

Meeting Summary

Advisory Committee of Political Parties

February 2–3, 2022

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Summary of Meeting of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties

Meeting Summary

The Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) convened on February 2–3, 2022, for a virtual post-general election (GE) meeting. The objective was to update committee members on the activities that Elections Canada (EC) conducted in the 44th General Election (GE) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to obtain their feedback and suggestions based on their experiences. EC also discussed the Recommendations Report of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) and provided an update on the status of political financing activities and an overview of the regulatory policy program. Finally, parties were informed of the process of redistribution of federal electoral districts, which will require members' involvement at a later stage.

This summary follows the order of the meeting agenda included in [Appendix A](#). The list of participants is included in [Appendix B](#).

Introductory Remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer

The CEO made opening remarks, offering retrospective highlights from the 44th GE. Mr. Perrault indicated that planning an election during the pandemic created challenges in the following four areas: recruitment, serving vulnerable electors, renting polling places and voting by mail.

The CEO reminded members that he made recommendations to Parliament before the election, which gave rise to bill C-19. He indicated that, although bill C-19 didn't align with all of his recommendations and the bill did not pass, he has the capacity to temporarily adapt legislation in exceptional circumstances and could use this authority during the election to make some changes due to the pandemic.

The CEO reviewed key data from the 44th GE and underlined the unprecedented accuracy and coverage of the National Register of Electors in recent years, especially considering the challenges posed by the pandemic. He noted that an exceptionally high number of candidates (2,010) had been confirmed in this election.

The CEO remarked that data shows that, although the GE happened during the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, the election was managed safely and didn't contribute to COVID-19 outbreaks, except at one returning office after the election. However, because the election was called at the start of the fourth wave, many landlords who had previously agreed to lease spaces to returning officers (ROs) to use

as polling locations and offices changed their minds. This had a significant impact on the logistics of the election; ROs needed to find new locations. As a result, there were delays in sending voter information cards in some areas.

Mr. Perrault indicated that recruiting workers was slow early on, but caught up in time for advance polls. The average age of poll workers was lowered during this election, which is a first in the CEO's memory. He noted that, as a result of the pandemic, some services to electors were reduced when compared to the 43rd GE. This had an impact on the elector experience and on the election as a whole.

The CEO expressed that the decrease in the voter turnout was anticipated due to the pandemic. He also noted that many electors voted in advance or by mail in their own electoral district, but some of the ballots were returned late. Mr. Perrault pointed out that there was some misunderstanding in the media around the issue of cancelled ballots. He clarified that the increase in cancelled ballots was largely attributable to the fact that EC allowed electors who had not been able to mail in their special ballot to change their plans and vote at the polls in person instead if they felt their mail-in ballot would not arrive on time. In those cases, the elector's special ballot application was cancelled.

The CEO shared positive highlights from the last GE. He stated that the election had been conducted almost entirely remotely and in a manner that was safe for voters and poll workers, that adapted voting services were successfully offered at long-term care facilities, that vote by mail was set up in less than six months, that 200,000 electoral workers were recruited despite the fourth wave of the pandemic, that great creativity was exercised in the search for polling places and that the organization created a team tasked with tracking and coordinating information, health measures and policies related to the pandemic.

The CEO took the opportunity to elaborate on key issues that were faced during this election, including the issues in Kenora and in First Nations communities. He indicated that, on average, 57% of reserves had an on-reserve polling station. He noted that, due to various issues such as natural disasters and the pandemic, the remaining 274 First Nations communities were assigned an election day polling station off their reserve at varying distance. The CEO expressed that EC is determined to increase this number. He explained how geography and the complexity of relations are the biggest factors to consider in order to solve this issue. More information can be found on this matter in the [Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021](#). Mr. Perrault expressed the need to review how EC engages First Nation communities, both between and during elections, and he informed the committee that this would be a priority for EC in the future.

The CEO closed off his opening remarks by asked participants to share their questions and comments.

During the question session, participants agreed that the issues faced by First Nations communities regarding access to voting was urgent and needed to be addressed. The CEO took note of a suggestion made regarding security considerations for candidates

that were up for nomination. EC also heard that some ACP members felt that the *Canada Elections Act* should be revised by an independent committee rather than by members of Parliament. When asked, the CEO indicated that he would likely continue recommending a longer minimum election period for snap elections. Participants asked if financial agents at EC could receive more training on the financing rules for parties (especially for reporting). EC heard this and noted that more training could be provided on financial rules.

Updates on Political Financing

Presenter: Josée Villeneuve, Senior Director, Political Financing

Ms. Villeneuve reported on the audit activities that EC conducted in the 43rd GE. She indicated that all audit activities had been completed for candidates, parties and third parties but that, if there were unpaid claims and loans, candidates would have three years, or until October 20, 2022, to pay off their debts. She shared the main findings from the candidate electoral returns, such as the most common issues. For instance, though no systemic problems of compliance were identified, her team noticed failures to comply with reporting requirements and misclassifications of expenses in the returns.

Ms. Villeneuve briefed the committee on the first ever survey of official agents, noting that the [Survey](#) is available on EC's website.

In looking at the 44th GE, Ms. Villeneuve pointed out that EC was in the process of receiving candidate and third-party returns. She indicated that only 39% of returns were considered complete or partially complete. The rest were either incomplete (missing documents), under review or not yet submitted. She informed ACP members that, with less than half of the submissions complete, this may affect our ability to issue accelerated reimbursements quickly and to complete the audits within 12 months. Ms. Villeneuve spoke about the new monitoring tool that was launched in December 2021 within the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC) to facilitate compliance with filing requirements.

Ms. Villeneuve informed members that, for the triennial exercise, EC reviewed the process and adopted a more targeted approach that balances risks against the burden on parties. All parties continue to be required to submit at least 250 valid member declarations using the prescribed form by June 30, 2022. Then, parties will be deemed to have fulfilled their requirements if they meet one of the following factors:

1. They have at least one elected member in the House of Commons at the time of the triennial review exercise.
2. They have met the threshold for the requirement to file quarterly returns (meaning that they had at least 2% of the vote nationwide or 5% of the vote in the electoral districts in which they had candidates).
3. They had at least 250 contributors or raised at least \$100,000 in the year preceding the triennial exercise.

Parties that do not meet one of these factors would be subject to further verification of confirmation.

Ms. Villeneuve remarked that the Electoral District Association (EDA) training offers a combination of modules that are self-paced, online live sessions and Q&A sessions with subject matter experts. She then fielded questions of precision from participants. EC committed to following up in writing with ACPD members on this topic.

Recommendations Report

Presenter: Anne Lawson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Ms. Lawson presented an overview of the CEO's recommendations that could affect the activities of political parties and she plans to table the report in early spring. She reminded participants that the CEO had intended to table the report in spring 2021, but that EC adjusted its priorities to ensure that an election could be delivered safely to all Canadians. With this in mind, she indicated that the report would include recommendations from the CEO and the Commissioner arising from the 43rd GE and the post-election period, EC's consultations on political communications from 2020–2021 and the 44th GE.

Ms. Lawson explained that participants were going to be divided into three breakout sessions to discuss 12 different areas that the CEO was exploring for his recommendations. The possible recommendations discussed were as follows:

- Pre-registration of candidates
- Shorter time period for payment of candidates' unpaid claims and loans
- Longer election period for elections without a fixed date
- Vote by mail: return of special ballots, voting in person on polling day and time allocated to counting ballots
- Weekend vote (Saturday and Sunday)
- Potential conflict of fixed-date election with religious holidays
- Transparency with respect to all communications of registered political entities (including third parties)
- Accessibility, transparency and searchability of digital ad registries
- Prohibiting communications undermining trust in the voting process

Regulatory Policy Function

Presenters: Anne Lawson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, and Josée Leblanc, Acting Senior Director, Integrity, Regulatory Policy and Parliamentary

Ms. Lawson informed ACPD that, as of April 1, 2020, a new regulatory policy team has been established at EC to develop principle-based instruments to help define and govern EC's administration of the *Canada Elections Act* (the Act) in the key areas of

electoral operations and political finance. The objective is to provide predictability, accountability, efficiency, clarity and transparency on how the agency operates, aligned with the Act and guided by EC's Electoral Integrity Framework.

Ms. LeBlanc provided examples of regulatory policies to ACPP participants that are likely to become the subject of discussions in the future, including the service and staffing model at the polls, vote counting and results reporting (including the role of observers), the registration and deregistration processes for political entities and the delivery of additional special ballot services (e.g. Vote on Campus).

The presenters indicated that the next steps in policy development were to finalize the forward policy agenda, consult with external stakeholders on policy areas, continue drafting policy instruments and share the forward policy agenda with ACPP in June for discussion.

The CEO highlighted that EC's goal with this process is to ensure the regulatory policies remain transparent and accessible.

Electoral Redistribution Process

Presenter: Pierre Desjardins, Senior Director, Electoral Distribution

Mr. Desjardins briefed ACPP on the process of redistribution of federal electoral districts, which happens every decennial year after the Census and is led by independent provincial commissions. He explained that the process was launched in November 2021, and that the results could be implemented as early as April 2024. He informed members that Canadians and political parties could participate in the process through public hearings, which are scheduled to start as early as April 2022 and end by December 2022 at the latest. Mr. Desjardins directed ACPP participants to the redistribution website where more information can be found: www.redistribution2022.ca.

Mr. Desjardins fielded the few questions of clarification that participants asked.

Closing Remarks and Forward Calendar

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer and Susan Torosian, Executive Director, Public Affairs and Civic Education

Ms. Torosian and the CEO made closing remarks, before she presented the forward calendar. Ms. Torosian pointed to the agency's priorities, including closing the 44th GE, planning the ACPP Annual General Meeting in June 2022, giving information to political parties on the implications of the *Accessibility Canada Act*, creating a system to allow electors who are visually impaired to vote independently, working on the policy forward

agenda, implementing the agency's digital transformation and focusing on the review of the First Nations Program.

After Ms. Torosian presented the forward calendar, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m. on February 3, 2022.

Appendix

Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

Day 1: February 2, 2022

12:30–1:00 p.m.	Sound and video check (ACPP participants)
1:00–1:15 p.m.	Logistics and housekeeping
1:15–1:55 p.m.	Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer
1:55–2:55 p.m.	Open round table on the 44th general election
2:55–3:25 p.m.	Break
3:25–3:55 p.m.	Updates on political financing
3:55–4:05 p.m.	Wrap-up

Day 2: February 3, 2022

12:30–1:00 p.m.	Sound and video check (ACPP participants)
1:00–1:05 p.m.	Agenda and objectives
1:05–2:55 p.m.	Consultation on the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations
2:55–3:25 p.m.	Break
3:25–3:55 p.m.	Regulatory policy function
3:55–4:40 p.m.	Information session on the electoral redistribution process
4:40–5:00 p.m.	Closing remarks and forward calendar
5:00 p.m.	Adjournment

Appendix B: List of Participants

ACPP representatives

Liz White	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Stephen Best	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Josée Beaudin	Bloc Québécois
Sylvain Gauthier	Bloc Québécois
Mitesh Joshi	CFF – Direct Democracy Party
Partap Dua	CFF – Direct Democracy Party
Ken Stouffer	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Rod Taylor	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Elizabeth Rowley	Communist Party of Canada
Jay Watts	Communist Party of Canada
Keith Sheppard	Conservative Party of Canada
Trevor Bailey	Conservative Party of Canada
Jeannôt Guillemette	Free Party Canada
Richard Magnan	Free Party Canada
Deepasha Gupta	Green Party of Canada
Robin Marty	Green Party of Canada
Azam Ishmael	Liberal Party of Canada
John Arnold	Liberal Party of Canada
Coreen Corcoran	Libertarian Party of Canada
Jacques Y Boudreau	Libertarian Party of Canada
Danny Légaré	Marijuana Party
Lori Montmarquette	Marijuana Party
Anna Di Carlo	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Christian Legeais	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Alvin Knibbs	Maverick Party

Elections Canada staff present for the duration or part of the meeting

Barisonzi, Marcello
 Bazinet, Denis
 Blais, Nathalie A.
 Borutskie, Dawn
 Brydon, Dianne
 Caron, Serge
 Cattan, Soraya
 Chang, Chih
 Desbiens, Céline
 Desjardins, Pierre
 Dunlop, Jane
 Duquette, Danielle

Fischer, Daniel
Gauthier, Natasha
Gedna, Edwidge
Girouard, Olivier
Henley, Cyntia
Hopfner, Joseph
Jacmain, Sylvie
Jorgenson, Paul
Kashmeri, Shireen
Kluke, Tamara
Knight, Trevor
Lafèche, Annie
Laliberté, Michelle
Langlois, George
Lapp, Miriam
Lavoie, Mario
Larrivée, Daniel
Lawson, Anne
Leblanc, Josée
Legault, Paul
Lewis, Nathalie
Litowski, Anne
Martineau, Jérémie
Martineau, Sophie
Messier, Maxime
Morin, Jean-François
Morris, Christopher
Paquette, Stacey
Perrault, Stéphane
Raatikainen, Mira
Ray, Jonathan
Robertson, Shawn
Roussel, Michel
Sampson, Robert
Sloan, Nicole
Torosian, Susan
Tyrie, Steven
Wise, Melanie

Meeting facilitator

Alain Rabeau, Principal, Senior Consultant, Facilitator and Trainer, Intersol Group