



ENHANCING INCLUSION IN ELECTIONS:

Case studies from PIANZEA members

A PIANZEA Discussion Paper

*Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand
Electoral Administrators Network*



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Acronyms and definitions

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AROB	Autonomous Region of Bougainville
CEC	Chief Electoral Commissioner
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Electoral Officer
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organisations
EDAWG	Elections Disability Access Working Group
EMB	Electoral Management Body
FEO	Fijian Elections Office
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
KYE Quiz	Know Your Election Quiz
MP(s)	Member(s) of parliament
NEC	Nauru Electoral Commission
OBEC	Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PEC	Palau Election Commission
PIANZEA Network	Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WENA	Women Empowerment Nauru Association

1. Introduction

Increasing the electoral participation of women, people with disability, and young people is an important focus area for electoral management bodies (EMBs). The principle of equity demands that these groups should be enabled to participate fully in their country's democracy, just like everyone else. However, improving participation is important for several other reasons:

"A true democracy requires that the poorest and most marginalized citizens have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their lives." – International Foundation for Electoral Systems ([IFES](#))

- Participating in elections helps women, people with disability, and young people to exercise their full rights as citizens, which can break down barriers to their inclusion in other social and economic activities.¹
- Diverse electoral participation strengthens the foundations of democracy by allowing a broader cross-section of people to shape the way they are governed. This helps to ensure that government decisions better reflect the needs of all citizens.²
- The inclusion of all citizens in democratic processes is shown to prevent political instability and conflict.³

These benefits lead to better governance and sustainable development outcomes, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.⁴

Further, the rights of women, people with disability, and other diverse groups to vote are established in United Nations (UN) treaties and conventions, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*.

This paper brings together several innovative examples of electoral participation from PIANZEA Network members, with case studies from Fiji, Kiribati, PNG (the Autonomous Region of Bougainville), Australia, Nauru and New Zealand. The focus is on simple or cost-effective activities that EMBs can deliver regardless of their size and resources.

Following this introduction, the paper includes:

- a summary of previous research on inclusion to develop a set of guiding principles for inclusive electoral participation
- case studies from PIANZEA Network members
- a conclusion and a list of useful resources.

¹ IFES and NDI, *Equal Access How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes*, 2014, p. 19.

² UNDP and UN Women, *Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation*, Foreword.

³ International IDEA, *Overcoming Political Exclusion: Strategies for marginalised groups to successfully engage in political decision making*, 2013, p. 20.

⁴ Women Deliver, *Strengthen Girls' and Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power*, 2019, accessed 04 March 2022.

2. Context

There is a large amount of practical guidance available to help EMBs achieve the goal of greater electoral participation. Most of the practical guides share some important general characteristics. First, they combine rights-based and operational-based (structural and organisational) principles. Second, many of the guides are built around the idea of “nothing about us without us”, which means that people from underrepresented groups should be closely involved in developing policies or activities that affect them. Third, many of the guides focus on “leaving no one behind”.⁵⁶ The guides also take a ‘whole of electoral cycle’ approach to inclusion, and stress that addressing exclusion must be specifically considered pre, during, and post-election.

The guides also provide some specific notes related to particular groups:

- **Young people** – The resources on youth participation focus on creating a sustainable model of engagement. This is because EMBs need to constantly engage with new generations as young people “out-grow their membership”⁷ of this group. This unique challenge means that EMBs need to think carefully about how the methods they use to engage with young people can be repeated regularly.
- **Women** – The guides mostly focus on the safety of women as they engage in the political process, as well as addressing discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender inequality and exclude women. Solutions to these challenge include initiatives to address stereotypes, conducting gender assessments within an EMB, developing gender action plans and gender-sensitive processes and procedures, and creating safe spaces for women to participate in elections.
- **People with disability** – The resources focus on building relationships between EMBs and Disabled Person’s Organisations (DPOs) to address barriers to participation and develop accessible electoral processes.⁸ This ensures that people with disability are included in developing solutions that work for themselves and their community. The resources also focus on ensuring that election rules and laws mandate inclusion requirements for people with disability in the electoral process, as outlined in the CRPD.

Based on the existing guides, we have created a set of guiding principles for how EMBs can support improved electoral participation for people with disability, women, and young people (see below). The principles can be used to guide the design of electoral participation activities. For example, when an EMB is creating a new initiative to encourage people with disability to register to vote, it should conduct **genuine** and **respectful** engagement with people with disability, ensure **accountability** by clearly setting out goals and next steps, and build in **sustainability** through capacity development for people with disability.

⁵ For example, the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and IFES have all produced useful guides that are available online (see Section Four for website links).

⁶ Ace Project, *Youth and Elections – Guiding Principles*, n.d., accessed 11 February 2022; Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth & SDGs, *Guiding Principles for Supporting Young People as Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda*, 2017, accessed 11 February 2022.

⁷ Ace Project, *Youth and Elections – Guiding Principles*, n.d., accessed 11 February 2022.

⁸ IFES, *Inclusion and Meaningful Political Participation*, 2020, accessed 11 February 2022.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ELECTORAL INCLUSION

1. **Genuine** – engagement should not be ‘one-off’ or tokenistic; the intent of engaging with a group must be clear, for the right reasons, and based on the idea of both parties communicating their values and goals.
2. **Respectful and rights-based** – all engagement should be respectful and acknowledge the right of the group to participate and be heard.
3. **Accountable** – this means setting out clear processes, goals, and next-steps, and creating opportunities for groups to follow up on the outcomes of activities.
4. **Self-guiding** – the group being engaged should be given the opportunity to decide on priorities and methods, and lead decision-making as much as possible.
5. **Sustainable** – engagement should be combined with education, training and leadership development for the relevant groups.
6. **Inclusive** – all engagement should be sensitive to the diversity of the group (recognising that not all people within a group have the same experiences) and be accessible to people with disability, those who speak a different language, and people of different genders, sexualities, and ages.
7. **Voluntary and safe** – participation should be voluntary for members of the group and all engagement should be designed and conducted with safety in mind.



3. What are PIANZEA members doing?

This section provides some examples of the innovative activities that PIANZEA members are undertaking to improve electoral inclusiveness. Although all PIANZEA members are working in different contexts, the case studies show that supporting inclusion in elections does not have to be a complicated and expensive task. Combined with the guiding principles, PIANZEA members can use the case studies as inspiration for designing new electoral inclusion activities.

The case studies are divided into activities that take place between elections, and those that are focused on polling days.

3.1 Between elections

Fiji: Know Your Election Quizzes

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

A single online platform, more than one thousand teams, 60 minutes of questions, and the winner takes all - that's the Fijian Elections Office's (FEO) Know Your Election (KYE) Quiz competition. The FEO implemented this innovative activity after analysis of the 2018 General Election revealed that turnout was lowest for voters aged between 18 and 30. It became apparent that FEO needed to find ways to make voter education more interesting for young people. Since the launch of the first KYE Quiz in 2021, the FEO has hosted six Quizzes, all held in the same format and on the same platform. The KYE Quiz has become the FEO's primary voter engagement and education tool during non-election periods. The FEO is currently preparing to deliver the 2022 General Election and more KYE Quizzes are in the pipeline to complement the ongoing voter awareness campaign for the general election.

OUTCOMES

From 200 teams in the first KYE Quiz, the FEO has had over 1,500 teams register for its most recent Quiz. Combined, the FEO has had 4,954 teams participate so far in the KYE Quiz competitions. This has had a significant positive impact on voter engagement and awareness among young people.

CHALLENGES

Now that the KYE Quiz is a regular event, it can be difficult to keep participants engaged. To address this, the FEO has occasionally increased the prize or added consolation prizes for participating teams.

LESSONS

If an EMB is looking to host online quiz competitions, it is important to first ensure that the EMB website has a lot of good content. This means that when participants go looking for answers on the EMB website, they will get credible information which will not only help them score points in the quiz but also build their knowledge.

CONTEXT

Fiji is located in Melanesia, and has a population of approximately 896,450 across 100 inhabited islands.

Fiji has a unicameral (single) legislature with 50 members. MPs are elected using an open list proportional representation system with a single national constituency. In Fiji's open list proportional representation system, votes are cast for individual candidates rather than for parties.

Under the 2014 *Electoral Decree*, elections in Fiji are managed by the FEO, led by the Supervisor of Elections. The Supervisor and the FEO report to the Electoral Commission Fiji, which comprises a chairperson and six members appointed by the President on the advice of the Constitutional Offices Commission. The Supervisor of Elections is the Secretary to the Electoral Commission.

Know Your Election: Quiz 2

Date: 28 March 2022

Time: 7.00pm



Fiji: Elections Disability Access Working Group (EDAWG)



ACTIVITY SUMMARY

EDAWG was established in 2016 to look at ways of making electoral processes more inclusive for people with disability. It includes 13 disability organisations, and is tasked with combining the experiences and knowledge of these groups with that of the FEO. EDAWG identifies measures to empower people with disability to participate in elections alongside their fellow citizens. So far, these measures have included procedural reforms and specially targeted materials.

OUTCOMES

Voter Registration – Prior to the 2018 election, EDAWG worked with the FEO to ensure that as many people with disability as possible were on the electoral roll. FEO conducted mobile registrations (home visits) for those unable to visit enrolment centres.

Polling Venues – EDAWG scrutinised the polling venue list for the 2018 election and worked with the FEO operations team to make sure as many polling places as possible were accessible.

Voter Education – EDAWG and the FEO produced materials in large print for people with visual impairments.

FEO Website – In 2017, the FEO website was revamped to improve its accessibility.

Election materials – The FEO designed special election materials including an Assisted Voting Chart featuring the 9 voting steps, and provided magnifying glasses for voters with visual impairments and voting booths for wheelchair users.

Assisted Voting – EDAWG and the FEO developed assisted voting procedures for those unable to visit polling stations, supported by a 2018 amendment to the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act*.

CHALLENGES

Disability organisations have records for people registered with them, but there are many people with disability in Fiji that are not registered – particularly in rural communities. This makes it difficult to know where to focus inclusion measures.

LESSONS

There needs to be a working group or committee that brings together the EMB and disability organisations to ensure that electoral processes are accessible. People with disability need to be directly involved in all processes.

Kiribati: Raising awareness of women's political participation

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Women's participation in Kiribati elections is low, due in part to customary gender roles. In 2015, the Kiribati election team visited several outer islands to roll out awareness training regarding women's right to vote and their power to influence the future of their community and country. The aim was to increase the number of women participating in the election process, from registration to voting. The program also sought to increase the number of female political candidates.

OUTCOMES

At the 2020 election there was a strong increase in the number of women registered to vote, and the number of women elected to parliament increased from three to four.

CHALLENGES

Kiribati comprises several geographically scattered islands, making travel for the purposes of voter education time consuming and expensive. Customs can create a challenge if they negatively impact people's attitudes towards women's political participation.

LESSONS

It is vital to incorporate educational programs about gender equality and women's rights to political participation into all levels of the education system, from primary school onwards. This helps to change people's mindsets.

CONTEXT

Kiribati is located in the central Pacific, and has a population of approximately 119,000 people across 21 inhabited islands.

The House of Assembly (*Maneaba ni Maungatabu*) has 45 members, 44 elected for a four-year term in single-seat and multi-seat constituencies, and 1 delegate from Rabi Island representing Banaba. In single-member constituencies, members are elected using a two-round system. To be elected in the first round a candidate requires an absolute majority. If no candidate receives a majority in the first round a second round is held, in which whoever receives a plurality (the highest number) of votes is elected. In multi-member constituencies, members of parliament (MPs) are elected using block voting.

Responsibility for supervising elections lies with the Electoral Commission, which consists of a Chief Electoral Commissioner (CEC) and not less than two or more than four commissioners, appointed by the *Beretitenti* (President) on the advice of the Cabinet. Under the Election Act 2019, the carrying out of administrative arrangements and the conduct of elections is vested in the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), who is at present appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs, under Section 8 of the Act. The CEO in turn appoints electoral officers and assistant officers for each electoral district. These officers assist in the registration of voters and the actual conduct of the elections.

Bougainville: Implementing a GESI Policy

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner (OBEC) developed a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) policy alongside its Strategic Plan 2018-2022. The GESI policy operationalizes elements of the *Bougainville Elections Act 2007* (and associated Regulations) that provide for the participation and inclusion of young people, women and people with disability in elections. The GESI policy shapes OBEC's approach to all aspects of the electoral cycle, including enrolment, awareness, polling and counting processes. OBEC has implemented three key strategies for inclusion: preferencing women, young people and people with disability when recruiting for temporary election worker roles; identifying the number of people with disability in each constituency during enrolment to plan for polling accessibility; and ensuring polling accessibility through measures such as voting from home, women-only voting queues and booths, and assistance for blind or illiterate voters.

OUTCOMES

Developing a GESI policy has ensured that OBEC takes the needs of women, people with disability and young people into account at all stages of the electoral cycle. It has also supported the implementation of two inclusion pilot projects: continuous enrolment to ensure young people have time to enrol; and identification of people with disability to support accessibility planning.

CHALLENGES

Lack of data on people with disability makes it harder to plan accessibility measures. Enrolling young people can be challenging because they are busy with educational commitments during enrolment and voting periods.

LESSONS

It is important to take a holistic and consistent approach to inclusion.

CONTEXT

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) is a self-governing territory in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It has a population of approximately 250,000 people on several islands that are part of the Solomon Islands archipelago in Western Melanesia.

The Bougainville House of Representatives has 40 seats, comprising 33 members elected from open, single-member constituencies, three regional seats reserved for women, three regional seats reserved for ex-combatants in the civil conflict, and one seat for the President. The President is elected from a single national constituency. The six reserved seats are elected from three constituencies (North, South, and Central), with one female and one ex-combatant representing each constituency. All constituencies use a limited preferential voting system, where voters rank their three preferred candidates on each of the four ballot papers that they receive.

Elections are managed by OBEC, which is an independent Constitutional Office established under Article 106 of the Constitution in 2014. OBEC is led by an Electoral Commissioner, and its budget is allocated by the Autonomous Bougainville Government.

Nauru: International Women's Day debate competition

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

In 2021, the Nauru Electoral Commission (NEC) ran its first ever debate competition for women in Nauru, in partnership with the Women Empowerment Nauru Association (WENA). The two-day event aimed to empower women by giving them a chance to develop their debating skills, and to raise awareness around civic participation.

OUTCOMES

The final debate was attended by 70 people, including the Electoral Commissioner and various politicians. The event raised awareness of the importance of women's political participation in Nauru.

CHALLENGES

The event required significant organization, which was challenging for the NEC as it has few staff.

LESSONS

Partnering with other organizations to run events helps to share the logistical burden and builds relationships with people who are passionate about specific issues, such as women's empowerment.

CONTEXT

Nauru is an island in Micronesia with a population of approximately 10,000, making it the world's second-smallest country by population size.

Nauru has a unicameral Parliament composed of 19 seats. MPs are elected in multi-seat constituencies using the Dowdall System, a modification of the preferential Borda count.

The NEC was established in 2016 under the new *Electoral Act*. It comprises of three Electoral Commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the President on the advice of the Cabinet.



Nauru: Secondary schools election simulation

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

In 2020, the NEC facilitated student prefect elections for Nauru Secondary Schools. This program simulated the process of the national general election with students nominating as candidates, voter roll management, poll workers and vote counting.

The aim of this program was to engage young people in the electoral process and increase their electoral knowledge before voting for the first time at a national election.

OUTCOMES

The next cohort of eligible voters were meaningfully engaged in the electoral process, including understanding the secrecy of their vote, learning how to cast a valid vote and understanding the count system. The simulation occurred over three weeks to raise awareness of the program, receive nominations, campaign, vote and count results. Students received training on the election process, polling official training and count training. Students then conducted polling and count processes.

The simulation also increased youth knowledge regarding being a candidate and developing a campaign platform. Student candidates were given a chance to present their campaign platform to student voters and developed candidate posters. Seven girls and seven boys were elected to be student prefects.

CHALLENGES

Scheduling issues meant training could not be provided to students until just prior to polling day. It was also important to minimise the amount of disruption to classes.

Staffing the simulation was also a challenge due to the NEC's staffing resources.

LESSONS

Students were provided with a range of resources and NEC staff were available to assist the process. Simulating the electoral process of a national general election is useful for educating the next generation of voters.



3.2 During an election

Palau: Confined voter registration

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

The Palau Election Commission (PEC) has a process in place for helping 'Confined Voters' (e.g. people with a physical disability, those confined to hospital) to take part in elections. Confined Voters can submit a request form up to seven days prior to polling day, then PEC officials visit them on the day of the election to take their vote. The number of Confined Votes is reported along with the election results.

OUTCOMES

This system supports people with disability to exercise their right to vote and make a difference to the country.

CHALLENGES

Some Confined Voters do not understand or trust the process, which makes them reluctant to make use of it.

LESSONS

Effective outreach to marginalised groups prior to election day is vital, because it helps to identify their needs and build their trust in any special voting processes.

CONTEXT

Palau is located in the Western Pacific and has a population of approximately 18,200 across nine inhabited islands.

Palau's bicameral legislature (the Palau National Congress; *Olbiil era Kelulau*) comprises the House of Delegates and the Senate. The House of Delegates has one member for each of the country's 16 states. Members are elected using a first past the post system. The Senate has 13 members, elected from a single, national multi-member constituency using block voting. There is also a President directly elected by absolute majority using a two-round system.

The PEC is an independent body that was established under the *Palau Voting Rights Act 1981*, and is empowered to register voters and conduct elections. The Commission comprises five members appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. Commission members elect a Chair, but the President is technically the Election Commissioner.

New Zealand: Disability Communities Engagement

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Before and during New Zealand's 2020 General Election, The New Zealand Electoral Commission (EC) aimed to improve electoral participation outcomes for disability communities.

The work was collaborative and involved diverse representation of organisations within the disability sector. These ranged from national organisations to smaller locally-focused groups. The EC worked with organisations to better understand the needs of their members and the communities they represent. The EC then tailored support that sought to improve access to and participation in the electoral system. This included the provision of forms and resources in accessible formats, the training of support workers to facilitate enrolment and provide information, and co-delivery of accessible education sessions that included facilitating enrolment.

OUTCOMES

By engaging with disability communities, the EC strengthened existing relationships and developed new relationships with key stakeholders to support electoral participation activities. This engagement led to an increased understanding of disability communities, and informed the development of effective future engagement that meets community needs.

CONTEXT

New Zealand is located in the southwestern Pacific. It has a population of approximately 5 million people.

New Zealand has a unicameral parliament with 120 seats. Members are elected using a mixed member proportional voting system. Each voter has a party vote and an electorate vote. They use the party vote for a party, and the electorate vote to vote for a specific candidate standing in their electorate.

The New Zealand Electoral Commission was established in 2010 and is an independent Crown Entity that administers the Electoral Act 1993. The EC is overseen by the Electoral Commission Board, which comprises a chairperson, deputy chairperson, and the Chief Electoral Officer, who is also Chief Executive of the Electoral commission.

CHALLENGES

A key challenge was responding equitably to the diverse needs and priorities of various disability stakeholders and communities, particularly with limited funding. Another key issue is ensuring staff are well equipped and supported to competently engage with communities and members in a way that meets their needs.

LESSONS

It is important to build organisational competency and understanding of the diversity of disability communities. Allow this to be the foundation that informs and supports any initiatives and activities.

Starting activities far in advance of electoral events will enable the focus of the main campaign period to be about delivering activities. Building and maintaining relationships with key communities between election events will also support the delivery of future initiatives.

Australia: Accessibility on polling day

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Before the 2022 federal election, the AEC consulted with voters on accessible service offerings that would consider local challenges to electoral participation.

Following the consultation, the AEC co-designed and worked with partners to:

- develop in-language resources including videos, podcasts and social media content to explain the voting process, this included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- identify and train local Community Field Officers (CFOs) to provide electoral participation education to electors in remote locations and to assist election officials with cultural competency and language barriers
- deliver voter education sessions to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- implement an on-demand virtual Auslan interpreting service at all polling places and in one polling place in each division a 'text to speech pen' and a portable hearing loop were available.

A telephone voting option was available for people who are blind or have low vision. Electors who were required to isolate due to COVID-19 were able to cast a postal vote or use a dedicated telephone voting option.

OUTCOMES

In-language materials and CFOs were well received by community members as a respectful and culturally appropriate way to engage with voters. The addition of the Auslan service offering provided additional support to people who are deaf and hard of hearing. The enhanced AEC website empowered electors to select a polling place that best supported their needs.

LESSONS

The AEC needs to continue working with organisations who are regularly providing services to electors facing challenges to electoral participation. This will inform the AEC of those challenges and provide opportunities to work with the service provider, Community Field Officers and electors to co-design strategies to better support the electoral participation of all Australians.

CHALLENGES

The AEC was required to make last minute changes to the COVID-19 telephone voting service.

CONTEXT

Australia is located at the western edge of the Pacific. It has a population of approximately 25.7 million people.

Australia has a bicameral national legislature. The lower house (House of Representatives) has 151 members elected using a full preferential voting system. The upper house (Senate) has 76 members (12 from each state and 2 from each territory) elected using a single transferable vote system.

Australia's national EMB is the AEC, which was established as an independent statutory authority in 1984 following major amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. The AEC is headed by the Electoral Commissioner, who is appointed by the government. Each state and territory has its own electoral commission, which runs state/territory elections.

4. Summary

It is very important for EMBs to organise activities that help women, people with disability, young people and traditionally underrepresented groups to participate equally in elections. Improving inclusion across the electoral cycle is not just the right thing to do – it also helps to strengthen democracy. EMBs play a very important role in this area.

This paper put forward seven principles that EMBs can use to help design activities to improve electoral inclusiveness. It also provided several case studies from PIANZEA member. The purpose of these was to show that working with women, people with disability, young people, and other priority groups to increase electoral participation can be done in simple and cost-effective ways. Small changes to existing processes can be just as effective and important as standalone programs.

There is great scope for sharing innovative ideas around electoral inclusion through the PIANZEA Network. We strongly encourage members to reach out through the Network to their peers so that we can work together to improve electoral inclusiveness.

Useful resources

- **Ace Project – Youth and Elections – Guiding Principles**
- **IFES – Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes**
- **IFES – Inclusion and Meaningful Political Participation**
- **International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics – Political Participation of Women with Disabilities**
- **UNDP – Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation**
- **UNDP – Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle**
- **Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth & SDGs – Guiding Principles for Supporting Young People as Critical Agents of Change in the 2030 Agenda**

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