

LIBRARIES PROMOTE THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

Shortly before the recent federal election, the Australian Electoral Commission asked ALIA if libraries would join with them to help reduce the number of informal votes in specified areas.

In March 2016, ALIA was approached by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to coordinate the delivery of community electoral information sessions around the nation in the lead-up to the federal election. The AEC was keen to engage with communities in new ways to lower the level of informal voting in electorates where it had been higher than the state or territory average in previous elections.

ALIA was delighted to accept this offer on behalf of the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, even knowing that the short timeframe would be a challenge.

The first step was to call for expressions of interest for the grant-funded opportunity, and more than 20 library services stepped forward. We signed letters of agreement with 21 of these services in the ACT, NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. Northern Territory libraries expressed support, but the timing coincided with the introduction of a new library management system across the Territory.

Our commitment was to deliver at least 84 sessions and, in the event, public libraries delivered 116 sessions at 64 library locations. In addition to English, sessions were delivered in 13 community languages: Gujarati, Farsi, Swahili, Cantonese, Dinka, Hindi, Arabic, Somali, Mandarin, Dari, Vietnamese, Spanish and Turkish.



Staff with election promotional material at Millicent Library, SA.

Attendance levels were low – often there was a single-figure number of attendees – but there was the additional benefit of library staff boneing up on how to vote at the forthcoming election, and this knowledge could be passed on through informal conversations with library users.

Libraries excelled at publicity and promotion for the events. ALIA designed a range of materials, including a poster, a flyer, a social media graphic and an email signature, and these were used extensively.

Libraries promoted the sessions with posters and flyers on noticeboards and desks, and through websites,



A Chinese-language voting instruction session in Maribyrnong, VIC.

council newsletters, social media, multicultural networks, other council services, faith centres (mosques and temples), local newspapers and radio. Paid advertisements in local newspapers and online were placed to reach non-library users, and word-of-mouth was an important factor in contacting hard-to-reach groups.

While we would have liked more people to participate, the program helped raise community awareness of the importance of voting, and in at least three of the electorates – Blaxland and McMahon in NSW and O'Connor in WA – the level of informal voting significantly decreased.

We appreciated the opportunity to build connections with the AEC and we hope this will lead to more joint initiatives in future.

Participating library services

ACT Libraries ACT

NSW Blacktown City Libraries
Fairfield City Library
Kogarah Library
Liverpool City Library
Rockdale City Library

QLD Brisbane City Council Library Services

SA Millicent Public Library
Port Adelaide Enfield Public Library Services

TAS LINC Tasmania

VIC City of Darebin Library Service
Geelong Regional Library Corporation
Greater Dandenong Libraries
Hume Global Learning Village Library Service
Maribyrnong Library Service
Melbourne Library Service
West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation

WA Albany Public Library
City of Stirling Libraries
City of Swan Library Service
City of Wanneroo Library Service

