



**Northern Territory
Electoral Commission**

Service Charter

2020 Territory Election

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Darwin

Level 3, TCG Centre
80 Mitchell Street

GPO Box 2419
Darwin NT 0801

 08 8999 5000

 08 8999 7630

 www.ntec.nt.gov.au

 ntec@nt.gov.au

ABN: 84 085 734 992

Alice Springs

Election Service Centre
(Previous ANZ Bank building)
Todd Street Mall

PO Box 2304
Alice Springs NT 0871

 08 8999 5000

 08 8999 7630

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Foreword

The next Northern Territory general election is scheduled to occur on Saturday, 22 August 2020. The Northern Territory has fixed four year parliamentary terms, following changes in 2009 to the [Electoral Act 2004](#) (the Act).

A general election is a significant event. It is instrumental in determining the Northern Territory's parliamentary representatives and who will govern the Territory. It also requires considerable financial, human and administrative resources, and the adherence to strict statutory requirements.

The 2020 Territory Election will be conducted in a manner that aligns with the 2020 Territory Election [COVID-19 Management Plan](#) (COVID-19 Management Plan) that was developed in consultation with the Department of Health (DOH). The COVID-19 Management Plan has been developed to decrease the risk of the spread of COVID-19 through election activities. The COVID-19 Management Plan and its guidelines apply to electors, NTEC staff, candidates and campaigners.

The delivery of an activity the size of a Northern Territory general election requires clear identified objectives which can guide the focus, resources and effort.

The NT Electoral Commission's (NTEC) activities must withstand close scrutiny. Actions and decisions must be transparent and public confidence maintained in the NTEC's ability to deliver an impartial, fair and accurate election result. Identifying objectives, key performance indicators and service level commitments to stakeholders at the outset, will enhance transparency and public confidence.

The service charter outlines the NTEC's approach to the delivery of the 2020 Territory Election, including identifying activities which require particular consideration, as well as how the NTEC's performance will be assessed.

Iain Loganathan
Electoral Commissioner

Date: 14 July 2020

Introduction

The service charter outlines the NTEC’s broad goals and aims for the conduct of the election. It defines the NTEC’s service level commitments to stakeholders, as well as the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to evaluate election outcomes. The evaluation of the KPIs will provide a benchmark and inform future proposed amendments to the Act, as well as improvements in electoral procedures.

The aim of the service charter is to provide transparency and accountability of the NTEC for the delivery of the 2020 Territory Election. It also aims to assist stakeholders, including electors, candidates, registered political parties and the media, with election preparations and set their expectations of, and interactions with, the NTEC.

Context

The Northern Territory is divided into 25 Legislative Assembly divisions. At a general election candidates contest ballots in each of these 25 divisions. Successful candidates represent the electors and communities within their division in the Legislative Assembly.

Members of the Legislative Assembly are elected for a four year term, with all seats becoming vacant at each general election.

The name, size and boundary of each electoral division is determined every four years by the Redistribution Committee, in accordance with the Act and the [Northern Territory \(Self-Government\) Act 1978 \(Cth\)](#).

The committee takes into account a range of demographic, physical and community interest factors, as well as submissions and feedback received from the public and organisations. The boundaries that apply at the 2020 Territory Election were gazetted in September 2019 and are available at ntec.nt.gov.au.

The 25 members of the Legislative Assembly are elected using a full preferential system of voting, where voters are required to indicate their first preference next to their most preferred candidate, and the numbers 2, 3 and so on against all the other candidates on the ballot paper until all squares are numbered in order of the voter’s choice.

Election timetable

Activity	Date
Issue of the writ (and nominations open)	Thursday, 30 July 2020
Close of electoral roll	5:00 pm, Friday, 31 July 2020
Close of candidate nominations	12:00 noon, Thursday, 6 August 2020
Declaration of candidate nominations	As soon as practicable after 12:00 noon, Thursday, 6 August 2020
Early, mobile and postal voting commences	Monday, 10 August 2020
Last day for receipt of postal vote applications	6:00 pm, Thursday, 20 August 2020
Election day	Saturday, 22 August 2020
Last day for receipt of postal votes	12:00 noon, Friday, 4 September 2020
Return of the writ (latest date)	Monday, 28 September 2020

See [Appendix A](#) for the full 2020 Territory Election timetable.

Principles for the 2020 Territory Election

The 2020 Territory Election will be conducted recognising established and accepted guiding principles that:

- follow Northern Territory electoral law, and apply it impartially and equitably with all participants in the process treated fairly and justly
- perform all tasks in a non-partisan and politically neutral manner to the highest standard of accuracy
- work to provide every elector with a quality and convenient service in which to exercise their democratic rights.

For the principles to be achieved, the NTEC has created objectives for the 2020 Territory Election.

Election objectives

The NTEC's major operational objectives for the 2020 Territory Election are to:

- increase enrolment and voter participation rates
- decrease informal voting rates
- assist candidates and registered political parties to meet nomination and other compliance requirements, and participate effectively in the electoral process
- inform and educate voters to vote formally
- inform voters of their voting options
- provide every eligible voter with an electoral experience that is convenient, straightforward, confidential and respectful of their needs
- advise voters impacted by changes to electoral boundaries
- conduct the election in a manner that is compliant with the law and meets published service standards
- maintain stakeholder confidence and trust in the NTEC's capacity to deliver impartial, accurate and efficient electoral outcomes
- incorporate the use of technology to modernise the delivery of electoral services
- ensure all votes cast are counted accurately and efficiently
- release election results in a timely manner.

COVID-19 Guidelines

The COVID-19 Management Plan identifies guiding principles for physical distancing and hygiene to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. The COVID-19 Management Plan also identifies electoral measures and strategies to assist in the NTEC's delivery of the 2020 Territory Election in the safest way possible. The document is available on the [NTEC website](#).

To comply with the COVID-19 guidelines, two new roles of physical distancing officer and hygiene officer have been created to service each voting centre.

The following guidelines have been developed in consultation with the DOH, and may change at any time based on advice and directions from DOH in response to situational changes for COVID-19.

Physical distancing

- Encourage social distancing, including wherever possible encouraging the distance between people to be at least 1.5 metres, or as far as reasonably practicable.
- Encourage postal voting, including for vulnerable electors, so they are not required to attend a voting centre.

- Encourage electors to vote early. Social distancing restrictions are more likely to be complied with at early voting centres due to the smaller number of electors, and increased early voting will reduce the number of people needing to vote on election day.
- When using inside spaces for voting and counting, aim to allow for four square metres per person.
- Monitor the number of people inside indoor voting and counting centres to ensure there is compliance with social distancing principles. This includes ensuring all people and voting booths are at least 1.5 metres apart.
- Ensure only one voter uses a voting booth at a time in accordance with Section 87 of the Act, except when an elector needs assistance to vote.
- Encourage voters not to gather or linger in or around voting centres before or after voting.

Hygiene

- People should not attend a voting or counting centre if experiencing even mild symptoms of illness. Provisions will be made to account for electors who are unable to attend a voting centre due to illness.
- Documented hygiene and cleaning protocols are to be followed at all voting and counting centres.
- Alcohol hand sanitiser is to be available for voting centre staff and voters.
- Voters will be provided a new pencil when they are issued with their ballot papers to ensure pencils are not shared with others.

Key performance indicators

The following KPIs have been adopted to allow the NTEC to measure success in meeting its election objectives and its own performance.

Pre-election outcomes

Indicator	Measure	Target
Public awareness flyers	Flyers delivered to voters enrolled in designated urban electorates in the period 1-9 August 2020	100% delivered in timeframe
Public awareness campaign – including Aboriginal language	Number of advertisements issued Number of platforms or media outlets used to distribute message eg. Facebook, NT News, Mix 104.9 radio	76 10
Public awareness campaign – Aboriginal language	Number of advertisements issued in Aboriginal language Number of Aboriginal languages targeted in advertisements	32 8
Social media and website	Percentage of voters clicking on a social media advertisement to access the NTEC website	0.5% click through rate
Public notice of voting centres	Public notice of voting centres, placed in accordance with the Act	Yes
Education and enrolment drives to remote locations	Number of remote communities visited Number of new enrolments and updates to electoral roll	90 400
Training staff	Percentage of staff undertaking the required training	100% by election day
Redundancy provisions for electronic mark-off and election website	Establish and test redundancy provision for electronic mark-off and election website before voting commences on Monday, 10 August 2020	By 9 August 2020

Enrolment outcomes

Indicator	Measure	Target
Average Territory-wide enrolment participation rate (percentage of eligible Territorians on the roll)	Percentage of the total eligible (84.9% in Sept 2019)	85%
18-24 year old enrolment participation rate brought closer to the national average of 80%	Percentage of the total eligible (63.9% - Sept 2019)	70%
Online enrolment	Percentage of enrolment transactions conducted online (51.3% in 2016)	55%

Voter service outcomes

Indicator	Measure	Target
Voter participation rate (Territory-wide)	Percentage of voters on the electoral roll who vote (74.0% in 2016)	80%
Informality rate (Territory-wide)	Percentage of unintentional informal votes cast (19.9% in 2016)	10%
First preference count results from election day voting centres received and published on the website	Percentage of the total number of first preference count results from election day voting centres published on the website (approx. 44 voting centres)	90% by 9:00 pm
First preference count results from early voting and mobile voting centres received and published on website	Percentage of the total number of first preference count results from early and mobile voting centres published on the website on election day	80% by 11:30 pm
Early voting services - turnout	Percentage of total votes cast (36.2% in 2016)	55%
Early voting centre – numbers	Increase in number of early voting centres in response to COVID-19	3
Voting centre opening hours	Percentage of the total number of voting centres being open and equipped for voting for their designated operation hours: Election day voting centres Early voting centres Remote voting centres	100% 100% 100%
Voters utilising postal voting services	Increase in voters utilising postal voting services (6,649 in 2016) Increase in online applications (5,116 in 2016) Increase in postal votes sent in first dispatch of postal votes (81.4%)	Yes Yes Yes
Mobile voter turnout	Increase in mobile voter turnout (15,536 in 2016)	Yes
Improved voter participation in all remote electoral divisions	Percentage increase in voter turnout in remote divisions: Arafura (49.2%) Arnhem (57.6%) Barkly (63.1%) Daly (71.0%) Gwoja (55.4%) Mulka (58.7%) Namatjira (58.3%)	% increase in remote divisions
Mobile voting	Number of locations visited by teams Total Urban Remote	178 5 173
Utilising technologies to increase convenience for electors and NTEC staff	Percentage of electronic Certified Lists provided in all voting centres (including remote voting) which quickens the voting process and improves accuracy	100%
Complaints and enquiries	Percentage of complaints and enquiries responded to or acknowledged within 24 hours	100%

Post-election outcomes

Indicator	Measure	Target
Budget	Delivery of election within total budget of \$3.4 million	\$3.4 million
Post-election survey	Percentage of post-election surveys that indicate strong satisfaction with the NTEC's performance running the election	100%
Post-election survey	Percentage of post-election surveys that indicate strong satisfaction with recruitment, training, payment and operational support	100%
Election review report	Publication of the election review report within 12 months of the election	Yes
Payment of staff	Percentage of staff paid within four weeks of election day	100%

Service commitments to voters

Northern Territory voters can expect:

- a current electoral roll for each division, based on the information provided by electors
- a range of voting options to make it as easy as possible for every voter to cast their vote and exercise their right to vote
- well located, accessible voting centres
- an effort to provide appropriate services for voters with particular requirements due to their location, cultural or linguistic background, or disability
- accurate, user-friendly and timely information about when, where and how to enrol to vote
- accurate, user-friendly and timely information about when, where and how to vote
- ballot papers, advertising, a website and other election materials that are accurate, easy to read and understand
- accurate, timely reporting of election results and statistics on an accessible, user-friendly website
- a helpful and responsive call centre and complaint management service
- courteous, informed and helpful NTEC staff
- the introduction of physical distancing and hygiene measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Service commitments to candidates

Candidates nominating for election to the Legislative Assembly can expect:

- clear, accurate and timely information about their rights and responsibilities as a candidate, including access to candidate information sessions run by the NTEC
- efficient and timely nomination processes, with relevant and accessible information available to enable lodgement within the statutory timeframe
- access to accurate and timely election results, as well as other related information such as the status of declaration vote processing (note: this process may be delayed due to physical distancing requirements for COVID-19)
- clearly documented policy and protocols relating to the vote count
- clearly documented advice of political disclosure requirements under the Act
- regular distribution of election information through newsletters and the NTEC website
- the opportunity to provide feedback via an online survey after the election
- timely refund of nomination deposits (where eligible) in accordance with the Act
- helpful and courteous service and advice provided by NTEC staff.

Service commitments to registered political parties

Registered political parties nominating candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly can expect:

- clear, accurate and timely information about the rights and responsibilities of parties and candidates, including access to candidate information sessions run by the NTEC
- an efficient and timely nomination process
- accurate and timely electoral roll data, including roll data under new electoral boundaries following the redistribution
- accurate and timely election results, as well as other related information such as the status of declaration vote processing or a recount (note: this process may be delayed due to physical distancing requirements for COVID-19)
- clearly documented policy and protocols relating to vote counts
- clearly documented advice of political disclosure requirements under the Act
- regular distribution of election information through newsletters and the NTEC website
- clear points of contact for different election-related matters
- the opportunity to provide face-to-face feedback and commentary before and after the election
- helpful and courteous service and advice provided by NTEC staff.

Service commitments to the media

Media organisations and their representatives can expect:

- a media pack containing electoral background information
- specified points of contact at the NTEC to provide informed and helpful assistance, and timely responses to requests for information
- clear guidance on media rights and responsibilities in covering election day activities
- an up-to-date website containing relevant electoral information, and progressively updated election results
- the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the systems and processes undertaken by the NTEC in the provision of results and other information.

Service standards for NTEC staff

The NTEC employs more than 450 casual and contract staff during a general election, many for election day only, and others for a period of weeks or months in the lead-up to the election.

Staff engaged by the NTEC can expect:

- efficient and timely recruitment processes, including electronic advice regarding the outcome of their application
- accurate advice and information concerning their conditions of employment, location, remuneration and position responsibilities
- appropriate and sufficient training for the role to be performed (online, face-to-face, and/or on-the-job training), as well as the provision of suitable training materials, manuals and/or guides
- accurate and timely payment
- a safe working environment in accordance with the COVID-19 Management Plan.

Stakeholder support

In making the commitments outlined above, it is requested that stakeholders acknowledge and respect the NTEC's need to meet its obligations independently, impartially and accurately in accordance with legislative requirements.

The priorities and expectations of individual stakeholders may not always align with the NTEC's statutory obligations. For example, while many stakeholders will want the election outcome to be known very soon after the close of voting, counting and checking processes take time when undertaken correctly and in accordance with legislation. A public declaration of the election result cannot be made until the postal votes are processed following the deadline of their receipt at 12:00 noon on the second Friday following election day.

The NTEC will however seek to meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders, where possible and appropriate.

Vote count and scrutiny

The counting of all ballot papers, whether early votes, absent and provisional votes, or ordinary votes, cannot commence until after 6:00pm on election day. Section 98 of the Act broadly describes the processes and rules to be followed during the counting of ballot papers.

Information about the vote count can also be found in the [information sheet](#) and [candidate handbook](#) on the NTEC website. The information in these documents is designed to provide guidance to candidates, political parties, scrutineers, and the media about key aspects of the NTEC's counting and scrutiny arrangements, along with the approach that will be adopted regarding close results and recounts at the 2020 Territory Election.

Changes to scrutineering due to COVID-19

The traditional method of scrutineering, which involves scrutineers being in close proximity to each other and NTEC staff, does not comply with current physical distancing principles.

All NTEC staff and scrutineers are required to practice physical distancing at voting centres and scrutiny centres. The requirement to maintain a distance of 1.5m from another person, or allow for four square metres per person, has resulted in a need to change how scrutineering is conducted.

Changes to scrutineering during voting

Candidates are entitled to have a scrutineer present in voting centres. The NTEC will assess all voting centres and where physical distancing requirements cannot be met, will attempt to source a larger venue.

If an alternative venue cannot be sourced and a smaller voting centre is used, there may be a maximum number of scrutineers allowed to enter the voting centre. Where this occurs, scrutineers may need to rotate entry into the voting centre. This should be discussed with the voting centre's manager if required. The rotation of scrutineers in smaller voting centres will allow a sufficient number of NTEC staff and voters to occupy the centre at any one time to conduct voting.

Changes to scrutineering during vote count

Inside a scrutiny centre where vote counting occurs, one scrutineer per candidate per count table is allowed. No votes are to be challenged by scrutineers on election night. This is due to the crowded nature of scrutiny centres and the need to maintain social distancing which would limit a scrutineer's ability to have a clear and close view of ballot papers. Ballot papers may be challenged from the Monday following the election during the fresh count of all votes.

Fewer time constraints and a traditionally lower attendance at these counts will allow for greater adherence to physical distancing and a clearer view of ballot papers.

2020 Territory Election timetable

Electoral Act reference	Timetable requirements	Date
Issue of the writ: authorises the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to conduct an election in accordance with the Act and sets the date for the close of nominations, election day, the return of the writ and triggers all other key milestones and operational deadlines. [s 27]	Issue of the writ	Thursday, 30 July 2020
The electoral roll is closed during the period starting at 5:00 pm, one day after the issue of the writ for an election and ending at the close of voting for an election. [s 8]	Close of electoral roll	5:00 pm Friday, 31 July 2020
Nominations must close at 12 noon, four days after the issue of the writ. [ss 28(a), 34]	Close of nominations	12:00 noon Thursday, 6 August 2020
A draw for positions of candidate names on the ballot paper is conducted as soon as practicable after the close of nominations. [s 41]	Draw for ballot paper positions	Thursday, 6 August 2020
Early voting [s 69] Postal ballot materials can be dispatched as soon as possible after the draw for ballot paper positions and may be completed at any time during the postal voting period, ending at 6:00 pm on election day. [ss 62, 66]	Early and postal voting commences	Monday, 10 August 2020
Mobile voting may be provided in remote areas and special institutions and can start 9 days after the issue of the writ and must end no later than 6pm on election day. [s 3]	Commencement of mobile voting	Monday, 10 August 2020
Postal voting dispatch to cease to overseas address four days before election day. [s 62(3)(a)]	Close of postal vote issuing to overseas addresses	6:00 pm Tuesday, 18 August 2020
Postal voting dispatch to cease to Australian address two days before election day. [s 62(3)(b)]	Close of postal vote issuing within Australia	6:00 pm Thursday, 20 August 2020
Voting centre hours determined by the NTEC. [s 69(1)(b)]	Close of early voting	6:00 pm Friday, 21 August 2020
Election day must be 19 days after the issue of the writ. [ss 23(1), 28(b)]	Election day	8:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday, 22 August 2020
Postal votes must be received by 12:00 noon on the second Friday following election day in order to be included in the count. [s 112]	Deadline for the receipt of postal votes	12:00 noon Friday, 4 September 2020
Results of the election are to be publicly declared as soon as practicable after they have been determined. [s 131]	Declaration of the election result	Monday, 7 September 2020 (TBC)
The writ traditionally sets out the latest date for its return, usually about 4-5 weeks after election day. [s 133]	Return of the writ (latest date)	Monday, 28 September
An application to challenge the validity of an election must be made to the Supreme Court no later than 21 days after the date fixed for the return of the writ. [s236]	Disputed returns	Monday, 19 October