



# Meeting Summary

## Advisory Committee of Political Parties

Annual General Meeting, June 20, 2022

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# Summary of Meeting of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties

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## Meeting summary

The Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) convened on June 20, 2022, for the first in-person iteration of the annual general meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The meeting objectives were to update Committee members on the activities that Elections Canada (EC) has conducted since the 44th general election (GE); and to obtain member feedback and suggestions on the topics presented.

EC discussed the agency's digital transformation strategy and provided updates on its accessibility plan and the regulatory policy function. Lastly, parties were introduced to the new Commissioner of Canada Elections.

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

## Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) gave introductory remarks, during which he welcomed new members and acknowledged the passing of Michel Blondin, Leader of the Parti pour l'Indépendance du Québec and a member of the ACPP.

Mr. Perrault then briefed the Committee on the status of the electoral boundary readjustment process and noted that, as part of their electoral redistribution process, seven out of ten independent commissions were actively seeking input from the public on their proposed boundary changes.

He spoke to the Committee about Bill C-14, which is meant to preserve the allocation of seats for provinces that are currently overrepresented, including Quebec. He noted that, as the House of Commons has passed the bill, the Senate is currently studying it. As such, there could be delays in the work of at least one of the provincial commissions.

Mr. Perrault said that his report, [Recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada following the 43rd and 44th General Elections](#) (submitted in June 2022), is expected to be studied in parliamentary committee some time next fall. Such a study is normally followed by a government response, which, in this case, can result in legislative outcomes in or around 2024.

Mr. Perrault introduced the newly appointed Commissioner of Canada Elections, Caroline Simard, explaining that she was selected following a transparent, rigorous and competitive process. The details can be found on the [EC website](#).

Mr. Perrault then explained the agency's preparation activities for the next election by describing the minimum viable product plus two (MVP+2) approach. The approach consists in deploying an election similar to the previous one, with the addition of Vote on Campus and extended services to remote communities, especially Indigenous ones. He expanded on the latter detail by briefing the Committee on the agency's new Indigenous Electoral Services Review: done over the long term, it would look at how EC engages and works with Indigenous communities when offering electoral services. Though this project is broad in scope, the current priorities include reviewing advance voting in Indigenous communities and offering Indigenous languages at the polls.

The CEO reminded ACPP members that the confidence-and-supply agreement between the Liberal and New Democratic parties includes three ordinary election days and a "vote-anywhere-in-an-electoral-district" model. He noted that EC is studying these elements and hopes to engage with Parliamentarians on them, as they present some operational challenges. As the agency is not expecting the workforce to grow, both of these elements would require EC to introduce some form of technology to better manage the list of electors—although this is already one of EC's priorities. The use of electronic lists would simplify and speed up tasks at the polls. Mr. Perrault also noted that the goal of offering more voting opportunities could be better achieved by increasing the number of advance polling days—rather than adding days at the very end of the electoral calendar—to match the increasing demand for early voting options. He noted, in that regard, the recent Ontario election, which increased the number of advance polling days.

Mr. Perrault concluded his remarks by reminding parties of the upcoming deadline to meet the registration requirements of the *Canada Elections Act* (CEA), which should be done every three years.

The CEO then opened the floor to questions from participants. During the question period, participants expressed interest in the flexible advance poll model that EC is exploring. Several ACPP members also expressed support for the CEO's recommendations to Parliament, indicating that they would like to participate in the committee hearings that will address these recommendations. Mr. Perrault reminded participants that he does not have control over the committee; however, he suggested that interested parties write him a letter, and he would then write to the committee to inform them of the specific items on which the participants wish to be heard.

A question was asked about increasing the electoral participation of individuals in long-term care facilities. Mr. Perrault responded that EC's role is to make sure that there are accessible voting options, to inform electors and to remove barriers to participation. To increase the turnout of these electors, a suggestion was made to provide a technological voting option. Mr. Perrault explained that, under the current legislation, EC

has limited opportunities to use technology for voting purposes but noted that the agency is exploring such use for the future.

Participants briefly discussed the requirements of the [triennial confirmation of members](#), specifically the need for parties to show that they have at least 250 valid members. The CEO was asked how members are identified and decided upon. He responded that each party decides on how membership is gained and that Parliament chose this number as a threshold to determine whether the party warrants formal recognition.

Some participants raised concerns about ballot harvesting and external influence on voters who have dementia. Mr. Perrault briefed the Committee on the procedures and mechanisms EC has put in place in these areas, while also noting that there have been few to no accounts of these situations arising. This session ended with a request from some ACPP members to clarify the rules regarding third-party communications in the CEA. The CEO confirmed that one of the intentions of his recommendations was to accomplish exactly this.

## Digital transformation

Presenters: Denis Bazinet, Senior Director, Digital Enterprise Transformation; Serge Caron, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer (DCEO), Digital Transformation and Security Officer; Anne Lawson, DCEO, Political Entities Champion; Sylvie Jacmain, Senior Director, Voting Services and Development

Mr. Bazinet began this segment by explaining the vision of the digital transformation strategy for 2028. He briefed the Committee to the effect that the expected results include the following:

- EC's services and tools are accessible and responsive to user needs.
- EC's processes and systems are agile and able to meet evolving business needs.
- EC has access to sound data to understand the needs of Canadians and to inform business decisions.
- EC is the authoritative source of information about the federal electoral process for Canadians.

Mr. Bazinet then outlined the agency's transformation priorities:

- Simplify the voting process to provide a better voting experience.
- Enable returning officers to serve electors and local campaigns earlier and more effectively.
- Modernize and integrate systems to gain efficiencies and service consistency.
- Expand EC's service offering to meet Canadians' and political entities' expectations regarding more convenient service channels.

- Improve and modernize how EC collects, manages and uses data.

The Committee was told that the digital transformation teams were being formed to increase the agency's agility to transform and deliver elections at the same time. Mr. Bazinet explained that, to jumpstart strategies wherever possible, partnerships with industry experts were being explored. He also explained that EC has adopted a user-centric approach to delivering projects, which includes user communities in the creation and deployment of future services.

Mr. Bazinet updated ACPP members on the progress made since the 44th GE, which included:

- approving the digital transformation strategy for 2028
- identifying investment areas for the next two years
- launching key foundational projects
- launching the Champions Network to define and oversee transformation
- ratifying enterprise transformation governance
- launching some research and exploration activities

Then, a vision of the transformation of services to political entities was presented to members. It includes four major goals:

1. To modernize services to political entities to make them more effective and integrated. This includes:
  - an online self-serve registration service for all political entities
  - an online service for filing financial returns that can accommodate large uploads and is device-neutral
  - online publishing of content in near real time
  - electronic signature capabilities that are easy to use and trustworthy
2. To enhance the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC) to be more intuitive and engaging
3. To continue to develop CEA compliance tools and dashboards
4. To create distinctive data repositories for information belonging to political entities

Ms. Lawson, introduced as EC's champion for political entities, engaged the Committee members to identify where they wanted to see changes in services to political entities. While fielding questions, she reminded participants that this initiative is aimed at making sure that the agency's processes become more efficient and user-friendly. She also emphasized that it will take time to improve the various legacy systems now used to serve political entities.

Participants were concerned that data collection could lead to risks in data use. EC said that the digital transformation strategy is aimed at securely storing and harmonizing collected data rather than at collecting more data. Members requested that small parties with less funds have access to tools that safely store data. EC directed parties to the [Canadian Centre for Cyber Security's guidance for political parties](#) for exactly this purpose.

Members showed great curiosity in learning more about the approach to consultations and timelines for these changes. EC committed to keeping ACPP members informed on the developments and to engaging them in user testing where appropriate.

Ms. Jacmain then briefed the Committee on the strategic vision for voting services, as it pertains to digital transformation. She explained that the vision was broken down into three main goals:

- electors have access to more flexible and accessible voting options
- voting services are delivered with fewer resources, but processes are more efficient
- field operations and voting services are predictable and real-time data is available

Potential initiatives for attaining this vision were outlined, including rolling out a “first-come, first-served” model (also referred to as a “bank teller model”) where electors can vote at any table at a polling station, and digital sequence number sheets are made available to candidates and parties.

Ms. Jacmain reminded participants of the parameters involved in attaining this vision, noting that the initiatives must be permissible in the current legislative context and that there must be minimal disruption to existing business applications. Some implications of these initiatives were also touched on, including that the polling divisions could be larger than in the past and designed around voting locations, which in turn might affect the reporting of election results at the polling division level. Ms. Jacmain noted that, with these initiatives, EC will be required to develop and deploy a reliable and secure mechanism to capture, transmit and distribute the data from the sequence number sheets and to have a contingency plan in case of failure.

Following the presentation, the panel fielded questions from ACPP participants. EC clarified that the goal of digital transformation is to improve and simplify the agency's processes to benefit electors and political parties. EC noted that one priority was to offer a digital list of electors at the polls to digitally strike electors from the list as they vote. This would improve elector experience by enabling the first-come, first-served model so that electors would not have to wait to vote at their designated polling station in the polling place. This initiative would also enable a range of other long-term service improvements. In response to concerns about electronically sharing with parties the names of electors who voted, Mr. Perrault stated that the names are already being shared, as required by law. Participants asked how and when further consultations on

the various aspects of this digital transformation would take place. EC explained that the agency is working on the consultation approach and timeline. Mr. Bazinet clarified that the digital transformation will likely not be finished by 2028.

To conclude, the presenters outlined next steps for the digital transformation strategy:

- Inform political entities about the services and obtain their input on which ones EC should prioritize
- Identify what may be available and ready for use in 2024 and 2025
- Plan to provide a progress update at the next ACPP meeting

## **Elections Canada's Accessibility Plan**

Presenter: Susan Torosian, Executive Director, Public Affairs and Civic Education; Juan Melara-Pineda, Senior Analyst and Team Lead

Ms. Torosian began by providing context about the agency's Accessibility Plan, noting that it was intended to make sure that EC remains in compliance with the [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA). She provided an overview of the steps being taken to identify, remove and prevent barriers that employees of EC and members of the public face when interacting with the agency.

Ms. Torosian presented the requirements of the ACA and their implications for the agency. She explained that, in accordance with the Act, EC is required to publish an accessibility plan no later than December 31, 2022. The plan will address barriers identified in these areas:

- employment
- built environment
- information technology
- communications
- acquisition of goods and services
- design of programs and services
- transportation

Ms. Torosian explained that the ACA requires EC to actively consult with people with disabilities and assess the agency's progress one year after the release of the plan and every year thereafter. She noted that the plan will be revised three years after its initial publication and will be subject to continual review to avoid the creation of new accessibility barriers and to find long-term solutions to issues that are identified in the plan.



In addition to these potential improvements, Ms. Torosian confirmed that the CEO's recommendations to Parliament included the following accessibility-related legislative improvements, which were recommended by stakeholders representing electors with disabilities:

- Give electors the flexibility to mark special ballots with the name of a political party or a candidate's first and last name.
- Allow for greater flexibility regarding polling days and times in long-term care facilities and remove the requirement for providing proof of address for electors who live and vote in these facilities.
- Allow electors to request the assistance of a person of their choice to mark their ballot, provided that person makes the required statutory declaration.

Following the presentation, the floor was opened to questions from ACPD members. The Committee asked how many electors and candidates fall into the cohort of people with disabilities in Canada. Mr. Melara-Pineda noted that, while we do not have this precise information on candidates, 6.2 million (approximately one in five) Canadians self-report as having a disability.

ACPD members were supportive of EC's initiative to make elections more accessible. In response to comments on the challenges of reaching out to electors with disabilities, EC reminded members that, in 2019, the CEA was amended by Bill C-76 to provide significant resources to assist political parties in making their campaigns more accessible; and to provide support to individual candidates with disabilities, allowing them to claim accessibility expenses. EC probed further, asking in what areas parties face barriers when reaching electors with disabilities. Participants recommended further consultations on this matter but also pointed to venue, interpretation and coordination costs.

## **Update on regulatory policy function**

Presenter: Mélanie Rousseau, Assistant Director, Integrity, Regulatory Policy and Parliamentary Affairs

Ms. Rousseau updated the Committee on the Regulatory Policy program, which was initially presented to ACPD members at the February 2022 meeting.

Ms. Rousseau reminded participants that the ultimate goal of this project is to maintain Canadians' trust in the electoral system. She explained that the program's specific role is to clearly and concisely express how the CEA is interpreted and applied by EC in the two major areas governed by the Act: voting operations and political financing. She noted that this is done by developing instruments based on the principles of the Act and the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#).

Ms. Rousseau elaborated on how regulatory policies are distinct from written opinions, guidelines and interpretation notes (OGIs): OGIs are designed to assist with compliance with the Act, while regulatory policies are designed for administrative purposes.

Ms. Rousseau then outlined the six key areas within the scope of the electoral integrity framework: accessibility, transparency, reliability, fairness, independence and security.

She explained that the goal of the Regulatory Policy program is to ensure that the decisions and operations of the agency are transparent and that regulatory instruments support this objective specifically, as they are a way to document and share what EC is doing and how and why it is doing it.

The development of regulatory policy instruments will require some stakeholder engagement. To make sure that engagement and consultation is useful and constructive for EC and its stakeholders, Ms. Rousseau outlined the agency's engagement principles, including: relevance and balance, transparency and accountability, listening, sharing information and engaging in dialogue/consulting.

Ms. Rousseau specified that, in developing policy instruments, EC plans to consult with the ACPP to learn from the experiences of political parties with the electoral process to make informed decisions about ongoing and future areas of policy development. She noted that the format, subjects and timing of these consultations are yet to be determined.

While participants asked questions, EC clarified that the Electoral Integrity Framework can and should be used as a tool against which to measure EC's decisions, programs and services, and as a structure upon which to support the application of the CEA, or any proposed amendments to it.

## **Commissioner of Canada Elections**

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer; Yves Côté, outgoing Commissioner of Canada Elections; Caroline Simard, incoming Commissioner of Canada Elections

Mr. Perrault presented Yves Côté, the outgoing Commissioner of Canada Elections (CCE) and thanked Mr. Côté for his years of public service work.

Mr. Côté took the opportunity to share his thoughts and observations on his time as Commissioner. He noted the important changes that had been implemented in his time, including the addition of new tools such as [administrative monetary penalties](#) to the CCE's repertoire. He then expressed pride in the accomplishments, while also noting that there remain areas for improvement.

During the question period, Mr. Côté fielded questions from participants. One had to do with the risk of individuals voting twice. Mr. Côté stated that there are very few instances

where people voted twice or where non-citizens vote, noting that, within most of these cases, there has not been record of criminal intent.

Participants enquired about the timeline for processing and completing complaints lodged with the CCE. Mr. Côté explained that the CCE is still reviewing cases from the previous election. He pointed out that, sometimes, cases are brought forward years after an election, making it difficult to establish clear timelines.

Members asked how a candidate or party leader can obey the law that requires them to pay off their debt when they cannot do so. Mr. Côté clarified that the CCE must apply the law as it is written. It was noted that the offence falls under due diligence only, and only requires that one show diligence in trying to pay off their debt.

Members asked if there had been discussions on restoring confidence in those people who were turned away at polling stations over public health orders. The Commissioner indicated that there were no discussions on this front and could not comment further, as there are ongoing investigations on this topic.

Following Mr. Côté's remarks, Ms. Simard shared her background with the Committee and spoke about the approach she intends to take as Commissioner. The Committee was told that Ms. Simard's term began on August 15, 2022, and that the Deputy Commissioner of Canada Elections, Marc Chénier, would be staying in his role to assist with the transition of the new Commissioner and to facilitate the continuity of operations. Mr. Chénier will act as the Commissioner after Mr. Côté's retirement and until Ms. Simard begins in the position.

At the close of this session, Mr. Côté received a round of applause from the Committee members for his years of service.

## **Closing remarks and forward calendar**

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

Ms. Torosian and Mr. Perrault delivered closing remarks before presenting EC's forward calendar.

Ms. Torosian pointed to the agency's priorities, including:

- closing the 44th GE
- planning the next ACPP meeting
- giving information to political parties on the implications of the ACA
- 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
- focusing on the Indigenous Electoral Services Review

After Ms. Torosian presented the forward calendar, the meeting was adjourned around 3:30 p.m. June 20, 2022.

Following the adjournment of the ACPP meeting, the Steering Committee on OGI's sat for approximately 30 minutes. Following the adjournment of the OGI Steering Committee, the [Broadcasting Arbitrator](#) met with the ACPP for approximately 45 minutes.

# Appendices

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## Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

**June 20, 2022**

8:00–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast in room Chaudière A and participant registration
9:00–9:15 a.m.	Welcome, logistics and housekeeping, overview of agenda
9:15–10:30 a.m.	Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer
10:30–10:45 a.m.	Break
10:45 a.m.– 12:15 p.m.	Digital transformation
12:15–1:15 p.m.	Lunch in room Chaudière A
1:15–1:45 p.m.	Elections Canada’s accessibility plan
1:45–2:30 p.m.	Update on regulatory policy function
2:30–2:45 p.m.	Break
2:45–3:15 p.m.	Commissioner of Canada Elections
3:15–3:30 p.m.	Closing remarks, forward calendar and agenda
3:30–3:45 p.m.	Adjournment of ACPP and break
3:45–4:15 p.m.	Opinions, Guidelines and Interpretations
4:15–5:00 p.m.	Broadcasting Arbitrator

## Appendix B: List of Participants

### ACPP representatives

Name	Political party
Stephen Best	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Khalid Rao	Centrist Party of Canada
Jackie Leach	Conservative Party of Canada
Trevor Bailey	Conservative Party of Canada
David Darwin	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Rod Taylor	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Deepasha Gupta	Green Party of Canada
John Arnold	Liberal Party of Canada
Coreen Corcoran	Libertarian Party of Canada
John Akpata	Marijuana Party
Anna Di Carlo	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Christian Legeais	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Jesse Calvert	New Democratic Party
Richard Magnan	Parti Libre Canada
Michel Leclerc	Parti Libre Canada
Sébastien CoRhino	Parti Rhinoceros Party
Daniel Tyrie	People's Party of Canada
Travis Morris	People's Party of Canada

### Other invited guests or presenters

Name	Organization
Yves Côté	Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections
Caroline Simard	Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections

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

Denis Bazinet; Pauline Bejjani; Jody Blimkie; Serge Caron; Chih Chang; Pierre Desjardins; Danielle Duquette; Edwidge Gedna; Cyntia Henley; Sylvie Jacmain; Geneviève Jetté; Paul Jorgenson; Tamara Kluge; George Langlois; Miriam Lapp; Manya Laroche-Reinhardt; Marie-Pier Larose; Anne Lawson; Sophie Martineau; Irini Mavroudis; Juan Melara-Pineda; Jennifer Mendez; Jeff Merrett; Maxime Messier; Joseph Péloquin-Hopfner; Stéphane Perrault; Mélanie Rousseau; Michel Roussel; Yannick St-Denis; Susan Torosian; Josée Villeneuve

### Meeting facilitator

Alain Rabeau, Intersol Group