6. Community Education and Engagement

Community Information and Education

A wide range of community information and education activities were undertaken in 2014 to raise awareness and encourage the participation of communities facing barriers to electoral participation. These included outreach enrolment sessions, targeted information and education sessions, special mobile voting sessions and a roadshow that aimed to raise public awareness (see Figure 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile voting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>5,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: Education and engagement activities, 2014

VEC Roadshow

In conjunction with an events company contracted for the purpose, the VEC implemented an updated roadshow, Driving Votes, for the 2014 State election enrolment period. A van wrapped in advertising campaign imagery rolled out to 19 destinations across Victoria, focusing on districts with historically poorer electoral statistics and targeting high foot traffic locations. The schedule incorporated static sites including Federation Square, Dandenong Market and Southern Cross Station, and roving activities, in which Driving Votes staff travelled through major thoroughfares and areas of interest such as shopping strips, parks, street festivals and busy intersections.

The campaign was designed to engage youth and CALD audiences, to reinforce awareness of the upcoming election and the importance of correctly enrolling. Electors were encouraged to utilise the VEC’s online resources, although face-to-face information and paper forms were also provided.

Driving Votes was a success, generating awareness and public engagement. A total of 55,655 items of VEC merchandise were distributed and there were 29,647 direct interactions with electors. Visitor feedback was overwhelmingly positive, praising the convenience factor and the VEC’s willingness to put a public face on the electoral process.

Community Sector Information Kits

Around 2,500 Community Sector Information Kits were distributed to key community sector organisations across Victoria in July 2014. The aim was to raise awareness of the 2014 State election among communities facing barriers to electoral participation. Around 1,000 of these kits were sent to ethno-specific service providers.

In addition to promoting the information, education and outreach services offered by the VEC, the Kit provided information about enrolling and voting in the election. The Kit consisted of a cover letter, posters, Easy English Guides and specially coded enrolment forms.

Aboriginal Communities

Due to a staffing loss, The VEC was not able to roll out a full outreach program prior to the State election. Instead, the VEC sponsored the 10th anniversary of the Long Walk Women’s Luncheon on 17 October – celebrating the success and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The Electoral Commissioner spoke to the 600 attendees about the VEC’s active citizenship work with Aboriginal teenagers, through its involvement with the Richmond Emerging Aboriginal Leaders Program. In addition, in early November an outreach session was held in Robinvale, which has a proportionately high number of indigenous Victorians.

CALD Communities

Community Education Sessions

In the months preceding the 2014 State election, the VEC delivered a total of 151 face-to-face electoral information sessions to 3,196 members of established and new and emerging CALD communities in metropolitan and regional Victoria. The project team was able to work with groups that are harder to reach owing to their geographic location, age and/or gender.

Culturally responsive electoral information sessions were delivered in community settings such as churches, private spaces, cultural and
Community Education and Engagement

Community gatherings in areas where CALD communities are located, and in English language classes in western, outer-western and south-eastern areas. Sessions were delivered in a variety of languages including English. The interpreter service was used to meet the communities’ language needs. Of these sessions, 59 were delivered by Community Educators as part of the VEC’s Democracy Ambassador Program.

Democracy Ambassador Program

In 2013, responding to a submission made by the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV), the VEC commenced the first part of a Democracy Ambassador (DA) pilot project. The project aims to provide electoral information and education to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly new and emerging communities.

Community Educators share their lived experience, which leads to raising and promoting community awareness about the election through local community media. This successfully generated engagement by CALD communities.

The Easy English – Vote in Victorian State Elections booklet was used extensively with CALD communities. It succinctly conveys information on how to enrol and how to vote correctly. The VEC received very positive feedback about the booklet via the Community Educators.

People Experiencing Homelessness

The VEC continued its Homeless not Voteless Program in 2014, expanding the number and location of enrolment outreach and mobile voting sessions.

Enrolment Outreach

The VEC conducted 30 enrolment outreach sessions at key agencies that provide services to people experiencing homelessness from September 2014 to the close of the electoral roll on 18 November. During the enrolment sessions, 86 people completed enrolment forms and a further 68 people checked that their details were included on the electoral roll.

At the time of the election, there was a total of 1,780 electors who identified as experiencing homelessness on the electoral roll. A total of 356 homeless persons enrolled or updated their details on the roll during 2014.

Mobile Voting

Mobile voting was conducted at 20 of the locations that had been visited as part of the community outreach activities. The sessions were held at times that agencies suggested were most suitable, generally coinciding with the highest volume of people attending the service. Many of the sessions were held at lunch time or in the early afternoon. In the 2014 State election, 320 votes were cast at the homeless mobile voting locations.
Support from Service Providers

The service providers who hosted enrolment outreach and mobile voting sessions played a key role in supporting the participation of people experiencing homelessness. In addition to providing access to their venues and assisting the VEC to identify the most suitable times, the staff of these services facilitated the access and active participation of people. Two members of the Council to Homeless Persons Peer Education and Support Program formed part of the outreach team, participating in both the outreach enrolment and mobile voting activities. These two team members provided strong linkages with the service users and facilitated communication and access.

Feedback from service provider:

“… it is such a valuable thing that the VEC does … if this [mobile voting] did not happen at our centre, the majority of our clients due to their circumstances would not have voted at a normal polling booth unsupported. Keep up the great work, we love it and fully support the VEC in continuing the mobile sessions.”

People Living with a Disability

The VEC seeks to enable people with disabilities to fully participate in enrolling and voting. In 2014, the VEC developed a resource pack specifically for people living in shared group homes. The Department of Health and Human Services played a key role by assisting with the distribution of these packs to over 1,000 shared group homes in early October 2014. A total of 23 education sessions were delivered to 538 people with a disability between February and November.

The DHHS and the VEOHRC were identified as partners in this project. DHHS played a key role in distributing the election kits to shared group homes and subsequently distributing, via email, the VEC letter to shared group homes seeking input to the online survey.

The VEC’s Electoral Access Advisory Group provided advice about the Voting is for Everyone initiative and, more generally, about how the VEC could facilitate participation in the electoral process by people with a disability.

Election Questions 2014

An online youth engagement project - Election Questions 2014 (EQ14) – targeted, amongst others, first time voters. The aim of EQ14 was to help young voters make the connection between issues that they care about and politics, through an experience of positive community participation.

The VEC contracted OurSay – an online youth engagement company with expertise in this area – to conduct the project, and it leveraged popular social media networks to drive active engagement on issues relevant to young people with regard to the State election.

EQ14 attracted 4,600 unique visitors and 1,200 participants. Of the 1,200 who participated, 267 registered a question. A total of 111 candidates committed to participating and ultimately, 42 candidates across 37 electorates responded to questions.

Following the State election and formal completion of the EQ14 program, OurSay surveyed all participants on the level of impact the project had on their personal engagement in elections, electoral matters and civic action generally. The survey found that as a result of participating in EQ14:

- 36% of participants were more engaged in electoral matters and the Victorian State election
- 50% simply felt engaged, as a result of participating
- 9% felt less engaged and
- 4% did not know whether they were more engaged.

OurSay received some informal feedback from voters expressing their disappointment with the low candidate response rate.

The survey also investigated the relative influence participation in EQ14 had on further community participation and related behaviours. The survey found that as a result of participating in EQ14, participants were more likely to:

- know candidates in their electoral division: 54%
- research who their candidates were: 37%
- research the policies of candidates: 46%
- research the policies of political parties: 35%
- know when the Victorian State election was being held: 33%
- think about who they would vote for prior to Election Day: 41%
- vote on Election Day: 11%.
Democracy Live

In place of a tally room (see Services to the Media section), which had been poorly attended by parties, candidates and the public in the past, the VEC hosted a public event at Federation Square to celebrate democracy on election night. An events company (RBK Productions) was contracted to organise the event.

The event commenced at 6.30 pm and ran through to 10.30 pm in terms of activity, which included street performers, a cover band, a coffee cart and live crosses to election coverage on the ABC on the giant screen in Federation Square. Increased security measures were taken to ensure the event proceeded without incident.

Several thousand members of the public attended the event, some for brief periods of time and some staying longer to enjoy the entertainment and coverage – up to the concession and acceptance speeches. The event organiser recorded a number of positive comments in relation to the event.

Quotes from Democracy Live attendees:

“This actually makes the election seem cool”

“What an awesome night. This was totally unexpected”

“Wow, the result has come through already? That was quick”