



**Electoral
Commission**
QUEENSLAND

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



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Acknowledgement of Country

The Electoral Commission of Queensland acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and recognises their culture, history, diversity and their deep connection to the land, waters and seas of Queensland and the Torres Strait. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate and wish to pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

About the artwork

This artwork tells a Queensland story. A story that began countless generations ago. A story that remains unfinished.

As our reconciliation journey continues, we are reminded of our responsibility to better understand our state's past and take brave action towards a more equitable future.

The heart of the artwork is symbolic of our commitment to reconciliation through bringing people together in strong partnerships.

This creates a ripple effect through the organisation, reaching far and wide; carried across Queensland by our vision of connecting with First Nations peoples for a more inclusive electoral system. Nobody is isolated. Nobody is left behind.

The Four Pillars of reconciliation stand proudly in the artwork: guiding the way to a better tomorrow, and our five organisational values are connected throughout; just like they are across the organisation. Queensland's outline runs throughout.

As we write the next chapters together as equals, our story will change for the better. And by working to elevate First Nations voices in the democratic processes of the state, the ECQ will create a more rewarding future for all Queenslanders.

Honouring our past, together shaping our future.

The artwork concept and narrative was developed by David Williams. David is a proud Wakka Wakka artist at Gilimbaa.



Commitment statement

The Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ) will foster a fair and inclusive electoral system that facilitates the electoral participation of all First Nations Queenslanders in our state's urban, regional and remote communities.

We commit to ensuring ECQ staff have the training to engage with First Nations Queenslanders and communities in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways that demonstrate respect for First Nations cultures.

Our engagement approach will guide the way ECQ staff work with First Nations Queenslanders and communities. It will help deepen our understanding of the unique needs of First Nations Queenslanders and communities and support our delivery of a fair and inclusive electoral system.

We commit to listening and learning from First Nations Queenslanders, to honour our past and together shape our future.



Introduction

The ECQ is an independent statutory authority responsible for the impartial conduct of Queensland elections. The ECQ performs functions under its enabling legislation: the *Electoral Act 1992*, *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, *Referendums Act 1997*, *Local Government Act 2009*, *City of Brisbane Act 2010* and *Industrial Relations Act 2016*.

The ECQ's main functions encompass several areas – delivering elections, administering electoral funding and disclosure laws, and reviewing electoral boundaries.

The ECQ has a proud history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Queensland to ensure they can exercise their right to participate in public life.

During 2022, the ECQ undertook consultation with Indigenous local government chief executive officers, with the objective of laying the groundwork for co-designing culturally appropriate electoral services, as well as improving enrolment and participation for First Nations Queenslanders. The ECQ will work closely with other local governments, particularly those with a high proportion of First Nations electors and which receive remote voting services to co-design electoral services.

The ECQ acknowledges that representation of First Nations Queenslanders is an important factor in electoral processes. The importance of this was a key driver in the ECQ's decision to develop this First Nations Engagement Strategy.



Strategic links

The ECQ's First Nations Engagement Strategy will support the delivery of activities and/or outcomes across the below key policies and initiatives.

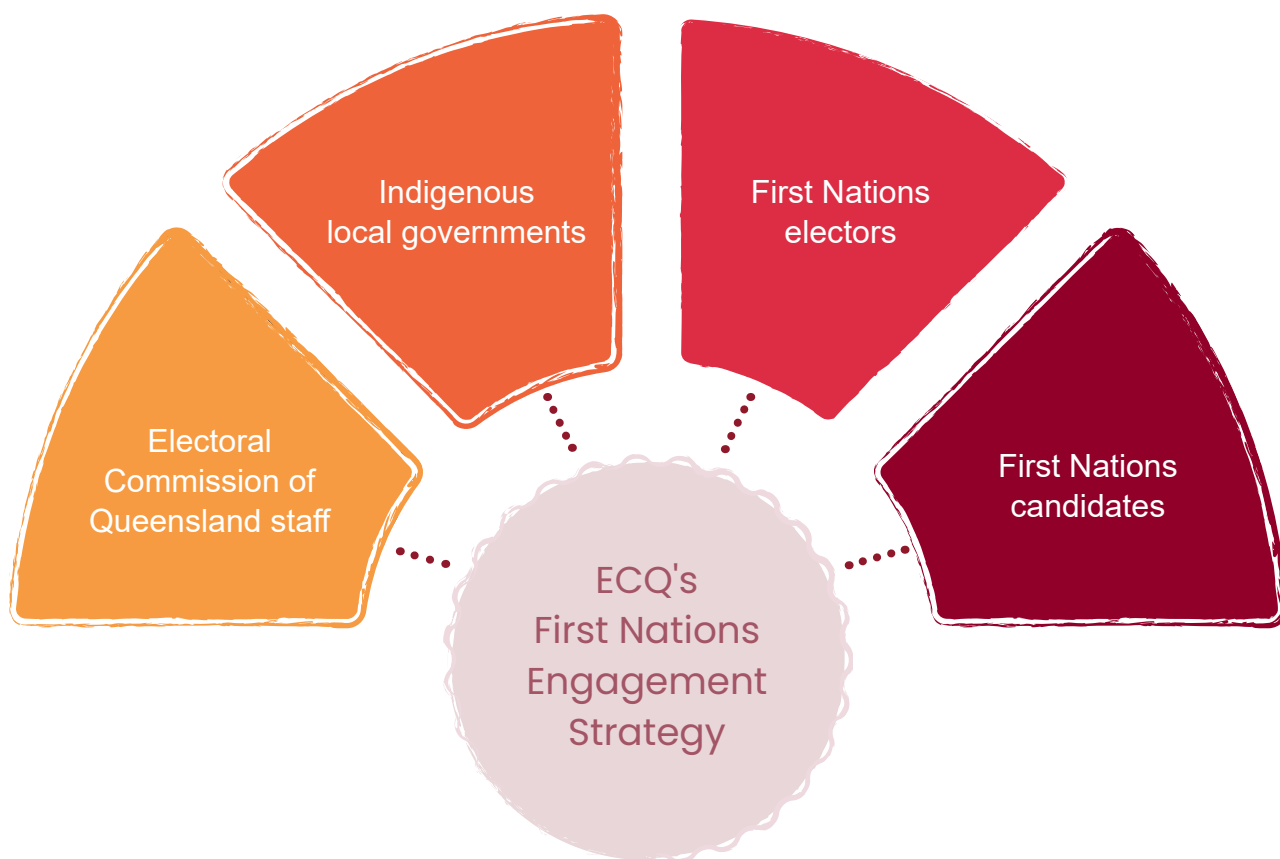
Policy/Initiative	Description
Strategic Plan 2023-27	The ECQ's Strategic Plan defines the organisation's direction and future focus through the establishment of realistic strategic objectives and key performance indicators that respond to the ECQ's purpose and vision.
Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-21	The ECQ's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) set out a range of internal changes necessary for developing the ECQ's capacity as a culturally capable service provider. This work was aimed at enhancing the ECQ's ability to work effectively with diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote, regional and urban settings, to deliver electoral services that meet community needs.
Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP), Australian Electoral Commission	Through the IEPP, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) aims to deliver effective and culturally appropriate services to First Nations Australians. The AEC works directly with communities or in partnership with other organisations to deliver services in ways that meet cultural and regional needs. As a strategic partner and major election management body, the ECQ will continuously seek opportunities to collaborate with the AEC and IEPP to improve the electoral participation of First Nations Queenslanders.
Remote Event Management	The delivery of elections in remote and First Nations communities requires special considerations and planning to ensure success. The Remote Event Management project is managed by key ECQ staff who understand the complex logistical and operational environments within remote communities. The project has a strong focus on communication and community engagement and understanding of the nuances of the communities being serviced.



Engagement cohort

The ECQ First Nations Engagement Strategy is informed by the below high-level overview and understanding of key target audiences.

The strategy is both internally and externally facing and should be used as a reference guide to support engagement with each of the identified audience groups.



First Nations Engagement Strategy summary

Our vision

Working together with First Nations Queenslanders to deliver a fair and inclusive electoral system that supports electoral participation for all First Nations peoples across Queensland.



Our values

Engaging with respect

Listening first

Building relationships

A trusted and consistent partner

Our strategic priorities

1

Support a culturally capable workforce

- 1.1 Improve cultural capability training opportunities for ECQ staff.
- 1.2 Support place-based First Nations employment opportunities.
- 1.3 Develop tools and resources to support culturally appropriate engagement.

⋮

2

Co-design electoral services with communities

- 2.1 Strengthen relationships with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland.
- 2.2 Co-design appropriate and effective election tools and resources.
- 2.3 Formalise governance arrangement with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland.

⋮

3

Simplify electoral participation

- 3.1 Improve accessibility of election communications.
- 3.2 Support engagement and accessibility for candidates.
- 3.3 Collaborate with Indigenous Electoral Participation Program activities led by the AEC.

⋮

4

Build our role in advocacy and partnerships

- 4.1 Build relationships and networks with partner organisations.
- 4.2 Advocate for changes to improve accessibility for First Nations electors and candidates.



Strategic priority 1: Support a culturally capable workforce

We will foster and develop the cultural competency of ECQ staff, including through specific training for those working in First Nations communities during election periods.

Why is this important?

To engage in meaningful and impactful ways with First Nations peoples and communities, it is important that ECQ staff have the competencies they need to engage in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways that demonstrate respect for First Nations cultures.

How we will achieve this

Cultural capability training

The ECQ will deliver cultural capability training which will focus on the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, customs and histories, and strategies to support staff to interact and take culturally safe and appropriate action.

For ECQ staff who will be working directly with First Nations communities, such as Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers and temporary election staff – an additional tailored community awareness component will be delivered. This will help to build upon the existing staff awareness and understanding of cultural protocols, such as Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country. This understanding of community protocols, will enable ECQ to confidently undertake activities such as inviting Elders to provide a Welcome to Country during training sessions for temporary election staff.

Tools and resources

The ECQ will develop tools and resources to support culturally appropriate and respectful engagement with First Nations Queenslanders.

While the diversity and complexity of the many First Nations cultural groups across Queensland makes it difficult to prescribe universal rules for engagement, there are some fundamental principles that support the conduct of respectful work.

The ECQ will harness the rich First Nations cultural and language diversity that exists from region to region across Queensland to support the delivery of electoral communication to First Nations communities. The development of a cultural engagement resources will help to minimise terminology or language barriers First Nations Queenslanders may experience when engaging in the electoral process, particularly those for whom English is their second or third language.

How will we achieve this?

We will:

- 1.1 Improve cultural capability training opportunities for ECQ staff.
- 1.2 Support place-based First Nations employment opportunities.
- 1.3 Develop tools and resources to support culturally appropriate engagement.

Place-based First Nations employment opportunities

The ECQ is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the population of Queensland. By supporting a localised workforce through more local employment opportunities, the ECQ is aiming to achieve an increase in First Nations electoral engagement, by both electors and candidates.



Strategic priority 2:

Co-design electoral services with communities

We will commit to a co-design process when developing and rolling out electoral services to First Nations communities to ensure First Nations voices are heard and feedback is provided in a culturally appropriate way.

Why is this important?

Co-design involves a genuine partnership to define problems, develop strategies and commit to enduring solutions through an equitable engagement process. The ECQ understands that the unique perspectives of First Nations Queenslanders can positively contribute to the success of the electoral process within communities.

Relationships and co-design

The ECQ is committed to continuing to build relationships and work with First Nations communities to co-design and deliver culturally appropriate and effective election services.

The ECQ will implement a co-design process when engaging with communities, to enable a tailored approach to meet the various needs of different communities. Activities may include local community enrolment drives, increased opportunities for employment at elections, and education and training for future candidates in partnership with relevant agencies.

The ECQ acknowledges that strong relationships are key to delivering election services, especially in remote and regional areas of Queensland. As part of its existing electoral operations, the ECQ works closely with Queensland's Indigenous local governments.

To further support these relationships, the ECQ will endeavour to provide more face-to-face engagement at regional levels, and on Country. To engage potential future candidates, the ECQ will continue to partner with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning on training or information sessions for candidates.

The above activities will be underpinned by ECQ's commitment to provide more consistent communication with First Nations communities – both during, and outside of, election cycles. By providing more consistent messaging, and engaging on a localised level, the ECQ will strengthen its capabilities in co-designing electoral services with communities.

How will we achieve this?

We will:

- 2.1 Strengthen relationships with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland.
- 2.2 Co-design appropriate and effective election tools and resources.
- 2.3 Formalise governance arrangements with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland.

Partnerships

The ECQ has identified opportunities for policy and service delivery alignment by working in a closer partnership with the AEC. At a national level, the AEC maintains an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible electors through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services and targeted education and public awareness programs. By leveraging its relationship with the AEC, the ECQ will identify opportunities for improved data collection and information sharing, for the benefit of First Nations communities across Queensland.

The establishment of strategic partnerships with local youth programs and educational institutions, will help the ECQ to engage with young people to raise awareness and understanding about the electoral system and enrolment process. Historically, the perspectives of young people who are younger than voting age have been largely uncaptured and by engaging early, the ECQ aims to increase elector enrolment numbers and expand the electoral knowledge base of future electors and candidates.

Shared governance

Strong and robust election planning is key to the delivery of quality electoral services by the ECQ. By strengthening shared governance with Indigenous local governments in the election planning phase, we can increase the potential for stronger elector turnout and lower informality.





Strategic priority 3: Simplify electoral participation

We will work with First Nations communities to simplify the electoral process, through listening and by providing tailored tools and resources to support and enhance the understanding of, and participation in, the electoral process.

Why is this important?

The electoral process is complex and can be difficult to understand for electors and candidates. An important part of the ECQ's role is to support the education of Queensland electors and their understanding of the electoral process, as well as to simplify the process and improve accessibility wherever possible.

Engagement and accessibility

The ECQ is committed to creating an inclusive electoral system that facilitates the electoral participation of all First Nations Queenslanders.

The ECQ has a comprehensive communication and awareness-raising approach, especially in the lead up to by-elections and major local government and state elections. This approach considers a range of audience groups and uses a mix of channels and platforms to maximise reach across the state including print, digital, outdoor, convenience, television and other advertising.

However, it is acknowledged that additional tailored promotion of elections using localised channels in First Nations communities is important, and accordingly, the ECQ commenced a deeper engagement with First Nations media in 2022, including the Black Star Radio network, to proactively promote by-elections.

Improving electoral communication

At the ECQ, we believe that every First Nations Queenslander should understand what the electoral process means to them, their community and their day-to-day life.

The ECQ understands that television and digital channels are not always the most effective approaches, particularly for remote communities. This understanding has been deepened through consultation with Indigenous local governments, an increasing awareness of best practice communication and engagement for First Nations communities and the ECQ's experience of working with First Nations communities for by-elections and major local government and State elections. The design and development of bespoke communication and engagement materials for First Nations communities to promote electoral activities will continue, supported by activities identified by this strategy.

Supporting participation

The ECQ is committed to working with Indigenous local governments to improve the participation of First Nations Queenslanders in the electoral process, through continued tailoring of communication channels, the development of bespoke educational materials, and partnerships with local organisations. Most importantly, this work will be underpinned by listening and understanding First Nations communities' needs.

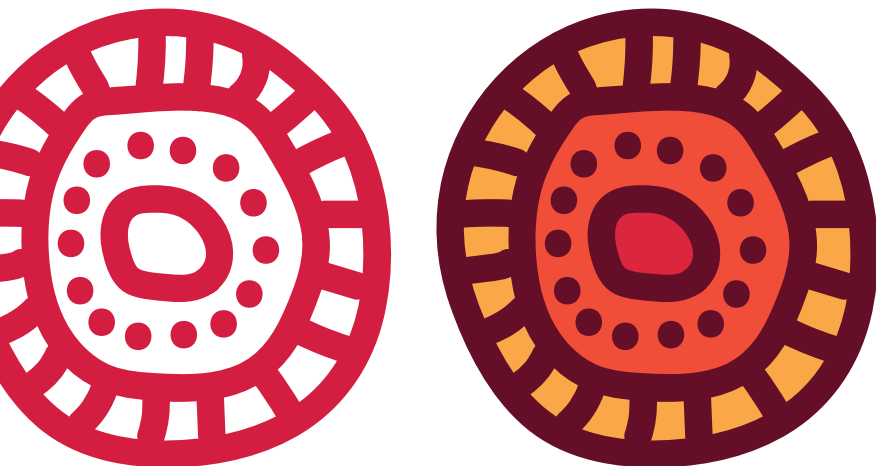
By working with Indigenous local governments and partner organisations the ECQ will improve the participation of First Nations Queenslanders along the electoral process journey from candidate nominations and disclosures, to early voting, education and awareness and to turnout, formality and the communication of election outcomes.

Supporting enrolment is an important consideration and the ECQ will continue to work with the AEC to support enrolment-focused activities in Queensland wherever possible.

How will we achieve this?

We will:

- 3.1 Improve the accessibility of electoral communication.
- 3.2 Support engagement and accessibility for candidates.
- 3.3 Collaborate with Indigenous Electoral Participation Program activities led by AEC.





Strategic priority 4: Build our role in advocacy and partnerships

We will build relationships with partners and communities to support positive and successful electoral processes. Through these relationships we will listen and build an understanding about where communities and organisations are seeking advocacy support. We will advocate for the change that communities need to deliver fair and effective elections.

Why is this important?

Every eligible Queensland adult has the right to participate in elections, however this was not always the case. From 1885, Queensland law explicitly excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from voting and Queensland was the last state in Australia to lift these prohibitions in 1965. Almost 50 years after the Queensland Government repealed discriminatory electoral laws against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there are still gaps in participation that need to be addressed.

Building relationships and partnerships

Consultation with Indigenous local governments and an understanding of the ECQ's experience of working with First Nations communities for by-elections and major local and state elections, revealed that there are several barriers that exist for First Nations Queenslanders as both electors and candidates. For example, it is a requirement at the time of nomination for a nomination deposit of \$250 to be paid by cash, bank cheque, credit card, or electronic funds transfer.

This requirement was identified as a barrier for many candidates in remote communities who have no access to a bank and/or insufficient identification to open a bank account.

How will we achieve this?

We will:

- 4.1 Build relationships and networks with partner organisations.
- 4.2 Advocate for change to improve accessibility for First Nations electors and candidates.

Advocating for change

Queensland elections are governed under several acts: the *Electoral Act 1992*, *Local Government Electoral Act 2011*, *Referendums Act 1997*, and *Industrial Relations Act 2016*.

Though the ECQ does not have the authority to directly amend these acts and the associated electoral rules, the ECQ has obligations under section 7 of the *Electoral Act 1992* to provide information and advice on electoral matters to the Legislative Assembly, the government, departments and government authorities. The ECQ can use feedback and insights from delivering its electoral responsibilities to advise the Queensland Government about the challenges faced by First Nations Queenslanders in electoral participation and any unintended operational difficulties.

To act as an effective advocate, it will be important for the ECQ to invest in building relationships with, and spending time listening to, Indigenous local governments, First Nations-led organisations and First Nations communities.

Implementation

The four strategic priorities introduced in this strategy are supported by 11 strategies, each with associated actions. These strategies outline the steps necessary to achieve the ECQ's vision of working together with First Nations Queenslanders to deliver a fair and inclusive electoral system that supports electoral participation for all First Nations Queenslanders across the state.

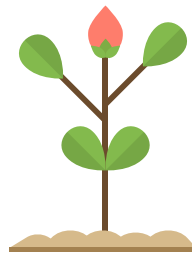
Each strategy reflects what was heard through the strategy design process. The order of the recommendations is significant and they have been ordered according to importance of their delivery. While many strategies can be explored simultaneously, some are interdependent and will require a staged and sequential approach to effectively progress them.

The ECQ will deliver on this strategy across three phases:



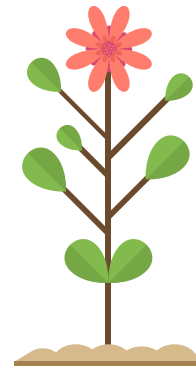
Establish

Establish a foundation for First Nations engagement in the lead-up to the 2024 elections.



Strengthen

Develop and build on our First Nations engagement activities to support electoral participation in the 2024 elections.



Grow

Expand our impact past the 2024 elections – continue to work closely with First Nations peoples to enable meaningful engagement and participation in future Queensland elections.

Implementation roadmap



Establish (April 2023 – November 2023)

Improve cultural capability training for ECQ staff. (strategy 1.1)

Support place-based First Nations employment opportunities. (strategy 1.2)



Strengthen (December 2023 – October 2024)

Develop tools and resources to support culturally appropriate engagement. (strategy 1.3)

Strengthen relationships with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland. (strategy 2.1)

Co-design appropriate and effective election tools and resources. (strategy 2.2)

Improve accessibility of election communication. (strategy 3.1)

Support engagement and accessibility for candidates. (strategy 3.2)

Collaborate with Indigenous Electoral Participation Program activities led by AEC. (strategy 3.3)

Build relationships and networks with partner organisations. (strategy 4.1)



Grow (November 2024 onward)

Formalise governance arrangements with Indigenous local governments and First Nations communities across Queensland. (strategy 2.3)

Advocate for changes to improve accessibility for First Nations electors and candidates. (strategy 4.2)

Conclusion

The ECQ is committed to delivering on the priorities outlined in this strategy, but we can't do it alone. We are committed to continuing to work with First Nations communities, Indigenous local governments and the AEC who have provided important input into this strategy.

We understand engagement is an ever-evolving process and will learn and adjust our approach as we progress, listening to feedback and taking the community's advice as we work together to deliver a fair and inclusive electoral system that supports electoral participation for all First Nations Queenslanders.





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