

Country: Australia

Theme: Enhancement of Participation by Special Categories of Voters

Sub Theme: Any Other-Indigenous Voters

Title of The Best Practice / Case Study: Raising awareness with Indigenous voters through the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP).

Area of Coverage: Urban, regional and remote areas across all Australian jurisdictions

Period of implementation: 1 July 2009 to present (ongoing program)

Background: Australia has a system of compulsory voting with an estimated 95.1 per cent of eligible Australia enrolled to vote. However, AEC analysis of enrolment, turnout, formality and census population data indicate that Indigenous Australians are much less likely to participate in the electoral process than other Australians with approximately 50 per cent enrolled to vote, 63 per cent turning out to vote and 90 per cent voting formally. Low levels of participation are due to a variety of factors such as a lack of trust of political systems, a perception that voting is complicated, and Indigenous disadvantage more broadly.

Brief Description of Best Practice: The AEC established the IEPP in 2010 with the objective of reducing Indigenous disadvantage in electoral participation. The IEPP is delivered across Australia by 20 AEC Community Engagement Officers, the majority of whom are Indigenous. Program staff work directly with Indigenous communities or in partnership with other organisations to deliver services in ways that meet cultural and regional needs. Services include the delivery of electoral information sessions, tailored materials for Indigenous voters, partnerships with government and non-government agencies, and a range of other community outreach activities. The IEPP campaign to educate and inform Indigenous Australians during the 2016 federal election aimed to maximise electoral participation and build the reputation and trust in the AEC. Care was taken to produce authentic and respectful materials to engage Indigenous Australians in a culturally appropriate way. This approach was informed by Indigenous staff, consultation with Indigenous communities, quantitative and qualitative research by Australian government agencies, including the Department of Finance, as well as Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The services of Indigenous-owned businesses were utilised to produce artworks, products and videos to further safeguard cultural appropriateness and authenticity. Education and informational materials included videos, posters, websites and brochures all featuring Indigenous branding and the tagline -Our Vote, Our Future. Digital channels such as Facebook and YouTube were heavily utilised to appeal to Indigenous youth (2011 census shows 57% of the Indigenous population is aged under 25 years of age and around 92% participate in online communities or social networking). Positive role models such as Indigenous sportspeople and other celebrities were used to engage young people. A

series of videos featuring high profile Indigenous Australians including well-known footballers, an international model and Indigenous actors were developed. These materials were designed to help Indigenous voters understand recent changes to the voting system and to encourage voters to enrol before the close of rolls deadline. The information campaign was supported by specific measures to assist Indigenous voters at the election. In order to enhance the election experience for Indigenous voters and to improve formality levels, targets were set for Indigenous polling official recruitment to ensure the staffing profile reflected the communities voting at each polling place. Additional community-based Indigenous Voter Information Officers were employed at polling places in areas with significant Indigenous populations to ensure Indigenous voters were assisted by people with relevant local, cultural and language knowledge.

Challenges : A person is not required to identify as Indigenous on the electoral roll when they register to vote so it is not possible to know exactly how many Indigenous Australians participate in elections and referendums and therefore the success of the program must be measured in other ways.

Outcome: 3,000 voters enrolling online indicated they were prompted to enrol due to the AEC's Indigenous -Our Vote Our Future. campaign, an increase of over 200 per cent from the previous year. A reach of 1,440,135 people through the AEC Indigenous Facebook page and 98,168 views of the AEC's Indigenous website page. 1,538 (1.77 per cent) of polling official positions were filled by Indigenous Australians.