

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of this nation and their custodianship of this land and its waterways. We are privileged to conduct our work on these lands, where sovereignty was never ceded.

Introducing Matters That Count

Imagine. Candidates with the best chance of winning Lower House seats in the forthcoming federal election are asked by constituents where they stand on a set of key issues of deep concern to so many, especially women.

You and your friends work to secure their responses on these issues. Your summaries of their responses are promoted across your networks—family, other friends, acquaintances, colleagues and your community networks, ultimately assisting people to make informed choices about candidates on election day.

Once your representative takes a seat in the Lower House, you and your friends decide to continue on, monitoring their commitments and/or policy performance.

You check in several times during the first parliamentary term to confirm whether or not your representative is keeping to their word and advocating on your behalf in bringing urgent priorities and policy reforms before our national parliament.

This is democracy at work in 2022—people, especially women, claiming a voice on matters of profound concern to them; pushing back in outrage against those who spend obscenely on buying influence; pressing for policy outcomes which serve the common good rather than naked self-interest; being prepared to maintain a watching brief to see if their candidates make good on their public commitments.

Now that's accountability for you.

Welcome to *Matters That Count*—a federal election initiative of the Victorian Women's Trust.

Back in 1997, we commissioned a now famous poster: *Don't Get Mad, Get Elected!* On the back of this early call to action we have sought to empower women at all levels, to claim a voice within what is still an overtly masculine political culture through initiatives such as the *Purple Sage Project*, *Watermark Australia*, the *Monster Climate Petition* and our pioneering work in developing our model of Kitchen Table Conversations.

We prize our independence. We have entered the public arena at other times of great community unease, such as with the sexism and destructiveness which swirled around the Gillard minority government.

There is too much at stake to wait until the magic day when gender parity is finally achieved in the House of Representatives. Women need to give urgent voice to their interests and concerns, muscle in on the national policy arena, and seek to elevate nation-building policies which would make an enormous difference in their day-to-day lives as well as achieve a far greater measure of gender equality.

And we now do so in the firm belief that the forthcoming election is one of those line-in-the-sand moments in time.

COVID-19 exposed deep seams of gendered inequality for too long ingrained in our economy, our federal budgets and national policies affecting women specifically, and the broader community more generally.

The public furore eighteen months ago over sexual assault allegations, ongoing allegations about sexual harassment, the misogynistic nature of our political parliamentary culture, compounded the quiet fury felt by many women around the nation. Australia is one of the richest countries in the world. While we can afford pretty much anything, we nonetheless do have to make choices.

This is no better illustrated than by the Stage 4 tax cuts to take effect in 2024. Columnist Ross Gittens (*The Age* 5 May 2021) tells us that these will cost \$17 billion a year, with the ostensible aim of delivering huge savings to high income earners. But as Gittens further argues, most of these beneficiaries are old and male; and tax economists, such as Professor Patricia Apps, say there is no evidence to support the idea that these tax beneficiaries will be more productive to the economy.

Instead of such targeted largesse, we can choose to prioritise public health and care service. Instead of choosing to increase COVID-19 financial support for the construction industry, we can opt to raise the wages of child care and aged care workers, among the lowest paid people in our communities.

Our critical choices

Our close reading of the lie of the land over the past few years tells us that there are a number of issues causing great unease in the hearts and minds of many Australians, especially women.

Our collective sense of what makes a decent, fair and compassionate society is being eroded before our eyes. Our planet is in peril, yet leadership is wanting. Powerful calls for an Indigenous voice in our national parliament are summarily dismissed.

For maximum impact, our candidate screening process requires us to focus on a select number of core issues for immediate action. With this in mind, we see eight in particular which must be profiled in the forthcoming federal election:

- **Strong and urgent action to reduce carbon emissions**
- **Enshrining in the constitution a voice for First Nations People**
- **Wage justice for people working in early years and aged care settings**
- **Re-framing men's violence against women and children**
- **Redesigning our childcare system**
- **Creating affordable housing for older women**
- **Ending the cruel treatment of asylum seekers**
- **Integrity and accountability of our elected representatives, public servants and political life**

You can find our treatment of each of these issues at www.mattersthatcount.com.au. Each of these commitments is represented on an A4 page. On each of these pages we make our case for the importance of the issues, as well as spaces for candidates to sign off on their preparedness to take the actions that are outlined.

We would love you to become involved in *Matters That Count*

Time is on the wing.

The federal election will be held on the 21st May.

If you decide to join us and take part in this process you will need to get started as soon as possible.

Instructional guide

To help you to carry out the screening exercise in this relatively short period of time, we've created a step-by-step instructional guide for you to follow. This starts with how to bring a small group of friends together, and takes you through the tasks which need completing. Along the way, we've provided templates for you to use as well.

It is crucial that you are able to present the eight commitments as outlined above, to each of the candidates with whom you intend to make contact. This is detailed further in the guide.

You will find a list of FAQs on the *Matters That Count* website (www.mattersthatcount.com.au) to help you with any tricky or practical detail.

Stay in touch

The *Matters That Count* team is there for you to help you take part in this momentous pre-election exercise.

The best way for making contact is to email us at mattersthatcount@vwt.org.au and include your preferred means of contact.

Matters That Count: our guide to screening your 2022 federal election candidates

In this guide, we start with getting your group together, and then we outline the steps your group takes—identifying your candidates for screening; making contact with the candidates; prompting candidates for their responses; summarising results of the screening; and, finally promoting the outcomes of your screening across your network.

Getting your small group together

Gathering your small, informal group together will hardly take any time because you are bringing together between two and four like-minded friends or acquaintances prepared to take part in the screening exercise. It's preferable that you all live in the same electorate.

This small group doesn't require formal definition or anything other than simple logistics.

You are likely to be meeting in one another's home where friendship and civility is the go. You know how to operate with each other; and invariably you will have some fun and enjoyment in the process.

As soon as you have decided to run *Matters That Count* in your own electorate, it would be great if you could register your activity by completing the form on www.mattersthatcount.com.au so we can build a picture of where activity is happening across Australia.

Send this initiative to all your friends and family across Australia who you think may be interested in screening candidates in their own electorate. Share in whatever way is easiest for you: phone conversation, text message, email and social media are all good options.

As a group, you need to:

1. Identify your candidates for screening

Establish the 2-4 candidates who, in your view, are most likely to win the seat. This may include your sitting member, and up to three other candidates.

2. Make contact with your candidates

Communicate by phone, in person and/or email with each of these candidates to arrange for them to respond and complete the screening exercise.

3. Prompt candidates for responses

Follow up with each candidate to remind them of the need to provide you with responses by the deadline.

4. Summarise the results of the screening

Compile a short summary table of candidate responses using the template provided in this pack.

5. Promote candidate responses across your networks and beyond

Share the summary table of candidate responses with the *Matters That Count* project team, as well as across your network.

As you and your small group work through this guide and agree on tasks, the main thing to watch for is your time to meet the project's deadline of **Saturday 7th May** for receiving candidate responses.

How you allocate the tasks is up to you. For example, your group may choose to take one candidate each and approach them with the eight policy commitments in hand.

At all times, make sure that you conduct yourselves in ways which are respectful, courteous and constructive.

Identifying your candidates for screening

There's neither the time nor the need to screen every candidate standing for election in your seat. The trick here is to focus on the small number of candidates you think have the strongest chance of winning.

More often than not, it will involve approaching candidates from major parties, minor parties with traction in your region (for example National Party or The Greens) and any high-profile independents.

We suggest you try and keep the list to somewhere between 2-4 candidates, no more.

To find out what electorate you live in, go to www.aec.gov.au and search using either your location or postcode.

Making contact with your candidates

You should allow as much time as possible to approach your selected candidates; and to make sure they provide their responses back to your group by the **Saturday 7th May** deadline.

Depending on your location and available time, you will need to choose how best to make contact with your candidates: in-person, phone, email and online meetings are all possible options.

Whichever way you make initial contact, you need to provide information about yourselves and the task.

We recommend you keep your own, simple record of your efforts to make contact with candidates. Note down the date, time and method of contact.

This needs to include:

1. Who you are
2. Why you have decided to run the *Matters That Count* candidate screening process
3. The eight policy matters for their consideration and commitment
4. The final date for receiving their response. You should aim to have their responses by the 7th May deadline
5. You need to indicate that you will be sharing their responses across the electorate

We have created a template for you to use, if you wish, when contacting your selected candidates. This template can be modified for use as a cover letter, in an email, or as talking points for a phone conversation or meeting.

Each candidate will need a copy of all eight policy commitments. If you are meeting in-person, you will need to print off all eight commitments from the website and take them with you to the meeting.

If contacting candidates by any other means, share the eight commitments with them via email, making sure to include your contact details and asking them to respond no later than **Saturday 7th May**.

In the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of our website, we have included some advice on downloading and printing the 8 policy matters, as well as attaching them in an email.

Dear [insert name of candidate],

My name is [insert name], and together with [insert names of other small group members] we are contacting candidates most likely to be elected to represent us in this seat of [insert name of electorate] at the upcoming federal election.

We are frustrated, angry and sad that our political leaders have failed to take necessary action on national issues we believe are crucial to the values, identity and future of our nation. Because of this, we have decided to work together in a small group, and run the *Matters That Count* candidate screening process in our electorate. This has been developed and provided to us by the Victorian Women's Trust. Executive Director, Mary Crooks, is the formal organisational contact, based at 200 Alexandra Pde Fitzroy, Melbourne.

As a presenting candidate in the forthcoming federal election, it is crucial that voters like us have a clear idea about where you stand on issues we see as hugely important to our nation.

We have attached to this email a list of 8 such issues. We seek your response to all of these matters that count, and your responses will inform our voting choices. We would appreciate your response no later than Saturday 7th May, preferably by email.

Once we have received your response, we will send it in to the *Matters That Count* project team at the Victorian Women's Trust for wider publicity. We will also be working hard to distribute the responses as widely as possible across the electorate during the weeks leading up to election day.

We thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name]

Prompting candidates

You may need to prompt your selected candidates for a response to the policy matters you've given them. Don't wait until **Saturday 7th May**—that is too late in the process and will leave you with little time to share their commitments.

If you haven't heard anything by **Friday 29th April**, then get in touch and politely remind them you are waiting for their responses. Let them know that if you don't receive anything from them by **Saturday 7th May**, it will be recorded as "No response."

When candidates do respond, make sure you acknowledge their communication and thank them for their time.

Summarising the results of your candidate screening

Ideally, you should bring your small group together on, or as close to, 7th May in order to bring your collective effort together and build the summary of responses.

There may be instances where you have contacted a candidate and haven't received any commitments, or indeed a response of any kind. This too is important feedback to include when summarising the responses you received.

We have created a summary table for you to populate with the results from your screening, enabling you to distribute them among your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and community networks over the coming weeks.

Encourage your candidate to email you their commitments because it establishes a paper trail to validate their response. If the candidate has trouble attaching the 8 signed commitments to an email, they can always list their commitments in the text of an email. This will give you the information you need to populate the summary table, as well as generate a paper trail.

Electorate _____

Contact person from small group _____

Contact phone _____

Contact email _____

Commitments	Candidate: Party:	Candidate: Party:	Candidate: Party:	Candidate: Party:
1. Strong and urgent action to reduce carbon emissions				
2. Enshrining in the constitution a voice for First Nations People				
3. Wage justice for people working in early years and aged care settings				
4. Re-framing men's violence against women and children				
5. Redesigning our childcare system				
6. Creating affordable housing for older women				
7. Ending the cruel treatment of asylum seekers				
8. Integrity and accountability of our elected representatives, public servants and political life				

✓ – candidate confirms to seek and act on a specific commitment

✗ – candidate does not commit to seek and act on a specific commitment

NR – candidate provides no response by deadline

Promoting candidate responses across your networks and beyond

The election is now only a matter of weeks away and your small group has the vital table which summarises information that other people are highly likely to find useful in deciding how they will vote.

There are various options available to you as to how best to share the information you collected from selected candidates:

1. Conversations. Conversations. Conversations.

Don't underestimate the power of conversation. You would probably be surprised to find how many conversational opportunities there are in your everyday life—with your family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues and community members every day until the election itself.

The important thing is to bring their attention to the summary table. Send it to them or give them a copy that you have been able to print off at home. The summary table is the key—a table tells a thousand words!

2. The conversational snowball effect!

For every one of these conversations you should urge others to do the same across their networks. Again, make sure they can bring the table to new eyes. In this way the reach and impact of the table of results becomes hugely extended in a short space of time.

3. Using your socials

Parts of social media get a bad wrap, but there is no doubt that social media has power and reach, especially when used with civility and respect. Facebook and Instagram tiles from our website will help you create social media posts about what you have found from the candidate screening process. Again the summary table is integral to these communications.

4. Send your summary table to us a.s.a.p.

Make sure you provide the *Matters That Count* project team with a copy of the results table so we can create a picture of activity nationwide. Our preferred way is for you to take a photo of your summary table, or scan it from home, and email it to

mattersthatcount@vwt.org.au

5. Bring your creative power to the task

You will no doubt think of other ways to share candidate responses which fit with your time and resources.

You will notice the following sentence on all the material we provide for you to use with candidates and when sharing candidate responses: "Authorised by Mary Crooks, Victorian Women's Trust, 200 Alexandra Pde Fitzroy Melbourne." In order to comply with Australian electoral law, this authorisation must feature in all *Matters That Count* communications you send out. Please do not remove it or modify it. It is there to protect you.

Keeping your elected local member accountable

Well done for taking part and completing the candidate screening exercise.

Give yourselves a pat on the back! You mustn't underestimate the value of doing this kind of work to maintain and enhance our democratic culture, let alone giving women a greater voice.

After the election, when the representatives assemble in our national parliament, the *Matters That Count* project team will release its guide as to how people can keep their elected members accountable over the term of the parliament.

Again, thank you for joining with us. Stay tuned!