

**Voter Education for  
Inclusive, Informed &  
Ethical Participation  
New Delhi, India**

October 2016



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
A. Voter Education .....	5
B. Civic Education .....	7
C. Canadians Communicating with Elections Canada .....	7
D. Post-Election Assessment.....	8
E. Voter Education Costs.....	8
F. Lessons Learned.....	9
Conclusion .....	9



## Introduction

One of Elections Canada's (EC) key roles is to communicate effectively and clearly to Canadians about the electoral process, registration procedures, qualifications to be eligible to vote, and requirements to be entitled to vote. EC also provides information on alternative voting methods and the accessibility of voting sites while encouraging Canadians to be vigilant and proactive in bringing matters of concern to the agency's attention.

To that end, the agency has developed many resources to reach out to the Canadian electorate, especially those who face barriers to voting, such as new voters, youth and students, seniors, Aboriginal electors, persons with disabilities, electors who are homeless, and members of ethno cultural communities. Research in Canada shows that these groups experience lower rates of voter participation caused by a combination of accessibility and motivational barriers to voting. Additionally, these groups often lack the documents required to prove their address and are thus less likely to be registered and receive a [voter information card](#) (VIC)<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to its public information responsibility as described above, Elections Canada has a mandate to make the electoral process better known to students at the primary and secondary levels. EC fulfills this role by offering, on an ongoing basis, free educational resources, tools, activities and information for both elementary and secondary students. The agency also works with a variety of civic education and youth civic engagement organizations to provide elementary and high school students access to participatory and experiential programming inside and outside the classroom.

## A. Voter Education

### A.1. Electoral Reminder Program

When an election is called, Elections Canada launches a comprehensive, multimedia communication campaign: the [Electoral Reminder Program](#). The program provides information to both the general population of electors and to the specific groups of electors who may face barriers to voting, about voter identification requirements and when, where and ways to register and vote in a federal general election. The program also seeks to increase pre-polling day registration and to communicate information about the identification required to vote.

For the 2015 general election (GE), the communication channels included a new election-specific website, a multimedia advertising campaign to encourage electors to register through the online registration service, digital and print information products, direct mail, social media, as well as national and local outreach. Throughout the electoral calendar, the Electoral Reminder Program was also supported on the ground and across the country by regional media advisors who worked alongside local Elections Canada officers to respond to regional and local media requests.

---

<sup>1</sup> A card that Elections Canada sends during an election campaign to every elector whose name appears on the preliminary lists of electors. It tells electors when and where they can cast their ballots on Election Day or at the advance polls. A card is also sent to every elector who is added to the list of electors during the revision period.

## A.2. Partnerships

In support of its outreach efforts for the 2015 GE, the agency established partnerships with over 50 national and regional organizations serving identified target groups of electors. Through formal contracts and verbal agreements, the organizations disseminated Elections Canada's information products electronically as well as through in person briefings prior to and during the general election. These organizations also promoted the agency's online registration service in their communications and at events they hosted prior to the election.

In addition, a network of community relations officers (CROs) was again recruited for the 2015 GE to conduct local outreach activities with the identified target groups. As in past elections, the CROs interacted directly with electors in ridings where significant population segments experienced barriers to the electoral process. The CROs were also responsible for promoting the online registration service, providing basic election information with specific emphasis on the voter identification requirements, and supporting the letter of confirmation of residence process as appropriate.

## A.3. Online Channels

During the 2015 GE, online channels emerged in line with Canadians' growing preference to communicate with Elections Canada through social media and the agency's website.

While the main source of information about the electoral process remained the VIC and traditional media (e.g. television, radio and newspapers), electors also took advantage of the new opportunity to interact with EC on social media, in both official languages.

Elections Canada's [Twitter](#) messages earned over 17 million impressions, its [YouTube](#) videos were viewed approximately 700,000 times, and its [Facebook](#) posts reached over 13 million users – a number that represents half of the registered electors in Canada<sup>2</sup>. Electors sent over 23,000 messages to EC on social media, and the agency posted around 4,600 messages. Social media activity was primarily information driven; the agency answered questions from electors, referred them to the website or the toll free line for more information, or directed them to the online complaint form to register a formal complaint.

Additionally, a 2015 GE-specific website was active from the drop of the writ until shortly after the GE. It focused on elector services and transactions, such as: an online registration service; information on voter identification requirements; and the Voter Information Service, a service that allowed electors to find their voting locations along with information on the accessibility of their voting place. The 2015 GE website<sup>3</sup> used newly created pictures, infographics and videos to explain complex information in shareable digital formats, and it featured information tailored to some of the sub-population groups. All communication channels pointed electors to the 2015 GE website as the main source of comprehensive election information.

<sup>2</sup> 26,044,161 electors on the 42<sup>nd</sup> GE final lists of electors.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the 2015 GE website is no longer live.

## A.4. Services and Information for Electors with Disabilities

In February 2015, in consultation with its [Advisory Group for Disability Issues](#) (AGDI), Elections Canada released its [Accessibility Policy and Service Offering for people with disabilities](#), which provided details about the tools and services available for the 2015 general election.

## B. Civic Education

### B.1. Canada's Democracy Week

[Canada's Democracy Week](#) (CDW) is an annual civic education initiative dedicated to engaging Canadians with their democracy. Inspired by the United Nations' annual International Day of Democracy (September 15), Elections Canada launched its inaugural CDW in September 2011. Today, CDW informs, engages and connects Canadians with the democratic process through an annual, week-long series of in-person programming for teachers to use in their school.

The theme for CDW2015, which took place from September 14 to 21, 2015, was "Let's Get Canada Ready to Vote!" CDW2015 engaged teachers and elementary and secondary school-aged youth with ideas on how they could be part of the week and be part of the 2015 federal election. For 2016, the theme will be "Teaching Democracy: Let's talk teacher needs in support of our intention to renew our civic education programming."

### B.2. Inspire Democracy

In April 2014, Elections Canada launched Inspire Democracy, an initiative that included: a new [website](#) with research and tools to encourage youth civic engagement in Canada, a quarterly newsletter, and a series of workshops across the country. The initiative focused in particular on building a community of youth-serving organizations

youth voter turnout and committed to helping EC provide voter information to young people. Research shows that young leaders and those who have influence with youth play a critical role in raising awareness and helping overcome barriers to voting. By providing these organizations with research and tools on youth voter turnout, they have become more effective in responding to the informational needs of Canadian youth when it comes to voting.

## C. Canadians Communicating with Elections Canada

At the outset of the 2015 General Election, Elections Canada encouraged Canadians to be vigilant and proactive in bringing matters of concerns to EC's attention. In all, Elections Canada received and responded to some 1.3 million calls. During the electoral period, EC also received approximately 40,000 written communications, in addition to the 23,000 social media messages received.

Furthermore, to improve its risk awareness and ability to respond accordingly, Elections Canada specifically aimed to provide more ways for electors to interact with the agency for the 2015 GE. As a result of expanding its electors' feedback framework – including online channels, centralizing its complaints management structure and widely promoting how electors could communicate with Elections Canada – the agency received 17,200 complaints during the general election in 2015. This amounted to about six complaints per 10,000 electors.

## **D. Post-Election Assessment**

Elections Canada conducts and commissions surveys, studies and post-mortems to evaluate its main activities and programs. Over the past decade, efforts have been made to systematize post-election evaluations to allow the agency to better identify trends and thus gain a deeper understanding of the feedback provided by returning officers and political parties following the election, as well as of the views and challenges facing electors, candidates and election officers. Other evaluations measure the effectiveness of the agency's communications program and its impact on electoral awareness. Elections Canada uses this information to continually improve its services in order to keep pace with the changing needs and expectations of Canadians.

Overall conclusions of the post-election assessment and the key priorities that will guide Elections Canada's work as it prepares for the 2019 GE are detailed in a retrospective report tabled to Parliament.<sup>4</sup> Elections Canada also thoroughly analyzes complaints to identify trends, areas for improvement in service delivery and possible recommendations moving forward, also which are discussed in the retrospective report.

The findings of the 2015 GE's review reaffirm the progress EC made toward achieving its objectives. Electors knew when, where and the ways to register and vote. They perceived Elections Canada as the most trusted source of election information, and they did not hesitate to communicate with the agency via a number of channels – including social media – to share their questions, experiences, concerns and complaints.

## **E. Voter Education Costs**

For the 2015 general election, the total cost of the agency's development and delivery of the Election Reminder Program and its youth-focused civic education efforts totaled around CAD\$44,446,000, in comparison to CAD\$33,392,000 for the prior election (2011 GE). The 2015 communication program cost amounted to approximately 7.5% of the total cost of the 2015 GE, which was CAD\$443million. The post-election assessment totaled about CAD\$2.1million.

---

<sup>4</sup> Retrospective Report on the 42nd General Election of October 19, 2015 to be published mid-September 2016.

## F. Lessons Learned

A variety of surveys conducted with electors at different times during and after the 2015 federal election provided insights into the effectiveness of Elections Canada's Electoral Reminder Program and how it might be strengthened. There were a variety of lessons learned from the 2015 General Election which will be considered in preparations for future elections:

- As indicated earlier, the information program was very effective in increasing electors' knowledge about when and where to vote, but less so about the different ways to vote, particularly among students, new voters and Aboriginal voters. In particular, their knowledge of the options to vote by mail or at a local Elections Canada office was quite weak.
- Knowledge of the need to prove one's identity was high and increased over the course of the campaign. Knowledge of the need to prove one's address also increased but was considerably lower, and will thus need more emphasis moving forward.
- For students and new voters, knowledge of the need to be registered remained unchanged at around 70% throughout the campaign, suggesting that a clearer, better targeted message about the need to be on the voters list may be required for those groups known to have lower rates of registration or to experience barriers to registration.
- Overall, a strong majority of electors recalled receiving the VIC and saw it as the most important piece to facilitate voting.
- While awareness of the online registration service was moderate in the 2015 GE (its first federal election), it did prove to be the registration channel of choice for younger electors. Elections Canada will continue to advertise and promote the service, and will work to improve the functionality of the online registration service to ensure all groups can make equal use of it.
- Finally, EC will conduct further analysis on the experience of electors with a disability — although the vast majority of electors with a disability indicated that it was convenient to vote, fewer than half were aware of the accessibility tools and services that were available.

## Conclusion

EC will continue to use three key strategies to ensure Canadians are aware of their registration and voting options: (1) knowledge sharing on factors affecting electoral participation with key intervenors to maintain strong networks, on an ongoing basis, who in turn will be more effective at responding to the informational needs of Canadian youth when it comes to voting; (2) comprehensive multi-media communications campaign immediately before the call of an election and during the election which focuses on all Canadians including those who face barriers to the electoral process, and (3) Civic Education programming for youth.