

June 2021

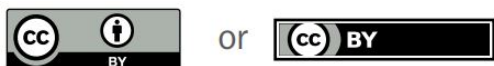
# Case study

**National Training and Education Unit, Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)**

© 2021 Australian Electoral Commission

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au>

The Australian Electoral Commission asserts the right to be recognised as author of the original material in the following manner:



This case study was developed in early 2020. Since this time, the AEC has made significant further advancements in electoral training and civic and voter education. The Case Study is part of an International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) project focusing on Training and Education in Electoral Administration.

Enquiries regarding the licence and any use of this document are welcome at:

Assistant Commissioner, Education and Communications  
Australian Electoral Commission  
PO Box 6172  
KINGSTON ACT 2604  
Email: [info@aec.gov.au](mailto:info@aec.gov.au)

## Table of Contents

<b>Case study: Australian Electoral Commission .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Foreword .....	3
About the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) .....	3
<b>Context for the establishment of the National Training and Education Unit .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The first years of operation .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Role and function of the NTEU .....	6
Learning Governance Committee .....	7
Creating a learning culture .....	8
Learning hub .....	8
Funding model .....	8
<b>Professionalising the AEC's workforce.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Election Planning and Learning Program .....	9
Election Readiness Program.....	10
Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) capacity building program.....	12
Large scale and local rehearsals.....	12
Election experience program.....	13
Training the AEC's election workforce.....	13
<b>Lessons and the future.....</b>	<b>15</b>

# Case study: Australian Electoral Commission

---

## Foreword

Professionalism is critical to the work of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC).

It features in the AEC's values of *electoral integrity through quality, agility and professionalism* which underpins everything the AEC does and it's one of the four key activities of the organisation – '*continue to professionalise our workforce*'. Building and maintaining a capable and agile organisation and professional workforce is critical to delivering electoral events and in recent years the AEC has made significant investment in reforming its internal learning and development function to embed:

- critical operational and leadership capabilities that underpin election readiness, and
- a culture of compliance, electoral integrity and professionalism.

This case study provides insights into how the AEC invested time, money and resources to use learning and development as one of the strategic levers to drive organisational and cultural change in the 2017-19 electoral cycle.

## About the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)

### Role and function

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is an independent statutory authority established by the Australian Government. The *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*<sup>1</sup> establishes the AEC's roles and responsibilities as an independent statutory authority.

The AEC is funded to deliver one purpose and one outcome:

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

The AEC does this by:

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

### Organisational structure and leadership

The Electoral Commissioner, appointed under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, is responsible for managing and operating the AEC.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* [www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2019C00103](http://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2019C00103)

The AEC's regular Australian Public Service<sup>2</sup> (APS) workforce are located throughout Australia in a network of divisional, state and territory offices, including a national office in Canberra.

Recruiting, developing and retaining a professional and capable workforce is a key linchpin for the AEC. The AEC's regular APS workforce of 840<sup>3</sup> combine with its temporary election workforce (TEW) of more than 87,000 Australians to deliver national elections.

### International services

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funds<sup>4</sup> the AEC to lead a number of bilateral electoral capacity building efforts, particularly in the Pacific region. DFAT has also provided funding and support—for over 20 years—for the AEC's major electoral capacity building program through the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network (PIANZEA). Through PIANZEA, the AEC provides secretariat services, is a representative on the network's advisory group, and facilitates peer to peer support for electoral administrators across the Pacific.

In 2018–19 the AEC:

- helped the PNG Electoral Commission, including through two BRIDGE workshops, to embed its new corporate plan
- provided technical assistance to the Tonga Electoral Office, including training officials and developing procedures
- hosted the 2019 PIANZEA Network senior officials meeting and three concurrent BRIDGE workshops in Brisbane
- deployed four advisers across the Fiji islands to work alongside the Fijian Elections Office to support delivery of the 2018 election
- deployed three advisers to Solomon Islands to assist with logistics, operations and training to support delivery of the 2019 election.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Australia's federal civil service

<sup>3</sup> Source: Australian Electoral Commission 2018/19 Annual Report [annualreport.aec.gov.au/2019/accountability.html#managing](https://annualreport.aec.gov.au/2019/accountability.html#managing)

<sup>4</sup> Under section 7(1)(fa) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* the AEC assists international electoral management bodies.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Australian Electoral Commission 2018/19 Annual Report <https://annualreport.aec.gov.au/2019/aec-functions.html#highlights>

# Context for the establishment of the National Training and Education Unit

---

A professional AEC workforce comprises competent, knowledgeable and highly skilled staff who produce work of the highest standard. As a result, one of the functional areas which remains most critical and important to the AEC is learning and development.

Prior to the conduct of the 2016 federal election, the AEC made some significant strides forward in the area of learning and development with the introduction of a new learning management system, the establishment of a new training curriculum for the AEC's core and temporary workforce and the successful delivery of the Election Readiness Program (ERP).

The approach at the 2016 federal election was successful in supporting the integration and communication of key integrity measures in polling official training, including ballot paper handling and security practices as well as other measures to enhance the approach. However, the evaluation of the 2016 federal election<sup>6</sup> identified areas where refinement of the training models was required. Training was one of the most pressing issues emerging from the analysis of the 2016 federal election and where the AEC would focus efforts to implement targeted enhancements for the 2019 federal election.

In early 2017, shortly after the evaluation of the 2016 federal election was completed, the AEC conducted a high-level review<sup>7</sup> and evaluation of the AEC's learning and development strategy, structure and capability.

The review identified 14 key findings, all fully endorsed by the AEC's Executive Leadership Team<sup>8</sup> (ELT), which provided the AEC with a clear and positive way forward, outlining possible improvements in the short term, and in the long term, to enhancing organisational learning and development.

One of the first steps the AEC's ELT took, in response to key finding 3 '*the AEC must strengthen organisational governance of learning and development*', was to implement changes. The AEC's Deputy Electoral Commissioner (DEC) took direct responsibility and oversight of learning and development across all levels of the organisation and a new Learning Coordination Unit (LCU) was established in June 2017 reporting directly to the DEC.

Staff from the existing learning and development team, that had been part of the AEC's People Services Branch<sup>9</sup>, transitioned into the new LCU tasked to further professionalise,

---

<sup>6</sup> Source: Australian Electoral Commission 2016/17 Annual Report, Agency Direction 3 [annualreport.aec.gov.au/2017/reporting/agency-purpose.html](https://annualreport.aec.gov.au/2017/reporting/agency-purpose.html)

<sup>7</sup> Source: Australian Electoral Commission 2016/17 Annual Report, Agency Direction 3 [annualreport.aec.gov.au/2017/reporting/agency-purpose.html](https://annualreport.aec.gov.au/2017/reporting/agency-purpose.html)

<sup>8</sup> The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) are the senior management team that assist the Electoral Commissioner in the delivery of strategic leadership and operational management of the AEC. The ELT includes the Electoral Commissioner, Deputy Electoral Commissioner and two First Assistant Commissioners.

<sup>9</sup> The People Services Branch (now known as the Corporate Services Branch) provide key enterprise wide support services to the AEC. These services require specialised knowledge, best practice and

coordinate, oversee and drive the organisation's approach to learning and development. The main responsibilities of the LCU were to ensure learning and development activities remain relevant, focused on business outcomes and build capability by:

- defining and implementing the AEC's learning and development strategy, policy and standards, and
- driving and coordinating a whole-of-organisation approach to learning and development, in consultation with key internal stakeholders, including the ELT, the AEC's senior executive staff and relevant functional areas of the organisation.

Shortly after the LCU was established, the AEC commenced planning on a new organisational design to ensure the organisation's structure was agile and responsive to allow the AEC to continue to deliver high quality electoral services into the future, while ensuring it has the required capability to respond to changing community and stakeholder expectations.

As a result of this review, the LCU and the public education and awareness function within the AEC, which included the administration of the National Electoral Education Centre (NEEC), were brought together to create the National Training and Education Unit (NTEU). The inclusion of the public education and awareness function in the NTEU acknowledges and recognizes the considerable synergies between both functions in leading and administering training, education and awareness programs to both internal and external audiences. In addition, this change brings together the organisation's training professionals into one unit, which enhances capability and focus on driving best practice outcomes.

## The first years of operation

---

The AEC pursues a nationally coordinated, whole-of-organisation approach to staff learning and development through the:

- establishment of the NTEU
- oversight by the Learning Governance Committee
- creation of a learning culture
- launch of an online 'learning hub'
- adoption of an agreed funding model for learning and development.

### Role and function of the NTEU

The NTEU, established in February 2018, is responsible for centrally leading the delivery of high quality training, development and education that professionalises the AEC's workforce and builds knowledge of electoral processes in its stakeholders.

More specifically, the NTEU has responsibility for:

- developing and implementing the AEC's learning and development strategy
- implementing nationally consistent training policies and standards

---

technology, and include physical security, recruitment, work health & safety, payroll systems, property management, corporate reporting, budgeting and financial management.

- leading, coordinating and administering identified training and development programs and activities
- providing advice, guidance and support to business areas in the planning, design, development, implementation and evaluation of training and development activities
- supporting the AEC's commitments to the Building Resources in Democracy Governance and Elections (BRIDGE<sup>10</sup>) partnership by:
  - maintaining and updating curriculum materials and other resources
  - providing advice on and conducting BRIDGE workshops, and
  - accrediting and developing BRIDGE facilitators within the AEC
- managing and delivering on the AEC's commitment to public education through the NEEC and developing and delivering other electoral education programs.

The NTEU operates as an agile, dynamic and highly productive team that is responsive to organisational needs. The NTEU is a unit, dispersed across various locations, with its core based in the AEC's national office in Canberra. NTEU staff have been largely drawn from within the AEC to form a team of enthusiastic and highly skilled practitioners in the field of training and education with extensive electoral experience. The inclusion of an agile pool in the NTEU's structure – in line with the AEC's value of agility – enables the effective allocation (and reallocation) of staff resources to projects within the Unit where the need is greatest. It also provides NTEU staff (including NEEC staff) the opportunity to participate in a greater variety of projects, at the same time further broadening their set of skills and responsibilities than they would otherwise experience.

## Learning Governance Committee

Shortly after the LCU was established in June 2017, the AEC also implemented changes to strengthen the governance and coordination of learning and development within the organisation through the establishment of a Learning Governance Committee (LGC).

The committee is chaired by the Deputy Electoral Commissioner and includes seven members of the AEC's senior executive staff, with meetings held on a regular basis.

Working with the then LCU and now NTEU, the LGC is responsible for providing effective governance of the whole-of-organisation approach to learning and development. This includes:

- endorsing the strategic direction and operating model for learning and development in the organisation<sup>11</sup>
- overseeing the development and implementation of learning and development initiatives that best support the organisation's priorities and strategic direction, as well as enhancing people's capability and organisational effectiveness
- approving the allocation of funding to learning and development initiatives, and
- providing guidance to the NTEU.

---

<sup>10</sup> Source: [www.bridge-project.org/](http://www.bridge-project.org/)

<sup>11</sup> In line with the AEC Corporate Plan 2019-2023  
[www.aec.gov.au/About\\_AEC/Publications/corporate-plan/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/Publications/corporate-plan/index.htm)



## Creating a learning culture

This approach is at the core of the training and education programs the AEC develops and delivers. The AEC's regular workforce are acquiring new knowledge and skills in many different ways – planned and unplanned, formal and informal, at work and outside work. The 70:20:10 approach, accepted throughout the Australian Public Service<sup>12</sup>, underpins the AEC's approach to learning and development, which reflects that:

*70% is work based learning* – a majority of learning comes from on the job experience and practice and staff are supported and have access to learning tools such as simulations, rehearsals, job aids, and knowledge management systems.

*20% is peer based learning* - this can include coaching, mentoring and developing through others, as well as involvement with forums/communities of practice, acting opportunities, overseas deployments, working groups and project teams.

*10% is formal learning* - this includes a mix of classroom, eLearning and other traditional forms of education that can involve assessment and/or accreditation.

## Learning hub

A key feature of the NTEU's engagement with the organisation is the establishment of an online learning hub accessible by all organisation staff. The aim of the learning hub is to provide a 'one stop shop' that offers staff a range of resources to support their operational and professional development. Some of the features of the learning hub include:

- a learning events calendar which provides organisation wide visibility of programs being delivered throughout the year
- a noticeboard where updates on specific learning activities and programs is available
- information on the various learning programs delivered by the AEC. Each program has a dedicated site that includes a participant portal (restricted to program participants only) so participants can access and share information, a portal for facilitator/trainer delivering the program and access to other resources associated with that program.

The learning hub continues to evolve to support the work of the NTEU in creating a vibrant learning culture where there is active participation in learning and development and the AEC's workforce is motivated to further develop their own skills and knowledge.

## Funding model

The AEC has adopted a funding model for learning and development that establishes an annual national learning and development budget as well as dedicated learning and development budgets for each state and functional area within the AEC.

The allocation of the national learning and development budget is the responsibility of the NTEU and it primarily funds the development and delivery of national learning and development initiatives.

---

<sup>12</sup> Source: Australian Public Service Commission [apsc.govcms.gov.au/guide-learning-job-aps-and-making-most-experience-driven-development](https://apsc.govcms.gov.au/guide-learning-job-aps-and-making-most-experience-driven-development)

The learning and development budgets set for state and functional areas within the AEC fund individualised formal learning activities (i.e. the 70:20:10 approach) for staff in that state or functional area to attend. This can include costs associated with attendance and travel to attend training courses identified through staff development plans.

## Professionalising the AEC's workforce

---

In the last electoral cycle (2017-19) the AEC made a significant investment in time, money and resources in the diversity of training and development experiences to support the AEC's regular workforce at all levels to develop an understanding of, and prepare for performing their role during the 2019 federal election.

Programs designed to support critical operational and leadership capabilities included the:

- Election Planning and Learning Program
- Election Readiness Program
- Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) Capacity Building Program
- use of rehearsals, large scale and local, of critical election processes, and
- Election Experience Program.

The AEC also made a significant investment in enhancing and expanding the training provided to the AEC's temporary election workforce.

### Election Planning and Learning Program

The Election Planning and Learning Program was the organisation's first significant step towards taking a holistic approach to planning and learning in the lead up to the conduct of the 2019 federal election whereby operational planning aligns to the completion of associated learning activities. The program, established after significant consultation and coordination with a number of business areas within the organisation, ensures the AEC's regular workforce are well placed for election delivery and have an understanding of the activities associated with delivering a national election.

Key components of the program include:

- developing of new operational delivery plans
- completing of a suite of election eLearning modules
- policy and procedure comprehension activities
- participating in national and local rehearsals, and
- viewing of election training videos.

To support embedding the learning, and ensuring the planning was robust and rigorous, the program was mapped out over a series of months. At the beginning of each month, information was published internally that provided an overview of topic areas of focus for that month and associated learning activities requiring completion by staff.

The learning activities identified in the Election Planning and Learning Program embodied all aspects of the 70:20:10 approach. They were a key input to, and in some instances a pre-requisite for, staff attendance at formal training programs including the Election Readiness

Program, AEO Capacity Building Program and the Election Experience Program, as well as activities such as whole-of-organisation rehearsals of critical election processes designed to simulate key election activities to reinforce and further embed learning.

## Election Readiness Program

The Election Readiness Program (ERP) is the AEC's flagship professional development program and a critical part of the AEC's learning and development curriculum. An AEC Executive sponsor<sup>13</sup> supported each ERP, which reinforced its status and importance.

The foundation of the ERP was the Election Ready Operational Capacity Development Program (or 'EROCD'). This program was redeveloped into ERP ahead of the 2016 federal election, and was again reviewed after the conduct of the 2016 federal election to improve the training experience and outcomes for the AEC's regular workforce.

Every aspect of the ERP was meticulously reviewed and redesigned by experienced AEC staff with a focus on the operational knowledge and skills required at the Divisional Returning Officer<sup>14</sup> level. The ERP was also redesigned to have a real focus on management and leadership. Key themes including risk, and work health and safety were also included to further professionalise the role of the DRO during an electoral event, emphasising how the DRO demonstrates and models leadership behaviour to their staff, rather than merely overseeing the daily activities of the electoral division.

The ERP is now an intensive 10-day program that uses a blended learning approach to facilitate maximum engagement and learning opportunities for participants and the BRIDGE methodology<sup>15</sup> was used as a model for the redevelopment of the ERP. Participants complete a number of pre-requisites that allowed for more hands-on and simulated activities during the ERP to better enhance the learning experience.

The objectives of the ERP are to:

- build and enhance the critical operational and leadership capabilities that underpin election readiness
- build a peer network among participants
- provide participants with a 'realistic preview' of the election period activities.

The AEC delivered ten (10) ERPs between February - December 2018 that resulted in 300 staff, or over a third of the AEC's regular workforce from around the country, including all DROs being trained in good electoral procedure and practice to a standard never achieved before.

AEC staff recruited in the early months of 2019, prior to the announcement of the 2019 federal election, participated in ERP via ERP Last Minute Delivery (LMD), an abbreviated format delivered in state capital cities by the local AEC office.

---

<sup>13</sup> A member of the AEC's senior executive who plays the role of advocate and support for each program, its participants and facilitators, throughout its preparation and delivery.

<sup>14</sup> The AEC officer responsible for maintaining the roll and conducting the election in each division. The DRO is the returning officer for the House of Representatives election in their electoral division.

<sup>15</sup> The BRIDGE methodology combines participatory adult education techniques with a distinctive values based approach. [www.bridge-project.org/methodology/](http://www.bridge-project.org/methodology/)

## AEC trainer pool

For the AEC, it is critically important to have the right person facilitating or delivering training. A pool of AEC trainers, selected from the AEC's regular workforce, was established in late 2017 in readiness for the delivery of the ERP in 2018. The trainers selected were required to pass a rigorous two-stage assessment process.

**Stage one** was an expression of interest (EOI) process with responses assessed against identified trainer skill and knowledge requirements. The EOIs were reviewed and assessed by a selection panel and successful applicants progressed to stage two.

**Stage two** was a four day train-the-trainer workshop for successful stage one applicants. This stage was modelled on the BRIDGE Train the Facilitator workshop, providing applicants with an opportunity to experience and become familiar with the ERP content and methodology and then, at the workshop, deliver an allocated session from the ERP content.

It also provided participants with an opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they identified in their EOI in accordance with the trainer skill and knowledge requirements. A selection panel was present for the duration of the train-the-trainer workshop to review and assess the performance of applicants and make the final selection of AEC trainers.

As a result of this process, a pool of 13 AEC trainers from around the country was established who delivered the 10 ERP programs throughout 2018.

## Establishing an AEC learning facility

As an added bonus for the AEC's renewed focus on professional development and training, the nature of the ERP indicated a need for a new fit-for-purpose facility that was concurrently funded by the AEC and established alongside the delivery of the program. The AEC established a learning facility at Essendon Fields in Victoria that provides AEC staff with the opportunity to undertake training in a modern environment that contains professional spaces developed to replicate those used during a real national election.

The space is not only a classroom, but also a model Out Posted Centre (OPC)<sup>16</sup>. When participants arrive to start the ERP, they sign-in, put on their bib/vest and treat the space as an operational OPC. Various parts of the facility house different electoral working environments such as polling places, counting centres, election specific hubs, ballot paper secure areas - sometimes at the same time – just as in a real national election. One of the biggest benefits of the learning facility is that participants can pick up tips on the best-practice OPC set-up to apply to planning on return to their workplaces.

Organisationally, Essendon Fields is both a national learning facility and a workplace for the co-location of small teams of AEC divisional office staff based in Victoria.

---

<sup>16</sup> An OPC is the centre of election operations for an electoral division during the conduct of an election and is the primary processing point for all election material and supplies, both pre and post-polling day.

## Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) capacity building program

Prior to the 2016 federal election, AEOs<sup>17</sup> met twice before the conduct of the election to share knowledge and experience as a capacity building activity for this group of senior leaders in the AEC. One outcome of these meetings was agreement that ongoing capacity building for this group was an essential part of preparations for future elections and that a structured and professional program that incorporates experiential learning was required.

The result was the development and delivery in 2018-19 of the AEO Capacity Building Program, the AEC's first professional program designed specifically for its senior leaders. Experienced electoral administrators from the AEC led the development and delivery of the program in consultation with the NTEU who manage the program and the Deputy Electoral Commissioner as the Program's sponsor. The program uses a variety of interactive techniques and realistic election scenarios engaging both experience and current policy and practice.

The AEO Capacity Building Program is a targeted election induction and training program which aims to ensure that the AEC's senior leaders - Australian Electoral Officers (AEOs) and Assistant AEOs (typically Directors Operations) - are properly equipped and supported to carry out their functions of preparing for, and delivering, the elections being contested in their state or territory.

The program is structured to be delivered as four elements, with the first element providing participants with an overview of the AEC and the remaining elements exposing participants to the AEO's range of responsibilities in respect to the key stages of the electoral cycle - election planning, delivery and evaluation. The objective of the program is to ensure AEOs and other key staff:

- build and enhance critical operational and leadership capabilities relevant to election readiness;
- build a peer network among AEOs and the broader AEC senior leadership team; and
- receive a realistic preview of the capabilities required to deliver a successful national election.

## Large scale and local rehearsals

The AEC recognises that exercises and rehearsals are an incredibly effective training tool that provide opportunities to develop further individual and organisational capability to conduct critical election processes. The AEC has incorporated exercises and rehearsals into learning programs like the ERP and also conducted rehearsals as standalone initiatives.

The organisation undertook two large-scale (national) rehearsals to provide the AEC's regular workforce, dispersed across the country, with the opportunity to practice critical election delivery activities prior to the conduct of the 2019 federal election. The two election critical activities identified for rehearsal are the candidate nomination process and declaration vote envelope management.

- The **candidate nomination rehearsal** involves all state and divisional offices in the receipt of candidate nominations, close of nominations and the declaration of

---

<sup>17</sup> An AEO plays a key role in election planning and delivery by coordinating, managing and quality-assuring all state-based operations; is the state spokesperson for electoral matters; and has a specific statutory role as the Senate Returning Officer.

candidate nominations, along with parts of the ballot paper generation process. Following legislative change in early 2019, a further nominations rehearsal was conducted to incorporate changed policy and procedures in the nominations process and associated system changes.

- The **declaration vote envelope management rehearsal**, an activity that represents one of the AEC's most complex election processes, involves the majority of the AEC's divisional offices starting with declaration votes from a small number of sources, undertaking the declaration vote exchange, processing the envelopes they receive through the preliminary scrutiny of declaration votes and then balancing the number of declaration votes in the AEC's election management system.

The large-scale rehearsals form part of the Election Planning and Learning Program and were designed to simulate the workload and challenges the AEC's regular workforce can expect with these activities during a national election. Replicating the scale, timing and use of live election systems and procedures are essential elements of the rehearsals.

A series of local rehearsals are also designed for conduct in an AEC divisional office. The set of materials and guidelines are accessible via the learning hub and are designed to provide divisional staff with a hands-on learning experience in various election processes conducted by staff in these offices during a national election. For example, one rehearsal provides staff with an understanding of the formality of House of Representatives ballot papers and another familiarises staff with the distribution of preferences process associated with the counting of the House of Representatives ballot papers.

## Election experience program

The conduct of nine by-elections in the period 2017-18 provided the unique opportunity for 110 AEC staff to participate in the AEC's Election Experience Program.

The Election Experience Program (EEP) is an eight-day program, only held during the conduct of a by-election<sup>18</sup> that provides participants, members of the AEC's regular workforce with little or no election experience, with exposure to learning opportunities that are best experienced through participating in the conduct of an actual electoral event.

The EEP adopts a blended learning approach, incorporating face-to-face training, observation of key election processes, on-the-job experience working in a polling place on polling day and involvement in post-polling day vote counting processes. An added highlight of this program is the opportunity for participants to engage in a question and answer session with the key operational staff responsible for the conduct of the by-election, learning first-hand the challenges experienced. The program also provides a great opportunity for participants to network with staff in similar positions who come from offices located around the country.

## Training the AEC's election workforce

The AEC administers a voting system involving pencils, paper and intensely manual processes where the election date is not known until the writs are issued. In the space of less than five weeks, the AEC grows from a regular workforce of less than 900 to one of

---

<sup>18</sup> An election held to fill a single vacancy in the House of Representatives. Between federal elections, vacancies result from death, resignation, absence without leave, expulsion, disqualification or ineligibility of a member.

more than 87,000 most of whom work as polling officials for just a single day – on polling day.

The AEC adopts a blended learning approach for the training of its temporary election workforce, particularly staff employed in polling official roles, given the short lead-time available to deliver the training and the mixture of theoretical and practical knowledge required. AEC policy states all polling officials must complete the required training prior to commencing their role and the DRO for the electoral division in which they will be employed must be satisfied they have satisfactorily completed the required training for their role.

The learning approach is tailored to each role, depending on its complexity and level of responsibility, and includes one, or a mix of:

- online training
- instructor led training
- visual aids – election training videos, and
- reference materials.

Critically important work occurred in the lead up to the 2019 federal election to further professionalise and enhance the overall quality and consistency of the training of the AEC's temporary election workforce. The NTEU overhauled and expanded training packages and supporting materials to provide the AEC's temporary election workforce with improved training designed to better support them in performing their role during the national election.

The **online training** developed for the 2019 federal election delivered a clean and modern look and feel designed so staff could complete their online training on their PC, laptop or tablet. There were 51 eLearning courses built to train staff in various roles and an 80 per cent pass mark was required for each eLearning module with unlimited attempts to achieve this pass mark. The online training is a home study pre-requisite prior to attendance at the instructor led training.

The **instructor led training** was redeveloped for the 2019 federal election and was primarily attended by staff employed in supervisory roles. The training sessions, delivered by external facilitators supported by subject matter experts, focused on critical election processes best delivered in practical scenarios.

To further professionalise and modernise the training of this workforce in critical election processes, the NTEU developed a suite of 23 **election training videos** that are short, task-focused and accessible via the AEC's Youtube channel<sup>19</sup> during the national election. The videos are incorporated into online training, where appropriate.

The **election procedures handbooks**, provided to a majority of the temporary election workforce, contained Quick Response (QR) codes for staff to scan and watch a video on a tablet or mobile device in the polling place or out-posted centre (OPC) as 'just-in-time' training or to reinforce the correct process to follow for a range of election tasks allowing staff to learn anytime and anywhere.

---

<sup>19</sup> [www.aec.gov.au/employment/training.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/employment/training.htm)

## Lessons and the future

---

The investment of time, money and resources over the last electoral cycle (2017-19) to reform the AEC's learning and development function has seen a significant difference in the diversity and quality of training and development experiences that support the AEC's regular and temporary workforce to develop an understanding of, and prepare to, perform their role during the national election.

The very nature of learning and development embeds into the broader context of continuous improvement. Insights gained and lessons learned include, but are not limited to:

1. The **articulation of the AEC's commitment to learning and development in key strategic documents**, such as the Corporate Plan demonstrates a clear intention to, and organisational focus on, building capability in its regular and temporary workforce.
2. The critical importance of the **connection between the NTEU and the functional/operational areas** of the AEC to ensure there is a **common understanding** of roles and responsibilities and the contribution learning and development can make to the achievement of business outcomes.
3. The **concerted commitment, investment and endorsement by the AEC's senior leadership** is crucial to the acceptance and development of a **learning culture** in the organisation.
4. The **diverse range of operational experience and professional expertise** staff in the NTEU have brought to the work of the NTEU, coupled with a commitment to the AEC's vision for learning and development has been an essential ingredient to the successful operation of the NTEU and delivery of learning programs.
5. The **evaluation, review and rewrite of programs** like ERP, EEP, AEO Capacity Building Program ensure sustainability and their continued success and especially make sure they remain fit-for-purpose.
6. **Rehearsals / simulations / exercises** continue to be a feature of AEC training approaches in the future. These activities not only provide an opportunity to develop further individual and organisational capability to conduct critical election processes, but to also gather metrics and data as a way of assessing performance and to be able to provide feedback on performance and identify where further improvements can be made.
7. Acknowledging continuing challenges associated with **growing and further establishing the AEC trainer/facilitator pool** will be important to future agility and success.
8. Further **utilising the diverse skills and experience of the substantial pool of professional educators at the NEEC** and incorporating these into a future learning and development environment presents both funding and organisational challenges.
9. The AEC has recently **renewed its commitment to the BRIDGE partnership** – a partnership that is immensely valuable to the AEC. BRIDGE is a feature of the international electoral assistance the AEC provides and **its methodology has been successfully adopted** in programs like ERP, EEP and the AEO Capacity Building Program. The AEC recently conducted a BRIDGE Train the Facilitator workshop as part of efforts to grow and expand the talent that is available in the AEC's trainer/facilitator pool and the NTEU will be **overseeing the integration of BRIDGE** into the AEC's training and development curriculum.



10. There is **data and lessons learned from the 2019 federal election**, identifying training and development as one of the strategic levers that can be used to further embed critical operational and leadership capabilities and a culture of compliance and professionalism.
11. **Polling officials perform very demanding roles and are a key part of the voter experience**. On what is often their first and only day on the job, and with limited training, polling officials are asked to ensure the security and safety of ballot papers, and to adhere to prescriptive legislation in an environment where there is zero tolerance for any errors in the electoral process. The AEC's **challenges in recruiting and training such a large temporary workforce for a short period of time is not unique** and while significant enhancements were made to the training of the AEC's temporary election workforce for the 2019 federal election, the training model for this workforce will continue to be an area of focus for the organisation in the coming years.
12. A current focus for the NTEU is on the **long term strategic direction of training and development** in the AEC. It is critical the AEC continues to invest in the further professionalisation of its regular and temporary workforce to ensure the AEC can effectively adapt and respond to the evolving technological, demographic and stakeholder demand for error free, transparent, modern and secure national electoral events.