

Advisory Committee of Political Parties

MEETING SUMMARY

Annual General MeetingJune 8, 2015

Meeting Summary

The objective of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of June 8, 2015, was to provide updates on Elections Canada's (EC) preparation for the upcoming 2015 general election.

This summary follows the order of the Agenda included as Appendix A. A list of the participants is included in Appendix B.

Introductory Remarks and Report by the Chief Electoral Officer

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Marc Mayrand, welcomed members of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) to their 2015 AGM. He noted that this is probably the last face-to-face meeting before the next general election, and he recognized the new participants. He also provided an update on EC's preparations leading up to the next general election.

Update on ACPP activities

ACPP members met for their AGM in October 2014, and again in December 2014, when a second general meeting took place to finalize the Opinions, Guidelines and Interpretation Notes (OGI) process, the OGI Steering Committee mandate, and the ACPP Terms of Reference.

ACPP meeting summaries are now available on the EC website, in a new section dedicated to advisory groups.

A technical briefing was also held in January 2015, to support the operation of the OGI Steering Committee. A great amount of work is being done on OGIs.

A teleconference was held in May 2015 with ACPP members to inform them about plans for the by-elections taking place in the electoral districts of Ottawa West–Nepean, Peterborough and Sudbury – all in Ontario.

Update on election readiness

As we are now no more than a few months away from the start of a federal general election, EC has reached a readiness state. All returning officers are appointed and in a state of readiness, potential offices and points of service have been identified, returning officers are now assigning polling places for polling divisions, voting location accessibility has been assessed, and field technology has been tested.

Redistribution - Schedule 3

As a result of the October 2013 representation order, which increased the number of electoral districts from 308 to 338, the list of districts that make up Schedule 3 must be updated.

Electoral districts in Schedule 3 are generally very large or have restricted transportation and communication networks. Therefore, candidates in these districts are required to obtain only 50 electors' signatures on their nomination paper (instead of 100).

The list of electoral districts making up Schedule 3 must be published in the *Canada Gazette* within seven days after the call of the general election. This list has been shared with parties in advance, to help them plan for the fixed-date election.

The CEO informed the ACPP that he will also write to the Clerk of the House of Commons to provide this list following the ACPP AGM. As well, returning officers will be informed of the Schedule 3 districts, to help them in their preparations and allow them to inform local candidates of any implications for them.

List of electors

In April 2015, EC sent letters to each political party asking them to officially request a copy of the annual list of electors, as per the *Canada Elections Act*. This early distribution of the annual lists to MPs and political parties took place in advance of the fixed election date. Political parties requesting lists also received a separate CD-ROM with concordance information for the 2013 Representation Order. In addition, EC provided official versions of the electoral district maps, polling division maps, and postal code documentation for all of Canada. As discussed in October, only electronic copies of the maps are currently being provided to registered political parties.

Polling division maps are continually being updated to reflect the movement of population and the addition of new streets and developments. Therefore, EC will continue to modify the maps until the start of the next general election. Once the general election is called, printed maps will be distributed to candidates, and they will also be available to order.

After the election is called, candidates and political parties will receive, on request, preliminary lists of electors that reflect the 2013 Representation Order – electors and addresses will be directly associated with the 338 electoral districts. There will be no further requirement for concordance information.

Special Voting Rules expansion

This initiative is designed to give youth – including Aboriginal youth – increased access to the electoral process, in a way that responds to their life circumstances. EC will be offering special ballot voting and registration services in the offices of additional assistant returning officers at selected campuses, Aboriginal Friendship Centres and community centres.

A total of 56 institutions and centres across Canada have been approached to help implement the initiative; this will translate into approximately 60 to 80 voting locations.

Participating institutions have so far confirmed 58 locations, including 44 locations in educational institutions, 12 in Friendship Centres and 2 in YMCAs. Once returning officers have confirmed the complete list, EC will send it to ACPP members and other stakeholders (expected later in summer 2015).

Social media

English and French Twitter accounts and YouTube channels were recently launched to provide Canadians with information about the electoral process. EC is encouraging Canadians and political parties to follow and to share EC's tweets and posts with their networks. But enquiries from political entities should continue to be directed to EC through the usual channels.

Consultations

On April 23 and 24, 2015, EC held the fourth meeting of the Advisory Group for Disability Issues in Gatineau, during which updates were provided on initiatives for the 2015 election. EC worked with group members on a visioning and prioritization exercise to identify priorities that they would like to see EC pursue beyond 2015. This will advance the collective objective of making voting as accessible as possible.

Advisory Group members have expressed an interest in meeting with ACPP members to discuss some of the proposed activities emerging from this exercise. ACPP members agreed in principle with this request.

Impact of Bill C-50 on the next general election

The CEO appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on May 7 to discuss two topics: the 2015–2016 Main Estimates and Bill C-50, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act*.

Though the amendments proposed in Bill C-50 relate mostly to the Special Voting Rules (SVR), which allow people to vote by mail, the bill also proposed other important changes for voters living outside Canada, as well as new ID requirements for all electors.

The bill would also permit EC to receive information from Citizenship and Immigration Canada about non-citizens, so they can be deleted from the register of electors.

EC is closely monitoring this bill, and it will give the ACPP more information about its impact and implementation, should it receive royal assent.

Official languages

In 2014, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages audited EC's service to electors. The report identified areas where improvements could be made; however, some of the proposed changes cannot be made in time for the next general election.

EC has taken the position that, in recruiting poll workers, returning officers must ensure that bilingual services are available at polling locations where a significant proportion of electors speak the minority official language. EC is asking for the support of political parties in spreading the word and encouraging candidates to submit names of bilingual poll workers to help returning officers achieve this objective.

Electoral integrity

ACPP members were informed about the work being done in the area of electoral integrity.

Poll worker performance

EC has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve compliance. These include simplifying procedures and providing clearer instructions for election workers, modernizing training, and enhancing recruitment practices. The role of central poll supervisors was also renewed, and they will be able to guide staff at polling places and ensure that procedures are followed.

In addition, a quality management program has been established whose short-term focus is to test the updated material that will be used in the next general election. Testing so far indicates that, despite improvements to EC's manuals and training, the application of special procedures continues to challenge poll workers due to those procedures' complexity.

EC has also launched a procurement process for the independent audit of poll worker performance introduced by Bill C-23, and is awaiting bids from interested parties. This process should be completed by the end of July, in time for a fall election.

Incident detection and response

Following the 41st general election, EC began working to improve its ability to respond to electoral incidents that may interfere with voter participation. In this regard, EC will monitor the election environment so that it is better prepared to detect and respond quickly to any incidents that threaten the integrity of the election process.

However, this is a shared responsibility, and other players have important roles. For example, through their behaviour, political actors and voters play a key role in ensuring the integrity of the election. The Commissioner of Canada Elections is responsible for enforcing the *Canada Elections Act*. But both EC and the Commissioner depend considerably on the vigilance of electors and political actors, and on their diligence in promptly reporting incidents.

Among the complaints EC expects to receive, some will relate to conduct that may contravene certain provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*. EC's role is to work with the Commissioner to help him address those complaints.

As well, EC expects to receive complaints regarding conduct that is seen as unethical or unfair, without necessarily being illegal. In such cases, even when it is not within EC's mandate to intervene, the complaints will not be ignored. EC will keep track of these cases and possibly report on them after the election so that Parliament may decide if a legislative change is required.

Round table discussion

Following the CEO's presentation, ACPP members posed questions regarding ACPP-related information on EC's website, as well requests for clarification about Bill C-50.

Questions were also asked on what can be expected in terms of illegal activities during the election, and how to inform voters of the ways to report instances they encounter. The CEO clarified that it would depend on the issue and the circumstances. There are various scenarios, and EC would respond accordingly: for example, through public announcements or the media. EC is also inviting Canadians to use the form on EC's website to report incidents, noting that it is important to state the date and time, the location, and who was involved. EC plans on promoting the web form, to standardize the collection of information and improve response time. Poll supervisors will also be present to deal with any incidents at polling stations; they will respond according to the situation.

The CEO was also asked to comment on the challenges the implementation of Bill C-23 may bring to this election, and if the CEO would make recommendations regarding them. It was noted that yes, after the election, the CEO will meet with ACPP members to discuss matters that should be brought to Parliament's attention, and he will seek input on potential recommendations.

Communication Tools and Channels

Belaineh Deguefé, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Integrated Services, Policy and Public Affairs, and Lisa Drouillard, Director, Outreach and Stakeholder Engagement, made a presentation on communication with candidates and the public. They provided updates on shareable tools, sections of the website for candidates and political parties, and various channels for communicating with EC.

The list of accepted ID has been updated to clarify the admissibility of some pieces, such as band membership cards, Métis cards and cards issued by an Inuit local authority. In any case of discrepancy between the printed list and the list on the website, the one on the website will prevail.

EC launched its social media campaign and reported having more than 2,000 followers – a number that is expected to grow. Social media are used to share election information on ID, registration, etc. The use of these channels will increase as the election approaches.

Discussion

ACPP members sought clarification on the right of candidates' representatives to see ID at the polls, and on the privacy issues that this might raise. It was reiterated that candidates' representatives have the right to see the ID document, but if an elector refuses to show the document to the scrutineers, the election officer will make a note in the poll book. The elector will receive a ballot nonetheless. No legal restrictions apply to parties regarding privacy if they find out private information from an elector's ID.

A question was asked about where to find information on the new boundaries. It was clarified that EC's website describes the boundaries of the new electoral districts.

In response to a question, EC clarified that its new social media accounts will be used to share information on when, where and ways to register and vote. The agency has launched these accounts early to test their impact and use. The approach to the social media content is factual; they will be used to provide information, but not to engage in debate.

When asked how students can determine in which electoral district to register and vote, it was clarified that they can choose to register and vote using either, for example, the address of their place of residence while at school or the address of their parents' home.

A document was shared with members to inform parties about expectations and requirements related to electoral integrity, prohibited behaviours, and the ways in which the rules will be enforced. ACPP members were invited to provide input and feedback on the document, and they were asked if they had questions or needed any clarification on those messages. Members had positive comments to share.

To the question of whether it is too late to address a problem after an election, members were reminded that it is important to act right away if an incident is detected, and that prevention is key. There are procedures available to be used in these cases.

Remarks by the Commissioner of Canada Elections

Yves Côté, Commissioner of Canada Elections, introduced Eric Ferron, Senior Director of Investigations, and Marc Chénier, General Counsel and Senior Director of Legal Services, at the Commissioner's office. They shared information on the Commissioner's role of ensuring compliance and enforcement during the 2015 general election.

The Commissioner gave an update on changes at the Commissioner's office since the last ACPP meeting, explained the Commissioner's role, and specified how to get in touch with the office using the online complaint form.

Discussion

Questions and comments were raised about how to ensure that all offences are dealt with consistently and thoroughly to address improper practices. It was reinforced that it is important to gather as much information as possible on each incident, and to get in touch with the Commissioner. Depending on the need, public announcements can be made; there are ways to reach out to electors to rectify misleading information, for example.

It was clarified to members that a fair balance needs to be struck when addressing allegations in order to ensure that fair investigations are conducted in a timely manner.

Due to the changes in Bill C-23, the Commissioner's office is no longer a part of EC; it is now part of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. Because this change is recent, Canadians might not differentiate between EC and the Commissioner's office. For this reason, it is important that information be shared between the institutions to address the issues and endeavour to resolve them quickly. Canadians should not be concerned if they are not clear about these roles. Complaints will come – through the website, e-mail or telephone – and officers will deal with matters according to their subject and direct them to the appropriate authority (EC or the Commissioner).

Electoral Services

Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events, discussed the overall conduct of the election, including the key items in service to candidates and electors, voting services, and accessibility to voting services.

Readiness - update

EC met in February with returning officers, assistant returning officers, and key personnel in local offices. They have been given all the documentation for conducting the election, except for a few policies and directives that still need to be sent.

Forms, manuals, equipment, applications and tools for the conduct of the election were updated following the last electoral reform. They are now either in place or ready to be delivered.

Testing on the new suite of applications to manage and integrate electoral lists with local offices, online registration and the production of the voter information cards has been completed, and results are positive.

Updated electoral lists and maps were provided in April; however, some changes and last-minute revisions are being made for certain voting sections. The definitive map of each electoral district, as well as the list of electors, will be provided to each candidate after the issue of the writs.

EC's deployment plan

Towards the end of August, EC will launch a recruitment drive for election officers on the web, and returning officers will call electoral district associations for names of potential election officers.

At the same time, EC will launch a voter registration drive, both on the web and on the ground, through flyers in targeted areas.

On September 1, returning officers will be instructed to lease and occupy their office, and EC will deploy materials and equipment. However, services to candidates and to voters cannot be offered until the writ period has begun.

Changes introduced by Bill C-23

- The bill offers candidates more opportunity to scrutinize the voter identification process for both special ballot and for ordinary and advance polling; this includes scrutineers' right to examine, but not handle, voters' identification documents.
- Polling location addresses will be provided to candidates and parties during the election.
- On election day, candidates' representatives will need to register only once to get access to all polling stations within their electoral district.
- After election day, bingo cards will be provided to candidates.
- Scrutineers will be allowed to take a picture of the bingo card completed at an advance poll once that poll closes.

Parties are being asked to urge their candidates to file early after the writ is issued. Returning
officers will offer a candidate the opportunity to re-submit if anything is missing. However, any
incomplete nomination papers that are submitted on the deadline are rejected without a second
chance. EC conducts administrative reviews when a candidate alleges having been unfairly treated
by a returning officer.

Compliance, service and good record-keeping

EC is implementing the following changes in response to the Neufeld Report recommendations:

- The training program for election officers was rebuilt from scratch.
- The job description of central poll supervisor was enhanced with quality assurance functions.
- Voting operations were modified to take some pressure off the deputy returning officers and poll clerks.
- To attract and retain more competent officers, pay rates have been increased and basic skills tests are embedded in the online application form.
- Online voter registration was introduced as part of an effort to increase the currency of the voters list on election day and reduce the volume of exceptions to handle.
- The poll book has been revamped, and the written oath of residence was created. This puts more documentary evidence at the disposal of the Commissioner, a judge or an auditor after the election.

The process remains labour-intensive, paper-based, and therefore error-prone, although most errors will be of an administrative nature. While the added record-keeping requirements ensure that a polling station leaves a bigger body of evidence after election day, those requirements also create more opportunities for record-keeping errors. It is therefore prudent to expect a post-event audit to report lapses in record-keeping again. "Job performance" may remain an area of concern after the 42nd general election, and EC will still want to talk to ACPP members and to MPs about re-engineering this business model.

Voter registration services

In 2015, EC is working to maximize the currency of the voters list on election day – especially the names of young voters. The currency of the list is defined by the number of eligible electors, shown at their current address, that it contains. This is important, because it enables more accurate voter information cards at the call of the election and fewer electors needing to register at their polling station on election day. The priority is also to engage the younger generation to participate in elections, thus stemming the decline of voter turnout in the long term.

EC has introduced online registration in response to electors' evolving expectations. As of January 2015, electors can sign in to the National Register of Electors by providing a driver's licence number that matches what EC has on file for them. EC's online voter registration strikes a fair balance between convenience and control. While the service comes across as fairly accessible and easy to use, mechanisms are in place to monitor, detect and address abuses.

Accessibility of voting services - updates

Physical accessibility of polling locations:

- A national survey of the accessibility of polling places has been completed.
- EC is working with returning officers to deal with the remaining non-accessible locations (most are in Quebec).

Full information about the accessibility of each location will be publicized on EC's website during the election. The voter information card will advise voters about the accessibility of their polling places and whether they should check with their returning officer, particularly in the four percent of sites that do not meet the 15 barrier-free criteria.

Independent voting

- An improved voting screen and magnifier will be available for visually impaired voters.
- A copy of the list of candidates will be available in large-print format and in Braille at voting locations on election day.
- Visually impaired electors who want to use mobile apps to read their ballot may do so (though such apps were not available as of fall 2014, the market for them is growing).

Students, youth and urban Aboriginal people

- Registration and voting by special ballot will be offered at selected campuses, Friendship Centres and YMCAs.
- Fifty-six institutions (including 40 universities or colleges/CEGEPs) are expected to participate.
- The list of participating institutions will be publicly available and provided to the ACPP by mid-August.
- During the election, returning officers will publish the location within each of those facilities, along with the date and time of operation, on the EC website.
- Voting services will be offered according to the provisions of the law governing SVR voting at the returning office.
- Service will be offered during the week before advance polls open (October 5 to 8, 2015).
- Parties' representatives will be welcome to attend and scrutinize this process, according to the provisions of the law.
- All eligible voters may avail themselves of this service it is not exclusive to students, youth or Aboriginal people.

Discussion

ACPP members asked questions about the points of service that the additional offices on campuses will offer. EC is currently confirming locations with these institutions and signing contracts for the temporary spaces. Mr. Roussel noted that due to logistics, EC cannot add more campuses to its list for the upcoming election.

Clarification questions were asked regarding the rights of candidates' representatives to see ID, regarding the voters list, and regarding the data that EC keeps about electors who refuse to show ID to candidates' representatives. EC clarified that staff at the additional offices will have portable computers and access to the Internet to download the list of candidates relevant to each elector.

Political Financing

Stéphane Perrault, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Regulatory Affairs, and Jeff Merrett, Director, Regulatory Instruments and Systems, provided general updates on political finance, as well as specific information about registered political party advertising in the context of the by-elections underway.

Regarding changes to the political finance systems to incorporate Bill C-23 requirements, a new timeline was provided to ACPP participants, who reviewed it. The initial phases of implementation (for nomination contestants and party quarterly returns, for candidates, for electoral district association and party annual returns, and party general election returns) have been completed or are on target for completion before the upcoming election.

Participants were given the new party return form for general election expenses. This form was updated to reflect the new reporting requirements of Bill C-23, including the new obligation to report on expenses related to voter contact calling services. However, additional changes to provide more detailed reporting of expenses have not been included. An expanded version would have required additional work to develop appropriate expense categories, in addition to substantial system changes that could not be implemented and tested in time for the upcoming election. Options and considerations for an expanded form may be explored later, after the 42nd general election. If this happens, ACPP members will be informed and engaged regarding any proposed changes.

In relation to training activities, ACPP members were told that parties will soon be informed about training sessions for official agents that will be conducted during the summer across Canada, before the general election.

Regarding party election advertising in the context of the three by-elections underway, participants were given key information and reminders. The situation of parties planning to conduct pre-writ advertising and surveys in summer 2015 was discussed, including the fact that those activities would not be subject to the spending limits of the general election. This was contrasted with the situation of parties planning to endorse a candidate in a by-election, which would subject that party to the by-election spending limits, even for spending activities such as advertising distributed to a broader area than the electoral district where by-election was taking place. Participants were invited to bring their questions regarding advertising to the OGI technical briefing to be held on June 9, which would deal with this matter.

ACPP Forward Agenda and Round Table

As the objective of this agenda item is to map out ACPP's forward agenda, Mr. Deguefé provided an overview of EC's plans for engaging and consulting with political parties and providing information to electors.

EC will be communicating with electors through the Electoral Reminder Program. He noted that electors and parties are encouraged to use the shareable tools online and help to spread the word on where, when and the ways to vote. He also noted that EC does not communicate to electors by phone.

EC's website is the authoritative source for the list of accepted ID.

Mr. Deguefé shared a document entitled "Rules of the Road" and invited ACPP members to provide their feedback by June 22.

As the CEO noted, the Advisory Group for Disability Issues has asked to meet with ACPP members, for discussion and recommendations regarding improving services to individuals with disabilities. Mr. Deguefé will follow up with the ACPP about setting meeting dates after the election.

ACPP members were also asked how they prefer to receive documents. It was noted that EC would like to reduce the use of paper and is planning to print only the documents that will be shared on the day of ACPP meetings; all other documents will be sent by e-mail.

Round table discussion and open forum

There were comments on civic education and the importance of doing more to ensure that students graduate with more interest, knowledge and engagement with respect to voting and elections.

A comment was made that there is interest in discussing other types of electoral models that could be used in Canada, including alternatives to the *Canada Elections Act*. The question arose about whether the ACPP could make recommendations to that effect.

The point was raised that all parties should be included in all candidates meetings. It was also suggested that future discussions should focus more on benefits to the communities and on electing MPs, and less on political parties.

Comments were also made about following up on other electoral models, such as Australia's, where voter turnout is better. Members insisted on the importance of civic education – that we need to take responsibility for teaching children about democracy and elections.

Closing Remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer

The CEO thanked ACPP members for their participation and noted that suggestions that members made during this AGM will be useful to EC.

In response to comments made during roundtable, Mr. Mayrand mentioned that our society requires more civic education. EC can contribute, but the primary responsibility lies with the provinces, since they have the lead in educational matters. The trend is to instill knowledge through civic education classes and to develop the curriculum for classrooms. EC will continue to work with the provinces and with educators to do this. The CEO noted that these educational efforts typically focus on people under the age of 18, but that efforts must also be directed to the 18–35 age group. This is because voter turnout has declined in the entire under-35 age group, which is a significant problem. It was noted that people often learn about politics through family discussions, but that parents currently lack enough understanding of democracy and elections to educate their children about these issues. The CEO agreed with ACPP members that there is still a lot to be done to remedy this situation. He noted that time must be invested in defining the issue before formulation of solutions can begin. For example, voter turnout has also been declining in many countries with proportional representation – therefore, there is more to the problem than simply Canada's type of electoral system.

The CEO also agreed that the regulatory burden on political parties and candidates is getting excessive; that was pointed out in the last post-election report to Parliament, and it is expected to continue. At one point, the burden could become so high that it undermines the accessibility and the rights of candidates.

The CEO brought up the issue of privacy, including whether electors' privacy should be a subject for future discussion.

In conclusion, the CEO noted that the ACPP has an ambitious forward agenda and list of discussion topics, and that EC would engage members following the election to establish priorities and timelines.

In closing, the CEO thanked the ACPP for participating in the meeting.



June 8, 2015 Double Tree by Hilton (Chaudière A & B) 1170 Aylmer Road, Gatineau, QC

AGENDA

Time	Agenda Item
8:00–8:45	Breakfast and Registration
8:45–9:00	Welcome
9:00–10:00	Introductory Remarks and Report by the Chief Electoral Officer
10:00–10:15	Break
10:15–11:15	Communication Tools and Channels
11:15–11:45	Commissioner of Canada Elections
11:45–12:45	Lunch (served on-site)
12:45-13:45	Electoral Services
13:45–14:45	Political Financing
14:45-15:00	Break
15:00–15:45	ACPP Forward Agenda and Open Forum
15:45–16:00	Wrap-up
16:00–17:00	Broadcasting Arbitrator Meeting

Appendix B: Meeting Participants

Political Party	Representative(s)
Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of	Ms. Liz White
Canada	Mr. Stephen Best
Bloc Québécois	Mr. Maxime Paquin-Charbonneau
Canadian Action Party	Mr. Jeremy Arney
	Mr. Will Arlow
Christian Heritage Party of Canada	Mr. Rod Taylor
	Mr. Peter Vogel
Communist Party of Canada	Mr. Larry Wasslen
Conservative Party of Canada	Mr. Dustin Van Vugt
	Mr. Greg Labuschagne
Green Party of Canada	Ms. Marlene Wells
	Mr. Nick Carter
Liberal Party of Canada	Mr. John Arnold
	Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst
	Ms. Leslie Hardy (observer)
Libertarian Party of Canada	Mr. James Walper
Marijuana Party	Mr. Talis-Ilmars Brauns
	Mr. John Akpata
Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada	Ms. Anna Di Carlo
N. D	Mr. Louis Lang
New Democratic Party	Ms. Lucy Watson Mr. Dave Hare
Down for Accountability Compatency and	
Party for Accountability, Competency and Transparency	Mr. Michael Nicula
Pirate Party of Canada	Mr. Roderick Lim
	Mr. James Phillips
Progressive Canadian Party	The Hon. Sinclair Stevens
	Mr. Brian Marlatt
Rhinoceros Party	Mr. Jean-Patrick Berthiaume
	Mr. Richard Côté