects of the website, such as clarity of content and accessibility.

More than 80% of candidates recalled receiving a copy of the Candidate Information Kit or Candidate Handbook, and 81% of those considered the Kit or Handbook effective in providing them with information about standing as a candidate. Similarly, 81% of candidates recalled receiving candidate bulletins or circulars from the VEC, and 72% of the candidates who received them considered them useful.

New signage rules were introduced for the 2018 election, allowing each candidate a maximum of two signs of a limited size within 100 metres of a voting centre. The great majority (84%) recalled that the VEC notified them of this change. Three fifths of these candidates were satisfied with how this change was managed by the VEC at voting centres, while one quarter of candidates were dissatisfied.

Response to the independent evaluation

Evaluation of VEC services at the previous State election revealed two major issues. First, compared to earlier State elections, the 2014 results showed declines in awareness of VEC communication across all forms of traditional media for all voter groups – despite a new campaign and materials which tested well with focus groups, and increased reach and frequency of the advertising campaign. This was probably the result of the proliferation of online and digital media, which weakened the impact of traditional media. Second, the level of satisfaction had shifted – fewer voters were as extremely satisfied compared to previous elections. This may be a consequence of rising public expectations that consumers should receive a service exactly when and as quickly as they want.

In response, the VEC broadened the scope of its communication campaign for 2018 to incorporate a much heavier emphasis on online media and outdoor advertising. This appears to have had some effect. Recall of VEC communications in 2018 was very high at 85%, and had increased significantly since 2014. Satisfaction with the overall voting experience was also high at 84%. Comparisons between 2014 and 2018 for particular questions, such as the helpfulness of the staff at voting centres, reveal generally positive and consistent responses.

An important new issue has arisen from the evaluation. According to Colmar Brunton’s tracking survey, although younger people’s awareness of the election and of VEC communications increased over the election, this had no apparent effect on their attitude to the election or their intention to vote. A 2018 research report on non-voters commissioned for the VEC showed that younger non-voters in particular are not familiar with State government or with the candidates in a State election.1 The VEC will need to consider how to encourage greater participation by younger Victorians in future State elections.

Staff feedback

Election Managers

Feedback received from Election Managers often provides a useful perspective on the VEC’s delivery of election services and leads to improvements in service delivery. The feedback is gathered via online surveys (for training feedback), online databases (for challenges they come across while performing their roles), and face-to-face debrief sessions. These debrief sessions allow the Election Managers to decide which election topics they wish to discuss and the opportunity to brainstorm with their peers and senior VEC staff to suggest new and improved processes.

By the numbers:

Evaluation

81% ordinary voters satisfied with voting services
68% email voters satisfied with voting services
83% postal voters satisfied with voting services
90% CALD voters satisfied with voting services
89% telephone voters satisfied with voting services
88% early voters satisfied with voting services

Election officials and casuals

All election casuals and officials were invited to participate in an online survey to provide feedback on the training and preparation they received, as well as on their experience working for the VEC. Over 5,500 responses were received which represents approximately 30% of the election workforce. More than 45% of those completing the survey indicated they were new to election work or new to the role.

Other findings include:

- most felt the manuals, home study, and online training were easy to understand.

Participants were invited to provide further feedback for all aspects of training and working on election day. Common suggestions included receiving manuals, online training and home study earlier in the election timeline and including an index and visual examples in manuals.