

July 2021

Media and Digital Engagement Plan

2021 / 2022 federal election

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Background

This document is part of the *AEC Reputation Management Framework*. It directly relates to the *Electoral Integrity: Reputation Management Strategy* and is guided by the six principles within that strategy, as reproduced below.



Principle 1: Be proactive in building a positive reputation for the Australian electoral system.



Principle 2: Undertake open and regular communication with voters and stakeholders.



Principle 3: Position the AEC as the foremost subject matter expert on federal electoral processes in Australia.



Principle 4: Judicious use of language, tone and timing in political, media and social media environments.



Principle 5: Back-up public statements with operational delivery.



Principle 6: Actively monitor issues, manage risks, and plan for crisis situations.

The purpose

This plan addresses the above principles for the next federal election by outlining:

1. a program of proactive public relations activities designed to address issues that could affect the AEC's reputation.
2. a structure and direction for social media management that will enable active participation in online conversations, reducing the spread of procedural disinformation.

Activities outlined in this plan will complement the broader *AEC Reputation Management Framework* as well as other AEC communication planned to occur for the next federal election as part of the *AEC Public Information Campaign Strategy*.

External operating environment

As outlined in the Parliamentary Library paper '*So when is the next election?: Australian elections timetable as at January 2020*', the next federal election can be held anytime from 7 August 2021 to 21 May 2022.

Entering 2021, as a potential federal election year, Australian media and social media commentary was saturated with observations of the 2020 US Presidential Election and subsequent fallout. This included numerous court cases alleging electoral fraud and ultimately the violent events at the Capitol Building in Washington DC on 6 January 2021.

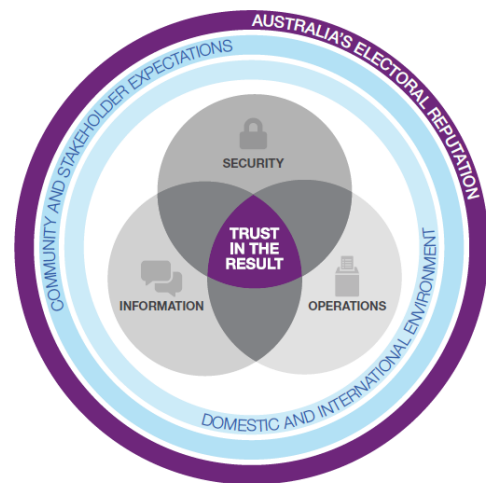
At the time, this commentary drew many comparisons to the Australian electoral system – most of which were favourable with the overwhelming sentiment that Australians are fortunate to have a robust electoral system that could withstand what they saw as blatant procedural disinformation.

However, other comparisons suggested that the claims of electoral fraud could not be disproved and there existed the potential for fraud in the Australian vote.

Given the scale of initial interest in the US election, it has the potential to be a significant influencer on the discussion that surrounds the next Australian federal election. Add to this the increasingly complex, divisive and immediate nature of mainstream and social media activity (as detailed in the *Electoral Integrity: Reputation management Strategy*) and decreasing levels of trust in public institutions.

Collectively, this creates an environment with significant reputation management challenges. While the AEC does not control every facet of a federal election, the reputation of the AEC as the agency entrusted with the delivery of the federal election, is crucial to trust in election results.

The effective management of reputation relies primarily on the integrity built into the delivery of services. As represented in this image, AEC operations, security and information combine as key factors in the overall trust in the process, and by extension, the election result.



The issues

There are a number of known potential issues that are being taken into account in the delivery of this plan. This includes the potential for procedural failure (AEC operations) but is predominantly concerning areas of likely disinformation. Each issue listed below represents an information risk.

This document sits outside of the AEC's risk management framework, so the issues will not be rated according to the AEC's risk matrix but rather presented here as further context to the plan. The key issues include, but are not limited to, the following.

- **The potential for low participation**

- The estimated federal enrolment rate of approximately 97 per cent is as high as it has ever been and likely one of the most complete electoral rolls in the world.
- However, low levels of institutional trust and recent domestic trends suggest that turnout is at risk of dropping lower than the 91.01 per cent experienced at the 2019 federal election.
- Being staged within the nation's ongoing management of COVID-19 sans widespread vaccination increases the chance of voter reluctance. The health risks of large gatherings, time delays from long queues and general apathy towards the political system amid the pandemic loom as influences to less turnout.
- Should turnout decrease further it could be used to question the health of Australian democracy, or even the legitimacy of results in particularly poorly attended electoral division contests.
- Formality rates have been largely stable from election to election in recent times and therefore present less risk than the potential for low turnout.

- **Indigenous participation**

- The estimated enrolment rate of Indigenous Australians is significantly lower, at around 78 per cent, than the overall national enrolment rate. As is the Northern Territory enrolment rate of around 85 per cent.

- This has been the subject of irregular critical commentary from some stakeholders and the media throughout the past 4-5 years.
- The lower Indigenous enrolment rate is occasionally attributed to, either wholly or partially, the AEC's processes. This includes the efficacy of direct enrolment in remote townships, the AEC's reduced NT staffing presence and the AEC's lessened in-person community engagement activities.
- **Electoral roll integrity**
 - There is a danger that suggestions could be raised of low levels of roll integrity. While there is nothing substantially different procedurally, there have been mid-cycle concerns raised by some media outlets regarding the evidence of identity requirements for enrolment.
 - Accusations could also raise issues present in some international democracies, such as suggestions of deceased Australians being on the roll or slow/incorrect update of enrolment from third-party records.
- **Speed of the count**
 - This is a consistent issue for the AEC, one that would be exacerbated greatly should the result be unknown on election night.
 - Compounding the concern is the likely increase of postal voting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will result in more unknown electoral division results on election night, increasing the chance of a high-profile seat or overall result being unknown for a period of time, in turn requiring patience from the Australian public.
- **Count integrity**
 - The potential for operational errors (e.g. transcription errors) aside, there is a possibility that people with vested interests could suggest fault with counting activities being undertaken by the AEC.
 - This has been seen in other jurisdictions and it cannot be ruled out that this could take the form of blatant disinformation.
 - Areas that have been the subject of previous focus include the Senate's electronic distribution of preferences, changes occurring as a result of fresh scrutiny and ill-informed scrutineer observations.
- **Postal voting integrity**
 - Among the potential areas of question or disinformation is the security of postal voting applications and ballot papers, verification checks in the process and poor delivery timeframes potentially disenfranchising Australian voters.
 - Postal voting or 'mail-in voting', as it is referred to in some other jurisdictions, came under scrutiny during the US Presidential election in 2020. This could increase the likelihood of intense scrutiny or disinformation at the Australian federal election, particularly if there are perceived delays or issues with the process.
- **Queuing**
 - The tolerance for waiting in a queue is continually decreasing. Queuing is also an activity that Australian citizens do not have to engage with often.

- Queuing criticism could emerge in light of this decreased tolerance, the likelihood of longer wait times due to COVID-19 safety measures and/or the more febrile electoral communication landscape.
- **Voter access (incl COVID-19 safety measures)**
 - COVID-19 safety measures being implemented could make access to voting options appear more limited to certain voter cohorts.
 - Overseas voting will likely be postal-only with some continued reliance on international posting systems that are not only out of the AEC's control/visibility but are observed to often experience delays. This could encounter claims of disenfranchisement.
 - Mobile voting activities will not occur in hospitals or residential facilities. Despite the increased postal voting service, this change could potentially draw criticism, particularly in light of the recent focus on aged care sector.
 - In addition, some voters may be hesitant to visit a physical voting venue due to COVID-19 concerns. This will persist for some despite safety measures being implemented that are now societal norms (e.g. capacity limits, hand sanitiser, hygiene officers).
 - The issue of voter access could become extreme should a COVID-19 outbreak occur during the voting period without what is perceived as reasonable alternative voting options being available.
- **Campaigning activities**
 - There are significant reputational dangers posed to the AEC by the varying and evolving campaigning tactics utilised at federal elections, including the prevalence of perceived disinformation.
 - Chief among the concerns is the expectation of the AEC to be the arbiters of truth or an enforcement body for a range of campaigning matters (e.g. advertising placement, colour, size, timing and format).
 - The potential for foreign influence, or perceptions of foreign influence, is also an area that could have a detrimental effect on the trust in Australia's democracy.
 - The somewhat common perception of the AEC displaying a lack of will regarding disinformation (which is actually the absence of legislative remit) causes people to question the neutrality of the agency, and by extension the integrity of the election.
- **Conspiracy theories & political partiality claims**
 - There is an anecdotal increase in the likelihood of conspiracy theories regarding the election process being raised and spread.
 - One example is that the AEC is operating in favour of one side of politics in our administration of the federal election. This is despite the obvious transparency and assurance measures that prevent such an occurrence.
 - Should such claims achieve traction they could be particularly damaging to voter confidence in election results.

The plan

In line with the *AEC Reputation Management Framework's* principles, the plan is to:

Communicate early

Undertake pre-election communication that will seek to address the known issues (listed above). This would enable a robust public discussion to occur outside of the election period and potentially take the sting out of any election-time discussion on the topics.

Maintain communication momentum

Develop a consistent and reliable record of communicating openly with the media and online followers ahead of, and into, the election period. Once fully commenced, regular election-focussed communication should continue to maintain media relationships and embed an integrity narrative.

Enable reactive capability

Thoroughly resource the Media and Digital Engagement Section with people, systems, procedures and materials to provide the ability to effectively monitor and respond to issues through media and social media channels.

Exercise reactive judgement

Act on the procedures established. Be timely, professional and authoritative in media and social media liaison around matters of potential reputational damage.

With respect to the AEC's operations on social media, the approach to engagement during the federal election will be to:

- regularly provide proactive content that is **relevant, informative and engaging**, as well as content that **anticipates forthcoming process criticism**;
- be **responsive to questions and criticisms** subject to a swift but **judicious review of claims**, individuals, environmental factors relevant to the issue;
- be **timely**, including the use of holding lines where needed;
- rely on facts within a broader concentration on **content accuracy**;
- regularly employ a tone that demonstrates **real people** are responding and endeavouring to be helpful, while maintaining **professionalism**;
- selectively employ a **firm tone to debunk procedural myths**;
- use **visual accompaniments** to provide context to issues wherever possible; and
- be **active** in the monitoring of content both on, and outside of, AEC channels.

Structure and procedures

The structure and procedures for the AEC's media and social media management at the federal election reflect a modern communication landscape where these aspects are intrinsically intertwined.

It is crucial for effective issues management that the Media and Digital Engagement Section has as much visibility as possible of the multiple entry and escalation points for issues.

Media management

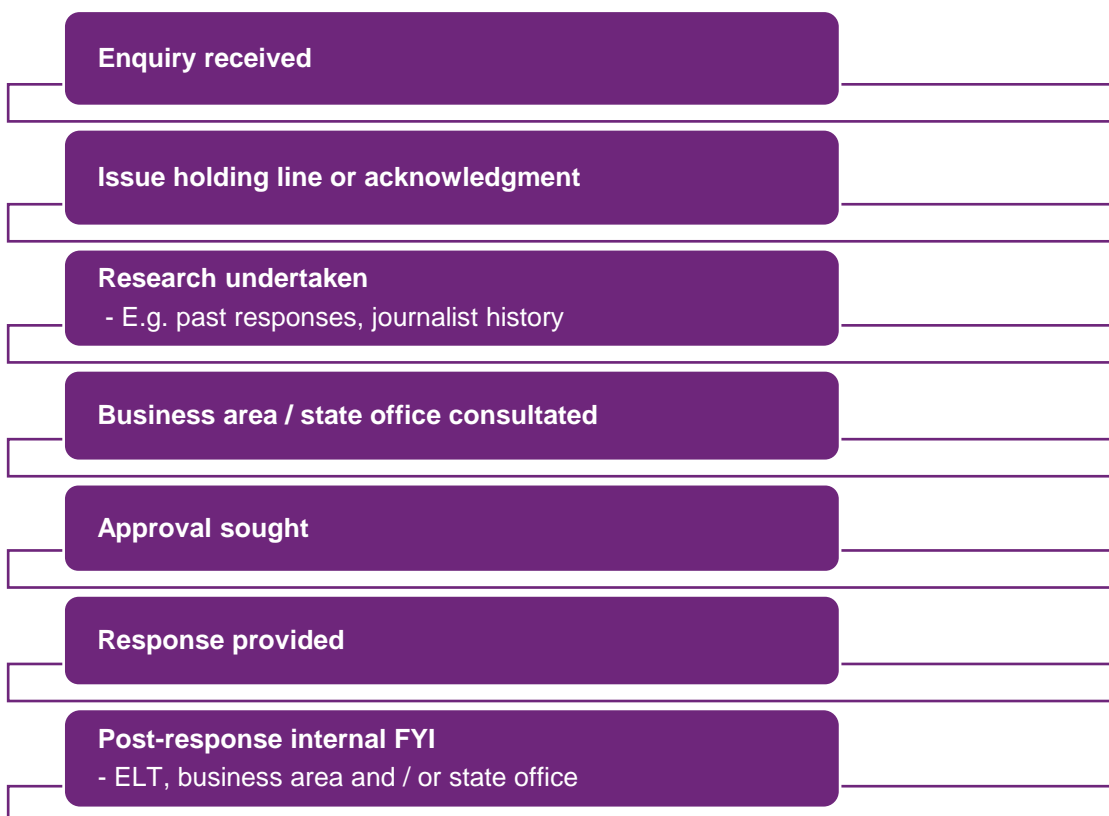
There will be a single point of advertised entry into the AEC for all media correspondence – the Media and Digital Engagement Section in National Office.

Media enquiries and interview requests will be coordinated centrally to ensure:

- appropriate media team and executive visibility;
- consistent messaging on key issues; and
- the application of media handling tactics as deemed appropriate.

Media enquiry handling process – routine matters

The AEC process for handling a routine media enquiry is quite linear. It typically follows the path below with a decision made on the necessity of each potential action, according to the context of the enquiry.



Media enquiry handling process – sensitive issues

In order to provide effective management of sensitive media issues the requirements for each interaction will be assessed based on need and cognisance of the varying requirements for timeliness, application of tone and channel selection. Each approach will take account of the:

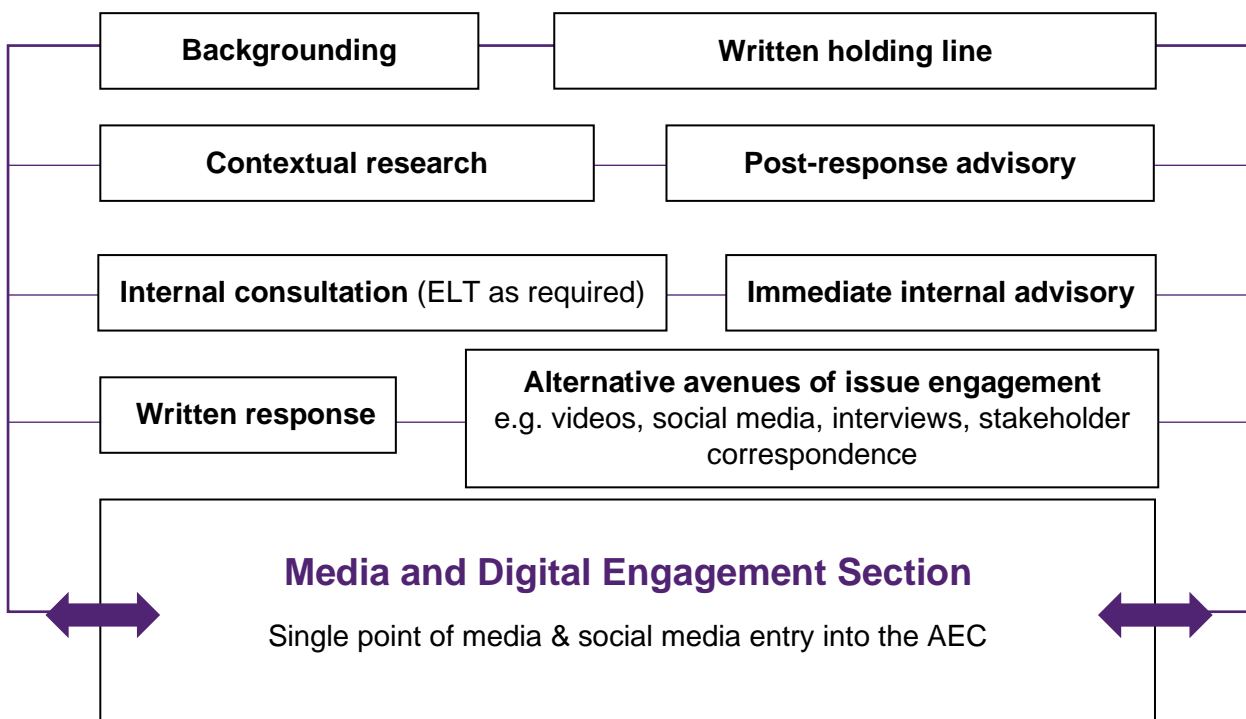
- journalist's historical reporting, relationship with the AEC and/or general approach;

- **Consultation:** potential consultation audiences are as per the advisory audiences. Consultation may be a simple request for information, a request to craft a draft response or a request for review of a draft response. ELT consultation / approval is sought sparingly and often at different stages of the enquiry process dependent on need, issue's sensitivity and/or history;
- AEC's contextual environment;
- potential speed of the issue's escalation/spread and the journalist deadline; and
- other stakeholder considerations.

Figure 1 demonstrates the key actions that could be taken to deal with an enquiry or issue that has been raised through AEC media or social media channels. Any of these actions could be utilised at any point in time when considering and responding to media enquiries.

In addition, Attachment A provides a catalogue of channel and tone considerations for handling particularly sensitive issues.

Figure 1: Media & social media enquiry handling process



Written holding line: deployed to inject a calming, factual presence for varying reasons including to demonstrate that the issue isn't being ignored and address an element of the issue ahead of further information.

'Backgrounding' phone conversation: used to provide speed of response, to develop or maintain a relationship and to give swift context to an issue that would be hard to convey in written form.

Immediate advisory: an immediate advisory may be provided to the: national media team's management line, relevant AEC business areas, state office, relevant external agency, minister's office, and/or ELT. The predominate consideration is issue sensitivity

Contextual research: this is often the first step and is undertaken to inform how to progress with the enquiry or issue. It includes searching:

- Google for individuals or key terms,
- AEC social media account activity,

- *Utilisation of media and social media monitoring tools, and/or*
- *The catalogue of past media enquiries*

Written response: *timing of this action is a decision made based on the issue complexity/sensitivity, the historical provision of information, publicly available information, and/or the urgency of the issue.*

Alternative avenues of issue engagement: *consideration may also be applied at any stage in the process to utilise the alternative avenues to address an issue that has arisen from a media enquiry or social media comment. See Attachment A.*

EC / DEC 'fast path'

For matters of particular subject matter and/or time sensitivity the AEC's Principal Media Advisor will seek either guidance or approval from the Electoral Commissioner directly, and immediately. For times when the Electoral Commissioner is unavailable, this engagement will be undertaken with the Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

AEC spokespeople

Designated AEC media spokespeople include the Electoral Commissioner, state and territory Australian Electoral Officers (AEOs) and nominated Media and Digital Engagement staff. These staff undergo pre-election media training, as outlined within this document.

In line with the AEC's Media Liaison Policy, the utilisation of other AEC staff members to speak to the media (conduct interviews) on behalf of the agency is to be undertaken by exception only and with prior approval from the Media and Digital Engagement Section or senior executive staff.

All media contact not initiated by, or referred by, the Media and Digital Engagement Section must be directed to the [AEC's media contacts](#) available via the website for action and/or discussion.

State Office Communications Officers

State Office Communication Officers often perform a number of varied communication roles for the agency during an election period (e.g. internal communications, complaints management etc). With regard to media and social media management, these officers will be a primary point of contact for the Media and Digital Engagement Section for assistance on matters relevant to their jurisdiction.

Media enquiries, AEO media interview requests, social media interactions or media event attendance requests may be directed to a State Office Communications Officer by the Media and Digital Engagement Section. This liaison will be to either seek relevant information or to request further coordination/finalisation of the matter.

Media releases

All AEC media releases will be distributed by the Media and Digital Engagement Section.

The Media and Digital Engagement Section will seek advanced business area review of the full suite of election-time media release templates.

During the election period, each media release will be sent through Objective to the National Election Manager (NEM) for approval with the line-area FAC, relevant branch AC and the state manager cohort cc'd into the request for visibility. With the exception of real-time issues, the Media and Digital Engagement Section will provide each media release to the NEM one day prior to its designated distribution date. Other members of ELT may be consulted depending on the nature of the media release.

MEDIA RELEASE



19 May 2019

More votes counted than ever before thanks to an enormous effort by temporary election staff

Australian Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers this morning thanked our temporary election staff for the successful conduct of the election and a record breaking evening of counting activity.

"Our 90,000 temporary election staff – everyday Australians we engage on a temporary basis – have done an extraordinary job yesterday of delivering democracy to the Australian people, culminating in the most votes ever counted on election night," Mr Rogers said.

"After 6pm in polling places and AEC count centres across Australia, more than 20 million ballot papers were counted, delivering an election night result.

"As well as counting all House of Representatives and Senate ballot papers cast yesterday our dedicated team of temporary staff counted more than 90% of pre-poll votes cast within an elector's home division."

For the close seats of Boothby, Chisholm, Cowan, Macquarie, Wentworth and Lilley, our election staff counted all of the pre-poll votes cast within an elector's home division.

"We identified during the night the seats that were likely to remain close and ensured that we progressed those counts as much as we possibly could on the night," Mr Rogers said.

Electoral Commissioner approval

In addition to the NEM, approval for routine procedural media releases that quote the Electoral Commissioner will be sought from the Electoral Commissioner – for obvious reasons. Electoral Commissioner approval will also be sought for media releases that deal with particularly sensitive subject matter.

Unplanned media releases

Not all media releases are initially drafted by the Media and Digital Engagement Section – this occasionally occurs within business areas, state offices or the Executive Leadership team (ELT). However, the Media and Digital Engagement Section must always review the content and will afford an opportunity for review to the relevant business area or state office as well.

Social media management

The AEC will operate the following corporate social media accounts during the federal election.

- Twitter
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Facebook (x2)
 - A general AEC account and an Indigenous-specific Facebook account

The administration of these AEC social media accounts, and the supporting social media management functions discussed below, will be undertaken entirely by the Media and Digital Engagement Section. This is in recognition of social media's close links to issues management.

The fast paced nature of issue development online makes it necessary to have close connection to the organisation's media monitoring capability, the point of entry/coordination for media requests and the team that will be included broadly in relevant operational updates through AEC command centre integration (discussed below).

The dangers of unchecked social media commentary

Ill-informed online commentary or questions regarding electoral processes have the potential to spread very quickly during an election period. This poses a significant risk to electoral integrity.

When contained to a relatively small group of like-minded users or a single channel, online commentary itself may have little tangible effect. However, if an issue or a piece of disinformation penetrates into a larger audience or multiple channels (including mainstream media) it can have a significant impact on the narrative of the election.

In addition, threats to the election process that extend beyond disinformation, for example physical or cyber threats, may be disseminated through social media channels. This provides the need to not only engage on the AEC's accounts but also to listen to online commentary outside of the AEC's accounts where it is possible to do so.

Social Media Operations Group

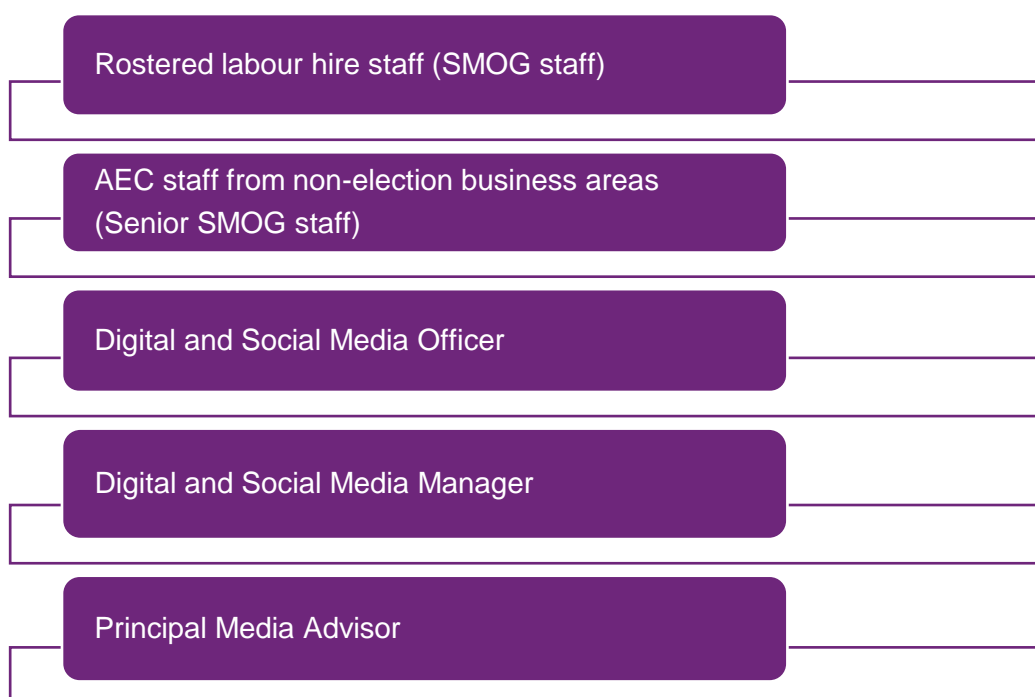
It is anticipated that the level of social media commentary requiring assessment during the election period will be significant. In order to monitor and manage increased traffic the AEC will stand up a Social Media Operations Group (the SMOG).

The structure and work patterns of the SMOG is based on previous election experience and lessons learned from the secondment of several staff to Services Australia during the early stages of COVID-19 in 2020.

Approximately ten surge staff members will be on-boarded (labour hire) to be part of the SMOG as close to one week prior to the issue of writs as is possible to predict. The SMOG will operate out of national office in Canberra and work in shifts during the election period with hours of operation tentatively set to be 5am to 10pm.

A minimum of one staff member each shift will be dedicated to triage – simply monitoring incoming mentions on the AEC's social media accounts and electing to ignore, allocate to a user or escalate beyond the SMOG. Other SMOG staff on shift will provide basic responses when applicable, monitor traffic outside of AEC mentions (based on keyword 'listen' briefs) and escalate content when required. Additional SMOG staff will be rostered on during anticipated peak periods with support provided by the permanent members of the Media and Digital Engagement Section.

SMOG supervision and escalation



In addition to rostered labour hire staff being recruited, senior SMOG staff are being sourced from within the AEC (from business areas without an active election-time role) to provide the first, immediate layer of supervision.

Senior SMOG staff will be physically seated within the SMOG during business hours, and for nominated out-of-hours shifts, to provide direction. In addition to monitoring staff and account activity senior SMOG staff will, upon direction, contribute to the compiling of social media activity reports, identification and escalation of themes, and the curation and use of pre-prepared responses.

The entire SMOG operation will be overseen by the Digital and Social Media Officer within the AEC's Media and Digital Engagement Section. This Officer will be responsible for:

- pre-populating the social media management tool (Falcon) with social media responses (pre-election);
- setting up and updating Falcon's 'listen' briefs;
- on-boarding SMOG staff;
- enabling SMOG staff (equipment, seats, system/software access, rosters etc);
- conducting SMOG staff training; and
- initial escalation of complex/sensitive content into the Command Centre's Media Hub.

The Digital and Social Media Manager and Principal Media Advisor are the senior points of escalation and will lead the management and curation of content for all sensitive matters arising on the channels.

Falcon

The AEC's social media management and monitoring tool is Falcon, which supports the following functionality key to the AEC's social media operation.

- **Publish:** The planning, review and approval flows for proactive content published to the AEC's social media channels.
- **Engage:** Reactive management of incoming social media messages including triaging priority messages, assigning tasks to specialised users, and pre-scripting responses to common questions.
- **Listen:** Monitoring of conversations on key social media channels using keyword briefs curated in real time.
- **Measure:** Production of information and statistics regarding activity monitored by the platform.

Each member of the Media and Digital Engagement Section, including the SMOG, will have an individual Falcon profile with the appropriate levels of access to functionality.

Social media monitoring

Using Falcon's listening tool, the SMOG will monitor an evolving set of key word briefs in an effort to capture and review as much relevant social media content as is possible via an automated tool.

Key word briefs will be reviewed and updated regularly, including as issues evolve. Limitations to this social media monitoring activity are numerous including the inability to capture content:

- outside of the core social media channels;
- held within platform privacy settings (e.g. Facebook community pages or behind private Twitter profiles); and
- typos or incorrectly phrased content that evades the keywords.

Approvals / workflows

The considerations and processes for reactive content on the AEC's social media accounts are identical to the media enquiry handling process outlined within this document.

Both mainstream media and social media interactions have the same potential audience and the same potential issues management impact. The primary point of difference will be considerations about the potential speed of spread for an issue – this changes the immediate ramifications of any AEC action/inaction and therefore changes decision making.

Command centre integration

The AEC Command Centre will have a Media Hub that accommodates up to three members of the Media and Digital Engagement Section. The Media Hub presence in the command centre will vary depending on circumstances.

During the federal election period (writ to writ) the Media Hub will have at least one Media and Digital Engagement section representative present at all times (during business hours and key election timetable milestones). This provides swift:

- executive visibility and/or engagement on media and social media issues;
- Media and Digital Engagement section visibility and/or engagement on operational issues that may enter the media or social media space; and
- the ability to connect with the AEC's broader crisis management processes.

The Media and Digital Engagement Section will ensure the appropriate flow of real-time information and reporting into the AEC Command Centre through the Media Hub.

Regular reporting

During the election period the Media and Digital Engagement Section will provide the following two daily reports.

Report	Time	Format / Content	Distribution
Media monitoring summary	9am (Approx.)	Online report. Relevant media coverage only.	Intranet/Sharepoint with optional alerts
Media activity summary	End of day	PDF report that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pertinent media enquiries• AEC media interviews completed / upcoming• AEC media releases distributed / upcoming• Any noteworthy coverage that day• Key social media trends or engagements	Email to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SES confidential• Media and Digital Engagement Section (incl SMOG)• Electoral Interference Coordinator• State Office Communication Officers• Six O'Clock Advisory

It will be at the discretion of the AEC's Electoral Interference Coordinator (the AEC's primary Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce Officer) to forward a media monitoring or media activity

summary report - or element of a report - to the Taskforce. This decision will be guided by necessity of awareness or action.

Public relations providers

Six O’Clock Advisory is the national public relations provider. They are engaged on a long-term Deed of Standing Offer and enlisted via pre-election and election-time work orders to assist with the planning and engagement activities outlined within this document.

Six O’Clock Advisory will engage local sub-contractors on an as-needs basis to assist in delivering specific requirements. This may include in-person activities undertaken in specific jurisdictions.

An integrated approach to communicating the election

The Media and Digital Engagement Section and Six O’Clock Advisory will work closely with the broader marketing function to ensure an integrated approach to communicating the federal election.

Consideration will be given to how the Media and Digital Engagement Plan, and its agreed activities, will intersect with outputs of other contracted providers including ORIMA Research, Wallis Strategic Market and Social Research, Universal McCann, Cultural Perspectives, BMF and Carbon Creative.

Pre-election preparation

Pre-election preparation actions ensure the capability of the agency to deliver media and digital engagement activities in both the pre-election and election periods. It enables our people and systems to perform effectively when needed.

Media contacts / connection

The Media and Digital Engagement Section will engage with media contacts across relevant government departments to seek primary contact details and have an agreed understanding of processes ahead of an election period.

A contact list will be developed and include member organisations of the Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce and others, such as the Australian Department of Health.

Media feed liaison

Early liaison will be undertaken with media representatives who traditionally handle the receipt of media feed data for key broadcast media outlets. This contact will seek early agreement to TCP embargo documentation as well as further establishing relationships.

Other media feed liaison will be undertaken upon request only.

Media representative relationships

The Media and Digital Engagement Section will seize opportunities to establish and/or strengthen relationships with key media personnel through pre-election conversation. This may include private social media messaging, phone calls or in-person meetings off the back of current events or public commentary.

This activity is designed to foster goodwill where possible heading into an election period.

Media training

In order to prepare the AEC's group of election-time spokespeople, the Media and Digital Engagement Section – in partnership with Six O'Clock Advisory - will conduct a range of media training activities.

In-person media training sessions will be offered to all Australian Electoral Officers (AEOs), their Director-level staff members and some national office participants as part of the Operational Leaders Program. Further in-person sessions may also be organised depending on identified need and opportunity.



In-person media training sessions will provide a mix of theoretical techniques and practical exercises. Where possible, theoretical exercises will mimic the conditions of a real election-time media interview.

Where possible, State Office Communications Officers will be integrated into the delivery of in-person media training for familiarity of process and strengthening of relationships regarding media matters.

Remote media training

As some of the most active AEC spokespeople during an election period, AEOs will also take part in monthly media interview practice sessions conducted remotely through Microsoft Teams.

These regular opportunities will complement the more immersive in-person media training sessions by providing an opportunity for regular practice. The monthly sessions will focus on key reputation issues for the agency, ensuring that AEC spokespeople are well practised on agreed, consistent talking points.

A member of the Media and Digital Engagement Section and the relevant State Office Communications Officer will be included in these sessions to assist the spokesperson to prepare for the interview and provide feedback.



Media talking points

Media talking points for an election period are pre-prepared within a series of Issues Briefing Notes (IBNs) that are supplied to the full group of AEC spokespeople.

IBNs are necessarily finalised close to an election period and remain live documents. AEC spokespeople can refer to IBNs in order to prepare for media interviews or compile a written media response. IBNs will be reviewed by business areas and approved by a member of ELT prior to distribution.

Electoral Commissioner media briefing pack

A media briefing pack will be created for the Electoral Commissioner and maintained throughout the election period. This media briefing pack will contain relevant talking points, statistics, media releases and other information as deemed pertinent.

State office preparation meetings

The Media and Digital Engagement Section will meet with each state office prior to the election to discuss the operation of this plan. This discussion will include:

- An outline of media and social media processes,

- Agreed understanding of the role of state office communications officers with respect to media issues management,
- identification of any local areas of communication concern that may need addressing,
- identification of any planned local activities for the election period, and
- Discussion regarding media event management procedures.

Six O’Clock Advisory will also attend the session as the AEC’s public relations provider to establish a positive working relationship.

Following the meetings, the table at [Attachment B](#) will be populated and actioned.

Social media operations group

The Social Media Operations Group (SMOG) will be enabled through pre-election preparation of rosters, equipment, physical seating plans, software access and training plans.

This will be the responsibility of the AEC’s Digital and Social Media Officer.

Populating Falcon

SMOG will be further enabled through the population of the AEC’s social media management tool. This will include:

- a full election period calendar of pre-prepared pro-active social media posts
- pre-set reactive responses for known issues,
- creation of a small set of priority and category tags (for reporting purposes), and
- the establishment of a core set of social media monitoring briefs.

Engagement with social media platforms

The AEC will re-establish and further cultivate positive working relationships with key social media organisations. This activity will commence in June 2021.

In addition to addressing content referral pathways, these discussions will involve exploration of the opportunity for platforms to encourage effective election participation through native, unpaid promotional activities. Examples from previous electoral events include distribution of an election day Facebook Megaphone to all Australian Facebook profiles on election day.

Further information about the AEC’s engagement with social media platforms is contained within the AEC’s Electoral Disinformation Plan.

Product creation

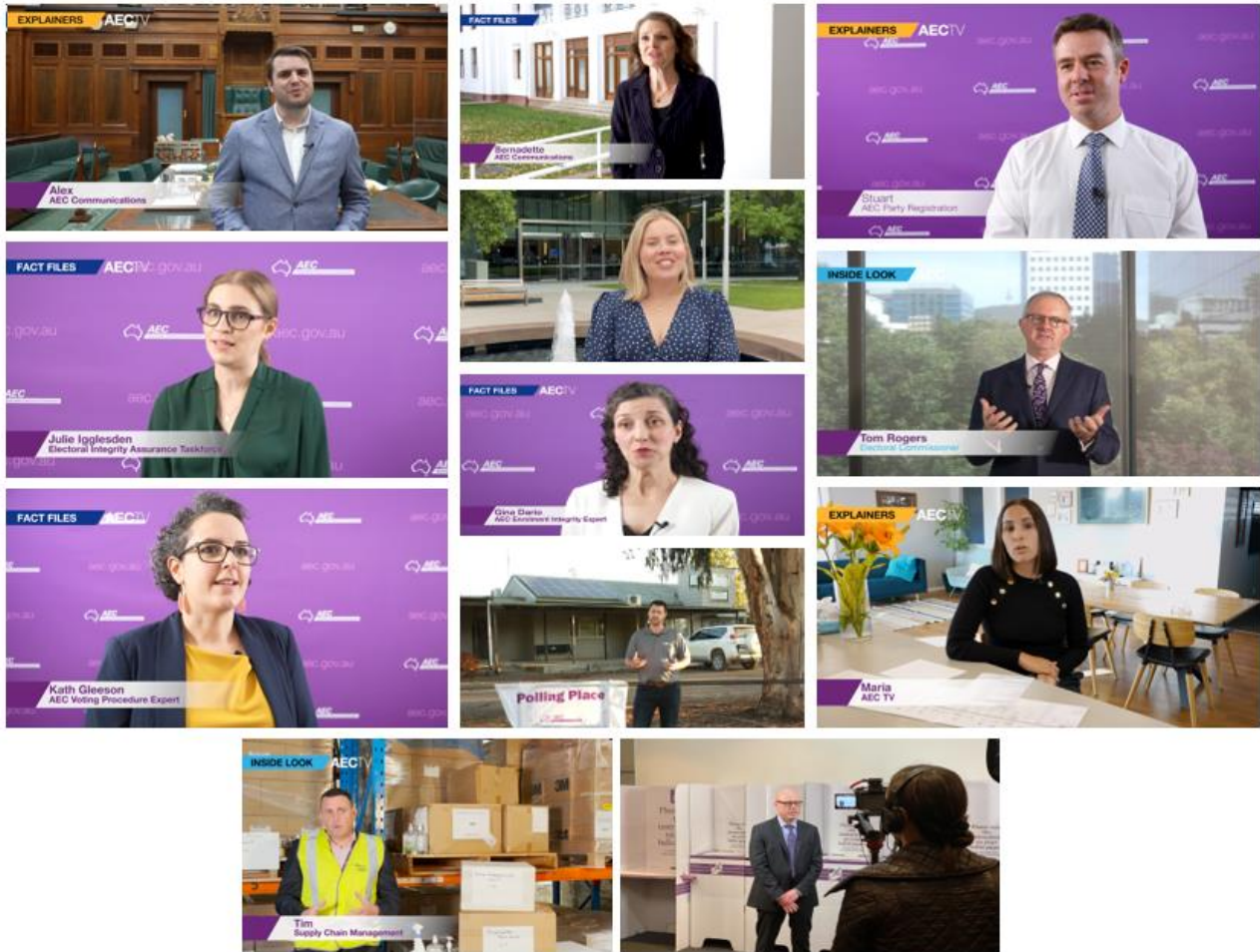
In order to communicate on complex issues effectively and quickly, the AEC requires visual products. A significant proportion of the period immediately leading up to the federal election will be spent creating visual content that address the key issues anticipated to be prevalent.

Products that will be created include:

- a web tool that depicts the AEC’s electoral integrity journey across the past three electoral cycles;
- a mythbuster series of social media tiles;
- infographics and animations that explain key election processes; and
- a series of short-form video content addressing common misconceptions:
 - branded as ‘AEC TV’ and featuring staff members from across the organisation.

Refer to [attachment C](#) for a list of pre-prepared products.

Our process. Our experts.



Images: Screenshots of AEC TV videos

MYTH: Postal vote applications from political parties are illegal

FACT: There is no electoral laws preventing it but you can apply directly through the AEC if you prefer

MYTH FALSE BUSTED

Postal vote applications can be sent by political parties but it is an **application only**. Political parties **never** handle ballot papers.

MYTH FALSE BUSTED

Images: Examples of myth busting graphic tiles

Pre-election communication

In order to meet the principles of the *Reputation Management Framework*, communication regarding election reputation matters needs to commence judiciously. Ideally this would be well in advance of the announcement of a federal election period but must take account of sensitive stakeholder considerations.

Below are a range of activities that may, to varying degrees, be implemented prior to the election period. Consideration of exactly what activities to undertake, and when, will be undertaken in close consultation with the Electoral Commissioner.

Professional forums

Opportunity exists for the Electoral Commissioner to use his increased profile, and the increased profile of electoral matters in proximity to a federal election, to host or take part in a range of varying professional forums prior to the election announcement.

This could include convening a think tank or press club event to discuss a pertinent electoral issue and/or participating in relevant podcasts or other intellectual forums that are distributed digitally.

These forums provide a platform to surface key issues to an audience of stakeholders and media that will potentially be influential during the federal election period.

Media briefings



Capital city briefings

The Media and Digital Engagement Section, with support from Six O'Clock Advisory, will undertake a series of pre-election media briefings – one held in each Australian capital city.

Direct engagement with senior and reporting editorial media representatives leads to stronger mutually beneficial relationships, more confidence in the AEC's administration of elections, and increased credibility and authority of its leaders and spokespeople.

Media briefings will be highly tailored, taking into account a geographic region's voting profile - participation rates, understanding of the voting process and electoral system, and attitudes towards voting.

These insights will shape messaging to ensure information and discussion is appropriately localised. Briefings would seek to provide editors, reporters, producers and media executives with a comprehensive overview of the AEC (state and national) and encourage a deeper level of understanding of media's role and the contribution it can make to helping achieve higher levels of participation and voting accuracy in Australia's electoral system.

To account for the busy schedules of media representatives, briefings would be staged in outlet newsrooms and boardrooms as appropriate. The following diagram outlines initial thinking of key targets in each capital city.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Kathleen Gazzola, Chief of Staff, Nine News
Michael Park, Chief of Staff, ABC TV
Cherie Beach, Content Director, ABC Radio
Denise Cahill, Head of News, NT News
Aneeta Bhole, Correspondent, SBS
Matt Cunningham, Bureau Chief, Sky News
Fox McLauchlan, General Manager, Radio Larrakia
Paul Wiles, News Director, CAAMA

QUEENSLAND

Neil Warren, News Director, 7 News
Amanda Paterson, News Director, Nine News
Dick Butler, Chief of Staff, Ten News
Martin Silk, State Political Reporter, AAP
Donna Thorne, Chief of Staff, ABC TV & Radio
Danielle Cronin, Editor, Brisbane Times
Jill Poulsen, Chief of Staff, The Courier Mail
Brendan Smith, Bureau Chief, Sky News
Max Dudley, Content Director, 4BC
Stefan Armbruster, Correspondent, SBS

NSW

Andrew Frampton, Chief of Staff, 7 News
Anthony Peterson, Chief of Staff, Nine News
Sydney Pead, Chief of Staff, Ten News
Reed Robinson, Chief of Staff, ABC TV
Simone Sutcliffe, Chief of Staff, SBS
Lucy Gray, Executive Producer, Sky News
Andrew Forbes, News Director, Sydney Morning Herald
Rose Brennan, Chief of Staff, The Daily Telegraph
John Redman, Producer, 2GB
James Madden, National Chief of Staff, The Australian
Angelo Rizzo, Chief of Staff, AAP

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Liz Sheehan, Producer, 6PR
Franziska Rimrod, Editor, WA Today
Michael Best, News Director, Nine News
Daniel Donnelly, Chief of Staff, Ten News
Jessica Higgins, Producer – Digital, SBS
Carly Angel, Chief of Staff, 7 News
Kate Campbell, Chief of Staff, The West Australian
Alisha O'Flaherty, Chief of Staff, ABC TV
Akash Fotedar, Producer, ABC WA Statewide
Rebecca Le May, Journalist AAP
Emily Evans, Video Journalist, Sky News



ACT

Gaven Morris, Director, ABC TV & Digital
Liz Foschia, Chief of Staff, ABC Federal Parliament House Bureau
Louise Willis, Content Director, ABC Radio
Chris Dutton, News Director, The Canberra Times
Daniel McCulloch, Chief of Staff, AAP
Roderick Quinn, Editorial Director, ACM
Sarah Martin, Chief Political Correspondent, Guardian Australia
Amber Austin-Wright, Federal Political Reporter, Network 10
Michael Pachi, National Political Editor, Nine Radio Press Gallery
Olivia Leeming, Federal Political Reporter, Seven Network
Laura Gardiner, Bureau Chief, Win News
Brett Mason, Chief Political Correspondent, SBS
Thomas O'Brien, Canberra Bureau Chief, Sky News
Andrew Page, Journalist, 2CC

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Warren Gibbs, Chief of Staff, The Advertiser
Andrew Rutter, Chief of Staff, Nine News
Paul Martino, Chief of Staff, 7 News
Nick Wood, Chief of Staff, Ten News
Matthew Pantelis, News Director, FiveAA
Rhiannon Elston, South Australia Correspondent, SBS
Amy Verral, Producer, ABC Radio
Patric James, Journalist, AAP
Alisha O'Flaherty, Chief of Staff, ABC TV
Emily Burley, Bureau Chief, Sky News

TASMANIA

Claire Bickers, Federal Politics Bureau Chief, The Mercury
Matthew Maloney, Chief Political Reporter, The Examiner
Marcus Cheek, State News Editor, ABC TV
Tamara Glumac, Chief of Staff, ABC TV
Fiona Breen, Executive Producer, ABC Radio
Ethan James, Journalist, AAP
Sarah Maunder, Tasmanian Correspondent, SBS
Michael Breen, Chief of Staff, Nightly News 7
Phil Bradley, Group Content Director, Triple M
Alex Johnston, News Director, WIN News

VICTORIA

Hugh Nailon, News Director, Nine News
James Bird, Chief of Staff, Ten News
Patrick Elligett, News Director, The Age
David Hurley, Chief of Staff, The Herald Sun
Maira Conway, Bureau Manager, SBS TV
Shaun Menegola, News Director, 7 News
Sarah Fransworth, Acting COS, ABC TV
Benita Kolvos, Journalist, AAP
Patrick Brown, Chief of Staff, Sky News
Gail Watson, News Director, 3AW

Reporting guide

The Media and Digital Engagement Section, in conjunction with Six O'clock Advisory, will prepare a Reporting Guide as a 'leave-behind' resource at media briefings.

The purpose of the guide is to provide journalists reporting on the federal election with a useful resource and encourage accuracy in reporting. The guide will include key statistics, a small sample of common mythbusters, information regarding key changes since the 2019 federal election and details of the range of media services the AEC provides.

The reporting guide will have both a hardcopy and digital version, with the digital version distributed broadly during the election period.

Editorial pieces

Editorial pieces will be created and distributed to major metropolitan newspapers focussing on the key issues the AEC would like to surface prior to the federal election period.

This may include the key changes to service provisions due to COVID safety measures, changes due to any legislative or regulatory amendments, why Australians should brace themselves not to see a result on election night or the rising concern regarding electoral disinformation.

The editorial pieces would be drafted by the Media and Digital Engagement Section but ultimately authored by the Electoral Commissioner and, as well as organic publication at the discretion of newspapers, will be promoted via AEC channels.

The roadshow of media briefings provide opportunity to pitch the offer of regular contributions from the Electoral Commissioner. Agreements (non-paid) could be struck with senior editors of Nine Newspapers, NewsCorp, Australian Community Media, Private Media and the ABC, just to name a few.

Media interviews

As part of the carefully controlled pre-election exposure of the Electoral Commissioner, the Principal Media Adviser, in consultation with Six O'clock advisory, will seek a small number of interviews with specific journalists discussing key aspects of delivering the federal election.

These interview opportunities may be part of a broader program of pre-election communication activity or stand alone as avenues to seed important messages.

AEC TV – launch & release

An opportunity exists to launch AEC TV as a public illustration of the AEC's increased efforts at the next federal election to address disinformation regarding the electoral process.

Launching the concept would simply be the distribution of a media release and complementary social media posts outlining the activity. This would feature the Electoral Commissioner's 'Welcome to AEC TV' video as well as commentary regarding other communication efforts being undertaken during the next federal election.

In addition, a bank of cut-down episodes could be distributed via tailored pitches to marketing media (with the written release) for embedding in media outlets' digital platforms.

A launch would not necessarily attract media reporting but rather flag to media and others the AEC's intention to be creative and active in our messaging in acknowledgment of the disinformation challenge.

Stop & Consider video series

Post-launch, there is the potential to create and release a slightly longer form of AEC TV video that concentrates on designated topics that are commonly misunderstood.



This series could be branded in line with the AEC's disinformation campaign 'Stop and Consider' and feature an interview style piece that either reacts to recent social media commentary or anticipates an election-time issue.

The videos would be hosted on the AEC TV YouTube channel and distributed via social media channels, including the AEC's LinkedIn profile.

Social media content

In addition to the AEC TV series, the Media and Digital Engagement Section will focus pre-election social media content on preparing for a federal election, with a specific concentration on:

- Enrolment
 - Focussing on overall completion rates, number of people who typically enrol/update in the final week, geographical areas of concern
- The voting system
 - Educational content designed to inform voters about Australia's preferential voting system ahead of a federal election.
- Planning for the election
 - Content that provides an inside look behind certain facets of election planning

This series will utilise relevant AEC TV videos, infographics, existing educational content from the AEC website and images from past federal elections.

Election-time communication


Election-time communication will include a mix of planned, proactive activities designed around the election timetable as well as the capability to respond to the environment or issues of the day.

Website homepage messaging

The AEC's website is visited millions of times throughout a federal election period, mostly for electoral transactions – this includes enrolment, finding a voting location and seeking results.

The homepage is the landing spot for almost all of that user traffic. The website homepage will display the most pertinent messages throughout each phase of the election period, providing quick access to relevant information/tools and, where appropriate, displaying a contextual message on matters of reputation.

The use of the website for reputational messaging is strongest in the counting period where updates and imagery will mimic other channel messaging. Videos and pictures will be used to explain the counting process and illustrate both the scale and complexity of the counting operation.



What are you looking for?


[For voters](#)[For parties and political participants](#)[Learn about elections](#)[Information centre](#)[The AEC](#)

XXXX federal election


Saturday DD MMMM YYYY

[Official results >](#)

[Counting the votes >](#)



Right not rushed



Central Senate Scrutiny at Moorebank NSW

Copy link 1/10

YouTube

The count begins at 6pm sharp on election night in polling places across the country. Polling night will see 20-25 million ballot papers counted in what is an indicative count - the start of an enormous counting exercise. Ballot papers will travel across approximately 40,000 transport routes, polling officials will perform mandatory secondary counts and verification exercises against the electoral roll will be undertaken. The entire process is open to observation from scrutineers and has multiple layers of security measures applied.

[Further information](#) | [Downloads and statistics](#)

Media releases

A series of media releases will be distributed by the Media and Digital Engagement Section throughout the federal election period.

Media releases will always be complemented by posts from the AEC's social media accounts. Not all content being announced or promoted by the AEC will be the subject of a media release – some messages will be via other avenues, including social media only.

See a list of election-time media release templates at [Attachment D](#).

Proactive social media posts

The AEC's social media accounts will be highly active during the election period, both proactively and reactively. Proactive, unpaid AEC social media messages will include supporting:

- AEC media releases,
- the AECs election-time advertising campaign,
- varying elements of election participation,
- communication on sensitive issues, and
- the provision of early voting statistics (infrequently, not daily).

Content will regularly include pre-prepared products (videos, infographics etc). Content will also feature visual products created in real-time.

Video updates

At pertinent stages of the count, short videos will be filmed to provide an update on election planning, voter services and counting activity.

This will feature appropriate commentary and imagery that supports the messages of integrity, scale and complexity. The video talent and location will be selected based on the contextual environment.

Interviewees may include the Principal Media Adviser, Electoral Commissioner, a relevant State Manager, polling staff or even voters. Locations may include count centres, the AEC's Command Centre or the AEC TV studio.

Content will be vetted by the Principal Media Adviser who may seek further approval depending on the nature of the video.

Story of the voting period

In the week immediately following the election, there's opportunity to use AEC interviews, footage and data to reflect positively on how the election was administered.

This is a video piece that could be created gradually throughout the election period and released soon after election day. It is an opportunity to tell the story of the election on our terms, in a timely manner.

Media interviews

During the federal election period AEC Spokespeople will conduct regular media interviews – a mix of proactively sought opportunities and facilitating requests.

Following what is anticipated to be an active pre-election period of media exposure for the Electoral Commissioner, opportunities for Electoral Commissioner media exposure will be sought/accepted infrequently based on identified need.

It is envisaged that AEOs will have an active presence both proactively and reactively, noting the principles of the Reputation Management Framework. An active presence establishes media relationships that can be called on if an issue arises and inserts an AEC voice into what otherwise may be a void of accurate procedural commentary.

Members of the Media and Digital Engagement Section will not seek proactive media interview opportunities outside of an exception. Requests for straightforward interviews will, for the most part, be accepted with a discussion regarding the appropriate spokesperson pending geographic location and availability. This is again in recognition of the value of having an active voice.

Press gallery briefing

In addition, a briefing, or series of briefings, will be held during the election period for press gallery journalists, preferably during the close of rolls period.

This will be the same format as the pre-election capital city briefings with the Electoral Commissioner in attendance. It will complement other election-time media contact and further seek to seed pertinent messages about the conduct of both voter services and the counting period.

The Media and Digital Engagement Section and Six O'Clock advisory will coordinate the briefing.

Third-party engagement

A range of third-party organisations will be identified that would be both appropriate and advantageous to communicate key AEC election messages.

Organisations will include tertiary education institutions, targeted workplaces, sporting organisations and others. Six O'Clock Advisory will conduct an outreach activity where organisations will be asked to assist the AEC, without charge, to distribute our messages via their existing channels (e.g. intranet, social media, website etc)

Messages will include temporary election workforce promotion, voter turnout, formality and disinformation. Pre-prepared products and wording will be supplied to make the request as easy as possible to facilitate.

Not all messages will be pushed to all identified organisations, in recognition of both the appropriateness of some audiences to only some messages as well as the likelihood of having only one successful request.

Direct approaches / pitches

Identified media will be directly approached for certain issues or story opportunities if identified as advantageous. This may include participation opportunities to highlight certain aspects of the electoral process.

Behind-the-scenes story

An identified journalist – either print or television - will be approached for a potential piece going behind-the-scenes of delivering a federal election. The idea is to host this representative in the early stages of the election period in order for them to run a piece at the height of potential interest – just prior to election day.

If the pitch is successful, this would involve a small series of AEC staff member interviews and on-location visits (e.g. OPCs, ballot paper printing, pre-poll setup and a pre-polling centre in operation). The Principal Media Adviser would coordinate the opportunity with assistance from Six O'Clock Advisory and the relevant state office/s, including the State Office Communications Officer.

A media piece that described the AEC's efforts to run a federal election would provide an increased understanding of the scale and complexity of an event, fostering increased goodwill at a crucial time.

Remote mobile polling opportunity

As has been traditional across numerous federal elections, the AEC will offer a media opportunity to local journalists to cover the first remote mobile polling votes cast in the election.

A location will be selected carefully with all cultural sensitivities the subject of prior consultation to ensure a media visit to the selected rural location is appropriate. An AEC spokesperson and appropriate media representative would accompany the media to the selected location.

The aim of this activity would be for coverage of the effort the AEC goes to in order to deliver the election to be syndicated to national media outlets.

Media event management

The AEC has a small number of events during a federal election where media representatives are able to, or likely to, be in attendance. It is important to not only be aware of these activities but to also appropriately manage them to varying degrees.

Declaration of nominations

The declaration of nominations includes a series of public events that can attract candidates themselves and/or members of the media.

A single media release will be issued for the declaration of nominations outlining both the nominations / ballot draw process and the availability of media attendance – this will be supported by posts on the AEC's social media accounts.

Each State Office Communications Officer is responsible for inputting content for their jurisdiction into a dedicated Sharepoint site that will automatically populate a webpage that the media release and social media posts hyperlinks to. This process makes it a nationally consistent and administratively easy task to deliver information across 159 electoral contests.

Managing media attendance

Each state office communications officer will identify declaration of nominations events that are more likely to draw media attendance. Through consultation with their state manager and the Media and Digital Engagement Section it will be determined which events will require a person to attend to perform a media management role.

The State Office Communications Officer, a Six o'clock Advisory staff member or a subcontracted local public relations staff member may attend identified events to greet and, if necessary, curtail media at an identified declaration of nominations event.

It is possible that media will attend a declaration of nominations event that does not have a media officer present. Local staff will manage this attendance and are able to liaise with state office if required.

Voting/count centre media attendance

A media alert will be distributed advising that any media representative wishing to visit a voting location must advise AEC Media of their intent.

Pending an appropriate notice period, all requests received by the Media and Digital Engagement Section to simply attend a voting location to take photographs or b-roll footage will be provisionally accepted, with guidelines for behaviour provided to the media representative (including COVID safety measures). It will be noted that we may get back into contact with them if there is an issue visiting a desired location – something that will be carefully communicated.

Note: This approach of providing provisional approval will be re-assessed if the COVID situation in a particular jurisdiction is heightened.

Any request for a more involved media opportunity at a polling location, or for access to a counting location, will be assessed on merit and according to the contextual environment.

All requests will be logged in a central list categorised by state and territory. Each request will also be communicated with the relevant state office communications officer who will be responsible for undertaking necessary consultation and identifying any issues to the Media and Digital Engagement Section in a timely manner.

The local consultation will not only identify any potential issues with media attendance at a specified location but will also provide the relevant Officer-in-Charge at an identified voting venue with advanced notice.

In-person media management

The State Office Communications Officer, a Six o'clock Advisory staff member or a subcontracted local public relations staff member may attend identified voting or count centre locations to greet and, if necessary, curtail media.

The need for this level of engagement will be identified based on the profile of a candidate being photographed, the number of media attending, the type of activity being captured and/or the history of the media representative in relation to AEC coverage.

Close counts or recounts

The media management of close counts or recounts will be carefully considered in consultation with the relevant state office executive and the Executive Leadership Team. It may involve any of the following.

- pitched or reactive media interviews
- the distribution of media releases outlining the process and progress
- social media posts advising updates to the process
- distribution of short-form videos that advise on count process or progress
- Collective picture and interview opportunities at an identified count centre.

Declaration of results

For declaration of results events, a small series of posts will be distributed via the AEC's social media accounts as a means of demonstrating count progress/finalisation and alerting media to the opportunity to attend.

As per the declaration of nominations process it will be the responsibility of the state office communications officer to input data into a dedicated Sharepoint site that will populate a webpage that lists the event details. For the declaration of results, this data input will occur as declaration events are locked in.

The State Office Communications Officer, a Six O'Clock Advisory staff member or a subcontracted local public relations staff member may attend identified declaration of results events to greet and, if necessary, curtail media at an identified declaration of nominations event.

Evaluation

The below are indicators which will determine the success of the Electoral Integrity: Reputation Management Strategy mapped against the AEC's six reputation management principles:



Principle 1: Be proactive in building a positive reputation for the Australian electoral system

Measure of success: AEC communication on reputational matters provides an evidence base of consistent effort to educate Australians on the election process and address potential disinformation.

Media and digital engagement specific: Key audiences are provided with information about the key issues impacting electoral integrity, including election processes and potential disinformation.



Principle 2: Undertake open and regular communication with voters and stakeholders

Measure of success: Electors and stakeholders have timely access to relevant information about topical aspects of electoral delivery at each point in the electoral cycle.

Media and digital engagement specific: Media and social media engagement is timely and impacts positively on individual and collective understanding of electoral processes.



Principle 3: Position the AEC as the foremost subject matter expert on federal electoral processes in Australia

Measure of success: The AEC is actively sought out, and thought of, as electoral experts and is therefore positioned to diffuse disinformation about electoral processes.

Media and digital engagement specific: AEC advice regarding procedural matters is well received or at least clearly assists in steering conversations towards factual accuracy.



Principle 4: Judicious use of language, tone and timing in political, media and social media environments

Measure of success: AEC communication regarding reputational matters resonates with consumers as a reflection of an authority that professionally acts within its legislative remit, strengthening positive perceptions of electoral integrity.



Principle 5: Back-up public statements with operational delivery

Measure of success: Historical statements regarding operational delivery errors are unable to be used as the catalyst for criticism in the current environment.

Media and digital engagement specific: Public statements made are realistic and in line with executive direction.



Principle 6: Actively monitor issues, manage risks, and plan for crisis situations

Measure of success: The AEC has a robust crisis management plan in place before the federal election. When issues are not known, the AEC becomes aware and is able to act quickly.

Media and digital engagement specific: Media and social media monitoring/management activities contribute effectively to the identification and management of issues.

Attachment A: Issues management tactics

There are a range of both proactive and reactive tactics that can be employed by the AEC to manage an issue in the media, should one arise during the tight timeframes of the federal election.

The table below outlines channels that may be utilised in relation to election related issues. The communication approach will be selected in consultation with the Executive Leadership Team and relevant state office executive as required.

Channels

Channel	Purpose	Considerations
Holding statement	To address a breaking issue and frame the AEC as an agency that is agile and ready to respond.	Timeliness – a holding statement issued regarding an already developed story is often seen as a negative. Scale – should be used for significant issues only.
Media statement	To insert AEC commentary into a developing or continuing issue.	The scale of the issue is a key consideration as remaining silent can, at times, be more beneficial.
Fact sheet / Q&As	To provide appropriate background to an issue or body of work, potentially correcting incorrect assumptions.	Most effective as an accompaniment to more succinct communication.
AEC website, social media	To provide regularly updated context to an issue and to demonstrate progress.	The AEC Twitter account effectively acts as a direct channel with media.
Spokesperson interview	To insert AEC commentary into a developing or continuing issue, or to set appropriate expectations for a potential issue.	Important to identify the appropriateness of providing a generic spokesperson in response to the specific issue. Often appropriate to use in response to requests until an issue develops into a more serious matter and is continuing despite AEC commentary.
State manager or Electoral Commissioner interview	To insert AEC commentary into a developing or continuing issue, or to set appropriate expectations for a potential issue.	Outlet selection and interview preparation is crucial. Especially important to undertake for more serious issues to get cut through.
Proactive interview pitch	To assist in controlling the narrative of a potential future issue.	Outlet/journalist selection is crucial. Particularly effective in setting expectations for an upcoming process.

Channel	Purpose	Considerations
'On location' filming/interview opportunity	To assist in controlling the narrative of a potential issue or to facilitate positive procedural reportage of a process receiving criticism.	Careful controls must be in place to facilitate a smooth event, including appropriate on-site staff briefing.
Editor's letter	To respond to criticism and turn the narrative.	<p>Effective when blatant unfounded criticism is published by a high-profile individual or outlet. Danger of being seen as an over-reaction if used incautiously.</p> <p>Potential to also notify a journalist of impending publication to achieve coverage of the response.</p>
Stakeholder letters	To advise key stakeholders of the AEC's actions in response to an issue to minimise the potential for third party media criticism.	Distribution timing could be an issue.
Elector letters	To communicate directly with the people affected by an issue, demonstrating commitment to an issue's resolution and genuine concern for the impact.	<p>Distribution timing could be an issue.</p> <p>Provides the ability to note the direct communication in complementary contact with stakeholders or the media.</p>
Advertising	To gain the attention of both electors and stakeholders regarding an issue, demonstrating commitment to an issue's resolution and genuine concern for the impact.	<p>Careful selection of publications required to ensure appropriate coverage.</p> <p>This is below the line advertising, not connected to the AEC's participation focussed campaign advertising.</p> <p>Requirements around government advertising limit the ability for a fast response.</p>
AEC TV video	To outline the AEC's approach to a process and/or respond to an emerging issue.	<p>Can be produced quickly and hosted on a number of channels, including AEC website and social media accounts.</p> <p>Using this approach for a well-developed issue could draw criticism for not being open to questions.</p>

Tactic

The table below outlines the tone and style of messaging that may be utilised in the channels identified above.

Tactic	Purpose	Considerations
Expectation management	To address a potential issue before incorrect expectations, draw negative commentary.	<p>Timing – Must be close enough to the event to be noteworthy for the audience.</p> <p>Channels – potential use of direct communication with stakeholders if potential effect of the issue is serious.</p>
Process	Falling back on procedures and legislative requirements can deflect an issue's focus away from the AEC to the broader system.	<p>Justification – using process as a reason for an issue may appear to be a 'poor excuse' if no prior action on the issue has been taken.</p> <p>Stakeholders – using process in the messaging can also be seen as 'pointing the finger'.</p>
Context	Providing a detailed narrative around an issue can help interested parties understand how an issue has occurred and identify with the AEC.	<p>Accuracy – providing details can lead to further investigation or questions, so it is crucial that facts are verified before they are used.</p> <p>Questions or allegations based on mis- or disinformation may not be easy to dismiss with context, as they often relate to emotive issues or language.</p>
Diversion	The promotion of related positive stories to illustrate a rounded view of AEC business in a particular field of interest.	Scale – should only be used for smaller or developing issues so as not to appear as an obvious distraction technique.
Imagery	The provision of visual evidence of positive work related to an issue can engender either sympathy for the AEC or support for the agency's response to an issue.	<p>Channels – powerful imagery should be used in as many channels as possible to gain exposure.</p> <p>State office communication officers and executive staff will be encouraged to take behind-the-scenes photos as a matter of course, to mitigate the risk of an appropriate photo not available in a usable timeframe.</p>
Regularity	For long running issues, regular updates can be used to avoid commentary straying into negativity – the aim is to	Channels – Twitter is fantastic for these smaller, regular

Tactic	Purpose	Considerations
	input into the 24/7 news cycle with AEC information.	updates that can act as complimentary to other tactics. COVI-19 updates demonstrate the merit of pairing these updates with useful graphics such as graphs or tables.
International comparisons	Comparisons to other democracies can remind the audience that the system run by the AEC is among the best in the world and criticisms can be trivial or unfounded.	Scale – to address issues such as counting speed rather than any errors, so as not to downplay a serious issue. Reputation – international ECs may not thank us for the comparison if it is too direct.
Apologetic	Being apologetic can demonstrate genuine concern for the impact while also displaying commitment to an issue's resolution. It can assist in providing a turning point for an issue if needed.	Scale – any form of public apology should be used in quite serious matters. Tone – one or two words can create an apology that looks insincere or sarcastic.
Unapologetic	This can be used to address irrational or unfounded criticism by displaying the seriousness of the work the AEC is doing.	Tone – it is important to be appropriately forceful but not disrespectful.

Attachment B: State office activities

The table below will be populated following state office engagement prior to the federal election period.

Activity	Details	Timing	Responsibility	Notes
<i>E.g. VIC weekly radio interviews</i>	<i>Pitch to ABC and 3AW mornings – to establish relationships and a voice.</i>	<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Six O’Clock Advisory</i>	

Attachment C: Pre-prepared digital content list

The below tables reflect digital products to be created in advance of the election period.

Short-form AEC TV videos

Products	
Welcome to AEC TV	Postal voting: Protecting your privacy
The facts on election timing	Postal voting: Delivery efforts
Ensuring the accuracy of the electoral roll	Polling place selection
Postal voting security	The enormous logistical challenge of delivering the election
The count: Declaring results	Security in our transport
The count: What's happening on Sunday?	COVID-19 materials
The count: Getting the votes home	It's on: We're ready, are you?
Check, re-check and check again: Conducting the Senate count	Securing our processes & systems
The polling day experience	What is candidate disendorsement?
How is Government formed	Multiple voting: The facts
Disinformation: The role of the voter	The role of scrutineers
Party registration: The process	Queues: Our work to reduce them
Senate voting: The reduced impact of a 1-only vote	Party postal vote applications
Political neutrality: At the heart of everything we do	Communicating with all Australians
Funding and disclosure	

Infographics

Products

Mythbuster series: This series will include a range of the key issues captured within the above AEC TV video list but focus in on specific areas of misunderstanding rather than addressing the full contextual environment surrounding an issue.

The count	Voting options
Voting systems around the world	Election planning
Postal voting	Electoral communication
Voting is compulsory	Need to vote early?
The electoral roll	
Away from home?	
Formality	
The nominations process	

Animations

Products

The count	Voting options
Voting systems around the world	Election planning
Postal voting	Electoral communication
Voting is compulsory	Need to vote early?
The electoral roll	
Away from home?	
Formality	
The nominations process	

Attachment D: Media release templates

The below list of media releases reflects a lessened need to communicate via this format. The more straightforward reminders or procedural communication will occur via social media channels instead.

Media release template	Purpose	Distribution timing
Welcome to AEC TV	To provide a tangible pre-election illustration of the AEC's efforts to address disinformation regarding the electoral process.	Pre-election
AEC recruiting polling staff in {location} for the 202X federal election	Targeted engagement for local media pickup and interview. National releases for TEW have had little impact in the past.	As determined necessary
People heading to {event} must think ahead for their vote	For use if there is an election day clash with a major event or COVID outbreak.	As determined necessary
The election is on! We're ready, are you?	The announcement media release for acknowledgement & record. This release will have a nod to enrolment messaging but will focus on the scale and complexity messaging as well as COVID safety measures.	On announcement
AEC encouraging voters to 'stop and consider' this federal election	Essential publication and record of the AEC's attempts to forewarn/forearm voters.	Day 1
Overseas voting arrangements for the 202X federal election	Despite a low ability to distribute media releases internationally, this picks up local media on what will be a change in service provision this election.	Day 2
Options different for some voters this election	This release is designed to address the issue of changed services for people traditionally served by mobile teams. It will include COVID messaging and reference to the coordinated postal voting efforts the AEC is implementing.	Day 2

The best electoral roll in history	<p>Dependent on figures but will be another crack at a good news story regardless of where exactly it lands.</p> <p>There is also scope to address positive growth in Indigenous and youth enrolment if we want to front-foot those messages.</p>	Day 9/10
Deadline to nominate as a candidate	This will be an alert about the deadline as well as a national invite to declaration of nomination events that will be listed on the website	Day 9
{Number} candidates contesting the 2019 federal election	<p>Must have a media release with the candidate figures for acknowledgment, to meet demand and to create a record.</p> <p>A large portion of this release will discuss the scale narrative of the work now being undertaken.</p>	Day 10
Early voting to begin: Expect some queues	<p>This release will link to early voting centre locations. Dependent on the length of the early voting period, it will either note a change or the traditional staggered start.</p> <p>It will also link to content about how we select voting locations, how to vote formally, the early voting eligibility requirements and COVID safety measures in place.</p> <p>A note about media attendance at voting venues will be included.</p>	Day XX
Remote voting starts	Perhaps in line with a PR opportunity.	Day 20
Postal voters: Don't delay	An early reminder to complete and return your postal vote ASAP once received. This will also include calls for patience for people who have applied but are yet to receive them.	Day 23
Media access to polling places	A dedicated note to media representatives to provide notice of polling place visits	Day 30
The count: Election night result no guarantee	A media alert designed to inform media representatives about the count process in advance of Saturday night	Day 31
<i>Sunday count release</i>	Content entirely dependent on what has happened the previous day	Day 34

Further count-specific releases

Timing and content entirely dependent on the environment

Days 35, 36 etc