

## **Elections Nova Scotia**

### **2021 – 2022 Budget Estimates**

**For Consideration by the Special Committee to  
Review the Estimates of the Chief Electoral  
Officer**



# Table of Contents

<b>Recommendations to the Special Committee</b>	3
<b>2021–2022 Budget Estimates</b>	3
<b>Budget Overview</b>	5
Budget Breakdown	5
Planning Assumptions	6
Outline of Budget Schedules	6
<b>What Elections Nova Scotia Does</b>	7
The Elections Nova Scotia Team	7
<b>Current Challenges</b>	7
Preparation for the 41 <sup>st</sup> Provincial General Election	7
<b>Conclusion and Required Actions</b>	8
<b>Appendix</b>	
1. 2021-2022 Treasury Board Target (Oct 2020) Reconciliation	9
2. Elections Nova Scotia Budget Plan Summary	10
3. Vision, Mission, Mandate, Values, and Goals	11
4. Organizational Chart	12

## Recommendation to the Special Committee

Elections Nova Scotia (ENS) presents a budget of \$4.884m for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to the Special Committee of the House of Assembly. This amount includes ENS's administrative requirements, one by-election, external legal counsel, service delivery to achieve the ENS mandate, and election readiness funding to meet planned goals. Given the uncertainty of the timing of the pending 41<sup>st</sup> Provincial General Election (PGE), ENS is working towards an initial election readiness date of April 1, 2021, but must also maintain our preparedness by planning for two additional election readiness dates of September 1, 2021 and April 1, 2022. These funding pressures include costs related to preparations to deliver an election under pandemic circumstances. ENS respectfully asks that the Special Committee review and recommend without alteration the ENS budget estimates to Treasury and Policy Board to be included in the 2021-2022 provincial budget.

## 2021–2022 Budget Estimates

The following schedule provides a summary of ENS's 2021-2022 budget estimates, as well as supplementary information that compares this to the 2020-2021 plan.

### ELECTIONS NOVA SCOTIA

<u>Departmental Expenses by Object (\$ thousands)</u>	2020-21 Submitted to Special Committee	2020-21 Approved Budget Estimate	2020-21 Forecast	2021-2022 Estimate to Special Committee
Salary and Employee benefits	1,836	1,843	1,957	1,953
Operating Costs	5,078	4,520	5,381	2,931
Gross Expenses	6,914	6,363	7,338	4,884
Less: Chargeable to Other Departments	-	-	-	-
<b>Total- Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>6,914</b>	<b>6,363</b>	<b>7,338</b>	<b>4,884</b>
<b>Ordinary recoveries</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</b>	18	18	18	18
Less: staff Funded by External Agencies	-	-	-	-
<b>Total- Funded Staff</b>	18	18	18	18

## Supplementary Information

<u>Programs and Services (\$ thousands)</u>	<b>2020-21 Submitted to Special Committee</b>	<b>2020-21 Approved Budget Estimate</b>	<b>2020-21 Forecast</b>	<b>2021-2022 Estimate to Special Committee</b>
Administration	2,581	2,594	2,594	2,788
Registered Party Funding	725	725	725	739
Service Delivery and Development	368	365	365	306
Election readiness*	2,940	2,679	2,679	616
COVID-19 related**			800	135
External legal council	100			50
By-election related	200		175	250
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,914</b>	<b>6,363</b>	<b>7,338</b>	<b>4,884</b>
* 2020-2021- Election readiness April 1 2021	2,940	2,679	2,679	
* 2021-2022- Election readiness Sept 1 2021				367
* 2021-2022- Election readiness April 1 2022				249
				616
** COVID related			800	135

## Budget Overview

The 2021-2022 fiscal year is planned to be a high-activity year as ENS must be prepared to deliver the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE. The funding for each PGE cycle is vastly different than the funding cycle required to run most government departments.

As part of the PGE cycle, ENS routinely requests readiness funding in the last two of the four years. This pattern is similar to the election budgeting cycles in other provinces where funding ramps up in the 18-month period before the election. The difference witnessed in the timing for preparedness in Nova Scotia compared to our neighbors stems from the lack of a legislated fixed election date.

In 2020-2021 to prepare for the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE, ENS procured and prepared election supplies; recruited, hired and trained election officials; identified and verify voting locations; and, engaged and communicated to election stakeholders to be ready to deliver an election after April 1, 2021. In addition to typical election readiness activities, ENS prepared to deliver the next election under the uncertainty regarding the proclamation of legislative amendments and the COVID-19 pandemic. ENS will continue election readiness efforts and work towards two additional election readiness dates of September 1, 2021, and April 1, 2022 until the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE is called. Additional COVID-19 advertising costs are planned for early in the fiscal year for production of the media outreach campaign.

## Budget Breakdown

The yearly budget of the agency conforms to three distinct pillars of spending:

1. **Administration** – This pillar focuses on the costs of day to day business: the salaries of ENS's permanent staff, the operational costs of leasing headquarters space, supplies, and the IT equipment required for permanent staff to fulfill their assigned business requirements.
2. **Service Delivery** – This pillar is dedicated to the costs associated with the delivery of ENS's mandate. The preparation for (but not the delivery of) PGEs and by-elections. This budget fluctuates greatly over the election cycle. The bulk of election readiness funding is spent in the 24 months preceding the publicly announced election readiness date.
3. **Registered Party Funding and Electoral District Associations subsidy for bookkeeping** – The third pillar identifies the mandatory political funding obligations as legislated in the *Elections Act* and the financial assistance earmarked for electoral district associations' bookkeeping requirements.

PGE delivery costs, including paying election officials, leasing returning offices and voting locations, and candidate spending reimbursements are funded by warrant after each event and therefore, not included in ENS annual budget requests. By-elections on the other hand, are not funded by warrants. In recent years, the Premier has needed to call at least one by-

election per year. Based on this history, ENS routinely requests a budget line for the delivery of one by-election per year. Should more than one by-election be required this year, ENS would submit the additional costs incurred to Finance and Treasury Board as extraordinary in-year spending. Should no by-election occur, ENS should run a surplus to be returned to the Province's general revenue fund.

## Planning Assumptions

The planning assumptions for ENS's 2021-2022 budget estimates are:

- In the absence of a fixed election date, ENS is on schedule to be election ready by April 1, 2021. Should a PGE not be called this spring, ENS will require funding to update delivery plans and to provide refresher training to approximately 300 core returning office field staff in advance of September 1, 2021 and April 1, 2022 readiness dates.
- At least one by-election will be held in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.
- Should the new Premier call a PGE at some point in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, ENS could be in a surplus position with respect to scheduled readiness and by-election spending to be either returned to the Province's general revenue fund or used to partially offset the \$10 plus million PGE.
- The ongoing service delivery activity remains funded at approximately \$300k for 2021-2022.
- Funding for external legal services of \$50k to ensure independence of the office of the CEO with respect to investigations and to protect the Justice assigned consul from potential conflicts of interest situations.
- The COVID-19 pandemic shall be considered in the writ budget estimates to ensure public health precautions will be in place for any electoral event in 2021-2022. The PGE costs are not included in this budget submission.

## Outline of Budget Schedules

- Appendix 1 is a budget schedule that provides a summary of the budget pressures submitted to Treasury and Policy Board in November 2020.
- Appendix 2 provides a summary of the ENS budget plan. This shows the cost breakdown of the additional \$1.201m required for election readiness, outside legal service costs and ongoing delivery of the ENS mandate.

## What Elections Nova Scotia Does

ENS is an independent non-partisan agency that reports directly to the members of the House of Assembly and is accountable to the public. The agency's mandate is to prepare and deliver fair and inclusive elections impartially and professionally. The agency is also responsible to ensure compliance with provincial electoral law including the investigation of election-related complaints and adherence to the political financing regime by stakeholders and to maintain a permanent register of electors in Nova Scotia.

ENS must always be ready to deliver a by-election. ENS must also be election ready when a PGE is anticipated. Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada without a fixed election date so ENS must anticipate the earliest date on which a PGE may be called and plan and budget accordingly. Once a PGE is called, ENS must establish returning offices in 55 electoral districts with approximately 300 trained core staff and open early voting options within 72 hours of a writ being issued.

Appendix 3 outlines ENS's vision, mission, mandate and goals.

## The Elections Nova Scotia Team

ENS staff work to effectively deliver PGEs and by-elections. The ENS team includes eighteen highly skilled and dedicated election specialists who work to maintain the reputation of Nova Scotia as being a leader in electoral administration in Canada. The scope of the work done by ENS staff is broad and covers all aspects of the electoral process.

Appendix 4 includes ENS's organization chart.

## Current Challenges

### Preparation for the 41st Provincial General Election

Given that the 40<sup>th</sup> PGE was held on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE must be called by June 10, 2022. The current government will enter its fifth year of governance with a new Premier as of May 2020 if no election is called before that time. Eight of the last eleven provincial governments were majorities where, on average, the Premier requested a writ of election prior to entering their fourth year of governing.

In January 2020, this Special Committee reviewed and recommended without alteration the Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) budget estimate for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The budget estimates included \$2.940m for election readiness funding. Treasury and Policy Board included \$2.679m of election readiness funding in ENS's final budget allocation approved for the 2020-2022 provincial budget estimates. ENS adjusted its deliverables to work within the budget allocation. An unfunded by-election and COVID-19 precautions created pressures resulting in extraordinary in-year spending.

Since April 1, 2020, ENS has been working diligently on election readiness activities.

Changes to the *Elections Act* received Royal Assent in March 2020. The challenge that ENS has encountered since that time has been a lack of clarity on the proclamation for Bill 225. To this date, it remains unclear to ENS whether any or all the legislative changes will be proclaimed. In order to be prepared by April 1, 2021, the CEO has recently directed staff to prepare for the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE as if the terms in Bill 225 were not in force. A report on this subject was recently presented to the members of the Legislative Assembly. A copy of this report and its impact on the stakeholders in the upcoming PGE is appended.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented other unique challenges to our election readiness preparations. ENS is working with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to determine what infection control precautions are needed to ensure the safety and confidence of voters, election workers, candidates, and their campaign teams during the next election.

## **Conclusion and Required Actions**

To conclude, ENS respectfully requests that the Special Committee review these budget estimates, including

- Costs to achieve election readiness of September 1, 2021 and April 1, 2022.
- Costs to maintain the mandate of ENS-
  - stakeholder outreach, ongoing IT system maintenance, security testing, list of electors maintenance, RO advisory, report production,
- Costs for external legal counsel
- Costs of one by-election

We also request that members of the Special Committee recommend the budget, without alteration, to Finance and Treasury Board be included in the 2021-2022 provincial budget estimates.

ENS also proposes that the Special Committee reconvene, upon request of the CEO, if the amounts approved by Finance and Treasury Board differ from what the Special Committee has recommended.



## Appendix 1

### 2021-2022 Treasury Board Target (October 19,2020) Reconciliation

2021-2022 Target reconciliation	(\$'000)
Target from Treasury Board	3,683
* 2021-2022- Election readiness Sept 1, 2021	502
* 2021-2022- Election readiness April 1, 2022	249
By-election costs	250
Service Delivery and Development costs to meet mandate	150
Outside legal council	50
	<hr/>
	4,884
	<hr/>

## Appendix 2

### Elections Nova Scotia Budget Plan Summary

<b>Overview</b>	<b>2020-21 Forecast</b>	<b>2021-22 Budget</b>	<b>2022-23</b>
Administration	2,594	2,788	2,788
Registered Party funding	725	739	739
Service delivery- ongoing	365	156	156
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,684</b>	<b>3,683</b>	<b>3,683</b>
Election readiness *	2,679	616	
COVID-19**	800	135	
Mandate fulfillment		150	150
External legal support		50	55
By-election (4 in 2019-20 and 1 after)	175	250	250
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,654</b>	<b>1,201</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,338</b>	<b>4,884</b>	<b>4,138</b>
*2020-2021 Election readiness April 1, 2021	2,679		
* 2021-2022- Election readiness Sept 1, 2021		367	
* 2021-2022- Election readiness April 1, 2022		249	
		616	
** 2021-22 includes COVID related costs	800	135	

## Appendix 3

### **VISION:**

Trusted by all Nova Scotians to excel in the delivery of fair and inclusive elections.

### **MISSION:**

To serve democracy by delivering provincial elections impartially and professionally.

### **MANDATE:**

Elections Nova Scotia is mandated to:

- conduct provincial general elections and by-elections,
- ensure compliance with provincial electoral law including the political financing regime,
- establish and maintain election-related information, including the Nova Scotia Register of Electors,
- seek advice and conduct studies related to electoral processes, and,
- conduct electoral education programs.

### **VALUES:**

- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Inclusivity
- Integrity (includes trustworthy, respect, professional, consistency, fair, and objective)
- Transparency

### **GOALS:**

1. To conduct quality, cost effective, accessible elections.
2. To create and provide quality election information.
3. To engage and educate stakeholders in all aspects of the electoral process.
4. To assist, seek and enforce compliance with the *Elections Act*.
5. To continuously develop individual and organizational effectiveness.

## Appendix 4

# Elections Nova Scotia Organizational Chart

