



Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer

April 1, 2011 - March 31, 2012



**ELECTIONS
NOVA SCOTIA**

Elections Nova Scotia is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting provincial elections.

Elements of our Strategic Plan

Mission

Elections Nova Scotia is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting provincial elections in Nova Scotia.

Mandate

Elections Nova Scotia must be prepared at all times to conduct a provincial general election, by-election, or plebiscite. It is responsible for enforcing provincial electoral law, including the political financing regime.

Elections Nova Scotia is also mandated to conduct voter education and information programs, and to provide support to the independent commission charged with reviewing the boundaries of provincial electoral districts.

Elections Nova Scotia is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of election-related data, including the Nova Scotia Register of Electors, and may carry out studies related to the electoral process in the pursuit of its mandate.

Values

- Integrity of the electoral process is paramount
- Transparency in everything we do
- Responsiveness to meet the needs of Nova Scotians in the electoral process
- Cohesiveness and consistency in administering the laws under which we operate
- Trustworthiness
- Continuous improvement of systems, policies, and procedures

Goals

- To conduct high quality electoral events
- To maintain accurate registers
- To deliver high quality election information and education
- To continuously develop individual and organizational effectiveness

Street Address 7037 Mumford Road | Suite 6 | Halifax | NS | B3L 2J1
Mailing Address PO Box 2246 | Halifax | NS | B3J 3C8

Phone (902) 424-8584 | Toll free in NS 1-800-565-1504
TTY for the hearing impaired (902) 424-7475

Fax (902) 424-6622

Email elections@gov.ns.ca

■ www.electionsnovascotia.ca

April 23, 2012

The Honourable Gordie Gosse
Speaker of Legislative Assembly
1st Floor, Province House
PO Box 1617
Halifax, NS
B3J 2Y3

Dear Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to present the first Annual Report of Elections Nova Scotia, made under the new *Elections Act*, SNS 2011, c.5, for the period April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012.

I respectfully request that you submit this report to the House of Assembly as soon as possible during the current spring sitting.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

Christine McCulloch, QC
Chief Electoral Officer

Enclosure





Contents

How the <i>Elections Act</i> has changed	4
A dozen ways to vote	6
Third party advertising	8
Learning Management System	8
Accessibility of the Electoral System	9
Electoral Boundaries Commission	10
Election Management System	10
Great citizens are made, not born	11
Plebiscite in Port Williams	11
Looking ahead	12

How the *Elections Act* has changed

In December 2011, Nova Scotia's House of Assembly passed a new *Elections Act*, the first major overhaul of electoral law in 25 years.

Some of the changes were made to improve access to voting opportunities for electors and to enhance the protection of personal information. Others allow Elections Nova Scotia to revise processes and procedures as needed and to take advantage of new technology to meet the needs of electors.

Overall, the changes are extensive and will bring Nova Scotia's elections into the 21st century.

Independence and Accountability of the Chief Electoral Officer

The new *Act* gives independence and accountability to the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Nova Scotia. The Chief Electoral Office is now an independent officer of the House of Assembly while Elections Nova Scotia is now an office of the House of Assembly. This solidifies Elections Nova Scotia's arm's length functioning from the elected officials of the House.

This independence is absolutely critical to ensure the integrity of Nova Scotia's democratic electoral system. Any interference by elected officials—either real or perceived—undermines the faith citizens have that the outcome of an election reflects the true will of the people.

The Chief Electoral Officer is appointed by a majority vote by the House of Assembly, and is accountable to the House for providing an annual strategic business plan, performance report, and budget for approval. Beyond those

confines, the Chief Electoral Officer has the authority to prepare for elections, conduct investigations, maintain a high quality register of electors, and manage the business of Elections Nova Scotia. This includes purchasing equipment and supplies.

It also includes hiring people. Under the new *Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer can appoint permanent and temporary casual staff and determine their classification rating and remuneration. While there are exceptions that allow Elections Nova Scotia to bypass government procurement and hiring policies, the office will endeavour to follow government policies when at all possible.

The staff of Elections Nova Scotia now enjoy the same benefits and privileges of other public servants, protecting them from law suits for anything done or not done in good faith while performing their duties.

The new *Act* allows the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint returning officers based on merit or remove for cause. These key election officers must be neutral and non-partisan; they could be perceived as neither if appointed by the executive branch of government.

As the head of a public body, the Chief Electoral Officer can now directly receive applications under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* for information held by Elections Nova Scotia.

The new *Act* strengthens the Chief Electoral Officer's powers to investigate alleged breaches of the *Act*, and extends the limitation period for the prosecution of alleged offences.

Improved Access to Voting Opportunities

The new *Elections Act* contains a clear mandate to improve accessibility to voting facilities.

Every polling station must be in an accessible premise with level access and an internal structure that allows persons with disabilities to cast their ballot without barrier or obstruction. In circumstances in which no accessible premise is available, the returning officer must have a plan to accommodate persons with disabilities. If it is requested, the elector may receive assistance to mark the ballot. Ballot boxes may also be moved by an election officer to make it easier for an elderly or disabled elector to vote.

Election officers will receive training and guidelines outlining how to provide appropriate service to those who are disabled. A communication campaign may be developed to help persons with disabilities understand the processes and their rights.

Write-in ballot teams may now visit electors in their residences. Schedules will be set up for the teams to visit electors in hospitals and residential care centres as well.

Engaging Youth and Citizens

The new *Elections Act* gives Elections Nova Scotia authority to develop public communication campaigns and programs for new electors.

Curriculum materials may be made available to school boards. It is hoped this will generate an understanding of and an interest in the electoral process in Nova Scotia's youth.



The new *Act* also allows the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint 16-18 year old residents of the province to certain election worker positions. This will give young people a first-hand experience with the voting process.

Elections Nova Scotia may now run pilot projects to test new processes, procedures, equipment, or technology that differs from that required by the *Elections Act*. These pilots can be held during a by-election or in up to one-third of the electoral districts during a general election.

Registration of Candidates

The new registration process is triggered when money is accepted or expended by the official agent on behalf of a prospective candidate in anticipation of an election.

These individuals must now register with the Chief Electoral Officer before either of those transactions takes place. The Chief Electoral Officer is required to publish a register of registered candidates as well as a financial report of all transactions during the registration period.

Protecting Elector Information

Under the new *Act*, electors' personal information held by Elections Nova Scotia may be provided to registered parties, local political organizations, candidates, independent MLAs, municipalities, and school boards for electoral purposes only.

However the new *Act* now will allow access to age demographic information, expressed in a range, as well as an indication of whether the elector voted in previous elections.

Consolidation of Electoral and Electoral Finance Laws

Elections Nova Scotia has consolidated all electoral and electoral finance legislation. The only area of election law that remains separate from the *Elections Act* is the *Controverted Elections Act*, which has been amended to make it work with the *Elections Act*.

The Chief Electoral Officer and the Election Commission, representative of registered political parties, will continue to review and advise on new provisions of the *Elections Act* respecting election expenses.

Third Party Advertising Expenses

The new *Act* requires that any third party that has spent \$500 in election advertising must register with the Chief Electoral Officer. They cannot register before an election has been called. They also must not spend more than \$10,000 during a general election.

All registered third parties must file a report with the Chief Electoral Officer with details of election advertising expenses. The Chief Electoral Officer must publish this along with the names and addresses of registered third parties.

38th Provincial General Election	● June 9, 2009
Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 38th Provincial General Election	● October 9, 2009
Resolution of the House of Assembly	● October 19, 2009
Research	● November, 2009//June, 2010
Public Policy Conference Saint Mary's University	● May 17-18, 2010
Consultation: Election Commission, Recognized Parties	● June, 2010/May, 2011
Discussions with the Legislation Committee of Government	● March/April, 2011
Response to the Resolution Including Draft Legislation	● May 6, 2011
Elections Act First Reading	● May 6, 2011
Second Reading	● May 10, 2011
Third Reading	● May 19, 2011
Royal Assent	● May 19, 2011
Proclaimed	● January 1, 2012
Systems Development and Implementation	● January - Ongoing
Continued Consultation with Election Commission on new and outstanding questions	● May, 2011 - Ongoing

A dozen ways to vote in Nova Scotia Provincial Elections

Under the *Elections Act*, there are a dozen ways to vote in provincial elections, along with options for how and when a person may vote. For example, during an election, voting may take place on any day of the week except Sundays and the Monday before election day.

Here are the many different ways of voting:

1. At the Polling Station on Election Day

Most electors will vote at their polling station on election day, which is always a Tuesday, from 8am to 8pm. Electors can find out where their polling station is by:

- A.** checking the voter information card they receive in the mail
- B.** entering their postal code or address in the Where Do I Vote? application on Elections Nova Scotia's website at <http://www.electionsnovascotia.ca>
- C.** phoning Elections Nova Scotia toll free at 1-800-565-1504 or TTY 1-866-774-7074.

Elections Nova Scotia strives to ensure all polling stations have level access for wheelchairs, and tools and services to assist those who have vision or hearing difficulties. Electors with disabilities who require assistance should check with their returning office ahead of time to make arrangements. In the rare event that the assigned polling station does not have the facilities needed, the elector will be transferred to one that does.

2. At an Advance Poll

For those who cannot vote on election day or wish to vote early, Elections Nova Scotia sets aside two days of advance polls in each electoral district. The advance polls are open on the Friday and Saturday immediately before election day, from 10am to 8pm. Electors can find the advance poll for their electoral district by checking their voter information card, visiting the Elections Nova Scotia website, or contacting Elections Nova Scotia by phone.

3. At the Continuous Poll at the Returning Office

Electors can vote by write-in ballot at their local returning office in their electoral district. First, they must complete a write-in ballot application. Once that is approved, they will be given a write-in ballot on which they can write either the name of the candidate or the registered party they are voting for. The continuous poll is open from 9am to 6pm every day except Sundays, up to and including the Thursday before election day.

4. At an Out-of-District Poll at any Returning Office in Nova Scotia

Electors can vote by write-in ballot at any returning office in the province from 9am to 6pm every day except Sundays, up to and including the Thursday before election day. The same rules apply as for the continuous poll.

5. At Home

Electors who cannot get to the polling station or the returning office, and need help applying for a write-in ballot, have two options:

- A.** The elector can ask a neighbour, family member, caregiver, or friend to act as agent in applying for and voting by write-in ballot.
- B.** The elector can make an appointment through the local returning office for a write-in ballot team to visit at home and assist with voting by write-in ballot.

6. In Residential Centres

All returning officers make arrangements for mobile poll visits on election day to seniors' residences, long-term care facilities, and other institutions with ten or more resident electors.

If an elector lives in a residential centre with fewer than ten residents, the local returning officer will make arrangements with the administrator for a write-in ballot team to visit the facility and to assist with voting by write-in ballot before election day.

7. At a Shelter

Electors staying in a shelter for their own protection can contact Elections Nova Scotia or their local returning office for assistance. They can vote by write-in ballot with the assistance of a write-in ballot team. Their anonymity and secrecy of their location will be respected.



Under the *Elections Act*, electors with no permanent residence can use whatever quarters they were living in at registration time—be that a shelter, hostel or other place that provides food, lodging, or social services—as their residence. Posters will be put up at the shelters with the location of the appropriate polling places. These electors will be required to complete an application to be added to the list of electors.

8. From Outside Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia electors who are living temporarily outside Nova Scotia are able to vote by mail. They can visit the Elections Nova Scotia website or phone Elections Nova Scotia for an application to vote by write-in ballot. Requests for write-in ballots must be received ten days before election day. Completed ballots must be received at the local returning office by close of polls (8pm) on election day.

9. At University or Community College

Post-secondary students must vote in the electoral district in which their principal residence is located. Since many college and university students have two residences—one when at school, and one when not at school—students can choose one or the other as principal residence for the purposes of Nova Scotia elections. Students can then vote on election day, at the advance polls, the continuous poll, the out-of-district poll, or by write-in ballot.

10. In Hospital

Electors who are temporarily in hospital during a Nova Scotia election can vote by write-in ballot.

Write-in ballot teams will visit hospitals on designated days between 9am and 6pm during the week before election day. The teams will be able to help electors with the name of their electoral district, the registered political parties, and names of candidates in the electoral districts.

11. Military Electors Posted Outside Nova Scotia

Electors who are away on duty aboard ship, at a Canadian Forces base in Canada, or serving out of country when a provincial election is called may vote by write-in ballot. During a provincial general election, Elections Nova Scotia will contact the Judge Advocate General's Office, which will send a message to all units of the Canadian Forces to inform them of the election, the eligibility requirements for voting, and the process for applying to vote by write-in ballot.

Elections Nova Scotia will advertise any by-elections within the province. Friends and relatives can then advise eligible members of the Canadian Forces of the election, how to apply for a write-in ballot, and the key dates for applying and returning the ballot.

For voting purposes, a serving member of the Canadian Forces and members of their immediate family who have lived in Nova Scotia at least six months and intend to return at the end of their duty, their residence is the place they declared in their Canadian Forces Statement of Ordinary Residence. Their mailing address for purpose of receiving the write-in ballot kit is the address of the ship or base to which they are posted.

12. From a Correctional Facility

Immediately following the election call, Elections Nova Scotia will provide liaison officers at each provincial and federal correctional facility with brochures and write-in ballot application forms to distribute to electors held in the facility.

Elections Nova Scotia receives and reviews the application forms to determine whether the applicant is qualified to vote and to confirm the applicant's electoral district. If approval criteria are met, Elections Nova Scotia will issue a write-in ballot kit for each approved elector and arrange expedient delivery to the correctional facility liaison officer in the correctional facility where the elector is held or detained.

The elector can then vote using the write-in ballot; the liaison officer will return the ballot envelope and ballot to Elections Nova Scotia. Once received, the ballot is sent to the appropriate returning office where it will be counted on election day.



Nova Scotians can vote on election day, at the advance polls, the continuous poll, the out-of-district poll or by mail.

Third Party Advertising

Third party advertising refers to election messages from individuals, groups, or organizations that are independent of registered political parties, registered district party associations, or candidates. These advertisements usually run during a campaign period, and either promote or oppose a registered political party, or the election of a candidate for office, or both.

They may include a message for or against a position on an issue that is associated with a particular political party or candidate, or a message stating a position on an issue itself.

The new *Elections Act* requires that third party participants in an election

campaign appoint an official agent, register with Elections Nova Scotia, and file an advertising report after the election.

This disclosure will ensure that the public learns who is sponsoring an election advertisement, and knows the interest that lies behind any publicly stated position. Third parties cannot spend more than \$10,000 on advertising during a general election; they also cannot spend more than \$2,000 on advertising that promotes or opposes the election of one or more candidates in a given electoral district.

Only the official agent may accept contributions made to the third party for election advertising purposes during the

election; the agent must also authorize every election advertising expense incurred on the third party's behalf.

A third party election advertising report is due within four months after election day, and must contain a list of election advertising expenses, as well as total contributions for election advertising purposes that were received in the period beginning six months before the issue of the writ and ending on election day.

It must also provide the name and address for each individual who made contributions totalling more than \$200 for election advertising purposes, along with the amount and date of each contribution.

Elections Nova Scotia Learning Management System

In 2011, Elections Nova Scotia hired Navantis Inc. to help develop an online training tool for election day field workers that will deliver standardized training across the province.

Whenever a provincial election is called, the province's 52 returning officers and two assistant returning officers must hire and train approximately 6,000 election day field workers under very tight timelines.

These positions include deputy returning officers and poll clerks. Their training is critical to the integrity and success of the election.

The new learning management tool will reinforce the hands-on training these workers already receive, and will act as a refresher for experienced field workers.

The content of the new learning management system has been integrated with the new Election Day Handbook to provide a uniform training program that can easily be delivered anywhere in the province.



Elections Nova Scotia's new online training system provides a uniform training program across the province.

Accessibility of Nova Scotia's Electoral System

A provincial general election is a major undertaking with strict requirements for precision oversight, security, confidentiality, and accessibility. Over the years, many changes have taken place to make voting as accessible as possible to all electors.

Elections Nova Scotia continues to work to remove obstacles electors may encounter at the polls. Services are changing and adapting to the needs of the electors of Nova Scotia, particularly persons with disabilities.

The *Elections Act* enables a dozen ways to vote in Nova Scotia provincial general elections, and options for how and when that voting may take place. For example, during an election, an elector can vote on any day of the week except Sundays and the Monday before election day.

Level Access

All polling stations and returning offices used during an electoral event must have level access and an internal structure that allows persons with disabilities to vote without barrier or obstruction. Elections Nova Scotia may approve temporary modifications to buildings used during those events to ensure accessibility if necessary. Under exceptional circumstances, the returning officer may seek approval from the Chief Electoral Officer to use a polling station that lacks level access. In those cases, the returning officer, in consultation with an affected elector, may issue a transfer certificate on election day so a person who uses a wheelchair, or who has other physical disabilities, can vote at another polling station that does have level access. As well, information officers and constables will be on site at the entrances to multiple poll locations to assist persons with disabilities on election day. Curbside voting is another

option for electors who have difficulty entering a polling station. The accessibility of a polling location is indicated on the voter information card. Cards are sent shortly after the issue of the writs to every elector whose name appears on the list of electors.

Write-in Ballot

Electors may now use a write-in ballot, a unique envelope system that protects the secrecy of the vote. This allows Nova Scotians to vote in one of several ways: by mail, in person at their local returning office, or at home. Electors wishing to vote at home by write-in ballot need to make an appointment to do so. At the scheduled time, a write-in ballot team will arrive, and the elector can vote in the presence of an election officer and a witness. This is particularly useful to persons with disabilities who would have difficulty reaching a polling station.

Mobile Polls

Electors who live in a residential centre can now vote using a mobile poll. At a scheduled time, election officers will set up the mobile poll at the institution. If necessary, the ballot box will be taken room to room and to the elector's bedside to facilitate voting.

Assistance Marking the Ballot

Electors may face many challenges when it is time to go to the polls. Elections Nova Scotia has additional tools and services available to assist those with special needs. For example, persons with visual impairment will be provided a voting template and a magnifier so they can mark their ballot. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may be assisted by a sign-language interpreter, and electors who need help with other language issues

may be assisted by a language interpreter or a friend or relative. Electors can also ask for assistance with registration and the marking of their ballot, and documents written specifically for persons with disabilities or low literacy will be available at polls, returning offices and on the Elections Nova Scotia website.

Website Tools

The Elections Nova Scotia website, electionsnovascotia.ca, features BrowseAloud, a speech-enabling utility designed to enhance the accessibility of the website. BrowseAloud reads all content aloud, with a high quality voice. It has other features including translation of text from English and French, to Italian, German and Spanish. The BrowseAloud utility is free to the visitor to the Elections Nova Scotia site. Elections Nova Scotia has prepared and will add more MP3 files and videos on the website to help electors fully understand the voting options and procedures.

Information and Other Assistance

Elections Nova Scotia provides training for all returning officers and election staff across the province on accessibility and sensitivity toward persons with disabilities.

Public education and information programs have been put in place to make electoral processes better known to the public, particularly those persons and groups who are most likely to experience difficulty exercising their democratic rights.

Elections Nova Scotia welcomes feedback and suggestions for ways to improve the electoral process. To that end, a polling location accessibility feedback process has been put in place, and the office can be contacted using TTY at a toll-free number: 1.866.774.7074



Support of the Electoral Boundaries Commission

On December 30, 2011, an eight-member independent Commission was established to review and provide recommendations on electoral boundaries. This followed consultations across the province by a Select Committee of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

Using the most up-to-date Canadian census information, the commission will examine and recommend boundaries in order to have a House of Assembly of no more than 52 seats.

While the commission is separate and independent of Elections Nova Scotia, the agency is providing technical and

administrative support to the commission. Most importantly, the commission will draw on Elections Nova Scotia expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) and will use a sophisticated tool designed by Elections Nova Scotia to develop and assess various scenarios in redrawing the boundaries of electoral districts.

Once the commission's recommendations have been presented and accepted by the House of Assembly, Elections Nova Scotia will use the same GIS tool to adjust polling division boundaries and prepare approximately 2,200 polling divisions in contemplation of

the next general election. As well, Elections Nova Scotia will conduct a merit-based selection process to choose and appoint returning officers in each of the electoral districts for the next general election.



The work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission will be aided by a new electronic tool designed by Elections Nova Scotia.

Election Management System Implemented

Elections Nova Scotia has upgraded its returning office management program to a modern election management system (EMS).

The new system allows election officers access to a centralized database of the most up-to-date information of Nova Scotia registered electors and their addresses. It also provides tools to manage the continuous voting opportunities that can span the election period. All access is audited and tightly controlled.

Election officers at all returning offices in the province will use this system for many purposes during an election. It will help returning officers to manage their electoral district, polling divisions and advance polling districts, poll locations, ballot boxes, and assignment of election officers.

Other election officers can use it to generate voter information cards as well as to manage voters' registration and any changes of address.

The system can also generate the various lists of electors that are distributed to the

candidates and election officers for use at the advance and election day polls.

The EMS has been designed and developed internally by Elections Nova Scotia with future requirements in mind. Enhancements will include modules for

reporting election night results (preliminary results from the field), managing election officers payroll, and incorporating geographic information system tools to validate civic and mailing addresses, and manage polling stations.



The election Management System was designed by Elections Nova Scotia and will be enhanced over time by integrating new modules.

Great citizens are made, not born



Elections Nova Scotia has developed a website devoted to Growing Great Citizens. It's a place where parents and teachers will find what we hope will be useful, easy to understand information for adults, students and families. In recent months, we have added new features and material to the site. During Democracy Week (September 12-16, 2011), Elections Nova Scotia added Nova Scotia oriented information, games and puzzles which will now be a permanent feature of the Growing Great Citizens site.

“The research shows that parents are a child’s first and most influential teacher.”

The site helps parents in particular to teach their children to feel connected to the world and the value of becoming involved and active in supporting positive change. It offers information on how to integrate teaching of civic and world engagement that recent research says is critical to building skills that enable children and young adults to be fully engaged.

And, it offers online games and activities for young children and teens alike.

It’s a fact.

Children who get involved in the community at a young age, come to understand the world around them and become connected. They grow into citizens who want to make positive changes in the world. Citizen engagement - participation - builds great communities; and the reverse is also true. Participation, engagement in the community, grows great citizens.

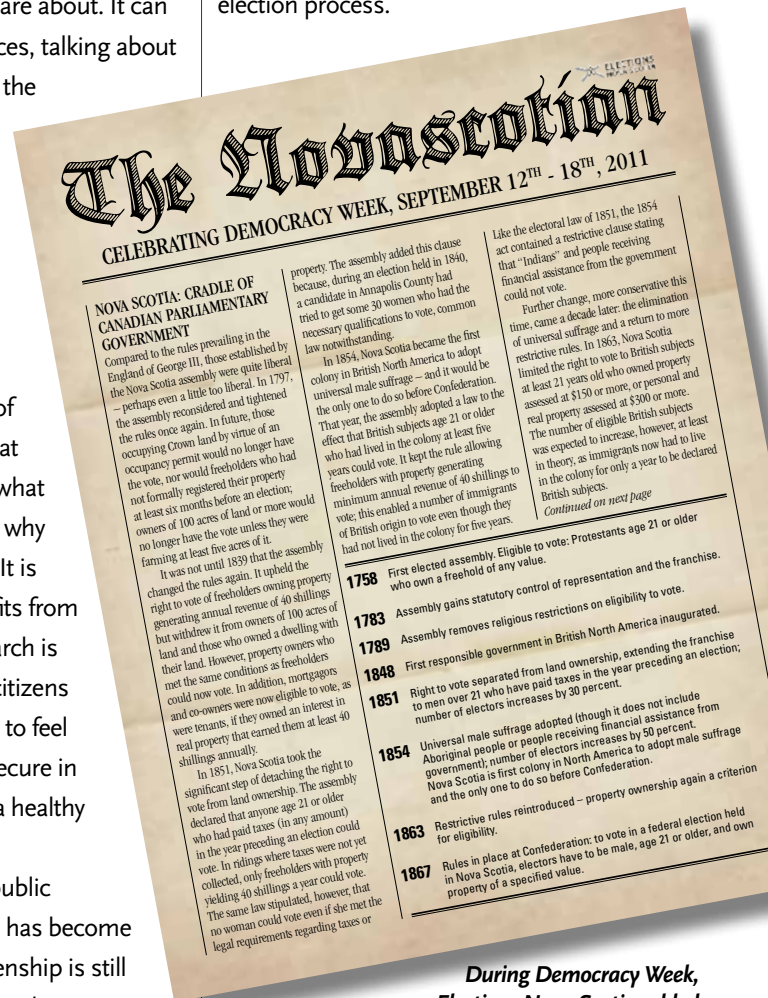
The research shows that parents are a child’s first and most influential teacher. By doing what comes naturally, parents have the power to teach, guide, and change the course of a life, a life they care about. It can be simple shared experiences, talking about things that are going on in the world and why; and inspiring questions.

At election time, we encourage parents to take their children with them when they vote. Talk about why they vote.

Depending on the age of the children, we suggest that they talk about the issues, what democracy is all about and why they choose to participate. It is clear the community benefits from engaged citizens, but research is just as clear that engaged citizens are significantly more likely to feel part of a community, feel secure in that community and have a healthy sense of self-worth.

We ask a great deal of public education today. The world has become a very complex place. Citizenship is still in the curriculum, but it’s a tight squeeze. Elections Nova Scotia is working

with the Department of Education to increase the use of schools as polling places and to use the opportunity to enhance student understanding of the election process.



During Democracy Week, Elections Nova Scotia added Nova Scotia oriented information, games and puzzles to its Growing Great Citizens website.

Plebiscite in Port Williams

There are two separate plebiscite regimes called for under the *Liquor Control Act* and administered by Elections Nova Scotia.

One is for the sale of alcohol in a licensed premises; the other is for the sale of packaged liquor, that is, by the bottle. There was only one plebiscite in 2011-12. In September, 2011, Elections Nova Scotia directed the returning officer for the electoral

district of Kings North, to conduct a plebiscite in the Municipality of the County of Kings regarding the application of a proposed winery in Port Williams to have an on-site retail store for its products.

The turnout for the plebiscite was 9.9% of those entitled to vote with a result of 91% in favour of the licensing of an on-site retail outlet.

Looking ahead

Nova Scotia now has the first comprehensive and modern *Elections Act* in a very long time. Over the last 12 months Elections Nova Scotia has been actively working on the multitude of processes, procedures, manuals, handbooks, directives, forms, training modules and systems development to enable implementation of the new *Act*.

A new legislative environment and the journey to it through research, analysis, consultation, and recommendation has improved the quality of the legislation and brought deeper understanding of the electoral environment and the relationships between Elections Nova Scotia and each of its major stakeholders. These include voters, registered political parties and electoral district associations, returning officers, official agents, and groups representing special interests to mention some of them. Over several years starting in 2005, Elections Nova Scotia has been modernized, restructured, relocated, and staffed to meet its mandate. It is time to look forward to our first general election under a greatly improved electoral regime and modern electoral management body both of which will serve Nova Scotians well in the years to come.

That is not to say we can be complacent. The agency must be diligent in continually renewing relationships with stakeholders and making recommendation for improvement. The principle of independence of the chief electoral officer and Elections Nova Scotia recognized in the new *Act* must be extended to all administrative processes and procedures to which they are subject.

The electoral environment continues to evolve rapidly across Canada. This is due in part to the dramatic impact of technology on all aspects of our lives but also due to the changing role of electoral management bodies to focus more and more on high quality services and broad accessibility to all participants in the process.

The extensive consultation during the legislative review that led to the new *Elections Act* provided a model for continuing the work required to continuously improve election law and the institutional capacity to administer free and fair elections. The Election Commission in particular has an important role to play in this regard.

Elections Nova Scotia from time to time introduces topics for discussion by the members of Election Commission. For example, there is growing interest and much work directed toward using some form of electronic voting in the future. The *Act* provides for pilot projects of limited scope under the authority of a resolution of the majority of the House of Assembly. Before seeking such a resolution, the chief electoral officer would seek the advice of the Election Commission on the design of such a pilot project. The commission, with representatives of each of the registered parties with elected members in the legislature, is a useful forum for deliberation and a helpful advisory body to the chief electoral officer.

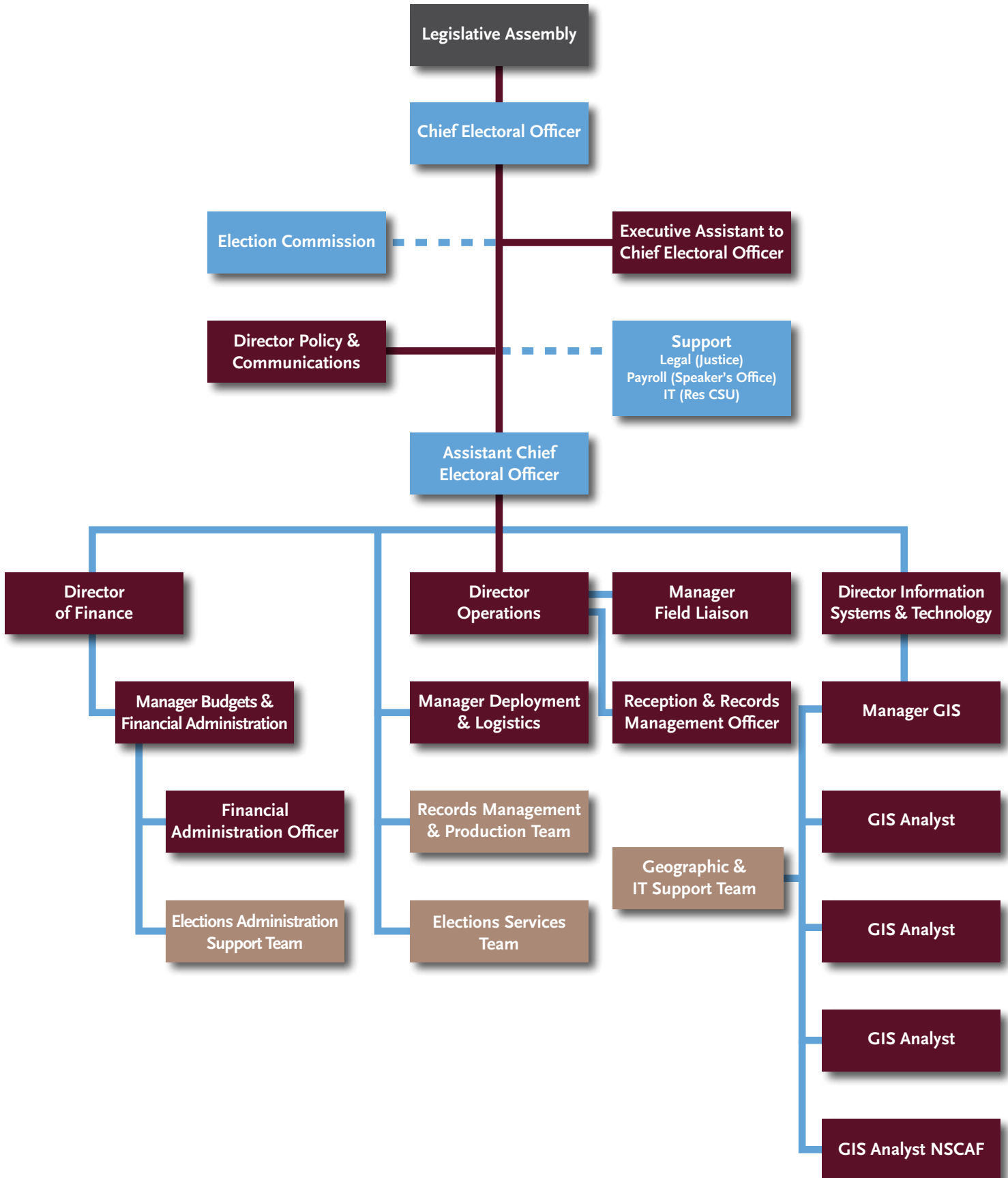
Moreover, the members are positioned to represent the views, ideas, and issues of the registered political parties and to introduce topics themselves for discussion leading to advice to the chief electoral officer.

“It is a time to look forward to our first general election under a greatly improved electoral regime.”

The immediate and long-term future will be focused on strengthening electoral processes, adapting technology to advance electoral systems, improving access, ensuring professional management and independence, and maintaining public confidence in the integrity of our electoral system.

The Chief Electoral Officer announced her retirement this past January. A panel has commenced the interview process with an objective to recommend a replacement to the House of Assembly this spring. A change management process is underway at Elections Nova Scotia to ensure the health of the agency and its members during the transition to new leadership.







electionsnovascotia.ca

902-424-8584
1-800-565-1504 Toll-free
902-424-7475 TTY for the hearing impaired