

Foreword

The Commonwealth Charter sets out the values and principles that bind together one third of humanity in 53 member countries. The very first of the Charter's core values is Democracy, including our shared recognition of the inalienable right of all Commonwealth citizens to choose freely and fairly the representatives and leaders of the societies in which they live. Election management bodies play a critical role in protecting this right and deepening our shared democratic culture.

This Commonwealth compendium of good election management practice is a fresh initiative that sets out for the first time the key features expected to be found in all Commonwealth national election management bodies. In addition, the compendium reflects the diversity of our membership by also summarising the value of key provisions and individual characteristics that exist in each of our election management bodies. This provides the opportunity for election management bodies and other readers of this compendium to learn from each other – the very essence of sharing our common wealth.

Democracy itself – especially the institutions and processes that support it – is a work of constant evolution reflecting changing national circumstances over time. Lifting the quality and strengthening the relevance of our election management bodies is a continuing work-in-progress: all must strive to learn and apply the lessons from each new election and rise to the emergence of new challenges, including evolving information and communication technologies as well as increasing demands for greater transparency and integrity.

The development of this first edition of the Compendium as a handbook of electoral good practice has benefitted from the knowledge, experience and vigorous debate of senior officials from election management bodies across the Commonwealth. Fresh thinking has emerged from a series of Commonwealth expert working groups over recent years on a number of issues, including incumbency; campaign funding; voter education and participation; voter registration; the counting, tabulation and transmission of results, and the impact of social media. I commend the contribution of the Commonwealth Electoral Network, the forum through which our elections officials and experts work together.

We are confident that this compendium will contribute to raising and advancing the Commonwealth's vision of good electoral practice backed by practical advice and support.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations