

Ngabun-Bambunj – Aboriginal education and engagement plan

Victorian Electoral Commission

2025–27





Nicholson Ward, Ky-ya.
"Ngabun-bambunj", 2024.
Digital print

Ky-ya Nicholson Ward is a proud Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Ngurai illum Wurrung, German and Irish woman. She is based in Naarm (Melbourne). Ky-ya is a passionate First Nations artist who tells the stories of her ancestors, family and Country under her "Djirringu Art" creative label. Ky-ya is also an activist, educator, mentor and dancer with Djirri Djirri Cultural Services.

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 we conduct our business. We pay our respects 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.

**Ngabun-Bambunj –
Aboriginal education and
engagement plan 2025–27**

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Electoral Commissioner's introduction

I am proud to present *Ngabun-Bambunj*, the Victorian Electoral Commission's Aboriginal education and engagement plan 2025–27. *Ngabun-Bambunj* is a Woi Wurrung word that means 'courage, bold, brave.' This is our first plan to make sure our work is culturally welcoming, engaging and respectful to the many First Nations communities across Victoria.

We take seriously our duty to identify and remove the barriers that stop many First Nations voters from taking part in electoral processes. *Ngabun-Bambunj* explains how we will work with communities to address these issues.

I look forward to seeing the plan in action. I truly hope that our focus on engaging our First Nations communities will go a long way to help make Victoria's democracy stronger.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Sven Bluemmel'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Sven Bluemmel
Electoral Commissioner

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Ngabun-bambunj: an invitation to be courageous and bold, together

We are honoured that our first Aboriginal education and engagement plan has been gifted the name 'Ngabun-bambunj' by Wurundjeri, Ngurai Ilum Wurrung woman, Dr Mandy Nicholson. With a design by Wurundjeri artist and Mandy's daughter, Ky-ya Nicholson Ward, the plan's Woi Wurrung name acknowledges our strong ties with Wurundjeri people.

Ngabun-bambunj means 'courage, bold, brave'. In our community engagement work, we are asking First Nations peoples to be courageous, to be bold, and to trust both the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) and the electoral process. We are building the belief that, by participating in the democratic process, First Nations people can make a difference and have a say in their futures.

We are asking the same of ourselves at the VEC. We ask our colleagues and leaders to think boldly about how our actions affect First Peoples. This thinking requires systemic and organisational change, and change takes courage.

It is a 2-way relationship and, like all relationships, requires bravery and courage to lean into tension and hold critical conversations to help heal trauma. This theme is a strong component of *Ngabun-bambunj*. We want to create courageous leaders who will lead our community towards building a culturally inclusive and strong future for all Victorians.

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Contents

9 About us

9 Our advisory groups

11 Aboriginal Advisory Group

12 Developing *Ngabun-Bambunj*

12 VEC statement on self-determination and improved outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians

14 Strategy 2027

14 Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) framework

16 Goals of *Ngabun-Bambunj*

18 Cultural safety

18 Community, capability, and connection

19 Cultural competency and representation

20 *Ngabun-Bambunj* outcomes

21 Measuring the success of *Ngabun-Bambunj*

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About us

The VEC is an independent authority set up under Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002*. Our vision is that all Victorians actively participate in their democracy, and our purpose is to provide high quality, accessible electoral services with innovation, honesty and independence.

Our vision is that all Victorians actively participate in their democracy.

Our responsibilities include:

- › running state, local council, and statutory 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.
- › regulating obligations under the *Electoral Act 2002*.

Our 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.

Our advisory groups

The VEC has 5 active community advisory groups. These are the:

- › Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG)
- › Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG) representing people with disabilities
- › Prisons and Without a Home (PAWAH) Advisory Group
- › Young People Advisory Group (YPAG)
- › Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Advisory Group.

Figure 1: Smoking ceremony at a VEC cultural leadership camp.



Aboriginal Advisory Group

The AAG continues to contribute invaluable guidance and cultural knowledge to our work. Representing Elders and community leaders from both metropolitan and regional Victoria, the AAG has helped us shape internal projects, including *Ngabun-Bambunj*, and how we engage First Nations communities.

The AAG currently has 8 members:

- › Andrew Jackomos (Yorta Yorta, Gunditjmara)
- › Nellie Flagg (Bunurong, Wemba Wemba, Dja Dja Wurrung)
- › Stacie Nicholson-Piper (Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung, Ngurai Illum Wurrung)
- › Patsy Doolan (Barkindji)
- › Shantelle Thompson (Barkindji)
- › Alan Brown
- › Marie Pewhairangi (Te Whanau a Ruataupare, Ngati Porou)
- › Diane Kerr (Wurundjeri).

We would also like to acknowledge previous AAG members from when the group formed in May 2021:

- › Deborah Mellett (Gurundji – Northern Territory)
- › Mai Katona (Gagudju Kakadu – Northern Territory)
- › Thelma Chilly (Wiradjurri, Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba, Muthi Muthi)
- › Shane Clarke (Bunurong, Latje Latje).

Developing *Ngabun-Bambunj*

Ngabun-Bambunj was shaped by the frameworks outlined below.

VEC statement on self-determination and improved outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians

We have a public statement and internal policy on self-determination and outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians. These documents define self-determination based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as ‘the ability for Indigenous people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development’ (UN General Assembly, 2007).

Self-determination as ‘the ability for Indigenous people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development’.

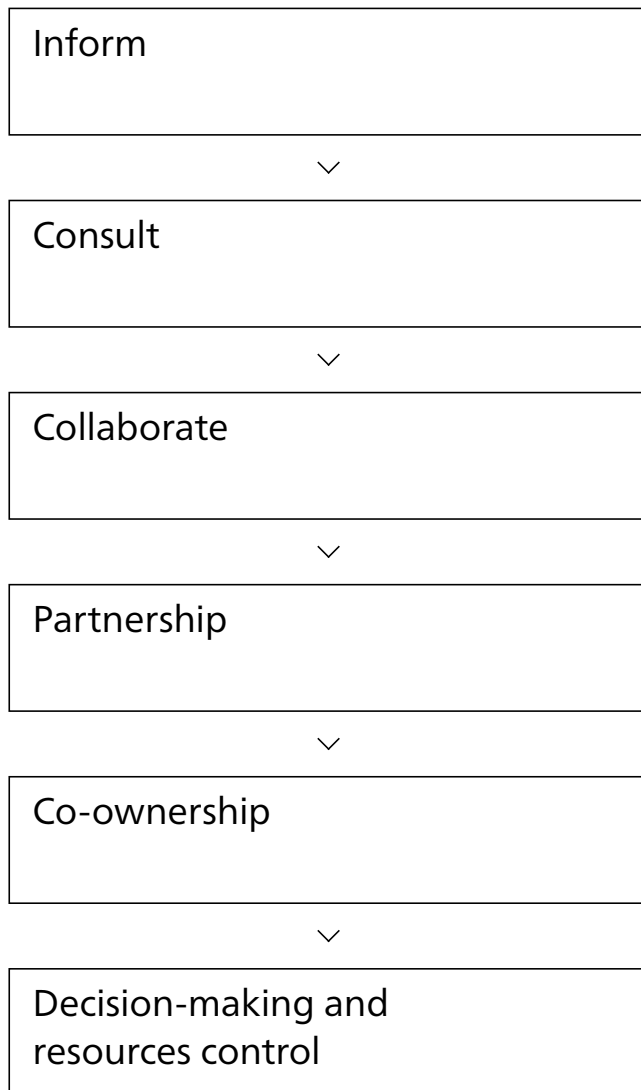
(UN General Assembly, 2007)

We commit to advancing self-determination through the reforms in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) and the Victorian Government Self-Determination Reform Framework. We will focus on the VAAF’s self-determination goals:

- › prioritising culture
- › addressing trauma and supporting healing
- › addressing racism and promoting cultural safety
- › transferring of power and resources to communities.

We support the right to self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians. We will work to advance this right while respecting our legislative responsibilities as an independent and impartial statutory authority. We will achieve this by following the VAAF’s framework for advancing self-determination, as shown below.

Figure 2: Continuum towards Aboriginal self-determination



Strategy 2027

Strategy 2027 sets VEC objectives until 2027. It reflects the dynamic and complex environment we work in, and responds to new challenges including:

- › changes to the law
- › changes to the way people expect elections to run, including using technology
- › misinformation and disinformation across the media landscape and their impact on political views
- › decreasing trust in democratic systems
- › increasing threats to our systems and applications and a need for better cybersecurity.

The strategy has 4 thematic areas that guide our work and help address these challenges:

- › Trust – we are trusted to deliver electoral services with integrity and high quality.
- › Voters – we deliver a great voter experience.
- › Processes and systems – our processes and systems respond to a complex environment.
- › Wellbeing – our people are capable, engaged and satisfied.

These themes inform the goals and actions of our education and engagement plans.

The VEC *Strategy 2027* has 4 thematic areas:

- › trust
- › voters
- › processes and systems
- › wellbeing.

Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) framework

We are committed to providing inclusive and accessible services to Victorians and creating a workplace that reflects the diverse communities we serve. We aim to foster respect and prevent all forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence.

We are developing an IDEA framework which will explain how we will work with people of all ages, genders, sexualities, abilities, ethnicities, cultures, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Our IDEA framework will build on our previous diversity and inclusion framework to increase trust in the VEC through recognising and celebrating diversity.

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The VEC has a history of championing inclusion through initiatives such as our democracy ambassador program. The IDEA framework will support the goals of our education and engagement plans to help our staff and communities thrive.

Figure 3: (From left) VEC's Anahera Neho-Cooper. Aboriginal Advisory Elder Deb Mellett. Aboriginal Democracy Ambassador, and Elisabeth Murdoch College (EMC) Vice Captain, Jenaya Bartlett. VEC's Jeremy Nikora. Image taken at 2023 Koorie Christmas event.



Goals of *Ngabun-Bambunj*

Aboriginal peoples are the oldest continuous living culture in the world and have been custodians of these lands for over 65,000 years. Their identity, language, customs, and songlines are all intertwined within the fabric of the land, trees, mountains, waterways and the air that carries the smoke from their welcome fires. The *Ngabun-Bambunj Aboriginal education and engagement plan 2025–27* aims to recognise this and encourage the full participation of Aboriginal Victorians in our state government and electoral processes.

Ngabun-Bambunj will help shape our workplace into one that genuinely commits to Aboriginal self-determination, as outlined in our self-determination policy. By increasing our understanding of the cultural nuances and values important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we hope to work in a culturally safe way and support Aboriginal communities' journeys to self-determination.

The foundations of *Ngabun-Bambunj* come from a 3-year process of learning, trust building and engaging with Aboriginal communities. We took the time to sit respectfully with Elders, young people, and other community members to hear their stories, their history, their trauma and ongoing challenges. Our hope is that they feel they have had an equitable say in shaping their future. This plan is based on the insights we gained from these conversations, and we are grateful to all who shared their experiences with us.

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We know that democracy must include everyone. The system we follow was created without regard for the existing culture and beliefs of Aboriginal peoples living in Victoria. Because of this, many Aboriginal people do not feel connected to, or represented or considered by Victoria's electoral system and the many historical policies that sought to control their freedom.

This plan aims to show how active participation in the electoral process can positively influence cultural priorities like language development, cultural and social identity, poverty, and health. Examples from other First Nations peoples, like the Sámi in Finland, Native Americans, and Māori in New Zealand, demonstrate the impact of this participation.

Active participation in the electoral process can positively influence cultural priorities like language development, cultural and social identity, poverty, and health.

We will:

- › build Aboriginal peoples' participation through supporting self-determination by:
 - prioritising culture
 - supporting healing
 - building cultural competency
 - promoting cultural safety
 - sharing power and resources.
- › build Aboriginal peoples' trust of, understanding of and access to participate in the electoral process
- › maximise the participation of Aboriginal people in democracy by providing more opportunities to enrol, vote, and engage.

We have 3 focus areas with actions to achieve them outlined under the headings below.

Cultural safety

To create culturally safe environments for First Nations communities, we will:

- › develop and promote culturally inclusive resources
- › create a checklist to help staff design inclusive materials
- › provide input to our style guide, policies, and procedures
- › offer mobile enrolment and voting at Aboriginal services, where appropriate.

Community, capability, and connection

To enhance First Nations community capability, we will:

- › recruit, train, and support Aboriginal democracy ambassadors
- › support Aboriginal organisations and programs through a range of initiatives
- › work with Aboriginal bodies to deliver leadership programs for emerging leaders
- › participate in Aboriginal cultural and community events.

Figure 4: A community member voting at the Nairn Marr Djambana early voting location.



Figure 5: Community members voting at the Nairn Marr Djambana early voting location.



Cultural competency and representation

To improve our cultural competency for our work with First Nations communities, we will:

- › consult with Elders and support the AAG
- › develop an Aboriginal workforce strategy to support Aboriginal staff and provide internship opportunities
- › always include Aboriginal people in decision making about our services and policies that impact their communities
- › build cultural competency among our Executive Management Group and staff
- › ensure representation at the executive level on decisions impacting Aboriginal electoral participation
- › provide cultural learning modules, workshops and on-Country activities
- › commit to and report on social procurement to prioritise culture and share power and resources
- › build VEC awareness of data sovereignty and the role it plays building trust in electoral processes.

***Ngabun-Bambunj* outcomes**

At the end of the plan, some of the outcomes we hope to see include:

- › more culturally safe enrolment and voting for Aboriginal people
- › more Aboriginal people wanting and knowing how to enrol and vote
- › more Aboriginal people enrolling and voting
- › genuine and ongoing relationships with Aboriginal Elders, young people, organisations, and communities
- › emerging Aboriginal leaders supported
- › increased employment of First Nations people at the VEC
- › representation influencing decisions that impact the electoral participation of Aboriginal people
- › co-ownership of our services and policies that impact Aboriginal communities
- › data on Aboriginal people being collected, stored and destroyed according to co-designed and agreed-on data sovereignty guidance.

Measuring the success of *Ngabun-Bambunj*

The Electoral Commissioner, VEC Executive Management Group and staff are responsible for ensuring we achieve the actions of the *Ngabun-Bambunj Aboriginal education and engagement plan 2025–27*.

We will maintain a progress report for *Ngabun-Bambunj* and invite feedback twice a year from the AAG.

We will supply an annual progress summary in the VEC annual report.

Ngabun-Bambunj is guided by its own program logic. The monitoring and evaluation plan includes measures and targets, with data drawn from a range of sources and reported on in quarterly, annual, and election reporting. For a copy of the program logic or monitoring and evaluation plan, please contact education@vec.vic.gov.au

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