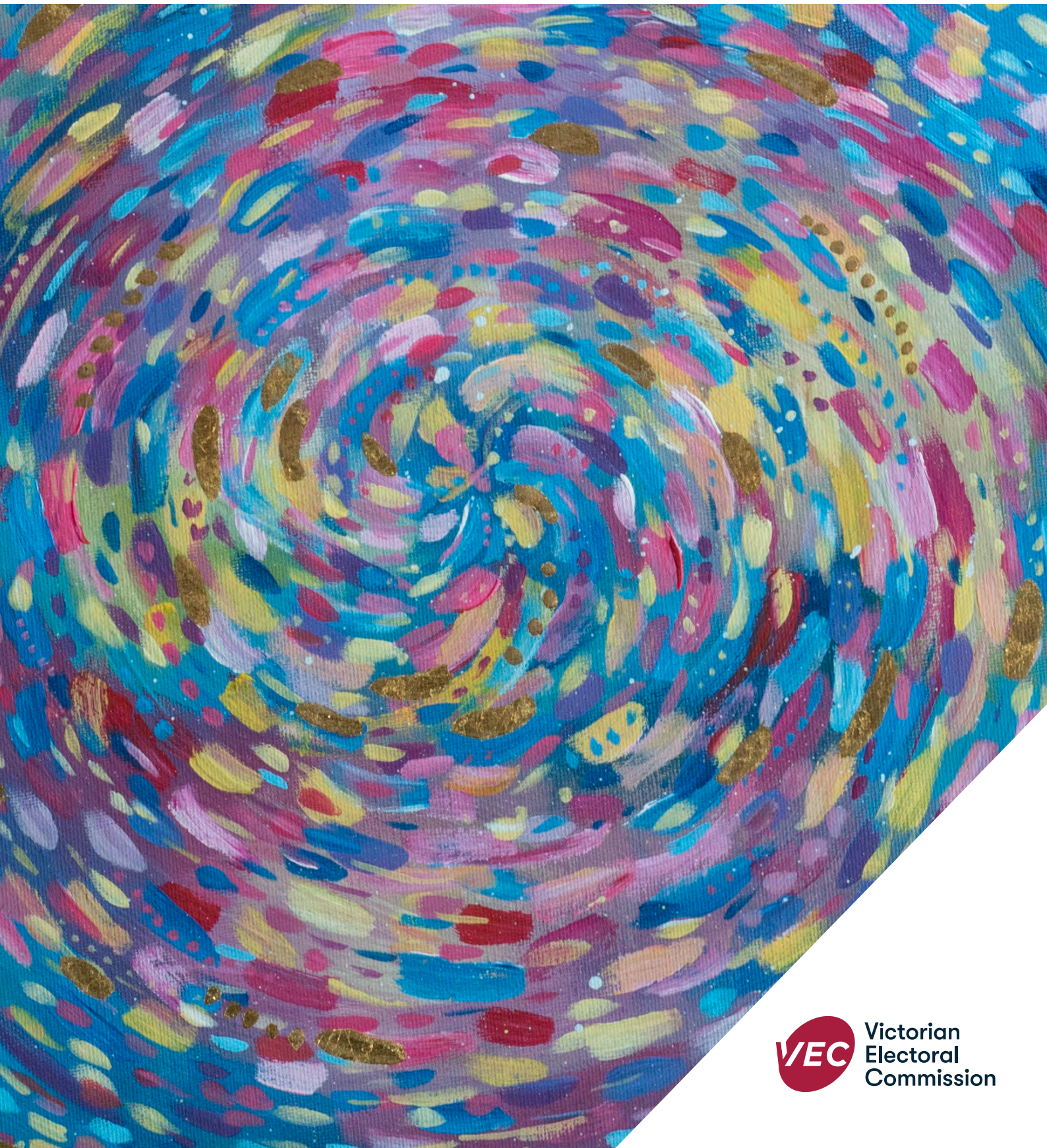
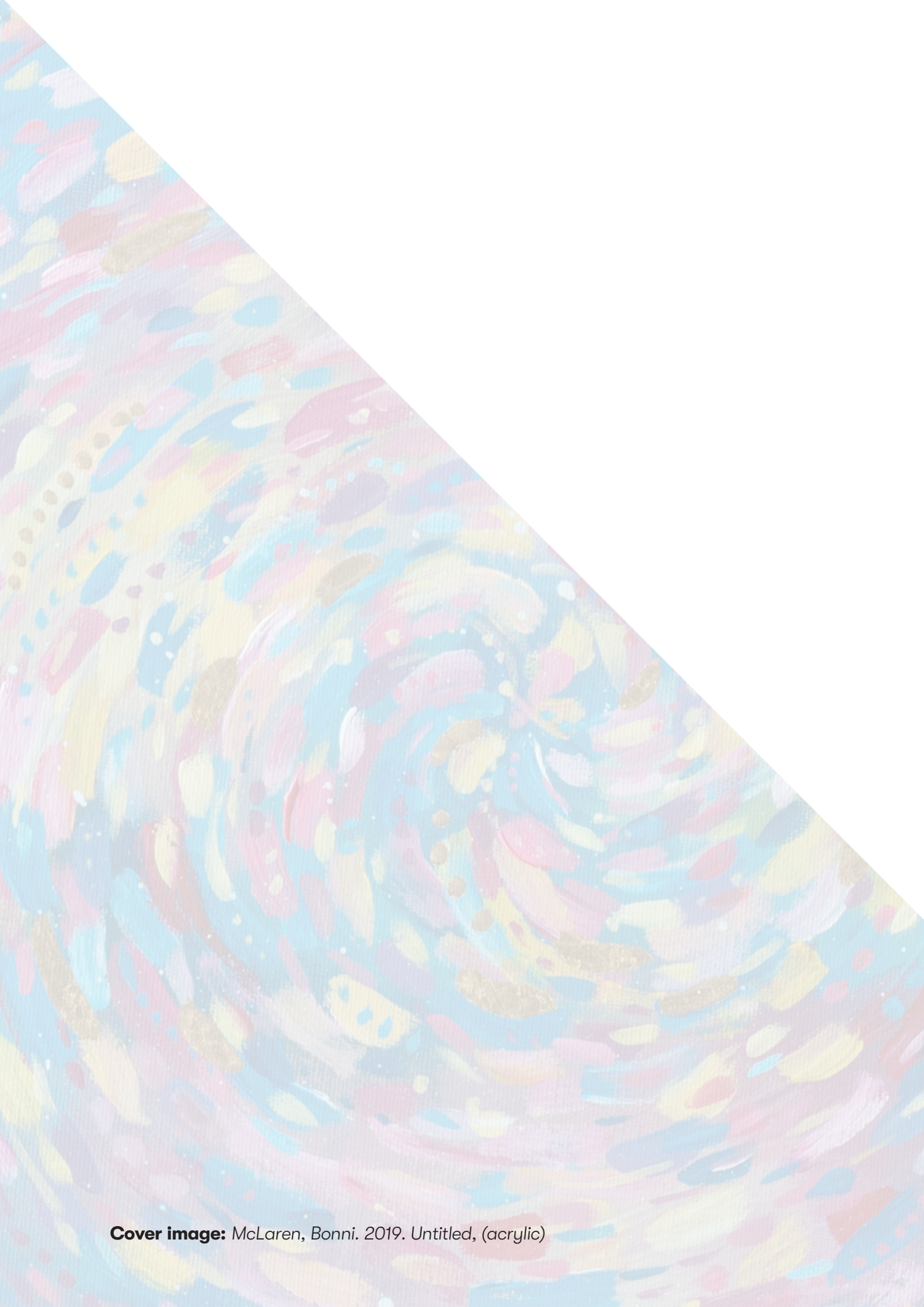


Victorian Electoral Commission

Young People Inclusion Plan

2021 – 2023





Cover image: McLaren, Bonni. 2019. Untitled, (acrylic)



The VEC's Young People Inclusion Plan

I am pleased to present the Victorian Electoral Commission's first Young People Inclusion Plan (YPIP) for 2021 to 2023.

The purpose of this YPIP is to support young people to be active citizens and exercise a life-long engagement with democracy. The importance of this goal is highlighted by clear evidence of a steady decline in the participation of young people in formal electoral processes. The Parliament of Victoria Electoral Matters Committee's *Inquiry into civics and electoral participation in Victorian state parliamentary elections (2018)*, noted that 'in many Western democracies, there is a wealth of evidence suggesting that young people in Australia are less likely to vote in elections, and be enrolled to vote, than other age cohorts'.¹

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) has a strong history of supporting the engagement of young people in the democratic process through a range of initiatives, including the Passport to Democracy program, which provides electoral education to students and young people both within schools and in out-of-school settings. The VEC also sends a celebratory 'birthday card' encouraging young people aged 17 to provisionally enrol, so that they are automatically included on the electoral roll once they turn 18. The VEC has built strong partnerships with youth service providers to support programs that encourage young people to be active citizens and learn more about democracy. Some examples include the annual sponsorship of teams for the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament, the provision of electoral education to young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the Korin Gamadji Institute, and the long-standing support of the Victorian Student Representative Council.

The YPIP is an important whole-of-organisation document that provides a pathway to better support the voices of young people in the democratic system. It provides actions to improve VEC services, projects and programs and further strengthens the work being done with other government bodies, educational institutions, peak body youth organisations and community groups representing young people. It will provide more opportunities for the VEC to collaborate with young people by establishing formalised consultation processes and employment pathways.

The VEC is proud to present its first YPIP and looks forward to working with young people, service providers and communities across Victoria to support its vision of all Victorians actively participating in their democracy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Warwick Gately'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Warwick Gately AM
Electoral Commissioner

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where it conducts its business.

The VEC pays respect to ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.



Secondary students at VicSRC Congress 2019 making friends.

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About the Victorian Electoral Commission

The VEC's vision is all Victorians actively participating in their democracy and its purpose is to deliver high quality, accessible electoral services with innovation, integrity and independence.

The VEC is an independent and impartial statutory authority established under Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002*. It operates under the auspices of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, within the portfolio of the Minister for Government Services.

However, the VEC is not subject to the direction or control of the Minister in respect to the performance of its responsibilities and functions and the exercise of its power.



Smiling VEC staff busy at work at the last State election 2018.

The VEC's primary responsibilities include:

- conducting State, local council, commercial and community elections
- maintaining the register of Victorian electors
- conducting electoral boundary reviews
- administering political funding and donation disclosure laws
- conducting research in the public interest
- promoting public awareness and understanding of electoral issues.



Secondary students at VicSRC Congress 2018.

The VEC's values are:

- independence – acting with impartiality and integrity
- accountability – transparent reporting and effective stewardship of resources
- innovation – shaping our future through creativity and leadership
- respect – consideration of self, others and the environment
- collaboration – working as a team with partners and communities.

The VEC currently has four active community advisory groups: the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Advisory Group, the Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG), the Homelessness Advisory Group (HAG) and the Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG).

The Young People Advisory Group (YPAG), described in this plan, will be the fifth community advisory group created by the VEC. It will comprise members from youth organisations and other professionals, and include people aged 18 to 29 who will be able to offer insights from their lived experience. The Young People Advisory Group will provide the VEC with community advice, feedback and ideas for achieving better electoral engagement with young people.

Purpose

The purpose of the Young People Inclusion Plan (YPIP) is to increase the participation of younger people in formal democratic processes, indicated by the rate at which they enrol and vote at elections.

It also aims to increase the knowledge, understanding and active engagement of younger people with democratic and electoral processes.

Importantly, the YPIP seeks to engage with stakeholders who work with young people and provide resources to support them in their work.

The YPIP will help VEC staff see engagement, enrolment and voting services from the perspectives of young people.

The YPIP also prescribes the actions, tools, capacities and knowledge that will enable VEC staff to create and deliver accessible services and information that are both inclusive of, and responsive to, the electoral needs of young people across Victoria.

VEC Diversity and Inclusion Framework

The VEC Diversity and Inclusion Framework was launched in June 2020 to increase confidence and trust in the VEC through the recognition and celebration of diversity, within both the VEC and the communities it serves. The VEC recognises that differences between people can span gender, race, ability, age, sexual orientation, income, faith, socio-economic background and living situation.

The VEC needs to represent the richness of all people, all backgrounds, and all perspectives, and recognise the overlapping nature of these communities. The VEC is committed to diversity and inclusion in its workplaces, with the people it employs, those it partners with and the services it delivers.

Strategy 2023

The VEC works to remove barriers to electoral participation and strives to ensure all eligible Victorians are engaged with the democratic process. The VEC's *Strategy 2023* provides an overarching five-year goal for the VEC to be change ready and ensure people, systems and relationships are in place to make the most of opportunities.

Strategy 2023 has four focus areas for overall implementation, including people, technology, decision-making and relationships. Extensive internal

consultation on the YPIP has ensured it aligns with *Strategy 2023*, most particularly in the 'relationships' pillar. The VEC's aim is to learn from others outside the organisation about opportunities and challenges. By seeking advice and knowledge from all networks when planning to improve its services and products, the VEC can remain relevant. It can provide services and products that not only meet customer expectations but where possible, have been co-designed with those very same customers.



VicSRC Executive Committee students filming a Teach the Teacher webinar.

The VEC's Young People Inclusion Plan 2020–2023

Partnerships and consultation

The VEC has long been recognised as the industry leader in the delivery of voter education and electoral inclusion programs for young people.

This leadership is demonstrated by the Passport to Democracy program, which has been running for over a decade and includes a website, curriculum-aligned teaching and learning activities, and a comprehensive face-to-face and virtual schools outreach program.

Furthermore, the VEC has a strong and ongoing history of partnerships with numerous organisations representing young people, including the Richmond Football Club's Korin Gamadji Institute, the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) and YMCA Victoria Youth Services.

Through these partnerships, the VEC has supported important young people events and programs, such as the VicSRC Student Congress and the YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament. The VEC is aware that electoral engagement needs to become a habitual activity from a young age for best effect and lifelong patterns.²

Young people are defined as those aged 10 to 29 years; this is further divided into those of pre-voting age, 10-to-17-year-olds, and those of voting age, 18-to-29-year-olds. These two cohorts require different types of engagement to build their knowledge and behaviours around active citizenship and to support their participation in formal electoral processes throughout their lives.

²Parliament of Victoria (2018) *Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Participation in Victorian State Parliamentary Elections* p.34
https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/emc/Civics_and_Electoral_Participation/EMC_58-03_Text_WEB.pdf

The YPIP has been designed following a review of research into young people's electoral engagement and relevant State and Federal government policy impacting young people, namely DHHS's *Youth Policy: Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*³, and the Australian Government's National Youth Policy Framework (currently under development). Importantly, the Victorian Government is consulting on a Victorian Youth Strategy, due for release in late 2021. Consultations with VEC staff and partner organisations from the youth sector, including the VicSRC, YMCA Victoria and the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Victorian Youth Congress, have also informed the development of the YPIP.



Students at VicSRC Congress 2019 walking to Open Morning to present their solutions to education issues.

³State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (2016) *Youth Policy: Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*
<https://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/file/721/download?token=9Zgj4ytl>

Background and statistics

The number of young people enrolled in Victoria increased significantly from 2010 due to the introduction of direct enrolment.

Direct enrolment involves the VEC using data from trusted sources, such as VicRoads and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), to automatically add eligible people to the electoral register.

Although this has significantly helped increase the number of young people enrolled, this group is more likely to be disengaged with electoral participation.⁴ Many young people also don't realise that they have been directly enrolled. This is further impacted by the more transient nature of younger people's accommodation/housing, where they are more likely to move more often and forget to update their electoral details when they do so. The YPIP aims to address the impacts of direct enrolment and work towards young people being active participants in the electoral process.

At the 2018 Victorian State election, the voter turnout rate for enrolled 18-year-olds was 90.36% compared to the overall turnout of 90.16%. This is positive; but the figures show a sharp decline in participation following that first voting experience, with only 85.79% of 20-to-24-year-olds and 83.7% of 25-to-29-year-olds voting. The YPIP seeks to improve understanding of the attitudes and behaviours of young people that impact their electoral participation. To meaningfully empower young people to actively engage in their democracy, existing barriers to enrolling and voting must be addressed. The VEC has recently utilised a co-design approach to work with groups of young Victorian people with different life experiences. Findings from this project and analysis of election data have also contributed to the YPIP.

The actions described in the following pages are a summary of the VEC's planned engagement with young people over the next two years. The actions are grouped under four headings: access, employment, community and capability.

⁴Australian Electoral Commission (2016) *Voter Turnout: 2016 House of Representatives and Senate elections* Voter turnout (apo.org.au)

Subject to resourcing, the VEC also hopes to:

- continue modifying and developing the Passport to Democracy website
- provide a program of ‘vote ready’ workshops for young adults
- redesign the VEC enrolment birthday card currently sent to 17-year-olds in partnership with young people
- develop new Passport to Democracy program elements specifically targeting primary school students
- design geospatial tools to identify priority schools for Passport to Democracy program delivery and to assist with program evaluation.



2019 Youth Parliamentarians in Queen's Hall, Parliament of Victoria.

Key priority areas and actions

Access: to premises, information and services

The VEC commits to providing information and services responsive to the needs of young people in Victoria.

To achieve this, the VEC will:

- establish a Young People Advisory Group that will meet at least twice a year, in addition to the annual VEC All Advisory Group meeting
- review direct enrolment communications with young people to support a higher level of engagement
- co-design social media campaigns with young people (particularly young people who are directly enrolled and those likely to be less engaged according to research) to develop authentic content and concepts about the democratic process with the aim of changing their attitudes to enrolling and voting
- deliver life skills and voting education for people aged 17 years or older, in partnership with community organisations, to reach young people outside of formal education structures
- ensure access for young people is adequately incorporated into VEC strategies for voting locations.

Employment: staff recruitment, training and retention

The VEC workforce expands to more than 25,000 people on election day at State elections. The VEC aims to employ and retain a diverse workforce, inclusive of young people, that represents the community it serves.

To achieve this, the VEC will:

- increase the recruitment channels for the employment of young people aged 18 to 29 years as election casual staff
- have a target employment figure of 20-25% of young people aged 18 to 29 for the 2022 State election casual workforce
- expand the existing Democracy Ambassador program to recruit a team of young people (18 to 29 years), who will target young voters across VEC priority communities in the lead up to the 2022 State election.



Alex, a Youth Parliament participant, delivers their speech in the Legislative Assembly.

Community: engagement, capacity building, collaboration and partnership

The VEC will work in partnership with service providers and communities representing young people to support electoral participation and education.

To achieve this, the VEC will:

- provide annual sponsorship of VicSRC student voice events and online learning modules to deliver democracy and electoral education to the organisation's youth members and staff
- provide annual sponsorship of youth teams representing VEC priority groups to participate in YMCA Victoria's Youth Parliament program, and support YMCA Victoria's 'Virtual Y' digital platform to deliver democracy and electoral education to young people up to the age of 25
- ensure the VEC's Passport to Democracy program is accessible to priority schools to increase the diversity of participants in the program
- develop and deliver professional development training to help teachers use Passport to Democracy curriculum resources
- build new and sustained partnerships with external stakeholders representing young people to:
 - present to and teach young people about democracy and voting
 - educate and upskill relevant staff and youth leaders on democracy and voting
 - facilitate engagement with young people to create more meaningful co-design opportunities.

Capability: build staff capability to be inclusive of, and responsive to, the needs of young people

The VEC will have highly trained and committed staff to meet the electoral participation needs of young people.

To achieve this, the VEC will:

- appoint a student intern (aged 18 to 29 years) to help research and identify relevant data sources, themes and evidence to inform VEC programs and the implementation of the YPIP
- co-design projects with young people to inform our programs and electoral education resources
- develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for the YPIP to measure the effectiveness of the YPIP and opportunities for improvement
- create and display a map of Passport to Democracy outreach sessions delivered across Victoria on the Passport to Democracy website, to demonstrate the program's impact and reach
- educate VEC staff on supporting workforce diversity and inclusion to ensure young people are a focus.



VEC geospatial staff looking over a boundary map.

Reporting and governance

The Electoral Commissioner and the VEC Executive Management Group are responsible for ensuring the actions of the YPIP are achieved.

The VEC will maintain a progress report for the YPIP and invite feedback at least twice a year from the Young People Advisory Group.

An annual progress summary will be reported in the VEC Annual Report.



Note passing in the Legislative Assembly during Youth Parliament.

Feedback

If you have any feedback or suggestions about the YPIP, you can:

Email us at info@vec.vic.gov.au

Call us on (03) 8620 1100



If you require interpreter services, you can contact us on 9209 0112.



If you are deaf, hard of hearing or need communication support, you can contact us on 133 677 or through the National Relay Service 1800 555 600.



Write to us at:

Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11
530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000.



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