

SCHOOLS' CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTIONS PROGRAM

For secondary schools

2014 HANDBOOK

Victoria

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Background

The Schools' Constitutional Conventions program started as an initiative of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation in 1995 to increase young Australians' knowledge about the Australian Constitution and the role it plays in our democracy. The first National Schools Constitutional Convention (NSCC) was held in 1995.

In Victoria, the program is managed through collaboration between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Social Education Victoria, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, Independent Schools Victoria and the Parliament of Victoria.

Designed for senior secondary (Years 9-12) students, the program consists of a series of Regional Conventions hosted by government and non-government schools, a State Convention held at Parliament House in September/October of each year and a National Convention held in Canberra during March or April of the *following* year.

Program aims

The Constitutional Convention Program aims are to:

- ☞ promote active citizenship, student representation and youth leadership
- ☞ provide students with opportunities to explore contemporary political and social issues
- ☞ promote student understanding of the Australian system of government and how the Australian Constitution provides the framework for our democracy
- ☞ encourage students to take an active interest in the traditions, processes and practices of government

The program has successfully engaged thousands of students from schools across the state and invites participation of students from a range of backgrounds and interests.

Although this program is perfect for students of Politics, Legal Studies, Humanities and English, it is also a great opportunity for students with a range of other interests. The program offers a wonderful chance for public speaking and is a natural fit for schools seeking an authentic and meaningful activity for their student leaders. The important underlying theme of the program is *student involvement* and host schools are encouraged to involve students across all stages of the program: the planning, organising and running of the Conventions.

About this handbook

Teachers who have previously participated in the Student Convention Program have developed very effective strategies to organise, manage and conduct the Regional Conventions. They have utilised different methods, such as dramatic presentations and the use of information technology, to bring their conventions to life.

This handbook has been prepared based on the ideas, suggestions and contributions from host school organisers. It contains strategies designed to reduce your workload, and recommends ways to encourage and facilitate student participation.

The Convention Planning Committee is made up of representatives from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Social Education Victoria, Parliament of Victoria and the Catholic and Independent school sectors. It provides an important role in overseeing the management of the program and has contributed some valuable insights to this handbook. Details of relevant contacts can be found on page 16 of this handbook.

A copy of the format for a Convention has been included as a further tool to assist in planning a program for the day.

Schools' Conventions – times and dates

Key Dates

- 📅 **Schools Regional Convention** Held March to 19 September 2014
- 📅 **State Convention** Monday 20 October 2014
- 📅 **National Convention** March 2015 (Canberra) TBC

Regional Conventions are usually held during Terms 1, 2 and Term 3. Students are advised to attend a Regional Convention (or a Model United Nations Conference) to be eligible to apply for attendance at the State Convention. Other ways students can progress to the State convention is through participation in VicSRC and YMCA Youth Parliament activities.

- 📅 A Regional Convention generally takes place over one day during school hours. If students are travelling from remote areas, the start and finish times need to be adjusted accordingly. **School bus schedules will need to be considered.**
- 📅 Try to ensure that participating schools complete the entire scheduled event. This will prevent the frustration of participants leaving prior to the voting and communiqué section of the event.
- 📅 The State Convention has been scheduled for Monday, 20 October 2014 and will be held at Parliament House, Melbourne.
- 📅 It is advisable that students attend a State Convention before applying for attendance at the National Convention (see VicSRC and YMCA participation exceptions).
- 📅 The 2015 National Convention will be held in Canberra in March. The actual dates are to be confirmed. This event is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education.

What is a regional school convention?

Conventions provide students with excellent opportunities to explore issues concerning Australia's system of government. In previous years, students have found that being involved in the organisation of Regional Conventions has broadened the relevance of their Civics and Citizenship Education (including knowledge of the Australian Constitution). Many issues discussed at the conventions address The Victorian curriculum (AusVELS) within the Interpersonal Development and Civics and Citizenship domains. Conventions should be open to Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 students, regardless of the subjects they are studying.

The Australian Constitution affects every Australian and it is important that all students have opportunities to become critically informed and active citizens.

The Schools Constitutional Convention Program is open to senior secondary school students (Years 9-12) from government and non-government schools. It provides a forum for discussing contemporary social issues, and especially those relating to Australia's Constitution. Topics in recent years have included discussions on whether Australia should become a Republic; if Australia needs a Bill of Rights; and if the Australian flag should be changed.

An overview of a Regional Convention program

- ☞ A school agrees to host a Regional Convention.
- ☞ The date, location and topics are determined and the event will be promoted on relevant websites including the participating schools, the DEECD and supporting organisations such as Social Education Victoria, Catholic Education Office and Independent Schools Victoria.
- ☞ Local schools are formally invited by the host school to send representatives. It is a good idea to send out some pre-reading/information relating to the topic so that students can prepare to discuss and debate the issue. This can take the form of newspaper

articles, cartoons, or web sites (a maximum of 120 students is recommended).

- ✎ Typically, guest speakers are invited to give a presentation on a selected topic to students.
- ✎ Students break into groups and discuss the issue.
- ✎ Informal discussion occurs over morning tea and/or lunch.
- ✎ Plenary/Reporting back to the group.
- ✎ Voting on the issue.
- ✎ Evaluation completed.

What are the benefits for students in participating in a convention?

Participation in conventions provides a range of benefits to students, allowing them to:

- ✎ experience what is meant by **active citizenship**
- ✎ develop important leadership skills, utilise initiative and build self confidence
- ✎ meet with a broad range of students and teachers from other schools
- ✎ employ public speaking and debating skills
- ✎ develop an understanding and appreciation of the Australian Constitution and how it affects their daily lives

- ✎ discuss contemporary issues that affect their lives and the life of the nation, such as reconciliation and the protection of various freedoms
- ✎ develop an understanding and appreciation of Australia's legal and political systems and how our system of government works

Examples of student involvement in Regional Conventions

Some examples of additional student involvement in conventions include:

- ✎ Business Studies classes have taken responsibility for letter-writing, sending invitations to schools, following-up invitations with telephone calls and preparing delegate name tags, program notes and other organisational logistics.
- ✎ Hospitality classes have planned and prepared lunch for delegates.
- ✎ Students in English classes have produced pre-reading information and have given brief talks on issues to be discussed at the convention.

Hosting a Regional Convention - possible topics

- ✎ Should the Legislative Council/Senate be reformed/abolished?
- ✎ Should rights, especially those of marginalised groups, be protected under the Australian Constitution? If so, how?
- ✎ Should Indigenous Australians be recognised in the Constitution?
- ✎ Can a citizen of Australia be a global citizen?
- ✎ Should people with dual citizenship be allowed to stand for Parliament?

- 🔖 Should we change the rules for asylum seekers?
- 🔖 Should the role of the Governor-General be reviewed?
- 🔖 How should we define nationhood in the 21st century?
- 🔖 Are all groups fairly represented in Parliament?
- 🔖 Should an Australian Bill of Rights incorporate special provision for youth?
- 🔖 How can the Constitution help ensure a fair, equitable and representative voting system?
- 🔖 Do we need three levels of Government, and if so, should they all be protected by the Constitution?
- 🔖 Should the Australian people be allowed to initiate referendums?
- 🔖 Should there be a new preamble to the Constitution?
- 🔖 Does our Constitution give us the best system of Government? If not, what can we do to improve it?
- 🔖 Should the Northern Territory become a State?
- 🔖 After 213 years of Federation, where to now?
- 🔖 How should rights be protected under the Constitution?

Hosting a Regional Convention

Preparing to host a Regional Convention

1. Getting started

- Contact coordinators of past conventions within your region for their assistance or to obtain details of their contacts and experiences.
- Decide on the date of your convention.
- Determine the issue to be investigated.
- Decide on speakers to address the convention. High-profile speakers can be a great draw card, especially if your choice of speakers and issue could lead to lively debate.
 - Speaker 1: _____
 - Speaker 2: _____
 - Speaker 3 : _____
- Send this information to:**

Social Education Victoria
Email: projects@sev.asn.au
Subject: Schools Constitutional Convention Program
- Develop a timeline for necessary actions.
- Contact as many local schools as you can. Broaden your feeder area as certain schools may find the timing and topic of your convention more suitable to their needs than that of a convention being held at a school nearer to them.
- Send an initial letter or fax to shortlisted/chosen schools, seeking the name of a contact person and indicating that you will be contacting the school if you have not heard from them by a specified date.
- Prepare and send an invitation with a brief outline of requirements and RSVP date. Promote your convention as a stepping-stone to the State Convention and the three-day, expenses-paid National Convention in Canberra.

- ❑ Speak directly with Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 Coordinators for best results. **This could be a task for a Student Planning Committee or Business Management students in your school** who are often seeking an opportunity to practise their telephone technique. It will save you time as well!

- ❑ If possible, students who have previously attended a National or State Convention could be asked to address staff and students at their school and other schools, to share their experiences at, and interest in, the conventions.

- ❑ Distribute information about your Regional Convention on a variety of youth forums and through student councils in other local schools.

2. Planning and organising a Regional Convention

Students are often keen to help you plan and organise the day. It's a case of good citizenship in action and shared responsibility!

Before the event, students can help with:

- Choosing the issue and developing the program
- Developing a list of planning tasks, timelines for achieving these tasks and identifying who is responsible for each
- Drafting letters
- Briefing presenters/speakers about their role
- Making contact with other schools, presenters/speakers
- Making venue arrangements
- Photocopying mail outs including pre-reading materials and lists of suitable web sites
- Preparing and photocopying the Student Workbook
- Preparing conference-style folders for participants
- Before the event, send each participant a copy of the program, with background information about speakers, copies of issues papers and a map of the school town with the venue highlighted
- Setting up the venue
- Organising a drama or PowerPoint presentation about the issue being presented at the Convention
- Ordering catering
- Confirming numbers attending
- Making nametags
- Preparing thank you letters
- Drafting a media release
- Other duties as needed

3. Student tasks on the day

Students can be involved in all areas of the day, including:

- Catering (whether it be a Home Economics activity or ordering lunch through the canteen or a local business)
- Greeting students, teachers and guests, and registration
- Welcoming guests
- Chairing the convention
- Introducing speakers
- Researching background information on speakers or an issue
- Taking minute/notes
- Photographing/videotaping the event
- Collecting and collating student evaluation forms

Useful tips and suggestions for managing a Regional Convention

-  Groups should be aware of the Constitution, available online at [http://www.aph.gov.au/About Parliament/Senate/Powers practice n procedures/Constitution](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/Constitution)
-  Invite the Principal to open/close the convention.
-  Provide catering.
-  Be **very specific** about what students are expected to discuss.
-  Invite drama students to prepare a short presentation about the issue and use it as an introduction to the day's program. Music (student bands or invited performers) can also be a great way to kick off proceedings.

- 📌 Coordinate student arrivals and direct participants to the venue.
- 📌 Organise a barbecue lunch or something similar, which generally helps students socialise.
- 📌 Use coloured stickers to designate discussion groups. Use this opportunity to mix schools within these groups.
- 📌 Try to ensure that some students do not *dominate* discussion. Encourage all voices to be heard.
- 📌 Make sure you have sufficient butcher's paper, pens, markers and other resources for students to use.
- 📌 Have evaluation sheets **completed and collected on the day of the convention.**
- 📌 Prepare Regional Convention Program Student Workbook. A sample can be found at the end of this document. The sample workbook is intended to provide convention organisers with a model of how they might configure workbook material for a student convention participant.

Online resources

Students and teachers can prepare for conventions by visiting the following websites:

Civics and Citizenship domain page on the DEECD website:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/civicscitizenship/support.htm>

Parliament of Australia website:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/>

The Parliamentary Education Office Canberra website:

<http://www.peo.gov.au/>

Victorian Electoral Commission website:

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/>

Australian Electoral Commission website:

<http://www.aec.gov.au/>

Civics and Citizenship Wiki, containing:

<http://civics-citizenship.wikispaces.com/>

Student Conventions Wordpress

<http://studentconventions.wordpress.com/school-constitutional-conventions/>

National Convention Blog

<http://nationalschoolsconvention.global2.vic.edu.au>

The SEV Model Citizen Project

<http://www.sev.asn.au/model-citizen/>

Contact for information about, and support of, your regional convention

Social Education Victoria

Email: projects@sev.asn.au

Subject: Schools Constitutional Convention Program

Progressing to the State and National Conventions

State Convention

The Application Form for the State Convention will be available in due course online at <http://civics-citizenship.wikispaces.com/>. It should be made available to all students participating in Regional Conventions. Students are asked to submit their applications via the online link (to be confirmed).

The closing date for applications is Friday 5th September.

(Please note: the State Convention has been scheduled for Monday 20 October 2014).

National Convention

Applications for the National Convention are distributed at the State Convention. Students are selected from the government, independent and Catholic schools sectors by way of a written application or an audio/visual report, similar to that required for the State Convention. Students must be in Years 10, 11 or 12 in the year they attend the National Convention.

See these links for active student citizenship information and AV project ideas and stimulus from around the world:

Young Citizens' Action Event

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzbFX5Acyhw>

Active citizenship education project

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRUmq0lgy5Y&feature=related>

Australian university students' project on C&C

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1h8uJvVWkU>

Civitas is kids who think!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ekxIVvuNBw>

Funding is provided to cover student travel to Canberra, accommodation and meals.

School Convention Evaluation Information

Thank you for your support in hosting a Regional Constitutional Convention in 2014. This program provides a focus for Civics and Citizenship education as well as important opportunities for senior secondary students to meet and discuss contemporary social and political issues. The program has now been supported by the Victorian and Australian government for 17 years and culminates in State and National Constitutional Conventions.

A key part of the 2014 program is the collection of data related to the conduct and effectiveness of Regional Conventions.

The three aspects of data collection are:

- 📄 Host school evaluation
- 📄 Participating schools (students and teachers) feedback
- 📄 Independent evaluation conducted in person or by phone

Evaluation forms are included in order to gain feedback about your convention. An independent evaluator will contact you to make arrangements to discuss your program. Evaluation forms can be found below.

Host School Regional Convention Evaluation Form

Please complete this form electronically as soon as possible after your convention has been conducted and return it to:

Social Education Victoria
150 Palmerston St,
Carlton, VIC 3053

or via email at admin@sev.asn.au

Host School name:	
Suburb/Town	

Contact person:	
------------------------	--

Contact email:	
-----------------------	--

Convention date:	
-------------------------	--

Convention venue:	
--------------------------	--

Convention topic:	
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Please attach additional information such as your press release, photographs, media releases, communiqué, student evaluation forms, etc.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Schools attending your convention

Name of school	Contact teacher phone number	Number of students attending	Sector: Catholic, Government, independent

2. General description of the event, agenda for the day, key speakers and processes used to engage students. Please attach any documentation used or developed for the event.

3. How would you rate the success of your Convention overall?

- Very successful
- Generally successful
- Satisfactory but needs work
- Didn't achieve our aims

4. What is this assessment based on?

5. What challenges were associated with hosting the Convention? How were these managed or overcome?

6. How does this activity compliment your school curriculum priorities and student learning outcomes?

7. What pre-Convention preparation did students and teachers undertake? How were students involved in the planning, organisation and management of the event?

8. How useful was the Convention Handbook for your planning and preparation?

Very useful Useful but needs more work Not Useful

Any elaborations on where the handbook was most useful or any suggestions or recommendations for how it could be improved:

9. If you were organising a similar event in the future what changes would you make or what advice could you offer to help other schools?

*****END OF HOST SCHOOL EVALUATION FORM *****

Thanks for your feedback

Participating School Regional Convention Evaluation Form

Participating school :		
Suburb/Town		Date:

Convention attended:	
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Convention host school:	
Suburb/Town	

Evaluating teacher:	
----------------------------	--

Teacher' email:	
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EVALUATION

Please rate the following elements of the Convention according to the following scale

1 – Strongly Agree 2 – Mostly Agree 3 – Could have been better 4 – Disagree

Before the Convention

- I was provided with enough information about the Convention.
- Students were provided with enough information about the Convention.
- Information provided about the Convention was clear and informative.

At the Convention

- I found the speakers to be informative and enjoyed their presentations.

- Students found the speakers to be informative and enjoyed their presentations.
- I found the discussions and deliberations to be engaging.
- Students found the discussions and deliberations to be engaging.
- The Convention was an effective forum for addressing student learning outcomes.
- Overall I enjoyed the Convention.
- Overall the students enjoyed the Convention.

After the Convention

- My school is able to build on and complement this experience.
- I will incorporate this experience into my teaching and professional development.

Comments

What was the most beneficial aspect of the Convention?

Are there any aspects of the Convention that you felt could be improved?

*****Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire*****

Sample Regional Convention Program Student Workbook

SCHOOLS' REGIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Student Workbook



TOPIC:

DATE:

LOCATION:

STUDENT NAME: _____

Sample Program for the Day

9:30am - 9:50am	Registration
9.50am - 10:00am	Opening Address conducted by a principal, mayor etc)
10:00am - 10:35am	1 st Keynote Speaker: including 5min Q&A
10:35am - 11:00am	Morning Tea (provided)
11:00am - 11:30am	2 nd Keynote Speaker: including 5min Q&A
11:30am - 12:00pm	Facilitated General Q&A about issue for whole group (possibly including a panel of people)
	Explanation about the next phase of the day
12:00pm -12:30pm	Discussion Groups
12:30pm - 12:50pm	Plenary Session
12:50pm - 1:25pm	Lunch (provided)
1:25pm - 2:15pm	Final resolutions, construction of communiqués to send to relevant people in positions of authority
2:15pm - 2:25pm	Evaluation forms completed
2:25pm - 2:30pm	Closing address including Invitation to State Convention

You may wish to include a location map of the school or other details regarding where to go on arrival.

Background Information

- ✎ Students will participate in a Regional Convention on **INSERT DATE**.

- ✎ Students who participate at this level are then eligible to apply to participate at the State Constitutional Convention (held in the Legislative Assembly Chamber, Parliament House Victoria) and the National Convention (Canberra).

- ✎ The issue this year is **INSERT TOPIC**. Prior to the Convention students should research the topic so as to have a basic understanding of the issue being discussed.

- ✎ At the event students will have the opportunity to listen to a debate on the issue. Two speakers will present differing viewpoints.

- ✎ To gain the most from this session **students should take notes whilst listening**. Following the session students will move into discussion groups to complete group work. This information will be presented to the rest of the participants. This will be followed by another speaker from the **INSERT SPEAKER** who will conduct a referendum. Finally, students will hear from peers who have applied for and attended a National Constitutional Convention in Canberra.

Hints for Students

- 📖 There is a variety of valuable skills and information you can acquire from a day like this. The key is to be receptive to everything. Keep an open and inquisitive mind. Be as observant as you can. Learn from what you see and hear around you.

- 📖 This is a great opportunity to watch professional speakers live. Look at how the speakers present. Observe the way they structure arguments, for example, what they do when emphasising a point. . Be analytical. Pick out what you like and dislike from each presentation style.

- 📖 At university you will be responsible for your own notes; therefore you will need to develop the skill of listening to the lecturer speak and writing down what you hear at the same time. At the convention the speakers will present their arguments. Practice your note taking.

- 📖 The skill of working in groups with other people is indispensable, and is one you will continually use throughout your schooling, at university and in your professional lives. This is an excellent opportunity to practice your group working skills. Be interested and considerate. Listen to other viewpoints respectfully and have the confidence to make your own point heard.

TOPIC:

OVERVIEW:

ARGUMENTS FOR:

ARGUMENTS AGAINST:

Note Taking Page

Speaker One:

Speaker Two:

Plenary session:

Resolutions:

Acknowledgements

These details offer ideas for students who are helping to organise and present the event and those involved in the final wrap up of the day.

Master of Ceremonies

Keynote Speakers

(Names and contact details where appropriate)

Teacher and Student Delegates

(Names of schools and teacher contacts)

Acknowledgement of Event Organisers