



Voices of Deakin Terms of Reference

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Introduction and context

1. Voices of Deakin (VoD) is a resident-led community initiative, dedicated to strengthening democratic participation in the federal electorate of Deakin, and the state and local electorates that fall within it. Our primary focus is on meaningful community engagement that leads to greater connection to and independent representation in Parliament.
2. VoD members are grounded in the human-centred values of fairness, integrity and equality. We believe government decision making and policy development should be evidence-based, not driven by ideology, donors and lobbyists.
3. Inspired by other 'Voices' groups across Australia, we aim to foster accountability among elected leaders and cultivate a more vibrant, responsive democracy, shaped by community voice.
4. By connecting with the broader Community Independent network we can enhance our engagement, share best practices, and amplify our impact.

Purpose

5. VoD's purpose is to engage and listen to our community and encourage active participation in the democratic process. This enables us to advocate for shared concerns and, where appropriate, endorse a high-quality, community values-aligned independent candidate aligned for state and local elections, while holding our elected representatives to account.

In scope

6. Our primary goal is to listen to the community—understand what they value, their concerns and how they wish to be represented. We bring the community together, and advocate for shared concerns.

7. Our secondary goal is to seek nominations for residents who may be suitable to be endorsed as an independent candidate for federal, state and local elections. Nominations may be self-submitted or made by community members.
8. VoD will provide its subscriber list to the endorsed candidate to assist with campaign launch. This is made clear on the VoD website, and subscribers will have the opportunity to opt-out.

Out of scope

9. Although VoD operates in the sphere of politics, **it is not a political party, nor is it affiliated with any political party**. Our primary concern is the betterment of the communities that make up the Deakin electorate, and finding an independent candidate that most people in the community can see will work hard to achieve better outcomes for them if elected. VoD operates at a federal, state and local levels.
10. VoD does not provide fundraising support or volunteers to its endorsed candidates; however, if members wish to donate to or volunteer for a candidate in a personal capacity, they are free to do so. VoD may consider providing a kick-start donation or loan to an endorsed candidate's campaign.

Deliverables

Community listening and engagement campaign

11. **Annual Survey:** The primary means of gathering information about community views, concerns, and political engagement. The Survey will be run primarily online, with responses also collected manually through direct discussion.
12. **Community Conversations:** Simple, relaxed small-group discussions led by a volunteer facilitator to create a welcoming space for people to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas. These can take place in someone's home, a pub or café, online or anywhere suitable for a gathering.
13. **Listening Report:** The Listening Report synthesises responses from the Survey and community conversations. It will help inform selection criteria for assessing candidate applications, and endorsed candidates will be expected to support and understand emerging issues.
14. **Direct community engagement:** Including activities such as door knocking and letterbox drops, attending local festivals, markets and events, hosting trivia nights and community forums, and speaking with local community groups.
15. **Targeted outreach and issues:** May include activities such as 'issues-based' community surveys to further understand community sentiment in certain areas.

Nominee assessment and candidate endorsement

16. **Nominations and screening:** Seeking nominations for the role of endorsed independent candidate, followed by a review of applications and initial screening.
17. **Assessment and shortlisting:** Interviewing suitable nominees, conducting reference checks and shortlisting candidates based on a rigorous, transparent process of assessment based on merit and alignment with community values.
18. **Member vote:** Providing members who reside in Deakin an opportunity to meet and ask questions of shortlisted nominees ahead of the final vote on who to endorse (if there is more than one nominee).

Membership

19. VoD comprises four groups, the Steering Committee (Committee), general members, volunteers and subscribers. The roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Roles and Responsibilities section.
20. People seeking involvement in VoD typically have a desire to build community connection, make politics accessible to their community, and/or aspire to vote for a genuine independent candidate.

Conditions

Committee, members and volunteers

21. **Code of Conduct:** All members and volunteers must sign and adhere to the VoD Code of Conduct. Breaches may result in reminders of the code, suspension of membership, or in the case of volunteers, decline any further support. Cases of serious misconduct will result in immediate cancellation of membership.

Committee and members

22. **Fees:** An annual fee applies for committee and general members, payable in July of each year. New members joining in May or June pay for the current and following 12 months. Fee waivers may be considered for people for whom payment is a barrier.
23. **Meetings:** Members commit to attend joint Committee/Membership meetings periodically (see paragraphs 37 and 47).
24. **Residency:** The Committee and Membership will ideally be residents of Deakin. Applications from outside the electorate are considered on a case-by-case basis, noting there are regular electoral boundary changes. Volunteers and subscribers need not reside in Deakin.
25. **Political affiliation:** VoD is working for a democratic model beyond the two-party preferred system so members and volunteers cannot be a member of a political party. If a VoD member or volunteer is found to hold a party membership, they must resign from either VoD or the political party. If they opt for the latter, the membership fee is non-refundable.

Roles and responsibilities

Steering committee

26. The Committee comprises up to eight members, including four office bearer positions: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Committee membership is open to general members with around three months involvement in VoD, or in an endorsed independent candidate's campaign. Due to the limited number of positions, approved applicants may be placed on a waiting list until a vacancy arises. Committee appointments require unanimous agreement among current members.
27. If there are vacancies on the Steering Committee, but no suitable applicants, the Committee may unanimously agree to appoint a person they believe would add value to the Committee, regardless of prior involvement with VoD or a candidate.
28. The Committee determines VoD's strategy, direction, and culture, and oversees administration including finances, ITE, website, communications and general operations. It liaises with external groups such as Climate 200, Huddle, other 'Voices' groups, and the federal and state electoral commissions.
29. Additionally, the Committee implements listening campaigns (Surveys, Community Conversations, and the Listening Report), co-ordinates events and attendance at festivals, and organises materials needed for VoD activities. It manages the candidate endorsement process and final vote, and handles volunteer onboarding and information nights.
30. Committee members are deeply committed to achieving VoD goals; they are keen to be involved in the minutiae of the group and have significant involvement in 'steering the ship'. They have the desire, and capacity to commit to attend meetings with reasonable consistency, and are happy to undertake a relatively equitable portion of the Committee workload on a regular basis.

Office bearers

31. Office bearer terms are for three years (generally 2.5 years in operation, six months in hiatus). Office bearer elections are held within two months of officially coming out of hiatus after a federal election campaign, allowing time for new appointments and handovers.

32. Committee members holding an office bearer position can re-nominate for the same position if they wish to continue in that capacity.
33. If an office bearer resigns before the end of their term, an election is held to fill the role on a shorter term, unless it occurs during hiatus, in which case it will be left vacant until the next office bearer election. The outgoing office bearer agrees to provide a proper handover to the new office bearer (ideally), or to a Committee member.

General members

34. **Eligibility and application:** Anyone from the community may nominate to become a general member, provided they meet the conditions outlined in clauses 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25 (code of conduct, fees, residency, and political affiliation). Applications are submitted via the VoD website and assessed by the Steering Committee. In the unlikely event an application is rejected, the membership fee will be refunded.

Role and participation

35. General members play a central role in supporting the Committee in implementing VoD work, including providing input on strategy and direction for the group. With Committee consultation they can lead small working groups in areas of interest and host their own community conversations.
36. **Voting rights:** Members residing in Deakin may participate in the final vote to endorse a candidate in instances where there is more than one suitable candidate.
37. **Meetings and events:** Members are encouraged to attend combined Committee/Membership meetings periodically (see paragraph 47). We recognise that personal commitments vary, and frequent attendance is not expected. However, we do ask members to remain engaged with the group and participate in meetings when they are able. Periodic participation helps ensure diverse perspectives are represented and supports a connected, informed community.
38. **Pathway to Committee:** Members may apply for a position on the Committee after approximately three months of involvement, noting the commitments outlined in Clause 30.

Volunteers and subscribers

39. **Volunteers:** Volunteers generously donate their time to assist with community engagement and backend support as their capacity allows. All volunteers must adhere to the VoD Code of Conduct and cannot be members of any political party.
40. **Subscribers:** Subscribers are community members who are interested in keeping abreast of the activities of VoD, but may not have interest in or be in a position to commit to volunteering.

Endorsed candidates and elections

41. **Separation of roles:** An endorsed candidate is distinctly separate from VoD. To ensure integrity and transparency, potential nominees and endorsed candidates are ineligible to sit on the Committee, though, they may join VoD as a general member.
42. **Candidate commitments:** An endorsed candidate is expected to remain responsive to the needs of the electorate, advocate for evidence-based policy and decision making, champion good governance, human rights and ethics, and model of good behaviour both inside and outside parliament. Candidates must commit putting the community first.
43. **Campaign hiatus:** Once a candidate is endorsed, the Committee will determine an appropriate date for VoD to enter hiatus until after the election. During hiatus the website will be operational, but nothing will be posted on social media about the candidate or the coming election. Members and volunteers may support the candidate in a personal capacity if they wish.

Administration

Steering Committee

44. **Meetings:** Committee meetings are held weekly during peak times, but may drop back to fortnightly during quieter periods. Meetings are typically held online, on Thursday night, with occasional in-person sessions or time changes as agreed by members. Subgroup meetings may be scheduled as needed.
45. **Leadership:** Meetings are chaired by the President or their nominee. The meeting agenda and minutes are prepared by the VoD Secretary or Vice President.
46. **Decision making:** Decisions are made by consensus, meaning all members are satisfied with the outcome, even if it is not their first choice. If consensus cannot be reached, then the President makes the final decision. A quorum is 50% of members.

General membership

47. **Meetings:** Combined Committee and Membership meetings will be held regularly throughout the year, at times determined by the Committee. These meetings are chaired by a Committee member and the agenda will be developed by the Committee. General members can request the inclusion of an agenda item up to two weeks prior to the meeting.
48. **Decision making:** Decisions are usually made by simple majority of those present; however, the Committee may require a consensus decision or absolute majority on specific issues. General members will be notified in advance of the decision requirements for a vote to endorse a candidate.

About these Terms of Reference

49. **Effective date:** These Terms of Reference, originally developed in June 2025 and effective from 1 July 2025, were revised in 2026.
50. **Review cycle:** These Terms will be reviewed annually to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose, provided an election is not expected in the next 6 months and that Voices of Deakin is not in hiatus.
51. **Amendments:** Should these Terms undergo substantive amendments, a revised draft will be presented to general members for feedback, before being finalised by the Committee.