Evaluation
12. Evaluation

The 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 2014 State election 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. These objectives and the corresponding achievements can be found in Appendix 18.

For the 2014 State election, the VEC also set a large number of objectives relating to more than 50 individual medium to large scale projects, and many more small scale projects and tasks.

Project and task objectives and achievements also formed part of the VEC staff performance plans and have been further evaluated during the staff performance review process. These activities have been evaluated and reports prepared for the Planning Group and Management Group. Outcomes and evaluation will inform future election planning.

Electoral Matters Committee recommendations

The VEC also implemented programs and actions in response to recommendations made by the Electoral Matters Committee since the 2010 State election. These are detailed in Appendix 19.

Court of Disputed Returns

The VEC was required to appear before the Court of Disputed Returns in response to two petitioners claiming that the results of the 2014 Victorian should be declared void.

The petitioners, Maria Rigoni and Gerard Joseph Donohue, claimed that a significant number of voters had not been required by the VEC to declare that they were unable to attend a voting centre on Election Day, as specified in the Electoral Act 2002. Consequently, it was claimed that these votes were invalid and the results of the election were impacted.

The hearings occurred on 25 – 26 February with the judgements delivered by Justice Garde on 24 March 2015 in the Supreme Court of Victoria. The petitions were ultimately dismissed with Justice Garde finding that the results of the election had not been affected. In his judgement, Justice Garde suggested that an improvement to the voter declaration could be made by ensuring that election officials seek a formal oral declaration of a voter’s inability to attend on a voting centre on Election Day.

Voter Feedback and Evaluation

Voters were nearly unanimous in their praise for the services provided at the 2014 State election. Election officials were praised for their helpfulness, assistance and efficiency, and the layout and organisation of voting centres was well received.

Voters remained satisfied at an overall level, however extreme satisfaction has generally declined since the previous election and this was evident across a range of voter types.

Queues before and on Election Day were reported as an issue and impacted on the voters’ overall satisfaction. Of those surveyed who voted on Election Day, half reported having to wait to vote, and the reported length of time in the queue has increased.

Ordinary and Absent Voters

Eight in ten voters recalled seeing or hearing information about the election and this figure rose to nine in ten when prompted. Recall across traditional media was down and the VEC’s foray into social media (for the first time for a State election) was noticed. Fewer voters could recall receiving an EasyVote Guide (37% in 2014; 60% in 2010), however a similar proportion cut out the EasyVote Card to take with them to the voting centre.

Minimising the time spent voting was the key to satisfaction, with most wanting it to be quick and easy with no queues. Nearly half of voters queued for five minutes or less (22% - 6-10 minutes; 1% - 11-15 minutes; 6% - 16-20 minutes; 14% - longer than 20 minutes). Voting centre layout and signage were seen as having improved compared to previous elections.

Voters were most happy with the helpfulness and efficiency of staff and the only cause for complaint was the queue time.

Six out of ten voters were aware of the VEC’s website and 31% had used the website to gain information. Of those who had used the website, 78% were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the information available. A third used the Voting Centre Lookup application and 82% agreed that it was extremely easy to use. Overall satisfaction was 92%.
CALD Voters

It was difficult to find and survey voters whose first language was not English at voting centres (31 interviewed). Consequently, the potential for error in these results is greater, and care must be taken in their interpretation.

Eight in ten CALD voters recalled seeing some form of communication in the lead up to the election and again, there were drops across the recall in traditional media. TV had the highest recall but was down 21% on 2010. Around seven in ten perceived the information to be very effective or effective. A total of 21% wanted further information and this was seen to be, in equal measures: candidate/party information, early voting information and additional information about the legal age of voting. Fewer voters could recall receiving the EasyVote Guide and there was a 50% drop in the number of those who cut out and used the EasyVote Card compared to 2010. Eight in ten recipients felt that information was easy to find and understand in the EasyVote Guide. A quarter of CALD voters recalled seeing information about the election in their first language and all were satisfied with its quality.

More CALD voters were satisfied with their voting experience in 2014 (95%) compared to 2010 (86%). Quick and easy voting with no queues and helpful and efficient staff contributed to satisfaction, however more CALD voters reported being in queues for longer periods. Only 22% of CALD voters queued for five minutes or less.

Some 18% of CALD voters had visited the VEC’s website and 71% were satisfied with the experience. Overall satisfaction was 95%

Early Voters

Convenience was the main factor in the early voters’ motivation to vote early (39%), particularly if they were in the older age bracket (65 plus), whilst younger early voters had to be at work. Other reasons for voting early included: being in another part of the State or interstate (22%); being too busy with other commitments on Election Day (7%), health reasons (3%) and being overseas (2%).

Six in ten early voters recalled seeing or hearing VEC communication in the lead up to the election. The EasyVote Guide reached a greater proportion of early voters compared to the previous election (38% vs 23%), perhaps indicating that they were looking for information on early voting. Although recall of communication was down compared to 2010, the message takeout was stronger. After a decline in 2010, 2014 early voters indicated the highest level of satisfaction for effectiveness of information when comparing data from the three most recent State elections.

More than nine out of ten (92%) early voters were satisfied with their experience at the voting centre. However, 20% of early voters felt they had to queue for too long in 2014 as opposed to 1% in 2010, which could be due to the option of early voting becoming more popular. Three in ten early voters found out where they could vote early via the EasyVote Guide (up from 12% in 2010). Some 27% saw the centre when passing by, a further 23% were told by family or friends and 17% used the VEC’s Voting Centre Lookup. Overall satisfaction was 92%.

Postal Voters

Only 60 postal voters were able to be interviewed for this survey. Consequently, the potential for error in these results is greater and care must be taken in their interpretation.

In 2010 and 2014, health reasons were the most common motivator for selecting a postal vote over voting in person. It was also seen as a more convenient option for voting for a further 26% of respondents. Other reasons for postal voting cited included not being able to easily access the voting centre on Election Day.

Communication did not cut through as strongly with postal voters as in previous years with drops across all forms of media. Four in ten recalled seeing or hearing some form of communication, with 67% perceiving it to be effective – down from 75% in 2010. A total of 94% of postal voters were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the information provided on how to complete the postal vote.

In both 2010 and 2014, postal voters most commonly applied for a postal vote in response to an application that was sent to them by a political party, however it was less common in 2014 (39%) than it was in 2010 (56%). In 2014, more postal voters obtained their application for a postal vote from the post office (31% compared to 10% in 2010). Although awareness of the website hadn’t increased between the last two elections, usage of the website had – rising from 17% in 2010 to 32% in 2014. Overall satisfaction was 91%.

Political Parties

Political party representatives were unanimously positive about the VEC’s overall performance in the 2014 State election. Communication from the VEC and voting services provided to the public were all generally considered to be of a high standard, well run and professional. Communication from the VEC and that delivered to voters was believed to have been relevant and useful.

The process for nominating and enrolling ran smoothly and has improved over time. The VEC’s management of how-to-vote cards was perceived to have improved over time – the cards were well presented and easy to find on the website.

On the whole, the provision and operation of voting centres received very positive feedback; they were considered to be generally well run by knowledgeable, helpful and courteous election officials.

The marked increase in the volume of early votes was universally attributed to an increase in public awareness of this provision and a
relaxation in the requirement to provide a valid reason for voting early. On the whole, the VEC was considered to have coped with the increase in early voting efficiently, and the number and location of early voting centres was generally believed to be appropriate.

Relatively few negatives were identified, however the most commonly suggested areas of improvement for future elections included:

- shortening of the early voting period
- faster counting of early votes
- discontinuing the practice of joint voting centres
- a requirement for all postal votes to be returned directly to the VEC (rather than political parties)
- more attention to voting centre logistics (shade, toilets etc.)
- improved training of voting centre staff to ensure that they operated appropriately within their areas of responsibility
- a separate section of the VEC website for political parties.

Candidates

In line with the 2010 results, candidates were typically quite positive about election managers within their electorate. Almost all candidates (97%) were either extremely satisfied (84%) or satisfied (13%) with the election manager’s impartiality at all times – a big improvement on the 78% result in 2010. Nominations, ballot draws, responding to enquiries and registration of how-to-vote cards all received extremely favourable responses.

The areas for potential improvement nominated by a small number of candidates were the counting of votes and keeping the candidate informed of the progressive results.

Almost nine in ten candidates (88%) thought the Candidate’s Handbook was either extremely effective or effective. The same number could recall seeing or hearing some form of communication from the VEC and two thirds of them indicated that the communication was either extremely effective or effective.

A total of 88% of candidates were either extremely satisfied or satisfied with the operation of voting centres, and more than two thirds (69%) of candidates were satisfied with the service to voters in terms of how efficiently and effectively the early voting centres were managed. The early voting figure is slightly down from 2010 and is very likely due to the huge increase in the number of early voters. Suggestions for improvements on the subject of voting centres included more staff (17%), improve the facilities e.g. shelter, parking, toilets, wheelchair access (13%) and better locations and signage (11%).

Overall satisfaction with communication and services dropped a significant amount from the previous election (82% in 2014, down from 93% in 2010). Overall satisfaction was 82%. Suggestions for improvement included:

- more regulations on the early voting centres (17%)
- counting results/earlier tallying of results (16%)
- better explanations of how to vote (14%)
- better voting centre locations and signage (13%).

Response to the Independent Evaluation

Two major issues arise from these results. Compared to previous 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). Further, the level of satisfaction has shifted - fewer voters are as extremely satisfied compared to previous elections.

After examining these results, it is believed that the proliferation of online and digital media and the increase in multi-screening is having a significant impact on cut-through in traditional media. Viewers have more choice in free to air TV, paid/subscription TV, newspapers online, and music streaming online (Spotify), so to maintain a similar level of cut-through the VEC would need to increase its advertising budget by up to 300% and/or change its placement strategy to include a greater online/digital presence. This is affecting all advertisers, not just the VEC and as a result, the VEC is reviewing its media placement strategy for all electoral events. The positive aspect is that if voters did see or hear any communication from the VEC, they rated it highly.

The second issue – declining levels of high satisfaction is a little more problematic to address. When you have high levels of satisfaction, based on quality services and products, over time voters will see the offerings as becoming standard and their expectations increase. Therefore, to obtain a similar level of extreme satisfaction, you need to deliver innovation, new services or improve upon what was delivered last time. For example, the speed with which new technology is being introduced in society translates into higher expectations about how a voter will transact with your service or product. Many voters are now used to banking and shopping online and are frustrated that they cannot vote online from the comfort of their home. Similarly, whereas previously voters would have been content to stand in line for up to 10 minutes to vote, now five minutes is perceived to be too long. Without a doubt, queueing for any length of time has impacted on satisfaction levels at the 2014 State election and this will be considered prior to the 2018 State election.
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.

As part of the evaluation of the State election, the VEC conducted debriefing sessions with Election Managers and Region Coordinators. Suggestions and feedback will be used to aid our continuous improvement strategy.

Election Officials and Casuals

This election provided an opportunity for many people who have not previously worked at an election to do so.

All election casuals and officials were invited to participate in an online survey to provide feedback on the training and preparation they received. This feedback will be used to analyse and improve the VEC’s approach to training and supporting our election workforce. Over 8,100 responses were received which represents over 35% of those who worked. More than 45% of those completing the survey indicated they were new to election work or new to the role they were undertaking. Electoral experience by category is shown in Figure 24. Figure 25 shows how respondents rated different elements of training in terms of effectiveness in preparing them for their role.

Other findings include:

- responses regarding how well the training and support provided by VEC assisted them to understand and undertake their roles and responsibilities were exceptionally positive. On scale of 1-5 (where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent), the overall rating was 4.31
- 97.48% (7,433) indicated that they were interested in working at future elections and only 2.58% (197) said they were not. Length of the day, pay rates and people getting older were the main reasons for those not interested in working at future elections
- satisfaction with staffing levels, role rotation, occupational health and safety and support from immediate supervisors were all rated an average of above 4
- forms and manuals were rated with a rated average of above four in relation to being clear and easy to understand.

For areas in which poor or unsatisfactory ratings were given, participants were invited to comment. Separate training sessions for new staff and more hands on examples during training were identified as being the most helpful options to improve preparation.