



Australian Electoral Commission

# CORPORATE PLAN

2016–20



**AEC**

Australian Electoral Commission

# COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

I, as the accountable authority of the Australian Electoral Commission, present the 2016–17 AEC Corporate Plan, which covers the period of 2016–20, as required under paragraph 35(1) (b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

**Tom Rogers**  
Electoral Commissioner

# MESSAGE FROM THE ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER



Welcome to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Corporate Plan 2016–20. The plan maps out the future of the AEC as it continues on the change journey that began after the 2013 federal election.

The AEC's actions and plans since then have been underpinned by a commitment to electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism, a firm belief that 'every task matters', no matter how big or small that task is, and an ongoing commitment to the sanctity of the ballot paper in all its forms and at all times.

The AEC's activities are guided by the Election Readiness Framework, the AEC's key tool for planning for electoral events. There are three major phases to the framework – Evaluate and Learn, Implement Change, and Mobilisation.

The AEC's core activities as it enters 2016–17 will move from Mobilisation (the delivery of the 2016 federal election) to Evaluate and Learn.

Following the completion of the 2016 federal election, our focus will be on rigour in post-election processes. Reviewing the AEC's election planning and delivery, and seeking opportunities for modernisation and innovative reforms in delivering electoral events, will be paramount.

We will continue to build staff capability and enhance the agency governance framework while maintaining the ability to mobilise and deliver electoral events whenever they are called.

I look forward to an exciting and challenging future for the AEC as it continues on its change journey, and demonstrates its ability to deliver trusted, consistently reliable, high quality and high integrity electoral events.

**Tom Rogers**  
**Electoral Commissioner**

# PURPOSE

## Agency purpose

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is an independent statutory authority established by the Australian Government to:

Maintain an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services, and targeted education and public awareness programs.



We do this by:

1. conducting successful electoral events, including federal elections, by-elections and referendums
2. ensuring confidence in the electoral roll
3. administering political party registrations and financial disclosure
4. undertaking public awareness activities.

Associated activities include:

- conducting ballots for industrial and commercial organisations
- undertaking electoral analysis
- supporting electoral redistributions
- administering election funding to eligible political parties
- assisting overseas electoral management bodies.

# PURPOSE

## Agency directions

Our agency purpose is supported by five agency directions.

### AEC 2016–20 AGENCY DIRECTIONS

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 1.0 | Deliver a changed model for electoral events      |
| 2.0 | Govern the organisation for quality and assurance |
| 3.0 | Professionalise the workforce                     |
| 4.0 | Re-establish the reputation of the AEC            |
| 5.0 | Build an agile and responsive organisation        |

# OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

With the successful delivery of the 2015 Canning and North Sydney by-elections, and successful 2016 federal election, the AEC has advanced its public reputation considerably following the issues associated with the 2013 federal election.

We continue to operate in an external environment comprising a strict legal framework – the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* – combined with community demands for increased transparency in institutions, and more convenient and accessible online services, and government and community expectations of a leaner and more efficient public service.

We also operate in an environment of increased public scrutiny of the funding and governance of political parties. The AEC continues to work collaboratively with registered parties to ensure appropriate financial disclosures are obtained and placed on the public record.

Electoral events are necessarily conducted in a high profile environment where impartiality, accuracy, reliability, efficiency and consistency are essential. One of the challenges of all electoral management bodies lies in ensuring these requirements are met while, at the same time, providing a service to voters that recognises them as individuals living in individual and often divergent communities.

The AEC's national office drives election planning and operations overall, but the delivery of electoral services is mostly at a local level. Maintaining a permanent central presence plus a state and territory network that can be mobilised when required to deliver localised electoral services to a very large and dispersed population is a huge challenge, and an ongoing one. There is typically a relatively short timeframe between when an election is announced and election day to deliver these services. The need to continue to identify opportunities for innovation is becoming increasingly paramount to the management and delivery of high quality, high integrity and consistent services.

The steady introduction of technology into electoral processes – both in terms of maintaining a reliable and complete electoral roll and more options for accessible voting – promises gains in efficiency, accountability and accuracy. But it also brings with it a new set of challenges, such as:

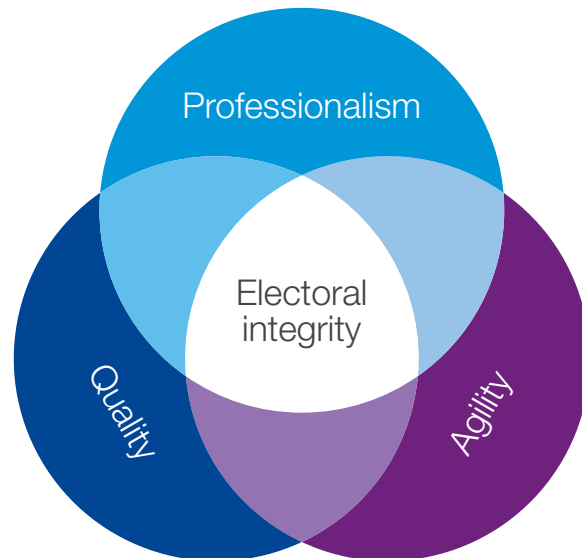
- making these new technologies accessible to and understandable by all voters
- preventing unauthorised access to or manipulation of systems for recording votes
- a growing need to invest in core infrastructure and systems that will support automation.

The AEC's journey and continual improvement will require a solid commitment to the process and outcomes of internal and external evaluation.

# OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

## The AEC's values and commitments – essential in our operating environment

The AEC values and commitments are an essential component of our operating environment and frame how AEC staff work. The AEC's focus is on electoral integrity through the values of **quality**, **agility** and **professionalism**.



### QUALITY

Quality must be evident in every task across the AEC, with best practice driving every aspect of our business.

### AGILITY

Agility is critical. We must readily and swiftly adapt to change, operate effectively despite uncertainty, and look for innovative solutions – not obstacles.

### PROFESSIONALISM

Professionalism is our hallmark. A professional AEC comprises competent, knowledgeable and highly skilled electoral practitioners producing work of the highest standard.

## BALLOT PAPER PRINCIPLES

The AEC values are supported by the organisational commitment to the ballot paper principles and '**every task matters**' principle.

The ballot paper principles underpin all AEC planning, training, systems, handling and practices associated with ballot papers. They show how important ballot paper security is, and provide a basis for the treatment of every ballot paper from printing to destruction, by anyone who handles ballot papers, including but not limited to staff, polling officials and contractors.

A commitment to **every task matters** provides assurance that we comply with, and adhere to, all applicable legislation necessary to deliver electoral integrity.

# PERFORMANCE 2016-17

AGENCY DIRECTIONS 2016-17	Strategies to achieve agency directions in 2016-17	Internal supporting activities 2016-17	How our performance will be measured
<b>1.0 Deliver a changed model for electoral events</b>	<b>1.1</b> Undertake a post implementation review of election planning and delivery.	Operationalise the lessons learned framework.	1. Federal electoral events are successfully delivered.
	<b>1.2</b> Reform electoral business processes and practices.	Undertake a review of funding and disclosure processes.	2. Maintain ability to conduct a federal electoral event within a timeframe as assessed by the Electoral Commissioner.
	<b>1.3</b> Provide support for election systems to be in place to meet the directed level of election readiness.	Identify capability development activities through the election evaluation process.	3. Evaluation and reform of election practices is implemented according to election readiness phases.
	<b>1.4</b> Reform and manage the Industrial and Commercial Elections (ICE) Program.	Implement a new system to allow better management of industrial and commercial elections.	4. Industrial elections, Protected Action Ballots and Torres Strait Regional Authority elections are delivered in accordance with the relevant legislation and rules.
<b>2.0 Govern the organisation for quality and assurance</b>	<b>2.1</b> Implement and support an enhanced governance framework.	Implement an Information Management Strategy that will support risk based decision making.	1. The governance framework is effective in supporting the AEC to meet its objectives.
	<b>2.2</b> Maintain electoral integrity with a focus on confidence in the electoral roll.	Review the governance framework.  Further enhance the work of the Electoral Integrity Unit.	2. High level of confidence in the electoral roll.  3. Timely conduct of redistribution activities.
	<b>2.3</b> Evolve an organisational structure that supports the agency directions.	Align the structure of the AEC to best deliver on the agency's objectives.	4. The organisation is structured to support the achievement of the agency directions.



# PERFORMANCE 2016–17

AGENCY DIRECTIONS 2016–17	Strategies to achieve agency directions in 2016–17	Internal supporting activities 2016–17	How our performance will be measured
<b>3.0 Professionalise the workforce</b>	<b>3.1</b> Educate all staff on roles and principles.	Continue the rollout of the core skills and capability training program for all AEC staff.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff understand their roles, the expectations and accountabilities.</li> <li>2. Management capability of key cohorts addressed in development plans and delivered with 90% participating in courses where appropriate.</li> </ol>
	<b>3.2</b> Build the management capability of the Executive Level cohort.		
<b>4.0 Re-establish the reputation of the AEC</b>	<b>4.1</b> Engage decision makers and opinion shapers in constructive conversations to shape expectations.	Continue to deliver external-facing services with professionalism and integrity. These include international services, party registration and the provision of roll products.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Productive relationship is maintained with the Minister, Parliament, key agencies and other stakeholders.</li> <li>2. High quality services delivered with effective management of issues in line with relevant legislation and agreements.</li> <li>3. Information is timely and accurate, uses appropriate technology and channels, and meets accessibility standards.</li> </ol>
	<b>4.2</b> Entrench a culture of quality, professionalism and agility to support electoral integrity.		
<b>5.0 Build an agile and responsive organisation</b>	<b>5.1</b> Develop options and capabilities post-2016.	Undertake a review to identify opportunities for innovative delivery of services both externally and internally.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create an environment to encourage innovative practices to support the AEC and the conduct of electoral events.</li> </ol>

# PERFORMANCE 2016–17

## Relationship to Portfolio Budget Statements performance criteria

The AEC agency directions draw from and contribute to the four AEC performance criteria set out for 2016-17 in the 2016–17 Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS).<sup>1</sup>

A chart mapping the PBS performance criteria to the agency directions is below.

## Map of 2016–17 PBS performance criteria to AEC agency directions

PBS PERFORMANCE CRITERIA 2016–17	AEC AGENCY DIRECTIONS				
	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0
	Deliver a changed model for electoral events	Govern the organisation for quality and assurance	Professionalise the workforce	Re-establish the reputation of the AEC	Build an agile and responsive organisation
<b>Federal Elections, By-elections and Referendums</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal electoral events are successfully delivered.</li> <li>Maintain ability to conduct a federal electoral event within a timeframe as assessed by the Electoral Commissioner.</li> <li>Timely conduct of redistribution activities.</li> <li>Industrial elections, Protected Action Ballots and Torres Strait Regional Authority elections are delivered in accordance with the relevant legislation and rules.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓		✓

<sup>1</sup> The criteria are outlined under ‘AEC Program 1.1 – Deliver electoral events’, available in *Budget 2016–17 Portfolio Budget Statements* (PBS), Budget Related Paper No. 1.8 (Finance Portfolio), page 84, available at [www.finance.gov.au/publications/portfolio-budget-statements/16-17/](http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/portfolio-budget-statements/16-17/).

# PERFORMANCE 2016–17

PBS PERFORMANCE CRITERIA 2016–17	AEC AGENCY DIRECTIONS				
	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0
	Deliver a changed model for electoral events	Govern the organisation for quality and assurance	Professionalise the workforce	Re-establish the reputation of the AEC	Build an agile and responsive organisation
<b>Electoral Roll Management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of confidence in the electoral roll.</li> </ul>		✓		✓	✓
<b>Party Registrations and Financial Disclosure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Party registration processed in accordance with the <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>.</li> <li>Financial disclosures obtained and placed on the public record in accordance with the <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>.</li> </ul>		✓	✓		
<b>Public Awareness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver communication, education and public awareness activities to inform all Australians of electoral matters.</li> <li>Information is timely and accurate, uses appropriate technology and channels, and meets accessibility standards.</li> </ul>			✓	✓	✓

# PLANNED PERFORMANCE BEYOND 2016–17

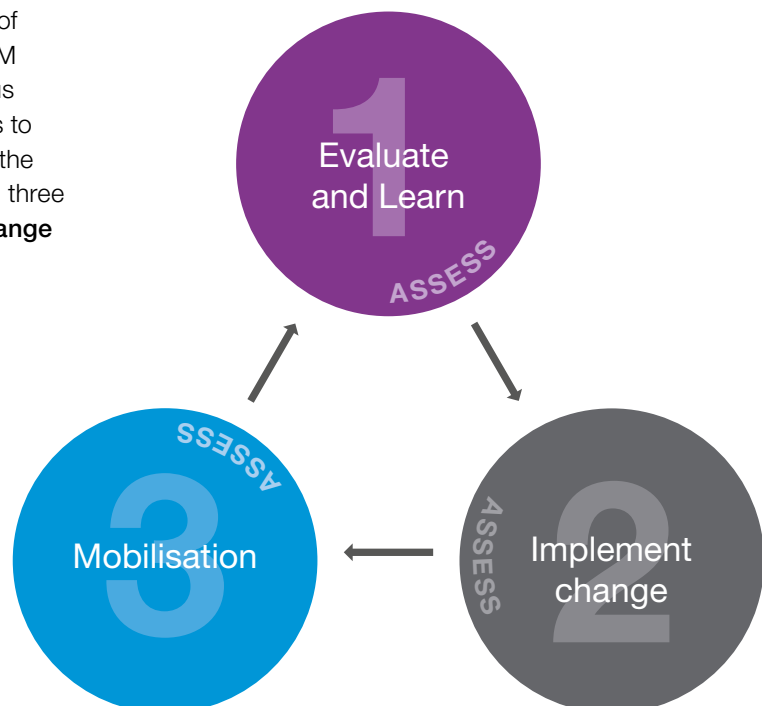
The AEC’s current agency directions will continue to provide the strategic alignment necessary for rebuilding the confidence and trust of stakeholders and the Australian public. The election readiness framework provides the construct for the AEC to plan and deliver for an electoral event. The framework defines delivery through an event picture, while the election ready road map (ERRM) is the pathway.

The election readiness framework and ERRM are central to planning within the AEC, as they unify or align many of the business processes conducted across the organisation with the compelling need to deliver successful electoral events.

The ERRM sets out the sequence of actions that need to be completed between the return of the writs from the previous election and the issue of writs for the next election. In this way the ERRM connects the lessons learned from the previous electoral event with the actions the AEC needs to take in planning, preparing for, and delivering, the next electoral event; the ERRM travels through three phases, **Evaluate and Learn**, **Implement Change** and **Mobilisation**.

In planning for the future, the three phases are loosely aligned to the next three financial years. While these three phases are sequential, elements of overlap can exist; similarly, the timeframes of each phase are driven as much by the external environment as the normal three-year electoral cycle. The AEC must be ready to respond whenever an election is called.

Planned activities will develop for each agency direction as set out in the following table.



# PLANNED PERFORMANCE BEYOND 2016–17

AGENCY DIRECTIONS	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE AGENCY DIRECTIONS <sup>a</sup>			
	Evaluate and Learn → Implement Change → Mobilisation			
	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	
<b>1.0 Deliver a changed model for electoral events</b>	<b>1.1</b>	Undertake a post implementation review of election planning and delivery.	Implement lessons learned from review of election planning and delivery.	Mobilise and use lessons learned from post implementation review of election planning and delivery.
	<b>1.2</b>	Reform electoral business processes and practices.	Implement agreed reforms to electoral business processes and practices.	Mobilise and use reformed electoral business processes and practices.
	<b>1.3</b>	Provide support for election systems to be in place to meet the directed level of election readiness.	Put election systems in place to meet the directed level of election readiness.	Use new election systems in federal election and other electoral events.
	<b>1.4</b>	Reform and manage the Industrial and Commercial Elections (ICE) Program.	Implement ICE Program changes.	Embed and use ICE Program changes in ICE events.
<b>2.0 Govern the organisation for quality and assurance</b>	<b>2.1</b>	Implement and support an enhanced governance framework.	Enhanced governance framework in place.	Implement and support an enhanced governance framework.
	<b>2.2</b>	Maintain electoral integrity with a focus on confidence in the electoral roll.	Maintain electoral integrity with a focus on confidence in the electoral roll.	Maintain electoral integrity with a focus on confidence in the electoral roll.
	<b>2.3</b>	Evolve an organisational structure that supports the agency directions.	Implement new organisational structure.	Continue to monitor and adjust as necessary.
<b>3.0 Professionalise the workforce</b>	<b>3.1</b>	Educate all staff on roles and principles.	Staff understand their role and required contribution.	A high performing workforce effectively lead, manage and undertake electoral events.
	<b>3.2</b>	Build the management capability of the Executive Level cohort.	Managers build capability of their teams.	Maintain and continue development of upcoming managers.

# PLANNED PERFORMANCE BEYOND 2016–17

AGENCY DIRECTIONS	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE AGENCY DIRECTIONS <sup>a</sup>			
	Evaluate and Learn → Implement Change → Mobilisation			
	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	
<b>4.0 Re-establish the reputation of the AEC</b>	<b>4.1</b>	Engage decision makers and opinion shapers in constructive conversations to shape expectations.	Engage decision makers and opinion shapers in constructive conversations to shape expectations.	Engage decision makers and opinion shapers in constructive conversations to shape expectations.
	<b>4.2</b>	Entrench a culture of quality, professionalism and agility to support electoral integrity.	Demonstrate a culture of quality, professionalism and agility to support electoral integrity.	Demonstrate a culture of quality, professionalism and agility to support electoral integrity.
<b>5.0 Build an agile and responsive organisation</b>	<b>5.1</b>	Develop options and capabilities post-2016.	Implement options and capabilities developed post-2016.	Mobilise agreed options and capabilities developed post-2016.

<sup>a</sup> Strategies for 2019–20 will broadly reflect those for 2016–17 in line with the AEC’s Election Ready Road Map.

# REGULATOR PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Australian Government has committed to reducing the cost of unnecessary or inefficient regulation imposed on individuals, business and community organisations, and has developed a framework to measure the performance of regulators. As a regulatory body, the AEC aims to

reduce the regulatory burden imposed on electors through enrolment and voting activities.

The AEC will measure itself against the six mandatory key performance indicators, consistent with the AEC's obligations under the regulator performance framework.

MANDATORY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	MEASURES OF SUCCESS
Regulators do not unnecessarily impede the efficient operation of regulated entities.	Federal electoral events are successfully delivered.
Communication with regulated entities is clear, targeted and effective.	Information is timely and accurate, uses appropriate technology and channels, and meets accessibility standards.
Actions undertaken by regulators are proportionate to the regulatory risk being managed.	Maintain ability to conduct a federal electoral event within a timeframe as assessed by the Electoral Commissioner.
Compliance and monitoring approaches are streamlined and coordinated.	The governance framework is effective in supporting the AEC to meet its objectives.
Regulators are open and transparent in their dealings with regulated entities.	Productive relationship is maintained with the Minister, Parliament, key agencies and other stakeholders.
Regulators actively contribute to the continuous improvement of regulatory frameworks.	Evaluation and reform of election practices is implemented according to election readiness phases.  Create an environment to encourage innovative practices to support the AEC and the conduct of electoral events.

# CAPABILITY

## Resource allocation

Resources, particularly financial resources, are allocated according to agency directions and strategies, risk to the agency and organisational priorities.

Supporting information for making allocation decisions is collected through business planning and project management processes prior to the start of each financial year.

Progress against key performance indicators is measured and monitored regularly through the AEC's reporting structure to ensure priorities are met on time and within budget and that resources can be reallocated where necessary.

Resources available, including budget expenses and the average staffing level, are detailed in the Portfolio Budget Statements.



## Information technology

The AEC's Information Technology Strategic Plan 2015-2020 (IT Strategic Plan) describes the AEC's desired information technology vision to 2020. It is supported by the IT Architecture Plan, which outlines the principles that drive AEC decision-making and investment in information technology. Both plans accord with the work of the Australian Government's Digital Transformation Office in making access to government services 'simpler, clearer and faster for everyone'.

The vision for the AEC IT Strategic Plan is 'deliver and support robust information technology capabilities that allow the agency to deliver high integrity elections'. Information technology is a critical enabler for the AEC – it underpins the delivery of safe, transparent and efficient modern elections and can make engaging with the AEC easier and more convenient for voters and prospective voters.

In support of the agency directions, the IT Strategic Plan focuses on seven objectives. The objectives are:

- improve election logistics
- improve election transparency
- improve stakeholder experience (of engaging/interacting with the AEC)
- be ready (election readiness)
- reduce risk (through replacing old and outdated systems)
- improve election staff effectiveness (through improved desktop and mobile access and training)
- maintain capability (by ensuring IT services and assets are integrated and of industry standard).

The IT Strategic Plan is periodically reviewed in line with business planning cycles to ensure the AEC can respond to changing priorities while achieving the IT Strategic Plan's overall vision.



## Workforce planning

The AEC will continue to develop and implement an integrated approach to workforce planning, ensuring recruitment, learning and development, and performance management activities are complementary and coordinated. This work will build capability in a systematic and sustainable manner in line with the phases of the election readiness framework.

The AEC's approach to workforce planning and management will enable the organisation to:

- develop a complete workforce planning picture that caters for both the permanent and temporary election workforces for future electoral events
- attract, retain and develop a more agile workforce with greater diversity, reflective of the demographic of the Australian community and with a skillset aligned with the capabilities required to deliver electoral events
- develop a culture of quality, professionalism and agility to support electoral integrity
- embed standards of behaviour and work practices that align with the AEC's values and commitments
- improve consistency of practice in operational roles and build levels of compliance, quality and integrity across operational activities.

## Risk oversight and management

Risk management allows the AEC to better understand the choices faced in allocating resources in support of this corporate plan. It also improves decision-making, performance and accountability, and acts to minimise losses and maximise opportunities for the agency. Accordingly, risk assessments and risk management processes are incorporated into all critical activities of the agency.

A Strategic Risk Management Plan and the Risk Management Policy set the risk environment in which the AEC operates. The Strategic Risk Management Plan is supported by operational and project risk assessments.



All risk assessments are recorded in an Enterprise Risk Register, which acts as a central point of access for staff to update whenever risks are realised, or when circumstances change. There is monthly risk management reporting to the Executive Leadership Team and other internal business and operational groups at the AEC.

Further, the AEC contributes to the annual Comcover Risk Management Benchmarking Survey, with the 2016 results showing the AEC comparing well with like organisations, and making significant improvements since the previous year. In 2015-16 the AEC's risk management maturity level improved from systematic to integrated.

The AEC will continue to work towards maturing its risk framework, in particular through:

- increased education and empowerment of staff
- use of key risk indicators and near-miss data
- investigating and implementing dedicated risk management software.

## Assurance

The AEC has an assurance framework that provides the Electoral Commissioner with confidence that the preparation, delivery and evaluation of an electoral event is conducted to the highest standard, and in line with legislation and organisational policies. The focus is on checking the objectiveness of our policies and procedures as well as employees' adherence to those policies.

The framework operates at multiple levels, including local assessment, national monitoring and independent auditing. Regular reporting is provided to various governance committees and the Executive Leadership Team to achieve objective assurance.

