



2 October 2009

Jen Branscombe  
Community Engagement Officer  
Victorian Electoral Commission  
Melbourne Vic 3000

**ECCV Scoping Paper to the Victorian Electoral Commission  
about the notion of 'Democracy Ambassadors'**

Dear Jen,

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to present a paper to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) about the notion of *democracy ambassadors*. As the state-wide peak advocacy body representing Victoria's growing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, ECCV has a particularly strong interest in proposing the notion of *democracy ambassadors* as an idea that will positively contribute to promoting better engagement in CALD communities where all citizens can fulfill their voting commitments.

Victoria's unique demographic composition is made up of people from over 200 countries, bringing with them a wealth of languages and cultures, and creating a diverse religious base. Ensuring that Victoria's multicultural communities fully participate within the social, economic and cultural aspects of Australian society is one of ECCV's core areas of business. ECCV is pleased to present this scoping paper that focuses on developing the notion of *democracy ambassadors* as initially proposed in the ECCV submission to the EMC's *Inquiry into voter participation and informal voting in Victoria*.

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Sincerely,  
Dr Irene Bouzo  
Acting Director  
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

## **Purpose**

The aim of having *democracy ambassadors* is to facilitate information sharing and provide an ongoing education on democracy directly to Victoria's ethnic communities by working with these communities on a face-to-face basis.

## **Description of Responsibilities**

The *democracy ambassador's* primary responsibilities are to communicate clear messages about enrolment, voting and elections and to some extent provide support and empower members of Victoria's ethnic communities to engage in the electoral system by participating in the voting process.

The role of *democracy ambassadors* is to:

- Relay messages about enrolment, including how to register for enrolment and the time enrolment details need to be updated.
- Provide information on when citizens are eligible to vote and assist in identifying voter's appropriate electoral roll.
- Provide information about election time.
- Explain the different types of voting systems and the variation in the methods used to indicate the voter's preferences on a ballot paper.
- Provide assistance at state and local council elections (if required) on how to fill out the ballot paper and where the ballot paper should go once it is completed.
- Explain how people can get to the voting centres and what alternative options they have if they cannot get to those centres on Election Day.
- Clarify the compulsory nature of voting, particularly in local elections.
- Gather information from the community by inviting feedback regarding their understanding of the voting system and the appropriateness of the services provided.
- Promote the range of information sources produced by the VEC and explain how and where they can be accessed.

ECCV applauds the VEC's approach to information sharing as seen in the form of online based translated material for voting as well as written material (i.e. brochures and leaflets) that are provided at state election voting centres. ECCV however, is concerned that for many in the target audience, the Web is not necessarily the first port of call to gain information. While the state election voting centres contain written resources, ECCV is mindful that the ageing part of the

CALD community cannot easily access those centres, hence our recommendation that hard copy multi-lingual voting leaflets should be distributed at different community based organisations and ethno specific aged care facilities.

ECCV recommends that the translated material is in plain language so that they are easy to read, and we suggest the use of graphic illustrations as much as possible to explain the method and the steps involved in the voting process.

### **Target Audience**

The target audiences who are of particular concern to ECCV are:

- Senior citizens from established CALD communities,
- Migrant communities with low level English language proficiency and literacy rates,
- Young members of our new and emerging communities and
- Recent refugee communities.

### **Community Information Forums, Content and Locations**

ECCV proposes that the VEC develops and funds community information forums as a platform for *democracy ambassadors* to deliver education directly to the communities on a face-to-face basis. The education provided in these forums could be built on existing leadership participation programs successfully run by ECCV in this past such as the 'Australia Africa Democracy Project'. This project involved the creation of booklets to educate newly arrived communities about the basic structure of Australian society and system of governance at local, state and federal levels. The aim of the project was to build guidance and show how migrants' involvement in the process affects the decision making at each of those levels. Thus, ECCV sees *democracy ambassadors* as a pathway for further community engagement.

The purpose of community information forums is to provide members of ethnic communities an opportunity to navigate the electoral process so that they know what to expect and are clear about their responsibilities. These forums are also a window for *democracy ambassadors* to attend to queries regarding the system and get feedback from the community about their voting experiences. The forums will also provide an opportunity for young people of a CALD background to develop skills and enhance capacity building in their communities.

It is expected that forums would be very beneficial to sections of the target audience, particularly those who are illiterate. Sharing information by word-of-mouth would be far more effective for this group. ECCV has noted that some ethnic communities prefer to receive information in an oral form as a complementary method to the translated brochures presented by the VEC. Therefore ECCV recommends adequate resources be allocated to arranging and hosting these community information forums.

Furthermore, ECCV suggests that these forums are held in public venues over a number of days before Election Day with time slots for each community to attend. For ease of access, ECCV suggests that these forums are conducted across the Metropolitan Melbourne area with target ethnic concentrations.

### **Training of Democracy Ambassadors**

To ensure that *democracy ambassadors* provide communication support effectively, ECCV suggests that they receive appropriate training about the kind of information that they should deliver. Furthermore, to ensure the success of *democracy ambassadors* in this role they need to be culturally competent so that they can respond appropriately to the target audience's cultural needs as well as multi-lingual to better understand and inform the target audience about the electoral system and voting process.

### **Selection Based on Nomination**

ECCV proposes that *democracy ambassadors* are selected by the VEC through a recruitment process where positions are advertised through ECCV's newsletter as well as in the ethnic media and press. ECCV recommends that the VEC requests ethnic welfare and community based organisations to nominate potential *democracy ambassadors*.

As a measure to secure political impartiality, *democracy ambassadors* could be asked to be paired. This should ensure that they monitor but also support each other.

An issue that ECCV has noted is the difficulty experienced when recruiting and retaining CALD background volunteers. ECCV feedback indicates that volunteering is not well understood in some CALD background groups; therefore ECCV believes every possible incentive is required to attract new personnel. ECCV also proposes that the VEC provide remuneration especially to cover the out-of-pocket expenses (including transportation costs) of *democracy ambassadors* during election periods.

### **What VEC can offer**

ECCV recommends that VEC provides appropriate information to ethnic community based organisations interested in nominating potential candidates about the roles and responsibilities of *democracy ambassadors*; the conditions of service and the need for impartial political affiliation.

ECCV supports VEC's idea of publicly recognising and celebrating the involvement of *democracy ambassadors* in this project and recommends issuing certificates and reference letters upon termination of the role. This formal recognition could act as an incentive to increase ethnic participation and has secondary benefits such as enhanced self-esteem.

### **What ECCV can offer**

ECCV has well-established links with a wide range of multicultural and ethno-specific organisations with our membership currently standing at 190. As a starting point ECCV can promote the notion of *democracy ambassadors* through our network and seek expressions of interest.

ECCV recommends that VEC uses existing ECCV network to contact ethnic community groups. ECCV can distribute information relating to *Democracy Ambassadors* in its newsletter and online E bulletin. ECCV has produced a Multicultural Aged Care Directory that contains extensive lists of multicultural and ethnic community based organisations and ethnic residential aged care facilities. In addition the ECCV's youth committee is a network resource.

ECCV assembles a youth committee which meets on a regular basis to discuss issues relating to youth. Members of this committee are representatives from multicultural youth organisations and networks. As the committee focuses on encouraging young people to be involved in specific project working groups, ECCV sees a great opportunity to design a project that identifies young leaders who could be trained up to participate as *democracy ambassadors*. Thus, a possible model for *democracy ambassadors* might involve working with the ECCV youth committee.

The ECCV welcomes suggestions and looks forward to the opportunities of working with VEC on developing and implementing the idea of *democracy ambassadors*.