



## Guidelines for Observing Counting Operations at the Office of the Special Voting Rules Administrator

This document is Elections Canada's guideline OGI 2021-07, Part 3.

### Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented number of electors are expected to vote by mail during a general election, and Elections Canada will open the doors of the office of the Special Voting Rules Administrator (SVRA) to political party representatives who wish to observe the counting of the ballots. The office of the SVRA is located at 440 Coventry Road in Ottawa, Ontario.

While at the office of the SVRA, the role of political party representatives is to observe the counting process being performed by special ballot officers (SBOs) under the supervision of the SVRA or a designate. The presence of observers will help ensure the level of scrutiny required for a fair and transparent process.

The pandemic is evolving quickly. Elections Canada's location at 440 Coventry Road—which houses both the office of the SVRA and our national distribution centre—is currently subject to capacity limits. Therefore, a limited number of employees, political party representatives and visitors will be allowed inside the office of the SVRA at any one time. We will ask political parties to provide, by no later than the 21st day before polling day, the number of representatives they plan to send to the office of the SVRA on each day of counting. We expect counts to occur daily starting the 14th day before polling day, and we anticipate that a second daily shift of counting will be added near the end of the election period. The Chief Electoral Officer could decide to restrict the number of representatives from each party who may be present at the office of the SVRA—for example, where doing so would be necessary to ensure equitable access to all parties. We will let parties know immediately if such a decision is made.

We encourage political parties to provide the names of their representatives as early as possible in the election period. Elections Canada will send the representatives an email containing:

- An authorization form to be completed ahead of time (top section only)
- Details about an information session on the counting procedures at the office of the SVRA
- Information about voluntary COVID-19 rapid testing
- Instructions on how to access the building at 440 Coventry Road
- Information on the health and safety measures in place

Since the counting procedures at the office of the SVRA are complex and differ from those at the polls, political party representatives will be required to attend a mandatory information session.

## Authorization of a Political Party Representative—Office of the Special Voting Rules Administrator

The *Authorization of a Political Party Representative* form (EC 20074) authorizes you to act as an observer at the office of the SVRA for this federal election. Ask the person from your party who is responsible for coordinating observation at the office of the SVRA to provide you with the signed form, as it is required to access the office.

You must present the signed *Authorization of a Political Party Representative* (EC 20074) to the SVRA or a designate when you arrive at 440 Coventry Road and, once inside the building, whenever asked. The original form or a photocopy will be accepted; a digital copy cannot be accepted. The SVRA or a designate will verify that the top section of the form has been properly completed, and you will be required to make a solemn declaration. You will be given a *Political Party Representative Identification Badge* (EC 20902) inside a *Clear Plastic Hanging Badge Holder* (EC 20909). Do not add anything to or write anything on the badge.

**Note:** Rules governing the conduct of representatives at the office of the SVRA, local Elections Canada offices and polling stations differ. If you are observing proceedings at a polling station, please refer to the *Guidelines for Candidates' Representatives* (EC 20045). If you are observing proceedings at a local Elections Canada office, please refer to the *Special Voting Rules—Guidelines for Candidates' Representatives* (EC 78058).

As a political party representative observing the counting of the ballots, you **MUST**:

- Respect and help maintain the secrecy of the vote and the confidentiality of preliminary results.
- Be prepared to show your signed *Authorization of a Political Party Representative* form (EC 20074) to the SVRA or a designate.
- Display your *Political Party Representative Identification Badge* (EC 20902) whenever you are acting as a political party representative.
- Respect the decisions of the SVRA.
- Observe the work being performed by a pair of SBOs, provided that your presence does not interfere with their work.
- Stand in the designated areas for political party representatives.
- Follow the health and safety measures in place.
- Attend a training session (date and time to be determined) on the counting process at the office of the SVRA and the health and safety measures in place.

As a political party representative during the count, you **MAY NOT**:

- Interfere with the counting process; if you do so, you risk being asked to leave or being removed from the office of the SVRA.
- Systematically challenge an SBO about the counting process.
- Talk directly to an SBO; you may address your comments, questions or objections only to the SVRA or a designate.
- Take any photographs or make a video recording of the counting procedures.
- Handle, manipulate or in any way touch a ballot during the count.
- Sit next to a SBO's table.
- Display any campaign literature or wear any colours or emblems that would identify your candidate or a party.

**Note:** Counts at the office of the SVRA could start as early as Day 14, depending on the volume of ballots received. As volumes increase throughout the election period, a second daily shift of counting may be added. The counting schedule will be posted on the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC) portal as counts are confirmed.

### **Access to the Office of the Special Voting Rules Administrator**

- The office of the SVRA is located at 440 Coventry Road, in Ottawa, Ontario, in a warehouse behind the RCMP building.
- The counting of the ballots takes place on the 2nd floor; there are no available elevators (if necessary, a freight elevator can be used).
- The office is in a warehouse with concrete floors; appropriate and comfortable footwear is recommended.

### **Parking**

- There is NO parking available on the premises.
- Daily passes allowing you to park at the Canadian Tire store located at 330 Coventry Road are available from the Commissionaire at 440 Coventry Road. The cost of the parking pass remains to be determined. The walk between the parking lot and the office of the SVRA takes about five minutes.
- Public transportation: The nearest bus stop is #18 Belfast/Coventry; the nearest O-Train station is St-Laurent.

## Health and Safety Measures During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Employees, guests and observers must follow strict health and safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures have been put in place for the safety and well-being of everyone entering and working at the 440 Coventry Road location. They were developed by Elections Canada in consultation with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Every political party representative must follow the guidelines below for their own safety and the safety of others.

### Wear a mask and practise proper hygiene

- Everyone in the building must wear a properly fitted mask at all times. If you will be at the office of the SVRA for more than eight hours, you should change your mask after every four hours.
- Elections Canada will supply a mask, or you may bring your own. Your mask must be neutral in colour and must not show support for or opposition to any candidate or political party.
- If you choose to wear a face shield, you must also wear a mask.
- You should wash your hands frequently, or use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available; cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm; and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

### Maintain physical distancing

- Avoid gathering around doors and common areas.
- Respect and follow the floor markings on the 2nd floor of 440 Coventry Road, including in the “counting cage” and outside the counting area (kitchen, hallways, bathrooms, etc.).
- Minimize contact with others while observing a count.
- Stay at least two metres from others, including election officers and other representatives, at all times.

**Note:** If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, please stay home. If you start experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 while at the office of the SVRA, leave the building and inform the SVRA or a designate in case there is a need for contact tracing.

Elections Canada is planning to offer voluntary rapid testing for COVID-19 to its employees at the 440 Coventry Road location. Political party representatives will also be eligible for voluntary testing if they wish. We will provide more details in our confirmation email.