

Democracy delivered

Strategic plan
2021–2024

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Background to this plan

The NSW Electoral Commission is central to delivering democracy with integrity and fairness in New South Wales.

The Electoral Commission's work combines planning and running elections, with our regulatory work in maintaining the integrity of our political landscape. This work is supported by ongoing policy, research, communications and engagement activities.

This four-year Strategic plan does not attempt to describe everything we do on a day-to-day basis. This plan sets out the major changes we want to achieve to make the best contribution to fulfilling our vision and purpose of Democracy delivered.

The plan's three strategic goals focus on improving engagement with the community to maintain trust and confidence; using data more effectively to inform service delivery, policy and operational performance; and becoming a more mature, flexible, sustainable and scalable organisation.

Underlying those goals is an ambition to keep improving the organisation's agility. The ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances and to design and deploy new policy, solutions and services for emerging and rapidly changing circumstances will be a necessity now and into the future.

Foreword from the Commissioner

I am pleased to present the NSW Electoral Commission's Strategic plan for 2021 to 2024, which defines our strategic agenda and roadmap for the next four financial years.

Democracy doesn't just happen. It relies on systems and processes of representation, regulation and engagement without which we can't enjoy the practical, day-to-day benefits of free and fair elections in an open and effective democracy.

The Electoral Commission is responsible for the fundamental electoral infrastructure enabling democracy to function.

Perhaps the biggest single strategic challenge the Electoral Commission faces in the next four years is securing the right mix of funding, talent and organisational stability to deliver on its commitment to a healthy and effective democracy in New South Wales.

In our previous strategic planning period, 2017-20, we improved the way we determine and mobilise practical, clear strategies for success. Looking forward we aim to build on those improvements, and create a better experience for all participants in the democratic process.

This strategic plan is the next step in our organisational maturity. It informs our annual work programs and supports us to maintain focus on the bigger picture as we execute our day-to-day operations with integrity, commitment and excellence.

I look forward working with our dedicated staff to deliver these outcomes for the people of New South Wales.



John Schmidt
NSW Electoral Commissioner

Executive summary

The Electoral Commission's work is an investment in delivering an effective democracy for everybody. This plan is an explanation of how we propose, over the next four years, to get that work done.

The first part of the plan sets out our high-level strategic intent and documents our vision, goals and objectives for the next four years.

The second part considers some of the challenges and opportunities in our environment and how we will address them. It also captures the way we work with our key stakeholders and how they interact with the democratic processes in New South Wales.

The third part of the plan articulates the culture and the organisational behaviours we have defined together as important to us and how we work. These are underpinned by the public sector values of integrity, accountability, service and trust.

The fourth part of the plan sets out our three improvement goals.

This document is a statement of direction and priorities and a way of measuring our success.

Each goal has been designed around our customer, stakeholder, legal and business requirements. All of our four divisions, Elections, Funding Disclosure Compliance and General Counsel, Information Services and Corporate are critical contributors to success.

Part 1: Our goals

Goals 1 and **2** focus on how we can work better internally to support our external services and engagement.

Goal 3 is outward looking and supports us in building on our existing reach, impact and collaboration with key stakeholders to improve our engagement and delivery.

Each goal in this plan has a number of measures which the Electoral Commission will track to test effectiveness and report on progress and performance.



Delivering free and fair elections in New South Wales

We also take into account the relationship between our work as an independent integrity agency and the NSW Government's priorities, including its focus on delivering free and fair elections as part of the "accountable and responsible government" State outcome.

In particular, we will respond to the following specific NSW Government measures and targets: The proper conduct of elections is a core requirement for a democratic society.

- Compliance with requirements for the conduct of New South Wales elections.
- No successful challenges to elections due to irregularities in the NSW Electoral Commission's electoral practices.
- Voter enrolment rates.
- Participation rates for New South Wales elections.
- Overall core voter satisfaction level.
- Overall satisfaction level for electronic voting.
- Effective and efficient regulation of electoral participants.
- Participants' declarations and returns managed in accordance with statutory requirements and NSW Electoral Commission's service requirements.

Democracy delivered

Our purpose is to deliver trusted and independent systems, processes, oversight and engagement that support democracy in New South Wales.

Our vision is to maintain confidence in the integrity of the democratic process and make it easy for people to understand and participate.

What we do

We conduct, regulate, and report on general elections and by-elections for the Parliament of New South Wales. We also provide electoral services to local governments.

Our work includes:

- Running independent, fair and accessible elections.
- Providing transparent processes and guidance to assist political participants (including candidates, parties, elected members, donors, third-party campaigners and lobbyists) to comply with their obligations.
- Publishing political donation and expenditure disclosures and registers of political parties, candidates agents, third-party campaigners and third-party lobbyists.
- Engaging with the public to make it easier for people to understand and participate in the democratic process.
- Investigating possible offences and enforcing breaches of electoral, funding and disclosure, and lobbying laws.
- Administering public funding schemes for the benefit of parliamentary parties, State candidates and independent Members of Parliament.

Our work

Who we are here for

We are here to serve the people of New South Wales.

The people of NSW

Voters

What we do

Each of these services is part of our end-to-end democratic process, delivered collaboratively by teams across the NSW Electoral Commission.

Who we engage

We seek to ensure that voters and political participants understand what they need to do to play their part in the democratic process and can simply and seamlessly navigate through our services to meet their obligations.

Elected members

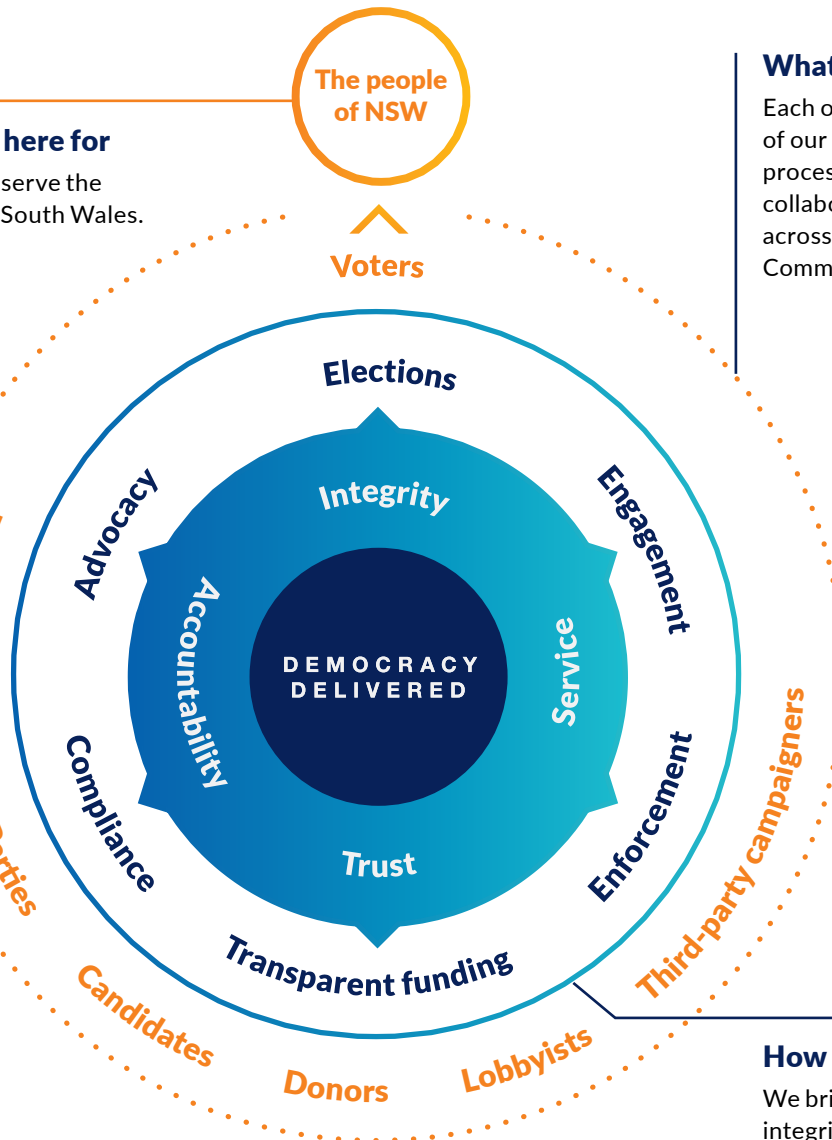
Parties

Candidates

Donors

Lobbyists

Third-party campaigners



How we do it

We bring the values of integrity, accountability, service and trust to the democratic process.

Part 2: Responding to our environment




Risks and opportunities









We face changes and challenges in our operating environment which present both risks and opportunities for our organisation. In the planning process, we identified major issues affecting us and used them to set strategic goals.

The table below sets out a series of risks and opportunities we have assessed across three areas:

- global trends
- legislative change
- resource challenges.

The analysis also indicates where these risks and opportunities align with our three strategic goals.

Global trends	Risk	Opportunity	
Political: Volatility and fragmentation in global politics and changing conversations between citizens and governments. Declining voter turnout and voter disengagement with democratic processes, even in compulsory voting systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining voter turnout. • Loss of public confidence in democratic processes and institutions and voter disengagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build confidence in democratic process, by engaging people around voting and making it easy to understand and use our services. In doing so, strengthen our positioning as trusted, independent, authoritative and an effective regulator. 	
Changing communication preferences and experience, including social media and information overload.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications clutter and less reliable sources make it difficult to get cut-through for important messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become more customer-centric and integrated in how we design and deliver our services and activities. • Design our information channels to build visibility and understanding of our messaging and respond to public questions and conversations. 	
<p>Digital transformation, AI, rise of data capacity and analytics.</p> <p>Growing mistrust due to use of technology.</p> <p>Adoption of technology and risk of failure to meet consumer expectations with technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of technology failures. • Rising cybersecurity challenges. • Service interruption. • Loss of public confidence. • Failure to lift digital and data skills and capabilities across the whole workforce including for the temporary election workforce. • Failure to deal with the privacy concerns regarding the collection and potential misuse of data, roll data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitise external services where we can, to provide faster, simpler engagement and better service. • Identify and implement internal digital and process efficiencies so we can work more effectively. • Improve how we capture and use data and insights to support improvements. • Ensure our technology processes and systems are streamlined, robust and address business continuity. • Improve data governance: extend work already being done across the Commission. 	

Legislative change	Risk	Opportunity	
Changes in electoral legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People fail to comply with requirements because they don't understand them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using improved communications platforms, deliver effective ways to meet compliance obligations. • Take opportunities to increase awareness and advocate for improvements to legislation. 	
Resource challenges	Risk	Opportunity	
Work health and safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace health and safety (WHS) challenges; including WHS risks relating to our workforce and the unique nature of our work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share resources and build collaborations across jurisdictions, including with other electoral commissions. 	
Need to source and maintain funding across all of our activities so we can deliver our legislative requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite our ongoing obligations the commission is funded on an event and project basis. Underlying functions and systems that are vital to our work do not receive sufficient funding. • Impact on services and ability to attract an election workforce. • Challenges in balancing workforce permanency with flexibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframing our approach and strategy to reflect a better balance in planning and investment between “event” and less visible operational work. • Strengthen our resourcing model. Create efficiencies through streamlined, repeatable processes. 	 
Dealing with legacy systems and the need for ongoing technology infrastructure maintenance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to match ambitions for better service and more reliable support and advice with the necessary modern technology and other operational systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in our systems to ensure they are up to date, maintainable, reliable, secure and relevant to our needs. • Balance short-term needs in election years, with longer-term planning and maintenance. 	 
A funding model that does not meet our legislative remit resulting in organisational fragility, and suboptimal outcomes for the Commission and the people of New South Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational fragility. • High reliance on contingent labour to deliver ongoing services. • Knowledge retention and attraction. • Key person dependence. • WHS risks. • High-cost resourcing model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe the Commission's workforce strategy and operating model to match strategic intent with a realistic and contemporary approach to staffing and performance. • Focus on building workforce capabilities and expertise. • De-risk election delivery and reliance on more expensive short-term resources by managing the maintenance and renewal of election systems in non-election years. 	 

Working with our stakeholders

This table provides a summary of our main stakeholders how we interact with them and how they interact with the democratic process in New South Wales.

Who	How they interact with the democratic processes	How we interact with them
Beneficiaries: The people of New South Wales.	Our democracy is here to serve the people of New South Wales; they look to the Electoral Commission for advice on how to participate and assurance on how electoral processes are conducted and regulated.	We provide trusted and independent systems, processes and oversight of the democratic process and seek to make it easier for them to understand and participate. We facilitate public awareness of political donations. We administer public funding schemes for election campaigns and administration.
Participants		
Voters (now + next; includes under 18s, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal peoples and other communities).	Participate in the voting process and look to us for guidance on how to do so.	We encourage them to participate and make it as safe, easy and convenient as possible.
Non-voters.	They do not participate in voting.	We encourage them to participate. We enforce compliance where needed.
Parties, candidates, party agents, elected Members, third-party campaigners.	They are key stakeholders in our democratic processes.	We provide them with guidance/support to assist them comply with their obligations. We enforce compliance where needed.
Lobbyists, donors.	They participate in the broader political process.	We provide them with guidance/support to assist them to comply with their obligations. We enforce compliance where needed.
Reviewers		
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.	Inquires into and reports on electoral laws and practices and spending and public funding of political parties. Looks only at issues referred by a House or Minister.	We appear before the Committee and make submissions to their inquiries.
Connectors		
Community organisations, NGOs, Peak bodies, Reference Groups.	Public interface.	We work with them to connect us and our information with the people of New South Wales.
Media.	Public interface.	We work with them to connect us and our information with the people of New South Wales.
Clients		
State Parliament.	Govern on behalf of the people of New South Wales.	We conduct elections.
Local Councils.	Govern on behalf of the people of local government areas.	Where engaged to do so, we conduct elections on their behalf.
Other election clients.	Purchase election services from us.	Where engaged to do so, we conduct elections on their behalf.
Collaborators		
Other electoral commissions, AEC and ECANZ	Collaborate; share knowledge and experience.	We work with them to share knowledge and experience. Joint roll agreement with AEC.
Academics, students.	Collaborate; share knowledge; analyse us.	We share knowledge; collaborate on research and gain insights.

Part 3: Our organisational culture

The NSW Electoral Commission's positive culture is one of our great strengths. As an organisation that needs to deliver on-time and with precision across all activities, our staff are focused on outcomes and we work together to do what's needed to achieve them.

We are continuing to build our agility as an organisation. Over the next four years we will build on our existing flexible work practices to create an increasingly consistent experience for our staff however and wherever they are working.

We expect to be held to our values and behaviours – and to hold each other to account – so that they are not just words but come to life in our day-to-day collaborations, how we work and the way we design our systems, processes and products.

By living our values and behaviours, we create the most positive experience for people who interact with us. This, in turn, builds and maintains our reputation – and brand – as a respected organisation of the highest integrity that is easy to deal with.

Our behaviours

Our behaviours define what is distinctive about how we work at the NSW Electoral Commission and what we need to do to deliver on our shared goals. We are each accountable for bringing them to life in our work.

Responsive

We recognise the need to be flexible in dealing with our changing environment. We look for opportunities to build on ideas and adapt and innovate in how we work, to keep improving our services and enhance the experience people have when dealing with us.

Solution-focused

We are focused on outcomes and delivering on our shared goals. We move quickly beyond identifying a problem to working out how best to solve it, while keeping our strategic goals top of mind.

Transparent

To demonstrate our integrity and build trust in our services, we are open with each other and our customers, clients, stakeholders and audiences. This keeps us accountable and creates opportunities for others to work more effectively with us.

Customer-centred

We start by considering the needs of our customers, clients, stakeholders and audiences and find the best way to serve them, while meeting our legal and business requirements. We believe this is essential to make it easy for people to participate in democratic processes.

Collaborative

We look for opportunities to share ideas and knowledge and work as partners internally and externally because we know this is how we get the best results.

Our values

Our core values are the NSW Public Service values:

- Integrity
- Service
- Accountability
- Trust

Each of these values is expected and non-negotiable and is our everyday behaviour. For more detail on what they mean in practice visit psc.nsw.gov.au



Part 3: Our goals and strategies to achieve them

We have set three strategic goals for the next four years. For each goal, the plan explains the strategies to achieve them. The goals don't explain everything we do. They reflect choices we have made about where we can have the biggest impact.

Strategy (WHAT)	Objective (WHY)	Initiatives (HOW) ways in which we will achieve this
Align our services, roadmaps, projects and performance to strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all investment and work contributes to our goals/ performance and staff understand their role in the NSW Electoral Commission's success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement plans across teams, divisions, and activities and align these with individual development plans (Div/BU/Individual). Align our ICT investment and systems with our strategy, based around a single view of our customers.
Build a stable organisation with a strong and positive culture that effectively scales to meet changing requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure our services, products, processes and technology are funded, documented and fit-for-purpose and continually improve to meet changing requirements. Build our skill, capacity and ability to collaborate through a motivated and effective workforce with a learning culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define and document an operating model and governance framework. Define and publish procedures, policies, and standards across all areas including operations, technology, policy, etc. Manage our systems and data as assets with real value, using roadmaps to plan and prioritise changes across election and non-election years. Manage and monitor staff engagement through the annual <i>People Matter Employee Survey</i>, organisational health checks and pulse surveys. Enable and embed flexible work practices throughout our organisation.
Secure resources to build and maintain sustainable and stable NSW Electoral Commission services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding, workforce, physical assets and technology to build and maintain sustainable and stable core capabilities, operations, elections and key events to better deliver out services. Eliminate key person dependencies and invest in our future leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that our Workforce Strategy continues to support our goals and strategies. Define and implement a succession plan for the NSW Electoral Commission. Define and document a capabilities framework for the Electoral Commission to meet its strategic goals. Improve sharing of information and knowledge to reduce silos and barriers to ensure the effective use of knowledge across the Electoral Commission. Prepare an election workforce plan including making better use of shared services and joint asset strategies within ECANZ. Manage all activities and risks and secure our information.
Strengthen our governance processes and risk management culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support decision making by ensuring systems are in place that inspire confidence in decision making and shared ownership of risk. IT systems (election and non-election) are safe and secure. Regulatory framework is underpinned by a robust risk management framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align governance and risk management to industry and government standards. Implement Risk Culture Recommendations to uplift maturity across the NSW Electoral Commission. Implement cyber security strategy. Strengthen our regulatory/legislative functions and management frameworks.



**Goal 2:
Effective use
of data**

Use evidence driven insights to inform service delivery, policy, regulatory and operational performance and organisational efficiency.

It is becoming increasingly important that the Electoral Commission, across all of its work, has easy and simple access to data that is reliable, accurate, trusted and compliant with standards of security and privacy.

Strategy (WHAT)	Objective (WHY)	Initiatives (HOW) ways in which we will achieve this.
Increase our use of evidence-based insights to inform, support and monitor the delivery of our services and to promote continuous service improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data drives our service/project/regulatory planning and delivery. Reduce costs and to drive service improvements. Make it easier for our customers to engage with us. To understand the evidence the different parts of the Electoral Commission need both for projects and service planning and ongoing operational performance, which feeds into the measurement of KPIs and other performance metrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance documentation of internal process, capabilities, information flows and aggregate data from different sources to improve KPI measurement and reporting. Centralise information and knowledge management to support data insights. Move more services online. Develop an integrated customer service strategy.
Enhance the structure of our services, customer segments and data to increase insights and performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understand our customer needs, design services and products that continually improve for the benefit of our customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish enterprise view of data sources and information flows as part of the NSW Electoral Commission operating model. Develop single view of customer and data requirements that could drive better services/value (segments).
Build data management and analytics capability across the NSW Electoral Commission to drive improvements in our services, policy and regulation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safely capture, store and use data across the Electoral Commission to drive improvements in planning, service design and delivery and policy and regulation. Ensure our services and products are continually improving for the benefit of our customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build data management and analytics capability across the Electoral Commission. Structure, safely capture, store and use data across the Electoral Commission to drive improvements in planning, service design and delivery and policy and regulation.





We want to build trust and confidence in our electoral and democratic systems and processes.
We want to make it easier for people to understand and participate in democracy and for political participants to understand and comply with their legal obligations.

Strategy (WHAT)	Objective (WHY)	Initiatives (HOW) ways in which we will achieve this.
Build knowledge in voters and political participants to increase engagement, participation and compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable people to understand and be engaged in the democratic process across their preferred channels. • Give audiences a consistent, easy, positive experience across all our activities. • Support people from under-represented groups to better participate in the democratic process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess and address education gaps and needs of current and future electors and political participants. • Improve voter participation through easy communications and better, user centred digital services. • Extend our integrated communications and stakeholder engagement strategies between elections. • Develop user centred digital presence. • Explore partnerships and other options to extend external engagement activities.
Continually improve our services and products for the benefit of our customers through cross-jurisdiction collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with other jurisdictions to ensure effective delivery of democracy and improve the sharing of information regarding systems and processes for greater efficiency and better impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participate in ECANZ and other working groups and share decisions and findings. • Progress a national platform by maturing our information-sharing relationships with other electoral commissions' IT departments. Scope effectiveness of sharing solutions where appropriate. • Develop a secondment program to build knowledge and awareness across electoral commissions.
Develop stakeholder networks to more effectively confront contemporary and emerging challenges to democracy in New South Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with academia, policy makers and other jurisdictions to share ideas, insights and practice that more effectively confront contemporary and emerging challenges to democracy in New South Wales. • Leverage our external impact by working with collaborative partners. • Ensure political participants have a consistent experience across all interactions with NSW Electoral Commission. • Use our expert knowledge to drive policy and legislative improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specific research goals in consultation with the Electoral Regulation Research Network (ERRN). • Aggregate electoral research (ERRN and others) and NSW Electoral Commission commissioned research so it is easy to share.



Part 4: Getting the work done

The Strategic plan explains what we want to achieve over the next four years and why, in a number of specific areas, to make the biggest contribution to achieving our mission and purpose given the context and conditions we face.

The plan does not spell out the detail of how we will get that work done. Operational planning, which must be adaptable to changing conditions and circumstances, will be the subject of a separate process. It will explain the projects and initiatives we will undertake both at an organisational and divisional and business unit level.

Themes goals and measures

We have identified three strategic themes that capture the range of our work. Under each of these, we have defined a goal and the strategies and initiatives we will use to achieve that goal, and indicators of how we will measure success.

Accountability, monitoring and reporting

This plan sets out our strategic agenda for the next four year. It will be reviewed each year to ensure it continues to meet our needs. We will report on our progress in our annual reports and other organisational reports.

When new opportunities arise, we will measure them against our strategic goals, identify what we have the capacity to achieve and, if needed, adjust our priorities. Progress towards our goals will be monitored through our senior executive governance committees and our Independent Audit and Risk Committee. We will track our progress towards our goals and how we have performed against our key performance indicators.