



**Local Government Association of South Australia**

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL  
MATTERS**

**INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

**June 2006**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This submission has been prepared by the South Australian Local Government Association (LGA). The LGA is the peak body which provides assistance, advice and support to Councils in South Australia across an increasingly broad range of areas and according to identified annual priorities.

Local Government in SA will conduct its next periodic elections in November 2006. The LGA has developed a broad strategy for its involvement with Local Government elections which aims to increase voter turnout, encourage increased nomination of candidates, foster the participation of candidates from under-represented groups and ensure candidates nominating have access to information, and are prepared for, the role of being a Council Member.

The LGA believes that civics education is more than a simple process of voting and electoral promotion. In addition to Council election strategies, the LGA has developed a number of resources and strategies including an education kit and guidelines for engaging with youth and indigenous persons outside of the scheduled electoral periods. Councils have increased the level of community consultation and community involvement in the local decision-making processes with assistance from guidelines produced by the LGA.

This submission gives an account of the LGA strategies appropriate to the Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education.

The Local Government Elections will be held in November 2006 and Councils now have a legislative obligation to provide information and promote public participation on Local Government elections. This is in accordance with the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999, S12 (b) as follows.

*"A council is responsible for the provision of information, education and publicity designed to promote public participation in the electoral processes for its area, to inform potential voters about the candidates who are standing for election in its area, and to advise its local community about the outcome of elections and polls conducted in its area."*

In addition, the State Government SA Strategic Plan includes a target to increase voter turn out in Local Government elections to 50% by 2014. The LGA has for many years worked with Councils to increase voter participation and encourages Councils to work to local targets within their own areas.

To support Councils in the lead up to the 2006 Local Government elections, the LGA has received funding from the Local Government Research & Development Scheme for a state-wide promotional strategy. The LGA strategy and Council Elections Promotional Kit can be accessed via [www.lga.sa.gov.au/goto/electionresources](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/goto/electionresources)

The LGA considers that civics and electoral education in the early stages develops the basic skills, knowledge and understanding of what Local Government is and its position within the Australian system of government. Councils have an obligation to promote public participation in the electoral processes in their areas and the LGA strategy supports Councils to fulfil this obligation.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 *The current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system***

It is understood that initially young people's knowledge of the Australian electoral system is delivered to them via the conventional education channels ie. primary and secondary schools.

Web-based resources are increasingly being accessed by students of all ages and the LGA ensures that its resources are available via electronic means.

### **2.2 *The nature of civics education and its links with electoral educations***

The LGA provides resources on its website that link Australia's political history to its political system. An online education resource has been designed as a guide to Local Government in South Australia. Students, teachers and the general public can–

- learn about the history of Local Government;
- learn how councils operate and the services they provide;
- gather ideas for teaching and learning; and
- access information on the range of career options that exist in Local Government.

These resources are available at [www.localstuff.sa.gov.au](http://www.localstuff.sa.gov.au) and enable Councils to provide new and innovative resources and information to educational facilities including adding local information about their specific area.

The curriculum overview provided on the above website (for teachers) makes a direct link between this online resource and 'Civics and Citizenship Education'.

### **2.3 *Electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, including TAFE colleges and universities***

The LGA is not aware of the specific information available via schools and TAFE. However, the Local Government Training Packages underpins Certificate Courses available at TAFE and adopted by the LGA in its induction training for new persons, including trainees, appointed to positions in Local Government.

The LGA Training and Education Program is exploring alternative external educational opportunities designed to support Council Members in undertaking their role and to attract potential candidates in the future.

Negotiations are progressing with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) to provide a Council Member development training program jointly with the LGA.

### **2.4 *The school age at which electoral education should begin***

Learning and development continues throughout the formative years and beyond. The resources available at [www.localstuff.sa.gov.au](http://www.localstuff.sa.gov.au) provide a range of teaching strategies to support the teaching of Local Government to students of all ages.

## **2.5 *The potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs***

For the 2003 Local Government elections, the Local Government Association, the Office for State/Local Government Relations and Office for Youth, worked on a joint youth initiative which was focused on providing information about enrolling to vote and general participation in Local Government elections.

The project included:

- the production of a promotional flyer;
- a youth election education website;
- using the experience and existing networks of the Youth Advisory Councils and Office for Youth to distribute information about Local Government and the elections, and
- specific youth-targeted advertising in street press.

The LGA is currently working with the Office for State/Local Government Relations and Office for Youth to update the 2003 resources and is exploring other opportunities for the 2006 Council Elections, including developing networks of young business leaders.

In 2005 the LGA sponsored the SA Youth Parliament where youth parliamentarians were acquainted with all 3 spheres of government. Financial and other support will again be given to the 2006 Youth Parliament through a grant from the Local Government Research and Development Scheme.

Youth Parliament is a unique experience that gives young people aged 12-25 years an insight in to the system of law making in South Australia. The LGA encouraged Councils to support their local participants by hosting a team or conducting a training session. Several Youth Parliamentarians have successfully run in previous Local Government elections.

In October 2005, a South Australian branch of the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) was formed. The LGA will be working with the SA branch to explore opportunities to encourage women (particularly young women) to consider standing as candidates in the 2006 Elections.

## **2.6 *The adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities.***

The LGA is committed to promoting a greater diversity of representation in Local Government elections. Information about the relevance of Local Government to the community generally and opportunities for influencing decision making is likely to facilitate greater interest and thereby participation in Local Government, including increased voter turn out and candidate nominations amongst under-represented groups.

A number of projects have therefore been identified to assist the LGA to increase the participation (both voting and candidate numbers) of under-represented groups.

Following on from the success of a 2002/2003 project (for the 2003 Council Elections), the resource guide "Involving Aboriginal People in Local Government Elections and Voting" has been updated for use at the 2006 Council elections. The guide is available via the following link to the LGA website <http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=967#e1668>

The LGA is also working with the Office for State/Local Government Relations, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division to conduct Local Government Information Sessions in July 2006 which will specifically target Aboriginal community leaders and networks. The aim is to encourage Aboriginal participants at these forums to act as ambassadors to promote involvement by standing as a candidate and/or voting in the November 2006 Council Elections.

### **2.7 The adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens**

The LGA has been working with the State Government (through the Office for State/Local Government Relations and Multicultural SA) to further develop networks and participation with members of CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities. The LGA will present information to Multicultural SA Community Volunteers in July 2006. The focus will be on Council Elections and will include information about nominating for Council and the importance of voting. It is hoped that these Community Volunteers, who are recognised community leaders or spokespeople, can encourage increased participation of their communities with Local Government, particularly in Council Elections.

### **2.8 The role of the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) and SEO (State Electoral Office) in promoting electoral education**

The LGA enjoys a good working relationship with the SEO and AEC and in the spirit of fostering better communication the LGA provides a web link to the SEO and the AEC where students, teachers and the general public can find information on educational resources.

The LGA also supports the joint AEC and SEO Electoral Education Centre (EEC) which is based in the CBD of Adelaide. The centre conducts pre-arranged electoral education sessions for groups including all school levels, tertiary and community groups.

The LGA is also a member of a SA Electoral Education Reference Group along with the SEO, AEC and the SA Education Department. This group provides advice to the Electoral Education Centre and works on other initiative to support civics education.

A recent initiative was the production of a 'pencil holder' which contains information about the 3 spheres of government. The pencil holder is distributed to students who visit the EEC.

## **2.9 *The role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education***

Councils have a legislative obligation to provide information and promote public participation on Local Government elections in accordance with the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999, S12 (b). (see Introduction)

In addition to this legislative requirement Councils provide information to schools voluntarily and usually at the request of the school. This may involve a visit from the school to the Council or to a Council site e.g. Council Chamber, wetlands, etc.

The LGA believes that better focus is needed at the school level to educate students in the meaning of local democracy. Educators would stand a better chance of engaging their students on the basis of local issues, and later to enhance skills and understanding to include other areas and broader issues.

Students and young people are also a key target group because of their links with parents and wider family members. The flow-on effect may as a consequence educate the wider community in Local Government issues.

## **2.10 *Access to and adequacy of funding for school visits to the Federal Parliament***

Council Members in South Australia receive numerous requests for funding from members of their communities. In some Councils, members make discretionary financial donations to residents within the Council area to assist with sporting obligations, personal development opportunities and travel.

The LGA is not aware of the specific funding arrangements for school visits to the Federal Parliament, but would encourage schools to visit their local Council initially as a priority.

## **2.11 *Opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education***

The LGA is continuously adopting new and innovative approaches to electoral education in conjunction with Councils, stakeholders and the wider community. However, funding of new initiatives continues to be an issue.

## **3. SUMMARY**

The LGA supports Councils in South Australia to fulfil their obligations to promote public participation in the electoral processes of their area. The assistance and support provided by the LGA is based on a broad strategy to raise the general awareness of candidates and voters at Local Government elections, and is not designed to address the needs of any one individual Council.