

Voices of Deakin Terms of Reference

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Introduction and context

1. Voices of Deakin (VoD) is a highly engaged group of residents seeking to create a better future for our community, including for the generations who follow us, through meaningful community engagement that leads to greater connection to and independent representation in Parliament.
2. VoD members are an informed collective of progressive thinkers with strong human-centred values. We believe in fairness, integrity and equality, and that government decision making and policy development should be based on evidence, not determined by ideology, donors and lobbyists.
3. Inspired by shared concerns about the eroding public trust in our democracy, in 2024 we embarked on a community listening project to find out what the people of our federal electorate of Deakin care most about, to help us find an independent candidate that would have broad appeal across the electorate.
4. Having seen other 'Voices' groups in Australia demonstrate the potential of community-led change, we believe it is possible to demand accountability for our elected leaders, and ultimately, create a more vibrant democracy and a more hopeful future.

Purpose

5. VoD's purpose is to engage and listen to our community and encourage active participation in the democratic process. This will enable us to endorse a high-quality 'community' independent candidate that aligns with community values to run at the next federal election, and to hold our elected federal representative to account.

In scope

6. Our primary goal is to listen to the community—find out what they value, what they are concerned about and how they would like to be represented in Parliament. We will encourage discussion, share ideas, host and attend events, and bring the community together, and advocate as appropriate for shared concerns.
7. To support our purpose, with the benefit of connectivity with the broader ‘Voices’ movement and their collective experience and knowledge, we will develop, establish and implement a range of documents, processes and activities that help us engage with the Deakin community in a meaningful way.
8. Our secondary goal is to seek nominations for residents who may be suitable to be endorsed as an independent candidate for Deakin at the next federal election. Applicants can self-nominate, or members of the community can nominate a third party.
9. VoD will provide its subscriber list to the endorsed candidate to assist with kicking off their campaign. This will be made clear on the VoD website, and subscribers provided with the opportunity to opt-out.

Out of scope

10. Although VoD operates in the sphere of federal politics, **it is not a political party, nor is it affiliated with any political party**. Our primary concern is the betterment of the Deakin community, and finding an independent candidate that most people would feel comfortable voting for—one the community can see will work hard to achieve better outcomes for them if elected.
11. VoD does not engage in fundraising activities for or provide volunteers to its endorsed candidate; however, if members wish to donate to or volunteer for the candidate in a personal capacity and as a personal choice, they are free to do so. VoD may consider providing a kick-start donation or loan to the endorsed candidate's campaign.
12. VoD operates only at a federal level; it does not endorse candidates for Victorian state elections, or local council elections. However, it may comment on the alignment of candidates in non-federal elections, to the values expressed by Deakin residents.

Values and behaviours

13. All VoD members and volunteers are expected to sign and adhere to the VoD code of conduct, particularly when wearing, carrying or standing by the VoD logo, or engaging with the community on our behalf.

Deliverables

Community listening and engagement campaign

14. The key deliverables of our listening and engagement campaign include:
 - The VoD annual Survey (Survey) is our primary means of gathering information about community views and concerns, and the level of engagement in politics. The Survey will be run primarily online, but responses may also be collected manually through direct discussion with members of the community.
 - Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs)—members of the community host a small gathering of people who discuss their thoughts on a scripted list of questions, similar in nature to those included in the Survey.
 - At the end of the 12-month Survey period, a Listening Report will be produced based on both the responses to the Survey and the results of KTCs.
 - The listening project will be used to inform the selection criteria for assessing applicants who nominate to become the endorsed candidate—if it was widely and strongly expected that a

candidate would support a particular policy issue, then the endorsed candidate would be expected to understand the implications associated with that issue.

- Engaging directly with the community through activities such as door knocking, attending festivals, markets and other local events, hosting trivia nights, 'politics in the pub' and community forums, as well as speaking with local community groups.
- VoD may also run 'issues-based' community surveys to further understand community sentiment in certain areas, and will look to make political decisions of significance more accessible to the community through the VoD website.
- Increasing our reach in the community through letterbox drops, handing out flyers at shops and train stations, and by maintaining a strong online presence via our website and social media.

Nominee assessment and candidate endorsement

15. The key deliverables of candidate endorsement process include:

- Seeking nominations for the role of endorsed independent candidate, then reviewing applications and screening nominees
- Interviewing suitable nominees, and shortlisting and conducting reference checks in a rigorous, transparent process of assessing each nominee on their merit
- Members will have an opportunity to meet and ask questions of nominees ahead of the final vote on who to endorse.

Membership

16. VoD consists of four key groups, the Steering Committee (Committee), general membership (Membership), volunteers and subscribers. The roles and responsibilities for each are outlined below.
17. People seeking involvement in Voices of Deakin typically have a desire to build community connection and engagement, and make politics more accessible to their broader community, in both a practical and an educational sense, and/or aspire to have the option of voting for a genuine independent candidate at federal elections.

Conditions of membership

18. There is an annual fee to join as a committee or general member, as publicised on the Voices of Deakin website. The fee is payable in July of each year, and the membership fee for new members who join in May or June will also cover the cost of the following 12 months. Consideration will also be given to people where a payment of a membership fee is a barrier to joining. Members commit to attend at least two of the quarterly joint Committee/Membership meetings each year.
19. The Committee and Membership will ideally be residents of Deakin; however, people from outside of the electorate may apply and will be considered on a case-by-case basis, noting the need for flexibility with electoral boundary changes. Volunteers and subscribers do not need to live within the Deakin electorate.
20. Due to the nature of Voices of Deakin working for a democratic model beyond Australia's two-party preferred system, anyone who is a member of a political party must resign from the party before they can join Voices of Deakin. If a Voices of Deakin member (or volunteer) is found to also be a member of a political party, they will be required to rescind either their party membership or their Voices of Deakin membership. If they opt for the latter, the membership fee is non-refundable.
21. Committee members, general members and volunteers are expected to sign and adhere to the Code of Conduct—anyone found to be in breach will be reminded of what they agreed to, and if there are any further incidents, the Committee reserves the right to cancel their membership, or in the case of volunteers, decline their offer of support. Incidents which the Committee considers to be serious misconduct will result in immediate cancellation of membership.

Steering committee

22. The Committee will comprise up to eight members, which includes four office bearer positions: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.
23. Committee membership is open only to general members with around six months involvement in VoD, or in an endorsed community independent election campaign. It is important to note that there are a limited number of positions, and successful applicants may initially be placed on a waiting list until a role becomes available.
24. Applications for Committee membership will be discussed in a meeting with all Committee members present. Given the need for harmonious collaboration in the Committee, nominees cannot be appointed to the Committee if any of the current members provide reasonable grounds for objection. Membership decisions will be recorded in the minutes.
25. If there are vacancies on the Steering Committee, but no suitable applicants, the Steering Committee may unanimously agree to appoint a person(s) they believe would add value to the work of the Steering Committee.

Office bearers

26. The Committee will elect (or re-elect) its office bearers within two months of officially coming out of hiatus after a federal election campaign. The elected office bearers agree to hold their position for up to two months after officially coming out of hiatus after the next federal election (three-year terms—two years in operation, one year in hiatus), to allow time for the appointment of new office bearers and handovers if required. If an office bearer resigns before the end of their term, an election will be held to fill the role on a shorter term, unless the resignation occurs during hiatus, in which case it will be left vacant until the next Committee election. The resignee agrees to provide a proper handover to the new office bearer once elected (ideally), or if that isn't possible, to a Committee member.
27. When Committee elections are to be held, any Committee member can nominate for any office bearer role, and any Committee member can nominate a fellow Committee member for any office bearer role—the person nominated has the right to decline. People already holding office bearer roles can re-nominate for the same role if they wish to continue in that capacity.

General members

28. Anyone from the community can nominate to be a member, provided they meet the conditions outlined at clauses [18](#), [19](#), [20](#) and [21](#).
29. Applications to become a member are available on the Voices of Deakin website. All applications will be assessed by the Steering Committee, and in the unlikely event an application is rejected, the membership fee will be refunded.

Volunteers and subscribers

30. Anyone can volunteer or subscribe, provided they agree to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are not a member of a political party, as outlined at clauses [20](#) and [21](#).

Roles and responsibilities

Steering Committee

31. The Committee's role is to determine the strategy and direction of the group, communicate with members, volunteers, subscribers and other community groups and organisations, and collaboratively oversee and implement the work of the Group to ensure objectives are achieved.
32. Committee members are deeply committed to achieving VoD goals, and are keen to be involved in the minutiae of the group, determine strategy and direction, and have significant involvement in 'steering the ship'. They have the desire, capacity and availability to commit to attend meetings with

reasonable consistency, and are happy to pitch in and undertake a relatively equitable portion of the Committee workload on a regular basis.

33. Office bearer responsibilities will be broadly similar to equivalent roles in other community groups, while the Committee as a whole is responsible for:
- Determining strategy and direction for VoD, and driving its culture.
 - All aspects of the group's administration, such as finances, IT, infrastructure, website and communications, social media and general operations.
 - Liaising with other community groups and organisations such as Climate 200, Huddle, the Community Independents Project, other 'Voices' groups, the AEC and so on.
 - Implementing VoD's signature listening campaign activities such as the Survey, KTCs, door knocking and the Listening Report.
 - Setting and co-ordinating other VoD events and activities to be undertaken such as politics in the pub, community forums, and fundraising events such as trivia nights.
 - Ensuring that VoD is present at key festivals and events such as Maroondah and Whitehorse Spring Festivals, markets and so on.
 - Designing, purchasing and co-ordinating the materials needed to fulfill VoD activities.
 - Co-ordinating all aspects of the candidate endorsement process, and participate in the final vote.
 - Providing opportunities combined meetings of the Committee and general members.
 - Onboarding volunteers, and holding volunteer and member information nights and events.

Members

34. The Membership's role is to play a central role in supporting the Committee with input on the strategy and direction of the group, and collaborating to implement the work of the Group.
35. General members are keen to make meaningful contributions to VoD. They have the interest, capacity and availability to commit to contributing regularly, but need flexibility to scale their involvement up and down as appropriate to their personal circumstance.
36. If VoD general members are interested in stepping up their contributions and becoming more deeply involved, they can apply for a position on the Committee.
37. The role of members is new and may evolve—currently members can optionally be involved in:
- Reviewing and providing input into proposed strategies put forward by the Committee.
 - Supporting the Committee in all aspects of VoD work, including but not limited to: co-ordination of or attendance at festivals, events, forums and fundraisers; KTCs, politics in the pub; door knocking and letterboxing; social media; and onboarding volunteers.
 - Providing suggestions to the Committee on potential community engagement activities.
 - Participate in the vote to select the endorsed candidate from the Committee's shortlist, noting that only members who reside in Deakin can take part in this process.
 - Attending combined meetings of the Committee and general members, as well as volunteer information nights and events.
38. Additionally, in consultation and agreement with the Committee, general members may:
- Host their own signature events such as KTCs and politics in the pub, consistent with the VoD approach.
 - Raise awareness among the community and co-ordinate peaceful attendance at local demonstrations on issues of importance that are aligned with VoD values and purpose.

Volunteers and subscribers

39. Volunteers generously donate their time to assist with engaging the community and helping out behind the scenes. All volunteers can contribute as and when they have capacity and availability.
40. 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 federal elections

41. VoD's endorsed candidate is distinctly separate from VoD. For the purposes of integrity and transparency, potential nominees and endorsed candidates are unable to sit on the Committee; however, they are welcome to join VoD as a general member.
42. An endorsed candidate is expected to commit to being responsive to the needs of the electorate, being an advocate for evidence-based policy and decision making, championing good governance, human rights and ethics, and being a model of good behaviour both inside and outside parliament.
43. Once a candidate has been endorsed, the Committee will determine an appropriate date for VoD to go into hiatus until after the election, to enable members and volunteers to support the candidate if they wish to. The website will be minimised to allow the Survey to remain open and to provide general information, and social media posts will be paused.

Administration

Steering Committee

Meetings

44. Committee meetings generally range from fortnightly to weekly. At peak times such as seeking nominations for candidates, preparing for festivals and so on, meetings will be weekly; however, during quieter periods they may drop back to fortnightly.
45. Meetings are usually held online, on Tuesday night, but occasionally there are in-person meetings and changes to the day and/or time. The regular meeting time may be changed by the agreement of all Committee members. If required subgroup meetings may be held, and will be scheduled for a time convenient to those who need to attend.
46. Meetings will usually be chaired by the VoD President or their nominee, and the meeting agenda and minutes will usually be provided by the VoD Secretary or Vice President.

Decision making

47. Decisions will be made by consensus; that is members are satisfied with the decision, even though it may not be their first choice. If a consensus decision proves to be elusive, then the Committee President makes the final decision.

General membership

Meetings

48. The Committee will hold a combined meeting of the Committee and Membership once a quarter. Additional meetings may occur as required.
49. These meetings will usually be chaired by a member of the Committee and will be scheduled in consultation with the other Committee members. The agenda will be developed by the Committee. General members can request the inclusion of an agenda item up to two weeks in advance of the meeting.

Decision making

50. Decisions will usually be by simple majority of those present; however, the Committee may opt to require a consensus decision or absolute majority on certain issues.
51. General members will be notified in advance of the decision requirements for the vote to endorse a candidate.

About this Terms of Reference

52. These Terms of Reference were developed in June 2025, and is effective from 1 July 2025.
53. These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose, provided a federal election is not expected in the next 18 months and that Voices of Deakin is not in hiatus. This restriction is to ensure there is no disruption to the nominee endorsement process, or to the candidate or the election campaign itself. If a review is placed on hold due to a federal election, the Committee will determine the next appropriate date for review, which may be the next scheduled review if deemed appropriate.
54. Should these Terms of Reference be amended, a revised draft will be provided to general members for suggestions, before being finalised by the Committee.