



## Electoral Commission of South Australia **Election Funding – Public Funding Guide**

## Contents

<b>Purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Introduction to public funding.....	5
Types of funding available.....	5
<b>Eligibility .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Political parties .....	6
Candidates .....	6
Groups.....	6
<b>State campaign accounts.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Key requirements .....	7
Money that must be deposited .....	7
Money that must <i>not</i> be deposited .....	7
<b>Funding entitlement .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Funding entitlements by participant type for a general election .....	8
Funding entitlements by participant type for a by-election .....	8
Payment of public funding .....	8
Advance funding for campaign activities .....	9
Overpayment .....	9
Claims subject to review post payment .....	9
<b>Glossary of key terms.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Related guides .....</b>	<b>10</b>

## Purpose

This guide assists political parties, candidates (including groups of candidates), and their agents in understanding their general entitlement to public funding under Part 13A of the [Electoral Act 1985](#) (the Act) and the relevant provisions of the [Electoral Regulations 2024](#) (Regulations).

The information provided in this guide is general in nature. While the Electoral Commission of South Australia (ECSA) can offer guidance on its administrative approach to Part 13A, it cannot provide legal advice.

Stakeholders should refer to the specific wording of the Act and Regulations and seek independent legal or professional advice for any matters requiring interpretation.

**Note:** This guide deals only with *public funding*. Separate guides are available for *administrative expenditure funding*, *advance funding* and *policy development funding*.

## Summary

Public funding is available to registered political parties, candidates, and groups participating in an election who:

- are elected, or
- receive a minimum percentage of formal first preference votes in the district contested:
  - At least 4% for candidates contesting a House of Assembly (HA) seat
  - At least 2% for candidates or groups contesting a Legislative Council (LC) seat.

To receive funding, eligible participants must also provide satisfactory evidence of political expenditure incurred.

Expenditure caps apply to candidates and vary depending on:

- whether the candidate is endorsed by a registered political party
- whether the candidate is contesting a seat in the HA or LC.

Advance payment of public funding (advance funding) to assist candidates and parties with campaign costs is available under section 130PF of the Act. This is addressed in a separate guide.

## Overview

### Introduction to public funding

Public funding supports registered political parties, candidates, and groups in covering costs associated with state election campaigns and by-elections. The amount of funding is calculated per eligible vote and varies depending on the participant's type and parliamentary status.

Under section 130P of the Act, a general entitlement to public funding is established for:

- registered political parties
- independent members
- candidates and groups contesting elections.

### Types of funding available

There are 2 funding streams available:

- **Public funding** (post-election) – to support campaign costs, conditional on lodging either:
  - a certificate under section 130PF, or
  - a certificate under section 130Q, lodged within 14 days after polling day.
- **Advance funding** – to support campaign costs, conditional on lodging:
  - a certificate under section 130PF.

**Note:** This guide deals only with *public funding*. Separate guides are available for *administrative expenditure funding*, *advance funding* and *policy development funding*.

### Important note:

- Under section 130Q of the Act, a registered political party is not entitled to public funding unless it has been registered for at least 8 months before polling day.
- This requirement also affects advance payments under section 130PF; however, new parties may be eligible for independent candidate entitlements.
- In all cases, the amount received must not exceed the relevant expenditure cap.

## Eligibility

Eligibility criteria vary depending on whether the participant is a political party, candidate, or group. In all cases, eligibility requires:

- submission of a capped expenditure period return, and
- lodgement of either:
  - a certificate under section 130PF, or
  - a certificate under section 130Q, lodged within 14 days after polling day.

### Political parties

A party qualifies for public funding if it:

- has been registered for at least:
  - 8 months prior to polling day, and
- meets the lodgement requirements (submission of a capped expenditure period return and lodgement of either a certificate under section 130PF or a certificate under section 130Q within 14 days after polling day), and
- has candidates elected or receives at least:
  - 4% of the total first preference votes in a House of Assembly election, or
  - 2% of the total first preference votes in a Legislative Council election.

**Note:** Under section 130PF of the Act, new parties may be eligible for advance funding as independents. This provision applies to advance payments only. The 8-month registration requirement continues to apply for public funding after polling day (section 130Q).

### Candidates

A candidate qualifies for public funding if they:

- are elected, or
- in a House of Assembly (HA) election, receive at least 4% of the total primary votes, or
- in a Legislative Council (LC) election, receive at least 2% of the total primary votes, and
- meet the lodgement requirements above.

**Note:** Under section 130PF of the Act, new candidates may be eligible for a set amount of advance funding. This provision applies to advance payments only. Full public funding after polling day (section 130Q) requires:

- Election, or
- Receiving at least 4% of the total first preference votes in a HA election, or
- Receiving at least 2% of the total first preference votes in an LC election,

in addition to meeting the lodgement requirements.

### Groups

A group qualifies for public funding if:

- at least one member of the group is elected, or
- the group receives at least 2% of the total primary votes, and
- meets the lodgement requirements above.

## State campaign accounts

A state campaign account is a dedicated financial institution account that must be used by political participants in South Australian state elections to manage donations, public funding, and political expenditure. These accounts are required for candidates, groups, and registered political parties.

### Key requirements

- The state campaign account must be established with an authorised deposit-taking institution (ADI).

A list of ADIs can be found on the [APRA Register of Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions](#).

- The account must be registered with ECSA:
  - The Electoral Commissioner maintains a register of state campaign accounts
  - The account must be listed on the register before it can be used.
  - Agents are responsible for account details, including:
    - Account name and number.
    - Agent responsible for the account.
    - Any other details required by the Electoral Commissioner.

### Money that must be deposited

- Public funding payments.
- Donations received (unless unlawful, not electoral donations or excluded by regulation).
- Funds for political expenditure or reimbursement.
- For mixed-purpose payments, only the portion for political expenditure must be deposited.

### Money that must *not* be deposited

- Administrative or policy development payments.
- Transfers from federal campaign accounts under the [Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918](#).

**Note:** If money is mistakenly deposited, it is not an offence, if the agent takes reasonable steps to withdraw it immediately upon becoming aware of the error.

## Funding entitlement

Public funding is calculated per eligible vote and varies depending on the type of participant and their parliamentary status at the time of dissolution. This includes both HA and LC elections.

There are 2 types of entitlements:

- **Standard:** A fixed rate per vote.
- **Tapered:** A higher rate for the first 10% of votes, then a lower rate thereafter.

### Funding entitlements by participant type for a general election

Participant type	Entitlement type	Funding rate (2026 indexed)
Candidate or group endorsed by a registered party with at least one MP at dissolution	Standard	\$5.50 per eligible vote
Candidate or group endorsed by a registered party with no MPs at dissolution	Tapered	\$6.00 per vote for first 10% of total primary votes \$5.50 per vote thereafter
Independent candidate with a sitting MP at dissolution	Standard	\$8.50 per eligible vote
Other independent candidates or groups	Tapered	\$9.00 per vote for first 10% of total primary votes \$8.50 per vote thereafter

### Funding entitlements by participant type for a by-election

Participant type	Entitlement type	Funding rate (2026 indexed)
Candidate endorsed by a registered party with at least one MP at time of event resulting in the vacancy	Standard	\$8.50 per eligible vote
Any other candidate or group	Tapered	\$9.00 per vote for first 10% of total primary votes \$8.50 per vote thereafter

### Payment of public funding

- Funding payment is limited to the lesser of the calculated public funding entitlement or the actual political expenditure incurred.
- No payments will be made without satisfactory evidence of campaign-related costs and submission of capped expenditure period return.
- Payments are indexed annually in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Election funding is paid to the appointed agent of a registered political party, independent candidate, or group, and must be deposited into the state campaign account.
- Payment will be made within 120 days after polling day, following the acceptance of the capped expenditure period return.
- The payment will be reduced by any amount that has been paid as an advance payment of funding.



## Advance funding for campaign activities

Under section 130PF of the Act, eligible candidates, groups, and registered political parties may apply for advance funding to support campaign activities prior to polling day.

To receive advance funding, participants must:

- lodge a certificate of intent with the Electoral Commissioner.
- meet the eligibility criteria for public funding.
- use funds strictly for political expenditure.

Advance payments are subject to reconciliation after the election. The Electoral Commissioner may require repayment of advance payments in certain circumstances.

See our [advance funding page](#) on the ECSA website for more information.

## Overpayment

If ECSA determines that an overpayment has occurred and varies its decision, any excess amount may be recovered as a debt owed to the State.

## Claims subject to review post payment

ECSA may review a claim for election funding made by registered political parties, candidates, or groups. The party agent or candidate agent must assist ECSA in conducting the review by providing full and free access at all reasonable times to:

- all accounts, records, documents and papers of the party agent and of the party or candidate, as applicable, relating directly or indirectly to the expenditure referred to in the claim.
- all information and explanations that ECSA reasonably requests with respect to the expenditure referred to in the claim.

If, upon review, ECSA is satisfied that an overpayment has occurred and decides to vary the decision, the excess funds paid must be recovered as a debt to the State.

## Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition
<b>Act</b>	The <i>Electoral Act 1985</i> , which governs public funding, expenditure caps, and disclosure obligations.
<b>Advance funding</b>	Funding provided before polling day to eligible political participants to support campaign-related expenses, conditional on lodging a certificate under section 130PF.
<b>Agent</b>	A person appointed to manage financial matters and lodge disclosure returns on behalf of a party, candidate, group, third party, or associated entity.
<b>Capped expenditure period</b>	The period during which expenditure caps apply: Begins 1 July before a general election or on the day a by-election is announced and ends 30 days after polling day.
<b>Consumer Price Index (CPI)</b>	The measure used to index funding entitlements annually to reflect inflation.
<b>Disclosure return</b>	A financial report lodged with the Electoral Commissioner detailing amounts received, debts incurred, and compliance declarations.

Term	Definition
<b>Electoral Commissioner</b>	The official responsible for administering funding entitlements, assessing claims, and requiring repayment where necessary.
<b>Electoral donation</b>	A donation made to support political expenditure or electoral participation, subject to prescribed disclosure requirements.
<b>Eligible vote</b>	A formal first preference vote cast for a candidate, group, or party that meets the threshold for public funding.
<b>Expenditure cap</b>	The maximum amount of political expenditure allowed during the capped expenditure period, varying by participant type and election.
<b>Group</b>	A group of candidates contesting a Legislative Council election under a shared banner or identity.
<b>Independent candidate</b>	A candidate not endorsed by a registered political party.
<b>Political expenditure</b>	Generally, means expenditure incurred for the dominant purpose of creating or communicating electoral matter. For further information, see the <i>Political Expenditure Guide</i> and Part 13A of the Act.
<b>Public funding</b>	Financial support provided to eligible electoral participants based on vote share, subject to conditions under Part 13A.
<b>Registered political party</b>	A party registered under the Act and eligible for public funding, administrative support, and policy development funding.
<b>Regulations</b>	The <i>Electoral Regulations 2024</i> , which provide additional detail and procedural requirements under the Act.
<b>Repayment of funds</b>	The requirement to return advance funding or public funding in circumstances where eligibility is not met or expenditure is found to be ineligible.
<b>State campaign account</b>	A dedicated bank account used to manage donations, public funding, and political expenditure for state elections.
<b>Tapered entitlement</b>	A funding model that provides a higher rate for the first 10% of votes, then a lower rate thereafter.

## Related guides

Separate guides are available for the following funding streams:

- Administrative Funding Guide – entitlement for operational and compliance costs.
- Advance Funding Guide – entitlement to receive funding prior to election expenditure.
- Policy Development Funding Guide – entitlement to support the formulation of party policies.
- **Public Funding Guide – entitlement based on vote share and campaign expenditure.**

## Document version control

Version	Date	Author	Reason for update
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